

Mulberry FAQs

1. How old is the Mulberry Tree?

There are differing theories and evidence regarding the age and the origins of the Mulberry Tree; we can be certain that the tree is at least as old as the Hospital Building (c.1855). Regardless of its true age, it is fully appreciated that it represents a connection to London's war-time past and there is an appreciation of the historical significance of Mulberry Trees to the area.

2. What will happen to the Mulberry Tree?

The proposals are to relocate the Mulberry Tree to the front lawn within the existing site. It is being relocated via an expert tree relocation company, Ruskins, who are a leading company in this area with a very strong track record. A bespoke relocation strategy for this tree, based on the best approach and experience, will be designed and implemented.

In addition, cuttings have been successfully taken from the Mulberry Tree and these cuttings will be replanted both on the site and in the local community working with local schools and community groups. This will ensure the genetic continuity of the tree and its legacy is retained in perpetuity.

3. Why can the tree not remain in the existing location?

The site is extremely constrained with the large grade II listed main hospital building dictating the layout and design of the development. The tree must therefore be relocated in order to enable the delivery of much needed affordable housing for the Borough, the restoration of the Listed Hospital Building and the large range of public and heritage benefits the scheme brings.

The retention of the tree in its existing location would impact significantly on the viability of the scheme and the deliverability of the associated benefits and affordable housing. It would also jeopardise the ability for the listed building to be brought back into use.

Furthermore, a culmination of factors including species, age and environment have contributed to the tree's current fragile state, limiting its prospects for continued survival in the existing setting.

The historical trauma to the Mulberry Tree, including its bombing in WW2, is well documented. Given this historical trauma and the increasing fragility of the tree, the proposed relocation of the Mulberry Tree to the heart of the front lawn and away from the main building works will provide a better environment in which the Mulberry Tree can be managed, flourish and be accessed and enjoyed by the public.

Having fully recognised the cultural and historical importance of the Mulberry Tree, relocating it is a highly positive alternative to allowing it to decline further, or seeking to simply remove it on planning balance. Once the tree has been re-positioned, it will be the focus of a bespoke veteran tree management plan, seeking to manage its current defects and improving its long-term outlook.

4. What are the implications of the updated National Planning Policy Framework (Government Guidelines)?

Paragraph 175 (c) of the NPPF sets out that Local Planning Authorities should not grant permission for schemes which result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists.

However, in this instance, the development proposals do not incur the loss or deterioration of the Mulberry Tree as the tree is being relocated. Given this, and there being a single tree involved in habitat terms, the proposals do not fall squarely within paragraph 175(c) of the NPPF guidelines as the Council has recognised, but in any event the retention of the tree, its relocation to a position of improved public access and a commitment to a veteran tree management plan, which will be tailored to assist with the Mulberry Tree's long-term contribution to the site, provide a suitably strong mitigation and compensation strategy. This, alongside the suite of public benefits the scheme brings, would amount to wholly exceptional reasons in this case in any event. In short, the aim of the scheme is to enable the Mulberry Tree to thrive in its new improved location.