Dear all

I am writing an open letter to all involved in the arboricultural sector on the Isle of Wight in light of the unprecedented and fast-moving situation created by the Coronavirus. Due to the Government “lock-down” and restriction of non-essential movement announced by the Prime Minister, the Planning Authority has needed to make difficult decisions about how best to continue to support the planning related sector whilst protecting staff. The following measures will continually be kept under review and I will update you when things change.

- Planning Services staff including the Tree Officer are now all working from home.
- We will only be able to carry out a limited number of site visits, due to safety of our staff.
- We continue to accept tree works applications electronically but won’t be processing those submitted by paper, as Seaclose Offices are now closed. We will continue to process tree works applications that have been submitted and for which site visits have been undertaken already. We may also be able to process new electronic submissions, that are supported by good quality information and photographs showing relevant trees. Whether we can do so, will be at the discretion of the Tree Officer and Team Leaders, and you will be updated if this is not possible. By concentrating on applications currently under consideration, we should be in a better position to move more quickly to progress new applications once we can undertake public consultation.
- We will still consult with statutory consultees if required, once we have validated your application.
- We will still investigate allegations of unlawful activity in relation to protected trees. We will be devising an online complaint form for these breaches, which should allow us to investigate in a timely manner.
- A 5 day notice application is to carry works out on a protected tree that is an imminent risk to health and safety. We will continue to accept 5 day notice applications that are submitted. A report should also be submitted alongside which fully explains the problem and safety risk along with photos. If sufficient detail is provided our Tree Officer will make an assessment. If the application is not considered to be a 5 day notice it will be determined like a normal tree works application.
We recognise that in these unprecedented circumstances you may not get your decisions as quickly as you might like, but please do bear us and ultimately we want to minimise the risks of challenge to your application and our decisions.

There are also things that you as a sector can do to help us. If you are continuing to submit applications for tree works please submit them electronically either via the Planning Portal (https://www.planningportal.co.uk/) or to the relevant email addresses as per our website. This allows us to continue to process your application. Applications received by post will not be able to be processed whilst “lockdown” restrictions are in place.
Planning applications and Tree works - development@iow.gov.uk
In these uncertain times I trust the above information is useful, and I hope that you all stay safe

Yours sincerely

Russell Chick MRTP
Planning Team Leader