

Application for Consent to Remove Scots Pine Trees G1–G4 Subject to Tree Preservation Order

Site Address: The Cedars, Back Lane, Preston, Hitchin Herts SG4 7UJ

Applicant: Sarah Langrish, John Langrish

Tree Preservation Order: 0144

Date of TPO: 1998

Date property constructed: 2002

1. Proposal

We are applying for consent to remove four of the six Scots pine trees identified as G1, G2, G3 and G4 on the Tree Preservation Order plan/schedule and replace them with native trees that we believe fit the space better, fulfil the original purpose of the TPO by screening our house from the neighbour whilst still enhancing the landscape both from an aesthetic and environmental viewpoint.

G1, G2, G3 and G4 are the Scots pines situated closest to the house and are therefore the trees having the greatest impact on the property.

The two remaining Scots pines, G5 and G6, will be retained.

G5 and G6 also align with the Scots pines in the neighbouring garden (which are not protected), meaning that a line of mature Scots pines will continue to form part of the wider landscape following the proposed removal of G1–G4.

G1–G4 currently vary in height from approximately 14 metres to 20 metres (this is my calculation but could vary). Scots pine has the potential to grow to approximately 35 metres, meaning there remains considerable potential for further growth and further impact on our house and garden.

We propose replacing G1–G4 with smaller native trees, principally field maple and/or silver birch, although we are very happy to take advice from the Council's Tree Officer regarding the most appropriate species, number and planting locations.

We would, furthermore, welcome a site visit by the Council's Tree Officer to discuss the proposed removal and replacement planting.

Our objective is to resolve the ongoing problems caused by G1–G4 while retaining G5 and G6, maintaining mature tree cover and enhancing the site's biodiversity in the longer term.

The proposal is therefore selective rather than wholesale removal of the protected group.

2. Background and Change in Circumstances

The Tree Preservation Order was made in 1998, approximately four years before the present house was constructed in 2002.

Since the TPO was made, the trees have continued to grow and their relationship with the property has changed considerably.

G1–G4 currently range from approximately 14 metres to 20 metres in height and have the potential to grow to approximately 35 metres.

The lower branches of the Scots pines have progressively been lost as the trees have matured, leaving the remaining branches and canopy predominantly at considerable height.

As a result, the trees no longer perform some of the functions they may originally have provided when they were smaller and therefore no longer act as a screen between Tudor Cottage and The Cedars. We would like to replant and reinstate the privacy aspect of having the trees.

The four trees closest to the house are now creating significant problems in relation to the driveway, garden wall, roof, gutters, overflow gullies and fascia boards.

The potential for further growth towards approximately 35 metres is also a significant consideration, as the existing problems could become more pronounced as the trees increase in size.

We respectfully ask that the current circumstances, current amenity value and future potential impact of the trees are considered as part of this application.

3. Amenity Assessment

We understand that Tree Preservation Orders are made in the interests of amenity and that the assessment of amenity should consider the trees' visibility, individual/collective and wider impact, and other relevant factors.

We respectfully ask the Council to assess the current amenity value of G1–G4, together with their future potential, rather than relying solely on the circumstances that existed when the TPO was made in 1998.

3.1 Visibility from a Public Place

G1–G4 are located at the end of a long private driveway, leading from a relatively small road.

The trees are barely visible from the public highway and are not a prominent feature of the streetscape.

Their principal visual impact is experienced from within the private property rather than by members of the general public.

Although G1–G4 are currently between approximately 14 and 20 metres high, their location at the end of the driveway means that they have very limited visibility from public viewpoints.

There are also a number of other Scots pines in neighbouring gardens which are not protected by TPOs.

We recognise that the protection status of neighbouring trees does not, by itself, determine this application. However, their presence is relevant context when considering the wider landscape character and the contribution made by these particular trees.

We would welcome the Tree Officer undertaking a site visit from the public highway so that the actual visibility of G1–G4 can be assessed first-hand.

We respectfully submit that the very limited public visibility of these four trees is an important consideration when assessing their current amenity value.

4. Individual, Collective and Wider Impact

The four Scots pines G1–G4 currently range from approximately 14 metres to 20 metres in height and have the potential to grow to approximately 35 metres.

While they are substantial trees, we do not believe that their size alone gives them exceptional visual amenity value, particularly given their limited visibility from the public highway.

