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No. PRO 1047

Arboricultural report for an oak tree (*Quercus robur*) at The Spinney Vine Grove Hillingdon Uxbridge UB10 9LW

Client: Adam Councell
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Vine Grove
Hillingdon
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UB10 9LW

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1.0 Instructions

1.1 I am instructed by Adam Councell to carry out an arboricultural inspection at a formal level of an oak at The Spinney, Vine Grove, Hillingdon. I am to provide a report that fulfils the following criteria

- A schedule to provide basic data, tree location and a condition assessment
- An assessment of the level of risk posed by the tree based on targets, defects and the likelihood of failure.
- A schedule of any subsequent work that may be required

1.2 The request for a standard level of inspection of the tree, from ground level, has come about as a result of a limb failing from the lower crown recently. My client therefore wishes to discharge their duty of care with regard to the tree and its condition.

1.3 The purpose of the inspection is to establish whether or not the tree can realistically be retained.

2.0 Introduction

The Site

2.1 The Spinney is a detached property served by an in-out driveway located on the south-east side of Vine Grove at the end of the cul-de-sac. The property includes a front garden largely given over to parking and a larger rear garden.

2.2 The property is bordered Vine Grove to the north-west side, by Hillingdon Court Park to the south-east and by other residential properties on all other sides.

2.3 Vine Grove is a small residential cul-de-sac off Blossom Way to the east of Uxbridge town centre. The surrounding area is sub-urban, with medium density housing and the town centre beyond.

2.4 The topography of the site is more or less level.

Date of Inspection

2.5 I inspected the oak tree at The Spinney on Wednesday September 2nd, 2026.

Credentials

2.6 I confirm that I hold the Level 6 Professional Diploma in Arboriculture. This is the highest level of award in the industry.

2.7 I hold the National Diploma in Arboriculture which I attained in 1987. I have studied and practiced Arboriculture for over 30 years, during which time I

have been involved with both the private and public sector.

2.8 I hold professional member status of the Arboricultural Association (M. Arbor A.), recognised as a higher vocational level within the industry.

2.9 I hold the LANTRA award for professional tree inspections have undertaken an intensive course in the principles and application of VTA Visual Tree Assessment. I have been assessed and found to have attained the advanced level of technical competence of a VTA Practitioner with Elite Training.

2.10 I have based this report on my observations and any provided information and I have come to conclusions in the light of my experience.

Legal considerations

2.11 It has been established at the time of the survey that the property is covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO 7 1967). If any works to protected trees are proposed, other than the removal of dead wood or the implementation of operations agreed as part of a formal planning consent, a formal application must be submitted and approved by the Local Planning Authority before such works can be carried out.

Targets

2.12 The oak is within striking range, should it fail and uproot, of the house 17m to the north, a garden office 1.5m to the south, which the tree overhangs and the neighbours' garden building 4m to the west (also overhung by the tree).

The oak tree - introduction

2.13 The oak tree (*Quercus robur*) is a mature tree located in the back garden The Spinney, one of several oak trees in the back garden backing on to Hillingdon Court Park.

2.14 The subject oak is 23m high with a crown spread extending for 6.5m N; 12.5m S; 10m E; 10m W. The diameter of the tree stem measured at a height of 1.5m is 118cm.

Report limitations

2.15 The condition of the tree has been based on a visual inspection made at ground level, using binoculars. The tree has not been climbed or accessed using a mobile elevated platform, as I have only been asked to make an inspection from ground level and to inspect the stem base.

2.16 Trees are dynamic living organisms that are subjected constantly to external stresses and to biological and non-biological influences. As such the structure of the tree could change at any given time.

Methodology

2.17 My inspection has been conducted using the established principles of Visual Tree Assessment (VTA), taking into account:

- A distanced visual overview of the tree, taking account of its overall shape and form, foliage colour and general appearance appropriate to the time of year and any other elements that do not appear normal for the species.
- Exposure to the weather (either due to the tree being solitary or having been recently exposed to new wind forces following the removal of surrounding trees or other recent changes to the surrounds).
- Prevailing ground conditions such as erosion, ponding, soil characteristics and the presence/lack of surrounding vegetation.
- Information pertinent to the trees' history such as previously failed limbs, excavations, the appearance of fungal fruiting bodies, etc.
- The health and visual defects of the tree (its 'body language) e.g. cavities, foliage dieback, the appearance of deadwood, bulging or fibre buckling.

