



Landscape Proof of Evidence regarding appeal against the decision of West Berkshire Council to refuse planning permission for the Part retrospective Change of use of land for the formation of 5 Gypsy/Traveller pitches comprising of 1 mobile home, 1 touring caravan, and 1 utility building per pitch

Proof of evidence on Landscape and Visual Effects

Robert Petrow dated April 2025

Our Ref: 1111/RP Rev A

Council Reference: 23/00815/FUL

Appeal Reference: APP/W0340/W/24/3356688

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 My name is Robert Petrow. I am a Chartered Landscape Architect and the Managing Director of Petrow Harley Limited. I am instructed to present evidence at this inquiry Mr. R. Black, ("the Appellant") on Landscape and Visual Effects.

1.2 The scheme was refused planning consent on the 24 October 2024. Reason 1 below relates to refusal on landscape and visual effects as follows:

1. The application site lies in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. This is specially protected landscape as defined in the NPPF. The development of this site for gypsy and traveller accommodation [5 pitches] will harm the visual character of the area, particularly in relation to the soft transition between the built-up area of Hermitage to the south and open countryside to the north. This is considered to be contrary to the advice in policies ADDP5, CS7 and CS19 in the WBCS of 2006 to 2026 and the advice in para 176 of the NPPF of 2023. It is accordingly unacceptable. It is also contrary to the advice in policy TS3 in the HSADPD of 2017.

1.3 My evidence addresses the Landscape and Visual Effects of the proposed development (reason for refusal 1) and considers the following key issues in relation to these effects of the development as follows:

- Landscape and Visual effects on the National Landscape (Previously called Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which have changed their name to 'National Landscapes' on the 22 November 2023,
- Effect on adjacent dwellings;
- Effect on adjacent public open spaces and rights of way.

In addition, I have prepared the following information in support of this appeal:

- A Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVIA) dated March 2025 which is attached to my proof as Appendix C.

1.4 I hold a National Certificate and National Diploma in Horticulture from Merrist Wood College. A Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree and Post Graduate Honours Diploma in Landscape Architecture from Greenwich University. I am a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute.

1.5 I have over 30 years' experience in landscape design starting as a landscape foreman for Squires Landscape before becoming a Landscape Manager at Fulham Place. After this I was employed as a landscape assistant at Boyer Design, a senior landscape architect at Kelsey Associates and a senior consultant at ADAS. I established Petrow Harley in 2011 of which I am now the Managing Director.

1.6 Petrow Harley is an independent practice of Chartered Landscape Architects working for both private and local authority clients. We have now completed over 1,100 projects working on a range of schemes including Park and Open Spaces, Schools, Housing schemes, Renewable Energy and Leisure schemes.

1.7 I have visited the site and walked the surrounding areas including all local open spaces and public rights of way. My statement has been carried out in compliance with The Landscape Institute's 'Code of Standards of Conduct and Practice for Landscape Professionals'. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinion.

2.0 THE APPEAL SITE

- 2.1 The site is on the outskirts of Hermitage Village in a semi-rural location at approximately 120m elevation, south of the M4, and accessed via Hampstead Norreys Road. The site itself appears to have been used in the past as paddocks/ grazing land but is not considered to have had high agricultural value. The area has a rolling landscape, with a few high points of 145m or higher with numerous woodlands - many of which are ancient - ditches, streams and ponds. The native hedgerows and mature trees of the area are generally in good condition. .
- 2.2 The immediate landscape, whilst within the National Landscape of the North Wessex Downs, is not considered to be tranquil, with the M4 creating both auditory and visual disturbance, particularly felt within the site itself. The large lorries passing at speed along the M4 are especially noticeable when walking the adjacent public rights of way close to the site. This, coupled with various features such as pylons, the large metal sheds of nearby farms / previous farmsteads, have an urbanising effect and detract from the National Landscape.
- 2.3 The site is located within the National Landscape of the North Wessex Downs (on the 22nd November 2023 all designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales become National Landscapes. These are however still shown as AONB in the online interactive map and is outside of the Settlement Boundary. Pinewood Pits – Furze Hill is a Local Wildlife Site, located immediately to the east of the site. It is protected under local policy PPS9 and 'may contain populations of statutorily protected species'.
- 2.4 National Landscapes were renamed to reflect the areas' importance to the country and their role in protecting the environment. They are designated as exceptional landscapes whose distinctive character and natural beauty are precious enough to be safeguarded in the national interest. They are protected and enhanced for nature, people, business, and culture. The prime purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the landscape. This is reflected in the fundamental role of the local planning authorities, which is to ensure that the very features that make the North Wessex Downs special and worthy of its designation are protected. This is achieved by legislation, strict development plan policies and through the vigilant exercise of development management powers.
- 2.5 On 26th December 2023, a new duty came into force in English National Landscapes. This duty states that all 'relevant authorities must seek to further the purposes' of the designated landscape; for National Landscapes, this purpose is conserving and enhancing natural beauty. This duty features in Section 245 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, which gained Royal Assent on 26 October 2023 – and it overrides and strengthens the previous duty to 'have regard' to the purposes. This new duty ensures that organisations and decision makers work to protect and improve these nationally valuable places, so they can play a significant role in delivering the UK Government's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23).
- 2.6 The Development Proposals include a planning application for:
Part retrospective Change of use of land for the formation of 5 Gypsy/Traveller pitches comprising of 1 mobile home, 1 touring caravan, and 1 utility building per pitch

3.0 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The methodology used in preparing my evidence and LVIA is based on the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition 2013 (GLVIA3) prepared by the LI/Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. GLVIA3 is the key guidance when assessing landscape and visual effects.
- 3.2 The assessment of the likely effects can be considered a judgement made by a qualified professional. Landscape and visual issues can be subjective and so to provide a clearer understanding of the reasoning the Landscape Institute recommends the use of a standard tabular methodology which feeds into a matrix to determine the effects.
- 3.3 The landscape baseline is assessed to provide an understanding of the landscape as a resource in the area(s) that may be affected – its constituent elements, its character, and the way this varies spatially, its geographic extent and history, its condition, the way in which the landscape is experienced, and the value attached to it.

The visual baseline is assessed to establish the area in which the development is visible, the different groups of people who may experience views of the development, the places where they will be affected and the nature of the views and visual amenity at these points.

- 3.4 To assess the landscape effects, firstly the value is assessed. The susceptibility of a landscape is then determined by identifying its condition and its ability to either absorb, or not the type of development proposed without significant harm). Value and susceptibility are combined to determine landscape sensitivity. The magnitude of change (the size, scale, and extent of a change) to the character of the landscape resulting from the Application is also assessed.
- 3.5 Magnitude and sensitivity are combined in the matrix to determine the degree of significance of an effect (beneficial or adverse) ranging from Large to Negligible.
- 3.6 Landscape Quality
Landscape quality is a measure of the physical state of a landscape. It may include the extent to which the typical landscape character types are present, the degree to which the landscape is 'intact' and the condition of individual elements.
- 3.7 Landscape Value
It may also be a measure of the aesthetic, perceptual and other intangible characteristics of a landscape, such as views, tranquillity, wildness, remoteness, cultural and artistic references.
- 3.8 Landscape Susceptibility
Can be defined as "the degree to which a defined landscape including its character and associated visual resources might respond to specified development types or land management changes without undue negative consequences.
- 3.9 Landscape Sensitivity
Landscape sensitivity is a measure of the ability of a landscape to accommodate change arising from specified types of development or land management. It combines judgements of the susceptibility of the landscape to change and the values attached to the landscape. The landscape sensitivity to change is determined by combining judgements on landscape value and its susceptibility to change.

3.10 Assessment of Visual Effects

This is assessed by assessing the value attached to views by considering heritage, planning designations, tourist guides, literature and other cultural factors.

- 3.11 The susceptibility of a visual receptor group to changes in views and visual amenity is assessed, by reference to the occupation (place of work) or activity of the people experiencing the view at particular locations, the extent to which their attention or interest may be focused on the view.

- 3.12 The sensitivity of a visual receptor group is arrived at by combining the susceptibility of a visual receptor group and the value attached to views. Factors such as the expectation of the viewer, their duration of view and the angle or direction in which they would see the site should be considered.

The level of visual effects is assessed by combining the sensitivity of the person looking at the view with the magnitude in change to that view.

Peoples' sensitivity to change in a view can vary, for example workers within an industrial area are less sensitive than people who chose to use a Public Right of Way (PRoW) for the enjoyment of the countryside and views.

Viewers within an unattractive landscape are less sensitive than those in an acknowledged scenic landscape such as AONB, National Park or AGLV.

- 3.13 A series of tables are included within Appendix B to describe how Landscape and Visual Value, Susceptibility, Sensitivity Magnitude of Change have been applied.

4.0 Landscape Effects

4.1 *Landscape Base line*

4.1.1 At a national level the site is found within the National Character Area: 116 - Berkshire and Marlborough Downs.

Natural England describe this as:

"Vast arable fields stretch across the sparsely settled, rolling Chalk hills of the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs National Character Area (NCA). There are extensive views from the escarpment in particular, punctuated by landmarks including chalk-cut horse figures, beech clumps and ancient monuments. Historic routeways, including the Ridgeway National Trail, provide public access across this landscape. Writers and artists have been inspired by this landscape, including Eric Ravilious and Richard Jefferies, while monuments around Avebury have attracted historians and antiquarians such as John Aubrey. Avebury stone circle is a popular visitor destination and part of a World Heritage Site and there are numerous other Scheduled Monuments and heritage features across this landscape. Heritage features are at risk from damage by cultivation and animal burrowing. The natural beauty and special scenic qualities of the area lead to the majority of the area (97 percent) being included in the North Wessex Downs.

