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Subsidence damage investigation report for

15 Birchington Road, Crouch End

N8 8HP

Prepared by **Trevor Heaps** BSc, MICFor, RC. Arbor.A.

Prepared for: Luke & Georgina Hartley

Date: 4th December 2025

Our Ref: TH 5699



Summary

Summary of damage:

Cracks have developed around the edges of the front bay window (ground floor and first floor).

We have been instructed to visit the property, survey all significant vegetation growing within influencing distance of it, appraise all available supporting and theoretical evidence and then determine which, if any, vegetation is likely to have caused or contributed to the damage. We are then to recommend appropriate remedial / prevention measures.

No expert geotechnical information has been provided at this stage; however, a site visit has been carried out, and this report concludes that it is more likely than not that the damage has been caused by tree-related subsidence.

Remedial / preventative works have been recommended.

Note: Our responsibility is to provide objective advice on the most effective means to allow stability to be restored to a property. It is the responsibility of the tree owner/s and local authorities to determine whether or not the suggested work is justified / or if the damage should be tolerated.

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1.0 Qualifications and Experience

1.1 I am Trevor Heaps, Director of Trevor Heaps Arboricultural Consultancy Ltd. I hold a First-Class Honours Degree in Arboriculture; I am a Chartered Arboriculturist and a professional member of the Institute of Chartered Foresters; and I am also a Registered Consultant with the Arboricultural Association. Further information about my qualifications and experience is provided in Appendix 1.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Most trees growing near buildings do not cause any damage. However, in some cases, subsidence and structural damage can be linked to tree roots. Blocked drains and lifted paving may also be a problem.

2.2 Understanding the factors involved in how trees damage buildings, including soil type and depth of foundations, will help both tree and house owners determine what action to take and when to get professional help¹.

3.0 Instruction

3.1 I have been instructed to visit the damaged property, survey all significant vegetation growing within influencing distance of it, appraise all available supporting documentation and then determine which, if any, vegetation is likely to have caused or contributed to the damage.

3.2 I am then to provide recommendations for remedial /preventative action that will provide on-going and long-term stability, allowing repairs to be undertaken.

3.2 Contact details:

Who	Name	Organisation	Details
Arboricultural consultant	Trevor Heaps	THAC Ltd. 12 Plover Drive, Milford-on-Sea, Hampshire, SO41 0XF	Tel: 07957 763 533 E-mail: trevor@trevorheaps.co.uk
Client	Luke & Georgina Hartley		
London Borough of Haringey - LPA	Tree Officer	Planning & Regeneration Service, 6th floor River Park House, 225 High Road, Wood Green, N22 8HQ	Tel: 020 8489 5504 – Press 2 E-mail: planningcustomercare@haringey.gov.uk

4.0 Limitations

4.1 I am an arboricultural expert and not qualified to comment on structural or geotechnical matters.

4.2 This report assesses all of the currently available information (provided by third-party experts) against the data collected at the tree survey in order to provide professional tree management advice.

4.3 This report is a best assessment of the trees and their setting at the time of the survey; any subsequent building works or changes to landform in the proximity of the trees may invalidate the advice given.

4.4 It is assumed that the current building movement and associated damage is the result of clay shrinkage subsidence and that other possible causal factors have been discounted.

4.5 This is in an initial appraisal report and recommendations are made based on the information provided. The report may be subject to review upon receipt of further information being made available.

5.0 Information provided.

5.1 The following technical information was provided to assist our assessment:

Technical information	Provided?
Description of damage (i.e. is structure falling towards implicated vegetation)	N
Engineer's report (background and description of damage)	N
Borehole log (foundation depth)	N
Soil testing adjacent to foundations (plasticity index and moisture content etc.)	N
Soil testing in area away from influence of vegetations (control)	N
Root analysis (identification of roots found beneath damaged structure)	N
Drain survey (to check whether drains damaged and leaking)	N
Level monitoring (to demonstrate seasonal movement)	N
Crack monitoring (to demonstrate seasonal movement)	N
Heave Assessment	N
Other?	N

6.0 Statutory tree protection

6.1 It is not clear from the Council's website whether the trees within or adjacent to this property are covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO); however, the property is within the Crouch End Conservation Area. This means that if any works are required to trees with a stem diameter of 75mm or above, then a Section 211 Notice must be served on the Council.