4.1 Size and Form

G1–G4 have developed into substantial trees in close proximity to the house.

Their considerable height, combined with the loss of their lower branches, has resulted in a form which is increasingly sparse when viewed from the surrounding properties.

The trees also have significant potential for further growth.

If allowed to mature towards their potential height of approximately 35 metres, their proximity to the house is likely to increase the existing problems associated with their roots, branches, needles and canopy.

We therefore consider that replacing G1–G4 with appropriately sized native species would provide a more sustainable long-term solution for this residential setting.

4.2 Screening

The trees may originally have provided useful screening when they were smaller and had branches at lower levels.

This is no longer the case.

As the trees have grown, their lower branches have been lost and their remaining branches are now predominantly well above the level of the neighbouring properties and gardens.

They therefore no longer provide an effective screen between the properties.

In particular, the branches are now too high to materially block views from adjacent buildings.

Further growth towards a potential height of approximately 35 metres is unlikely to restore this lost screening function, as the issue is the height of the remaining lower canopy rather than simply the overall height of the trees.

We have explored reshaping and pruning the trees and indeed had them pruned March 2025. Unfortunately, you can not reduce the height of scots pines as this will harm and even kill them. There is also no way to encourage growth of lower branches for privacy.

The proposed removal of G1–G4 would therefore not result in the loss of an effective screen which currently provides significant privacy or visual separation.

4.3 Windbreak Function

The trees are also now too tall and sparse to provide an effective windbreak.

Their current form allows considerable wind movement through the canopy.

Indeed, despite pruning, we regularly experience branches being lost during windy conditions, demonstrating both the exposure of the trees and their limited effectiveness as a dense windbreak.

Further growth towards approximately 35 metres could increase the exposure and potential consequences associated with branch loss and damage to property especially ours and our neighbours cars.

4.4 Collective Impact

We recognise that the six Scots pines can be considered collectively and that their contribution as a group should be taken into account.

However, this application is deliberately limited to the four trees closest to the house, G1–G4.

The two remaining Scots pines, G5 and G6, will be retained.

Importantly, G5 and G6 align with the Scots pines in the neighbouring garden, which are also visible as part of the wider line of trees.

Consequently, the removal of G1–G4 will not result in the complete loss of the visual character of a line of Scots pines.

A line of mature pines will continue to be present across the neighbouring properties, with G5 and G6 forming part of that existing landscape feature.

The proposal therefore seeks to reduce the number of trees immediately adjacent to the house, where they are causing significant damage and maintenance problems, while retaining G5 and G6.

The removal of G1–G4 should therefore be considered in the context of the two retained Scots pines and the neighbouring Scots pines, rather than as the complete removal of the existing line of pines.

Replacement planting with smaller native trees will also provide an opportunity to establish a more diverse and appropriately scaled tree group over time.

4.5 Wider Landscape Impact

The property is situated at the end of a long driveway and G1–G4 are barely visible from the public highway.

There are numerous Scots pines in neighbouring gardens, including trees which are not protected by TPOs.

The removal of G1–G4 would therefore not remove Scots pine from the wider landscape.

G5 and G6 would remain, and the neighbouring gardens would continue to contain Scots pines forming part of the wider line of trees.

We recognise that the protection status of neighbouring trees does not determine whether G1–G4 should remain protected. However, their presence provides relevant context when considering the wider landscape impact of the proposal.

5. Rarity, Cultural or Historic Value

G1–G4 are Scots pines, a native species which is well represented in the UK and in the surrounding area.

They are not, to our knowledge, rare or unusual specimens and do not possess any particular botanical characteristics that distinguish them from other Scots pines.

There are also other Scots pines in neighbouring gardens.

We are not aware of any association between these particular trees and local folklore, historical figures, historic events or other cultural significance.

They are not known to be associated with a historic building, notable person or particular historical event.

While we recognise that the trees are substantial and have ecological value, we do not consider that they possess any special rarity, cultural or historical characteristics which would give them an exceptional level of amenity value.

6. Nature Conservation and Wildlife

We recognise that mature Scots pines have ecological value and can provide habitat and food resources for wildlife, including squirrels.

We have taken this into account in proposing selective rather than wholesale removal.

We are not seeking to remove all six Scots pines.

G5 and G6 will remain, retaining some of the existing habitat and ecological value.

We also propose replacement planting with smaller native trees which can provide a diverse range of habitat and food resources for insects, birds and other wildlife.

