

Urgent removal of Old and Valuable Tree between Bonham Road and Hospital Road, Pok Fu Lam infected with brown root rot disease

A spokesman for the Highways Department (HyD) said today (May 8) that the department, if weather and site conditions permit, will commence urgent removal works early next week for an Old and Valuable Tree (OVT), which is also a stone wall tree, on a slope between Bonham Road and Hospital Road in Pok Fu Lam infected with brown root rot disease (BRRD) in order to ensure public safety.

The OVT concerned is a 17-metre-tall *Ficus microcarpa*, which is listed on the Register of OVTs with registration number HYD CW/1. Part of the tree crown spans across Hospital Road. The tree was confirmed with BRRD infection in early 2019. Since then, the HyD has been, in accordance with the guidelines of the Tree Management Office (TMO) of the Development Bureau, strengthening maintenance works and conducting regular inspections to closely monitor the tree's health and structural conditions. A series of measures have been taken to improve the tree's health, including quarterly tree risk assessments, regular pruning to reduce the weight of the tree crown and the overall loading, spraying of fungicide, and application of soil conditioner. Regularly surveying has been conducted to monitor the displacement of the tree. In addition, the HyD has been supporting and stabilising the tree using large concrete blocks and cables since 2021.

However, a large crack was identified at one of the main prop roots during a regular maintenance inspection by the HyD in 2023. After Typhoon Saola and the Black Rainstorm Warning Signal in early September 2023, the HyD observed significant degrees of outward tilting or displacement at various positions of the main trunk and branches, indicating a threat to the tree's stability. The HyD subsequently carried out tree pruning works in September 2023 and March 2024 in order to reduce the loading of the tree crown. Nevertheless, the HyD observed rapid deterioration of roots with severe decay and breakage in early April 2024, indicating that BRRD had further degraded the woody tissue of roots and caused irreversible structural damage to the tree. As the tree gradually loses main support from its roots, there is a risk of tree failure during inclement weather or typhoon seasons, posing a serious threat to public safety. After consulting the Urban Forestry Advisory Panel with the assistance of the TMO, and notifying the Central and Western District Council of the proposed tree removal, if weather and site conditions permit, the HyD will launch the urgent tree removal works early next week, which is expected to complete in two days, and will make appropriate adjustments based on weather and on-site conditions.

The spokesman emphasised that the department will continue to adopt a

prudent approach in inspecting and maintaining trees under its care, and will only consider removing problematic trees in the absence of other viable risk mitigation measures.