

3615

9th July 2018

ARBORICULTURALIST'S REPORT

Terms of Reference

- 1.1 This report was requested by Yvonne Irving of Little Altcar Council.
- 1.2 The instruction to inspect a hedge at Altcar Lane, Formby was received by email.
- 1.2 The purpose of my inspection and report is to assess the condition and value of a hedgeline alongside Altcar Lane.

Limitations

- 2.1 The content of this report is valid for a period of three years from the date shown above.
- 2.2 The report is for the sole use of the client and its reproduction or use by anyone else is forbidden unless written consent is given by the author.
- 2.3 This is an arboricultural report and as such, no reliance should be placed on comments relating to buildings or soil data.
- 2.4 This is not a full arboricultural survey. This can be supplied but will be subject to a further fee. Any safety implications identified during the inspection are of course noted within this report.
- 2.5 My observations and comments are based upon experience with previous cases. I have no formal engineering qualifications.
- 2.6 The inspection was undertaken from ground level.

The Site

- 3.1 I carried out my site visit on 2nd July 2018, during which time the weather was fine and dry with adequate visibility.

- 3.2 The hedge runs east to west along the southern boundary of Altcar Lane, from the boundary of 27 Altcar Lane to the entrance of a caravan storage area close to a small woodland by the sewage treatment works. It forms the boundary between Altcar Lane and an area of former agricultural grazing land which has now been designated for residential development.
- 3.3 It is immediately adjacent to the public road, which means that management has been undertaken to cut back vegetation to prevent the obstruction of vehicular traffic.
- 3.4 The hedge contains a mixture of trees, shrubs and non-woody vegetation. The species mix includes Hawthorn, Elder, Cherry, White Poplar, Sycamore, Bramble and Snowberry.
- 3.5 The hedge was originally planted over 50 years ago as a monoculture Hawthorn hedge. Other species of woody and non-woody vegetation have colonised the area over the years. The Hawthorn has been heavily suppressed in areas where the White Poplar trees are present
- 3.6 Where the Hawthorn is still present, it is healthy and displays normal vigour, giving it a PSULE of at least 50 years, potentially more.
- 3.7 Hedgerows are valuable landscape features and their value can be quantified as visual amenity, historical, ecological and functional.
- 3.8 In this case, the hedge provides:
- 3.8.1 a wildlife corridor, allowing the natural movement of small mammals and birds.
 - 3.8.2 a valuable food source for songbirds and habitat for invertebrates and insects.
 - 3.8.3 a foraging area for bats and nesting for numerous bird species.
- 3.9 It is also important as a visual barrier between the proposed new development and the existing Altcar Lane housing.

Legislation

- 4.1 Legislation regarding hedgerows is found in two areas. The NERC Act 2006 and the Hedgerow Regulations 1997. Both documents provide guidance and appropriate levels of statutory protection for important and valuable hedgerows.

- 4.2 Under the Hedgerow Regulations, the hedge does not qualify as being an “important” hedge because of the number of woody species present. It does however meet most of the other criteria.
- 4.3 Under the NERC Act, the hedge meets many of the criteria within section 41.

Discussion

- 5.1 The original assessment of the hedge undertaken for the developer for planning purposes has described the hedge as “defunct”, the meaning of which is “no longer existing or functional”. This is clearly not the case.
- 5.2 From a development point of view, it makes no sense to remove an existing, healthy landscape feature that could enhance a new housing scheme, unless it were to restrict the development.
- 5.3 If Root Protection Areas (RPA’s) were to be awarded to the Poplar trees as part of a BS5837 2012 tree survey, they would encroach into land with potential for development as housing or associated infrastructure. There would obviously be a financial loss to the developer in losing the potential of useable land.
- 5.4 If the hedge was to be retained and taken into management, one of the management items would be the removal of the Poplar trees, which are suppressing the Hawthorn. This would be backed up by planting new Hawthorn shrubs in areas where there are significant gaps.
- 5.5 Following the removal of the Poplar trees and chemical treatment of the roots to prevent regrowth, it would be possible to plant up the area and improve the hedge density.
- 5.6 The absence of the Poplar trees would remove the constraints on the developer created by their RPA’s. The vastly reduced protection zone for the hedge would not have any adverse influence on the layout of the proposed development.
- 5.7 The healthy hedge would be a valuable visual, ecological and social asset to the existing and future built environment.

Prior to commencing any arboricultural work to trees, it is essential to liaise with the Local Planning Authority they may be protected by a Tree Preservation Order or within a Conservation Area.

Any arboricultural work should be carried out by a competent arborist in line with BS3998 British Standards for Tree Work. Should you require details of suitably qualified contractors, the Arboricultural Association maintains a list which is available by calling 01242 522 152 or via their website (www.trees.org.uk).

Trees are self-optimising mechanical structures that grow in and react to their environment. They are living organisms that live and die, and are capable of being wounded or infected by objects or other organisms. As self-optimising structures, trees will make as much economic use of materials as possible to ensure that any stresses are uniformly spread over the entire surface area. This means that even a mechanically perfect tree could be damaged or caused to fail by extreme events, such as weather, that overload specific areas (break points).

No tree can ever be guaranteed to be 100% safe and even trees in good condition can suffer damage under normal conditions. Any tree can be hazardous as a result of decay or structural weakness, but the risk posed by that hazard is determined by its size and location in relation to the potential target. Frequent inspections can help to identify potential problems before they become acute and allow for intervention to mitigate against a risk posed by hazard.

All wild birds, their young, eggs and active nests are protected under law and it is an offence to damage a nest intentionally while it is in use or being built. Non-urgent tree work or hedge cutting should not be undertaken during the bird nesting or breeding season (March to July, but depending on seasonal temperatures, some birds continue breeding into August and September).

All bats and their roosts are strictly protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Natural Habitats and Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Where bats are suspected to be present, seek advice from a licensed bat specialist before carrying out any major tree work or hedge cutting.

Should you have any questions or require any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Hatton
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