7.0 Ecological constraints

7.1 The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) provides statutory protection to birds, bats and other species that inhabit trees.

7.2 In addition to any tree matters considered in this report, these animals could impose significant constraints on the timing of recommended tree works.

8.0 The tree survey

8.1 The property was visited by Trevor Heaps, on the 2nd December 2025.

8.2 The trees were inspected from ground level, in accordance with the Visual Tree Assessment (VTA) methodology, developed by Mattheck & Breloer (The Body Language of Trees, 1994).

8.3 No soil or root samples were taken for analysis and no drain covers were lifted.

8.4 Tree heights, crown spreads and stem diameters were estimated. Distances between trees and the property/structures were determined using a laser distance finder.

9.0 Tree damage in context

9.1 In order for a structure to be damaged by a tree (due to subsidence), the following conditions must exist:

1. The structure should be situated on shrinkable clay soil.
2. The structure should have live tree roots growing beneath its foundations.
3. The live tree roots should belong to a tree that has the potential to desiccate clay.
4. The clay beneath the foundation should be desiccated enough for it to lose its ability to support the damaged structure.

10.0 The damaged structure

10.1 The original building is a mid-terraced dwelling. It was an end-of-terraced dwelling before a new house was added to the right hand side.

10.3 We have no information on the age of the property, nor the depth of any foundations present.

10.3 Cracks have developed around the edges of the front bay window (ground floor and first floor).

10.4 Tell-tales (crack monitoring wall studs) were noted on the sides of the bay windows, and so the problem appears to have occurred in the past.

10.5 We were advised that several other nearby properties have also been affected by subsidence this summer.

11.0 The Soils and Topography

11.1 The property occupies a level site with no adverse topographical features.

11.2 No information on the underlying sub-soils was provided and therefore the following is taken from the British Geological Survey's website (link below).

https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk/?_ga=2.23657850.1135499556.1675622214-1704845471.1675622214

11.3 The soil texture is London Clay Formation - Clay, silt and sand.

11.4 London Clay is highly shrinkable.

12.0 The trees

12.1 The relevant trees' locations are shown in the Site Plan (Appendix 5). Further information can be found in appendices 2 & 3.

12.2 To help categorise the general condition of the trees in the Site Plan, they are color-coded as follows:

- **1 (tree coloured green) – No issues noted** - These trees are considered to pose little risk of causing subsidence (at present or in the future).
- **2 (tree coloured yellow) – Be aware** – These trees are considered to have the potential to cause subsidence in the future and will usually need to be removed or maintained at their current dimensions.
- **3 (tree coloured red) – Take action** - These trees are considered to be close enough and / or large enough to be causing subsidence at present. These trees will usually need to be removed.

13.0 Discussion

13.1 No technical information has been provided at this stage and so the following notes are based on my observations and experience:

13.2 The property is situated on highly shrinkable clay soils.

13.3 The foundation depths are currently unknown; however, the building was constructed long before the landmark drought during 1976, after which industry standards changed and foundation depths were subsequently increased. Furthermore, from past experience, it is often the case that bay windows are built on sub-standard foundations (but this needs to be confirmed).

13.4 The cracks and the timing of the cracks are consistent with vegetation-related subsidence.

13.5 The following vegetation was found to be large enough, and/or close enough (i.e. within known influencing distance) to be causing the current episode of damage, or to have the potential to cause damage in the future:

Ref	Species	Water demand	Risk Type
T1	Box Elder	Moderate	Current risk
G2	Lawson Cypress	High	Future risk
T3	Hornbeam	Low	Acceptable
T4	Hornbeam	Low	Acceptable
S5	Unknown	Moderate	Current risk
S6	Cabbage Palm	Moderate	Current risk
S7	Unknown	Moderate	Current risk
S8	Privet	Moderate	Future risk
S9	Bay	Moderate	Future risk
S10	Unknown shrub	Moderate	Future risk
H11	Privet	Moderate	Future risk

13.6 Some of this vegetation is situated within third-party land. Third-party tree owners can sometimes be held liable for tree-related damage – if the damage is reasonably foreseeable, and if no action is taken to prevent it.

