

5. LONDON STREET: TREE REMOVAL

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The purpose of this report is to obtain the Committee's recommendation to the Board that it consent to the removal of a street tree obstructing the proposed construction of a new driveway/footpath crossing at 34 London Street.

BACKGROUND

An application has been received from Murray Brown Design Ltd for the removal of a street tree growing in the grass berm outside 34 London Street. This is to allow the construction of a new driveway crossing to the site which is proposed to be redeveloped by constructing three new townhouse units. The Board's consent to remove the tree is required before an application can be made for building consent.

Access to one of the units (Unit 1) is proposed for the south boundary of the property, off London Street. The unit's garage will be constructed to accommodate two vehicles. To have reasonable manoeuvring space giving safe access to the garage, the construction of a 4.8 metre wide driveway crossing, as shown on the application plan, is normally required. The street tree is situated 1.2 metres within the proposed crossing alignment.

THE TREE

The tree is a semi-mature box elder (*Acer negundo*) that was planted as part of the reconstruction and landscaping of the London Street roadway and footpaths in 1992. The tree is approximately 4.0 metres tall and about the same in crown diameter. It is still quite a young tree and is in a healthy and sound condition. There is no arboricultural reason why it should be removed.

TREE REMOVAL/REPLACEMENT OR TRANSPLANTING CONSIDERATIONS

The applicant, Murray Brown Ltd, has suggested that the tree be transplanted further east in the berm, clear of the driveway. However, to be successful in shifting trees of this size, the preparation of a large diameter root ball in the grass berm is required. This involves the excavation of a quite large (and deep) hole and the use of substantial lifting and digging machinery. Carried out correctly, in a manner that gives the tree the best chance of survival, operations such as this can cost several thousand dollars.

A preliminary investigation of the Council service plans shows that a water-main is located beneath the root system of the tree. With the considerable risk of the (PVC) pipe being damaged in the course of the transplanting operation, shifting the tree cannot be recommended.

Given the above considerations, should the Committee decide that the existing tree be removed, it would be preferable to plant a large nursery stock tree as a replacement, in a suitable position outside the property. A good quality replacement tree would soon grow and catch up with the size difference of the existing trees in the street.

OTHER OPTIONS

The applicant, Murray Brown Ltd, was asked to reconsider the design of the development and consider the possibility of repositioning the driveway clear of the tree. However, the response was that the design, as submitted, was the most practical and cost effective one for the development of the site and the one they wished to proceed with.

It would be possible to by-pass the tree by a distance of 1.0 metre by reducing the width of the driveway crossing to 2.7 metres (the minimum driveway width). However, considerable care would need to be exercised in reversing a vehicle past the tree out into the street.

Some pruning would be required to give sufficient clearance for vehicles and pruning to clear taller vehicles would give the tree a one-sided, unbalanced crown appearance.

The box elder has the potential to grow more than four times its present size. If the driveway is constructed close to the tree, there is a risk that roots would eventually damage it.

CONCLUSION

The re-development of the property at 34 London Street is something that is going to be in existence, without further alteration, for many years. Committing the future occupants of the property to a degree of long term risk and inconvenience is perhaps unreasonable when the existing tree can be satisfactorily replaced with a large nursery stock tree a safe distance from the new driveway. Any detrimental impact on the landscape values of the street by the removal and replacement of the existing tree would be short term and minor.

Staff

Recommendation: That the Committee recommend to the Board that:

1. It approve the removal of the box elder and its replacement with a large nursery stock tree not less than 3.5 metres in height.
2. The applicant pay the full cost of removing the existing tree and the cost of providing and planting the replacement tree.