4.1.2 At a brough level the site is found within the Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic (WH4). Its key characteristics are described as:

- 1) Geologically and topographically varied with steep and gentle undulating slopes rising to a central ridge Plateau gravel drift deposits and sands and gravels overlaying clay have created an undulating topography with both steep and gentle slopes rising to a central ridge between Bradfield Southend to the east and Ashmore Green to the west.
- 2) Presence of surface water and small streams A direct consequence of the underlying geological and soil conditions is the presence of surface water due to impeded drainage, with surface springs along the clay interface and a highly divided network of small streams. The Bourne, a tributary of the River Pang, follows a prominent valley running eastwards from the eastern end of the central ridge, and numerous smaller streams run down from north and south from the main ridge line. In the Beenham and Bradfield Southend areas the streams have become deeply incised, creating pronounced ridges.
- 3) Complex pattern of land cover, dominated by woodland and with remnant heaths. The area is distinctive for its varied geological pattern of clays, silts, sands and gravels, which result in nutrient-poor soils. The mixed sand, clay and gravel substrate creates a mosaic of land cover including damp pasture, paddocks and heathland, the latter concentrated in Bucklebury, but woodland is a prominent landscape element. Most former heathland is now tree-covered, with coniferous plantation and regenerated woodland, and interlinked linear woodland extends down the slopes from the ridge across the clay towards the valley landscape, including thin wooded valleys centred on minor tributary streams such as The Bourne. On localised tracts of more fertile loamy soils, mostly on lower, gentler slopes such as those dropping towards the Pang Valley and to the south-east near Beenham, there are areas of arable farmland.

- 4) Varied field pattern with strong hedgerows There is a varied field pattern with irregular fields, interspersed with parcels of woodland and commons indicative of medieval and post-medieval assarts. Fields with parallel and sinuous boundaries predominate, and represent 'ladder' fields probably resulting from the 17th and 18th century informal enclosure. Field boundaries include dense and intact hedgerows with trees, with larger amalgamated fields present in some areas.
- 5) Parklands are a characteristic feature Areas of parkland are evident, defined by well-established pastures with mature free-standing trees. Some are still associated with their estate houses, as at Englefield, whereas other areas of parkland stand-alone e.g. Woolhampton Park.
- 6) Relatively densely settled, particularly along the ridge, but with woodland containment A fairly well-populated area with numerous, mostly linear, villages along the ridge (including Bradfield Southend, Beenham, Cold Ash and Hermitage), with further settlement spread out along the roads during the 20th century. Smaller hamlets and farmsteads are often located on the mid slopes, whilst larger private residences and large institutional buildings, such as Douai Abbey and several private schools, are scattered throughout the woodlands. The main building material is brick and tile, although timber framing and thatch also occur. Tree cover means that settlements typically feel rural and isolated, with many houses set back from the road and fronted by trees (this is particularly the case at Upper Bucklebury), although modern development is more evident towards the western end of the character area at Cold Ash, Ashmore Green, Hermitage and along the B4009.
- 7) A minor road network contained by the wooded landscape Busier roads, notably the M4, are limited to the fringes of the character area, and within the area the undulating and wooded landscape contains and limits the influence of roads. On the ridge slopes, winding rural lanes pass through open and wooded landscapes, and are frequently overhung by deep grassy or woodland banks.
- 8) An accessible landscape. An extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and byways pass through this landscape, connecting the small settlements, and many of the woodlands and commons have open access.
- 9) Quiet, intimate and secluded character. The varied landform and land cover means that there are many secluded locations within this area, despite the relatively dense settlement pattern, and a sense of elevated separation from the urban areas to the south west.

4.1.3. The recommended Landscape Strategy is:

- 1) Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its varied landscape of woodland, heathland and farmland. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.
- 2) Conserve and restore heathland characteristics Take opportunities for restoration of habitats and reinstatement of features that have been lost, including management of areas of re-wooded common land to reintroduce a stronger

heathland presence and link existing small, fragmented sites. Consider potential for reintroduction of grazing management.

- 3) Promote appropriate woodland management This is particularly important for ancient and semi-natural woodland areas but also relevant to more recently planted woodland areas (e.g. alongside the M4). Appropriate coppicing, pollarding, planting, thinning and management of invasive species and disease should all be encouraged. Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnected valleys: the aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in areas which have been converted to coniferous monoculture plantation, and to ensure that woodland boundaries are sensitive to landform.
- 4) Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements. Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows, and encourage restoration/reinstatement of hedgerows within expansive arable fields and around horse paddocks. Preserve the wooded context of settlements, to contain and filter the impact of built form.
- 5) Retain the distinction between and individual identity of settlements Retain a sense of distinction between individual settlements through a clear understanding of the role of landform, tree cover and rural buildings in characterising settings and in forming boundaries that conserve and enhance distinctions in character – e.g. the historic farmstead at Henwick, along a rural lane, contained by tree cover and on rising ground, marks a rapid change to a rural landscape from the nearby edge of Thatcham. Avoid extended linear development along roads, which creates a more developed character resulting in the loss of individual settlement identity. More small scale focused development set back from main routes often has less impact on character and can be more readily contained by landscape.
- 6) Conserve elements that mark a transition between settlement and countryside Where possible retain small, enclosed fields around villages, and farm buildings which contribute positively to rural character.
- 7) Conserve the existing character of rural lanes and public rights of way Avoid measures to ease traffic flow that would have an adverse impact on character. Retain and manage hedgebanks, ditches and verges and replant hedges on banks where these have been lost, including individual oak trees planted at irregular intervals to maintain continuity and enhancement of the existing landscape character. Consider potential to designate Quiet Lanes, and measures to discourage the use of narrow lanes as 'rat runs' or by overly large vehicles – e.g. adequate signage and lower speed limits.
- 8) Maintain open views from routeways Whilst woodland and hedgerow planting is generally to be encouraged, sporadic long views across open land add to the variety that characterises this area. Gaps between dwellings that offer views across open farmland help to retain rural settlement character.

4.2 Locally based Landscape Character Assessment

The West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment is by necessity of a broad scale and to refine this, we have carried out a locally based Landscape Character Assessment to identify the distinct landscapes within the study area which is defined by a 1-kilometre radius from the development site.

4.3 Our assessment largely agrees with the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment and has identified five distinct landscape zones as follows:

1. Agriculture
2. Recreational Landscape
3. Woodland
4. Built Form/Rural Settlement
5. M4 Road

4.4 The site lies Zone 1: Agriculture. The landscape character is characterised by varied sized fields ranging from large to irregular medieval 'assarts' (formed by clearance of woodland for farming). Agriculture varies from large arable fields to smaller grazing equestrian paddocks. The soil is heavy clay and prone to water logging. Fields are bound by hedgerows, and mature trees in mainly good condition, providing an important habitat network.

4.5 The zone is defined by the following key characteristics:

- Some accessibility via public rights of way, although some footpaths have been ploughed, forcing walker to the perimeter of the field;
- Varied soil, but mainly clay with some flint and chalk;
- Numerous local ditches, streams and ponds;
- Smaller fields bounded by mature hedgerows and trees, some veteran, in varied condition – some degree of degradation especially in larger fields where hedgerows and copses have been removed owing to mechanisation of farming;
- Views vary from open and long distant in larger fields to short distant in smaller irregular fields located next to woodlands;
- Some discordant and prominent features associated with agriculture, classified in this report as Built Form, such as large metal storage sheds, hardstanding and pylons urbanise and degrade the landscape;
- The M4 creates significant auditory disturbance;
- Located within the National Landscape.

The zone is rated as having overall *Medium Value and Medium Landscape Sensitivity*.

My summary of the Landscape Effects on the Landscape Receptor's Character and its key characteristics are shown below:

Agriculture Landscape Receptor's Key Characteristics	Spatial extent	Duration	Nature Direct, indirect, secondary or cumulative	Significance Major, moderate, Minor or neutral (beneficial or adverse)	Construction phase	Year 1	Year 15	Notes
Some accessibility via public rights of way,	Local	Long-term	Direct	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	The proposals seek to create a small pedestrian pathway from the east boundary of the development onto the Eling Way to provide a safe pathway for residents from the Site into Hermitage village
Varied soil, but mainly clay with some flint and chalk;	Local	Long-term	Direct	Moderate adverse	Moderate adverse	Minor adverse	Minor adverse	The development creates hardstanding and built form on the site, previously grassland. These areas have been reduced.
The M4 creates significant auditory disturbance;	Local	Long-term	Cumulative	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	The M4 is a dominating feature in the landscape and the development will therefore have a neutral effect.

Agriculture Landscape Receptor's Key Characteristics	Spatial extent	Duration	Nature Direct, indirect, secondary or cumulative	Significance Major, moderate, Minor or neutral (beneficial or adverse)	Construction phase	Year 1	Year 15	Notes
Some discordant and prominent features associated with agriculture, classified in this report as Built Form, such as large metal storage sheds, hardstanding and pylons urbanise and degrade the landscape;	Local	Long-term	Cumulative	Minor adverse	Minor adverse	Minor adverse	Minor adverse	In the context of these discordant features, the development proposals may increase the cumulative effect of these urbanising features, but the effect is restricted to the site itself since it is visually well contained.
Numerous local ditches, streams and ponds;	Local	Long-term	Direct	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	The proposals do not affect local ditches, streams and ponds; there are none evident close to the site.
Fields bounded by mature hedgerows and trees, some veteran, in varied condition;	Local	Permanent	Direct	Minor Beneficial	Minor Beneficial	Minor Beneficial	Minor Beneficial	All the all trees and hedgerows in and on the boundary of the site are to be retained with additional native trees and hedgerow planting
Located within the National Landscape of North Wessex Downs.	Local	Long-term	Direct	Minor adverse	Minor adverse	Minor adverse	Minor adverse	Any development of the site will be adverse, but the visual effects are confined to the site.

