

ALFRISTON PARISH COUNCIL

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**Notes of a Public Meeting to discuss the
replacement of the Market Square Horse Chestnut tree
held in the War Memorial Hall, Alfriston
on Thursday 2nd November 2006, commencing at 7.30pm**

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|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Present: | Cllr D. Monteath-Wilson | Meeting Chairman |
| | Mr R. Green | Tree Surgeon and Arborist |
| | Mr M. Charlton | Parish Tree Warden |
| | 29 parishioners | |
| | P.M. Ayers | Parish Clerk |

Cllr Monteath Wilson welcomed everyone, in particular, the tree specialists, who would be addressing the meeting and taking questions in due course. The Parish Council had been made aware that the Horse Chestnut tree was now in an advanced stage of decay, hastened by the hot dry summer, and had recently been condemned as unsafe by East Sussex County Council. Despite that step, any costs of removing the tree would have to be borne by the Parish Council, to whom the tree belonged, and that difficult decision had been made at the October meeting. Removal would cause considerable disruption, but the Parish Council had concluded that it should take control of the replacement process because the Horse Chestnut had been an integral part of village life for well over 100 years, and local residents should have the opportunity of considering its replacement. The experts had identified two native trees – the English Oak and the Lime - as most suitable as a replacement tree, given current conditions and the possibility of global warming. The Parish Council would consider the replacement and plan a re-planting ceremony formally at its meeting on 20th November, when the benefit of local opinion would assist the decisions.

It was understood that the necessary licences had now been obtained, and the tree was due to be removed on Monday 13th November. Removal and re-planting would be an expensive but necessary process for which the Parish Council would welcome donations and public subscription, which would be marked in an appropriate way. Replacement of the surrounding low flint wall was also a high priority. The idea of burying a time capsule had already been raised with the School, and if a large enough piece of wood could be saved from the Horse Chestnut, Rev'd Frank Fox-Wilson would be commissioned to produce a sculpture from it. Mr I. Wilson explained some of the history of the tree, which had been moved to the centre of the Square by his Great Grandfather around 1872 to prevent ponies and traps turning from West Street to North Street at a dangerous speed.

The Clerk explained that because of the hazard that the tree now constituted, he had advised Councillors that it was in order to waive Standing Orders in order to expedite removal of the hazard. R.W.Green Ltd, who had undertaken work for the Parish Council recently, had quoted prices for the work, and these had been accepted. The Clerk went on to add that whilst Councillors were aware of the prices for removing and replacing the tree, they were not aware of a further section of Mr Green's letter in which he offered to supply and plant the new tree free of charge in view of the long standing connection and affection for the village, which both he and his wife had. The meeting applauded such a generous gesture.

Mr Charlton spoke in favour of the Lime tree. This was a native broad leaved tree, explained in the hand-outs left on each seat, and appended to these notes. It had attractive small flowers and a pleasant smell. It developed a conical shape whereas the Oak spread in all directions. The Lime

had been used by the Anglo-Saxons in the production of shields, whereas the Oak had been used in the construction of ships. Oaks survived best in open countryside surrounded by grass, not in a constricted site such as the Market Square. The Lime tree did produce a sticky substance which could coat cars parked on the double yellow lines, but this only took place for a few days each year.

He and Mr Green had considered other possible trees – the Ash, which was not long-lived and split easily, the Beech, which was shallow rooted, would break up the road surface and was unsuitable if global warming occurred, the Hornbeam, which was too slow-growing, or a Horse Chestnut, which could be infected by the bleeding canker outbreak currently suffered.

Mr Green spoke in favour of the English Oak. He remembered using conkers from the present Horse Chestnut tree back in the 1960s, but suggested that the decision needed now was to agree on a suitable tree to grace the Market Square for the next 150-200 years. Thus, it was important to choose carefully, and avoid trees that might suffer from global warming or which were short-lived. He accepted that the Oak was a Wealden tree, more common north of the A27, although he pointed to a young tree growing strongly on the Tye. He accepted that a disadvantage was the site, although he would take all possible steps to make this as tolerable for any tree as possible. The Oak was a long-lived tree, with a life expectation of 200 years – longer than a Lime, either tree would need pruning occasionally to keep it clear of buildings and high-sided vehicles. The Oak suffered from powdery mildew from time to time and occasionally sudden oak death, although this was, in his opinion, unlikely. It did not like salinity, and the raised flint wall would be important in preventing road salt getting to its confined roots.

