

WESTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

23 JULY 2025

UPDATE REPORT

Item No: 4(2) Application No: 25/00827/FULMAJ Page No. 33-72

Site: Welford Park, Welford, Newbury, RG20 8HU

1. Registered Speakers

Please refer to List of Speakers provided under separate cover.

2. Additional Consultation Responses

Public representations:	<p>As of 2pm on 22.07.2025, 5 further supportive representations have been received (including a letter of support from the applicant).</p> <p>The latest comments can be summarised as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Support given for the environmental efforts of Welford Park to date.- Welford Park needs to diversify to bring in additional revenue.- The weddings have been run sympathetically and cause minimal disruption to the natural glade.- Local overnight accommodation has been supported.- The proposal allows for additional people to experience the woodland.- The proposal supports rural economic development.- The economic development will support future generations.- The wedding venue is respectful to the natural environment.- Welford Park's commercial developments are conducted with a strong sense of responsibility and integrity.- An increase in the number of weddings in the same style over 6-months annually will not cause local problems.- The wedding structures would only remain in place for 6 months.
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3. Notes from Site Visit

- 3.1. At the Committee site visit, a Member requested that further information relating to Tree Preservation Orders be provided.
- 3.2. A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) is an order made by a Local Planning Authority in terms of the Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation)(England) Regulations 2012 to protect specific trees, groups of trees or woodlands in the interests of amenity. An Order prohibits the cutting down, topping, lopping, uprooting, wilful damage or destruction, or cutting of roots without the local planning authority's consent. If consent is given, it can be subject to conditions. A Tree Preservation Order covering a woodland protects both trees and saplings within the identified area, including those planted or growing naturally after the Order is made. This is because

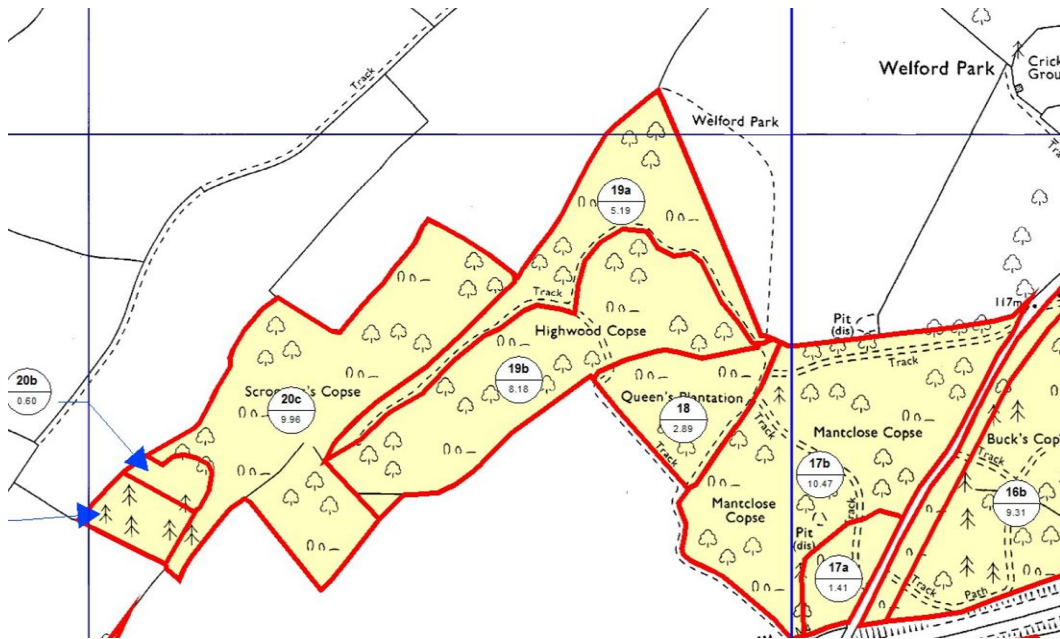
the purpose of the Order is to safeguard the woodland as a whole, which depends on regeneration or new planting.

- 3.3. Owners of protected trees, including ancient woodlands, must not carry out, or cause or permit the carrying out of any of the above prohibited activities without the consent of the local authority. Owners are responsible for maintaining the trees. The local planning authority cannot require maintenance work to be done to a tree simply because it is protected. However, the authority can encourage good tree management, particularly when determining planning applications for consent under a TPO. This is to preserve and enhance the amenity provided by protected trees.
- 3.4. Local planning authorities can make a Tree Preservation Order if it appears to them to be expedient in the interests of amenity to make provision for the preservation of trees or woodlands in their area. This was especially necessary due to the wedding venue being within 2no. ancient woodlands and the anticipated harm.

4. Additional Information

Felling licence

- 4.1. On the site visit, Members were informed by the Applicant that felling licences had been obtained for the trees recently removed. Tree felling is a legally controlled activity and licences are required for the felling of most trees. There are some exemptions to the felling licence requirement, including trees in private gardens, churchyards and public open spaces. Only 5 cubic metres of timber in a calendar quarter (3 months) can be felled without a felling licence. There is a presumption against permanent loss of woodland cover, especially within ancient woodland, although some exceptions exist. A typical exception is a Thinning Licence, where sufficient woodland cover is retained so as not to require restocking.
- 4.2. Subsequent to the site visit, a document was submitted to counter the Tree Officer's claim that trees had been removed without a felling licence. This document dates back to 26th May 2016 and is valid until 15th September 2025. The document indicates that the Highwood Copse 19b (wedding venue site) only has a thinning licence.
- 4.3. "Thinning" is defined within the Forestry Act as felling carried out in order to improve the growth of other trees. The UK Forestry Standard's definition is "the removal of a proportion of trees in a forest after canopy closure, usually to promote grown and greater value in the remaining trees". The Forestry Commission therefore allows the felling of no more than 30% of trees from any area, spread evenly among the retained trees.
- 4.4. The nearest felling licence location is 19a, above the wedding venue by a few hundred metres and the rest are around 30a, approx. 1.5km to the east near the dismantled railway in a separate woodland.



Letter from Applicant regarding felling of Ash Dieback

- 4.5. During the site visit, the applicant indicated that annual tree surveys were carried out as part of Welford Park's woodland management. These surveys were requested but not provided, however, a letter has now been submitted that was issued by Foxes Tree Services & Son Ltd dated 14.07.2025 to the applicant.
- 4.6. The letter confirms that 3x Ash Trees were felled in the wedding ceremony area due to the presence of Ash Dieback and the trees were dead. Ash trees become very brittle and unsafe once dieback sets in. The letter states that the 3x Ash Trees were felled for "obvious safety reasons with large groups of people potentially sitting under the dead trees".