



FAQs about the RSL building project

Update: 11 February 2020

What is happening at the Radcliffe Science Library?

The Radcliffe Science Library is undergoing a major refurbishment project to transform the buildings into a 21st century facility for library services, college facilities, and museum collections storage. As part of this work, essential maintenance works are required to the basement levels to provide secure waterproofing and high-quality environmental control of the areas that will be used to store rare, precious and historic museum objects.

What has happened to the books and services in the RSL?

The Radcliffe Science Library is now closed, with books and services transferred to the Vere Harmsworth Library until building works are completed, when they will be returned to the RSL.

What are the impacts to the area of these building works?

The University has undertaken extensive arboricultural and environmental impact surveys of the surrounding areas to assess the impact of the building works. One of these surveys found that the essential waterproofing works to safeguard the museum storage facility will encroach on the root protection areas of three plane trees along Parks Road, which is the minimum area around a tree deemed necessary for its viability. These trees were planted after the original construction of the RSL basement in 1976 and have not reached full maturity.

Extensive analysis by both University and external arboriculturalists concludes that the constraints to root growth of these three trees will significantly compromise their long-term health and stability, and they should therefore be removed entirely. In mitigation for their loss, new trees will be planted along Parks Road with the use of planting pits to ensure their successful establishment, once all the building works have been completed.

Access

Three trees are scheduled for removal on Sunday 23 February (with a backup alternative date of 1 March). While the work takes place, there will be a partial closure of Parks Road, which will allow controlled traffic flow. The cycle path and footpath will be diverted on the day, with appropriate signage and ground marshals in place at either end of the path to help redirect pedestrians and cyclists.

Construction hoardings will be put up around the site from April. The hoardings will cut across the middle of the length of lawn in front of the Museum of Natural History, and along Parks Road to the corner of South Parks Road. There will be no public access to this area during the building works. Parking spaces and cycle racks will be relocated, with some parking places permanently removed as part of the University and City Council's strategic plans for environmental sustainability in the city.

The Natural History and Pitt Rivers museums will remain open as usual, and visitors directed to their entrance via clear signage on the building hoardings.

At times, diversions may be in place for cyclists and pedestrians along Parks Road for safety reasons. These will be clearly signposted.

Environment

Half of the Museum lawn and boundary wall along Parks Road will be removed to undertake the basement works. These will be reinstated once works are complete.

The removal of the three trees along Parks Road is scheduled for late February in order to avoid birds' nesting season and minimise disruption to any wildlife. When building works are complete, these will be replaced with trees chosen for their different ecological niches, to enhance biodiversity and visual interest in the area. They will be nursery grown trees of about 3-4 metres in height when planted, which can live for hundreds of years. They will be planted with a secure barrier to protect their root systems, so that any future works can be carried out without affecting them. (Further details provided below.)

