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Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

WESTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY 23 JULY 2025**

Councillors Present: Phil Barnett (Chairman), Adrian Abbs, Antony Amirtharaj, Paul Dick, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines, Tony Vickers and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: Sam Chiverton, Bob Dray, Paul Goddard, Lauren Hill, Sarah House Cheyanne Kirby, Fiohn Menpes Greenslade, Gordon Oliver, Jon Thomas

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Clive Hooker

PART I

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the inclusion of the following amendment:

- Councillor Woollaston advised he sent apologies and Councillor Benneyworth substituted for him at the meeting. However, this was not clarified in the minutes.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Tony Vickers declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 4(2) by virtue of the fact that he was pre-determined on the item and had lobbied Members in support of it. As his interest was personal and prejudicial and a disclosable pecuniary interest, he would move to the public gallery at the start of the item and would be leaving the meeting after speaking as Ward Member and would take no part in the debate or voting on the matter. He advised he would not be returning for item 4(3).

Councillor Nigel Foot declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4(2) by virtue of the fact that he was Portfolio Holder for Countryside and had been in communication with the Council's Senior Tree Officer as well as the Service Director for Environment on this item. As his interest was personal and not prejudicial or a disclosable pecuniary interest, he determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.)

Councillor Tony Vickers declared a personal interest in all 3 agenda items by virtue of the fact that he was the Council's representative on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Council of Partners. As his interest was personal and not prejudicial or a disclosable pecuniary interest, he determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on item 4(1).

Councillors Adrian Abbs, Denise Gaines, Paul Dick, Antony Amirtharaj, Nigel Foot and Phil Barnett declared that they had been lobbied on Agenda Item 4(2).

3. Schedule of Planning Applications

- (1) **24/02810/FULMAJ - Hungerford Park**

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1. The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4(1)) concerning Planning Application 24/02810/FULMAJ in respect of the installation of 4860 ground mounted photovoltaic panels, in an equine field, to provide power to the commercial buildings within the grounds and to export to the Local Grid at Hungerford Park.
2. Ms Cheyanne Kirby introduced the report to Members, which took account of all the relevant policy considerations and other material planning considerations. In conclusion the report detailed that the proposal was acceptable in planning terms and officers recommended that the Development Manager be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the conditions outlined in the main report.
3. The Chairman asked Mr Paul Goddard if he had any observations relating to the application. He noted the following:
 - It was projected there were going to be 20 large vehicles travelling in and out on a daily basis during the course of construction.
 - He noted that there were two haul routes considered. The primary route was via Priory Road to the south with an alternative route via Park Street to the north. These haul routes had been secured by condition and a swept path analysis had been secured by condition for large vehicles using the site.
 - The traffic usage for the site after the construction phase was very low and was not going to cause traffic concerns.
4. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Ms Helen Simpson, Town Council representative, and Mr Graham Welchman-Taylor, agent, addressed the Committee on this application.

Parish/Town Council Representation

5. Ms Helen Simpson addressed the Committee. The full representation can be viewed here:

[Western Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 23 July 2025](#) (21:34)

Member Questions to the Parish/Town Council

6. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
 - Her understanding was that the North Wessex Downs team had not been asked to comment on this application.
 - A caravan at Hungerford Park had been refused planning permission in 2013.

Agent Representation

7. Mr Graham Welchman-Taylor addressed the Committee. The full representation can be viewed here:

[Western Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 23 July 2025](#) (27:02)

Member Questions to the Agent

8. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
 - The system had been designed with the primary focus of providing energy to the estate during the darker months and as a result there was a significant excess during the summer months that could be sold back to the grid.
 - As part of the Construction Management Plan, reasonable delivery times were to be outlined. Discussions had been held with the applicant and the contractors with regard to this.

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- A third of the energy produced on the site was to be used by the site and two thirds were to be exported back to the grid.
- Decommissioning of a solar panel site was relatively quick and the site could be returned to its natural state within 3-4 months.
- An assessment had been carried out to determine whether roof mounted installation was viable however this was only likely to generate a small percentage of the energy required.

