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Birds dropping trees?

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The fate of trees which a **Surrey golf club** wanted to cut down because of bird poo falling on its clubhouse patio is still unclear. The beech trees outside Guildford Golf Club's clubhouse, in Merrow, were scheduled to be cut down in May, before a last-minute tree preservation order (TPO) was put in place. Guildford Borough Council's officers put the TPO in place on Friday (May 12) just days before the trees were due to be felled, on the following Monday.

Residents and councillors had spoken out against the plans to fell the trees, which are within the **Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**, and officers will decide in the next six months if they should be permanently protected.

People can write to the council to give their views on protecting the trees, though the council's former leader made clear this was not a subjective exercise, but one based on the expert opinions of the council's tree officers.

Councillor **Joss Bigmore** (Residents for Guildford and Villages, Merrow) said he thought they were "beautiful" trees, but there had to be expert analysis rather than people saying: "I just like the tree."
He told the LDRS: "They should be assessed. If they're dangerous, then something needs to be done with them. If they're not, then they should be protected because they're stunning trees. But we should let the experts opine as to whether there is any real danger from them or whether they should be protected."

The golf club set out reasons for wanting to fell the trees in a newsletter to members, seen by the LDRS, which outlined "key reasons" for wanting to fell the trees, including regarding insurance and after storms in January 2022 had brought down one tree at the club.

The newsletter also outlined the "unacceptable" problem of bird droppings falling from the trees and landing on patio seating and tables.

Residents have until June 8 to write to the council to outline their views on if the TPO should be made permanent.

Katherine Atkinson, the independent chair of the Board of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), said cutting down the trees "would have a significant negative impact on the local environment and the public's enjoyment of it". She wrote to the borough council regarding the TPO, pointing out the trees' location in the nationally protected AONB and that they provided a "natural screen" for the clubhouse buildings, conserving and enhancing the "scenic beauty of the landscape".

She added: "The trees provide shade for those using the public footpath (especially in the areas with benches) and because they are mature trees they provide important habitat for a wide range of species. The trees stand as a highly visible and highly valued feature within this part of the AONB, from a distance forming a natural green skyline around the clubhouse and contributing to the sweep of landscape up from the bottom of Merrow Downs."

She said the response to the initial plans to fell the trees was "immediate and clear" and that the "amenity value" of the trees to the public was clear.

Councillor **George Potter**, (Lib Dem, Burpham), who sits on the district and the borough council, said the door was "always open" for the golf club to have a discussion about the plans for the trees. He added: "The borough council will make a decision based on the merits of the case, and considering comments made by any and all parties, but public support for making the TPOs permanent would certainly be welcome."

Maggie Mamen lives in Canada, but regularly visits Guildford, and wrote to the council to call for the TPO to be made permanent. She said: "It is one of the major joys of these visits to walk up to Merrow Downs and admire the beautiful beech trees outside the club house in all the seasons. It is appalling that they are under any kind of threat."

A **Guildford Borough Council** spokesperson said: "A Provisional Tree Preservation Order was served on Guildford Golf Club on 11 May 2023. Interested parties have at least 28 days to comment on, object to, or support the Order. The Provisional Order will remain in force for up to six months. During this time, but only after the first 28 days, we will consider the responses and decide whether the order will be confirmed."

Guildford Golf Club was contacted for comment.

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