

OFFICER REPORT

Application Number: P2026/0321

Site Address: St Thomas Church Church Place Neath Neath Port Talbot
SA11 3LL

Proposal: Works to the following trees protected by Neath Town
Centre Conservation Area Status, some of which are also
covered by Tree Preservation Order T16:
-To remove one Horse Chestnut to near ground level (tag
number 996).
-To reduce the crown of one Corsican Pine on its western
side only by 3 to 4 metres (981)
-To reduce the crown of one Horse Chestnut on its northern
side only by a maximum of 2.5 metres (982)
-To lift the crowns of the Olearia shrubs above the footpath
to 2.4 metres and above the grass area to 1.5 metres -
997(G)

Applicant: Mrs Helen Bennett

Agent: Mr Nick Thomas

Ward: Neath North

Application Type: Works to a tree with a TPO

Valid Date: 20th May 2026

Statutory Expiry Date: 14th July 2026

Ext. of Time / PPA date: 3rd August 2026

Publicity Expiry Date: 9th July 2026

RECOMMENDATION - Approved

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Site Address:	St Thomas Church Church Place Neath Neath Port Talbot SA11 3LL
Proposal:	Works to the following trees protected by Neath Town Centre Conservation Area Status, some of which are also covered by Tree Preservation Order T16: -To remove one Horse Chestnut to near ground level (tag number 996). -To reduce the crown of one Corsican Pine on its western side only by 3 to 4 metres (981) -To reduce the crown of one Horse Chestnut on its northern side only by a maximum of 2.5 metres (982) -To lift the crowns of the Olearia shrubs above the footpath to 2.4 metres and above the grass area to 1.5 metres - 997(G)

Agree with works proposed	Yes
Recommend Refusal of Works	No
Vary Works Proposed	No

If to vary works, suggested description of amended works.

n/a

Public Consultations

Community Council - no response received.

Tree Officer: No objection, subject to condition

The Authority's Biodiversity Team – Request a Preliminary Roost Assessment

Neighbouring properties were consulted via letter and a site notice was also displayed

In response, to date, no representations have been received.

Assessment

In support of the tree works application the applicant has provided a tree health and condition survey by 'The Arb Team' dated January 2025.

The application requests the following works:

- To remove one Horse Chestnut to near ground level (tag number 996).
- To reduce the crown of one Corsican Pine on its western side only by 3 to 4 metres (981)
- To reduce the crown of one Horse Chestnut on its northern side only by a maximum of 2.5 metres (982)
- To lift the crowns of the Olearia shrubs above the footpath to 2.4 metres and above the grass area to 1.5 metres - 997(G)

Summary of Tree Officer Comments

Horse Chestnut (T996) - Removal

- Observed to be in terminal decline with severe physiological stress.
- Exhibited minimal foliar growth and clear signs of structural degradation.
- Condition aligns with the findings of the submitted arboricultural report.
- Removal is considered justified on arboricultural and safety grounds.

Corsican Pine (T981) - Crown Reduction

- Scope of works clarified with the agent and confirmed during the site visit.
- Proposed works include:
 - Reduction of an extended lateral limb on the western side of the crown.
 - More limited reduction of the remaining western crown to reduce overhang

towards adjacent buildings.

- Maximum reduction is approximately 4 metres to the extended lateral limb, with more moderate pruning elsewhere.

- Works are considered proportionate, retaining the tree's overall structure and amenity value while addressing encroachment concerns.

Horse Chestnut (T982) - Crown Reduction

Proposed reduction of up to 2.5 metres is modest in scale.

Works are considered acceptable and would help alleviate amenity concerns relating to the adjacent building.

The reduction can be carried out without significant adverse impact on the tree's form or amenity contribution.

Olearia Group (G997) - Crown Lifting

- Confirmed as not protected by the Tree Preservation Order (TPO) and assessed under Conservation Area controls.

- Proposed works are limited to crown lifting for access and clearance purposes.

- Works indicate retention of the group rather than significant alteration.

Tree Officer recommendations for limitations to works:-

Corsican Pine (T981): reduction of the extended lateral branch projecting over the western aspect of the crown by no more than 4 metres from its tip, together with limited reduction of the remaining western crown only to the extent necessary to draw back overhang from adjacent buildings

- The Horse Chestnut (T982): crown reduction not exceeding 2.5 metres from the outer crown limit.

- The works to the Corsican Pine shall not comprise a uniform reduction of the western aspect of the crown and shall be carried out so as to retain the natural form, habit and structural integrity of the tree.

- All pruning cuts shall be made to suitable growth points and excessive wound sizes shall be avoided. The works to the Horse Chestnut shall be undertaken in a

manner that maintains a balanced and natural crown form.

These limitations will be secured by planning condition in order secure the long term health and visual amenity of the trees in question.

Planning Officer Comments

Visual Amenity

The trees subject of this application collectively contribute positively to the established landscape character of the church grounds and provide visual amenity within the setting of St Thomas Church and surrounding area.

The Horse Chestnut identified as Tree 996 is proposed for removal. The Council's Tree Officer has confirmed that site observations verified the findings of the submitted arboricultural report, identifying the tree as being in a state of terminal decline, displaying significant physiological deterioration, limited canopy cover and evidence of structural degradation. As such, its removal is considered justified on arboricultural and public safety grounds. Notwithstanding the loss of the tree, Planning Policy Wales promotes the protection and enhancement of green infrastructure and seeks biodiversity net benefit through development. In order to mitigate the loss and maintain the long-term arboricultural and ecological value of the site, a condition is recommended requiring the planting of three replacement trees of an appropriate native species, size and specification during the first available planting season following removal.

