

Protecting a notable oak tree in Woosehill Meadows, Wokingham

MRN 262 WDVTA Veteran Tree Survey

www.wdvta.org.uk

On Saturday morning, June 14th 2025, a party of volunteers from the Woosehill Meadows and Emm Brook Conservation group led by Jürgen Adam, built a wattle fence around this significant but threatened old oak tree. This was to protect its roots from compaction as a result of footfall from a nearby popular path through Woosehill Meadows, close to the Emm Brook.

Soil compaction can damage a tree's roots and inhibit its ability to absorb water, oxygen and nutrients. This is because when the soil is compacted, the population of beneficial micro-organisms (mycorrhizae/fungi and bacteria) that help make nutrients available for the tree to absorb, is reduced.



In April 2009 this tree was recorded as MRN 262 on the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association(WDVTA) tree survey with the details and photos below.

Record Number: 262 (Recorder: WT27)

Grid reference: SU 79855 68777

English Oak (Maiden, Alive - standing)

Girth: 3.35m at 1.50m on 14-Apr-09

Setting: Public or Open Space + Bridlepath / Footpath

<https://www.wdvta.org.uk/WDVTS/index.php?mrn=262>



On 16th June 2025 new photos of the tree (below) were taken from roughly the same spot



In contrast to the 2006 photos, these new pictures show how the wattle fence is shielding the base of the trunk which originally stood right up against the edge of the footpath. The protected area is probably not stretching as far as the underground roots on path side of the tree, but the proximity of the Emm Brook prevented volunteers from moving the footpath any further from the tree to make the exclusion area wider. It is to be hoped, however, that this new protection area will go some way towards helping conserve the tree's future health.

It is noticeable that, over the 16 years the tree has been growing between 2009 and 2025, the slope of the trunk across the path has increased quite markedly (see photos above). It could be that footfall compaction over this period will have contributed to this. Another factor may have been the fall/felling of some major branches a few years ago. Their remains can still be seen at the base of the trunk (see below). We will be exploring this and seeking recommendations as to whether structural work on the tree may be advisable.



June 2025

Remains of major branches



Feb 2025

Tree lean and site of branch removal

In 2009 the tree's girth was recorded as 3.35m at approximately 1.30m. In 2025 the recorded girth was 3.53m. This is a small increase of approximately 18cm. As reported in the WDVTA Survey Handbook <https://www.wdvta.org.uk/pdf/P-WDVTS-Recording-instructions.pdf> the mean increase in girth of mature trees with a full crown and growing in a good condition is 2.5cm per year. This would suggest that after 16 years the girth should have increased by about 40cm. However the measurements suggest it had grown by less than half of that. Even allowing that these were amateur recordings, it still suggests that the tree may be growing at a less than usual rate.

Over the years, guidelines have been drawn up to estimate the age of trees from the size of their girth. These vary according to the species of tree. The WDVTA Survey Handbook provides a detailed account of this matter and includes a chart which focuses especially on oak trees. See section 6b *Estimates of age for oaks with girth 2.5m – 20m*. Assuming that the tree is growing in 'an average garden park' the estimate of age for this tree could be roughly about 170 years old, certainly no more than 200 years.

This tree is recorded as no.46325 in the national Ancient Tree Inventory which maps the oldest and most important trees in the UK. In this it is classified as '*notable*' rather than '*veteran*' or '*ancient*'. While the classification is important for professional arboricultural purposes there is nothing to stop this, or any tree, being known popularly as veteran or ancient.

Barbara Stagles 30.06.25