Table 1: Landscape effects

5.0 Visual Effects

- 5.1 A visual appraisal has been undertaken to assist in the understanding of how the Development Site affect views available to people and their visual amenity. A site visit was undertaken in late March 2025 by Robert Petrow (CMLI) and Helen John (CMLI). Site visits were carried out when deciduous planting was not in full-leaf and the screening afforded by vegetation was therefore reduced; it is an “early spring” assessment.
- 5.2 The appraisal has been carried out by reference to Ordnance Survey mapping data and then site visits. This has allowed a ‘Zone of Visual Influence’ to be established (ZVI) which is the study area for assessing visual effects. This establishes the area in which the development may be visible, the different groups of people who may experience views, the viewpoints where they will be affected and the nature of views at those points.
- 5.3 A word scale has been used to describe the visual presence the application site within the view
- 5.4 The table below shows a summary of existing Views which have been assessed in terms of value and combined with susceptibility to give sensitivity.

The visual impact upon the existing receptors is summarised within the table below with a word scale to describe the visual effect as follows:	Duration Permanent, long-term or short-term	Value	Susceptibility	Sensitivity	Notes
Visual receptor					
<i>Residential properties (private views)</i>					
Sandhill (two storey dwelling) to the north and Torcove (single storey bungalow) to the south.	Long	High	Medium	High	Private views from edge of area
<i>Road users (Public views)</i>					
Users of the B4009	Short	Low.	Medium	Medium	There is no footway along this stretch of the road, where cars travel at 30 - 40mph and therefore the duration of view is short, approximately 3 seconds
Recreational users (Public Views)					
Eling Way to the east and the Footpath CHIE/24/1 to the south and west of the site.	Short	High	High	High	Filtered views only
Other public places, visitor sites or workplaces					
Recreation ground to the east of the site and Hermitage village hall	Long	Medium	Medium	Medium	Filtered views only

Table 2: Existing views

The visual impact upon the existing receptors	Duration Permanent, long-term or short-term	Nature Direct, indirect, secondary or cumulative	Significance Major, Moderate, Minor or neutral (beneficial or adverse)	Construction phase magnitude of visual change	Year 1 magnitude of visual change	Year 15 magnitude of visual change	Notes
Visual receptor							
<i>Public Highways</i>							
B4009	Long	Direct	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	Neutral	The site is currently well contained and after 15 years, is likely to be fully screened.
M4	Long	Direct	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	The high speed with which vehicles pass the site, even if partially the effect is considered neutral.
<i>Public rights of way</i>							
Footpath CHIE/24/1	Long	Direct	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	Neutral	The site is currently well contained and after 15 years, is likely to be fully screened.
Eling Way	Long	Direct	Moderate Adverse	Moderate Adverse	Moderate Adverse	Neutral	It is considered that these receptors, having been directed to the Eling Way as a recreational route promoted by North Wessex Downs National Landscape unit, have a higher sensitivity to such development. The site is currently well contained and after 15 years, is likely to be fully screened.
<i>Public places or visitor sites,</i>							
Play park and Hermitage village hall	Long	Direct	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	The site is currently moderately well contained from the elevated position of the recreation ground. After 15 years, is likely to be better screened but may still be slightly visible from this elevated position.
<i>Residential properties</i>							
Sandhill and Torcove	Long	Direct	Moderate - Major Adverse	Moderate - Major Adverse	Moderate - Major Adverse	Slight/Moderate Adverse	With mitigation there are likely to be filtered southwards views from the Sandhill dwelling to the site and from Torcove bungalow. As planting matures the adverse effect will be reduced to slight.

Table 3: Visual Effects

6.0 Response to the for Reasons for Refusal.

6.1 The reasons for refusal in relation to the landscape and visual effects is that the application site lies in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. This is specially protected landscape as defined in the NPPF. The development of this site for gypsy and traveller accommodation [5 pitches] will harm the visual character of the area, particularly in relation to the soft transition between the built-up area of Hermitage to the south and open countryside to the

6.2 North Wessex Downs National Landscape

The North Wessex Downs was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1972 under the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949. Following the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, the Government confirmed that the landscape qualities of National Parks and AONBs are equivalent. It is accepted that the site lies within the National Landscape which is a designated exceptional landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are precious enough to be safeguarded in the national interest.

6.3 The National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (NPPF) states that:

189. Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.

190. When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.*

6.4 On 16th December the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (2023) amended section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) to create a new duty to “seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area” when discharging this function in National Landscapes (the legislation uses the original term for National Landscapes, ‘Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’). The new duty replaces the previous requirement for relevant authorities to just “have regard” to the purpose of National Landscapes so is a more proactive and strengthened requirement.

- 6.5 The Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for Designation as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England (GALD) updated June 2021 states that “a designation can wash over” (i.e. include a tract of land even though that land does not itself meet the designation criteria, even close to the boundary of a designated area, provided it sits within the seep of qualifying land).
- 6.6 This appears to have been applied in the North Wessex Downs NL in the locality of the Appeal Site and the local landscape does not exhibit the special qualities described within the management plan.
- 6.7 The development site baseline has been defined as ‘rough grazing/paddocks’ character’ by Petrow Harley. The proposals include an increase in hard standing and built form, which urbanises the site and alters its landscape character from Agriculture to a ‘built form/settlement fringe’ character. The landscape proposals however have reduced the hard surfacing down to a minimum and include substantial new areas of planting to reduce these effects. The change is reversible, since the hardcore can be lifted and the mobile homes and caravans removed, albeit that soil decompaction and remediation would be needed after removal. The duration of the development proposals is assumed to be long.
- 6.8 It is considered that the baseline landscape character of the area in which the site is found (Agriculture) has a Medium Value and Medium Sensitivity to change and that the built form within the site results in a deterioration to the landscape character but that this deterioration is mainly limited to the site itself. The proposed landscaping will assist in enhancing and strengthening the character and distinctiveness of the landscape and to provide buffer areas and appropriate protection to ensure that the existing physical features can be maintained.
- 6.9 Views to and from the site within the Study Area are generally well contained and limited by mature trees and hedgerows. It should be noted that the ash trees which are predominant especially along the west boundary, may fail owing to ash dieback disease and therefore a successional tree planting strategy has been proposed to strengthen the planted boundary.
- 6.10 The Landscape management guidelines outlined by the West Berkshire District Landscape Character Assessment are:
- 1) *Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the nationally designated landscape of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Conserve and enhance the valued features of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including its varied landscape of woodland, heathland and farmland. Restore and enhance any features which have been lost or degraded. Ensure that changes in the landscape including land use change and development are sensitively sited and designed so as not to detract from the special qualities of the landscape.*

Response: The landscape proposals include measures to restore the native hedgerow surrounding the site, which will help to future proof the ash dieback which is likely to occur within the next few years, affecting many trees lining the B4009 as it passing the site. There appears to have been scrub on the land when viewing the baseline aerial image. The proposals include the introduction of a network of native planting. It is considered that the development will result in land use change and degradation of the landscape character of the site, but in terms of its visual impact, this is mainly retained to the site itself owing to its siting behind vegetation. Further planted along all boundaries will further help to restrict the impact to the site and not detract from the wider landscape character.

- 2) *Conserve and restore heathland characteristics Take opportunities for restoration of habitats and reinstatement of features that have been lost, including management of areas of re-wooded common land to reintroduce a stronger heathland presence and link existing small, fragmented sites. Consider potential for reintroduction of grazing management.*

Response: The site is not heathland and therefore this characteristic is not relevant. The baseline appears to have been grazing land, albeit it a relatively small parcel. The proposals seek to have x 5 pitches and substantial hardcore for vehicles, touring caravans and mobile home pitches and there is therefore no opportunity to reintroduce the grazing. However, within the wider context, the contribution which this small parcel of land would make to the wider grazing management of the landscape is negligible.

- 3) *Promote appropriate woodland management This is particularly important for ancient and semi-natural woodland areas but also relevant to more recently planted woodland areas (e.g. alongside the M4). Appropriate coppicing, pollarding, planting, thinning and management of invasive species and disease should all be encouraged. Ensure that new woodland planting follows the existing pattern of wooded ridges and interconnected valleys: The aim should be to create a more mixed woodland character in areas which have been converted to coniferous monoculture plantation, and to ensure that woodland boundaries are sensitive to landform.*

Response: The baseline for the site was grazing land rather than woodland. However, the management of the proposed network of hedges and tree establishment will be important and is considered within the landscape strategy.

- 4) *Conserve and strengthen existing boundary elements. Seek to prevent further loss or decline in the quality of boundary hedgerows, and encourage restoration/reinstatement of hedgerows within expansive arable fields and around horse paddocks. Preserve the wooded context of settlements, to contain and filter the impact of built form.*

Response: The landscape management is very relevant to the site, since it appears to be a former paddock, and the reinstatement of hedgerow and establishment of trees, connected to the wider landscape, e.g. the adjacent Furze Hill Local Wildlife Site, is intrinsic to the landscape strategy. A landscape management plan should be provided to ensure the long term success of the landscape proposals.

- 5) *Retain the distinction between and individual identity of settlements Retain a sense of distinction between individual settlements through a clear understanding of the role of landform, tree cover and rural buildings in characterising settings and in forming boundaries that conserve and enhance distinctions in character – e.g. the historic farmstead at Henwick, along a rural lane, contained by tree cover and on rising ground, marks a rapid change to a rural landscape from the nearby edge of Thatcham. Avoid extended linear development along roads, which creates a more developed character resulting in the loss of individual settlement identity. More small scale focused development set back from main routes often has less impact on character and can be more readily contained by landscape.*

Response: The development proposals create further linear development along the B4009 road, which is not in keeping with the landscape management guidelines recommended in the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment. However, the built form is single storey and set back from the road, towards the eastern boundary. The surrounding vegetation screens the site relatively well. The proposals are small scale and will have less impact and can be contained within the landscape.

- 6) *Conserve elements that mark a transition between settlement and countryside Where possible retain small, enclosed fields around villages, and farm buildings which contribute positively to rural character.*

Response: The development proposals seek to retain and reinforce the enclosed boundary planting and the small, enclosed field character on the edge of Hermitage Village and therefore is in part keeping with the landscape management guidelines recommended in the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment.

