



Decay Detection Investigation

PiCUS/RESI PD

Old Rectory

Hodwell, Ashwell

Hertfordshire

SG7 5QQ

August 2026

260786-TMA-XX-RP-AR-1600

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 One tree was inspected and tested for decay using specialist equipment. The conclusion of this report is that the tree is considered to present an unacceptable risk of harm through stem failure, due to the extent of decay identified and the poor physiological condition of the crown. The following recommendations have been made:

- Tree removal due to extensive basal decay resulting from southern bracket (*Ganoderma australe*) colonisation, to prevent stem failure causing injury or property damage.
- Stump grinding (stump removal) following the removal of the tree to facilitate replanting.
- Replacement planting (of a suitable species) during the first planting season (September to April) following tree removal.

Please see below and Appendix A for a Quantified Tree Risk Assessment and tree details including the full specification for the above recommendations.

Statutory Permissions

1.2 The tree is protected by virtue of its location within a Conservation Area. It is therefore necessary to notify North Hertfordshire District Council by submitting a section 211 notice, a minimum of six weeks prior to carrying out any work to trees which does not fall under exemptions. It is strongly recommended that the legal status of trees is further investigated before any works are commissioned as any trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), will require approval through a formal application. Unauthorised work to protected trees could lead to prosecution, resulting in enforcement action such as fines and a criminal record. Details of legal protections may be available on the local authority's website.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 TMA received instructions from Paul Rothwell to attend site and inspect T1 Norway spruce (*Picea abies*) at Old Rectory, Hodwell, Ashwell. Following the inspection, we are instructed to prepare a report of our findings and make appropriate recommendations to manage the risks assessed.
- 2.2 Paul Rothwell contacted us to arrange this investigation due to concerns relating to fungal fruiting bodies observed growing from the base and lower stem of the tree.
- 2.3 The scope of this investigation is: to visually inspect¹ the identified tree from ground level and record relevant features; to inspect the tree's stem for decay using sonic tomography and/or a decay detecting drill (as considered appropriate); and to provide a report of our findings including recommendations for works where assessed to be required and/or additional inspections where necessary. These decay detection methods are further explained at Appendix B of this report.
- 2.4 Trees are dynamic living organisms that change both physiologically and structurally over time² - sometimes significantly. The observations and recommendations made will therefore become less reliable as more time passes, and the subject trees should be re-inspected within the designated time period specified in accordance with the assigned risk category for each tree (or immediately following storm-force winds at or exceeding Beaufort Wind Scale 7 (50-61km/h or 32- 38mph) - which may increase the likelihood of structural failure).
- 2.5 TMA have invested considerable time and resources in acquiring the expertise and experience to enable the company to offer the assessment of trees using PiCUS and RESI PD decay detection equipment, however, no liability is accepted for any errors or omissions within the analysis, algorithms or calculations incorporated into the PiCUS or RESI PD software.
- 2.6 The results, conclusions and recommendations presented in this report are based on the conditions at the time of inspection. Trees are subject to dynamic, natural processes and the effects of any debilitating factors may be progressive. Consequently, the observations made, and the data collected and analysed are interpreted to present an assessment of the tree in its current condition and situation.
- 2.7 Tree owners and/or the occupiers of properties with trees have legal duty of care³ regarding their trees under the Occupiers Liability Acts⁴. Various guidance is available on how those with responsibility for trees can meet their duty of care. A list of key guidance is attached at Appendix C.
- 2.8 Tree Risk Assessment involves careful consideration of three factors:

1 - Mattheck, Updated field guide to visual tree assessment, ISBN-13: 978-3923704590

2 - BSI. (2010) British Standard 3998: Tree works - Recommendations. UK: British Standards Institution.

3 - Occupiers Liability Act (1957) c. 31, 5, 6. Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/5-6/31>

4 - Occupiers Liability Act (1984) c. 3. Available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/3>

- The area likely to be affected by the failure of a tree or tree part.
- The size of the tree or tree part under consideration.
- The likelihood of any potential failure.

The first 2 factors can be determined factually, the last factor can only ever be an estimate based on a wide range of variables including visual indications and the knowledge and experience of the person making the assessment.

It is essential to make management decisions that are proportionate, balanced, and reasonable, considering the level of risk around trees, and that address safety concerns, whilst minimising the environmental and ecological impact considering the many benefits that trees provide. Further information is freely available at the National Tree Safety Group website <https://ntsgroup.org.uk/publications/>

3 TREE INSPECTION

Inspection details

- 3.1 The tree was inspected as arranged with the client on the 24th of August 2026 by Matthew Barker, who also wrote this report.
- 3.2 Matthew Barker is a senior arboricultural consultant dealing with trees in relation to all forms of human activity including trees within the built environment. He holds a Level 4 Diploma in Arboriculture, RHS Certificate of Arboriculture (grade distinction), and is a LANTRA qualified Professional Tree Inspector. He is also a registered Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) practitioner and a Technician Member of the Arboricultural Association.
- 3.3 The details and condition notes for the tree inspected are attached in the schedule at Appendix A. This schedule also contains recommendations for works and/or further inspections as appropriate. Where tree work recommendations have been made to address safety concerns, they have been given a risk of harm (RoH) rating, and work should be prioritised accordingly.
- 3.4 If further inspection/investigation works have been recommended, they will be given a time-based priority, and it is strongly recommended that these recommendations are carried out within the time limits stated. Information on Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA)⁵ and TMA use of the system is attached at Appendix D.