We understand that newly planted trees cannot immediately replicate every ecological function of mature Scots pines but would be happy to discuss what you would consider to be a good alternative.

However, the proposed planting would maintain tree cover and provide an opportunity to enhance biodiversity over the longer term.

7. Property Damage and Justification for Removal

G1–G4 are the four trees closest to the house and are causing substantial and recurring problems.

7.1 Damage to the Driveway

The extensive root systems associated with G1–G4 are causing damage to the driveway, including lifting and cracking of the surface.

The continued growth of these trees, currently between approximately 14 and 20 metres high and with potential to reach approximately 35 metres, is likely to result in further root development and associated problems. Our understanding is that Scots pines have a massive

root system. G4 and G3 are only 10 metres from our property and as the tree grows further we worry about the impact to our house. Surely it makes more sense to remove these overgrown specimens and replace with something more appropriate to the space whilst still enhancing the environment. We have thought about root barriers however the roots are already at the point where they are affecting the property. We can't cut the roots to reduce them or the trees may become unstable. Restricting the roots and not allowing them to grow with the tree is also not advisable as they are extremely tall species and need massive roots for stability.

Removal of G1–G4 would allow the affected area to be repaired and would prevent continued root growth in the immediate vicinity.

7.2 Cracking to the Garden Wall

A garden wall close to the trees has developed cracking.

Given the proximity and size of G1–G4 and their extensive root systems, there is concern that continued root growth may contribute to further movement and deterioration.

Evidence of the wall has been provided with a photograph of the cracking .

7.3 Damage to Roof, Gutters and Overflow Gullies

The size and proximity of G1–G4 result in a vast and substantial quantity of needles and other debris falling onto the roof and entering the property's drainage system.

The needles accumulate on the roof tiles, gutters and overflow gullies, where they constantly become trapped and cause blockages.

We have already attempted to mitigate this problem by installing gutter guards/cages designed to prevent needles from entering or accumulating in the gutters.

Unfortunately, these measures have not been successful.

The volume of needles is such that blockages continue to occur.

The gutters and overflow gullies therefore require professional clearance approximately four to five times each year. In addition, we clean the gutters that we can reach on a monthly basis and, if windy or in heavy rain, the gutters will always block.

Despite this regular maintenance, blocked drainage has resulted in overflowing water and damage to the fascia boards of the house.

The accumulation of needles on the roof has also become sufficiently severe that we have recently had the roof professionally cleaned and cleared at considerable expense (evidence of this clean can be provided if needed.)

There has also been damage and deterioration to the roof tiles associated with the accumulation of needles and debris.

The problem is therefore not simply one of appearance or inconvenience. It is causing actual damage to the property and significant recurring maintenance costs.

7.4 Vehicles and General Maintenance

G1–G4 also shed substantial quantities of needles and debris onto vehicles parked at the property.

This creates an ongoing cleaning and maintenance problem and is another consequence of the trees' current size and proximity to the house. The needles collect near the windscreen wipers and block the drainage ducts. These have to be cleaned out on a weekly basis.

8. Mitigation Already Attempted

We have not reached the decision to seek removal without first attempting to manage the problems.

In particular:

- Gutter guards/cages have been installed to try to prevent needle accumulation.
- The gutters and overflow gullies are professionally cleared approximately four to five times per year in addition to our own unblocking.
- The roof has recently required professional cleaning and clearance because of the build-up of needles.
- Trees have been pruned to try and reduce the impact on our house.
- Despite these measures, blockages and overflowing water continue to occur.
- Damage has occurred to the fascia boards and roof tiles.

These measures demonstrate that the problems cannot reasonably be resolved through routine maintenance alone.

9. Replacement Planting and Biodiversity

We recognise that removing G1–G4 will result in the loss of some established habitat.

We therefore propose replacing the four Scots pines with smaller native trees, principally field maple and/or silver birch.

These species would provide valuable habitat and food resources for wildlife, including insects and birds, while being considerably more appropriate in scale for the property.

The replacement trees would be planted in suitable locations with sufficient room to mature naturally without creating the same problems associated with very large trees close to the house.

We are also conscious that newly planted trees cannot immediately replace every ecological function of mature Scots pines.

However, the proposed planting would maintain tree cover and provide an opportunity to create a more diverse native tree population over the longer term.

