

Save Greytown's tree

I was devastated to read (*Midweek*, January 23) of the proposed destruction of the iconic Greytown tree, Farley's oak, this autumn.

Cr Gray, with his honeyed insipid words, fails dismally to justify this terrible act. There must be ulterior motives here?

The tree is not a danger to the public. It would not hurt a sparrow. The tree has withstood 152 years of sometimes severe Wairarapa northwest gales. The tap roots of the tree go down to the water table 4 to 5m below. These roots will form a solid foundation. I have never seen an oak tree which has blown over. The water supply will ensure the tree remains healthy. The fact the tree has been trimmed back on its eastern side twice in the past five years supports this fact.

Unfortunately, the tree's canopy has been damaged on the western side. About 10 years ago, South Wairarapa

District Council workers chopped off a big root of the tree on the West St side. During this work tar seal and road rubble were thrown round the tree.

In 2007 concerned citizens noted twigs and branchlets dying. MAF was informed and an expert confirmed physical damage had been done. Remedies were recommended and in 2008 growth on the east side of the tree was cut back to even up the canopy, dead material was removed and old tar seal and rubble broken up to allow oxygen into the root system. All this work has been successful and the tree is slowly recovering from its ordeal.

Farley's Oak just needs more time. Not five months but five years.

It is ludicrous for Cr Gray to compare Farley's oak with healthy oak trees undamaged by man. Similarly his comment that saplings in Colliers Reserve will substitute for a 152-year-old oak tree in West St.

**N COOPER
Kilbirnie**

Oak's felling put on hold

Greytown's endangered
Farley's Oak has been
granted a stay of execution.
Philippa Novak finds out
more.

The tree still stands majestically at the side of West Street, despite being scheduled late last year for the chop this autumn, deemed to be dying and a safety risk.

Now a new arborist report and new growth have seen a reconsideration by Greytown Community Board and that has given new hope to supporters of the tree.

Allan Farley feels he has a close connection to Greytown's historic English oak tree which he notes that in its over 150 years has always enjoyed the name Farley's Oak.

All the land around the oak was originally owned by early settler Ben Stevens who balloted for the 40-acre (16ha) block back in the 1850s when he arrived in Greytown. The Stevens family retained that land till around 1928.

"I believe the Farley connection put in an appearance at this time when my great-grandfather Harold bought the land and farmed it until the 1960s. The Farleys, of course, inherited the growing tree. Even then it must have been an eye-catcher and it became known, somewhat affectionately, as Farley's Oak," Allan says.

"When West Street was widened in the 1960s the tree was no longer within the farm boundary and its future looked uncertain as the council planned to cut it down to widen West Street so the road could become a heavy traffic bypass. I believe their intention was to turn the wood into council furniture."

Allan says it was fortunate that a group of concerned citizens rallied together and saved the tree.

More recently, Neal Cooper, a former Greytown resident who is an expert and authority on tree care, wrote to a local newspaper voicing his concern regarding the possible felling of the tree.

He maintained the tree is not dying but is, in fact, recovering, even showing new growth — this despite two arborist's reports that an invasion of honey fungus will make the tree unstable.

"It appears the council is concerned the tree may prove unstable and possibly capable of toppling over and killing someone," Allan says.

"Of course, I'm not against the tree coming down if there's a good sensible reason, and I know that people suggest that the large bough that hangs over the street could be a danger, especially to large trucks. This limb could be removed, although its removal may kill the tree."

He suggests the tree be left alone to do its own thing.

Greytown Community Board has recommended that South Wairarapa District Council treat and monitor the tree — more pruning, aerating and fertilising, with a regular check on the tree's condition every six months.

With the fungus there were "questions about the root system" but it "has not had, it would appear, the sort of destructive effects we thought it might be having", community board chairwoman Kay Gray said.

■ Greytown is recognised as the first place in New Zealand to celebrate Arbor Day when residents held a tree-planting ceremony in July 1890.



NAMESAKE: Ian Farley at the Farley Oak.



