# Backlash over felling of historic oak tree at Toby Carvery site



Toby Carvery, a restaurant chain operated by Mitchells & Butlers, is facing backlash following the felling of a historic oak tree believed to be over 400 years old in Whitewebbs Park, located in north London. The tree, measuring 6.1 metres in girth, stood adjacent to the Whitewebbs House Toby Carvery car park and had been assessed as dying and posing a risk to public safety by tree experts employed by the company. The tree was removed on April 3, as reported by the PA news agency.

Subsequently, Enfield Council has escalated the matter to the Metropolitan Police, categorising the incident as criminal damage. Additionally, the council has imposed an emergency preservation order on the remains of the stump, indicating their commitment to protecting the site and addressing the community's concerns.

Local residents and environmental advocates have expressed their dismay over the decision to cut down the tree, referring to the act as “devastating” and drawing parallels to the notorious felling of the Sycamore Gap tree in 2023. Ed Pyne, a senior conservation adviser with the Woodland Trust, voiced deep concern about the ecological ramifications of the removal. He remarked, “This is the most shocking fell I think I’ve ever seen in more than a decade working with ancient trees. In my view, and the view of many others, this is ecologically much more significant than the Sycamore Gap – and certainly a more irreplaceable tree.”

Pyne highlighted that ancient oaks foster diverse ecosystems, providing habitats essential for various species, including endangered dead wood beetles. He emphasised the lengthy process required for such habitats to develop and noted that the decaying phase of trees is a natural and beneficial aspect of their lifecycle, especially in ancient specimens.

Ed Allnut, a local resident and secretary of the Guardians of Whitewebbs group, articulated the sentiment of many in the community, stating, “The tree belonged to Enfield and to our national heritage. I am personally devastated. We want answers, and we want guarantees the other trees here are being protected properly.”

Responding to the community’s outcry, Ergin Erbil, leader of Enfield Council, confirmed that the incident occurred on April 3 and reiterated the council’s dedication to safeguarding urban forestry and green spaces in Enfield. “Enfield Council cares deeply about protecting trees and green spaces in the borough,” he noted. “We are treating the matter as criminal damage and have reported it to the police. We’ve now placed a legal protection (Tree Preservation Order) on the tree and are looking at ways to help it grow back.”

Compounding the issue, a report issued by the Tree Council and Forest Research has emphasised the necessity for a robust and effective protection system for England’s most significant trees following the recent controversies surrounding tree felling.

In defence of their actions, a spokesperson for Mitchells & Butlers stated that the tree was removed after receiving advice concerning a serious health and safety risk. They explained, “This was an essential action to protect our employees and guests, to whom we have a duty of care. Upon further inspection, our specialist arboriculture contractors made the assessment that the split and dead wood posed a serious health and safety risk and advised that the tree was unsafe and should be removed. We took every necessary measure to ensure all legal requirements were met.”

The felling of this ancient oak tree continues to evoke strong emotions and discussions, underscoring broader concerns regarding the preservation of the natural environment in urban areas.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://news.sky.com/story/ancient-oak-tree-felled-in-north-london-park-13349431> - This article confirms the felling of an ancient oak tree in Whitewebbs Park, Enfield, which has been met with significant public outcry. It also details the response from Toby Carvery's parent company, Mitchells & Butlers, regarding the health and safety concerns that led to the tree's removal.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/tree-felling-whitewebbs-wood-enfield-police-investigate-london-sycamore-gap-b1222509.html> - This report discusses the anger and disappointment among local residents and conservationists following the felling of the ancient oak tree, drawing parallels to the felling of the Sycamore Gap tree. It also highlights concerns about protecting urban woodlands.
* <https://enfielddispatch.co.uk/toby-carvery-admits-felling-ancient-whitewebbs-oak-tree/> - This article provides details on Toby Carvery's admission of felling the ancient oak tree and the incorrect assertion that the tree was dead. It further outlines the community's outrage and calls for accountability.
* <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/> - While not specific to the incident, the Woodland Trust's website is crucial for understanding the ecological significance of ancient trees and their conservation efforts, as highlighted in the article.
* <https://www.enfield.gov.uk/> - The official website of Enfield Council can provide insight into their policies on green spaces and tree preservation, supporting Ergin Erbil's statements on safeguarding urban forestry.