

19 01788 AS Wates Site Tenterden Landscape Officer comments in response to SJA Investigation into Root System of T312 Oak Landscape Officer 17 06 2020

References:

SJA AIR August 2019

Landscape Officer RPA and Buffer Zone Analysis 16 04 20

SJA Response to LO Comments May 2020

Landscape Officer Reponse to SJA 27 05 20

SJA Arboricultural Technical note - Investigation into Root System of T312 Oak June 2020

The investigation into the root system of T312 Oak showed that there was very little likelihood of significant rooting having occurred to the west, this was much in line with the supposition that the ditch was likely to be a significant barrier to rooting but an empirical base has now been provided.

Thus the buffer zone may be morphed or offset to favour the eastern aspect, it is how this achieved that now provides the current discussion.

Within the SJA June 2020 Technical note in figure 1. a more regular ovate shape is offered as the buffer zone for T1 as shown below on the left with the Landscape Officer's outline sketch for comparison in figure 2.

Figure 1

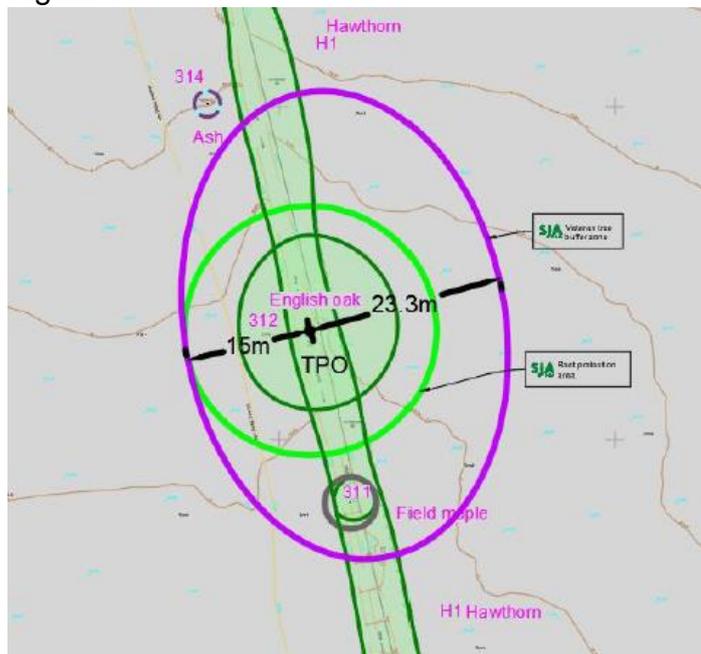
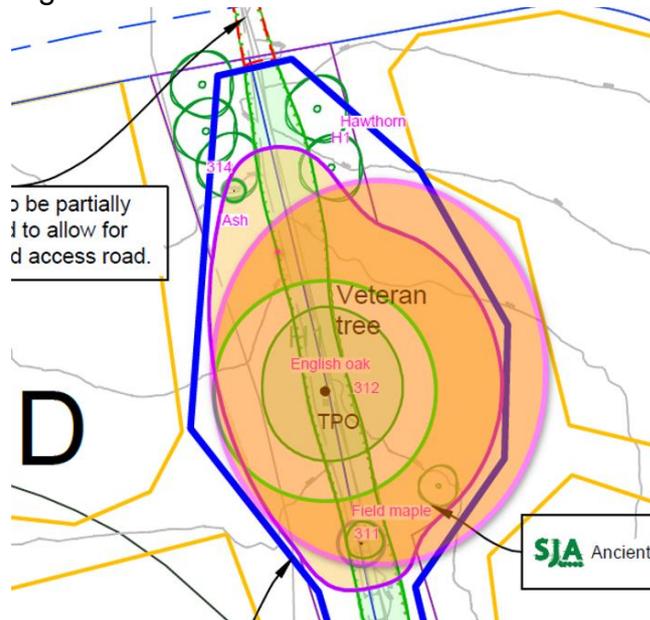


Figure 2.