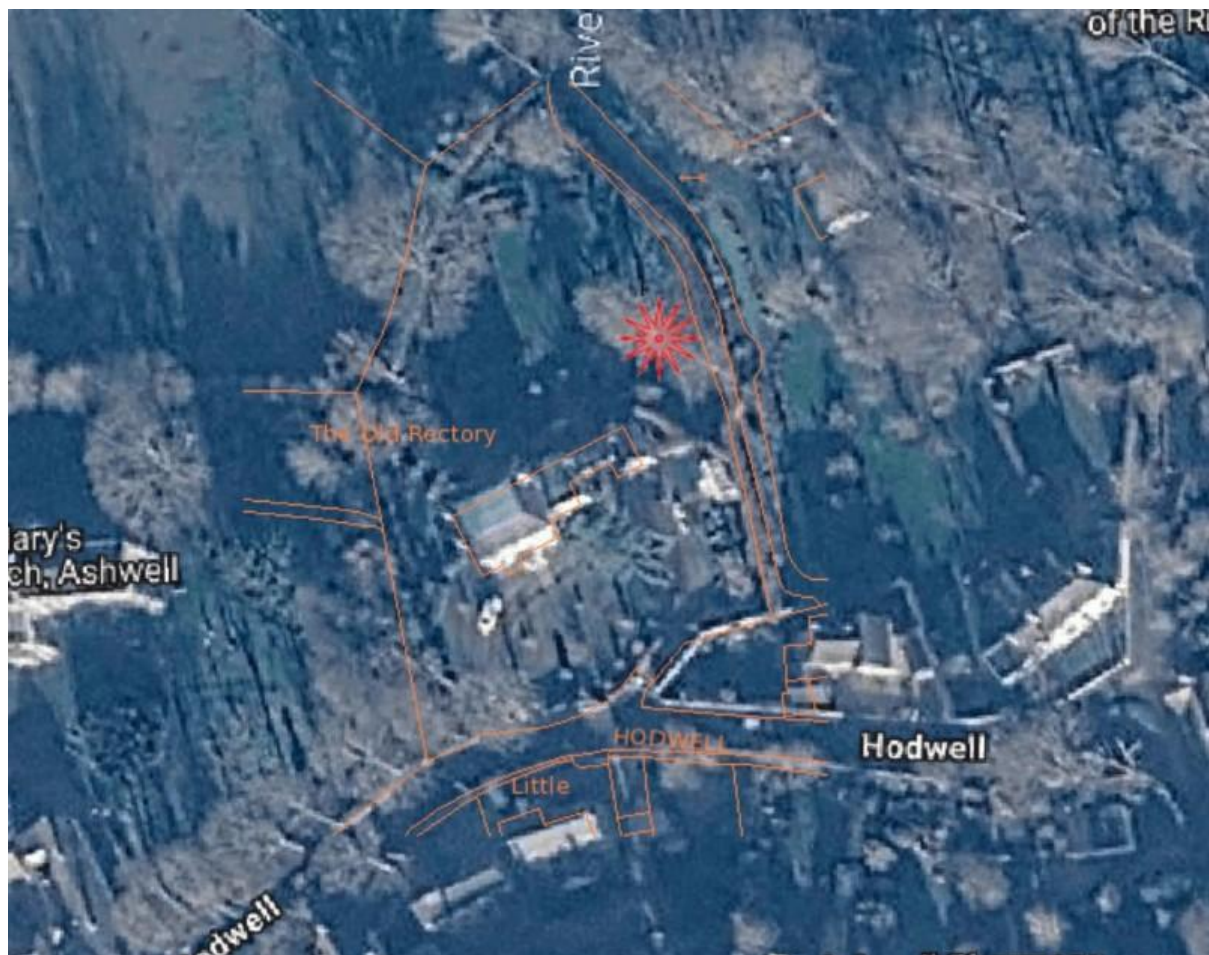
5 - QTRA (Quantified Tree Risk Assessment) is a tree risk evaluation system developed by Mike Ellison. It was developed to assist tree managers to identify, record & manage hazards posed by trees. It uses a risk of harm calculator to attribute a risk of harm value to a tree or tree part, considering the likelihood of failure in relation to its size and target.

4 T1 NORWAY SPRUCE



T1 Norway spruce: tree shown within its setting

- 4.1 An early mature Norway spruce (*Picea abies*), with pronounced root buttressing, in poor physiological condition, and exhibiting low vitality. The tree is located within the rear garden, and is surrounded by plant beds and lawns, constituting permeable ground. The tree is within falling distance of the house and the neighbouring property boundary.