- 7) *Conserve the existing character of rural lanes and public rights of way Avoid measures to ease traffic flow that would have an adverse impact on character. Retain and manage hedgebanks, ditches and verges and replant hedges on banks where these have been lost, including individual oak trees planted at irregular intervals to maintain continuity and enhancement of the existing landscape character. Consider potential to designate Quiet Lanes, and measures to discourage the use of narrow lanes as 'rat runs' or by overly large vehicles – e.g. adequate signage and lower speed limits.*

Response: It is not known whether traffic easing is an objective on this section of the B4009, but the planting of individual oak tree at irregular intervals, to potentially replace any trees which are currently failing/ of poor quality (refer to arboriculture survey) are included within the the landscape strategy, alongside bolstering the native hedgerow with additional planting.

- 8) *Maintain open views from routeways Whilst woodland and hedgerow planting is generally to be encouraged, sporadic long views across open land add to the variety that characterises this area. Gaps between dwellings that offer views across open farmland help to retain rural settlement character.*

Response: This landscape management guideline is not relevant to the site, since there are no long views into or out of the site.

7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.

- 7.1 The site lies within the National Landscape of the North Wessex Downs. The Site is defined in the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment as being within the WH4 Cold Ash Woodland and Heathland Mosaic, within the National Character Area: 116 - Berkshire and Marlborough Downs. Our own local character assessment defines the site as being within Landscape Character Zone 1: Agriculture
- 7.2 My judgement is that the landscape effects overall are Moderate Adverse; but are contained within a small and discrete area. the development proposals do not align with the landscape management guidelines recommended in the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment with some of the site converted from grassland to hardstanding and built form, although this land use change may be reversible. Areas of hard standing have been reduced to a minimum. The landscape proposals include measure to enhance the setting of the site.
- 7.3 The visual assessment has established that the site is currently well contained from adjacent character areas by native vegetation.
- 7.4 I consider that the negative effects of the proposals are limited to within the Appeal Site and do not affect the wider setting of the National Landscape. The proposals do not affect any important landscape features, and the new planting would conserve the landscape setting along the existing road.

GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

GLVIA	Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition, published jointly by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013.
Indirect effects*	Effects that result indirectly from the proposed project because of the direct effects, often occurring away from the site, or as a result of a sequence of interrelationships or a complex pathway. They may be separated by distance or in time from the source of the effects.
Key Landscape* Characteristics	Those combinations of elements which are particularly important to the current character of the landscape and help to give an area its particularly distinctive sense of place.
Landscape character*	A distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occurs consistently in a particular type of landscape and how this is perceived by people. It reflects combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use and human settlement. It creates the particular sense of place of different areas of the landscape.
Landscape designations	Areas protected by law or through planning policies for reason of their landscape qualities e.g. National Parks, AONB and Local Landscape Designations.
Landscape effects	Effects on the landscape as a resource in its own right. Change in the elements, characteristics, character, and qualities of the landscape as a result of development.
Landscape elements	A component part of the landscape, such as trees, hedges, buildings and ponds.
Landscape features	Prominent eye-catching elements, e.g. tree clumps, wooded hill tops, and church towers/spires.
Landscape quality (or condition)*	Based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional, and ecological perspectives. It also reflects the state of repair of individual features and elements which make up the character in any one place.
Landscape qualities	Term used to describe the aesthetic or perceptual and intangible characteristics of the landscape such as scenic quality, tranquillity, sense of wildness or remoteness. Cultural and artistic references may also be described here.
Landscape value*	The relative value that is attached to different landscapes by society. A landscape may be valued by different stakeholders for a wide variety of reasons.
LCA	Landscape Character Area – single unique areas that are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type.
LCT	Landscape Character Type – distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogeneous in character. They are generic in nature may occur in different areas in different parts of the country.
LVIA	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
Magnitude*	A term that combines judgements about the size and scale of the effect. The extent of the area over which has occurred, whether it is reversible or irreversible and whether it is short or long term in duration.
Mitigation	Measures including any process, activity, or design to avoid, reduce, remedy or compensate for adverse environmental impact or effects of a development.
NCA	National Character Areas. Landscape character areas as defined for the whole of England.
Photomontage*	A visualisation which superimposes an image of a proposed development upon a photograph or series of photographs.
Receptor	Physical or perceptual landscape resource, special interest, viewer group or individuals that may be affected by a proposal.
Scale Indicators*	Landscape elements and features of a known or recognisable scale such as houses, trees and vehicles that may be compared to other objects where the scale of height is less familiar, to indicate their true scale.
Sense of Place (genius loci)*	The essential character and spirit of an area: genius loci literally means 'spirit of the place'.

Sensitivity*	A term applied to specific receptors, combining judgements of the susceptibility of the receptor to the specific type of change or development proposed and the value related to that receptor.
Tranquility*	A state of calm and quietude associated with peace, considered to be a significant asset of landscape.
Type or Nature of Effect	Whether an effect is direct or indirect, temporary or permanent, positive (beneficial), neutral or negative (adverse) or cumulative.
Visual amenity*	The overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings which provide an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working and recreating, visiting or travelling through an area.
Visual effect*	Effects on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by people.
Visualisation*	A computer stimulation, photomontage, or other technique illustrating the predicted appearance of a development.

Note: Descriptions marked with an asterisk are identical to those provided in the Third Edition Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment glossary or text.

Appendix A

Landscape Value

This is determined using the criteria within the table below.

Table 1 Landscape Value

Landscape Value	Criteria
High	<p>Typically, designated landscapes including but not limited to World Heritage Site and National Landscapes. Considered to be an important component of the county's character. Landscape character highly distinctive with very few features perceived as either distracting or intrusive.</p> <p>The landscape condition is good, and components are generally well maintained to a high standard. In terms of seclusion enclosure by land use, traffic and movement, light pollution and presence/absence of major infrastructure, the landscape has an elevated of tranquility. Often attracting visitors for the enjoyment of the landscape.</p> <p>Rare or distinctive landscape elements and features are key components that contribute to the landscape character of the area.</p> <p>High importance and rarity, national scale, and limited potential for substitution.</p>
Medium	<p>Typically, locally designated landscape. Typical of many rural landscapes across the UK. Only occasional detracting or intrusive features. Countryside considered to be a distinctive component of the regional or local landscape character.</p> <p>The landscape condition is fair, and components are generally well maintained. In terms of seclusion, enclosure by land use, traffic and movement, light pollution and presence/ absence of major infrastructure, the landscape has a moderate level of tranquility.</p> <p>Some rare or distinctive landscape elements and features that contribute to the landscape character of the area.</p> <p>Medium importance and rarity, regional scale, limited potential for substitution.</p>
Low	<p>Typically, undesignated landscape including urban fringe and rural countryside considered to be of unremarkable character and containing detracting elements.</p> <p>The landscape condition may be poor and components poorly maintained or damaged.</p> <p>In term so seclusion enclosure by land use, traffic and movement, light pollution and presence/absence of major infrastructure, the landscape has limited levels of tranquility. Rare or distinctive elements and features are not notable components that contribute to the landscape character of the area.</p> <p>Low to medium importance and rarity. Local scale</p>
Negligible	<p>Poor quality, degraded landscape with many detracting or intrusive elements and few positive attributes. Would benefit from comprehensive restoration. Very low importance rarity, local scale.</p>

Landscape Susceptibility

This is determined using the criteria within the table below.

Table 2: Landscape Susceptibility

Landscape Susceptibility	Criteria
High	<p>Scale of enclosure – landscapes with a low capacity to accommodate the type of development being proposed owing to the interactions of topography, vegetation cover-built form, etc. Wide open countryside.</p> <p>Nature of land use – landscapes with no or little existing reference or context to the type of development being proposed.</p> <p>Nature of existing elements – landscape with components that are not easily replaced or substituted (e.g. ancient woodland, mature trees, historic parkland)</p> <p>Nature of existing features – landscape where detracting features, major infrastructure or industry is not present or where present has a limited influence on landscape character.</p>
Medium	<p>Scale of enclosure – landscapes with a medium capacity to accommodate the type of development being proposed owing to the interactions of topography, vegetation cover-built form, Wide open countryside.</p> <p>Nature of land use – landscapes with some existing reference or context to the type of development being proposed.</p> <p>Nature of existing elements – landscape with components that are easily replaced or substituted.</p> <p>Nature of existing features – landscape where detracting features, major infrastructure or industry is not present is present and has a noticeable influence on landscape character.</p>
Low	<p>Scale of enclosure – landscapes with a high capacity to accommodate the type of development being proposed owing to the interactions of topography, vegetation cover-built form, etc.</p> <p>Nature of land use – landscapes with extensive existing reference or context to the type of development being proposed.</p> <p>Nature of existing features – landscapes where detracting features, major infrastructure is present and has a dominating influence on landscape character.</p>
Negligible	<p>The proposed development is entirely in keeping with the character of the existing landscape and elements within it.</p>

Sensitivity to change.

This is determined using the criteria within the table below.

