

8. SKIPTON STREET TREES

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The purpose of this report is to respond to a deputation by Jenny Marshall regarding the trees in Skipton Street, Shirley.

BACKGROUND

The Board will recall that Jenny Marshall, representing the Macfarlane Park Neighbourhood Steering Group, requested the Scarlet Oak trees in Skipton Street be 'topped', as they are perceived to contribute toward damp conditions in the surrounding residences.

CONDITIONS OF TREES

The Scarlet Oaks in Skipton Street were planted in 1950 and average 15 metres in height. They are currently in a very healthy and structurally sound condition and are sufficiently mature as to form an attractive avenue effect along the street. The trees are deciduous with the canopies having been thinned over the years to give them an open, spreading nature. This enables the winter sunlight to permeate through the crowns to reach nearby properties.

DISCUSSION

Although it is acknowledged that an established tree may cause some shading for certain periods in summer and the transitional spring and autumn months, the enhancement to the environment by trees is invaluable. For this reason, the Parks and Waterways Unit make it a policy not to 'top' trees because of the significant impact caused to the shape of the mature tree's crown. This option also increases the chances of disease as the cut area will decay and provides a vulnerable pathogen entry-point to the wood structure, drastically shortening the tree's lifespan.

From an aesthetic point of view, the attractive character of Skipton Street would be spoilt by a topping operation, leaving a street lined with stump-like trees. Skipton Street has been identified as a Special Purpose (Road) Zone within the City Plan because of the value added to the locality by the mature Scarlet Oak trees. This classification means that any extra work other than standard maintenance is non-complying to the City Plan and further applications will be considered under Part II, Sections 104 and 105 of the Resource Management Act.

The Councils maintenance program provides for street tree crowns to be thinned by up to 25% in each pruning operation. The pruning rotation of street trees has been recently reduced to intervals of three years. This will provide better control over the growth of unwanted epicormic shoots and branches that may contribute significantly to the effects of property shading. As part of this maintenance rotation, the trees in Skipton Street have been attended to with general pruning and crown thinning in June 2002.

CONCLUSION

The aesthetic value of these fifty-year-old trees and preserving the Garden City ethic must be taken into account in any decision made regarding these Scarlet Oaks. 'Topping' the trees will not be considered by the Parks and Waterways Unit as their structure will be virtually destroyed by inappropriate pruning; a practice widely condemned within the Arboriculture Profession. Therefore, as the Scarlet Oaks were subject to routine pruning after the deputation was made to the Board, the Parks and Waterways Unit would prefer that further research is undertaken over time to establish the contribution these trees actually have on dampness and shading in Skipton Street.

Staff

Recommendation: That the Board decline the Skipton Street Residents request for the street trees to be 'topped' and that current approved maintenance practices continue.

Chairpersons

Recommendation: That the officer's recommendation be adopted; and that staff investigate the trees being designated as notable trees in the City Plan; and that further information be obtained on the impact the trees make to dampness and shading of properties.