

**Benjamin Murphy**, Chairman of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, provides an update on the health of Wanstead Park's historic Map Tree, and explains plans to plant a replacement.  
Photo by Geoff Wilkinson

**I**wanted to provide an update on the health of the British Isles shaped Cedar, known as the 'Map Tree', in Wanstead Park. The pronounced lean of this tree has been the subject of discussion and a cause of concern to park visitors.

Firstly, the safety of Epping Forest's visitors and staff is our number one priority. To achieve this, our arborists carry out tree inspections as part of a rolling programme to identify vulnerable trees and put measures in place to keep them safe. The rise of more extreme weather conditions, as a result of climate change, is a significant challenge we face in our mission to protect them.

This issue was self-identified, and the tree is deemed safe. However, there is damage to major structural roots caused by footfall near the base of the tree and the lean towards Ornamental Water continues to worsen. There remains a high degree of uncertainty around how long the tree may last, so our team are doing what they can to prolong its natural life, whilst we create a succession plan.

Our arborists explored a range of options with tree industry professionals, including:

- Propping, which would introduce rigid structures anchored in the ground that support tree branches or trunks from below.
- Introduction of static towers and steel cable braces to stop any further decline.
- Relocating the footpath from the base of the tree, reducing damage to buttress roots.

Unfortunately, these options cannot be implemented at this location or would not sustain the tree over the long term. Therefore, the recommended option is to plant a replacement tree nearby and establish knee-high fencing around the base in a horse-shoe shape around the tree's drip line.

The tree is considered healthy and, as such, it is a self-optimising structure. It has the ability to identify stresses and adapt to them. In this case the stress is the lean, which trees adapt to through additional structural roots and the production of reaction wood.

I recognise the connections people feel towards this iconic tree, which is of historical significance to Epping Forest. There remains some optimism the tree may surprise us and continue for decades to come, but it seems sensible we make plans now for its eventual replacement. This project is likely to cost around £4,000 for the new tree, fencing and its installation and we will work with the partners to raise funds for this ahead of planting next September.

For more information on Wanstead Park, visit [wnstd.com/park](http://wnstd.com/park)

# Updating THE MAP