T1 Norway spruce: MyTrees map with Google Maps overlay, showing the tree highlighted in red

- 4.2 The tree has had recent, minor pruning work carried out to reduce low hanging dead branches. Several moderately sized dead and suspended branches were present with the crown away from significant targets, and assessed to present a low risk of harm.

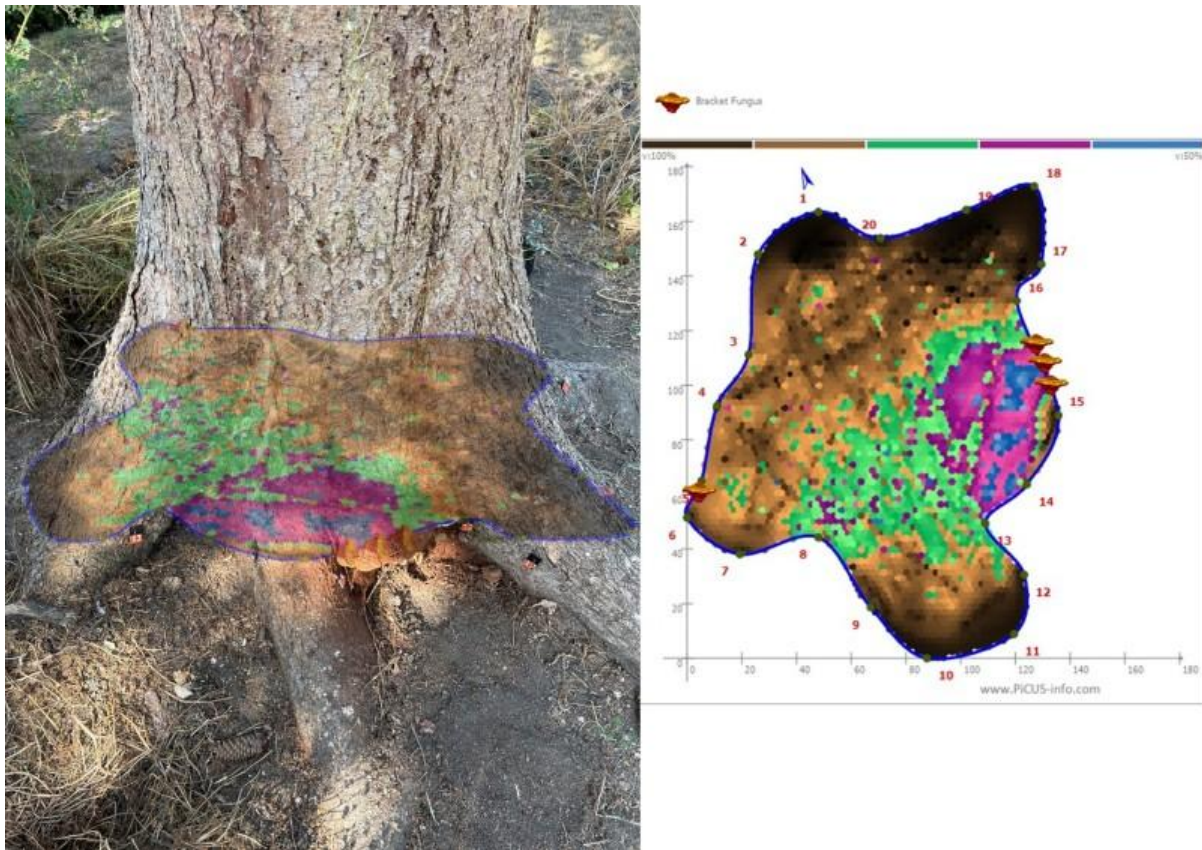


T1 Norway spruce: southern bracket (*Ganoderma australe*) fruiting bodies growing from the basal sinus on the eastern side

- 4.3 Fungal fruiting bodies of southern bracket (*Ganoderma australe*)⁶ were observed growing from the lower stem and root buttresses to the east and west. Following visual inspection, tap testing indicated an area of decay and potential hollowing close to the fruiting bodies and in the eastern root buttress, ascending up the stem on the eastern side to around 2 m. This test was recommended to quantify the extent of decay and sound wood remaining.

6 - Southern bracket is parasitic and saprobic. Can breach reaction zones. Attributed to a selective white rot. Trees with poor compartmentalisation ability / lacking true heartwood are often quickly hollowed out. Prompts buttress development. Can cause structural failure via windthrow or collapse and stem fracture. Hollowness and stability investigations may be required where significant targets exist. Likely that all UK examples are *Ganoderma adspersum* – likely not a synonym of *G. applanatum*.

