



24th January 2011

British Rail Property at Oxpens, Oxford.

The above site was visited on 17th May 2010. The purpose of the visit was to assess the tree cover and comment on future management options.

Access to the site during my visit was limited due to the dense undergrowth and my observations are made within that constraint. Approximate locations of trees and tree groups are marked on the attached site plan.

Present and Future Land use

The land (approximately 3.25 hectares) was originally a railway siding. It has not been used for this purpose for some years and large areas have become overgrown with woody vegetation. The land, along with designated adjoining land, has been earmarked for a major redevelopment in this area of the City. I am informed that the land to the south, which lies significantly lower than the rest of the area and close to the River Thames, may be required for flood relief contingencies.

I am not aware of any constraints (e.g. Tree Preservation Orders or Conservation Area status) applying to the site.

Tree Cover and Condition

The site is predominantly populated by scrub which has grown up since the land ceased being used. There is a large area of scrub to the south of the area where the dominant species is hawthorn. Within this area are few scattered willow pollards*, most of which are beginning to collapse. There are also significant areas of wild shrubs and bramble.

*Pollarding is a traditional management system where trees are cut at a specific height on a cyclical basis and allowed to re-grow. Willow trees are particularly suitable for this type of management.

A large poplar is situated close to the Oxford Business Centre on the western boundary. This is of good form and normal vigour. It would be assessed as a 'B' category tree (see below) within the guidelines of BS5837. Close to the poplar is an alder tree which is suppressed and of low arboricultural value.

'B' Category Trees – 'Those of moderate quality and value: those in such a condition as to make a significant contribution (a minimum of 20 years is suggested)' [British Standard BS5837:2005 – Trees in Relation to Construction.]

In general, the tree cover is of low arboricultural and amenity value and would not merit automatic retention for development purposes. The exception to this would be the few large willow pollards which are presumed to have considerable habitat value. These are located mainly to the south of the site in the area most likely to be used for flood relief contingencies and therefore unlikely to be developed. They would require more detailed inspection before definite retention is recommended. Most other trees on site could be removed or retained according to the requirements of any development.

Suggested Future Management

The site has now been partially cleared to allow access to main trees and tree groups.

It would be prudent to carry out an ecological assessment of the site before any major tree work takes place.

The willow pollards should be subjected to a more detailed inspection to assess their suitability for retention. Those considered in a satisfactory condition should be re-pollarded at a height similar to that of the previous pollarding. This process will need to be repeated every few years. Managed in this way, these trees will provide valuable habitat for many years to come without creating significant safety concerns. Most of these trees are located in the area likely to be used for flood relief contingencies.

The large poplar is situated on the western boundary may be worth retaining, but this species is prone to branch failure and is not ideal in areas of permanent occupancy. It does not merit automatic retention. The alder could be retained, but has little arboricultural merit.

Some areas of Hawthorn scrub may also be worth retaining as wildlife habitat if this is compatible with the development objectives.

Any assessment of the tree cover could form part of the pre-planning Arboricultural Survey and Report.

In summary, although a few trees may be worthy of retention for habitat purposes, their location leaves room for a substantial development.

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(Director)

Site Plan attached



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