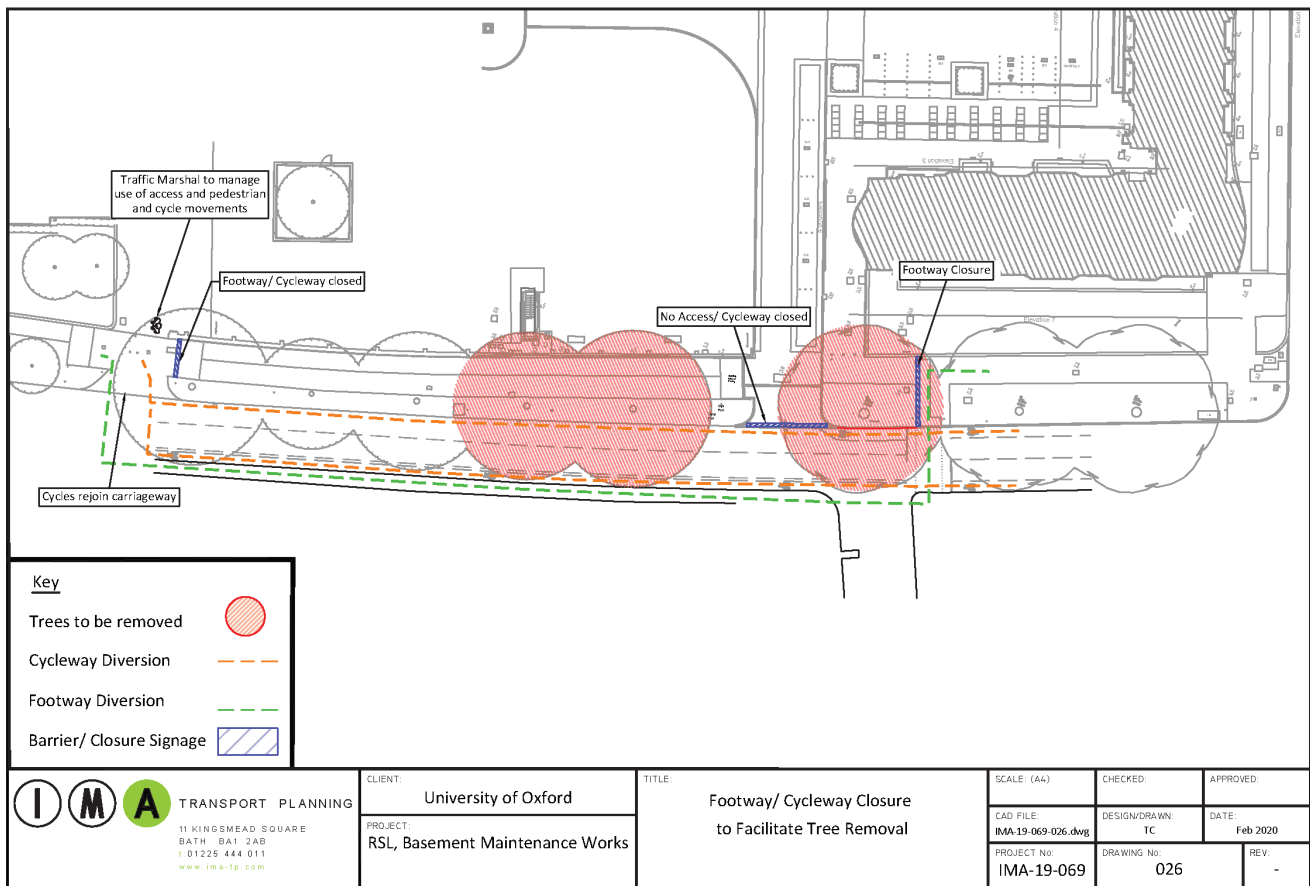
When will the works start, and how long will they last?

The works will officially begin in mid-April, when the contractor takes over the buildings. Key preparatory work, such as the removal of three plane trees, will take place at the end of February in order to minimise the impact on birds' nesting season. The project is scheduled for completion in autumn 2021.

Were alternative options to removing the trees considered?

The University commissioned two surveys from arboricultural experts and an environmental impact assessment of the area. The design team considered a variety of strategies to avoid the impact on the trees, while achieving the goal of long-term waterproofing security for the basement storage areas. Unfortunately, the arboricultural experts both confirmed that the root protection areas of three trees would remain significantly affected by the works, bringing risks to their health, life expectancy and safety. They both concluded that removal of the trees was the safest and most appropriate option under the circumstances.

Diagram of the area



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Further information about the replacement trees

Quercus cerris (turkey oak)

Large spreading oak with dark green foliage that persist well into autumn. Can reach the same crown dimensions as the plane tree it is replacing. Buds have fine hairs and the acorn cups are also fimbriated, sometimes referred to as Medusa's cup. The turkey oak is considered to be one of the fastest growing oaks but has a slightly shorter lifespan than our native oaks, although it will quite happily reach 500 years.

Quercus coccinea (scarlet oak)

A member of the red oaks, the foliage turns from dark green to a deep red colour in autumn. This tree is quite a pyramidal shape when young but spreads widely on maturity. The acorns are quite unique in that the cup will cover between a third and half of the nut. Again, this oak is relatively fast to establish and will grow to a significant height and spread.

Quercus castaneifolia (chestnut leaved oak)

Also a large spreading oak, the specimen at Kew is 170 years old and reaches 35m in height. The leaves are unusual for an oak in that they bear more resemblance to the sweet chestnut leaf. This tree will fill the space on the junction of Parks Road and Museum Road and hopefully become an iconic specimen.

These tree species have been selected to provide good replacements for the planes that are due to be removed. They are potentially much longer lived and they provide a different set of ecological niches

within the avenue to enhance the biodiversity of the area. Although they are not native, they are often associated with the era of the Victorian plant hunters and fit well with the Oxford treescape.

In addition, the space on the corner of South Parks Road and Parks Road is due to be planted with a *Quercus rubra* (red oak) to replace the *Tilia cordata* (small leaved lime) that was removed due to basal decay. We hope to plant this at the same time, even though it is not part of the project, as we begin to look at the opportunities for planting along South Parks Road in the future.