Ward Member Representation

9. Councillor Tony Vickers addressed the Committee. The full representation can be viewed here:

[Western Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 23 July 2025 - YouTube](#) (41:25)

Member Questions to the Ward Member

10. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:

- The quality of the agricultural land was a material factor, but he was not qualified to comment on that fact. The North Wessex Downs tried to look holistically at that.

Member Questions to Officers

11. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:

- Cheyanne Kirby advised that the site was classed as equestrian use and as a result was not considered agriculture. The balance would be different if the land was an arable field but officers had to base their decision on the site's usage as it was.
- Cheyanne Kirby informed Members that the DEFRA map was created in layers and did not specifically select each site. It provided a general census of the whole of the land, meaning that the broader area was seen as 3b but this specific segment of the land was not in agricultural use.
- Cheyanne Kirby advised that no objection letters had been received.
- Cheyanne Kirby noted that this was a major development as anything over 0.5 hectares was considered major in planning terms, however the development itself was not necessarily considered major development. A Landscape and Visual Appraisal had been submitted and onsite the proposal was considered to have moderate visual impact whereas the wider views were seen as being subject to low visual impact which was to be further mitigated by the planting of hedgerows and trees.
- Paul Goddard informed Members that the use of large vehicles on site for the purpose of this application was only ever expected to be temporary in nature during the construction phase and as a result would have created very little traffic impact.
- Paul Goddard advised that there were no safety mitigation measures put forward and that he did not consider that the number of vehicle movements projected were sufficient for the authority to consider any mitigation.
- Cheyanne Kirby advised that a specific construction management plan was not listed amongst the conditions, but specific requirements could be included within the conditions.

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- Bob Dray advised that the North Wessex Downs team had been consulted on the application on the 24th February but had not responded to the consultation.
- Bob Dray advised there was no preclusion for Solar Farms within the AONB which meant each site was considered on its merits. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) did determine that major development within an AONB was to be avoided unless under exceptional circumstances, however, officers had determined that this proposal did not constitute a major development.
- Cheyanne Kirby advised that the NPPF historically resisted solar arrays in an AONB and encouraged councils to build these in areas outside of the national landscape. She advised that this had changed in more recent versions of the NPPF with more concern paid to listed buildings and conservation areas. The national policy was to prioritise solar arrays. She highlighted that the West Berkshire local plan contained a climate change policy that stated net zero.
- Paul Goddard advised that highways officers had looked into concerns about the impact of large vehicles in Park Street. The authority was keen to avoid large vehicles travelling to the site through Kintbury and recommended that it was better that they entered the site through the A338. He noted that they would ideally have liked to have had the swept path analysis in front of them but this had not happened as of yet.

Debate

12. Councillor Adrian Abbs opened the debate by noting that there had been a change to the NPPF which altered the weight afforded to sites such as the one proposed. Ultimately, he felt that officers had weighted things correctly on this application highlighting that the usage was reversible. He could see no policy reason to go against officers' recommendations.
13. Councillor Tony Vickers highlighted that so few comments on planning applications were received from the North Wessex Downs as they only had one planner who covered 7 local planning authorities which received 600 planning applications every week. He felt it was important for Members to contact them directly if they had concerns about specific applications affecting the North Wessex Downs Natural Landscape.
14. Councillor Paul Dick echoed Councillor Abbs' comments.
15. Councillor Antony Amirtharaj felt that it was important to look beyond the net zero gain bought about by the proposal, he was concerned about the loss of agricultural land. His view was that the access route was dangerous and felt that there were not satisfactory mitigation plans in place to ensure that the entry point was safe. He felt it was important that additional conditions were put in place to ensure the safety aspect, or at least to monitor the safety of the entry point. Bob Dray advised the additional condition related to the Construction Management Plan which could include details of safety requirements.
16. Councillor Howard Woollaston shared Councillor Amirtharaj's concerns but noted that there were only to be 20 HGV movements over the course of the construction which allayed his concerns. He found no reason to refuse this proposal as it met all of the Council's priorities.
17. Councillor Denise Gaines congratulated the Hungerford Town Council representative on an excellent presentation. She was torn on the application as she was not keen on the development from a personal perspective, but from both a local and national

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policy perspective could see no reason to reject it. As a result she felt there was little choice but to go with officer's recommendations.

