

North Hertfordshire Council

Tree Officer comments

File Ref:

Date: 18/05/2026

Planning Officer: Harriet Sanders

Address: 5 Highbury Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG4 9RW

Subject: Full Permission Householder : Erection of detached garage/workshop outbuilding and detached summerhouse outbuilding following demolition of existing detached garage. Widening of existing vehicular access and replacement retaining wall, pillars and access gates. Hard and soft landscaping works.

1.0 Policy position: NPPF / Local Plan / Supplementary Planning Document

- 1.1 Paragraph 136 of the Achieving well-designed places chapter in the current Framework, addresses the integration of trees within new development. Draft NPPF Policy N3 (December 2025) proposes that trees in new development is included within the natural environment section to ensure consistency and alignment with wider environmental objectives.
- 1.2 North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 Chapter 11 deals with the natural environment.

Policy NE2: Landscape Planning permission will be granted for development proposals that: a) Respect the sensitivities of the relevant landscape character area and have regard to the guidelines identified for built development and landscape management; b) Do not cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area or the landscape character area in which the site is located, taking account of any suitable mitigation measures necessary to achieve this; c) Are designed and located to ensure the health and future retention of important landscape features; and d) Have considered the long-term management and maintenance of any existing and proposed landscaping

2.0 Observations

Trees

- 2.1 The proposed development includes the removal of Viburnum, Cotinus and Plum (amended from the AIA proposing only a reduction of the plum). These

trees/shrubs are not visibly significant and contribute little to the surrounding conservation area. There is no objection to their removal and they will be adequately mitigated by the new planting as detailed in the submitted landscaping scheme.

- 2.2 The application positions the Summerhouse outbuilding within the RPA of a TPO Beech tree. The Summerhouse appears to occupy a large portion of the RPA, any development formed within the RPA should avoid excavations or keep them to a minimum and should not exceed an area greater than 20% of existing unsurfaced ground. It should also provide for gaseous exchange and water infiltration to the root area. The proposed structure and the additional hard landscaping appears to occupy considerably more than 20% of the RPA. The construction proposes using ground screws, which will keep root disturbance to a minimum and the structure is described as floating, so is assumed to be just above the ground level, which will allow for gaseous exchange, but this and the height of airspace, if any, to be provided is not detailed. There are concerns the Summerhouse may still limit moisture infiltration to the root area beneath. Given Beech are particularly sensitive to alterations in ground conditions, details of how soil moisture in the root zone beneath the structure is to be maintained should be provided. Reference is made to *“Maintain hydration of the tree during the build phase”* but this does not provide for the long-term. Care must also be taken to ensure that waterlogging of the soil does not occur following implementation of any irrigation measures as these conditions are adverse to Beech.
- 2.3 The submitted plan appears to show considerable hard surface and landscaping proposals inside the RPA. Details of hard surface construction, including any excavations or soil level changes, which should be avoided, within the RPA will need to be provided to ensure that root damage is minimised and the final surfaces allow for water infiltration and gaseous exchange to the root zone.
- 2.4 The report advises that no heavy plant machinery is to move or be stored in the RPA however the increase in foot fall and movement of heavy materials during construction of the Summerhouse could compact the soil within the RPA and no provision has been made for suitable ground protection during this process.
- 2.5 The application includes the pruning of the Beech tree with details of a crown lift and a reduction not exceeding previous pruning points. This should not breach existing barriers created by the tree when last pruned to prevent microbial ingress and therefore should be less detrimental to the tree's health. These works are in accord with previous permitted works and are therefore acceptable.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 To ensure impact to TPO Beech is kept to minimum further details of hard surface construction, ground protection, within the RPA and moisture provision to the root zone beneath the Summerhouse structure is required. This should demonstrate how the proposed works will not be detrimental to the long-term health of the Beech tree.

4.0 Recommendation

- 4.1 I have no objection to the proposed development or related tree works, but to ensure retained trees are afforded adequate protection during the construction I recommend before any work commences the submission to the council for approval of an Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) and Tree Protection Plan (TPP) in accordance with British Standard 5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations that includes the details required. This can be secured by condition. Reference is made in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment section 1 to the AMS and TPP and again in section 9 para. (m), but it is not included within the submitted documents.

Reason: To prevent damage to or destruction of trees to be retained on the site in the interests of the appearance of the completed development and the visual amenity of the locality, and to comply with Policy NE2 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 to 2031.

Francis Mabbett
Tree and Landscape Officer