



WOKINGHAM DISTRICT VETERAN TREE ASSOCIATION WOKINGHAM TREE WARDEN NETWORK

Comments on the LDA Design Report for Elms Field, the Paddocks car park and Wellington House *

Planning application number F/2013/2284 Section 3107 Trees Open Space, Planting and Landscaping

Members of WDVTA and WTWN believe that while there is much to commend in the objectives and recommendations for trees in the LDA Design Report, there are a number of concerns that should be addressed.

1. A high loss of high and medium quality trees is proposed – this should be reduced and/or mitigated wherever possible

The LDA Design Report identifies a total of 139 trees and 16 tree groups that grow on this site. However of these 15 are Grade A (high quality) 25 are Grade B (Moderate Quality), 109 are Grade C (Low quality) 6 are Grade U (Suitable for removal).

Only 12 trees are proposed for retention, 5 of which are in the new park. These latter include 2 Category A trees, 1 Category B tree and 2 Category C trees (No information is easily accessible for the quality of the other 7). Of the 143 trees/tree groups are to be removed including approximately 13 Grade A, 20-24 Grade B, 104 Grade C trees. A total of 127 trees will be lost

The potential loss of approximately 13 high quality and 20 medium trees is a serious price to pay for this development. These include 4 trees recorded in the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association (WDVTA) survey of veteran and significant trees. See <http://www.wdvta.org.uk/WDVTS/index.php>

(The proposal's tree numbers (T) and their Master Record Numbers (MRN) on the WDVTA map are given below)

The 4 trees identified by WDVTS as significant to be lost are:

≡ 1 sycamore	(T 4), (MRN 695)	approximately 70 years old
≡ 1 English oak	(T 12) (MRN 185)	over 150 years old
≡ 1 common lime	(T 1)(MRN 183)	one of a row along Denmark Street
≡ 1 London plane	(T 24) (MRN 184),	approximately 100 years old over 100 years old.



We would hope that planners would look again at the plans to see if any more of those trees identified as Grade A or B and the four notable trees identified above, could be retained.

2. The trees suggested, although large in number, do not appear to include trees that have the capacity to be high and medium quality trees in future.

32 trees are proposed within the housing development and 136 trees within the park (including street trees).

However, in spite of the claims about the benefits of the trees proposed, which are to be commended, only some could be claimed to be genuinely native trees and many are ‘architectural’ or small versions of the species.

≡ **23 Elm (*Ulmus ‘New Horizon’*)** Clearly elm trees have been chosen to reflect the name of the park, ‘Elms Field’. The elms referred to in the name, however, were native English elms (*Ulmus procera*) that once grew in front of the house on Broad Street still named ‘The Elms’. Sadly it is generally no longer viable to plant English elms owing to Dutch elm disease, so perhaps the ‘New Horizon’ variety was chosen because it is claimed to be resistant to this disease.

However ‘New Horizon’ is a cross between the Japanese and Siberian elm and is cultivated in America. It is difficult to see what historical reference trees of this variety might claim. Moreover it is ‘architectural’ in form and some doubts reported about its need for maintenance and likely success. This needs further exploration by tree experts.

We would like to recommend planting a few disease resistant elm species of English origin, for example those to be obtained from a tree nursery in Rayne, Essex <http://www.kingco.co.uk/ulmus-species.html> . The owner started selling these elm trees in 2010 from resistant stock he discovered 25 years earlier. Wokingham Borough Council has recently allowed an elm from this nursery to be planted by the Wokingham Tree Warden Network in a park at Twyford. A small group of these elms would be a very valuable and suitable feature of Elms Field

- ≡ **34 White flowering cherries (*Prunus avium*)** – attractive native trees with many wild life and aesthetic benefits. These are to be welcomed.
- ≡ **37 Lime trees (*Tilia cordata* ‘Greenspire’)** – The small-leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*) is native to Britain and grows to 30m, not that much shorter than the common lime (*Tilia x vulgaris*) which grow at present on Elms Field. However the Greenspire variety appear to be ‘architectural versions’ of the small leaved lime. Many local people have specifically admired the existing common limes and regret their future loss. Most of these limes will be removed except one fine example (T81). The recommended trees would provide benefits for bees and other wildlife but they have a symmetrical and pyramidal shape. We would prefer fewer common or small leaved limes than the proposed 37 Greenspire variety.
- ≡ **3 Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)** – a good choice depending on the variety selected. These should provide a less uniform shape and many wildlife benefits. It is a pity only 3 of these proposed. Some householders do not like the berries that these trees drop in the autumn so it would be best not to plant them too near houses.
- ≡ **3 Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)** – these trees, native to America, have striking autumn colour so are to be welcomed.
- ≡ **11 Himalayan Birch (*Betula jacquemontii*)** – although not native to Britain, these trees have an attractive free flowing shape and their white bark is particularly striking in winter. They are to be welcomed.
- ≡ **20 Bastard Service tree (*Sorbus thuringiaca* ‘Fastigiata’)** – This is a small columnar, narrowly upright tree – architectural in shape. These would not seem to be especially suitable in the park. We would prefer to see Wild Service Trees (*Sorbus torminalis*) planted. These trees are native to Britain and are becoming increasingly rare. They have interestingly shaped leaves, edible fruit and attractive autumn colours.
- ≡ **5 Hornbeam (*Capinus betulus* ‘Fastigiata’)** – Hornbeams are attractive, native trees but the ‘Fastigiata’ variety is described as ‘a small, upright, columnar tree, architectural in shape’. Although native hornbeams are to be welcomed, trees of this smaller variety could look too formal.