14.0 Conclusions

14.1 It is more likely than not that the damage has been caused by tree-related subsidence.

14.2 To allow ground conditions to stabilise, a program of remedial / preventative tree work is provided in Appendix 2.

14.3 Alternatively, the damaged structure could be under-pinned to ensure the foundations extend to beneath the influencing depth of any nearby trees.

14.4 The various tree owners (where available, further details are provided in Appendix 2 and highlighted green) should be contacted and provided with a copy of this report, to make them aware of the damage and to give them an opportunity to take remedial action.

14.5 If further evidence is required to confirm or rule out tree-related subsidence, then the soil should be tested for its clay content, plasticity and moisture content; the foundation depths should be determined; and root analysis should be carried out to determine which (if any) nearby trees have roots beneath the foundations (building insurers usually carry out these investigations).

15.0 Other useful information

15.1 The appearance of any building defects should always be investigated promptly. If vegetation is implicated, then early removal of suspected trees may stabilise the situation at relatively little cost. Always contact a qualified structural engineer and arboriculturist before considering removal.

15.2 If a drainage system is damaged in anyway, this can allow roots to penetrate and proliferate; however, if a drainage system is watertight, roots have little capacity to gain access and cause damage. If further information is required, a drainage expert should be consulted.

15.3 Trees (and their roots) do not respect property boundaries and therefore trees on third-party land may be included in this report. If neighbouring trees are suspected of causing damage (or have the potential to cause damage) and you need to contact a tree owner about their tree, a sensible and non-confrontational approach (to request that appropriate action be taken) is advised. If the tree owner is uncooperative, then you should write to them by recorded delivery (i.e. put them on notice in case of any future problems) and keep a copy of the letter. You may also send them a copy of this report.

15.4 You have a common law right to cut back overhanging branches (and encroaching roots) back to a property boundary line. However, the following points should be noted:

- Your common law rights are intended to allow you to carry out the minimum amount of work.
- You must not trespass onto the land on which the trees are growing.
- Branches or roots must not be cut back beyond the boundary in anticipation of them overhanging.
- Any branches, fruit or roots that are removed must be carefully returned to the tree owner unless they agree otherwise.
- All work must be carried out with due care (i.e. you should avoid damaging property or carrying out work that would leave the tree unsafe or dangerous to avoid any comeback against yourself).
- You cannot reduce the height of trees or hedges on neighbouring land.
- While not required under common law, it would be courteous to notify the tree owner of your intentions to help allay any misunderstanding.

15.5 If you are unsure of the location of property boundaries, you should either check with Land Registry (<http://www.landregistry-titleddeeds.co.uk/>) or with the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) using the link below:

<http://www.rics.org/uk/join/member-accreditations-list/dispute-resolution-service/neighbour-disputes-service/>

15.6 When appointing a tree works contractor, please only use properly qualified and experienced companies and always check that they carry Public Liability Insurance within a minimum of £2,000,000 cover, and the relevant Employers Liability Insurance. A list of contractors approved by the Arboricultural Association can be found at www.trees.org.uk or by calling 01242 522 152.

16.0 Signature

16.1 This report represents a true and factual account of the potential arboricultural impacts, and makes recommendations for appropriate remedial action, at the subject property.

Signed



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Trevor Heaps

Chartered Arboriculturist

BSc (Hons), MArborA, MICFor.

Dated

4th December 2025

Appendix 1 - Professional résumé

I am Trevor Heaps, director of Trevor Heaps Arboricultural Consultancy Ltd. I am a Chartered Arboriculturist, a Professional Member of the Arboricultural Association (AA) and hold a First-Class Honours Degree in Arboriculture.