Sonic tomography investigation

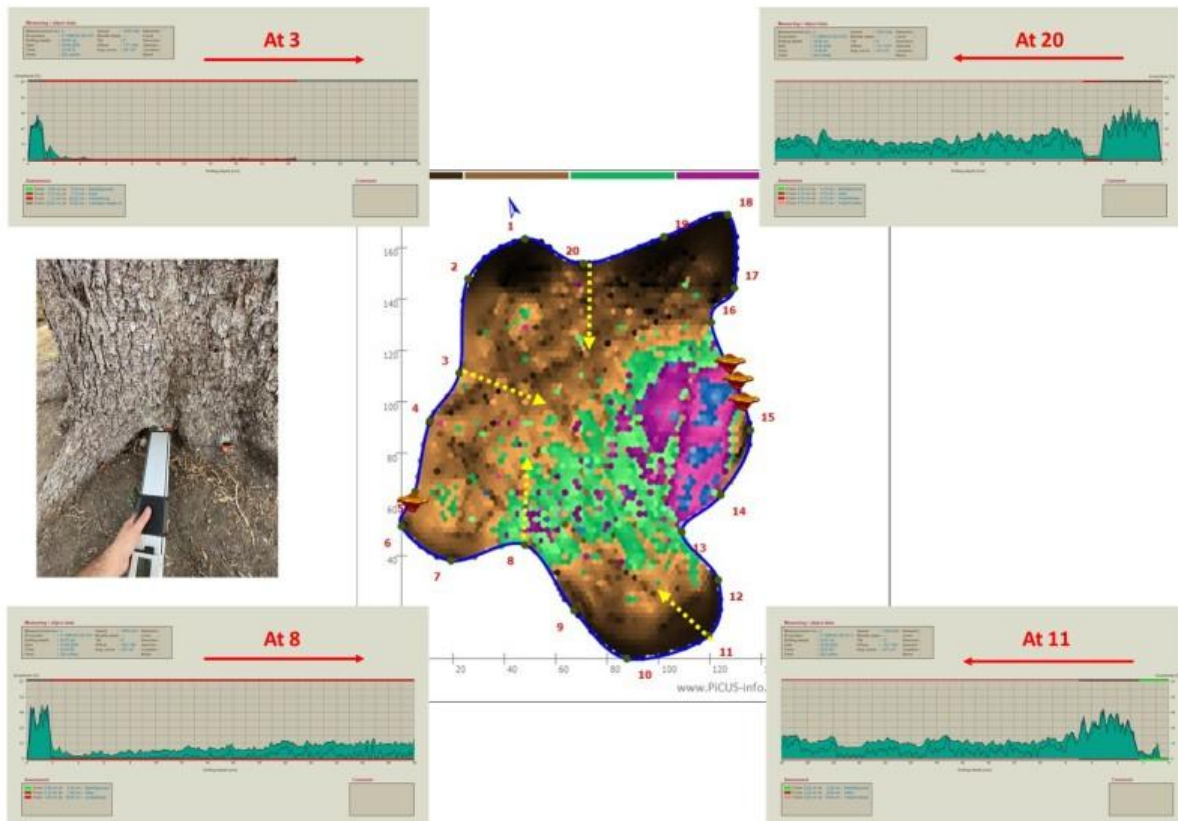


T1 Norway spruce: tomogram (right), tomogram superimposed in the approximate test position over the stem (left)

- 4.4 The sonic tomography test was undertaken at approximately 19 cm (at measuring point (mp) 1) above ground level (agl). This height was selected to encompass the most prominent cluster of fungal fruiting bodies and the area producing the most significant audible indications of decay, using a sounding mallet; where decay was suspected to be most developed.
- 4.5 The tomogram reveals low velocities, represented by blue and pink, indicating decay and/or hollowing, within the stem to the east and southeast. Intermediate velocities, represented by green, indicating incipient (early stage) decay can be seen throughout most of the central stem, with further mottled patches of blue and pink, indicating some more advanced intermediate decay developing. Additionally, high velocities represented by light and dark brown, indicating intact wood can be seen throughout most of the remaining stem, with the darkest areas, representing the densest wood, located in the outer circumference of the most protruding root buttresses to the north, northeast, and south.
- 4.6 Due to the volume of decay indicated in the tomogram and the poor physiological condition of the tree, it was considered prudent to further test the stem using the RESI PD microdrill to verify the results shown.

RESI PD investigation

- 4.7 The RESI PD tests were carried out at the same height as the sonic tomography test, to verify the results shown in the tomogram.



T1 Norway spruce: RESI PD drill traces shown positioned around the tomogram with the drill direction indicated using a red arrow and the approximate test location indicated using a yellow arrow

- 4.8 The stem was tested using the RESI PD at MP3, MP8, MP11, and MP20, and the results are as follows:
- The test at MP3 shows a high resistance, indicating intact wood to a depth of 1.15 cm, beyond which there is a very low resistance indicating decay and hollowing to a depth of 20.65 cm, where the drill automatically retracted the needle, a feature of the equipment to avoid damage following an extended passage through a cavity.
 - The test at MP8 shows a high resistance, indicating intact wood to a depth of 1.9 cm, beyond which there is a low resistance indicating decayed wood to a depth of 30 cm.
 - The test at MP11 shows a high resistance, indicating intact wood to a depth of 6.9 cm, where the resistance lowers and the graph pattern alters, indicating incipient decay to a depth of 30 cm.

- The test at MP20 shows a high resistance, indicating intact wood to a depth of 4.7 cm, where the resistance lowers indicating a localised cavity, before increasing to a moderate amplitude exhibiting an altered graph pattern, indicating incipient decay to a depth of 30 cm.