The landscape sensitivity to change is determined by combining judgements on landscape value and its susceptibility to change, as shown below:

Table 3: Landscape Sensitivity to change

Susceptibility	Landscape Value			
	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
High	High sensitivity	Medium -High sensitivity	Medium Sensitivity	Low Sensitivity
Medium	Medium - High sensitivity	Medium Sensitivity	Low Sensitivity	Negligible Sensitivity
Low	Medium Sensitivity	Low Sensitivity	Negligible Sensitivity	Negligible Sensitivity
Negligible	Low Sensitivity	Negligible Sensitivity	Negligible Sensitivity	Negligible Sensitivity

Magnitude of change

The magnitude of change to landscape character is assessed using the criteria below

Table 4: Magnitude of landscape change

Magnitude of landscape change	Definition	Effect
High	<p>Size and scale: Introduction of major new elements into the landscape not currently present or some major change to the scale, landform, landcover or pattern of the landscape.</p> <p>Extent of the development area: The proposal would occupy a large proportion of the application site.</p> <p>Duration: Long</p> <p>Reversibility: None – the development would be permanent</p>	<p>Adverse: Extensive loss of resource and or quality and integrity of resource, which serve to damage to key characteristics or elements.</p> <p>Beneficial: Large scale or major improvements of resource quality, extensive restoration or enhancement, major improvement of quality</p>
Medium	<p>Size and scale: Introduction of moderate new elements into the landscape not currently present or some major change to the scale, landform, landcover or pattern of the landscape.</p> <p>Extent of the development area: The proposal would occupy a moderate proportion of the application site.</p> <p>Duration: Moderate</p> <p>Reversibility: The development has a long life span but is not considered permanent. Once removed, it will leave a lasting change in the landscape/ land use.</p>	<p>Adverse: Some loss of resource and or quality and integrity of resource, which serve to damage to key characteristics or elements.</p> <p>Beneficial: Medium scale or moderate improvements of resource quality, extensive restoration or enhancement, major improvement of quality</p>
Low	<p>Size and scale: Introduction of a few new elements into the landscape not currently present or some major change to the scale, landform, landcover or pattern of the landscape.</p> <p>Extent of the development area: The proposal would occupy a small proportion of the application site.</p> <p>Duration: Short</p> <p>Reversibility: The development is temporary in nature but may leave a lasting change in the landscape once removed.</p>	<p>Adverse: Some measurable change in attributes, quality or vulnerability, minor loss of, or alteration to one or more key characteristics, features or elements</p> <p>Beneficial: Minor benefits to or addition to one or more key characteristics, features or elements, some beneficial effect on attribute or a reduced risk of negative effects occurring</p>
Negligible	<p>Size and scale: Introduction of a minor new elements into the landscape not currently present or some major change to the scale, landform, landcover or pattern of the landscape.</p> <p>Extent of the development area: The proposal would occupy a very small proportion of the application site.</p> <p>Duration: Short or temporary</p> <p>Reversibility: The development is reversible but may leave a small change in the landscape once removed.</p>	<p>Adverse: Very minor loss or detrimental alteration to one of more characteristics, features, or elements (Adverse)</p> <p>Very minor benefit to or positive addition of one or more characteristics features or elements (Beneficial)</p> <p>Negligible Adverse or Beneficial loss of resource or improvements</p>
No Change	<p>Size and scale: No new elements introduced into the landscape.</p> <p>Extent of the development area: No new development</p> <p>Duration: No new development, no duration.</p> <p>Reversibility: Fully reversible. No lasting effect.</p>	<p>No loss or alteration of characteristics, features or elements, no observable effects</p>

Significance of Landscape effects

The landscape sensitivity is combined with the magnitude of change to determine the likely effect of the proposals on landscape character (Adverse or Beneficial)

Table 6: Significance of effects

Sensitivity	Magnitude of effects (degree of change)				
	No Change	Negligible	Low	Medium	High
High	No effect	Slight	Slight to moderate	Moderate to large	Large to very large
Medium	No effect	Negligible to slight	Slight	Moderate	Moderate to large
Low	No effect	Negligible to slight	Negligible to slight	Slight	Slight to Moderate
Negligible	No effect	Negligible	Negligible to slight	Negligible to slight	Slight

VISUAL ASSESSEMENT

Value of existing view is determined using the criteria within the table below.

Table 7: Visual Value

Visual Value	Criteria
High	<p>Typically, receptors within or looking towards internationally or nationally designated landscape, areas, and features such as World Heritage Sites, National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Registered Historic Parks, and Gardens. Scheduled Ancient Monuments Grade I and II* listed buildings and other places where the landscape and or feature is the main reason for the visit.</p> <p>People using national trails and other designated routes where the view is likely to be the focus of attention.</p> <p>People living in residential properties.</p> <p>Communities where view contribute to the landscape setting enjoyed by residents in the area.</p> <p>People travelling through the landscape on roads, rail or other routes on recognised scenic routes or where there is a distinct awareness of views of their surroundings and their visual amenity.</p> <p>People walking on national long distant trails or promoted walks, well used rural routes close to urban centres, motorists on designated scenic routes, people walking in nationally designated landscapes. High importance and rarity, national scale, and limited potential for substitution.</p>
Medium	<p>Typically, receptors within, or looking towards, undesignated landscapes, areas, and features of local importance and in places where the landscape and or feature is not necessarily part of the reason for the visit.</p> <p>People engaged in outdoor recreation such as waking local rural footpaths whose attention is likely to be focused on the landscape and or particular views, not on national trails or within a designated landscape.</p> <p>People staying in hotels and healthcare institutions who are likely to appreciate and or benefit from views of their surroundings.</p> <p>Travellers on roads which have an attractive setting or scenic quality (rural or urban).</p> <p>People working in premises where the views are likely to make an important contribution to the setting and or the quality of working life. High or Medium importance and rarity, regional scale, limited potential for substitution.</p>
Low	<p>Typically, receptors in commercial and industrial premises, schools, playing fields etc. where the view is not central to the use.</p> <p>People using main roads, infrequently used and inaccessible PRoW and likely to be traveling for the purpose other than to enjoy the view.</p> <p>Low or medium importance and rarity. Local scale</p>
Negligible	<p>Typically, People moving past the view at high-speed e.g. main roads or motorways and main line railways. Little of no focus on or interest in the view.</p> <p>Very low importance.</p>

Visual Susceptibility

Susceptibility of view is determined using the criteria within the table below.

Table 8: Susceptibility of view

Visual Susceptibility	Criteria
High	Receptors for which the view is of primary importance and are likely to notice even minor change
Medium	Receptors for which the view is important but not the primary focus and are tolerant of some change
Low	Receptors for which the view is incidental or unimportant and is tolerant of a high degree of change.
Negligible	Receptors for which the view is unimportant and is tolerant of a high degree of change.

Visual Magnitude of change

Visual magnitude of change is determined using the criteria within the table below.

Table 9: Visual magnitude of change

Visual Magnitude of change	Criteria
High	<p>Substantial, obvious, loss or addition of features to the view.</p> <p>Major change in the composition of the view. A major proportion of the view may be blocked or occupied by the proposed development.</p> <p>The development introduces colours or forms that draw the eye and are not commonplace in the view.</p> <p>Views may be short distance and direct. Prominent position within the landscape, such as on the skyline or open hillside or open floodplain or plateau.</p> <p>Changes in the view may be visible over a large proportion of the view. The proposed development is permanent and irreversible.</p> <p>Typically, this would be where a development would be obvious to the casual viewer seen in close proximity with a large proportion of the view affected with little or no filtering or background and there would be a great deal of change from the present situation for the long or medium term</p>
Medium	<p>Readily noticeable loss or addition of features in the view.</p> <p>Partial alteration to the existing view and or the introduction of readily noticeable elements in the view.</p> <p>There is some screening or background by landform, woodland and built form. The colours and forms are largely in keeping with the colours and form within the existing landscape.</p> <p>Views may be middle distant direct or oblique.</p> <p>Views may be filtered by vegetation. Partial loss or changes to sites visual function and or contribution.</p> <p>The duration of effect would be considered long term and permanent but is reversible.</p> <p>Typically, this would be where a development would be seen in views for the long or medium term where a moderate proportion of the views is affected. There may be screening or background which minimise the scale or change from the present situation.</p>
Low	<p>The change in the view would not be readily noticeable.</p> <p>The development would form a minor constituent of the view, being partially visible, or at sufficient distance to being limited component of the view.</p> <p>The duration of effect may be considered long term and or permanent but is easily revisable or the duration may be short term.</p> <p>A significant part of the development is screened.</p> <p>It does not lie within a particularly prominent location within the landscape. Introduction of features which already are present in views.</p> <p>Typically, this would be where a moderate or low proportion of the view would be affected for the short term, or the development would be visible for the long term in distant views. Where only a small proportion of the view is affected in the medium term or long term. Where the medium term or long-term effect is reduced due to a high degree of filtering, screening or background or where there is a low scale of change from the existing view.</p>
Negligible	<p>A slight change in the view but barely noticeable to the casual observer. The change can only be perceived using equipment to enhance vision such as binoculars or zoom lenses.</p>
No Change	<p>No loss or alteration of characteristics, features or elements, no observable effect in either direction.</p>

Significance of Visual effects

Visual sensitivity is combined with the magnitude of change to determine the likely effect of the proposals on views (Adverse or Beneficial)

Table 10 Matrix for determining the level of effect on Visual Amenity

Sensitivity of the visual receptor.	Magnitude of effects (degree of change) Effect				
	No Change	Negligible	Low	Medium	High
High	No effect	Slight	Slight to moderate	Moderate to large	Large to very large
Medium	No effect	Negligible to slight	Slight	Moderate	Moderate to large
Low	No effect	Negligible to slight	Negligible to slight	Slight	Slight to Moderate
Negligible	No effect	Negligible	Negligible to slight	Negligible to slight	Slight

June 2020



ASH DIEBACK DISEASE

A GUIDE FOR TREE OWNERS



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THIS GUIDANCE **IS** FOR YOU **IF**:

- You are a homeowner or landowner and have trees on your land
- You think you may have ash trees on your land

THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU TO:

- Understand what ash dieback disease is and its impacts
- Learn to spot ash trees and understand what the signs of ash dieback look like
- Understand your responsibilities
- Understand options for managing affected ash trees
- Understand the value of ash trees and the environmental impact of ash dieback
- Understand the importance of replanting trees where possible and what species to plant

What is ash dieback disease?

Ash dieback is a highly destructive fungal disease affecting ash trees. It causes leaf loss and canopy decline and in some cases causes the trees to die. The disease was first officially recorded in the UK in 2012 and is now widespread across England, Wales and Scotland.

Why is it important?

Ash trees are the third most common tree in Britain, present in woodland, hedgerows, parks and gardens across the country and have much cultural significance in our urban and rural landscapes. They are also valuable habitats for over 1,000 species of wildlife, including a wide range of mammals, birds, invertebrates, plants and lichens.

