

Stoke Gabriel Parish Council,  
c/o the Parish Clerk,  
Jollylane Cottage,  
Hexworthy,  
Yelverton,  
Devon  
PL20 6SD

Rupert Baker  
49 East St  
Ashburton  
Devon  
TQ13 7AQ

Tel 01364 652217  
Mob 07875 572487

e-mail: e-mail 1: rupert\_baker@tiscali.co.uk  
e-mail 2: elaineandrupert@hotmail.com  
www.rupertbaker-treeconsultant.co.uk

Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2020

## **Inspection and comments on an Ash tree on the edge of the footpath running to a field earmarked as a cemetery, Stoke Gabriel**

Dear Councillors,

I was asked to inspect the above tree, and report on its condition and the risk it poses to neighbouring properties.

I visited the site on the 30<sup>th</sup> July. The weather at the time was good; dry and mostly sunny, with good visibility.

This letter may be taken as a formal report on the condition of the tree, and the risk it poses. I start with an introduction about myself and my competence to report on the trees, moving on to an explanation of what I found, with my conclusions:

Introduction: Rupert Baker is a consultant and plantsman who works in arboriculture, forestry, and horticulture, though he also 'gets his hands dirty'. He has over 40 years' experience in these fields. He carries out tree risk surveys using the QTRA system to assess risk; trees in relation to development surveys to BS5837: 2012, veteran tree management, woodland planting and management plans, and arboretum and orchard design and layout. He also plants, establishes, and prunes orchards and arboreta. He keeps his qualifications up to date with courses, research, and discussion. He is a member of the Royal Forestry Society, the Arboricultural Association, and the Tree Register of the British Isles.

He is fully insured for Professional Indemnity and Public Liability in respect of tree and woodland surveys, and for carrying out works for clients.

In addition to his own work, he serves as the Arboricultural consultant to the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) for the Chelsea and Hampton Court Flower Shows (When these are not cancelled due to pandemics..)

The tree I inspected for you is an Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), growing on the northern boundary of the footpath which runs from Aish Road into the field purchased by the Parish council as a potential cemetery. Soils here are fine-textured calcareous loams of the Crwbin Series, over Brixham limestone - reef limestone laid down in the Devonian period about 380 million years ago. Ash, being tolerant of a high pH, grows well on such soils provided they have not been compacted by construction work, and that the underlying bedrock has enough fissures and bedding planes to allow root ingress. (Source – on-site observation and BGS and SSEW maps). The houses to the south were built 9 years ago; and those to the north over 20 years ago. Given the tree's health and rate of growth, and the fact it is growing on a raised bank, I conclude that it took no serious harm from these developments.

According to South Hams District Council's interactive mapping, the tree is not legally protected by Tree Preservation Order.

The tree grows on an old Devon hedgebank, separating the track from a drive to properties to its north (Hirondelle and Little Paddocks). It will belong to whoever owns this hedge bank; this may be yourselves, the above property/s, or both. You would need to consult your deeds to see if the hedge bank is shown as being in ownership.

The tree itself is 22m high, multistemmed from its base, (common on hedgerow trees, as result of their being laid as part of the hedge in the past). It has six stems, with dbh (diameter at breast height) of between 25 and 40cm. It would be classed as being Mature in age and development. It has a full canopy with healthy looking foliage; which means that as yet, it is not suffering from Chalara Ash Dieback Disease (caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*). You are I am sure aware that the adjacent wood has a number of ash trees showing clear signs of the disease, so it may in future succumb; but is in my view currently healthy.

I cut enough of the ivy growing up the tree to be able to inspect its base carefully, both from your side, and from the private drive to the other houses. It appeared sound and healthy at the base with no signs of basal decay, and sound unions between its multiple stems.

The current advice from the Forestry Commission regarding healthy Ash is that they should be kept in case they show resistance to the disease,

I assessed the risk the trees posed to adjacent properties, and their inhabitants. I assessed this using the QTRA system, which gives a figure for the risk posed during the year following the inspection. It is worth noting that, given the relative position of the tree and the adjacent properties, it is the bungalow to its NE that is the most likely target, given the direction from which winds blow most strongly.

I assessed the risk for two scenarios - damage to the adjacent properties on either side, and injury to persons resident in them or using the gardens, as follows:

For the properties: Target range: 2; Size of part most likely to fail range: P (as the property is the target, the level of damage, assessed in the target rating, is used); Probability of Failure range: 6. This gives a Risk of Harm of less than 1:1million.

In respect of injury to persons using the gardens,

The following inputs were used: Target range 3; Size of part most likely to fail range 2; Probability of Failure range: 6. This also gives a Risk of Harm of less than 1:1million; and even if the gardens were to be used more regularly, during windy weather, which I consider unlikely, the inputs (2;2;6) still give a Risk of Harm of less than 1:1million.

The Health and Safety Executive considers that at this low level, it is unnecessary to carry out works to further reduce the risk.

To put the risk posed by trees into perspective, the total number of accidental deaths in the UK is over 12,000 per year. About 6 of these are due to trees (and the evidence suggests that the majority of these are caused by trees that are not the subject of an inspection programme). So one is 2000 times more likely to die from some other type of accident than by being hit by a falling tree. More specifically, 1870 people were killed in road traffic accidents in the UK in 2019. So one is around 300 times more likely to be killed in a road accident than by a falling tree.

To sum up: My professional opinion is that the tree is sound and healthy, poses a low level of risk to neighbours, and needs no work to reduce that risk further. Given the prevalence of Ash Dieback Disease, its condition will need to be monitored periodically, but it appears to be currently unaffected.

Do get in touch if you wish to discuss my findings;

I remain,

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Baker', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Rupert Baker BSc(Hons) Dip Arb (RFS) M Arbor A