Numbers of trees do not give an adequate picture of the attractiveness of a treescape. The maturity and quality of a few trees can more than compensate for large numbers of small trees, which are never going to grow to a notable size. A special attraction of the Elms Field is that some of the trees, for example those already listed, have reached a mature height and give special historic and cultural character to the area.

As far as we know, though this would need to be checked with arboricultural experts, few of the replacement trees that are proposed are likely to grow into notable trees as commented above. Using greater numbers of trees as a measure of the future quality of the overall treescape is not necessarily a valid argument.

3. Some trees to be removed have special significance for Wokingham's history and some replacements should be considered.

a. The English oak, *Quercus robur*

This is a very important tree for Wokingham, historically and culturally. It is very sad that all 8 English oaks on Elms Field are to be removed and there is no plan to replace them even with one specimen tree that could grow to its full extent as a special feature of the park. We wonder whether consideration could be given to replacing several proposed smaller trees with a young oak tree in a prominent position where it can grow to its full extent over coming years and become a symbolic landmark.

b. The London plane *Platanus hispanica*

The other distinctive tree that is suggested should be removed is the London Plane (T24). We wonder why there are no plans to replace this with a young London Plane as a successor to this memorable feature of Elms Field.

c. Pride of India *Koelreuteria paniculata* (T 85)

This is a very distinctive and attractive tree which people have enjoyed as they approach the Elms car park. If this cannot be saved then it would be splendid to plant another such tree in the park area.

4. Memorial trees growing on Elms Field should be protected or replaced.

Planners may not be aware that over the years, memorial trees have been planted in the Elms Field. A lime tree (possibly T 89) was planted by Bert Spragg to commemorate Fred Napper, a well-known beekeeper in the town. (Mr Spragg was later commemorated by the planting of a lime tree in Langborough Road Recreation Ground.) Mrs Jenny Gilbert of the Wokingham Horticultural Association reports that Betula Pendula (T 71) was planted in 1977 by the First Wokingham Brownies to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee. The copper beech (T 62) was planted by Mr Robert Wood and his son Mr Royston Wood in 1973 (Plant a tree in '73) in memory of Mrs Florence Wood (Robert's wife and Royston's mother) who lived in Molly Millers Lane on the site now occupied by the Alexandra Grange Care Home.

It would be good if consideration could be given to retaining any or all of these trees or allowing similar new trees to be planted with appropriate celebrations.

5. Community orchards – valuable but not suitable for Elms Field

There have been some suggestions that there should be a community orchard planted on Elms Field. WDVTA and WTWN are extremely supportive of the concept of community orchards and welcome those that have been planted or planned in various parks across the borough. We do not feel, however, that Elms Field would be a suitable park for a community orchard and are pleased to see that there is no proposal for one in the initial planning application.

6 All workers should be fully aware of protection measures for retained trees

It is pleasing to see that LDA stipulates that tree protection measures should be fully implemented with regard to trees not to be felled during construction work on the site. It is especially important, as the report indicates, that all members of the construction team are aware of, and pay attention to, these protection measures throughout the works. Experience of other construction works suggests that while the planning and management team may have these objectives in mind, workers at the 'coal face' do not always implement these regulations and this should be monitored throughout.

Summary/conclusion.

It would be helpful if the above 6 points were considered in the context of finalising any plans. We do not claim to be experts in arboriculture although we have taken care to explore the accuracy of our comments. We would appreciate it if our comments and suggestions could be checked by independent arboricultural specialists, in particular with regard to the characteristics and quality of the trees proposed to be planted.

BK Stagles

On behalf of the Wokingham District Veteran Trees Association and Wokingham Tree Warden Network

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* No comments have been made on the plans for Peach Place and Shute End as we believe there is nothing seriously controversial in the recommendations for trees on these sites.