It is estimated that there are more than 60 million ash trees outside woodlands in the UK and that the majority will become affected with ash dieback in years to come. A proportion of these infected and weakened trees will pose safety risks, especially if they are next to a busy road, public pathway, school or community grounds. Anyone with an ash tree on

their land has a responsibility to ensure that risk posed by the tree is kept within appropriate limits.

The future of ash trees

A small proportion of ash trees may have what's called 'genetic tolerance' to ash dieback, meaning they will survive and reproduce to create the next generation of trees. Therefore, tree owners have an important part to play in understanding the impacts of ash dieback on the environment and protecting tolerant and resistant trees and their associated wildlife wherever possible and safe to do so. **x**



A typical ash tree

1.

What is ash dieback disease?

How will ash trees be affected by ash dieback?

Ash dieback is caused by a fungus called *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (formerly known as *Chalara fraxinea*). It arrived in Europe from Asia during the 1990s and rapidly spread. Although the first official record in Britain was in 2012, later analysis shows that some UK trees were infected with the fungus as early as 2004.

The disease is a serious threat to the future of the common ash tree. Research from the UK and Europe has found that seven or eight out of every 10 ash trees may die (although there are some local variations), but some trees do show some levels of tolerance and may even recover over time.

Some research carried out in France and published in April 2020, suggests that isolated ash trees, such as those growing in hedges or other open areas, may be less affected by ash dieback than those in woodlands. Whether this will be the case in Britain, only time will tell.

The ash dieback fungus progressively damages the vascular tissues of the tree, causing

particular branches to die back by blocking their supply of water and nutrients, hence the name.

Ash dieback causes a range of symptoms including wilted and spotted leaves (see page 12 for more information and images). Most affected ash trees will lose some of the leaves at the top of the tree (which is called its crown). However, ash dieback can affect trees in different ways – for example, some may develop dark patches called ‘basal lesions’ at the base of their trunk, but have no sign of ash dieback in their leaves and branches. This is why it’s important to **consult a tree professional** if you are unsure. ➔



Image © Jon Stokes

Ash trees in a woodland declining due to ash dieback

Once the fungus infects a tree, the dead or dying branches can become brittle and fall. Over time, as the tree loses nutrition, water and the leaves which produce its food, the disease may eventually kill the tree. However, often other opportunistic disease-causing organisms (pathogens), such as honey fungus or shaggy bracket, may cause the eventual death of the tree by accelerating wood decay and tree failure rather than ash dieback itself.



Images © Jon Stokes

Honey fungus



Shaggy bracket fungus

How important are ash trees in Britain and what are their benefits?

Ash trees are hugely valuable native trees and support almost 1,000 species including a huge variety of lichens, invertebrates and other wildlife. They are a valued part of our national treescape, especially in limestone areas such as the Cotswolds, where ash have been dominant and were historically managed as old pollards, particularly for wood fuel.


The annual estimated social and environmental value of ash trees growing outside woodlands is an estimated £230 million. Ash is a precious native species and no one tree can entirely replace it.

Ash dieback will have an impact on local ecosystems and the appearance of many



Image © Jon Stokes

A hedgerow ash in the Cotswolds

urban and rural green spaces we enjoy. However, if we work together across the country to tackle the issue, the disease presents an opportunity to develop UK 'treescapes' that are more resilient to pests, diseases and other threats. 

2.

The science

How is ash dieback spread?

Tiny fungal spores land on the leaves of an ash tree or at the base of the trunk. These wind-borne spores are produced from small white mushroom-like structures, **pictured right**, which grow on last year's fallen ash leaf stalks in the leaf litter.

While the fungus is naturally spread via airborne spores, it can also be spread by moving infected trees through trade, or moving fallen leaves.



Image © Jon Stokes

Are any trees resistant to the disease? Is there a cure?

There is no known cure to this tree disease. However, there is long-term hope as several studies have reported that a low percentage of ash trees – between 1% and 5% of the population – may have a genetic tolerance to ash dieback, meaning they can survive and reproduce to eventually create the next generation of ash trees.

By retaining trees with no or limited signs of ash dieback, owners and tree managers might allow precious ash dieback-tolerant trees to live and reproduce.

In addition, dying and dead ash trees have huge ecological value, especially mature, veteran and ancient trees, so provided that they are managed following current guidance on [tree risk management](#), it's important to keep them in the landscape.

Owners of ash trees in areas open to the public will have to balance conserving ash with managing ash trees which might pose a danger to the public. It is important all owners of ash trees understand their responsibilities ([see page 14](#)). ➔

Does the fungus present a threat to humans or animals?

No, there is no evidence that the fungus can affect or infect humans or animals. The safety threat comes from dead or dying trees falling or dropping branches, causing injury or damage.

How quickly will an infected tree die?

It is not possible to predict how long it will take for a specific tree to decline. The climate, site conditions and local tree cover appear to play a large role in the extent to which trees are affected by the disease. Isolated trees, trees growing in open areas or those in hedges appear to be far less affected than those in a forest environment.

The photographs in **Figure 1** show the change in one tree in Devon over one season (photographs taken on 6.7.2016) ▶

Clearing fallen leaves from around infected trees

As the fungus grows in the leaves that fall on the ground in the autumn, clearing the leaf litter from around the bases of ash trees may reduce the levels of fungus spores present, which may increase the chances of the trees surviving for longer. This action should be considered especially for ancient, veteran or other trees of special importance. Always observe good biosecurity practices – more information can be found on the [government website](#).




Figure 1: Change in one tree over one season

Images from top to bottom: © Rob Wolton, Jon Stokes

and 7.7.2017). The pictures show a 10%-15% decline in the crown of a mature tree in a single season. However, reports show different rates of decline on a site-by-site basis.

Young ash, and those which have been coppiced (cut down to the base to encourage new growth) appear to generally decline from the disease quickly, while some ancient and mature trees, and ash trees outside woodlands, appear to be able to live for many years with the disease. However, mature ash trees with ash dieback can die more quickly if other pathogens, like honey fungus, take advantage of the already weakened tree. Trees have died from ash dieback in as little as two growing seasons.

Where the dark patches called 'basal lesions' are found on the trunks – usually in areas of dense ash populations and wet woodlands – these can make trees unstable and potentially dangerous more quickly. The rot found in these trees is usually associated with other secondary pathogens such as honey fungus and can occur without any obvious dieback symptoms in the crown. This makes identifying potentially 'dangerous' ash trees considerably harder. This is why it's important to learn to identify ash dieback, survey your trees and then get the advice of a qualified tree professional on what action you should take if you find any cause for concern (**See page 17**). 

Stress in trees

The health of a tree can be heavily affected by its living conditions. Conditions that are not good for a tree's health are said to cause 'stress'. These might include: root damage from ploughing, root compaction caused by people walking over the land on top of a tree's roots, building development or utilities works, air pollution levels, or where a grown tree in an open area has been shaded by trees planted too close. Trees in urban settings may experience higher levels of stress, and this stress can make them more susceptible to the symptoms of ash dieback or other pests and diseases.

3.

Spotting ash dieback in your trees

Where do I start?

The general steps that you may need to take to manage your ash trees are:

- 1 Learn to identify ash trees
- 2 Learn to spot symptoms of ash dieback disease
- 3 Survey your ash trees on a regular basis (**see page 17**)
- 4 Consult a qualified, insured tree professional to get some specific advice on the health and risks associated with your ash trees
- 5 Make a decision on whether there are any trees which might require pruning or felling, based on the advice of a professional
- 6 Put a management plan in place and apply for a felling licence if necessary
- 7 Continue monitoring your ash trees
- 8 Replace ash trees that are lost with another species wherever possible (**see page 21**)

How do I recognise an ash tree?

Ash is a very common tree, mostly found in woodland and hedgerows. In Britain, there are approximately 60 million ash trees growing outside woodlands, and an estimated two billion ash trees overall including all saplings and seedlings. ➤

HOW TO SPOT AN ASH TREE



- **Leaves:** Ash leaves are 'compound leaves', comprising three to six pairs of 'leaflets', arranged in opposite pairs with one terminal leaflet at the end of the leaf



One ash leaf comprises many leaflets

- **Seeds:** Ash seeds (called 'keys') are flat single-winged seeds which hang in abundant bunches (sometimes confused with ash leaves wilted by dieback)



Ash seeds

Images © Jon Stokes

Twigs with black leaf buds



- **Twigs and leaf buds:** Ash are easily identified in winter by their smooth twigs that have distinctive black, velvety buds arranged opposite each other.

Grey/brown bark with lichen growing on it



- **Bark:** The bark is pale brown to grey, which fissures as the tree ages. Over 770 species of lichen can live on it.

Height and form



- **Height and form:** When fully grown, ash trees can reach a height of 40 metres. ➔

Ash is most commonly confused with the rowan tree (which is sometimes also called the mountain ash). The main differences are:

- Mature rowan trees are much smaller than ash trees, growing to only 10 metres tall, compared to up to 40 metres in a mature ash tree
- Ash trees have shiny black buds in winter, where rowan trees have brown buds
- Ash flowers are small and black, while rowan flowers are white
- Ash produce seed in the form of winged 'keys', rowan produce berries
- Although both species have 'compound leaves' the whole leaf (all the leaflets) on rowan tree are in staggered pairs on the twig, while ash leaves grow opposite each other

Rowan trees cannot get ash dieback disease, although they can be affected by other diseases such as fireblight, which could lead to confusion. ➡



A compound ash leaf



A compound rowan leaf

Image © Jon Stokes



Ash leaves are opposite each other



Rowan leaves are staggered on the branch



Rowan tree (above), Rowan berries (right)

Image © Creative Commons/E Dronkert



Image © Creative Commons/Siaron James

How can I identify ash dieback in my trees?

It is easiest to spot signs of ash dieback during the summer when trees should be in full leaf, **like the one below**. Ash comes into leaf at different times in the spring, sometimes as late as the end of May, but by mid-June all healthy ash should be in full leaf.