Whilst this offers the minimum distance to the tree of the buffer zone of 23m - which is the applicable distance if the buffer zone was not offset, this does not address the Landscape Officer's viewpoint that the veteran tree should have the maximum distance possible around it to separate it from the developable area. The reasons relating to this approach are listed in the Landscape Officer's response of 27/05/2020 and for convenience is copied below in appendix 1.

Furthermore, the ovate shape still encompasses a large section of the hedge line that it need not and the shape seems to favour impacting the developable area to the east as little as possible. The Landscape Officer has justified an approach whereby the buffer zone will be approximately 31m from the stem of the to the east aspect using the following calculation as its basis: 46m diameter buffer zone – 15m RPA to west = approximately 31m to the east aspect.

A maximised buffer zone from the centre of the tree as drawn in outline in the Landscape Officer's response dated 16/04/2020 and shown in figure 2 above will ensure the maximum distance to the developable area. The quality of the veteran tree is clearly described in the SJA AIR as:

Root morphology implies preferential rooting to the east, historic ditch immediately to the west has restricted root growth; large dominant specimen; significant feature of the landscape; of particular visual importance; particularly good example of species; entirely in keeping with the character of the landscape; of high quality, high landscape and significant ecological value, and of long-term potential.

It follows from this description and classification that T312 must be accorded the setting that befits the tree in a biodiversity, habitat, cultural and landscape context.

Conclusion

The suggested morphing illustrated in figure 1 does not address the Landscape Officer's view that the distance to the veteran tree from the developable area should be maximised using the calculated area of the buffer zone of 1662m² – this results in a maximum distance from the middle of the stem of 31m. It must also be remembered that the buffer zone as calculated using the 15 x diameter of the veteran tree is a *minimum* as set out in the NE/FC Standing Advice and the LO in seeking to maximise the distance to the developable area is ensuring that the quality and status of the tree is fully respected – there is a clear case for the LPA seeking *more* than the minimum area given the importance of the tree that the LPA has not sought to pursue.

Appendix 1.

2.10-2.14 The purpose of the RPA and Buffer Zones is set out by SJA and the principle of morphing the buffer zones is accepted by the LO subject to a further evidential base.

However, the ultimate shape of the buffer zone is a matter for discussion. The approach to setting the buffer zone into the hedge owing to the benefit of the semi-natural habitat is reasonable but it does not maximise the 'buffer' element of the buffer zone. The Landscape Officer justifies an approach that largely maximises the buffer area with the grassland area incorporated for the following reasons:

1. The hedgerow will continue to provide the ecological benefits of a buffer zone to T312 whether or not it is designated as part of the 'buffer zone'. The hedgerow will be retained and the subsequent management of this area can be prescribed to reflect a semi-natural habitat;
2. The enhancement ("creation" (LO) para 2.12) of the grassland as a semi-natural habitat will effectively create a maximised buffer zone for the veteran oak and help increase the quality of the natural corridor of which it will be a part. Appropriate planting may be used to enhance the buffer zone;
3. The purpose of the buffer zone is to ... "protect"... a veteran tree (NESA), it is clear that this is recognised within the SJA Technical Advice (2.14) in terms of the physiological, ecological and developmental pressures that the oak faces. The full buffer zone morphed without the hedgerow will maximise the opportunities to mitigate the pressures on the tree which will be ongoing beyond the development process.
4. Sufficient buffer zone will also ensure that an enhanced risk management schedule is not applied thus conserving the tree's maximum biodiversity function.
5. In cultural and amenity terms, the context of a tree like T312 is extremely important as part of the areas heritage. In order to appreciate the significance of the veteran oak it is desirable for it (and any similar trees within the development) to have enough space around them to enable the appreciation of such natural assets and a maximised buffer zone will assist in achieving this in tandem with good design.