

CONDITION ASSESSMENT OF BEECH TREE LOCATED AT REAR OF 1 ST DENYS CROFT, CLITHEROE. BB72BY

Client: Mr and Mrs A Mckenzie 1 St Denys Croft, Clitheroe (The resident property owners)

Date of Tree Inspection: 31.7.26

Weather conditions: Clear and dry.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE.

1. The Tree in question is located to the rear of the property within 300mm of a 2m high mortared random stone wall being the boundary with 7 Pimlico Road. The tree is within Character Area 3 of the Clitheroe Conservation Area covered by Tree Protection legislation administered by Ribble Valley Borough Council and any planned works will have to be discussed with the Local Authority and no works carried out without formal permission from the council.
2. The large Beech Tree shed a limb into the garden on Friday 10th July in the afternoon. Clitheroe was very warm and clear with a high temperature of around 29°C (84°F–91°F), low humidity around 74%, and light winds at about 9 km/h. The council Tree Officer identified the cause of the incident as Summer Branch Drop and commented that branch 'would have killed someone had they been beneath it.' The debris was not retained for inspection but the girth diameter at the fracture point was described as being 150-200mm. The failed branch also exhibited the torn and ragged failure point of a horizontal branch as described in the professional literature. The client and the Tree officer has asked us to carry out a re-inspection and make appropriate recommendations.
3. Our remit is to carry out an inspection of the beech tree to determine any indicators of ill health, to determine the nature and extent of any decay or disease and to recommend appropriate action.

The Tree Inspector

I am Ken Linford, a consulting arborist, trained in Pre-development Tree assessment, Quantified Tree Risk Assessment and Tree Defect identification. I have experience as a tree care contractor for more than 25 years and have been providing a consulting service for Local Councils, private persons and architects for 26 years. My CPD record is open to inspection if required. I am covered by PI insurance by Trust Insurance to £1,000,000.



The Tree

1. The mature Beech tree is located 300mm from the rear garden boundary wall and has a height of 20m and a girth Diameter at 1.5m of 1510mm. The tree is twin stemmed from 2m from ground level with a further rubbing semi-conjoinment at 7m from ground level. Ivy infestation is present up to 8m and this has inhibited visual inspection.
2. We would regard the tree as being mature and predating the development of St Denys Croft. The tree may be consistent in age with the property 7 Pimlico Rd the end gable of which is some 3m distant. No significant boundary wall distortion is visible and we are not aware of any concerns from adjacent property owners at this stage.
3. The tree has a canopy spread extending 6m towards the end gable of the neighbouring property and some 10-12m over the garden and rear elevation of 1 St Denys Croft. The tree is located 6m from the development foul drain line of 1 St Denys Croft. .
4. The canopy was in full growth at the time of the branch failure and the inspection and was **significantly different** to its condition when last inspected. There was an obvious lack of twig extension and a marked dieback shown by the canopy thinness as shown in the photo. The lower fork showed no signs of an included bark union but the ivy cover makes inspection obstructed as in the 2015 inspection.



5. The root plate was inspected and appeared free from any Ganoderma fungal fruiting bodies and there is no past evidence of Meripilus or the fruiting bodies of other pathogens. Hammer tests around the root plate and lower indicated structurally sound timber.
6. The situation indicates Summer Branch Drop (SBD) the cause and significance of which has been debated by the Professional Community for over 30 years.

Summer Branch Drop

Summer branch drop is the unexpected failure and falling of a large limb from a mature, seemingly healthy tree during warm or hot, calm weather. It often happens without warning, featuring no strong winds or obvious visible defects. While the exact mechanical trigger is still not fully understood, it is most commonly linked to long horizontal branches, water stress from prolonged dry spells, and heavy summer canopies.

- **Weather Triggers:** Most events happen during hot, still afternoons, frequently after a long dry period followed by a sudden downpour or heavy rain.
- **Internal Water and Cell Stress:** Changes in internal tree pressure, high moisture levels from sudden rain, or high xylem pressure may weaken cell walls inside the wood.
- **Susceptible Trees:** Older or over-mature broadleaved species—such as oak, ash, beech, and horse chestnut—are most prone to shedding.

Risk Assessment

The normal procedure for risk Assessment is to determine the target and its value and its presence in relation to the Tree and its likely failure Zone. In this case the target is the occupants and their property and adjacent property. The canopy spread extends over the useable garden of the house and its owners, dog and visitors and to mitigate the possible risks the whole garden and access ways would have to be put out of bounds. Reducing the canopy spread of the tree by removing the horizontal branches might reduce the end weight of the branches and reduce failure likelihood but will result in a semi pollard of the tree and a dramatic change to its shape and visual amenity to the neighbourhood.

The likelihood of the failure of a tree can be assessed from visible features such as the presence of pathogens and their fruiting bodies and structural features such as a lean associated with wind damage or root damage and consequent imbalance. Internal cavities and the timber quality changes caused by *Ustulina* or root decay by *Meripilus giganteus*. A large beech which has been the subject of SBD shows no such evidence of likelihood and for many years we have been adopting a 'two strikes and you're out' principle. The idea being that after two incidents the SBD will become a normal pattern and removal of the tree is then considered to be expected.

According to the Arboricultural Association vigorous maturing trees of susceptible species appear less prone to 'summer branch drop' while over-mature and senescent specimens may shed branches repeatedly. An enclosed target area and a late mature and stressed Beech is therefore likely to carry a risk of harm.

People do have a respect for trees but a fear that they are large, heavy and may fail adds to the problem. The likelihood of a branch being able to kill someone or a tree diagnosis having the term 'widow maker' makes the fear of having to live with the tree an added burden. The residents in this situation fear using their garden as a place of safety in which friends can be met with and where they can rest in a summer afternoon. They also have the problem of sharing with their close neighbours the diagnosis of their SBD beech and their subsequent liabilities to third parties.

2026 may be known as the year global warming with a dry spring and summer brought desiccation and circumstances which make SBD a more likely phenomenon than previously.

CONCLUSIONS

The tree has no visible signs of structural defects or internal butt decay or root dysfunction. Ground and tree canopy desiccation is evident and beech have always been reported as surface rooters and therefore likely to summer in draught conditions. The failure of the limb raises significant doubts as to whether the tree should be retained in terms of the likelihood of a repeated limb or branch failure. The current and possibly future failure places responsibility to explain the problem to their near neighbours who will have views on the tree and its failure potential onto their roof or garden.

RECOMMENDED WORKS

The tree should be felled flush to ground and the stump treated with Eco Plugs inserted according to the manufacturer's instructions.

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CONSULTING ARBORIST

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