

Market Square – Plane Trees

Site visit by A Cole (Parks) & R Horsey (Planning) on 3rd November 2005

Brief

To investigate issues relating to the incidence of footway trip hazards in the brick paving caused by the tree roots of the Plane trees; and to propose options to resolve the problem.

1.Existing Surface

The footway is predominately brick paving and in various areas this has been in - filled with tarmac especially around the bases of the trees and where tree roots have caused the brick paving to become uneven. This tarmacing work was done within the last 12 months is already beginning to crack and distort where the tree roots are present and will become a hazard within the coming months.

The footway is not level from the Market Square to the Blue Boar Row and is 'humped' between the two avenues of trees and this needs to be reviewed in conjunction with the issue of the tree roots.

2.The Trees

a) The plane trees (*Platanus x Hispanica*) were surveyed in December 2004, all 16 trees are Young with minor faults; including that the erection of fairy lights in the trees are causing slight damage to them all. 2 Trees had been removed previously and are yet to be replaced, on the outside avenue (closest to the highway) towards the Guildhall Square.

b) One tree (No. 473) on the inside avenue has been recently cut back to accommodate an Annual Charter Fair ride, whilst another (No. 480) has a large vertical wound from the base to 2 metres high on its trunk which is extensively decayed.

c) All trees on both avenues require Crown Lifting to a height of 2.8m. The largest of the trees (No. 482), which is located immediately outside the Portman Building Society, is in need of attention as it is touching the building.

3.General Observations

a) The existing trees are planted too close together considering the mature size of London Planes (Height 30 m + Spread 10 m +).

b) Original view was to remove and replace all the trees (Budget 16K), however there is no guarantee that existing problem would not re – occur and potential bad PR in removing all existing good specimens.

c) Replace the existing brick paving with a suitable surface that would not 'move' as easily as bricks e.g. Yorkstone. This option is perhaps too cost prohibitive? Total area of brick paving 9.2m x 67.5m to be replaced.

d) The tree roots causing the problems are buttress and surface roots, this could be minimised by increasing the 'buffer area' around the bases of the trees. This is being exacerbated at present by the tarmac that has been surfaced right up to the tree bases which is not porous enough for surface water to filter through to the tree roots, this is causing additional root activity to search for water and leading to the tarmac breaking up.

e) Maintenance of other trees in the vicinity need to be considered e.g. 4 Mature Plane Trees (No.'s 488 – 491) along Western Boundary and also the Lime Trees in Guildhall Square. (Budget required for regular maintenance)

4.Recommendations

a) There are a number of options that could be taken, however RH & AC concur that the existing trees need thinning out by the removal of 5 trees (No.'s 474,476,478,480 & 486) and then the replacement of 3 trees in newly constructed tree pits with root barriers (to replace No.486 and fill the gap to the east of Henry Fawcett's Statue).

b) From a public perception this will seem less drastic and be beneficial, as this action will allow for the remaining trees to grow into the 'space' as they mature. Secondly, the replacement of 3 trees will complete the outside avenue and also provide an opportunity for new tree pits to be 'tested' in the event that should problems continue; the feasibility of phased replacement of the trees into new pits can be evaluated.

c) The tree outside the Portman Building Society (No. 482) should be maintained as a pollard, in order that it can be retained and not impinge on the adjacent building. In addition to this the tree was originally planted higher than the others and the raised area around the bole cannot be reduced, so it would be pertinent to provide 3 seats as a barrier to pedestrian traffic.

d) The tarmac around the tree bases should be removed and replaced with a porous level surface a minimum of 1.5m x 1.5m per pit at a cost £200/base. In addition to this the Lime trees in Guildhall Square require similar works, as the recent tarmac infill looks unsightly and will be detrimental to the trees.

e) Subject to finance being available, replace the existing brick and tarmac infill surface with Yorkstone in conjunction with installing porous infill around the base of the trees.

Cost of Options

1. Removal of 5 existing Trees inc. stump-grinding, crown lifting of trees along Blue Boar Row and pollarding of Plane by Portman Building Society. £3,800
2. Replacement of 3 Trees 25 -30cm girth inc. Construction of new pits with Tree Sand, root barriers, watering system, planting etc. £1,770
3. Replacement of Tarmac around tree bases with Sureset based upon 14 trees. £2,800
4. Supply and Installation of 3 Seats by Portman Building Society. £1,200
5. New Surface/Paving to areas – cost unknown

Other Considerations

a) Members need to be aware that to keep Trees in the Market Square and Guildhall Square, there is a need for an ongoing annual maintenance budget to ensure that they are managed appropriately. For example the Lime Trees will need re-pollarding in next 2 – 3 years and the 4 large poplars (No's 488 – 491) on Western edge require thinning and lifting works now. (Cost £870)

b) Original plan to remove all trees along Blue Boar Row and replace with new trees into constructed pits is still an option, however this may be unacceptable publicly. Furthermore it would have to be done in conjunction with the installation of a more robust surface.