2.18 I have used a nylon hammer for the purposes of detecting changes in resonance which may indicate that further investigation is required. I have also used a steel probe to establish the presence of areas of softening wood or hollows that might warrant a more detailed examination.

2.19 From this information a risk assessment is made of the likelihood of the parts most likely to fail in relation to the target/occupancy value within the trees failure area and recommendations are then made, which can include but are not necessarily confined to:

- Recommendation for further future monitoring or detailed investigation using decay detection equipment.
- Remedial pruning/ limb removal or other tree surgery works such as cable bracing.
- Whole tree removal.
- Pruning for aesthetic reasons.
- Removal of significant deadwood.
- Or no work may be needed.

2.20 The primary reasoning behind this method of assessment is to identify a foreseeable failure, make an informed decision and to act upon it within a specified time and to know that the response is reasonable in relation to the target area and the financial resourced available.

Picture 1. The oak seen from the north, showing the shape and overall form of the tree

3.0 Findings

Roots and buttress

3.1 The tree is growing in open ground, with some surrounding hard surfacing, including a resin bonded pathway running in a north – south direction, 1m to the east and the foundation of the garden office to the south. The garden office appears to be long established perhaps 12-15 years old.

3.2 The ground has not been disturbed in the recent past by any excavations around the tree, nor is there any evidence of cracking in the soil indicating that the root plate is moving. There were no fungal fruit bodies emerging from the soil in the vicinity of the tree.

3.3 The lower stem overall appears sound and normal with no obvious defects present. I have, however, noted a small area of hollow on the southeast side at the base of the stem, where I was able to push a steel probe into the ground under the stem for a distance of 20-30cm.

3.4 Striking the lower stem with a nylon hammer has not revealed any hollow sounds or unusual resonance normally associated with hollow or decaying wood.

Main stem

3.5 The main stem has a more or less upright habit, with a slight initial lean to the south. There are more pronounced buttress roots on the north side that have grown in response to the lean to provide more support to the tree, which is a normal growth phenomenon.

3.6 The stem has had four steel pegs inserted into the stem historically. These are positioned on the north side of the tree at 40cm, 1.5m , 1.7m and 2m (picture 2). The purpose of these is not known, but if this was an attempt to kill the tree it has failed completely.

Picture 2. The steel pegs driven into the bark do not appear to serve any purpose

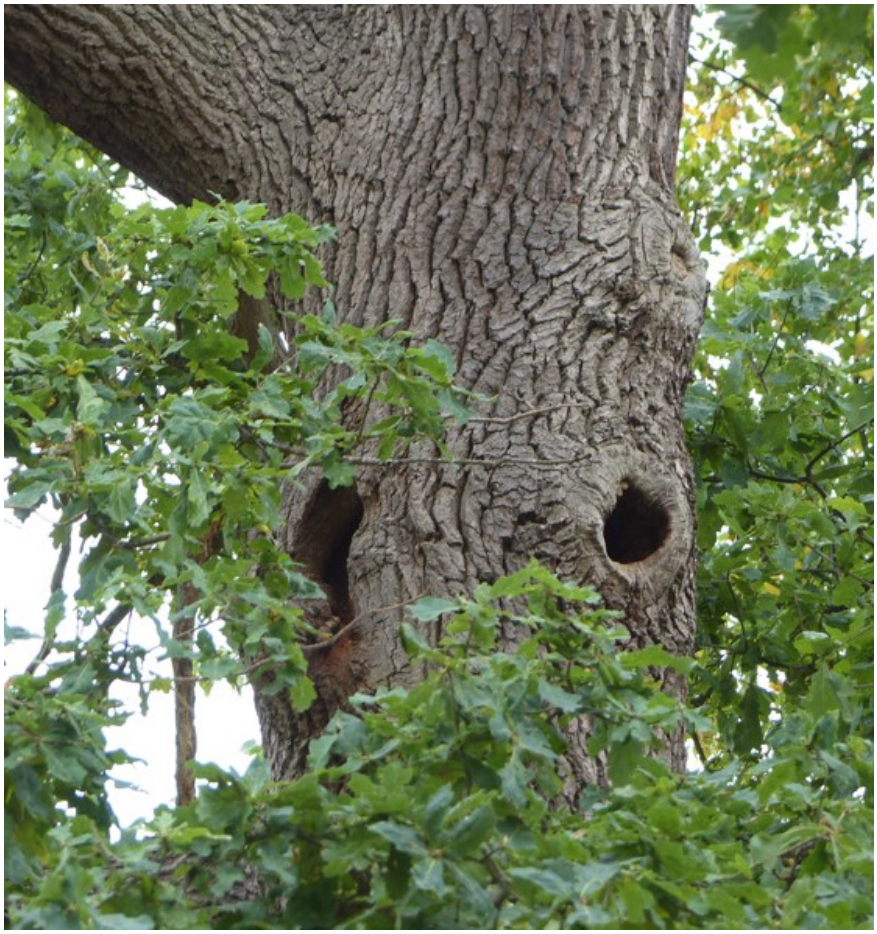
3.7 The tree first branches at 5m with a large scaffold branch growing to the east.