Office of Hon Chris Tremain

Minister of Internal Affairs
Minister of Local Government
Associate Minister of Tourism
MP for Napier

5 February 2013

Neil Cooper
Flat C1
66 Coutts Street
Kilbirnie
Wellington 6022

Dear Mr Cooper

On behalf of Minister Tremain, Minister of Internal Affairs, thank you for your letter received on 30 January 2012 regarding the 1860 Farley's Oak Tree in Greytown.

As this matter best fits into the portfolio responsibilities of the Minister for the Environment, I am transferring your letter for consideration to the office of the Hon Amy Adams.

Yours sincerely

Emma Stringer
Ministerial Secretary



26 FEB 2013

Office of Hon Amy Adams

Member of Parliament for Selwyn

Minister for the Environment

Minister for Communications and Information Technology

Associate Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery

ENV 9969

Neil Cooper
Flat C1
66 Coutts Street
Kilbirnie
WELLINGTON 6022

Dear Mr Cooper


Thank you for your letter of 25 January 2013 to Hon Chris Tremain regarding Farley's Oak Tree in Greytown. I am responding on his behalf as the issues you raise fall within my portfolio responsibilities as Minister for the Environment.

I recognise the values communities place on protecting notable trees through scheduling and appreciate that Farley's Oak has considerable historical significance and amenity value in Greytown. However, although I am responsible for the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), I rarely become involved in day-to-day processes under the RMA which are the responsibility of local councils.

In this instance, it is the responsibility of South Wairarapa District Council (the Council) to ensure that the South Wairarapa District Plan is complied with in respect to Farley's Oak. I understand that the Council has received an independent arborist report which noted that this tree is in a state that is beyond repair and has subsequently allowed work to progress for its removal as described in your letter.

If you wish to obtain further information about Council processes regarding notable trees, or for further investigation to be undertaken regarding the health of Farley's Oak, I encourage you to contact the Council directly by calling 06 306 9611.

Yours sincerely



Hon Amy Adams
Minister for the Environment



Ref: 2007-593

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
Investigation and Diagnostic Centre
PO Box 2095
Auckland 1140

24 October 2007

Neill Cooper QSM
"Grovely"
126A West Street
Greytown 5953

Dear Neill Cooper

Please find enclosed a copy of the report Brent Rogan of SPS Biosecurity Ltd provided MAF Biosecurity after assessing the dieback of Farley's Oak situated on the road verge outside 100 West Street, Greytown.

Brent's opinion is that this tree is suffering the effects of human intervention: i.e. excavation and roading activity and also raising the soil level around the base of the tree thus reducing the amount of oxygen supplied to the root system.

I hope you will find this report informative in the evaluation of the tree and the recommendations on how best to handle its care in the future.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heather Pearson'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Heather Pearson
Incursion Investigator

Email: heather.pearson@maf.govt.nz

For enquires contact: 09 909-5721 or 029-909-5721



SPS
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& ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

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PUBLIC ENQUIRY: QUERCUS ROBUR DIEBACK

19/10/2007

Heather Pearson
Biosecurity NZ

Re: Reported *Quercus robur* dieback...Greytown

Heather,

I investigated the *Quercus robur* dieback (as per previous correspondence) in West St Greytown yesterday morning. On site I met Neil Cooper, Mike Lynch and Robyn.

This very large oak, as is typical of many large exotic European hardwoods, had areas of heart/branch rot and evidence of native termites (*Kaloterms* and/or *Stoloterms*). This was entirely expected even before I examined the tree. There was no indication that the heart rot was coming through the main part of the trunk (i.e. no brackets or other fruit bodies). Neil mentioned that core samples had been taken and that a brown aromatic substance had been obtained. This too is to be expected as areas of rot are often surrounded by fermenting wood tissue (sugars) ...this is sometimes referred to as "Matai Beer".

I was shown photographs of what superficially looked like *Armillaria* fruitbodies taken in June of this year. There appeared to be no physical signs of *Armillaria* infection of the root collar area and the photograph did not display areas of the mushrooms which would assist in identification...it's worth noting that the deep gold-brown colour of the mushrooms is reminiscent of species of *Gymnopilus* though I can't rule other fungi such as the common pathogen *Agrocybe parasitica*. Having examined the base of the tree and examining the soundness of the root collar it's likely that the fruitbodies were in fact fruiting on dead detritus or old buried dead wood.