Professional training

- Arboriculture and Bats: Scoping Surveys for Arborists (BCT & AA) – October 2017
- Tree Science (AA) – June 2016
- OPM (Oak Processionary Moth) Training (FC) – May 2016
- Visual Tree Assessment (Arboricultural Association) - October 2015
- Trees and the Law (Dr Charles Mynors) - June 2015
- Mortgage (Home Buyers) Report Writing (LANTRA / CAS) - February 2015
- Tree Preservation Orders - effective application (LANTRA / CAS) - November 2014
- Professional Tree Inspection 3-day course (LANTRA / AA) - July 2014
- Arboricultural Consultancy Course (AA) - May 2014
- Further down the subsidence trail 1-day course (AA) - April 2013
- Getting to grips with subsidence 1-day course (AA) - November 2012

AA – Arboricultural Association

BCT – Bat Conservation Trust

CAS – Consulting Arborist Society

FC – Forestry Commission

Appendix 2 - Tree data schedule

Ref	Species	Age	Height (m)	Physio. condition	Structural condition	SRI	Relative age	Growth potential	Distance to damaged structure (m)	Species water demand	Mature height (m)	Recorded tree-to-damage distance (m)	Comments	Rec's	Priority of work	When to re-inspect
T1	Acer negundo (Box Elder)	E M	14	Fair	Fair	1	Similar ago to nearest part of building	Average tree with little scope for enlargement (Medium)	7	Moderate	18	The maximum tree-to-damage distance recorded is 18m. In 75 percent of cases, the tree was closer than 9m. In 50 percent of cases, the tree was closer than 6m.	Growing on third-party land. Straddles boundary. Ownership unclear. Has been cut back from the boundary. ²² Crouch Hall Road, London, N8 8HJ	Remove.	Within 3 months	N/A (to be removed)
G2	Chamaecyparis lawsoniana (Lawson Cypress)	E M	6	Normal	Fair	1	Much younger than nearest part of building	Average tree with little scope for enlargement (Medium)	8	High	18	The maximum tree-to-damage distance recorded is 17m. In 75 percent of cases, the tree was closer than 4m. In 50 percent of cases, the tree was closer than 2m.	Growing on third-party land. Managed by topping. ²² Crouch Hall Road, London, N8 8HJ	Reduce crown heights by around a third and re-prune every 3-5 years.	Within 12 months	3 years
T3	Carpinus betulus (Hornbeam)	M	10	Normal	Fair	1	Much younger than nearest part of building	Average tree with little scope for enlargement (Medium)	10.5	Low	17	The maximum tree-to-damage distance recorded is 10m. In 75 percent of cases, the tree was closer than 9m. In 50 percent of cases, the tree was closer than 5m.	Growing on third-party land. Street tree growing in tarmac.	Crown reduce back to previous pruning points and repeat every 2-3 years	Within 12 months	3 years
T4	Carpinus betulus (Hornbeam)	M	10	Normal	Fair	1	Much younger than nearest part of building	Average tree with little scope for enlargement (Medium)	15.5	Low	17	The maximum tree-to-damage distance recorded is 10m. In 75 percent of cases, the tree was closer than 9m. In 50 percent of cases, the tree was closer than 5m.	Growing on third-party land. Street tree growing in tarmac.	Crown reduce back to previous pruning points and repeat every 2-3 years	Within 12 months	3 years

Ref	Species	Age	Height (m)	Physio. condition	Structural condition	SRI	Relative age	Growth potential	Distance to damaged structure (m)	Species water demand	Mature height (m)	Recorded tree-to-damage distance (m)	Comments	Rec's	Priority of work	When to re-inspect
S5	Oleander (Nerium oleander)	SM	2.5	Normal	Normal	1	Much younger than nearest part of building	Average tree with little scope for enlargement (Medium)	0.4	Moderate	3	No data available.		Remove.	Within 3 months	3 years
S6	Cordyline australis (Cabbage Palm)	SM	2.5	Normal	Normal	1	Much younger than nearest part of building	Average tree with little scope for enlargement (Medium)	0.5	Moderate	12	No data available.		Remove.	Within 3 months	3 years
S7	Oleander (Nerium oleander)	SM	2.5	Normal	Normal	1	Much younger than nearest part of building	Average tree with little scope for enlargement (Medium)	0.4	Moderate	3	No data available.		Remove.	Within 3 months	3 years
S8	Ligustrum ovalifolium (Privet)	SM	2.5	Normal	Normal	1	Much younger than nearest part of building	Average tree with little scope for enlargement (Medium)	2	Moderate	5	No data available.		Reduce hedge down to 1.5m tall and clip annually to maintain new, smaller height.	Within 12 months	3 years