Analysis

- 4.9 These results indicate the condition of the stem at the test height, effectively a two-dimensional cross section of the stem. The results must be analysed in this context, and in consideration of the condition, and/or any features, observed above or below the test height which may influence the structure of the tree.
- 4.10 The tomogram indicates extensive decay within the stem, surrounded by incipient developing decay. It is suspected that the tree has so far been unable to compartmentalise the decay due to the arrangement of different wood densities indicated.
- 4.11 The extent of decay identified by the RESI PD confirms the presence of a significant volume of developed, and incipient decay, within the stem. It also suggests that some areas of incipient decay may be more advanced than indicated in the tomogram.
- 4.12 The development of decay within the stem may be exacerbated by recent drought conditions and poor physiology, which are suspected to affect the tree's ability to produce secondary growth for a prolonged period of time.

Conclusion

- 4.13 In consideration of the extent of decay, the poor physiological condition, the tree species characteristics and its potential targets, the extent of decay identified in this investigation is considered to present an unacceptable risk of harm through stem failure.
- 4.14 Management options are considered to be insufficient to bring the risk of harm within tolerable levels. Remedial pruning work is unlikely to result in a favourable response and is unlikely to be achievable without significant aesthetic detriment. As such, removal of the tree is considered the only practical option to mitigate the risk of harm.
- 4.15 It is therefore recommended that the tree is removed and replaced with a suitable species, more tolerant of the site conditions and that provides a positive amenity contribution to the area.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose of work recommendations key -

Red – urgent

Orange – necessary

Yellow - appropriate

Green - continue inspection regime

Blue – good arboricultural practice

Purple – to allow access

Pink - to manage nuisance

Grey – continue established management

Brown – to manage ancient or veteran trees

Taupe – landscape improvement

PoW Key: purpose of works

5.1 The following recommendations have been made:

- **Tree removal due to extensive basal decay resulting from southern bracket (*Ganoderma australe*) colonisation, to prevent stem failure causing injury or property damage - necessary**
- **Stump grinding (removal) following the removal of the tree to facilitate replanting - landscape improvement**
- **Replacement planting (of suitable species) during the first planting season (September to April) following tree removal - landscape improvement**

Please see Appendix A for a Quantified Tree Risk Assessment and tree details including the full specification for the above recommendations.

5.2 As mentioned previously, the tree is protected by virtue of its location within a Conservation Area. It is therefore necessary to notify North Hertfordshire District Council by submitting a section 211 notice, a minimum of six weeks prior to carrying out any work to trees which does not fall under exemptions. It is strongly recommended that the legal status of trees is further investigated before any works are commissioned as any trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), will require approval through a formal application. Unauthorised work to protected trees could lead to prosecution, resulting in enforcement action such as fines and a criminal record. Details of legal protections may be available on the local authority's website.

5.3 To aid with tree planting, the Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG) have produced a species selection document which is freely available to download here <https://www.tdag.org.uk/tree-species-selection-for-green-infrastructure.html>

6 APPENDICES CONTENTS

APPENDIX A

- 260786 - Old Rectory, Hodwell - Plan
- 260786 - Old Rectory, Hodwell - Tree Schedule

APPENDIX B

- TMA decay detection appendix

APPENDIX C

- Duty of Care Guidance

APPENDIX D

- TMA QTRA Briefing Note

APPENDIX A

- 260786 - Old Rectory, Hodwell - Plan
- 260786 - Old Rectory, Hodwell - Tree Schedule



- Priority Works**
- Urgent
 - Necessary
 - Appropriate
 - Continue inspection regime
 - Good arboricultural practice
 - To allow access
 - To manage nuisance
 - Continue established management
 - To manage ancient or veteran trees
 - Landscape improvement
 - Felled

REVISIONS		

Title:	
260786 - Old Rectory, Hodwell	
Client:	
Paul Rothwell	
Project:	
260768	
Date:	Drawn by:
24/8/2026	TMA
Drawing No:	Scale:
1	1:500@A4



