

SUBURB NEWS



The Newspaper of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association WINTER '85

MATURE SUBURB TREES THREATENED

Damages of several thousands of pounds were recently awarded against the London Borough of Barnet because the roots of one of their trees caused cracking and subsidence in an adjacent house. Because of this sort of action Local Authorities have understandably become very nervous over the possibility of future claims, and it appears that even a hint of a claim will drive them to fell almost any tree in their ownership. Insurance Companies have not helped matters when dealing with subsidence claims, their first reaction is to see where blame can be attributed and of course nearby trees usually end up as scapegoats.

It is therefore not surprising that the street trees in Hampstead Way between the junctions of Asmunds Place and the Orchard are now under threat and are programmed to be removed by the London Borough of Barnet. It is difficult to foresee where the Borough will stop with this policy, are the Turkey Oaks in Erskine Hill next, and then where?

MISGUIDED

The Authority are quick to point out as a somewhat misguided defence of this decision that they are replanting a greater number of trees than

they are removing. However it must be realised that however many trees are replanted there can be no substitution for the line of magnificent London Planes which now exist. Plane trees have played a large role in the street scene and great efforts are made to retain them in streets and squares throughout London. Even where underground car parks have been built such as Bloomsbury Square and Cavendish Square enormous efforts were made to retain the trees.

Rather than plant obscure varieties of small scale, short

lived trees such as Sorbus, Prunus and Crataegus it would be more advisable to judiciously thin and prune the existing trees and in doing so retain the look of a Garden Suburb rather than revert to the more usual bland suburbia of surrounding areas.

SCARE MONGERING

Most people are aware that the roots of trees can cause damage to buildings where both are in close proximity, usually cracking along walls. A great deal of scaremongering publicity and idle talk often leads to people worrying unduly about the effect of root damage to their own properties. Movement and cracking in walls can be caused by a variety of other factors and it is therefore a pity that tree roots receive such a high proportion of blame.

It might be an idea for people to consider the fact that cracking in the walls of houses may be caused by faulty or poorly constructed foundations. Possibly a general movement of the clay soils which exist throughout the Suburb or one of the many underground water courses that dries up and could lead to a collapse of the surrounding soil.

But even if the presence of trees of such close proximity that root encroachment under buildings is inevitable, there still remain two other factors that should be seriously considered before taking the easy option and felling a nearby tree.

Firstly, once a tree has been removed the roots that once existed under a house will eventually die and rot away, thus leaving a void which may well collapse and so cause a degree of subsidence that may never have happened had the tree remained.

LEAVE WELL ALONE

Secondly is the more complex problem of 'Heave' within the soil. Transpiration is the water loss from leaf and stem during the day and large trees do account for an enormous amount of water being taken daily from the soil. When this no longer happens because the tree has been removed, an increased volume of water will exist within the soil and this in turn can cause the soil to swell. The resultant swelling or heave as it is more commonly known, can lead to cracking in a house wall with the emphasis on an upward movement rather than downward as with subsidence, nevertheless the result is the same — a crack in the wall.

It should therefore be realised that the removal of trees will not necessarily remove the problem of soil movement, and in many cases can worsen a situation. The old adage of 'Leave well alone' is often the best approach.

As a conclusion to the immediate problem of the removal of Plane trees in Hampstead Way, I hope that the London Borough of Barnet have considered the



RA TRAFFIC REPORT

On December 4th the R.A., the Trust and the Joint Action Committee met the Minister of State for Transport, Mrs. Lynda Chalker and her army (five in number) of civil servants at the House of Commons.

Mrs. Chalker after stating she had a completely open mind listened very carefully as all three organisations presented our basic case; that the Department of Transport had ignored the environmental issues in its plans, had not demonstrated the need for any "improvements" especially since the opening of the M25 at South Mimms eastwards, and that the conduct of the public consultation exercise had been inadequate.

The outcome was in many ways unclear. The Minister made it clear that weeks or indeed months may be necessary to examine all the statistics and for a decision to be reached.

All these organisations will continue to monitor any developments, and the most notable since that meeting has been the

abandonment of the Archway Road scheme and the setting up of an enquiry into major roads in North and East London. Many activists in this area of London still consider that, despite protestations to the contrary, the Department of Transport is still very keen on the North London Motorway Box as a route into London. As Mrs. Chalker herself said "Traffic must go somewhere" — but as far as H.G.S. is concerned we would rather it did not go past us. MJ

The H2 Bus

As residents are no doubt aware the H2 bus service has gone for tender as part of the first privatisation exercise by London Regional Transport. The district manager of Leaside district, Mr. Hillman, considers that of the thirteen routes up for tender, the H2 is the least attractive to a private operator.

There has been some suggestion that the RA ought to tender, but the pre-qualification meeting attended by a member of the Traffic Committee made it quite clear that any applicant would have to be in possession of a current Road Traffic Operators Licence as at Mid-December 1984. The short time scale and the considerable capital required ruled out this option.

L.R.T. have made it clear that the tenders would be on the basis of the current service, with the same frequencies and start and finish times, but of course there is no guarantee that the service will remain the same if privatisation occurs or if L.R.T., which has to tender for each service, is successful. Leaside District have made it plain that the accounting for the H2 service has been changed so that it now is considered to recover 55% of its costs as compared with 24% when the service was last under threat.

We all appreciate the excellent personal service provided by the drivers and the extremely important social service that the H2 performs for the elderly, the young, and women coming home late at night. It would certainly help our case for L.R.T. to retain control if individuals could write to: K. Bright Esq., Chairman, London Regional Transport, 55 Broadway, London, SW1, expressing our concern for and appreciation of the service, and also the members of the L.R.T. Executive responsible for senior citizens and the handicapped who is Keith Brown Esq., at the same address.

The R.A. hopes that official bodies such as Abbeyfield, the residents of Emmott Close and the Fellowship will write to both the above named. MJ

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possibility of claims resulting from house movement and damage because of the removal of trees. A George

Tony George is a landscape architect and is a consultant to the HGS Trust.