Ref	Species	Age	Height (m)	Physio. condition	Structural condition	SRI	Relative age	Growth potential	Distance to damaged structure (m)	Species water demand	Mature height (m)	Recorded tree-to-damage distance (m)	Comments	Rec's	Priority of work	When to re-inspect
S9	Prunus nobilis (Bay)	SM	2.5	Normal	Normal	1	Much younger than nearest part of building	Average tree with little scope for enlargement (Medium)	3	Moderate	10	The maximum tree-to-damage distance recorded is 14m. In 75 percent of cases, the tree was closer than 6m. In 50 percent of cases, the tree was closer than 4m.		Reduce hedge down to 1.5m tall and clip annually to maintain new, smaller height.	Within 12 months	3 years
S10	Grevillea rosmarinifolia	SM	2.5	Normal	Normal	1	Much younger than nearest part of building	Average tree with little scope for enlargement (Medium)	3	Moderate	3	No data available.		As a precaution, prune / clip the tree on a regular basis to ensure it does not exceed current dimensions	Within 12 months	3 years
H11	Ligustrum ovalifolium (Privet)	SM	2.5	Normal	Normal	1	Much younger than nearest part of building	Average tree with little scope for enlargement (Medium)	2	Moderate	5	No data available.	Clipped boundary hedge.	Reduce hedge down to 1.5m tall and clip annually to maintain new, smaller height.	Within 12 months	3 years

Appendix 3 - Tree data schedule explanatory notes

This section explains the terms used in the **Tree Data Schedule** in Appendix 2.

Ref: Each item of vegetation has its own unique number prefixed by a letter such that:

T1=Tree **S2**=Shrub or stump **G3**=Group **H4**=Hedge **W5**=Woodland

Species: Common names are given

Age: Indicates the estimated age the tree as one of the following categories:

- **Y - Young** - Usually less than 10 years old
- **SM - Semi-Mature** - Significant future growth to be expected in both height and crown spread (typically below 30% of life expectancy)
- **EM - Early-Mature** - Full height almost attained. Significant growth may be expected in terms of crown spread (typically 30-60% of life expectancy)
- **M - Mature** - Full height attained. Crown spread will increase but growth increments will be slight (typically 60% or more of life expectancy)
- **V - Veteran** - A level of maturity whereby significant management may be required in order to keep the tree in a safe condition
- **OM - Over Mature** - As for veteran except management is not considered worthwhile

Height (m): The estimated height of the tree, in metres, measured from ground level to the top of the crown

Physio cond.: Indicates the physiological condition of the tree as one of the following categories:

- **Normal** - Healthy tree with no symptoms of significant disease
- **Fair** - Tree with early signs of disease, small defects, decreased life expectancy, or evidence of less-than-average vigour for the species
- **Poor** - Significant disease present, limited life expectancy, or with very low vigour for the species and evidence of physiological stress
- **Very poor** - Tree is in advanced stages of physiological failure and is dying
- **Dead** - No leaves or signs of life

Struct. cond.: Indicates the structural condition of the tree as one of the following categories:

- **Normal** - No significant structural defects noted
- **Fair** - Some structural defects noted but remedial action not required at present
- **Poor** - Significant defects noted resulting in a tree that requires regular monitoring or remedial action
- **Very poor** - Major defects noted that compromise the safety of the tree. Remedial works or tree removal is likely to be required.
- **Dead** - No leaves or signs of life

SRI – Subsidence Risk

1 (tree coloured green) – No issues noted - These trees are considered to pose little risk of causing subsidence (at present or in the future).

2 (tree coloured yellow) – Be aware – These trees are considered to have the potential to cause subsidence in the future and will usually need to be removed or maintained at their current dimensions.

3 (tree coloured red) – Take action - These trees are considered to be close enough and / or large enough to be causing subsidence at present. These trees will usually need to be removed.

