

Rendham Tree Warden Report July, 2025

We are experiencing a long hot summer. Rain, when it comes tends to be either incredibly light or torrential. This is particularly challenging for trees as well as humans in adjusting to this “new normal” weather. 6 July 2025 at 11:16 Tragically this summer there has been much talk about Sudden Branch Drop (SBD). SBD is a phenomena whereby large, mature, seemingly healthy trees drop a branch. Given the trees size this can be a gigantic branch weighing a huge amount and also extending up to 12 ft from the trunk due its length. (This type of SBD is to be distinguished from a tree dropping diseased or broken wood which could have been visibly assessed and dealt with by a arborist check which is not covered in this note).

The first sign of any SBD is usually a large cracking sound followed by the branch in question falling through the canopy of the tree swiping other leaves and branches as it descends followed by a large thump as it hits the ground. SBD usually happens in the Summer, during a lengthy dry spell (3-4 weeks), usually in calm conditions (this is not storm damage), generally during the afternoon early evening and usually immediately after heavy rainfall. Some trees are more prone to SBD than others. Notably Oak, Cedar, Sycamore, Eucalyptus and Beech: mainly it is thought due to their long limbs and dense canopies. The cause is unknown and theories seem to point to a build up of humidity in the canopy or some type of bacterial activity within the tree. In other words no-one knows why. In high traffic areas visited by humans; be it public parks, carparks, show grounds golf courses etc large trees are being lopped on a “just in case basis” but nowadays many do not like this from an environmental basis. However, when tragedy/damage from SBD occurs “what should have been done with hindsight“ is hotly debated. It may well be in the future access to large mature trees by the public will have to be restricted an impossible task really. At the moment it’s like trying to predict where lightening will strike.

Obviously, more research needs to be conducted into SBD especially given that hotter and more extreme weather now occurs in the UK with greater frequency. Maybe some kind of sensor can be installed in the tree to create some kind of prediction system but even so it’s unlikely to give much warning.

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