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Arboricultural Report

Canopy Management at Learmonth Gardens, Edinburgh
for
Learmonth Gardens Association

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1. Preliminaries
This document is produced in response to a request for broad guidance on the future management of the canopy at Learmonth Gardens from Mr Douglas Hall on behalf of Learmonth Gardens Association in November/December 2008. It focuses on issues raised by Association members regarding light penetration in the south-east corner of the Gardens.

The views and advice contained herein derive from our knowledge of the gardens as arboricultural consultants and contractors over a period of some ten years as well as our experience in advising clients as to the practices and policies of The City of Edinburgh Council on the management of trees within a Conservation Area.

The canopy was last formally inspected by ourselves in October 2008 and the specific area in question was further examined in December 2008.

2. Issues Raised
The primary are of concern among residents in this connection is taken to be the shading effect of the trees, particularly as this affects the residential properties on the east section of South Learmonth Gardens. Specifically, questions were raised on the following issues:

- The practicality and likely impact on light penetration of felling, crown-lifting, thinning or topping of the trees in this area
- The assumed views of the Council's Arboricultural Officer on such measures and hence the likelihood of permission for such works being granted
- The nature of any alternative measures which we perceive may assist in mitigating the shading effect of trees in this area.

3. Guidance Notes
3.1 Descriptive
The canopy in this area comprises substantial mature specimens of Sycamore, *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Wych Elm, *Ulmus glabra* with an undercanopy of smaller trees and shrubs. The physiological and structural condition of the major trees is generally good and no works were required in response to our formal inspection of October 2008.

3.2 Practical Interventions
Whilst direct light penetration to this area would clearly be improved by the felling of some or all of these trees, we would suggest that the aesthetic cost would far outweigh any such benefit and assume that there will be no appetite within the Association's membership for such drastic measures. Furthermore, the attitude of the Council would be a major influence on such a proposal, see 3.3 below.

Crown-thinning and raising of the clear canopy level are, in general terms, more tenable measures in this regard, although these will tend to enhance the level of ambient light to the area rather than impact on direct light penetration. It should be noted however that

there is no real overdensity within the crowns of the major trees and that scope for such action is therefore negligible.

We would suggest that a programme of *light* pruning to raise the clear canopy level of the Sycamores (survey Nos 01, 02, 04 & 05) by removing 2-3 minor lower branches (maximum diameter 5" at source) from each tree. In the case of the Elms (Nos 06 & 08) the appropriate corresponding action would be to lightly prune the ends of the pendulous higher branches to achieve a similar effect.

Topping, or reducing the height of these specimens is likely to be considered aesthetically and structurally harmful and may well have negligible impact on light penetration to adjacent properties.

3.3 The City of Edinburgh Council

In our experience, the council's Arboricultural Officer vigorously enforces a policy to protect and enhance the canopy throughout the city – and in particular in the more important, higher-profile areas of historic or architectural interest.

We would suggest that the council is therefore most unlikely to approve of any proposal to fell or top any of the trees in question. Thinning, whilst regarded as sound arboricultural practice, would perhaps be difficult to justify in this case, and hence we would suggest that a carefully-considered programme of light crown lifting would be more likely to be viewed sympathetically by the local authority.

3.4 Alternative proposals

We would suggest that consideration may be given to hard-pruning the large Specimen Common Holly, *Ilex aquifolium* (survey No 03) close to the south-east corner of the garden. The present spreading nature of this specimen is somewhat at odds with the formal setting of the garden and the species will respond to fairly vigorous measures to reduce height and crown spread, with regeneration managed to produce a more compact tree of 2-3m height in perhaps a conical or spherical profile.

The self-seeded specimens Common Elder, *Sambucus nigra* which presently invade the crown of the Holly should be removed and prevented from regrowing.

Taking a wider view, it is worth reflecting that the presence of Dutch Elm Disease within the city (despite the active and vigorous control policy of the council) dictates a strong likelihood of these trees having to be removed at some point in the future (though we are aware that the Association justifiably values these very fine specimens). In addition, the substantial Cherry (No 11) which is in a state of overmaturity will not be expected to survive in the longer term, and the impact of losses among these specimens will be an enforced opening up of the canopy in this corner of the garden.

As a preliminary, for Association planning purposes only, a general estimate of cost for the pruning on the major trees plus work on the Holly/ Elders is £740 plus VAT. Please note that the extent of the work on the Sycamores and Elms will vary from tree to tree (and may appear to be minimal in some cases) as our aim will be to sympathetically prune the trees as a grouping.