

**MINUTES of the Planning Committee of Melksham Without Parish Council  
held on Monday, 8 April 2024 at Melksham Without Parish Council Offices  
(First Floor), Melksham Community Campus, Market Place,  
Melksham, SN12 6ES at 7.00pm**

**Present:** Councillors Richard Wood (Chair of Planning); Alan Baines (Vice Chair of Planning); Mark Harris and Peter Richardson

**Officer:** Teresa Strange, Clerk

**In attendance:** Wiltshire Councillor Phil Alford (Melksham Without North & Shurnhold) & 36 members of public

**In attendance via zoom:** 7 members of the public

**474/23 Welcome, Announcements & Housekeeping**

Councillor Wood welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through the fire evacuation procedures for the building. He informed everyone that the meeting was being recorded to aid the production of the minutes and would be uploaded to YouTube, then deleted once the minutes had been approved.

**475/23 To receive Apologies and approval of reasons given**

Apologies were received from Councillor Pafford who was at a funeral out of County, Councillor Glover who was undertaking work at Guides HQ and Councillor Chivers who was in hospital.

**Resolved:** To accept and approve the reasons for absence.

**476/23 Declarations of Interest**

**a) To receive Declarations of Interest**

As Community Action Whitley & Shaw (CAWS) were coordinating a campaign against proposals for a battery storage facility north of Whitley, Councillor Richardson as Chair of CAWS declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 8 on the proposals by Lime Down Solar.

**b) To consider for approval any Dispensation Requests received by the Clerk and not previously considered**

None received.

**c) To note standing Dispensations relating to planning applications**

To note the Parish Council has a dispensation lodged with Wiltshire

Council dealing with S106 agreements relating to planning applications within the parish.

- 477/23 To consider holding items in Closed Session due to confidential nature** *Under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and representatives of the press and broadcast media be excluded from the meeting during consideration of business where publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.*

Councillor Wood advised item 12(a)(ii) regarding an update on the Neighbourhood Plan (NHP#2) and 13(c) Contact with Developers be held in closed session.

**Resolved:** To hold item 12(a)(ii) and 13(c) in closed session.

**478/23 Public Participation**

Standing Orders were suspended to allow members of the public to speak to the Planning Committee.

**178a Woodrow Road**

A representative from Vardent Developments was in attendance to update the Planning Committee on proposals for 178a Woodrow Road following submission of their recent application for 4 dwellings on the site (PL/2024/01559). Following receipt of feedback on proposals, they now proposed to reduce the number of dwellings on the site to two. They were also in receipt, via their solicitors, of the pre-planning advice received for a previous application for two dwellings. An extension request had been given and a revised application would be submitted shortly.

The developers were informed the Planning Committee would be making their observations to the revised proposal in due course, once in receipt of the new plans.

**Lime Down Solar – battery storage facility north of Top Lane, Whitley**

34 members of public (and 7 via zoom) from Whitley and Shaw were in attendance to voice their concerns at proposals for a battery storage facility north of Top Lane. (These comments have been included in the Council's response to the Lime Down consultation Min 481(e)/23) to avoid duplication in the minutes as all the comments were taken on board for the council's own response to the consultation).

Wiltshire Councillor Phil Alford informed the meeting the planning application would be considered by the Secretary of State and not Wiltshire Council as it was a national infrastructure project. Wiltshire

Council would be a formal consultee though and will be able to comment on proposals once the application had been submitted.

Discussion is still ongoing on how Wiltshire Council would provide feedback on the proposals, but would be focused on planning policy reasons. Councillor Alford confirmed Wiltshire Council had pre-application discussions with Lime Down Solar in January.

Confirmation was sought that specialist officers at Wiltshire Council, such as drainage, heritage etc would be called upon to help inform Wiltshire Council's response. Wiltshire Councillor Alford confirmed this would be the case.

He also confirmed that Wiltshire Council would not be responding to the current public consultation.

Standing Orders were reinstated.

**479/23 To consider the following new Planning Applications:**

No new planning applications had been received for consideration.

**480/23 Revised Plans:** To comment on any revised plans on planning applications received within the required **timeframe (14 days):**

**[PL/2024/00631](#): Mavern House, Corsham Road, Shaw.  
Proposed 1 and a half storey 4-bedroom dwelling (resubmission of PL/2022/09196)**

**Comments:** Whilst having no objections, the parish council do have reservations regarding pedestrian access onto School Lane from the site, as well as the manoeuvrability of vehicles onto School Lane from the property.

The parish council also reiterated their previous comment with regard to querying where the bins for the property will be emptied.

Attention is drawn to comments made by residents with regard to the drainage of the site.