260786 - Old Rectory, Hodwell, Ashwell, SG7 5QQ

Tree No (Tag)	Vegetation type	Species	No. of stems	Height (m)	Spread (m)	DBH (cm)	Life stage	Vitality	Physiological Condition	Structural Condition	Access to Tree	CAVAT value (£)/ Crown area (m2)
T1 (n/a)	Tree	1 Picea abies Norway Spruce	1	18.5	12.0	70	Early Mature	Low	Poor	Poor	Good	£2387.96 / 113.10m2
Site Features	Targets		Conditions			Notes					Survey date/ Surveyor	
Grass.	Building within falling distance of tree. Seating area within crown spread. Neighbouring property in falling distance.		Bark exudation. Branch - Suspended. Buttresses / buttress roots - Major adaptive growth / strong development. Bark wound - Mechanical. Die-back - Lower crown. Deadwood - Major. Fungal fruiting body - structural decay suspected. Physiological / cambial damage - Insect. Root damage - Mower. Raised surface roots. Weak live growth. Woodpecker holes.			Root damage - Damage evident to surface roots. Dysfunction suspected due to crown decline, and woodpecker and insect borer holes in stem to the east from the base to 2.5 m. Decay fungi - Ganoderma australe brackets at the base to the east from sinus and to the west protruding from under-side of pronounced root buttress. Sounding mallet tap test - Decay estimated to be present around fruiting bodies and in eastern root buttress, ascending up the stem on the eastern side to around 2 m. Bark exudation - Extensive resin exudation in area of suspected dysfunction. Crown - Low vitality throughout with dead branches in the lower crown to the east corresponding with stem dysfunction. Minor suspended branch in crown. Stem - Co-dominant leading stems from bifurcation at around 12 m. Bark included union suspected. Decay investigation - Sonic tomogram and RESI PD results indicate extensive basal decay.					24/08/26. /Matthew Barker.	
Recommendation	- Stump - Remove / grind following the removal of the tree. Remove all arrisings and replace with top soil to facilitate replanting. - Plant replacement tree (of suitable species) during the first planting season (September to April) following tree removal. - Fell - Ground level due to extensive basal decay resulting from Ganoderma australe colonisation and poor physiological condition indicating limited ability to produce secondary growth, to prevent stem failure causing injury or property damage.					Purpose of works		- Landscape improvement - Landscape improvement - Necessary		W3W		
Risk assessed	Tree failure on to building					Risk of harm range		1/10,000 - 1/1000,000		Risk category	2	

APPENDIX B

- TMA decay detection appendix

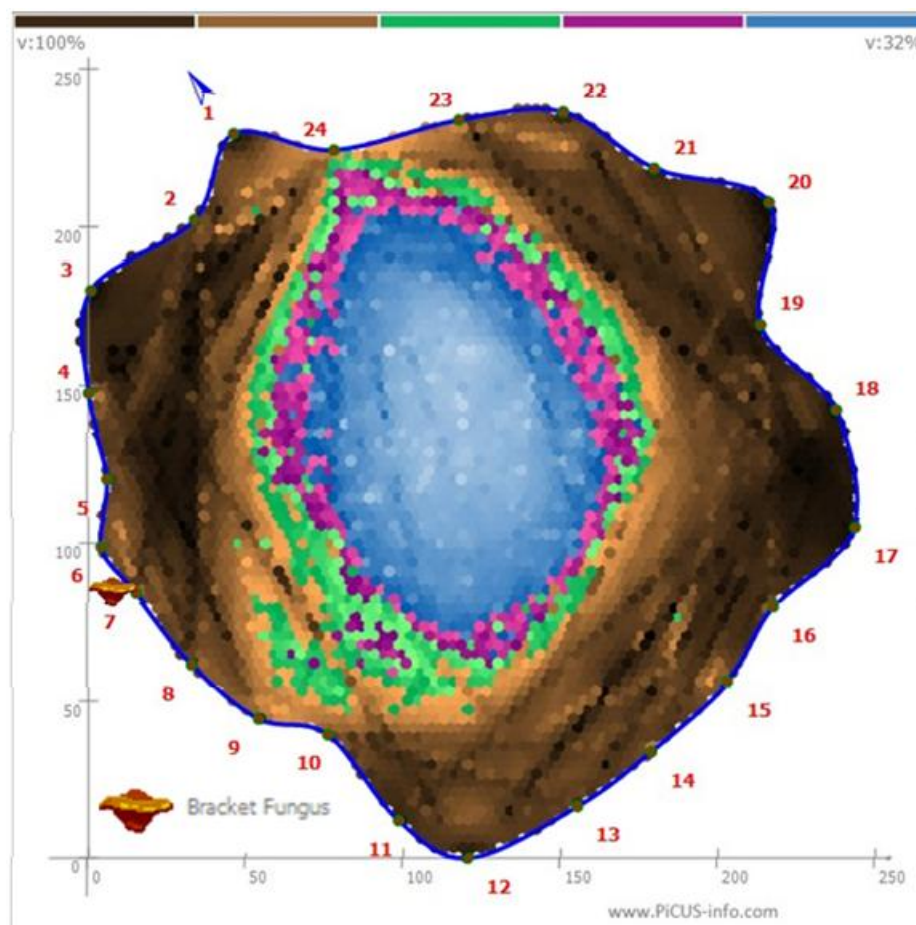
PiCUS Sonic Tomograph

Sonic tomography involves an assessment of the consistency of wood in a tree by passing sound waves through the trunk and measuring how long they take to reach sensors placed around the circumference.

Sound travels relatively slowly through/around decayed wood.

The resulting tomogram includes a scale at the top showing;

HIGH **VELOCITY** **TO** **LOW** **VELOCITY** indicating **SOUND** **WOOD** **TO** **DECAYED** **WOOD**



Sound waves can also be slowed by other factors, such as cracks or included bark, so it's crucial to fully understand the limitations of sonic tomography when assessing trees and use additional tools where necessary.

