

## **Removal of elm trees from Wood Street**

### Purpose

Information for the Greytown Community Board on the removal of trees from Wood Street in Greytown in November 2021.

### Summary

Six elm trees at the intersection of Wood Street and Kempton Street were removed because they were identified as being an immediate danger to the public. The trees had obvious signs of rot, decay, large cavities at their base and in the trunk/limbs and where they had been trimmed in the past. Council acted under emergency powers in the Resource Management Act to remove the trees before a failure of a tree or significant limb caused injury or damage to property.

### Background

The Council recognises that notable trees, including the iconic Elms in question are incredibly beautiful and an asset to Greytown and our region. Notable trees and mature trees add a distinct character to the South Wairarapa and are a real treasure for all of us. The Council is heavily invested in their protection and maintenance.

There will be times however that the Council will need to act quickly to remove trees that have become an immediate danger to the public or property. The decision to act, and the judgment on the risk posed, is an operational decision for Council.

The management of the trees in Wood Street is not a new issue. Council, using a resource consent in 2014, removed three trees which were part of a group of five notable trees along the Wood Street frontage. The last two notable trees in this grouping were brought down in this most recent action.

The trees have continued to decline in health over the years. We have received numerous public complaints about their condition. We were particularly worried about the adjacent kindergarten, as we were informed that branches had come down in the kindergarten carpark. The trees are very substantial and would easily kill a child or cause very severe injury if they came down in a strong wind.

The danger to property (most likely cars) and essential services is also real. The trees have interfered with high voltage powerlines in the past.

### The process in an emergency

Taking action in an emergency situation is different from the normal system of applying for a resource consent and notifying the public, community boards and others. We strictly limit the times that we would not follow the normal requirement to gain a resource consent.

Council under s330 of the RMA has specific powers to act in an emergency to prevent immediate and foreseeable effects on lifelines (network utilities), property and life. That was the situation we found ourselves in and the authority we used. In this situation a resource consent is still required, but is applied for retrospectively.

### The condition of the trees

Before we acted, we gained the advice of a professional arborist and we also talked with a consultant arborist, Richie Hill, who was familiar with the trees' history. We also conducted a visual examination of each of the trees.

The professional arborist told us that in his experience of 20 years as an arborist the trees represent an immediate risk to the public owing to their degraded condition. We have released this opinion on our website.

The consulting arborist told us that the poor structural condition of the trees would likely justify their removal. Mr Hill said he had tried in the past to have the trees in question removed from the notable trees list due to their severely damaged condition.

A visual inspection and historic information on the trees revealed that the trees have been poorly trimmed in the past and this has contributed to their deterioration. Their structures are stressed and unsound. There were holes in the limbs of varying sizes, with obvious large sections of rot at the base of the trees. There was evidence of considerable dieback, likely to have been caused by root disruption from the development of the adjacent carpark.

These were not professional reports prepared and peer reviewed, as there was not time for that to happen. That would be the normal process when we were not acting in an emergency. Our judgment was that the trees could come down in the next high wind, and we did not want Council to be in the position of failing to act to protect public safety. Council was obliged to work with the best information available to us at the time.

### The outcome

Six trees were eventually removed. The attached photos of the stumps of the felled trees demonstrate that the professional opinions were confirmed. The trees were found to be rotted to the core, with most of the bases being almost completely diseased or dead.

Instructions to the contractors was to only remove as much of the trees as strictly necessary to protect the public and property. Our approach will always be only to remove mature trees when necessary to safeguard our community, and we will follow regular consent process unless immediate safety concerns oblige us to act otherwise. Unfortunately, in this case the removal crew was not able to save any of the six trees in question.

We are working on a refreshed standard operating procedure to make sure all staff are aware of the proper process in both emergency and non-emergency situations.