Relative age: An indication of the age of the tree compared to the main building / structure

Growth potential: An indication of the future growth than can be anticipated from a tree:

- **High** - Young and vigorous tree capable of significant enlargement in the future
- **Medium** – (Med) - Middle-aged tree with reduced potential for future growth and enlargement
- **Low** – Tree in terminal decline; lacking vitality or vigour with limited potential for future growth or enlargement

Dist. to nearest structure (m): Measurement is taken from the centre of the tree / shrub to the closest part of nearby significant structure(s) such as house, garage, and conservatory

Species water demand: High, Moderate (Mod.) or Low: Some trees (such as poplar, willow and oak) have high water demands and can be problematic when growing close to susceptible properties on shrinkable clay soil. Other trees (such as beech and birch) have lower water demands. This column gives an idea of where a particular species of tree may fall within this hierarchy. The information is taken from NHBC Standards - Chapter 4.2 (Building near trees)

Mature height (m): An estimation on the tree's ultimate, mature height; taken either from NHBC Standards - Chapter 4.2 (Building near trees); a Field Guide to the trees of Britain and Northern Europe (Alan Mitchell); or the author's own experiences.

Recorded tree-to-damage distance (m): This information is taken from the paper 'The Relationship between Trees, Distance to Buildings and Subsidence Events on Shrinkable Clay Soil (Mercer, Reeves O'Callaghan 2011). It gives an indication of the maximum recorded distance between trees and the buildings they have damaged. To provide more meaningful information, it also shows (where data is available) the distances between trees and the buildings they have damaged in 75% and 50% of cases. See also Figure 1 below for further useful information from this paper (percentages of subsidence incidents per genera)

Comments: Tree form and pruning history are recorded along with an account of any significant defects.

Rec's: Recommendations are usually based on any defects observed and intended to ensure that the tree is maintained in an acceptable condition.

Priority of work: Depending upon the threat posed by the tree, and the likelihood of failure, any recommendations made should be carried out according to the given priority scale.

When to re-inspect: An interval of 6 months, 1 year, 1.5 years, 3 years or 5 years is allocated before the next inspection is due. Wherever practical, consideration should be given to seasonal changes so that deciduous trees are not always surveyed in winter when they have no leaves, or in summer when leaves may obscure branches within the upper crown.

Figure 1

Species/Genus	No. Samples	%
Oak	171	13.49
Ash	157	12.38
Cypress	149	11.75
Maple	118	9.31
Willow	110	8.68
Prunus	85	6.7
Poplar	70	5.52
Lime	62	4.89
Apple	54	4.26
Plane	54	4.26
Hawthorn	41	2.23
Birch	30	2.37
Beech	28	2.21
Sorbus	20	1.58
Horse Chestnut	15	1.18
False Acacia	13	1.03
Pear	13	1.03
Pine	12	0.95
Eucalyptus	10	0.79
Hornbeam	10	0.79
Cedar	9	0.71
Elm	8	0.63
Yew	6	0.47
Alder	5	0.39
Walnut	4	0.32
Laburnum	3	0.24
Hazel	2	0.16
Spruce	2	0.16
Ginkgo	1	0.08
Holly	1	0.08
Larch	1	0.08
Liquidambar	1	0.08
Monkey Puzzle	1	0.08
Tree of Heaven	1	0.08
Wellingtonia	1	0.08

Appendix 4 - References

ⁱ RHS, *Trees near building*. Available at <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=225>
(Accessed: 20 January 2020).

Appendix 5 – Photos

Photo 1 – looking SE at one side of the bay window



Photo 2 - looking NW at the other side of the bay window



Photo 3 – The ‘tell tales’



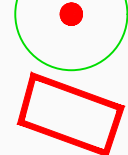
Appendix 5 - Site Plan
Aerial photo showing the approximate locations of the tree/s (Google Earth background). See Appendices 3 & 4 for an explanation of the colours used.

The colours below are based on NHBC calculations for determining foundation depths near trees. From this information (tree species, leaf type, current height, mature height, water demand and distance to building), it is possible to be guided on which trees pose a present or future subsidence risk to nearby buildings:

Tree Survey Legend

- 

Acceptable - Unlikely to be affecting the building at present or in the future
- 

Be aware - Unlikely to be affecting the building at present, but has the potential to do so in the future
- 

Take action - Is likely to be affecting the building at present