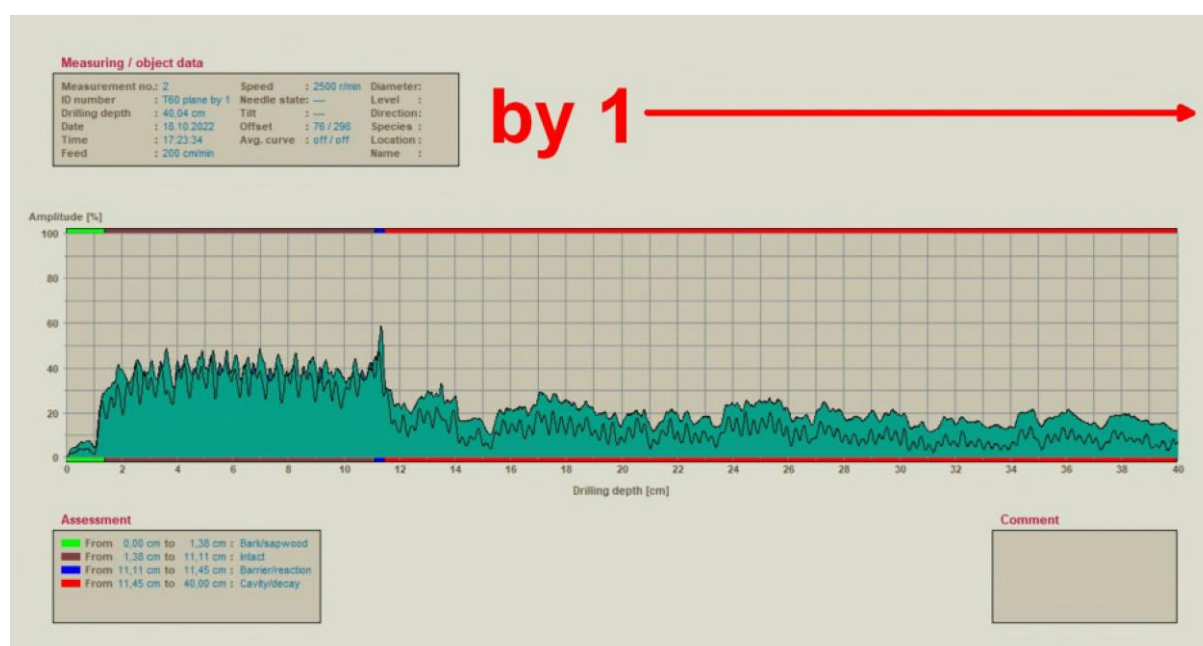
RESI PD

RESI PD is a micro drill used to measure the levels of resistance by drilling into wood to help determine its consistency. The results show high and low peaks for relatively high and low resistance.

The RESI PD has two motors, one to rotate the drill bit and another to push the drill forward, which can help clarify when resistance is actually due to friction as the drill bit moves through the tree.

Decayed wood normally has lower resistance to drilling.

Other factors may be observed, such as natural barrier zones, bark inclusions or a more accurate assessment of the extent of remaining wood around the circumference of a tree.



The RESI PD is often used in combination with the PiCUS tomograph to provide additional information about the condition of wood in a tree.

The RESI PD can also be used where sonic tomography is not appropriate, for example to assess the condition of surface roots, at height where installation of tomography sensors may be impractical, or on trees with small diameters.

The varying properties of wood and modes of decay mean that sometimes wood can be embrittled, which may not be detected using sonic tomography or resistance drilling.

INCREMENT BORER

An increment borer is used to extract a core of wood from a tree for analysis. The extent to which wood is embrittled can be visually assessed using Mattheck's 'Shake test'¹.

Additionally, samples can be sent away for laboratory analysis to test for pathogens.



Each of these pieces of specialist equipment work in different ways to provide additional information regarding the condition of wood in a tree.

They each have their specific uses and limitations, making professional assessment of results crucial.

These tools must only be used in conjunction with visual tree assessment by experienced arboriculturists, as an aid to make informed decisions about appropriate tree management.

¹ Updated Field Guide for Visual Tree Assessment. Mattheck 2007

APPENDIX C

- Duty of Care Guidance

Meeting your duty of care - Guidance for tree owners

Please see below a selection of publicly available documents which offer guidance and information for tree owners regarding their legal duty of care as described in the Occupiers Liability Acts (1957 & 1984).

- [Common sense risk management of trees – National Tree Safety Group](#)
- [Hazards from trees – Forestry Commission](#)
- [Veteran Trees: A guide to risk and responsibility \(IN131\) – Natural England](#)
- [Guide to Trees and the Law – Arboricultural Association](#)
- [Planning Policy Guidance – Tree Preservation Orders and trees in Conservation Areas](#)

APPENDIX D

- TMA QTRA Briefing Note

Quantified Tree Risk Assessment

TMA has adopted the Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) method for assessing the risk from trees, and all our arboricultural consultants are trained, registered users. Please contact us for further information.

