

Aylesford **575146 163094** **11 June 2009** **TM/09/01522/TPOC**
Blue Bell Hill And
Walderslade

Proposal: Taddington Wood – Reduce height or coppice trees to rear of
42 Marston Close (retaining all standard Oaks) and allow to
regenerate (T.P.O. 12-02-18)
Location: Land Rear Of 42 Marston Close Walderslade Chatham Kent
Applicant: Ian Howick

1. Description:

- 1.1 This proposal is for work to six large Hornbeams in Taddington Wood to the rear (south-west) of 42 Marston Close. The residents of no 42 have applied to either substantially reduce the height of these trees, or coppice them, as they consider their excessive height to be oppressive.

2. Reason for reporting to Committee:

- 2.1 There are strong objections from a number of local residents who do not want to see the trees coppiced.

3. The Site:

- 3.1 The site is part of an area of wooded open space, lying outside the urban built confines of Walderslade, to the west of the built-up area. It is within an area identified as an Important Green Space by saved policy P4/10 of the TMBLP. The woodland is owned by the Borough Council and maintained as public open space.

4. Planning History:

- 4.1 None relevant.

5. Consultees:

- 5.1 PC: No objection in principle providing it is acceptable to the tree officer.
- 5.2 Private reps: 9/0X/0S/3R. Objections raised on the following grounds:
- If approved it could create a precedent for a rash of similar requests from anyone whose property backs onto the woodland.
 - The reason stated for reduction or coppicing the trees is because the residents find them oppressive, which is trivial in comparison to the appreciation of mature healthy trees by many people who enjoy the woodland.
 - Coppicing is a drastic measure: the area will not recover in most people's lifetime (scrub and brambles are no compensation for mature trees.)

- The need for some management is recognised by some residents but removal of so many trees from one area will fundamentally alter the aspect to neighbours. It is suggested that perhaps only two trees immediately behind the property need to be reduced or coppiced, if strictly necessary.
- Other residents have applied to reduce the height of Hornbeams in their own gardens which have been approved. Would have no objection to the trees being reduced by one third.
- The trees act as a buffer for the motorway traffic and go-karting activities in Buckmore Park.
- Removal of the trees would open up the boundary to intruders and would be an additional playground for the motorcyclists that plague the valley. The trees act to keep the motorcyclists away from the boundaries. It has been mooted in the past by the Council that a 30 foot area behind the houses is cleared. This suggestion was roundly condemned for the fear of creating a racetrack.
- This is an award winning housing development designed to provide a largely open plan area in sympathy with local environment, which includes woodland. The owners of properties choose to live here due to the feature that this application seeks to remove.
- Concern about loss of habitat for a variety of birds, bats and other wildlife.

6. Determining Issues:

- 6.1 The trees concerned are protected by the Tree Preservation Order that covers most of the Walderslade area and which was served in 1969. The principal considerations in determining this application are the amenity value of the trees, and whether this would be unacceptably harmed through the proposed works, and also the question of good arboricultural and silvicultural practice. Saved Policy P4/10, which identifies the area as an Important Green Space, presumes against development here unless the need for it is overriding. Any proposals are required to not adversely affect the contribution that the space makes to the character and quality of the townscape.
- 6.2 The Borough Council's Senior Parks Officer and Landscape Officer had a lengthy discussion with the applicants prior to the application being submitted. It was recognised that some of the trees have grown very tall and can seem overbearing. The applicants were advised that the coppicing of the trees, retaining the standards, was likely to be the most acceptable option, in the long term interest of woodland. The applicants have said that they would be happy to see them reduced in height, but this is not in the longer term interest of the management or health of the trees, as topped trees can develop water pockets and, after re-growth has occurred and the weight becomes heavier, branches can start breaking out of them.

- 6.3 As pointed out by residents, some years ago a consultation exercise was carried out to seek local residents' views on a proposal to coppice a 10 m strip close to the rear boundaries of these properties to alleviate overshadowing and overhanging problems and to bring the strip into a more regular maintenance regime and thus alleviate future problems. That proposal was not welcomed by the majority of local residents and was not progressed. The cost of managing the wood on a rotational basis has been prohibitive over recent years as there has been no market for the coppiced wood.
- 6.4 Coppicing is considered to be important in maintaining a dynamic habitat for nesting birds and wildlife. It is a positive tool in the long-term management of woodland such as this. This view is endorsed by the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and Kent Wildlife Trust. Whilst coppicing appears to be initially rather drastic, the speed at which the coppice regenerates is impressive, creating a valuable and varied habitat for wildlife. Although the visual amenity value of the trees will temporarily be reduced, they will re-generate within a relatively short time span, thus restoring this contribution to amenity. Also, it should be noted that only the hornbeams are proposed for coppicing; the standards of other species, including some substantial Oaks that are nearby, will be retained throughout.
- 6.5 Despite the applicants' and some residents' preference for a reduction in the height of the trees, rather than coppicing, the Council needs to look at the longer term interests of the woodland and plan for future management. I believe that coppicing is the best option.

7. Recommendation:

- 7.1 **Grant Consent** in accordance with the following submitted details: Location Plan dated 11.06.2009 subject to:
- The applicants confirmation that the application is for coppicing the trees, rather than a reduction in height
 - The following conditions:
 1. Coppice and/or underwood shall be properly cut to within 300mm of ground level with the cuts so sloping outwards as to prevent any moisture from falling towards the centre of the stool and rotting it.

Reason: In the interests of good forestry and amenity.
 2. Subsequent to the implementation of any of the approved coppicing works the remaining tree stumps shall not be removed, wilfully damaged or destroyed UNLESS a period of one year has elapsed since the coppicing and the stumps have not regenerated at all in which case replacement trees (only for those which have failed to regenerate) shall be planted in the next available planting season in accordance with details to be agreed beforehand with the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To retain and enhance the character of the locality and in the interests of good forestry.

Contact: Liz Guthrie