



**ARBORICULTURAL CONSULTANT'S REPORT**

**WEeping WILLOW**

**At the junction of Chapel Hill and Silver Street  
Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex**

**June 2009**

**Prepared by:**

**Dr David Brown BSc(Hons) DipLD MA PhD MIHort FArborA  
A Registered Consultant of the Arboricultural Association**

The Weeping Willow tree was originally inspected in May 1998 in response to a proposal by the county highways section to remove the tree. The tree was found to be essentially sound but with some crown defects that could be managed by crown pruning to reduce hazard risk. It was noted at that time that the tree was towards the end of its useful life expectancy and that some thought should be given to a replacement strategy.

A further inspection was carried out in April 2005 and it was noted that some increase in the extent of decay had occurred since 1998 but that the tree was still within acceptable levels of structural failure risk given continuing monitoring and crown reduction. Again, the short useful life expectancy of the tree was noted.

The Willow was again inspected on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2009. The most noticeable change was the degree of crown extension and it is clear that if the tree is to be retained a regular programme of crown reduction pruning must be maintained. The propensity of this tree to throw up vertical regrowth branches was noted in 1998 and a significant limb in the western crown is now showing marked torsion cracking as a result of this branch/limb form.

The decay pockets present at the time of the original inspection in 1998 have continued to expand slowly but are still relatively small and contained within the original branch tissue within the trunk. It would therefore be possible to retain the tree provided that a continuing cycle of crown reduction is carried out to control crown branch loading. If this were implemented then the tree would have a remaining useful life expectancy of 10 to 20 years. However, the major western limb torsion cracking noted above requires the complete removal of this limb as the cracking is severe enough to present a high failure risk. This would result in a large gap in the crown of the tree and will substantially reduce its visual amenity. It is therefore probably the right time now to seriously consider the removal and replacement of this tree.

Given the forward visibility requirements at the main road junction and the possibility that some revision of the road layout may be desirable at that end of the traffic island, the location for a new tree is in conflict with the presence of the existing Willow. It is therefore not a viable option to plant a new tree elsewhere on the island that could mature a little before the Willow has to be removed. This means that the existing tree must be removed before a replacement tree can be planted.



There is an inevitable conflict in terms of road height clearance between a weeping tree and a traffic island location. Willow, while fast-growing, has soft wood and is quite structurally weak. Replacement with a further Willow is therefore not recommended. The location has space for a tree of relatively large mature size and visually requires a substantial full-crowned tree but probably not sufficient for a very large tree such as Plane, Oak or Lime. Three species that are becoming more widely planted in towns in the UK, and are now available from nurseries, are European Hop Hornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*), Southern Nettle Tree (*Celtis australis*) and Maidenhair Tree (*Ginkgo biloba*). One of these species would provide a suitable landmark specimen at this important location.

In summary, the existing tree could be retained with appropriate and continuing pruning but it is towards the end of its useful life expectancy and the major limb removal now necessary will reduce its amenity value. Removal and replacement is now probably the better arboricultural strategy.