

QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

TO THE PLANNING COMMITTEE ON 4 October 2022

Item 7 – 2 Westfield Avenue, Chelmsford – 22/01385/FUL

1. Mrs W - Applicant

Re Application 22/01385/FUL 2, Westfield Avenue

I would like to address a number of inaccuracies in the planning comments submitted by the resident of number 85 Broomfield Road.

I purchased the property in early March 2022. Previous owners had let the vegetation along Broomfield Road, and at the boundary with 85 Broomfield Road, get out of control. There were also massively overgrown laurel bushes at the front of the property, and 3 large fir trees at the front side boundary with No 4 Westfield Avenue.

I wanted to get started with the tree work before the nesting season, so employed tree surgeons to remove some of the overgrowth (having first checked that there were no TPO's). I have not however felled a dozen mature trees or four where the extension is planned as alleged. The work carried out was:

Removal of 3 Thuja Firs at the front.

These had grown to far higher than the roof and I discussed removal with the neighbour at no. 4. This has allowed space for the stunning magnolia tree to be seen, and uncovered a previously almost hidden cherry tree, and the boundary has been fenced.

Cutting back of Laurels at the front.

These were far too high and wide - significantly encroaching onto the pavement of Westfield Avenue. They were cut from around 4m to 2.5m, and trimmed as much as possible. This has led to them thickening up in the middle. Dead wood in the centre meant I was not able to trim them back as far as I would like to free up more pavement, but as they thicken from the inside we will continue to keep them trimmed so they do not obstruct the pavement.

Removal of 1 Silver Birch

This is the one tree felled that is (just) in the area of the proposed extension. I was advised that it was not a healthy tree, and somehow most of its branches were hanging over the garden of no 4 Westfield. Our neighbours actually suggested that they would be happy to see it gone, as it cut out lots of light from their garden. This was felled and the stump ground out.

Removal of 1 small Laurel bush (4ft)

This was planted in the middle of the garden, and I don't really like laurels. It was felled and the stump ground out.

Monolith of dead plum

This tree in the North West corner was significantly overhanging the garden of no. 85 Broomfield Road, and had only one small branch that was still alive, with most of the main

trunk rotten. It did look more alive, as it was completely covered in ivy. The dead branches were also pressing onto the listed wall. It was felled to 6ft.

Pruning of plum

This tree in the North East corner had 2 completely rotten branches, one in my garden and one overhanging Broomfield Road. These were removed but the rest of the tree was left.

Pruning along Rear Garden Boundary with Broomfield Road.

This boundary has 2 Philadelphus, 1 Elder, 1 Plum and 1 Lilac tree. All were massively overgrown with ivy. All have been coppiced and had ivy severed to encourage healthy growth. The main trunk of the plum was felled to ground level as it was rotten, but there are subsidiary trunks that still exist and I even got a single fruit from it.

Pruning along Front Garden Boundary with Broomfield Road

A cherry, birch and crab apple tree, along with a number of lilacs, were strangled by ivy which was severed at the roots to allow the trees to flourish. The ivy had also grown along the garden wall, covering it completely and extending up the side of the house and even into the windows.

In May I, along with other residents of Westfield Avenue, were sent a letter by Michael Hurst, a heritage officer at the City Council, about the state of the listed wall at the back of the garden. I wasn't living in the house so it took a while to get it, but when I did, I got in touch and arranged a meeting with him and representatives of the Quakers who own the property at no. 85. We met in July, and agreed that I would find contractors to carry out work to remove vegetation growing on the wall and lower the level of earth against it, as this could be contributing to structural damage.

This work started on 6th September. Ivy was stripped from the wall, plants were removed from in front of it, and some of the excess soil that had been allowed to build up against it was dug out - with a mini digger to within a couple of feet of the wall and then by hand closer to it. We did not excavate as much as we wanted to, as the lowest course of bricks exposed were showing significant cracking and we didn't want to go too quickly and potentially damage the wall.

During this work the tenant at number 85 was verbally abusive to the young men working on the wall, and made a complaint to the planning department, who visited my property. I informed the officer that the work we were doing was not on the extension that this application refers to, but instead the work on the wall agreed with the owners and the heritage officer to fix decades of neglect prior to my purchase of the property. I have kept both Michael Hurst and the Quakers up to date with pictures of the work done, and will be reviewing the situation with them in the spring when the wall has had a chance to settle and dry out, and when we can see if the tree work done so far has helped mitigate the lean of the wall.

I do not want to remove the Horse Chestnut Tree, both for privacy reasons and because I like conkers. It is growing away from the wall, and felling it could cause significant disturbance of the base of the wall where the roots are. We will be reviewing if one of its large branches needs to be removed in the future to protect the wall. A council tree officer has visited and said it is suffering from a leaf miner infestation, which does not necessitate removal and which I will attempt to combat by clearing away fallen leaves.

Far from causing criminal damage to the wall as the public planning comments have alleged, I am extremely happy to have a heritage asset in my back garden. I have fully cooperated

with the Quakers, at considerable expense, to fix the damage that was caused to it from this side prior to my purchase of the property, and will be ensuring that the future garden design both protects and showcases it. I am also happy to comply with the requirement to have protective fencing in place during the build to ensure contractors do not inadvertently damage the wall.

I'm also not destroying multiple mature trees but instead attempting to revitalise a neglected garden. I will be replacing the side vegetation onto Broomfield Road with a hedge (probably copper beech) and planting a secondary hedge of fruit trees inside the external hedge. As you can see from the plans I also have plans to have a wildflower roof, and the garden planting scheme will be developed to maximise biodiversity and wildlife habitats.