A second scaffold branch arises at 5.5m and grows over towards the west.

3.8 Just above the second scaffold branch there is a major cavity in the stem of the tree with two separate openings. It was not possible to view the cavity up close, but footage from a video provided by a tree surgeon has been reviewed.

3.9 One opening is on the east side of the stem and comprises a circular hole measuring about 15cm diameter. The opening of the cavity is completely surrounded by reaction wood, showing an excellent response to the wounding by the tree.

3.10 The other opening is located on the south side and is larger. The wound response around the edge of the opening cannot be seen as clearly and it cannot be confirmed that the wound response covers the whole of the opening. There is jagged bark around part of the cavity which obscures a full view.



Picture 3. The cavity on the main stem at 6m seen from the south east. Both openings are visible in the picture.

3.11 The video footage confirms that the two openings are joined. From the footage, it can be seen that the decay within appears to be a brown rot and that this rot is likely being contained by the tree with limited spread at present. Full confirmation of this would be possible using a microdrill if required.

3.12 There is a further small cavity, around 10cm in diameter higher up the stem on the east side at 10m. This too has a good profusion of reaction wood and appears well contained.

3.13 The smaller cavity has potential for bird nesting or bat roosts. The larger cavity however may prove too open and exposed to provide a realistic nesting position, although it isn't impossible that a larger bird could use this.

3.14 The rest of the main stem has a natural appearance with no signs of cracking, sap exudation, fungal fruit bodies or unusual bulges.

Branches, crown, and leaves

3.15 Following the initial growth of the mani scaffold branches already described, the tree has developed several other larger scaffold branches further up the stem, distributed evenly around the crown.

3.16 There is evidence of a larger branch having been removed some time ago from the upper crown on the east side of the tree, leaving a gap in the overall form of the tree, being partly filled by newer growth. The wound here is only partly healed and some decay is beginning to establish itself.

3.17 The branches are otherwise evenly spaced and have not developed any tightly forked unions. There are no signs of any weaknesses such as cracks in the bark, fungal fruit bodies or crossing/rubbing branches.

3.18 The lower scaffold limb arising at 5.5m and growing towards the west has a large scar towards the end of the branch consistent with tearing, possibly the result of storm damage. The scar is partly healed with some decay present and some pruning has taken place to shorten the limb. There has been good re-growth of twigs and smaller branches as a result.

3.19 Similarly, the scaffold limb arising at 5m and growing towards the east has also suffered some damage leaving a scar. This limb too has been pruned back.

3.20 The tree has numerous pruning scars from historic branch removal over time on the main stem and along the larger branches. Some of these are partly decayed, but none present any significant structural weakness.

3.21 There is a notable amount deadwood throughout the crown varying in size from twigs to larger pieces (pic.4). Furthermore the tree displays apical dieback and has a stag headed appearance.

3.22 Epicormic soots are appearing throughout the crown along branches and on the main stem. This is often associated with stress in the tree.

3.23 The colour and size of the foliage otherwise appears normal.

3.24 Seed production is below par with few acorns noted throughout the crown.

Picture 4. Tip dieback of branches manifesting throughout the crown

4.0 Analysis of findings

4.1 The oak is showing signs of stress. This is possibly a manifestation of historic construction works (for example the garden office construction) that can take many years to become fully apparent.