18. Councillor Paul Dick proposed to accept Officer's recommendation and grant planning permission subject to the conditions listed in the main report with an additional condition that a Construction Management Statement be submitted including safety measures. This was seconded by Councillor Howard Woollaston.
19. The Chairman invited Members of the Committee to vote on the proposal by Councillor Dick, seconded by Councillor Woollaston to grant planning permission. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Development Manager be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the conditions listed in the main report with an additional condition that a Construction Management Statement be submitted including safety measures.

(2) 25/00827/FULMAJ - Welford Park, Welford

20. As Councillor Tony Vickers had declared a pecuniary interest on item 4(2), in that he was pre-determined to support the application, he excused himself from the Committee and moved to the public gallery where he would offer his support as Ward Member. He made clear he would leave the room before questions to officers were asked to ensure that he did not influence the proceedings of the debate.
21. The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4(2)) concerning Planning Application 25/00827/FULMAJ in respect of use of land for wedding ceremonies and receptions for 6 months a year (April - September), including the temporary erection of tipis, catering tent, ceremony tent, toilet block and associated car parking (for a temporary period of 5 years) at Welford Park, Welford.
22. Ms Lauren Hill introduced the report to Members, which took account of all the relevant policy considerations and other material planning considerations. In conclusion the report detailed that the proposal was unsatisfactory in planning terms and officers recommended that the Development Manager be authorised to refuse planning permission for the reasons listed in the main report.
23. Fiohn Menpes Greenslade highlighted the ecological concerns that had led to the Ecology team objecting to the application. It was noted that direct effects of development could cause loss of ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees. He noted that he had concerns about the proposed mitigations as they were in very close proximity to human activity which would be unsuitable for a number of affected species due to the likelihood of human disturbance.
24. Jon Thomas raised the concerns of the Tree Team that had caused them to object to the application. He noted that the clearing had been used for permitted development and it was evident a number of trees had been removed since 2016. He felt it was important for the Council to consider whether it was appropriate to enforce a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). Overall it was noted that the proposal was likely to have a significant effect on trees in the woodland.
25. The Chairman asked Mr Paul Goddard if he any observations relating to the application. He noted the following:
 - Access to the proposal would be obtained from Welford Road. There were two access points proposed, the southern access adjacent to the M4 was proposed as the access with the northern access proposed as the exit. There were no concerns on this.
 - A concern for Highways officers was sustainability as there were limited means to access the site through any means other than motor vehicle.

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- He noted that the proposal was likely to generate a significant increase in traffic generation to the site which was itself unsustainable, this was contrary to the NPPF.
 - He felt that it failed to comply with local and national policy on climate and sustainability.
26. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Mr Will Puxley, supporter, and Ms Kerry Pflieger, agent, addressed the Committee on this application.

Supporter Representation

27. Mr Will Puxley addressed the Committee. The full representation can be viewed here:
[Western Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 23 July 2025 - YouTube](#) (1:58:24)

Member Questions to the Supporter

28. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
- This area of the site was selected as there was a natural clearing which had been well used by other agricultural activities. Anywhere else on the site would have required tree felling. They tried to ensure every area of the site was used.
 - It was noted that there was a church nearby which had seen a massive uplift as a result of the use of the site.
 - In order to scale the business they needed to be able to do more than the 8 weddings that could be done over the 28 days allowed under permitted development rights. Woodland grants received did not cover the cost of managing the woodlands and scaling the business was key to making the business sustainable.
 - An operator was bought in to reduce the overall cost of running the site, this provided additional resource for site management.

Applicant/Agent Representation

29. Ms Kerry Pflieger addressed the Committee. The full representation can be viewed here:
[Western Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 23 July 2025 - YouTube](#) (2:10:48)

Member Questions to the Applicant/Agent

30. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
- An ecological proposal had been submitted alongside the planning application which was informed by surveys of the site. As this was a natural clearing there were grasses present on the site which did not themselves contain any ancient woodland ground flora.
 - The woodland management plan had not been submitted when the application was originally submitted but it had some reference to events at Welford Park. This plan was for the whole of Welford Park, not the site specifically, it had been accepted by the Forestry Commission but was sat with the admin team awaiting formal sign off. A separate woodland management plan for the tipi site could be submitted as part of this application.