Proposed works to the Corsican Pine (Tree 981) comprise the reduction of an extended lateral branch on the western side of the crown, together with more limited pruning of the remaining western canopy to reduce encroachment over neighbouring buildings. Whilst the lateral branch reduction represents the most significant element of the works, the overall extent of pruning is considered proportionate and would retain the tree's form, character and amenity value.

The proposed crown reduction of up to 2.5 metres to the Horse Chestnut (Tree 982) is relatively modest in scale and is considered acceptable. The tree officer has confirmed works would assist in addressing issues relating to the proximity of the tree to the adjacent building. No unacceptable harm would be caused to its appearance or long-term contribution to local amenity.

The Olearia group (997G) is not protected by the existing TPO and has therefore been assessed within the context of the Conservation Area. The proposed works are limited to crown lifting to facilitate access and clearance and are indicative of

ongoing management and retention rather than significant alteration. There is, therefore, no unacceptable impact on the visual amenity afforded to the conservation.

Ecology

The Council's Ecologist has advised that the trees / site has potential to support roosting bats and recommends that a Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist prior to determination of the application.

Whilst this advice is noted, the presence of protected species is a separate legislative matter governed by wildlife legislation and does not, in this instance, prevent the Local Planning Authority from determining this tree works application. In assessing tree works applications, consideration is principally given to the impact of the proposed works on visual amenity and the long-term health and suitability of the tree. The requirement to ensure compliance with protected species legislation rests with the applicant and landowner.

Accordingly, it would not be reasonable to delay determination of the application pending the submission of a PRA. Nevertheless, the applicant will be made aware of the Council Ecologist's advice and the potential for bats to be present.

Should any works be authorised, an informative will be attached to the decision notice advising that a Preliminary Roost Assessment should be undertaken prior to felling and that any further survey work identified as necessary must be completed before works commence. The applicant will also be reminded that bats and their roosts are protected by law and that undertaking works which disturb or harm a protected species may constitute a criminal offence.

Conclusion / recommendation

The removal of Horse Chestnut Tree 996 is considered acceptable having regard to its poor physiological condition and advanced decline. A condition will be imposed requiring its replacement with 1 native tree (Silver birch). In this case, the 3 for 1' rule is not applicable since this applies to new development proposals as opposed to Planning Applications. The relevant statutory replacement duty that arises in this case is under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for trees protected by a TPO. One replacement tree is sufficient in this case having regard for the current condition of the tree to be felled.

The proposed pruning works to the remaining trees are proportionate and justified, and would not result in significant harm to their health, structural integrity or visual amenity value.

The proposed works to the Olearia group are also considered acceptable and would preserve the character and appearance of the Neath Town Centre Conservation Area.

A condition will also be imposed limiting the extent of the proposed works to accord with the recommendations of the council's arborist and also to secure 1 no. replacement tree having regard for the felled horse chestnut.

In this case, presence of protected species is a separate legislative matter governed by wildlife legislation.

Hence, the proposal is in accordance with Policies SP15 and EN7 of the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan.

Action Conditions

- 2 One replacement Silver Birch tree shall be replanted in a similar location as the felled Horse chestnut tree hereby approved within the next available planting season following felling. The replacement Silver Birch should be of a standard size as specified in BS3936-1 Nursery Stock- Part 1 Specification for trees and shrubs with an 8 to 10cm stem circumference. The supply, planting and post planting maintenance of the Silver Birch trees must be completed in accordance with BS8545:2014 Trees: from nursery to independence in the landscape.

Reason:

To comply with Policies SP15 and EN7 of the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan and to ensure that the work is carried out to a satisfactory standard, in the interests of good husbandry.

Regulatory Conditions

- 3 All works shall be undertaken in accordance with BS 3998:2010 Recommendations for Tree Work by a qualified and competent tree surgeon.

Reason:

To ensure that the work is carried out to a satisfactory standard, in the interests of good tree husbandry and to comply with Policies SP15 and EN7 of the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan.

- 4 Notwithstanding the submitted details, the approved works shall be limited to:

- a) The Corsican Pine (T981): reduction of the extended lateral branch projecting over the western aspect of the crown by no more than 4 metres from its tip, together with limited reduction of the remaining western crown only to the extent necessary to draw back overhang from adjacent buildings;
- b) The Horse Chestnut (T982): crown reduction not exceeding 2.5 metres from the outer crown limit.

The works to the Corsican Pine shall not comprise a uniform reduction of the western aspect of the crown and shall be carried out so as to retain the natural form, habit and structural integrity of the tree. All pruning cuts shall be made to suitable growth points and excessive wound sizes shall be avoided. The works to the Horse Chestnut shall be undertaken in a manner that maintains a balanced and natural crown form.

Reason:

In the interests of the visual amenity of the area and to safeguard the long-term health and appearance of the trees, having regard to Policies SP15 and EN7 of the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan and to ensure that the work is carried out to a satisfactory standard, in the interests of good husbandry.

Case Officer	Rhodri Griffiths
Telephone No.	01639 686750
Date of Recommendation	3rd August 2026