We are very happy to take advice from the Council's Tree Officer if another native species, or combination of species, would provide greater ecological or landscape benefit.

We would welcome a site visit to discuss and agree an appropriate replacement planting scheme.

10. Selective Nature of the Proposal

This application is deliberately limited to the four Scots pines G1, G2, G3 and G4, which are closest to the house.

We are not seeking removal of all six trees.

The two remaining trees, G5 and G6, will be retained.

G5 and G6 also align with the Scots pines in the neighbouring garden, meaning that the wider line of mature pines will continue to be visible.

The four trees proposed for removal are specifically those which have the greatest proximity to the house, driveway and garden wall and therefore create the greatest physical and maintenance problems.

This selective approach seeks to balance the retention of mature trees with the need to address the substantial problems being caused by G1–G4.

11. Supporting Evidence

We can provide the following supporting evidence:

- Photographs showing all six Scots pines and their relationship to the house;
- Photographs identifying G1, G2, G3 and G4;
- Photographs identifying G5 and G6;

- Ariel photograph showing the position of the house to the neighbour and the roads and demonstrating the lack of ‘public amenity’ the TPO trees provide.
- A photograph from the road showing G5 and G6 aligning with the neighbouring Scots pines;
- Photographs showing the trees' current sparse form and high branches
- AI generated idea of how silver birch could look and enhance the environment. (we are happy for ideas on what trees you would accept as an alternative.)

These can be provided if requested

- Photographs showing driveway lifting and cracking;
- Photographs of the cracked garden wall;
- Photographs of blocked gutters and overflow gullies;
- Photographs of roof tiles and accumulated needles;
- Photographs showing branches lost during windy conditions, where available;
- Evidence of the recent roof cleaning and clearance;
- Invoices/receipts for the recent roof cleaning; and

12. Conclusion

G1, G2, G3 and G4 are currently approximately 14 to 20 metres in height, with the potential to grow to approximately 35 metres.

They are situated closest to the house and are therefore the trees creating the greatest impact on the property.

We respectfully submit that their current public amenity value is limited.

They are located at the end of a long driveway and are barely visible from the public highway. They do not form a prominent feature of the streetscape.

Their growth has also changed their character and function. Their lower branches have been lost and their remaining branches are now too high to provide effective screening from neighbouring buildings.

Their sparse, elevated canopies also mean that they are no longer an effective windbreak, and branches are regularly lost during windy conditions.

The potential for G1–G4 to grow to approximately 35 metres means that the problems associated with their current size and location have the potential to increase further as the trees mature.

The trees are not known to have any particular rarity, cultural, historical or local folklore significance. Scots pine is not a rare species and there are other Scots pines in neighbouring gardens, including trees which are not protected.

Against this limited public amenity value, G1–G4 are causing significant and recurring problems to the property.

Their roots are causing damage to the driveway and there is cracking to a nearby garden wall.

Their needles are causing repeated blockages to gutters and overflow gullies, requiring professional clearance approximately four to five times each year.

Overflowing water has caused damage to the fascia boards, while the accumulation of needles has also caused damage/deterioration to roof tiles and recently required the roof to be professionally cleaned and cleared at considerable expense.

Practical mitigation has already been attempted, including pruning, the installation of gutter guards/cages, but this has not provided an effective long-term solution.

We recognise that mature Scots pines have ecological value, including for squirrels and other wildlife.

We are therefore not proposing wholesale removal of the group.

G5 and G6 will remain. These retained trees align with the Scots pines in the neighbouring garden, so a line of mature pines will continue to form part of the wider landscape.

We also propose replacement planting with smaller native trees, principally field maple and/or silver birch, providing future habitat and food resources for insects, birds, squirrels and other wildlife while creating tree cover that is more appropriate to the scale and location of the property.

We are very willing to work with the Local Planning Authority and would welcome a site visit by the Council's Tree Officer to assess the trees from the public highway, discuss the proposed removal and advise on the most appropriate replacement species and planting arrangement.

In light of the limited public visibility and amenity contribution of G1–G4, their current form and diminished screening function, their limited effectiveness as a windbreak, the absence of any particular rarity or cultural/historical significance, their potential for further growth to approximately 35 metres, the significant ongoing damage to the property, the unsuccessful mitigation measures already undertaken, the retention of G5 and G6 and the proposed replacement planting, we respectfully request that consent be granted for the removal of G1, G2, G3 and G4.