The Quantified Tree Risk Assessment Method

Tree safety management is a matter of limiting the risk of harm from tree failure while maintaining the benefits conferred by trees. Although it may seem counterintuitive, the condition of trees should not be the first consideration. Instead, tree managers should consider first the usage of the land on which the trees stand, and in turn this will inform the process of assessing the trees.

The Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) system, developed by Mike Ellison at Cheshire Woodlands, applies established and accepted risk management principles to tree safety management. The system moves the management of tree safety away from labelling trees as either 'safe' or 'unsafe' and thereby away from requiring definitive judgements from either tree assessors or tree managers. Instead, QTRA quantifies the risk of significant harm from tree failure in a way that enables tree managers to balance safety with tree values and operate to predetermined limits of tolerable or acceptable risk.

By quantifying the risk from tree failure as a probability, QTRA enables a tree owner or manager to manage the risk in accordance with widely applied and internationally recognised levels of risk tolerance. QTRA further provides a decision-making framework which considers the balance between the benefits provided by trees, levels of risk they pose, and costs of risk management.

QTRA Advisory Risk Thresholds

Thresholds	Description	Action
1/1 000	Unacceptable Risks will not ordinarily be tolerated	Control the risk
	Unacceptable (where imposed on others) Risks will not ordinarily be tolerated	Control the risk Review the risk
	Tolerable (by agreement) Risks may be tolerated if those exposed to the risk accept it, or the tree has exceptional value	Control the risk unless there is broad stakeholder agreement to tolerate it, or the tree has exceptional value Review the risk
1/10 000	Tolerable (where imposed on others) Risks are tolerable if ALARP	Assess costs and benefits of risk control Control the risk only where a significant benefit might be achieved at a reasonable cost Review the risk
1/1 000 000	Broadly Acceptable Risk is already ALARP	No action currently required Review the risk

TMA categories in relation to QTRA

QTRA Risk of harm	TMA Recommendation
<1/1000	1. URGENT
1/1001 – 1/10,000	2. NECESSARY
1/10,001 - 1/1,000 000	3. APPROPRIATE

QTRA assessment is based on statistical data, calculated over a 1-year period. Tree managers should prioritise their resources to deal with all urgent and necessary works as soon as is practically possible. Works categorised as appropriate should be completed or reviewed within the reinspection period provided.

Following a QTRA tree survey, tree owners can identify where the Risk of Harm (RoH) is unacceptably high and allocate resources to remediate those risks to As Low as Reasonably Practicable (ALARP). Other works with a tolerable or broadly acceptable RoH can be addressed appropriately considering other factors including the availability of resources.

Using QTRA, the land-use (Target) upon which trees could fail is assessed first. By valuing the Target first, the tree owner and the risk assessor are able to determine how often a tree survey or inspection of the trees is required. Each tree is then evaluated in terms of its size and probability of failure.

Ranges of value for Target, Size, and Probability of Failure are entered into a QTRA calculator which generates a traffic light colour-coded risk of harm. The tree owner can then compare the risk to advisory levels for risk tolerance.

For most clients there will be circumstances where tree or branch failure would be unacceptable even where a low risk of harm has been calculated, for example: playgrounds; busy roads; car parks etc. In these circumstances TMA will make recommendations as considered appropriate or in line with the clients stated tolerability of risk *raising the priority of works to necessary regardless of the low risk of harm calculated.*

By taking a QTRA approach, tree owners commonly find they spend substantially less resources on assessing and managing tree risk than they did previously, whilst maximising the many benefits their trees provide. Moreover, in the event of a 'tolerable' or 'acceptable' risk being realised, they are in a position to demonstrate the risk has been managed reasonably and proportionately, to ALARP.

Once trees have been assessed and assigned a 'risk category', an appropriate timeframe for reinspection can be implemented, with trees in areas of higher occupancy revisited within a shorter timeframe than trees in lower occupancy areas.

This allows tree owners to allocate time and resources appropriately according to the use of the land where the trees are growing, leading to more effective, targeted tree management which meets the tree owner's duty of care and also recognises the essential values that trees provide.

Non-risk related works such as actionable nuisance, formative pruning and young tree maintenance will be categorised as considered appropriate. Please see overleaf.

Purpose of works category	Example works
7. landscape improvement	Tree planting, stump removal to facilitate replanting
8. good arboricultural practice	Young tree maintenance, non-risk related tree work, formative pruning etc
9. continue established management	Non-risk related re-reduction, pollarding, repeated tree maintenance
13. to manage ancient or veteran trees	Specialised pruning or tree management techniques
15. to manage nuisance	Cut back from buildings, lights, signs, lifting low branches etc
16. to allow access	Clearance of basal growth/ vegetation/detritus

Where reinspection is recommended following vegetation clearance or for a decay investigation it will be categorised as 'Necessary' *and* assigned a safety action date. E.g.

- 'Clear vegetation to allow inspection of base' – 'To allow access' – within 5 months & 'Inspect base of tree following vegetation clearance' – 'Necessary' – within 6 months
- 'Undertake decay investigation' – 'Necessary' – within 12 months



Arboriculture Ecology Landscape

TMA Environmental Consultants

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