4.2 The tree has also been subjected to storm damage with limbs being torn off. The appearance of the larger cavity on the south side of the main stem is consistent with this.

4.3 The smaller cavity on the east side may be the result of branch removal or natural dieback. It is obvious that decay developing in both cavities has met deeper in the stem and that this has resulted in the one large cavity.

4.4 It seems that the tree is containing the spread of the decay at present and that the wood in between the two cavities as well as surrounding the remaining stem is thick enough to continue to provide satisfactory support for the upper crown.

4.5 However, as the tree ages and weakens the decay may begin to gain an upper hand, resulting in a failure. It is unlikely that this will happen in the near future and may speculatively it take a couple of decades for this to come about.

4.6 In the meantime the tree is showing signs of dying back and may be preparing to develop a smaller, more compact crown in old age. This is part of the ageing process for oak trees and can be viewed as normal, although limb failure is associated with this process.

4.7 As the tree ages, its' ability to lay down new wood diminishes. Whilst this may not present an immediate problem, it can manifest in limb failure as a result of increased weight on a branch.

4.8 Continued monitoring of the tree including proper visual inspections should take place no more than 5 years apart to record the progress of decay and die back.

4.9 In the meantime, pruning by crown reduction may encourage mid crown branch development whilst removing the deadwood. This has several benefits. First the problem of deadwood overhanging structures is removed. Whilst it is unlikely any serious harm would come about from deadwood falling there is a chance of minor damage being caused to the garden structures.

4.10 Secondly removing weight from the branches of the upper crown will reduce the risk of failure, which will take some pressure off the stem around the cavity. The wind sail area of the crown would also be reduced, further limiting the chances of complete failure.

4.11 Furthermore pruning will likely stimulate new growth and will help the tree divert resources into growth that will serve it into its old age. This is in effect artificially accelerating the development of a smaller crown in the tree.

4.12 It is important that the amount removed is not excessive in order to remove enough material to limit the stresses being placed on the branches and stem without taking too much away from the tree.

5.0 Risk assessment

Part of tree at risk of failure	Nature of failure	Likelihood of failure	Target affected	Level of risk of harm attributed
Root plate	Entire tree uproots	Event might come about during exceptionally high winds, but is very unlikely	Main house Garden buildings including neighbours' structure	**Low risk**
Lower stem	Tree stem fails lower down	Unlikely give sound condition of the lower stem	Main house Garden buildings including neighbours' structure	**Low risk**
Mid stem	Tree stem fails around area of the cavity	Possible due to presence of cavity and unassessed extent of possible decay in the stem	Garden area. Garden buildings including neighbours' structure	**Medium risk**
Branches	Larger dead branches/ parts of branches break off	Possible given the overall condition of the tree - limited consequences	Garden area. Garden buildings including neighbours' structure	**Medium low risk**
Smaller branches and twigs	Small branches and pieces of dead wood break away	Very probable particularly over the period of a year and during stronger winds - of no consequence	Garden area. Garden buildings including neighbours' structure	**Medium low risk**

Legend
Red background - Very urgent: Immediate action required. If possible, seal off area around the tree.
Orange background - Urgent. Works should be carried out with 3 months if possible
Yellow background – Moderately important – works to be carried out within 6-9 months if possible
Light green – No immediate urgency – Work can be carried out within 1-2 years
Dark green - No significant risk. Works not needed

See Appendix 1 for explanation of the risk assessment matrix

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 The oak is showing stress consistent with historical root damage likely arising from construction work a long time ago. The presence of a cavity on the main stem is not associated with construction work but does raise a concern about the overall structural stability of the tree.

6.2 The risk presented by the defects identified are not that great. It is unlikely the whole tree would fail and reach the house, so in the event of failure the most at risk structures would be the garden offices.

6.3 The tree shows signs that it is beginning to develop a smaller crown in keeping with the ageing process for oak trees. Whilst a small crown is less likely to fail and is desirable overall (under the circumstances), leaving this to let nature take its' course carries a raised risk of larger limb failure.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 Option 1 is to leave the tree alone with the further option to carry out another investigation two or three years from now. This strategy carries a medium high level of risk in view of the condition of the tree. This is not an ideal option.