Ward Member Representation

31. Councillor Tony Vickers addressed the Committee. The full representation can be viewed here:
[Western Area Planning Committee - Wednesday 23 July 2025 - YouTube](#) (2:19:25)

Member Questions to the Ward Member

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32. Members did not have any questions for clarification.

33. Councillor Tony Vickers left the meeting at 20:25

Member Questions to Officers

34. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:

- Paul Goddard felt that it was very unlikely anyone would travel to the site by any other means than motor vehicle with very limited public transport available to transport people to the site.
- Jon Thomas advised that they were informed on site that there was a felling licence. As part of the application they had checked the Forestry Commission website but had been unable to find one. This had since been sent through by the applicant. For the compartment relevant to the application there was permission to thin, which granted specific permission to fell the poorer quality trees. He highlighted that there was a difference between thinning and removing for safety. He felt that his concerns would not be successfully ameliorated by a woodland management plan due to the site's status as ancient woodland.
- Jon Thomas noted photos taken above the site illustrated that a number of trees had been removed since 2016. He felt that this was done for the purpose of supporting the existing wedding business.
- Jon Thomas was very certain that the usage as a wedding venue was causing damage to the site due to the trampling and the vehicle movements.
- Fiohn Menpes Greenslade was confident that there was ongoing degradation caused by the permitted development that was likely to be exacerbated by approving this application.
- Paul Goddard reiterated that the site was unsustainable from a highways and planning perspective.
- Jon Thomas advised that they were unaware of the permitted development prior to the application, as a result there was no trigger for a TPO. He noted that it was their responsibility to implement TPOs in the interest of amenity, this development was likely to increase harm to the woodland and as a result required protection.
- Bob Dray advised that permitted development rights were set nationally which the applicant was exercising. The Council could not do anything to trigger a review of that. He noted that the proposal was likely to lead to severe intensification of the problems witnessed through the permitted development.
- Bob Dray noted that if planning permission was granted the authority were required to inform the Secretary of State and give them an opportunity to call in the application and consider whether it needed to be redetermined.
- Bob Dray highlighted that this case was not a carbon copy of the Lilas Wood appeal. He advised that this was included as there were strong similarities between the two. He was unaware of what had specifically changed in policy terms since that decision but the high bar as to what constituted 'wholly exceptional' was still present.
- Bob Dray accepted that degradation of the site could be caused by uses that did not require planning permission, however, he highlighted that the purpose of this Committee was to consider the planning application before them.

Debate

35. Councillor Adrian Abbs opened the debate by highlighting he came into this with an open mind, but felt that this was an important venture for the local economy. However, the course of the meeting made it clear that this was an application that was contrary to a number of policies. He highlighted that 3 different officers had raised objections. He felt that this had to sway the outcome of the meeting. He also highlighted the importance of protecting ancient woodland and noted that the

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permitted development had already caused degradation of the site. He noted that he was surprised on the site visit to see that the tent was actually a semi-permanent building with concrete footings, he felt this was further damaging the ancient woodland. He noted that over the course of the meeting he had gone from being generally supportive of the application to being inclined to support officers recommendations to reject.

