

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL DECISION

DECISION OF: COUNCILLOR MIKE SOLOMON. THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES



WITH ADVICE FROM: THE DIRECTOR OF PLACE; AND IN CONSULTATION WITH CLLR JOHN CROCKFORD-HAWLEY (HERITAGE AND REGENERATION CHAMPION)

DECISION NO: 21/22 DP 161

SUBJECT: TREE FELLING PROPOSAL FOR WORLEBURY CAMP HILLFORT

KEY DECISION: NO

REASON: The decision is less than £500,000 and is not significant in terms of its effects on communities living in two or more wards.

BACKGROUND:

Worlebury Camp is a large Iron Age hillfort located on a limestone promontory to the north of Weston-super-Mare. It sits at the western spur of Worlebury Hill covering an area of approximately 10 hectares, within the larger Weston Woods (130 hectares). It is afforded the highest protection for a heritage asset in England, as a Scheduled Monument (National Heritage List for England number: 1011260).

There is evidence of human activity on Worle Hill since the Neolithic, but permanent settlement occurred in the Iron Age, around 2,300 years ago. Worlebury Camp is the earliest example of settlement within the immediate environs of Weston-super-Mare. Worlebury was one of the first detailed examinations of a hillfort in England, first excavated in the 1850s and again in the 1880s. The finds and evidence recovered during these excavations has the potential to provide an exciting and informative insight into the lives of our forebears.

Weston Woods and the land within which the hillfort sits is owned and managed by North Somerset Council. Worlebury Camp was placed on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register in 2016, categorised as vulnerable, with the principal threats being trees and vegetation.

In response to a wide range of concerns about its condition funding was successfully sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund of £10,000 in December 2017. The grant's purpose was to provide an archaeological condition survey to identify the threats and risks to the scheduled monument, and the findings were used to help inform the preparation of a Management Plan which was subject to public consultation between 12th October and 9th November 2018 and has been approved under Decision No. 18/19 DE 385.

The Management Plan provides a framework for coordinated management of this outstanding example of an Iron Age hillfort in North Somerset and to remove it from Historic England’s Heritage at Risk register. By implementing the objectives set out in the Management Plan, it is also hoped that Worlebury Camp Hillfort will become a destination of its own and attract new visitors to Weston-super-Mare.

The following objectives were identified in the management plan:

- Removal of primary threat to the hillfort (tree & vegetation cover)
- Increasing awareness of the archaeological and historical importance of the hillfort
- Improving understanding and interpretation through a programme of research and analysis
- Involving the local community in the management and preservation of the hillfort
- Improving links with Weston-super-Mare town centre, its schools, and the Museum
- Develop the full recreational potential of the heritage asset and restore the limestone grassland

In order to deliver these improvements, the National Lottery Heritage Fund has been identified as a key source of finance especially because of their existing support through the £10k grant previously mentioned.

A key element of the works relates to the need to fell trees to protect the hillfort; and to remove the risk posed by ash dieback disease. The Forestry Commission have already granted a felling licence that enables us to remove all trees on the 10.3 hectares of the Scheduled Monument and Historic England have provided Scheduled Monument Consent for the operation to remove the trees. Table 1 describes the breakdown of proposed tree felling on the hillfort. These operations are also illustrated on the map in Appendix A.

Activity	Map colour (see Appendix A)	Total area (hectares)	Total felling area (approx. ha)
Remove ash trees and thin out holm oaks by 30%	Blue	1.6	0.472
Northern slope – no management proposed as part of the lottery application	Beige	2.9	0.0
Existing open space – glade and ramparts	Incorporated in Green	1.4	0.0
Clear fell (except key native species)	Green	4.4	4.169
Total		10.3	4.641

Table 1 – tree felling proposals of the hillfort

This shows that under half of the hillfort area will be clear felled of trees (this is just under 4% of the whole woodland). Ash dieback disease is already present on the Hillfort and the clear fell area is dominated by ash trees and thus requires action to remove risks to visitors irrespective of plans to protect the hillfort. It is also important to note that there may be slight changes to these proposals because tree felling requires operational decisions to be made by contractors as they work.

DECISION:

That the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Service, in consultation with the Director of Place and Cllr John Crockford-Hawley (Heritage and Regeneration Champion) approves:

The tree felling proposals described in Table 1 and illustrated in Appendix A

REASONS:

The hillfort is a unique feature of Weston-super-Mare's landscape and history, but it is currently hidden from view. Removal of trees will open up the hillfort, making the archaeology more visible and intelligible, as well as removing risks to the archaeology itself.

Removal of trees in this area will also attract new visitors hoping to explore this nationally important archaeological site, and also provide a larger open recreational space on the edge of Weston Woods for residents and visitors alike.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

None

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The estimated costs associated with felling the trees is £60,000.

The cost for felling the trees is being addressed as part of a wider lottery application to improve the hillfort, if the funding bid is successful the grant funding will be used to fund the costs associated with decision.

If the lottery bid is unsuccessful the ash trees will be felled as part of the Council's wider, ongoing commitment to dealing with ash dieback. This will be subject to identifying funding for the ash dieback management plan.

LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979
Felling Licence, Forestry Act

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Removal of non-native and invasive trees/species. Restoration of limestone grassland will provide a wider variety of biodiversity and habitats within Weston Woods.

CONSULTATION

The Management Plan was subject to a period of public consultation during October and November 2018. Responses were incorporated into the final version, which was adopted in November 2018.

As part of the application for the felling licence to the Forestry Commission, further public consultation was held in February 2020. Letters were sent to all properties adjacent the hillfort (within a buffered area), and the wider public were also encouraged to provide responses on the proposals.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Lottery application is unsuccessful – existing resources will be diverted to remove Ash trees as part of our emerging ash dieback action plan which will inevitably help to remove

trees from the most vulnerable parts of the hillfort. However, this will significantly increase the time it takes to remove the hillfort from the 'at risk' register. Other sources of funding would be sought to deliver the other objectives of the management plan.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? No – this will be addressed through the tender exercise for the tree felling operation.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

The removal of ash trees contributes to the wider Council issue of addressing ash dieback across all Council land.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Map illustrating tree felling proposals on the hillfort

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Management Plan & Archaeological Condition Survey - <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/hillfort>

DP 138 Lottery Grant Application

Felling licence - Application ref: 018/44912/2018

Scheduled Monument consent – S00203042

SIGNATORIES:

DECISION MAKER(S):


Signed:
Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Services

Date: 24 August 2021.

WITH ADVICE FROM:


Signed: Director of Place

Date: 18 August 2021.

Appendix A - Map illustrating tree felling proposals on the hillfort

Worlebury Camp Hillfort – indicative felling plan *(These maps are for illustrative purposes only)*