Some affected ash trees will fail to come into leaf at all, while others will 'flush' normally before showing signs of ill-health or dieback later. It's important to bear in mind that failure to flush or dieback in ash can have many causes, **so if an ash tree looks unhealthy, it does not automatically mean it is affected with ash dieback.** ➔



Image © Jon Stokes

A healthy ash tree

SIGNS OF POSSIBLE ASH DIEBACK

- Spots on the leaves
- Wilted leaves
- Branches losing their leaves and 'dying back'
- Dark patches, called lesions, on the branches and/or trunk

The symptoms are easily visible in young trees, but they can be harder to recognise in more mature trees. Unfortunately, lesions can be caused by a number of factors including other fungi and bacteria and so dark patches alone do not necessarily mean the tree has ash dieback. For more detailed information on lookalike signs and symptoms of ash dieback, see the [Observatree guidance](#) here.

Anyone responsible for managing ash trees should learn to recognise the visual symptoms of ash dieback so they can assess the current health of their ash tree population and then consult, if appropriate, with a tree professional on what action they might take.

Once you know what you are looking for, you should survey your trees to assess their health. If you spot signs of ash dieback, you should survey them each year to track the progress of the disease.

ASSESSING THE CROWN HEALTH OF YOUR ASH TREE

Suffolk County Council has developed a four-part system for assessing the health of an ash tree's crown. While other problems such as drought stress or root problems can cause crowns to look sparse and thin, crown health is a quick and useful gauge of the tree's overall health.

As crown health is not the only symptom of ash dieback, if you are unsure, consult with a qualified tree professional. ➤



Spots on the leaves



Wilted leaves



Branches losing their leaves



Dark patches on the trunks

All images © Jon Stokes

By looking at the crown of an ash tree, you should be able to place it in one of the following classes. Don't worry if you're not completely sure – just make your best guess:

CLASS 1 100%–76% of the crown remains

CLASS 2 75%–51% of the crown remains

CLASS 3 50%–26% of the crown remains

CLASS 4 25%–0% of the crown remains

This system does not allow you to make specific management judgements about the safety of any individual tree, but it helps to identify trees that may need attention.

If you are concerned about the extent of decline in your tree's canopy (especially if it starts to look like a class 3 or 4 tree), you need to decide how to manage your tree. It is usually best to consult a qualified tree professional who can survey your tree or trees, assessing their condition and the circumstances in which they are growing, to advise you on what action to take. If the tree is assessed as presenting an unacceptable risk to people or property, felling may be recommended. It is important to seek guidance quickly if you think your tree may be in a dangerous condition.

Otherwise, pruning work such as the removal of dead wood, a reduction of the crown, or the removal of a specific limb might manage the safety risk while allowing the tree to continue providing benefits to the landscape and to nature.

For your management options for an ash tree **see page 16.** **x**



All images © Gary Battell

4.

Your responsibilities

Managing the risk from trees is the responsibility of the owners and managers of the land on which they grow. If your ash tree or one of its branches falls on someone or someone else's property, you may be liable.

Understanding the law

Under both the civil law and criminal law, an owner of land on which a tree stands has responsibilities for the health and safety of those on or near the land and has potential liabilities arising from the falling of a tree or branch. The civil law gives rise to duties and potential liabilities to pay damages in the event of a breach of those duties. The criminal law gives rise to the risk of prosecution in the event of an infringement of the criminal law. Further details can be found in the National Tree Safety Group publication **'Common sense risk management of trees'**.

Following official guidance

To help landowners understand the risk of harm posed by their trees and to manage such risk in a reasonable, balanced and proportionate way, national guidance has been produced by the National Tree Safety Group (NTSG) which should be followed by all tree owners.

NTSG's approach follows five key principles:

- Trees provide a wide variety of benefits to society
- Trees are living organisms that naturally lose branches or fall

- The overall risk to human safety is extremely low
- Tree owners have a legal duty of care
- Tree owners should take a balanced and proportionate approach to tree safety management

If you have any concerns about the health of your ash trees, you should consult a tree professional such as your Local Authority Tree Officer, or a qualified tree professional (see page 17).

Balancing safety with ecological benefits

Reasonable public safety must be the top priority when assessing what action to take on the trees you own. Levels of risk will range from low to high. Examples of locations where trees may present high levels of risks are: roads, car parks, railways, well-used public spaces, playgrounds, schoolgrounds and public right of ways.

Where ash trees pose a low safety risk, for example trees in hedges between two fields with no public access, they should be left to decline naturally so they can continue to contribute benefits to the environment (see page 17). ➤

5.

Options for managing affected ash trees

What are my options for managing my affected ash trees?

To decide which management option is most suitable for your ash trees, consider:

- Roughly what percentage of the crown has died?
- What risk does that tree pose to humans, animals or property?
- Can you mitigate the risk by means other than pruning or felling the tree (e.g. moving a pathway or a seat that is under the tree)?
- Is the tree old, or does it have a rich history worthy of preservation (ancient and veteran trees possess special cultural and ecological attributes)?
- Is the tree showing signs of tolerance to the disease?

NOTE: THESE ARE SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS – THE LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY REMAINS WITH YOU AS THE TREE OWNER. WHEN IN DOUBT, CONSULT A QUALIFIED PROFESSIONAL FOR ADVICE.

MANAGEMENT POSSIBILITIES

There are a range of tree management options that can be considered for trees affected by ash dieback. These include:

- Retain the tree with no work – provided the risk level is acceptable
- Deadwood removal – prune dead wood and branches showing marked symptoms of dieback to reduce the risk from falling branches
- Pollarding/topping: if the tree is posing an unacceptable risk to people or property, reduce its height by removing all the upper branches and allowing it to regrow
- Coppicing – cut the tree to the base and allow it to regrow
- Felling – fell the tree and prevent regrowth. The larger the trees, the more likely the wood will be of habitat value. Where

possible, the felled wood should be left in situ in as large pieces as possible. See guidance from the [Ancient Tree Forum](#).

Each of these options carries different benefits and challenges. To decide which management option is most suitable, consider:

- which option manages the risks most effectively?
- what is your purpose in taking action? Do you want to retain trees where possible, or remove all risk?

The final decisions will need to be made by the landowner but professional advice from a competent tree professional will be invaluable. To find a local professional, consult your Local Authority Tree Officer, or see [the advice from the Arboricultural Association](#) or the [Institute of Chartered Foresters](#).

HOW DO I PUT AN ONGOING PLAN FOR TREE MANAGEMENT IN PLACE?

The National Tree Safety Group (NTSG) provides the following guidance for householders to ensure you are meeting your responsibilities:

- You don't need a written tree safety 'policy', but you should have a 'management plan' either written down or implicitly understood. This can be as simple as having a set of processes agreed between yourself and anyone else who manages trees on your land (a gardener, maintenance staff) for how you ensure your trees are safe to enjoy
- In order to inspect your trees, you should walk around your garden once a year in late summer/autumn. If your trees look sound and healthy with no obvious defects, that's all you need to do
- A tree or branch with no leaves on it in summer is probably dead. If it is a large tree, or a branch at height, it may be dangerous for you to remove it, so you will need to employ a competent, fully insured tree surgeon
- If your tree has what looks like a fungus on it, [look it up](#) to check what its presence means or get advice from a suitably knowledgeable and experienced person ➡

As ash dieback spreads, the number of ash trees with problems will rise. Tree managers should adapt their tree management plans to take this into account – this may include carrying out more frequent inspections of affected trees, especially if they are alongside a road or path or other high-risk sites.

When you've decided on a course of action, you should:

- Familiarise yourself with and observe all relevant tree and environmental legislation ([see page 20](#))
- Ensure that trained, qualified and insured contractors carry out the work
- Wherever possible, re-plant trees with an appropriate species ([see this guidance from the Forestry Commission](#))

WHERE CAN I GO FOR SPECIFIC ADVICE ON MY TREES?

The final decision on what action to take will need to be made by you, the tree owner, but you should seek professional advice from a fully insured tree management professional who holds the LANTRA Professional Tree Inspection Certificate. To find a local professional, consult your Local Authority Tree Officer, or see [advice from the Arboricultural Association](#) or the [Institute of Chartered Foresters](#).

It's important to note that only trained and

experienced tree surgeons or forestry workers should do work on ash trees affected by ash dieback. Be aware that rogue trader tree contractors operate in some areas. Seek advice from your Local Authority if you're unsure about a contractor.

HOW DO I CONDUCT AN ASH SURVEY?

Local Authorities in [Norfolk](#) have produced guidance on conducting annual ash surveys to assess the risk posed by ash dieback symptoms, which they have kindly shared below:

- Inspect for ash dieback in the summer (mid-June to mid-September) when trees are in leaf and record the percentage of crown 'missing'
- Where possible, take photos so you can compare the changes in the trees between inspections
- If you have many trees, prioritise inspection of your trees by risk. For example, you might start with large trees beside roads or pathways, and inspect these trees most regularly
- Unless trees need urgent safety work, plan tree work outside of the bird nesting season (February – August)

WOULDN'T IT JUST BE EASIER TO FELL MY ASH TREES NOW?

Healthy looking ash trees should not be felled in anticipation of the disease, unless there are other overriding management requirements to do so. Ash dieback is having a serious impact ➤

on our treescape, and whatever we can do to retain trees in the landscape where safe to do so increases the chance that the next generation of ash trees will be able to grow and thrive.

Declining ash trees that may eventually die, can also continue to contribute ecological benefits if kept in the landscape for as long as possible. Therefore, where safe to do so, please consider keeping your ash trees in the landscape, and replace lost trees with other species.

MY TREE(S) MAY POSE A RISK TO THE PUBLIC – WHAT DO I NEED TO CONSIDER?

