1 Introduction

The St Benedicts Estate was built in the mid 1980s in grounds for which St Benedicts (Tooting) Management Company Ltd (‘the Management Company’) owns the freehold. This company is owned by the Estate property owners so is effectively a mutually owned residents association. The grounds include Estate-managed areas for which both flat and house owners pay for the upkeep and areas around leasehold blocks of flats for which only flat owners pay for the upkeep.

The grounds contain over 100 trees, around 30 of which are mature trees from the old St Benedicts Hospital grounds that are currently protected by Wandsworth Council Tree Preservation Order TPO 99/2003, which superseded earlier order TPO 99/1987. Trees T6, T7, T8 and T9 in the TPO are located off the Estate, are not the Management Company’s responsibility and are not covered by this Management Plan. Trees T11 and T22 have no longer existed for over 5 years. Laing Homes was required to protect preserved trees when it built the Estate and also to plant other trees. The Estate property legal agreements protect Laing Homes and the Management Company, to which it transferred the freehold, from the consequences of being required to allow the trees to grow. Almost all of the trees are in the Estate grounds for which both flat and house owners pay for the upkeep.

To assist in their management, the Management Company Directors documented the trees on the Estate Plan available on the website for the Estate, where the TPO is also available:

• http://www.stbentooting.co.uk/documents/plan-a3.pdf
• http://www.stbentooting.co.uk/documents/tree-preservation-order.pdf

The Management Company Directors also produced this tree management plan in line with our legal and contractual obligations, which they formally adopted on 11 October 2014.

2 Overall Policy on Trees

Opinions among property owners and residents regarding the trees vary, from wishing to fell specific trees to wishing to leave them in a natural state and carry out no maintenance. The Directors of the Management Company, who are themselves property owners on the Estate elected by the shareholding property owners, therefore decided to adopt as an over-riding policy:

To manage the trees on the Estate and allow them to grow in accordance with the legal and contractual obligations on the Management Company, following advice from a professionally qualified tree surgeon and, where applicable, as permitted by planning consent.

As stated in the TPO, trees on the Estate are considered to have amenity value and the Directors consider them part of the inherent nature of the Estate, so they need to be retained, allowed to grow and managed in a manner compatible with their location in a constrained urban area near adjacent properties. Owners and tenants were aware of the trees when they purchased or rented properties on the Estate, for which provision is made in the property legal agreements, so requests to fell trees will not be considered except for those in a dangerous state and self-seeded specimens that have grown since the Estate was built. Nor will requests that would damage trees be carried out unless required for safety.

Subsequent sections of this document set out management policies for specific groups of trees subject to complying with this overall policy and, where applicable, as permitted by planning consent. References of the form Tnn refer to the TPO, so all such trees require planning consent for work. Work to manage trees is carried out to the Management Company’s 4-year maintenance cycle, driven by property legal agreements, set out on its website:

• http://www.stbentooting.co.uk/calendar.htm#maintencencecycle
3 Preserved Trees Near Church Lane

*T1 Ash* near St Benedicts Close entrance. This tree is away from buildings so is allowed to grow naturally. It is examined periodically, typically annually but at least every four years, for signs of ash dieback disease.

*T2 Indian Bean* tree near St Benedicts Close entrance. This tree is away from buildings but close to the pavement and road so is allowed to grow naturally except that any low limbs obstructing the road would be removed. Since 2013, extensive die-back has been observed and major limbs have died. A professionally qualified tree surgeon advises that this tree is dying. It is examined annually and dead and damaged limbs removed, most recently in September 2014. On advice from Wandsworth Council’s tree officer, it will be replaced with a tree of the same species when it dies.

*T3 Sycamore and T3 Ash* between St Benedicts Close and Abbey Drive. These trees shade gardens in Abbey Drive, so are managed in accordance with professional advice. They are cut back to the point to which they were previously cut back around every four years but cannot be reduced further on advice from Wandsworth Council’s tree officer.

*T5 Deodar Cedar* in the grounds to the rear of flat block 31-36 Abbey Drive. This tree is in a very constrained location, close to the building, damages the building and severely shades flats in the block. It is reduced and raised to the maximum recommended and permitted extent around every four years to mitigate its impact. It is considered that Laing Homes was imprudent to erect a building so close to a preserved tree, but nothing further can now be done about this.

4 Oak Trees Adjoining Rectory Lane

*Oaks T10 and T13-T20* are on Estate grounds adjoining Rectory Lane and, together with *Oaks T12 and T21* in the grounds of freehold houses that are the responsibility of their owners, form the remains of a line of trees in the grounds of the former St Benedicts Hospital. This line of trees is of high amenity value but the trees appear to be centuries old and many have suffered severe die back and have had to have major limbs removed for safety.

Laing Homes planted additional oak trees in the gaps in the line between oak T13 and oak T14. These are being allowed to grow to maturity.

*Oaks T10 and T20* are close to buildings. As well as having dead wood removed for safety, these are reduced to maintain a distance of 3 metres from buildings every four years. Oak T20 is suffering from fungal infection to a major limb. This is examined annually for safety.

Other Estate oak trees away from buildings are allowed to grow naturally and have dead wood removed for safety around every four years. Oak T18 is in particularly poor condition and has had major limbs removed for safety. There are at least two self-seeded oak saplings near its location and these are being encouraged to grow. When oak T18 dies or decays to the point that it has to be felled for safety, one will be selected to grow to be its replacement.

*Oaks T12 and T21* are in the grounds of freehold houses so are the responsibility of their owners. Oak T21 in the rear garden of 1 Carlisle Way is being managed similarly to the Estate oak trees. Oak T12 in the front garden of 138 Rectory Lane is suffering die back, appears potentially unsafe and professional tree surgeons advise that it is dying. The house owner has been formally advised of this, of his responsibility to maintain or fell the tree and of his liability for any injury or damage caused by his not doing so.