19/10/2007

So what's responsible for the upper branch and tip dieback? I believe, having looked at this type of situation many times in the past two decades, that this is chiefly a physiological response to having (1) **major** roots damaged by excavations and roading activity (immediately evident on the roadside) and (2) the lawn surrounding the tree appears to have been raised thus reducing the amount of oxygen to the supplied to the (feeding) root system. Both of these events have resulted in the large tree having difficulty in supplying adequate photosynthates and indeed water to growing tips and branch ends. As logic dictates the dieback has been worse on the 'exposed' side of the tree, due to higher evapotranspirational rate(s). It's worth noting that much of the defoliation is now recovering as masses of epicormic and young shoots are developing on the formerly bare branches.

What can be done to improve the tree health? Though the tree appears to be recovering, it may help if the soil around the tree was aerated... a common practice with large trees in disturbed or compacted sites.

A few web sites that may be useful:

<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/1000/1002.html>

<http://www.homeandgardenstreecare.com/Page2.html>

http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/treecare/maintenance/construction_damage.html

Prognosis? The tree appears to have a bit of a setback but the medium term prognosis is good. A bit of heartrot will undoubtedly kill the odd branch and cause some measure of hollowing in parts of the tree. This is a very impressive (and for New Zealand very old) oak tree. Any limbing must be done with care to reduce the 'wound size' to minimise the affect of any subsequent heart rot. Painting or patching of wounds would not be in the interest of the trees health, as this often induces a micro-climate suitable for decay organisms.

Sampling? The only samples taken were of soil around the base of the tree. This was done to check for species of *Phytophthora*, which given the soils composition of compacted free draining silt and aggregate is unlikely. No samples were taken of shoots or branches (because at best we would only locate secondary organisms). I will periodically check the tree enroute to the other areas to determine the status of the tree and look for any associated organisms/mushrooms.

Summary: The tree is recovering from significant root damage.



Brent Rogan
Director
SPS Biosecurity Ltd

Helen McNaught
Facilities and Parks officer
South Wairarapa District Council
P.O.Box 6
Martinborough

15th February 2013

100, West St. Greytown – Heritage Oak Tree

Prepared by: Dave Aitchison N.Dip Arb. NCH Arb.

This report has been prepared for Helen McNaught, Facilities and Parks officer,
South Wairarapa District Council.

An assessment was undertaken and a report dated 15th April 2010, providing information
on the declining health of the Notable and Historical Oak tree along with
recommendations for remedial work.

A further inspection of this tree has been requested to ascertain the present health status of
this specimen and provide a written report.

A site visit and climbing inspection was undertaken on the 12th February 2013.

A sign is presently attached to the trunk of the tree informing the public that the tree is to
be identified for removal in the autumn of 2013.

In my capacity as a consulting arborist I have undertaken to provide an independent and
unbiased evaluation.

Location:

This specimen of *Quercus robur* (English Oak, Common Oak, Pedunculate Oak) is growing adjacent to a residential building in the grassed berm area outside the historic Farleys house #100, West St, Greytown.

Summary of previous report:

A period of almost three years has elapsed between my previous inspections of this specimen.

The report highlighted that the tree was in decline, it had been infected by *Armillaria mellea*. As a direct result of this fungal attack, deadwood and dieback was apparent throughout the canopy particularly on the house side and its amenity value was adversely impacted. Vigorous epi-cormic growth was found throughout the lower canopy.

In view of this, recommendations were provided to help improve the trees health and vitality, these included:

- Remove deadwood from tree to reduce immediate hazards.
- Irrigate trees rooting system particularly during periods of drought – may be manual or irrigation system.
- Fertilizing regime to improve nutrient availability.

Remedial tree work undertaken:

Since my last inspection the tree has been subject to significant pruning operations to remove deadwood and reshape the crown.

It is unclear if any of the other recommendations have been implemented.

