



Cedar Chase - since 1966

Trees a long read - Autumn 2020

Are you sitting comfortably? Then let Cath and I share a story of our recent learning about the trees of Cedar Chase.... Trees are such a strong feature of our estate, reminding us constantly of the changing seasons, with birds nesting and singing, squirrels leaping from branch to branch, pollen covering our cars, leaves rattling in the winds. The ever changing life and nature in the trees is one of the reasons we love this place.

Yet there are downsides to trees, the obvious one being that they don't stop growing until they start dying, growing into big dominating natural structures, and for some those downsides are very frustrating to live with, mostly being the fear of heavy winds with the proximity of the trees and our houses. It has to be recognised that our storms seem to be getting more brutal. In 2019 and 2020 we have had storms that have kept us sheltering in our houses due to their severity and following weather warnings. This is not something that has happened, with such ferocity, in previous years.

We live in a Conservation Area, which means all trees are subject to needing planning approval before work can be undertaken. We also have many trees (such as the Wingnuts and other major trees) that are individually also governed through Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) that even more tightly control what we can do.

Looking back....

Taking a look at the Bucks Council planning portal (a surprisingly useful tool) gave me some insight into tree work requested and approved. Just taking the Wingnut trees as an example, it seems we've undertaken significant work on them on average every two years to control their spread and density (11 times in the last 21 years, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2015, twice in 2017, 2019, 2020)

Some more numbers to help clarify what's been involved, looking at the £17,500 we have collectively spent on tree work over the last five years:

- 2020 - £3,236 - Felling the big Sycamore, pruning of Copper Beech, Wingnuts, Willow, Holm Oak, Cherry, Trees of Heaven
- 2019 - £1,800 - Feed Copper Beech, herbicide treatments, prune Wingnuts
- 2018 - £3,264 - Some woodlands work, Tree of Heaven, Ash, Beech, Larch
- 2017 - £4,716 - Pruning of Blue Cedar, Holm Oak, Sycamore, Wingnuts, Tree of Heaven, Copper Beech, Birch Cedar, Ash.
- 2016 - £4,548 Beech feed, Tree of Heavens pruned and 2 removed, Blue Cedar, Wingnuts, Ash, Holly, Hazel.

As you can see the cost of the work varies hugely. In 2019 there was no big prune in the financial year because the work slipped past September and thus into the next financial year. 2017 was the year that we had to do emergency work on the Cedar at the bottom of the woods when storm Doris took her top off.

The trees are discussed at each Committee meeting; and an annual tree survey considers the health of the trees and work to be carried out to look after the trees, with a consideration to safety.

When the trees are inspected, we are given a report detailing any potential dangers from dead limbs or diseased trees. The large sycamore in the woods which appeared to have a healthy trunk but not a healthy canopy, was inspected and found to be rotten at the core. This was felled last year (the remaining stump being the basis for our new tree-house), and the cross sections of the trunk clearly showing the rotten core.

Over many years we have been served well by Bartletts Tree Experts and had the support of the local Tree Officer with regards to the regular reduction of the Wing Nuts. The Tree Officer changed recently and had a difference of opinion regarding the reduction of the height of a tree that was showing no signs of ill health. We have also not been receiving the service we had from Bartletts, they have been difficult to get hold of to arrange visits, late with paperwork, unclear in their invoicing and general administration. The Committee were already working through the process to find a new tree company at the time the emails of concern over the Wing Nuts were received...

Looking Forwards

...In order to accelerate this process, Cath, Lee and I have set up a sub-committee to focus on the trees and finding a supportive and competent tree company. We see the need for a specific role on the Committee overseeing Trees. Previously it was bundled into other already big busy roles such as Gardens and Finances, but we recognise this needs a new focus and dedicated effort as we are not getting the results we want from our Tree Surgeons. You may recall the email I sent asking for a volunteer to lead the way on Cedar Chase Tree's, well kudos to Lee, he stepped forward to take on this role, and has immediately got stuck in to the work.

The Tree Sub Committee developed an outline plan of action to move us forward. We short-listed 3 Tree management companies that met our requirements, and are inviting them to tender to replace Bartletts.

We met with a friendly Tree Officer from a different council, to get some great advice as to the rules, the law and how we could best manage things. We learnt the key differences between the roles and influence a Tree Surgeon and a Tree Consultant have over getting the right outcomes with council planning authorities.

The following useful definitions come from the professional Arboricultural Association website - trees.org.uk

- *Consultants provide specialist opinion on tree health, safety, preservation, trees and buildings, planning and other law.*
- *Contractors, often known as "tree surgeons", provide specialist tree planting,*

pruning and felling services. Some may also advise on maintenance requirements and pest and disease control.

We will be engaging a Tree Consultant, to undertake a health-check and appraisal of all our key trees on the estate as well as take into consideration the impact on houses and identify any related structural issues which can be used to justify work.

For planning purposes we will divide our Trees into Zones, with Zone 1 being all those trees immediately close to areas of high frequency footfall and closest to houses. Zone 2 being those trees nearest playing areas, and Zone 3 being those not in Zone 1 or 2. this will help focus priorities and sequencing of work.

The Tree Consultant will provide us with an independent review of all our trees, helping us to develop a Tree Maintenance Plan, aiming for a 5+ year view of work ahead.

Hopefully the above sheds some useful light into the CC Trees, and makes clear the key to success will be in finding the right Tree Consultant, as their inspection report and justification of work being the key to getting work approved by the Tree Officer, and through the planning process.

Lee is keen to grapple with this new committee role, I hope everyone can support him in doing so, to help us get the outcome we desire.