7.2 Option 2 would be to prune the tree by crown reduction. A reduction of the crown volume should not exceed 30% and would include pruning back the ends of the branches by no more than 4m.

7.3 Reducing the tree will potentially reduce the weight borne by the limbs and therefore may reduce the potential for failure and further limit the area affected by damage in the event of failure. This is my preferred recommendation. Excessive pruning should be avoided as this would be of little benefit to the tree and would only serve to weaken the tree.

7.4 In addition it is recommended that a further inspection is made of the cavity in the future (no more than 5 years' time) , using a microdrill to fully ascertain the condition of the wood around the cavity. This will involve either climbing the tree or using an elevated platform (preferred) to reach the cavity.

7.5 Option 3 would be to prune the tree by heavy reduction, pruning below the cavity and effectively leaving the stem and the stumps of branches. Aesthetically damaging and physiologically harmful to the tree, this approach does at least address the matter of the cavity. This is my second most preferred option.

7.6 Option 4 would be to fell the tree outright. Although the feature would be lost, the risk is wholly removed and the strategy exercises a better safe than sorry approach. This is my least preferred recommendation.

8.0 Disclaimer

8.1 The statements made in this Report do not take account of extremes of climate vandalism or accident, whether physical chemical or fire. Merewood Arboricultural Consultancy Services cannot therefore accept liability in connection with these factors, nor where prescribed work is not carried out in a correct and professional manner in accordance with good practice. The authority of this Report ceases at any stated time limit within it, or if none stated after two years from the date of the survey or when site conditions change or pruning or other works not specified in the Report are carried out to or affecting the Subject tree(s), whichever is sooner.

Simon Hawkins Dip Arb L6 (ABC), ND Arb, MArborA

Bibliography

Manual of wood decay in trees – Weber & Mattheck
Principles of Tree Hazard Assessment and Management – Lonsdale
Diagnosis of Il Health in Trees- Strouts and Winter

Appendix 1
The Risk Assessment Matrix

To calculate the assessment of risk, guidance from the National Tree Safety Group has been followed. This in turn follows guidance from the HSE which sets out a tolerability of risk, wherein anything that is deemed to have a risk factor of less than 1:1,000,000 is deemed broadly acceptable (no action needed). A situation where a risk of between 1:100,000 to 1:1,000,000 is deemed tolerable (where risks need to be managed 'as low as reasonably practicable' and risks that are greater than 1:10,000 are unacceptable. The assessment of risk for trees has been calculated, weighing the probability of a component part of the tree failing against the likely severity of such an event arising.

Probability is based on an estimate of how likely such an event would take place over a twelve-month period, taking into account species, seasonal changes and the overall current condition of the tree. A probability of 1 to 100 for example indicates that if 100 identical trees showed an identical defect, the chances are that one of those trees would suffer a failure as a result of that defect over a 12-month period.

Level	Probability	Description	Individual failure mode
1	1 in 10 or greater	Inevitable	The event will occur in the near future
2	1 in 10 to 1 in 100	Probable	The event will very likely occur within the next 12 months
3	1 in 100 to 1 in 1000	Occasional	The event may occur within the next 12 months to three years
4	1 to 1000 to 1 in 10,000	Remote	The event may occur within the next three years but is unlikely to
5	Less than 1 in 10,000	Improbable	Most unlikely that the event will occur

Severity is based on how damaging the failure of a component would be and is influenced by the likely target (usually within falling distance of the tree or branch) and the size of the component. Thus, a small branch may be more likely to drop but is less likely to result in any harm whereas a large scaffold limb failing could have far more severe consequences.

Where the target is a road or footpath, the density of traffic is also takes into account. A busy main road attracts a higher severity relating that a quiet footpath.

Category	Degree	Description
1	Negligible	No discernible risk noted
2	Minor	Failure of small twigs or branches highly unlikely to result in any harm or injury
3	Moderate	Failure of branches that may cause some limited damage or minor injury
4	Significant	Failure of branches or the whole tree that could lead to major damage or serious injury
5	Severe	Complete failure of major limb or the whole tree is inevitable and will result in major damage or serious injury

The level of probability is then matched to the degree of severity to give an indication of urgency so that works can be prioritized and budgeted for.

