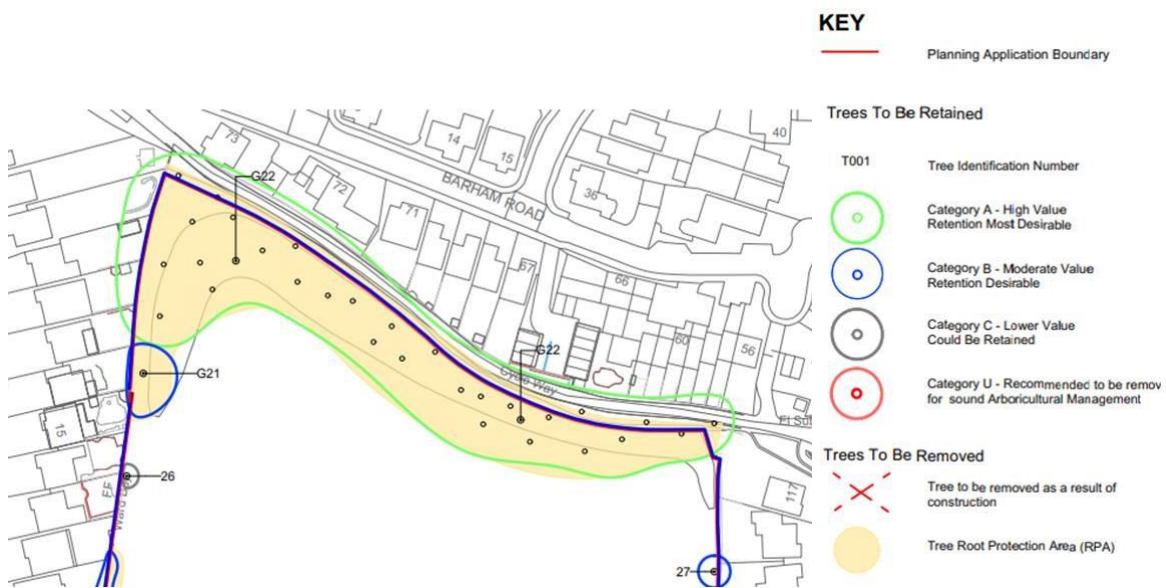


Dear Thomas,

I have received a number of complaints from residents in Cromwell Road and Barham Road regarding the revised planning application at the former Collenswood School site. Their main objection is that the new plans now propose the removal of a group of mature trees in this corner of the site. I have reviewed the plans and the committee reports myself and I share the residents concerns with the application. There are a number of reasons, set out below, why I believe these plans in their current form should not proceed.

1. The Tree Retention and Removal Plans P01 dated 7/3/2022, identifies the trees in the Cromwell/Barham Road corner as “Category A – High Value Retention Most Desirable” and designate a root protection zone around them.



The later tree retention plan dated September 2022, has downgraded these trees to Category B and designated them for removal. These anomalies are strange, and it appears as if the developer is changing the status of the trees to fit their own plans.



2. The Councils Arboriculture and Conservation Manager has not yet commented on the revised application, but a recommendation has still been given for the scheme's approval. Given that most of the objections to this revised scheme relate to the removal of trees this would seem to be a premature decision which should not have been made without an independent view on the arboricultural impacts.
3. The revised proposal still has poor pedestrian links to the Shephall area where historically the majority of pupils for this site have travelled from. There is no valid reason why a footpath cannot be provided along the southern boundary of the SESC site to provide a link from the Michaela School to the cycle track on the Shephall side. A fence between the footpath and SESC site could address any security issues.



4. Paragraph 1.5, Page 3 of July Committee report states “the larger groups of trees on the site make up areas of Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, which is Habitat of Principal Importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England”. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust were consulted on the original plans and viewed them to be acceptable. They have not been consulted on the revised plans which remove a large area of wildlife habitat from the site. There also seems to have been no change in the tree planting plans or Biodiversity Net Gain calculations to take account for the loss of these trees.
5. Paragraph 6.2.7, Page 6 of the October Committee report states the removal of trees is also required to renew a surface water sewer which can't be located and is assumed to be blocked. As a Chartered Land Surveyor, I have many years' experience undertaking and procuring topographic and underground utilities surveys. This is a poor reason to justify the removal of a mature woodland and it is my opinion that the developer hasn't properly investigated the site before coming to this decision. There is no reason why industry standard electromagnetic tracing techniques should not be able to accurately locate this sewer. All it would require is some minor clearance of low level shrubs to facilitate a surveyor accessing this area. It is also standard practice to undertake a CCTV survey of the existing drainage on site to check its condition prior to making decisions about connections or renewal. The lack of proper investigation of the site should not be used as a reason to approve the removal of these trees.

Given that the council has declared a climate emergency with a target of ensuring net-zero emissions by 2030, I believe it is important that the removal of these trees is given proper

consideration. Even if these trees were replanted at a ratio of 3:1 they would not come close to mitigating the environmental impact of the loss of large mature trees by 2030. Please could you pass these comments onto the committee members, and I would urge them to reject or defer this scheme until a more considered solution can be found.

Regards

Tom

Councillor Tom Wren

Chells Ward | Stevenage Borough Council | Liberal Democrat Group