Public questions were invited:

- Mrs Burton asked why a Sitka Spruce or London Plane had not been considered. Mr Charlton pointed out that the Sitka or a Norway Spruce were not native, nor were they long-lived. The Plane was a hybrid rather than a true broad-leaved tree. He conceded that it was imposing and helped absorb pollution, but it needed space, and the constricted space available was not suitable. It would drop branches – a danger in a village centre location – and would require more intervention to keep it healthy. Mr Green agreed, adding that whilst Plane trees were good as street trees, one would not be right in this location.
- Mr Trowell enquired about roots affecting pavements. Mr Green explained that he planned to use the optimum planting medium to encourage the tree to root deeper in search of moisture reducing the risk to pavements as both the Lime and the Oak were deep-rooting trees. The Plane tree would create such problems, penetrating tarmac and lifting paviers.
- Vernon Reynolds asked about infection of the Horse Chestnut. Mr Green pointed out that the tree had had major surgery, and if wounds had not been fully sealed, the ingress of water would have exacerbated the problems, whilst increased traffic may have severed the main roots. It was clear that the tree could not be recovered. He continued that two key Horse Chestnuts (the other near Alfriston Motors), had been lost this year, suggesting possible bleeding canker in the area. Whilst the Market Square tree was not suffering in that way, the presence of the bacterium could cause problems with another Horse Chestnut, but would not affect an Oak or a Lime.
- Cllr Kegg asked about fungal attack of a Lime. Mr Charlton said that all trees would suffer such an attack from time to time, and both experts agreed that the Oak was less likely to be affected in this way because of its higher levels of tannin. More insects lived in Oak trees than in Limes.
- Mr Savage asked about established Oaks in the locality. Mr Green accepted that Limes were more prevalent south of A27. He planned to plant either tree in a clay loam mix to retain moisture, but either tree would need watering for 3-4 years before the roots penetrated into the substrata. Mr Charlton added that tree husbandry had obviously been practised in the area, with its proliferation of Elms. Oak trees would encourage jays to the area because of their love of acorns.
- Mr Wilson expressed concern about water, since the tarmac surface meant that there was no surface water, and he was concerned about the survival of either tree. Mr Green accepted that this would be a forest tree in an unnatural situation, which is why he planned to dig out much of the soil around the Horse Chestnut and replace it with a specially mixed clay loam. The

substructure would be moist because of run-off from surrounding buildings, and he planned to include an irrigation pipe surrounding the new tree to assist watering until the roots got down deep enough to find natural water. Mr Wilson pointed out that the drain grid beside the Cross was to water the tree, but this could bring problems with salt or diesel spillage.

- Ms Lutring asked about the size of the proposed trees. Mr Green pointed to the explanatory sheets, which showed that either replacement tree would already be about 5 metres tall – similar to the present Horse Chestnut, and the girth of the trunk would be around 18cm.
- Mrs Burton expressed concern about pollarding of a Lime tree, creating unsightly black knots. Mr Charlton suggested that this would depend upon the contractor used to do the work, but that even in a Poplar or a Willow, it would take about 200 years to become a problem. Mr Green added that there would be a need to keep the highway clear, resulting in pruning upto 17.5 metres, but no other pruning should be needed for about 50 years, or when branches became a nuisance.
- Cllr Kegg asked about the suitability of a Sessile Oak. Mr Green pointed out that he and Mr Charlton had considered a range of trees including Elms and Cherries as well as others discussed earlier. The two under consideration had clean stems to 2 metres and had been formatively pruned.
- Mr Trowell asked about the effect of pigeons, which were prevalent in the village. The experts confirmed that they would not eat Oak leaves because of the amount of tannin in them, but the trees would attract jays and squirrels.
- Ms Lutring asked about the winter appearance of the two trees when there were no leaves. The Lime developed a more conical shape, whereas the Oak spread widely.

In the absence of further questions, Cllr Monteath-Wilson called for a vote to indicate the preference of those present. Cllr Knights officiated and declared that 2 votes were cast in favour of the Lime, whilst the remainder of those present (28) preferred the English Oak. This would be taken into account when the Parish Council formally considered the matter on 20th November.

Cllr Monteath-Wilson thanked the speakers for the impartial and knowledgeable way they had approached the session.

Mr Wilson asked again about the surrounding flint retaining wall, and it was confirmed that this would be repaired and re-instated if possible. Public donations would help towards that process. Mr Green reminded the meeting that the Oak, in particular, needed the protection of the retaining flint wall against salt pollution. Mr Savage suggested that the group who had gained flint walling skills recently could be asked for help in order to keep costs down.

Mr Green confirmed that once the Horse Chestnut had been removed, its roots would be removed and the soil excavated out. Anchorage points ready for the new tree would be fitted and the hole then filled using non-marine shingle and topped off with a non peat clay loam to make it safe until the new tree was ready for planting.

Cllr Monteath-Wilson reminded those present that any donations should be made payable to Alfriston Parish Council and sent to the Clerk. She thanked everyone for their interest in attending, and closed the meeting.