Former *Ash T11* has not existed for over 5 years. Wandsworth Council’s tree officer was informed of this in 2013. A new ash tree has been planted near its location. This is being allowed to grow to maturity with periodic examination, typically annually but at least every four years, for signs of ash dieback disease.
5 Lime Trees in Limetree Walk

*Limes T23-T36* form a double row on either side of Limetree Walk, previously the entrance to the former St Benedicts Hospital. This double line of trees is of high amenity value. The trees are in a constrained location near buildings and can present hazards to pedestrians using the publicly adopted footpath Limetree Walk.

Laing Homes planted additional lime trees between T24 and T25, between T32 and T33 and between T34 and T35. They also, apparently by accident, planted an alder rather than a lime between T26 and T27. These are being allowed to grow to maturity to form replacements for the mature lime trees when they die or decay to the extent that they have to be felled for safety.

*Limes T23-T27 and T32-T36* are between 3-storey blocks of flats and by the publicly adopted path Limetree Walk. They are rapidly growing, so are reduced and raised about every four years:

- to maintain their height at a similar level to the surrounding buildings, around 11.5 metres;
- to maintain their reach at about 2.7 metres from the trunks, about 5 metres from nearby buildings and providing a gap for natural light to reach the path during the day;
- to raise the trees to just above the height of the Council-maintained street lights, to avoid damage and ensure that the path remains adequately lit for safety at night; and
- to remove low growth so that branches that would strike pedestrians do not overhang the path for safety (this is an absolute requirement for safety);
- but subject to the over-riding constraints (except in respect of safety requirements) not to harm the trees and not to raise them above the natural bases of their crowns.

This matches the points to which they were cut back previously.

*Limes T28-T31* are on slightly higher land surrounding the clock tower from the former St Benedicts Hospital that Laing Homes was required to retain as a feature of the Estate. They are close to and pose a danger to the structure particularly the glass dials. They are rapidly growing, so are reduced and raised about every four years:

- to a similar height above ground as the other lime trees, around 11.5 metres, but, as they are growing on higher ground, reach above the other lime trees;
- to be 3 metres clear from the clock tower and not to have any branches that could blow on to and break the glass dials (this is an absolute requirement for safety); and
- to raise them to a similar height as the other lime trees and remove low growth so as to provide a clear view of the clock tower feature, particularly the clock dials;
- but subject to the over-riding constraints (except in respect of safety requirements) not to harm the trees and not to raise them above the natural bases of their crowns.

This matches the points to which they were cut back previously.

*Lime T22* has not existed for over 5 years. Wandsworth Council’s tree officer was informed of this in 2013. It is proposed to plant a replacement lime tree near this location, together with one in the corresponding new location on the other side of the path, to extend the double row of lime trees and join the additional lime trees planted by Laing Homes as eventual replacements for the mature lime trees.

6 Trees Screening St Benedicts Close and Abbey Drive

There is a line of trees and hedging planted by Laing Homes on the bank between St Benedicts Close and Abbey Drive to provide screening. This is particularly required to provide privacy for flats in block 105-135 St Benedicts Close, which would otherwise be directly overlooked by properties in Abbey Drive, as these are on a higher level. This screen is of high amenity value, is part of the design of the Estate and is essential to maintain, despite any shading it may cause to Abbey Drive.
The screen comprises various species including Lime, Alder, Robinia, Maple, Cherry, Ash and Oak trees. Three Oak trees behind parking spaces in the far corner of St Benedicts Close are very close to and are causing damage to the parking spaces.

The trees are monitored and reduced as required to maintain the screen while minimising the shading caused. The Oaks, which have less of a screening function but are of high value, are reduced to prevent them from overhanging the car park more than necessary while not damaging the trees. The damage from their roots to the car parking spaces is accepted and repaired as necessary.

Ash trees are examined periodically, typically annually but at least every four years, for signs of ash dieback disease. If other diseases become prevalent, any trees which may suffer from them will similarly be examined.

Other self-seeded trees between the screening trees and Abbey Drive that have grown since the Estate was built, do not form part of the screen and which cause a nuisance to and shade Abbey Drive are felled.

7 Other Trees

Other trees grow in various places on the Estate, some near buildings and overhanging parking spaces and paths.

Any danger to buildings, pedestrians or cars is removed, for example, by reducing or raising the tree concerned or removing low limbs or, if necessary, by felling the tree (this is an absolute requirement).

If property or parking space owners report or if it is observed that a tree is causing an issue, professional advice is taken and, where possible without damaging the tree, action is taken to reduce the issue, for example, by reducing or raising the tree or removing one or more limbs.

Otherwise, these trees are examined and, if necessary, reduced or raised about every four years. Trees near buildings and other structures are pruned more heavily than those in open locations with the intention of keeping them at least 3 metres or, if possible, 5 metres, from buildings and structures.

Fallen trees are removed and are not necessarily replaced depending on the suitability of the location for a tree and whether other trees nearby still provide good cover. In particular, the Staghorn Sumachs planted by Laing Homes are of little value, are prone to falling in gales because of their growth habit and are not being replaced with trees of the same species.

8 Trees in the Grounds of Freehold Properties

Trees in the grounds of freehold properties, including houses and the Housing Association block of flats 2-16 St Benedicts Close, are owned by the owners of those properties, not the Management Company, and are the responsibility of those owners to maintain safely.

If the Management Company identifies any danger or work professionally recommended as required, it informs the tree owner of this, of their responsibility to carry out the required work and of their liability for any injury or damage caused by their not doing so. Some owners may ask the Management Company to get the work done, in which case it is done at the same time as Management Company tree work with the cost re-charged to the owners.