Tree inspection:

A climbing inspection was undertaken and photographs provided to help illustrate any points and issues.

It should be noted that the two inspections occurred with a two months variance in timings. Both were undertaken during active growth and before autumnal onset, the impact of the timing differences on the overall assessment is not considered significant.

Present Health Status:

Comparative photo's shown below.

Farleys Oak looking south April 2010



Farleys Oak looking south Feb 2013



Farleys Oak looking west April 2010



Farleys Oak looking west Feb 2013



Lower limbs northern side April 2010



Lower limbs northern side Feb 2013



Inner canopy April 2010



Inner canopy Feb 2013



General condition:

The overall health of the tree in terms of vigour and vitality appears to have improved over the last three years. This can be attributed to two factors.

1. The density of the foliage re-growth from epicormic development particularly in the lower canopy and on the eastern side of the trees crown has increased substantially. This is a compensatory growth form developing as a reaction to the loss of upper canopy growth. The regenerating growth is also found on the main scaffold limbs and pruned back branches where an increase in density is also found in comparison to three years ago.
2. In combination with the increased foliage density, remedial tree surgery has been undertaken to remove the apical deadwood and reduce the crown parameters particularly on the eastern aspect. The impact of this on the overall balance and form of the tree is minimum but overall it does create a more compact crown development. The removal of deadwood has reduced the potential hazard impact and helped to improve its overall visual appearance.

The impact of the dieback of this tree is more pronounced on the western side and has the highest visible impact when viewed from the south looking north. When viewed from the north or eastern aspects the visual impact of the dieback and sparse foliage cover is far less noticeable.

Armillaria mellea (Honey Fungus):

The previous report identified that this specimen was infected with this fungal pathogen. It also provided information on this disease concluding that the dieback and decline of this specimen was determined to be as a direct result of its colonization.

A paragraph from that report is shown below, it provided an insight into the long term prognosis of this specimen.

'As a rule trees that are able to maintain their health and vigour are often able to confine the fungi to localized lesions and limit their spread up the roots by compartmentalising the affected areas'.

The visual inspection would indicate that the vitality of the tree has improved, with the increasing density of growth providing signs that the tree is at least maintaining its vigour if not improving it. Given the underground nature of the roots it is unknown if this fungal attack has been arrested and the rooting system compartmentalised from ongoing infestation.

The health of the canopy is in direct relation to the health of the roots. Using this as the premise then the health of this trees rooting system has improved over the last 3 years and the impact of the attacking pathogen has been reduced.

Amenity Value:

The amenity value of this tree to the community is a subjective one. The tree has lost its natural form, shape and balance. The pruning of this tree has removed the unsightly and dangerous deadwood and reduced the overall canopy dimensions. The unbalanced canopy remains but is not quite so pronounced. The loss of apical growths has left large unnatural stubs and stunted main stems giving an unnatural appearance particularly on the western aspect where relatively little foliage cover is provided.

The tree displays reasonable form and balance when viewed from the north and eastern aspects but is of very poor form and balance when viewed from the south and west.

In my opinion the overall amenity value of this tree has improved slightly over the preceding three years. However, given its growth patterns and one sided development this tree is highly unlikely to substantially increase its overall amenity value in its remaining viable lifespan.

Summary:

The signs which are evident in the canopy growth responses indicate that the overall vitality of this specimen has improved.

Its amenity value has improved slightly but is highly unlikely to improve substantially over its remaining lifetime.

It is unknown if the Honey fungus infestation has been limited in its spread or the degree of impact on the trees rooting system. In my experience it would be unusual for a tree that has suffered this degree of dieback over a long period of time to be able to arrest an attack of this vigour.

As the owners/caretakers of the tree Council has two options.

1. Retain the tree, monitor on a regular basis (suggest annually) to ascertain its relative health and implement the previously recommended irrigation and fertilizing regimes. If the present health improvement goes into reverse or the tree is determined as unsafe it can be identified for removal.
2. In its present condition the tree no longer provides enough value to be retained as an amenity tree and is identified for removal.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information.

Yours truly,

Dave Aitchison.