If your tree(s) are seriously affected by ash dieback and are, for example, in an area of public access or next to a road or park, you may have to notify other organisations and/or take legislation into account. For example:

- Are there any constraints from the Local Planning Authority, e.g. does the tree have a Tree Preservation Order, or do you live in a Conservation Area? (**see page 19**)
- Do you need a felling licence? (**see page 19**)
- Is your tree along a roadside or railside? If so, you should contact the local Highway Authority (e.g. your County Council) or Network Rail before undertaking any tree work
- Is the tree host to any European Protected Species, e.g. bats? (**see page 20**)
- Is the land protected as a designated site such as a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) or national nature reserve (NNR)? (**see page 21**)
- Might you be in breach of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WACA) 1981? (**see page 20**)

Is there any money to help with the costs of managing my ash tree?

Currently there is no central or local government financial support for private individuals managing their trees with ash dieback in the non-woodland environment. It is the responsibility of the landowner to fund the management of the trees on their property, including the risks posed by ash dieback. Support for work in woodlands is available through Forestry Commission grants – see [here](#). ➤



Image © Jon Stokes

Ancient ash trees, including living, dying or dead trees which have been managed down to the main stem, can have enormous ecological benefit

What do I do if my ash tree is protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) or grows in a conservation area?

If you have an ash tree which is protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), subject to certain exemptions, you must obtain formal permission from your Local Planning Authority, e.g. your District Council, to undertake work on this tree. That is, unless a felling licence would normally be required, in which case you should apply for the licence and declare the presence of the TPO on the application. If you live in a conservation area and want to undertake work on an ash tree which has ash dieback, you must notify your Local Planning Authority at least six weeks in advance. This gives the planning authority an opportunity to place a TPO on the tree if considered appropriate. There are some exceptions to these rules which differ in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, so consult your Local Planning Authority first.

Do I need a felling licence?

Tree felling is a legally controlled activity and you usually need permission to fell growing trees, including diseased ones. Licences are free and are issued by the Forestry Commission (in England) usually for a five-year period. Most felling licences will contain conditions that require felled trees or areas of woodland to be replaced by replanting or being allowed to regenerate. You generally don't require a felling license to fell single trees that are standing in a garden although other permissions may be needed.

Some exemptions exist to the need for a felling licence, including:

- There is an immediate risk of serious harm and urgent work is needed on a tree to remove the risk
- Felling which yields less than 5m³ of timber, to allow for very small-scale felling works. For example, a tree with a mid-trunk diameter of approx. 60cm and which stands 10-15m tall will generate c5m³ of timber. You can find out more about [estimating timber volumes here](#)
- All trees that are standing in a garden. However, for larger estates or residences of unusual composition, land attached to a dwelling is not automatically considered to be a garden by the Forestry Commission.

There are no exemptions for diseased ash trees and the Forestry Commission therefore expects that most ash tree felling in response to ash dieback will be permitted through the use of an approved felling licence, unless the usual exemptions apply.

It's important to note that, in certain circumstances you may still need permissions from other organisations before you begin felling trees (see Tree Preservation Orders in Section 5 and Wildlife & Countryside Act and other environmental legislation in Section 6). Further information can be found in [Tree Felling, Getting Permission](#) and [Operations Note 46a](#), both by the Forestry Commission.

Guidance varies from country to country. You can find out more specific information on felling licences and exemptions in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the links below.

- [England](#) | • [Northern Ireland](#)
- [Scotland](#) | • [Wales](#) 

6.

Conservation and promoting a healthy treescape

Keeping ash trees in the landscape for the future

The Tree Council, Defra and the Forestry Commission advocate that ash trees that do not pose a health and safety risk should be retained in the landscape wherever possible so they can continue to provide biodiversity benefits.

We strongly encourage all tree owners to replace ash trees lost by replanting other species. We hope that resistant ash trees will also regenerate naturally from seed.

What do I need to know about the Wildlife and Countryside Act?

All birds, their nests and eggs, are protected by law and it is thus an offence, with certain exceptions, to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird
- Intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built

It is therefore necessary to ensure that any management work on an ash tree does not disturb nesting birds. If you think you have nesting birds using your ash tree consult a tree professional (**see page 17**).

What do I need to do about European Protected Species (EPS)?

If there are rare, threatened or protected species in an ash tree (such as bats which may use holes in an old ash tree), specific advice is needed to protect them. It is illegal to:

- Capture, kill, disturb or injure them (on purpose or by not taking enough care)
- Damage or destroy their breeding or resting places (even accidentally)

To understand the law on protected species see the [gov.uk website](https://www.gov.uk), which shows how to apply for a protected species licence. If you think you have bats or other protected species using your ash tree consult a tree professional (**see page 17**). ▶



Image ©Commons / Allan Hopkins

A garden warbler in an ash tree

What do I do about ash trees in parks, public open spaces and heritage sites?

In public open spaces and public parks, the safety risks posed by ash dieback will be managed by the Local Authority or landowner, who will be responsible for managing their trees. If you see an ash tree that concerns you, contact the owners, describing the location and condition of the tree(s) in question.

What do I do if my ash trees are in a designated site of special scientific interest (SSSI) or a national nature reserve (NNR) etc?

Natural England and the Forestry Commission have produced specific guidance on how to manage ash trees in protected sites. For details, see [here](#).

What species should I replace ash with?

There is no one tree that can replace ash. However, **aspen, alder, field maple, sycamore, birch, rowan, oak and disease-resistant elm** are all good choices.

Your choice depends on why the replacement tree is being planted – is it for timber, wildlife or aesthetics? You might consider the following factors:

- Ash trees have a big beneficial impact on soil quality. **Alder** and **lime** leaves have similar qualities, as do to a smaller extent **sycamore, field maple** and **aspen**
- Many of the generalist birds and mammals that feed on ash can also be found on **oak** and **beech, sycamore, birch** and **hazel** ➔



A mature oak (left), and a mature sycamore (right)

Images © Jon Stokes

- For the specialist ash related insects, mosses and lichens, disease-resistant **elm** is the best substitute, followed by **sycamore, aspen, oak** and **hazel**

Alternative tree selection also varies depending on the conditions of the site where the tree will grow and the type of location, such as a hedgerow, garden or park.

New ash trees can be allowed to grow from seed (natural regeneration), but it is likely that most of these young trees may die from ash dieback themselves. Of course, any that survive may be the future of our ash population and should be nurtured carefully.

It is now theoretically possible to buy ash trees from nurseries within Britain and Europe. However, The Tree Council cannot recommend the purchase or planting of any ash trees at this stage, as there are currently no guaranteed disease-resistant strains available on the market.

An Ash Dieback Resilience Group has been set up in Devon and **suggests the following:**

- 1 Act now to minimise the landscape impact of ash tree loss – start promoting new trees and taking better care of existing trees
- 2 Use the Devon 3/2/1 formula: plant at least 3 new trees for loss of a large tree, 2 for a medium tree and 1 tree for a small tree
- 3 Promote natural regeneration (letting new trees grow from the natural seeds) wherever possible, particularly in woodlands
- 4 Grow the right trees in the right places in the right ways and give them the right aftercare
- 5 Encourage a diverse range of trees to develop a resilient landscape
- 6 When choosing species, consider local factors such as what trees are characteristic of the area, soil type, management requirements, local stresses
- 7 For wildlife, landscape and woodfuel, choose native species, or those well established in the British Isles, such as sycamore, wild pear, crab apple or white willow. In urban areas it is more acceptable to use species from other parts of the world
- 8 Reduce the risks of introducing new diseases by only planting trees grown in Britain, by reputable nurseries ▶

Ancient, veteran and heritage trees

Ancient, veteran and heritage trees are irreplaceable. They have great ecological, cultural and amenity value.

Much of the value of these trees can be retained for a long time, even after they have died. There is also some evidence that ancient and veteran trees may be more tolerant to ash dieback than other ash trees.

Therefore, when considering what action to take on such a tree, the advice of an experienced tree consultant who is knowledgeable in the care of ancient trees and their management for reasonable public safety should be sought. They will be able to advise on the level of risk posed and help you understand your options. For example, in some circumstances moving the 'target' (i.e. who or what might be harmed) by fencing off an informal footpath

may be a simpler and less costly option than removal or carrying out drastic tree surgery.

If there are no health and safety reasons that demand work to ancient, veteran, heritage or any other isolated ash trees, where possible the trees should be left to decline naturally. If leaf litter gathers around the base of these trees, it should be removed and destroyed (such as by composting), to reduce the levels of the fungus present. ▶

Terminology:

Ancient trees are those which have reached a great age in comparison with others of the same species.

Veteran trees can be any age, but will have ancient characteristics such as heartrot or hollowing of the trunk or major limbs.

Heritage trees are trees that are part of our history and culture, and can be connected with specific historic events or people.

Source: Ancient Tree Forum



Image © Jon Stokes

An ancient ash

About this guidance:

- This guide was produced by The Tree Council with expert input from the following organisations:

- Defra
- Forestry Commission
- Forest Research
- Natural England
- Arboricultural Association
- Ancient Tree Forum
- London Tree Officers Association
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- National Tree Safety Group
- Suffolk County Council
- Norfolk County Council

With thanks to all who have helped develop and review this guidance.


- The data in this document are solely the view of The Tree Council and contributors. The authors do not accept any liability for any loss incurred as a result of relying on its contents
- To find a qualified tree consultant, visit the [Arboricultural Association](#) or the [Institute of Chartered Foresters](#)

- There are a variety of online resources available to help with identifying ash dieback, including:

- [The Forestry Commission dieback identification advice](#)
- [The Observatree ash dieback identification guide](#)
- [The Tree Council guide to symptoms in large trees](#)
- [Arboricultural Association Ash Dieback Guidance for Tree Owners, Managers, Contractors and Consultants](#)

- [The National Tree Safety Group](#) (NTSG) provides detailed guidance on dealing with ash dieback, which should be followed by all owners of trees

- This guidance is in line with the government recommendations in the [Tree Health Resilience Strategy](#), published in May 2018

- For more information on managing individual ash trees affected by ash dieback, see the [Forestry Commission Operations Note 46a](#) 

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ASH DIEBACK DISEASE

A GUIDE FOR TREE OWNERS

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Registered charity number 279000



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