36. Councillor Antony Amirtharaj highlighted that the site was likely to create significant economic benefit. He noted that approving this application would allow for support of the wider economy. He noted officers recommendations and respected their knowledge, but highlighted that the site had permitted development rights regardless and this application was simply seeking to extend that usage. He felt that it was appropriate to approve this application with a woodland management plan and with officers working closely with the landowner to ensure that further damage was not caused to the ancient woodland and mitigate the harm that was being caused. He felt that it was important to empower landowners to enable economic development within their communities. He felt that restricting legacy landowners from ensuring their sites were economically viable ran the risk of corporate entities buying land and creating more harm moving forward.
37. Councillor Denise Gaines highlighted that ancient woodland was over 400 years old and it was their duty as Councillors to ensure that that woodland continued to thrive and not be cleared. She understood the economic argument but stressed that the woodland and its unique ecology could not be replaced if damaged. She noted that they had just adopted a local plan and approving this application would contravene a number of policies within it.
38. Councillor Howard Woollaston supported Councillor Amirtharaj's comments noting that there was significant economic benefit to the proposal. He noted that there was not a single objector and highlighted that it would generate employment within the local community. He noted the landowner was very considerate of the countryside and invested in preserving the land. He felt that the traffic concerns were irrelevant as no one travelled to a wedding via public transport nor did they walk to them. He advised he was inclined to go against officers' recommendations.
39. Councillor Paul Dick noted that the community and economic aspects of this application were strong, but noted that an Ancient Woodland could not be replanted.
40. Councillor Nigel Foot complimented the quality of the report and felt that it was balanced and informative. He felt that this was an extremely difficult situation noting the difficult circumstances faced by farmers all across the country. He stressed the grave concerns raised by the ecology and tree officers over the welfare of the ancient woodland and noted the importance of preserving this. He urged the applicant to review ways to truly mitigate this. He highlighted that rejecting this application would mean that this was referred up to the Secretary of State so felt that there was little recourse to go against officer's recommendations due to national and local policy.
41. Councillor Nigel Foot proposed to accept Officer's recommendation and reject planning permission for the reasons listed in the main report. This was seconded by Councillor Adrian Abbs.
42. The Chairman invited Members of the Committee to vote on the proposal by Councillor Foot, seconded by Councillor Abbs, to refuse planning permission. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Development Manager be authorised to refuse planning permission for the reasons listed in the main report.

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4. 24/01651/FUL - 2 Burfords, East Garston, Hungerford

43. The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4(3)) concerning Planning Application 24/01651/FUL in respect of a replacement dwelling at 2 Burfords, East Garston, Hungerford,
44. Mr Bob Dray introduced the report to Members, which took account of all the relevant policy considerations and other material planning considerations. In conclusion the report detailed that the proposal was acceptable in planning terms and officers recommended that the Development Manager be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the conditions outlined in the main and update reports.
45. The Chairman asked Mr Paul Goddard if he had any observations relating to the application. He advised that he had no objections.
46. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Mr Stephen Reschwamm, Parish/Town Council representative, addressed the Committee on this application.

Parish/Town Council Representation

47. Mr Stephen Reschwamm addressed the Committee. The full representation can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/JKsPhAB-IXU> (3:10:48)

Member Questions to the Parish/Town Council

48. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
- There were a couple of plots in the village that were of a similar size. Work had been done on other bungalows but they were still going to retain their bungalow status.
 - He was unsure whether the Parish Council had objected to the half storey extension application in 2012.

Member Questions to Officers

49. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
- Bob Dray advised that Natural England took the view that replacement dwellings could be excluded from nutrient neutrality.
 - Bob Dray advised that the Parish Council did object to the previous application on the site.

Debate

50. Councillor Gaines opened the debate by advising she saw no reason to object given the approval of an extension on the site in 2012.
51. Councillor Paul Dick supported Councillor Gaines comments.
52. Councillor Adrian Abbs sought clarity on whether anything could be done to condition returning the gate to its original condition. Bob Dray advised it was possible to put a condition related to the hard landscaping of the site but officers had not recommended it as they did not feel it was related to this application.
53. Councillor Amirtharaj reassured objectors that each application was judged on its own merits and no precedent was set when granting approval.
54. Councillor Denise Gaines proposed to accept Officer's recommendation and grant planning permission subject to the conditions listed in the main report and update report with an additional condition that the details of hard landscaping for the site be submitted before occupying the property. This was seconded by Councillor Dick

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55. The Chairman invited Members of the Committee to vote on the proposal by Councillor Gaines, seconded by Councillor Dick, to grant planning permission. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Development Manager be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the conditions outlined in the main report and update report with an additional condition that details of hard landscaping for the site be submitted before occupying the property.

(The meeting commenced at 18:30 and closed at 21:50)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature