



Beechwood Tree Care Limited

2 Playhatch Farm Cottages, Playhatch, RG4 9QX

Freephone: 08000 323636

Telephone: 0118 9406115

E mail: contact@beechwoodtreecare.co.uk

Arboricultural Advice

Prepared by: Neil Wilson, Beechwood Tree Care Ltd

1. Instructions and Client Brief

I have been asked by Paul Bushnell of John Bushnell Ltd to provide arboricultural advice regarding two mature London Plane trees located on an island within the River Thames which forms part of the boatyard at Watermans Way, Wargrave, Berkshire.

The two London Plane trees are the largest trees on the island and are mature specimens, approximately 20–25 m in height, with radial crown spreads of approximately 6–10 m.

The client has reported that the size and position of the trees are causing an ongoing operational problem. Boat owners are reluctant to use moorings beneath or adjacent to the trees because of leaf and other debris fall, bird fouling and concerns regarding potential damage from falling branches.

The resulting issues include additional cleaning requirements, complaints from boat owners, claims relating to damage or cleaning, and the need to offer discounts on affected moorings.

I have therefore been asked to consider whether there is a suitable arboricultural management solution that would reduce these problems whilst retaining the trees and providing a realistic prospect of obtaining the necessary consent from the Local Planning Authority (LPA).

2. Site and Tree Observations

The trees are protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO 70A/1975)

The boatyard operates seasonal moorings around the edge of the island. Most boats are lifted from the water and stored on land during the winter period.

The two London Planes are situated on an open island within the River Thames. Their crowns currently extend towards the areas used for seasonal boat moorings.

The trees have been subject to regular pruning in the past. At the time of my visit, they appeared to be in generally good physiological condition, with vigorous regrowth evident and no obvious signs of significant stress or decline from the level of inspection undertaken.

This was a walk-through visual survey only. I did not undertake a detailed tree inspection from ground level, nor was a climbing inspection or detailed aerial assessment undertaken. Consequently, this report should not be interpreted as a comprehensive tree safety assessment.

The open nature of the site means that the trees are exposed to wind from several directions. The proximity of the river also means that the potential target area associated with the moorings cannot readily be relocated.



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3. Problems Identified

3.1 Concerns regarding branch failure

No evidence of historic branch failure was identified or reported to me during my visit.

The concern regarding branch failure therefore appears to relate principally to the potential consequences of a branch failure occurring over or adjacent to occupied boat moorings.

As with all mature trees, the possibility of branch failure cannot be eliminated. The structural and physiological condition of a tree can change in response to a range of biological and environmental factors.

London Plane trees can also be affected by *Splanchnonema platani* (Massaria disease), which can cause the deterioration and failure of branches under certain circumstances. Summer branch drop is another phenomenon that can occur in mature trees, although its incidence varies between species and individual trees.

The presence of a significant target beneath the trees, together with the exposed nature of the site, means that the consequences of any significant branch failure could be considerable.

However, based on the limited inspection undertaken, I have not identified evidence that would, by itself, justify significant tree works specifically on the grounds of an existing structural defect or immediate safety risk.

3.2 Bird fouling

The areas beneath and immediately adjacent to the tree crowns are used for boat moorings.

Where the canopy extends over the moorings, birds can use the branches as roosting locations and bird fouling of the boats inevitably occurs.

This problem has previously been addressed to some extent through pruning. At present, the amount of canopy directly overhanging the moorings appears relatively limited.

Nevertheless, reducing the overall size and extent of the crowns would reduce the amount of suitable roosting canopy directly above the moorings.

3.3 Leaf fall and other tree debris

The trees are large, mature specimens and consequently produce a substantial volume of leaf material and other natural debris.

Because of the exposed nature of the site, wind can carry leaves and other debris beyond the immediate crown area, making complete prevention of leaf fall impossible while retaining mature trees.

The client has reported that leaves and other debris falling onto and into boats create a significant nuisance.

It has also been reported that leaves left on the surface of some white plastic boat hulls can result in staining that is difficult to remove. The current management response involves regular visual checks and removal of leaves and debris from the boats.

A reduction in the size and overall leaf-bearing area of the trees would be expected to reduce, although not eliminate, the quantity of leaf and other debris reaching the moorings.



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4. Previous Management

The trees have been subject to pruning on several occasions, including works undertaken in 2015, 2019, 2020 and 2023.

Despite this history of crown management, the client reports that the problems associated with the trees continue.

The repeated use of conventional crown reduction therefore does not appear to have provided a sufficiently long-term solution to the operational problems being experienced by the boatyard.

5. Management Options Considered

Option 1 – Removal and replacement

The first option would be to remove the two mature London Planes and replant with a single line of new trees positioned towards the centre of the island.

Removal would eliminate the problems directly associated with the existing trees, although replacement planting would introduce a new generation of trees and their associated future management requirements.

Given the size, maturity and visual prominence of the existing London Planes, I consider that obtaining consent for their complete removal may be difficult. Their removal would also result in the immediate loss of two established landscape features.

For these reasons, removal should, in my view, be regarded as a last-resort option rather than the preferred initial management solution.

Option 2 – Repeat conventional crown reduction

A second option would be to continue with conventional crown reduction at intervals of approximately 3–5 years. This approach would retain the existing tree form and appearance to a greater degree than pollarding.

However, the trees have already been subject to repeated pruning, including works in 2015, 2019, 2020 and 2023, and the client reports that the underlying problems remain.

Option 3 – Conversion to managed multi knuckle pollards

The third option would be to convert the trees to a managed pollard form, creating a series of established pollard points at suitable branch unions and subsequently managing the resulting regrowth on a regular cycle.

The intention would be to substantially reduce both the height and lateral spread of the existing crowns and to establish a sustainable, smaller tree form that can subsequently be maintained through repeat pollarding.

This would represent a significant change to the current appearance of the trees and would result in a noticeable reduction in crown size following the initial works.

However, it would retain the existing mature trees and their associated landscape and ecological benefits whilst providing a substantially smaller and more controllable crown structure.



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6. Recommended Management

Of the options considered, I recommend that an application be made to the LPA for the conversion of the two London Planes to managed pollards

The initial works should be designed to:

- * substantially reduce the overall height and lateral spread of the trees;
- * reduce the amount of leaf-bearing canopy extending over the moorings;
- * reduce the availability of branches directly above the boats for bird roosting;
- * establish clearly defined and sustainable pollard points;
- * retain the two existing mature trees rather than remove them; and
- * create a manageable long-term tree form capable of being maintained through repeat pollarding.

Following establishment, the trees should be subject to a regular repeat pollarding regime, anticipated to be approximately every three years, subject to assessment of the rate and nature of regrowth.

7. Consideration of Pollarding

The conversion of an established mature tree to pollarded management requires careful consideration and should only be undertaken where the individual trees, their condition and their existing structure are suitable. BS 3998:2010 recognises that pollarding is generally most appropriately initiated on young trees. However, this should not be interpreted as meaning that pollarding of mature trees is inherently inappropriate in every circumstance.

There are numerous examples of mature trees being retained and managed through established pollard regimes, particularly where there is a long-term management objective requiring the tree to remain at a substantially reduced size.

In this case, the proposed works would not be intended as a one-off severe reduction. The objective would be to establish a new, deliberately managed tree form which could then be maintained on a regular cycle.

Before any works are undertaken, the individual trees should be assessed to determine whether suitable branches and unions exist from which appropriate pollard points can be established.

8. Anticipated Benefits

The proposed management should substantially reduce the size of the existing crowns and consequently reduce the quantity of leaf and other debris reaching the moorings.

It should also reduce the extent of canopy directly over the boats and therefore reduce opportunities for bird roosting above the moorings.

The smaller crown dimensions would also reduce the potential size and weight of individual branches that could subsequently develop above the target area, although no tree management regime can eliminate the possibility of branch failure entirely.

Importantly, the proposal provides an opportunity to retain the two mature London Planes whilst adapting their size and form to better reflect the constraints imposed by their location and the current use of the surrounding area.



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9. Conclusion

The two London Planes are mature and prominent trees which contribute to the character of the island and the wider river environment.

At the same time, their current size and form are creating an ongoing conflict with the use of the surrounding area for seasonal boat moorings.

Previous conventional crown reductions have not, according to the information provided, adequately resolved the problems.

Complete removal would resolve the issues associated with these particular trees but would result in the loss of two mature specimens and would consequently require a significant justification to the LPA.

I therefore consider conversion to a managed pollard form to be a potentially appropriate compromise, subject to confirmation that the individual trees are suitable for the proposed treatment.

The objective would be to retain the mature trees while establishing a substantially smaller, controlled and sustainable crown form. The proposed three-year management cycle should then allow the trees to be maintained at a size more compatible with the use of the surrounding moorings.

If, following implementation and an appropriate period of monitoring, the proposed management regime does not adequately resolve the problems, the question of removal and replacement could be reconsidered at that stage.

Kind regards

Neil Wilson Beechwood Tree Care Ltd