		Impact				
		1	2	3	4	5
		Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Significant	Severe
Probabilty						
1	Very likely	Low Medium	Medium	Medium High	High	High
2	Likely	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium High	High
3	Possible	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium High	Medium High
4	Unlikely	Low	Low Medium	Low Medium	Medium	Medium High
5	Very unlikely	Low	Low	Low Medium	Medium	Medium

High level items should be dealt with immediately. There may be a need to secure the area to prevent people entering the area until such time as works can be carried out if there is any delay.

Medium high items should be dealt with within 3 months of being notified. A higher level of urgency may be required if seasonal factors such as autumn gales are expected

Medium level items should be dealt with within 6-9 months

Low medium items can be dealt with within one to two years. The status of such items may change if subsequent surveys identify a change of circumstance

Low level items do not require attention

Appendix 2
Glossary of terms

Adaptive growth
The growth of new wood in response to a stress concentration in the structure of a tree.

Apical dominance
The ability of a shoot apex to continue growing while inhibiting the axillary buds

Apical dieback
The death of the main shoot(s) in the upper crown often resulting in a stag-headed appearance.

Axillary Buds
The bud in the angle (axil) of a leaf stalk (petiole) and stem, which, during the growing season, may remain quiescent or give rise to a lateral shoot.

Barrier zone
A layer of atypical wood analogous to heartwood laid down by the vascular cambium and so following an annual ring in cross section (Barrier iv in the CODIT system)

Burr
A woody spheroid outgrowth on a tree, known as a sphaeroblast.

Buttresses
A local swelling of the stem at the base of a tree associated with the origin of a root. The buttresses are generally separated by flutes, or a root flare.

Canopy
Of a single tree, its crown, emphasizing the spreading and enclosing character. Of a forest, the crowns of the larger trees considered collectively.

CODIT
Abbreviation for the Compartmentalization of Decay in Trees, a concept advocated by Alex Shigo and colleagues in which there are said to be four barriers to the spread of decay in trees. Barrier iv also known as the barrier zone is the most effective in confining decay

Compression wood
The kind of reaction wood found in conifers, which is strong in compression and characterized by a high lignin content.

Crown
The main foliage-bearing part of the tree comprised of small branches & twigs considered collectively. The shape of the crown is partly determined by growth habit, partly by site factors.

Diffuse porous

In wood anatomy, having vessels uniformly distributed throughout the annual ring (viewed transversely).

Epicormic shoots
Shoots arising from dormant buds in a tree's main stem or framework branches

Incremental strip
An active area of rapid wood growth often associated with stress response

Occlusion
The continued radial growth of new wood, including wound wood, which gradually grows over wounds to the woody parts of trees.

Phloem
The living tissue in plants specialized mainly for conducting substances from the aerial part of the plant to the roots.

Resistograph
An instrument for estimating the extent of internal decay in trees by means of a small-diameter drill. The resistance to the drill bit is continuously recorded either on graph paper or on a computer readout, low resistance suggesting advanced decay.

Root plate
The part of the rooting system (excluding the small outermost roots) that are required to keep a tree windfirm.

Roots
The rooting environment around the tree, including soil, principal larger structural roots near the tree and the trunk supporting the main stem. Typically, the inspection will include a check for fungal fruit bodies or similar evidence of fungal activity; wood-structure defects or recent excavations that could have affected the stability of the tree.

Stem
An above-ground axis of a vascular plant supporting itself and all parts distal to it, namely any branches of higher order (see branch order) and their foliage, flowers fruit, etc. The stem also has functions of transport, storage and growth etc.

Trunk
The lower part of the main stem, visually well-defined and generally lacking side branches.

VTA
Visual Tree Assessment. The standard approach to tree risk assessment consisting of the diagnosis of structural defects and the evaluation of their significance from visible signs and the application of biomechanical criteria.

Xylem
The tissue in vascular plants that transports mainly water and nutrients from the roots through the aerial part of the plant to the leaves and buds. Xylem occurs in localized

vascular bundles in herbs and some species with ligneous systems. In plant species having secondary thickening these bundles coalesce to give a continuous cylinder of secondary xylem, or true wood.