Oak in rear garden of 118 Bro Deg, Ruthin

Date of inspection - 29 January 2021

Species – Pedunculate Oak (Quercus robur)

Age Class – Mature

Diameter at Breast Height – 1405mm

Height – 15m

Crown spread – 8m

Condition – Fair/Good

Vigour- Good

Location

The base of the tree is situated in the rear garden adjacent the boundary with 56 Maes Cataban and near to the side boundary with 119 Bro Deg

Condition

The rooting area of the tree is level and undisturbed apart from some recent work to erect a new fence and gravel boards along the eastern garden boundary.

At the base on the south side of the trunk there is opening. This opening does not lead to exposed heart wood or sapwood and has not initiated decay.

There is minor bark damage to the buttresses on the east side that has probably been caused by the erection of the new fence.

The oak's bole is stout in comparison to the crown it supports, there is no evidence of any major cavities. The trunk has some ivy growth which extends to the main limbs just above the main fork.

There was no evidence of sporophores or evidence of old sporophores on the trunk, buttresses or the roots.

The bole divides into five upright scaffold limbs at 3.8m that range in diameter from an estimated 300mm to 700mm diameter.

The oak has been poorly pruned in the past to remove most of the foliage bearing branches on the lower two thirds of the crown and also topped. This has led to a lion's tail appearance with long main branches only having foliage towards the tips and a lack of suitable branch framework. Most recently, tree pruning has been undertaken to remove lower branches growing towards the dwelling, estimated to be 75mm to 225mm in diameter at their bases. Plate 1 shows part of the crown before these branches were removed. The recent pruning has exacerbated the lion's tailing.

The historic and recent pruning has left the tree with foliage bearing branches confined to the top of the crown which has detrimentally impacted on the tree's appearance.

Plate 1.

Plate 2 is a photograph of the crown out of leaf from the rear garden of 118 Bro Deg and shows the old topping cuts in red and scaffold limb defects in blue. The two topping cuts left and second left in Plate 2 have resulted in the parent limb dying back to the main fork several metres below.

Plate 2.

The three main limb defects identified in blue are lower down the crown. The limb to the left has evidence of some hollowing out. Below the recent pruning cut there are two points of decay with the lower one having staining beneath, possibly indicating water outflow from a cavity which extends downwards from the above point of decay. At and just above the stub from the pruning there is section of included bark. During my visit, the property owner advised me that the tree contractor was particularly concerned about this particularly limb being weak.

The limb defect shown in blue towards the middle of plate 2 is not visible from the garden of 118 Bro Deg because it is on the northern side. This is the defect shown in the short video submitted by the tree owner and included in the photographs submitted by Mr Logan of 56 Maes Cataban. The defect comprises of a longitudinal cavity with a wide opening, probably resulting from a branch tearing out some time ago. The limb on the right hand side of Plate 1 shown in blue appears to have resulted from another branch failure.

As a result of the previous pruning there are decay entry points spread throughout the crown in the smaller branches. These vary from minor points of decay to several that appear to be a significant weakness as a result of the decay's extent.

Plate 3 shows top of the crown in leaf with good vigour and no evidence of dieback.

The main cause for concern is the potential for one of the main scaffold limbs to break out and fall into the garden. There is a risk that the worst affected of the smaller branches could also fail however the consequences of the failure of these branches would be less severe.

Amenity Assessment

An evaluation has been undertaken of the tree's amenity using the industry standard Tree Evaluation Method for Preservation Orders (TEMPO) a copy is attached as appendix 1 along with the guidance notes.

Plate 3.

Due to the oak's size, visibility and its potential lifespan the tree has scored highly and definitely meets the criteria to be afforded protection by a TPO. The photographs taken of the tree in leaf demonstrates the significant amenity it affords to the area, where there are few other large trees (Plate 3).

The Objections

The Tree survey report by A. Williams submitted claims that there are large limbs showing serious signs of rot and recommends their removal. These points of decay have not been described in the report. However personal conversation with the owner advised that the left hand limb in Plate 2 and the limb subject to the video are the main cause of concern. These limbs and other defective branches could be pruned out to reduce the level of risk as part of remedial pruning to the tree, that also took account

the tree's shape and the amenity it provides. A specification for the work will need to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

The undated report by the Drain Doctor states that there is severe root ingress in the drain and that it is believed a fence post has broken the drain. Tree roots will grow into a defective drain but rarely exert enough force to damage them, where they do, the drain can be repaired and the adjacent root cut away if appropriate.

In summary the objections made by the owner and residents relate to the safety of the tree and are covered above.

Conclusion

The tree is a mature specimen that is a prominent feature and affords significant amenity to the area. The girth of the tree's trunk indicates that it is of significant age and probably stood on a field boundary for many decades until the land was developed for housing. Since the houses were constructed the tree has remained as a feature in the landscape.

The tree has been subject to pruning that has not been sympathetic and has initiated decay in the smaller branches, several main upright limbs and caused dead branches. The defects in the main upright limbs need to be addressed to reduce risk. Notwithstanding, no major defects were noted in the trunk, buttresses, main forks or root plate.

List of documents referred to in report

Email of objection from Sophie Jones 19/01/2021

Tree survey report by A. Williams 18/01/2021

Schedule of works by A R Owen and photos

Drain Doctor Report (No Date)

Email of objection from Ian Logan 19/01/2021, 22/12/2021 and photographs

Email of objection from Hefin Hughes 16/01/2021

Letter of objection from Nancy Perkins 16/01/2021

Planning comment from Mark Timmins 18/01/2021

Provisional TPO

SB 16 February 2021