**481/23 Lime Down Solar Farm Public Consultation:**

**a) To note comments of residents to proposals**

Members noted the various comments received from members of public to the consultation that had been copied to the parish council.

**b) To note Wiltshire Council's reasoning for refusing a battery storage facility at Somerford Farm, Brinkworth PL/2022/02824**

Members noted the reasons for Wiltshire Council refusing a battery storage facility at Somerford Farm, Brinkworth in March 2024 and felt that the comments were entirely attributable to the proposal for battery storage north of Whitley and should be quoted in the response to the consultation. See Min 481(e)/23.

**c) To note Melksham Neighbourhood Plan policies (adopted and draft revised) for Renewable Energy installation (Policy 2).**

Members noted policy 2 in the current NHP#1 and Policy 2 in the reviewed draft neighbourhood plan (NHP#2) regarding Local Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Generation proposals. It also noted the relevant Renewable Energy policies in the adopted Wiltshire Council Core Strategy (Policy 42) and in the draft Local Plan (Policy 86).

**d) To approve notes of meeting held on 18 March regarding proposed battery storage facility north of Whitley with Lime Down Solar**

As per the Parish Council policy, the notes from the meeting held on 18 March are included in the minutes below:

Those present at the meeting included Councillors Richard Wood, Chair of Planning; Alan Baines, Vice Chair of Planning; David Pafford, Vice Chair of Council; Mark Harris; Peter Richardson; Wiltshire Councillor Phil Alford (Melksham Without North & Shurnhold); Teresa Strange, Clerk Melksham Without (via Zoom); Lorraine McRandle, Parish Officer, Melksham Without; Natasha Worrall, Project Development Manager, Island Green Power and Beth Motley, Director of Energy & Utilities, Counter Context

**Overview of Project**

The proposed solar park could provide around 500 megawatts of solar energy and provide enough clean affordable electricity to power around 115,000 homes.

Proposals comprise the installation of solar photovoltaic panels (pv) north of the M4, Hullavington and South West of Malmesbury, as well as an onsite energy storage system, plus infrastructure to connect the scheme with underground cabling into the national grid at Melksham (Beanacre) sub-station and covers approximately 2000 ha of land.

Land north of Whitley is proposed to house the battery storage facility for the site and is one of two sites currently being considered, with the other site being considered co-located with the proposed site for the

solar panels north of the M4 (Hullavington). Technical surveys are still to be undertaken, such as environment surveys, as well as further consultation work. They are awaiting feedback from various stakeholders before a decision is made on the location of the battery storage facility.

There will be a cable corridor to the sub-station in Melksham, however, the exact location has yet to be established, as survey work is still taking place. If the battery storage site at Whitley was not chosen, the cable corridor would run from the solar/battery storage site north of the M4.

Wiltshire Councillor Alford explained at the meeting with Wiltshire Council he had raised concerns about the visual impact and flooding and raised a concern at the impact on ecology and wildlife around the site, noting the proximity of a badger set, great crested newts, bats and otters, as well as other wildlife.

Councillor Richardson as a representative for the Beanacre, Shaw, Whitley & Blackmore Ward, noted the concerns of residents of Whitley/Shaw were as follows:

- Impact on heritage, particularly the Roman Road to the north of the site and course of Wansdyke.
- Impact on listed buildings in the vicinity, particularly those on the north side Top Lane.
- Impact on the setting and vista of the landscape.
- Impact on the medieval farming land at Northey Farm.
- Loss of greenfield/agricultural land and whether there is a more suitable brownfield site for the facility in the area.
- Potential to exacerbate existing flooding issues in the village.
- The impact of noise/vibrations for those living nearby.
- Is there a need for another solar farm/battery storage facility, given the proliferation already of such facilities in Wiltshire.
- Impact on wildlife, it was noted there was significant bat populations at Park Lane Quarry which are protected species.

The following questions were raised:

Q: Will you respond to each individual response and do investigative work and do you do this prior to choosing a site or after?

A: An Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report will shortly be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, which sets out the methodology of the environmental assessment and will include what investigative work/surveys are intended to be undertaken.

The location for the battery storage facility will not be chosen at this stage, but before the preliminary environmental information report is

submitted, which is not intended until August. However, need feedback from the parish council and other stakeholders, feedback from the consultation and the various outstanding reports. Once this information is received and reviewed a decision will be made on the most appropriate location for the battery storage site.

Q: Will the final decision on the location of the battery storage facility be based on a commercial basis?

A: No this would not be what decides the most appropriate location for the battery storage facility. Other factors need to be considered, such as willingness of landlords, environmental constraints and proximity to grid connection, for example, and will need to be evidenced as to why a certain site is chosen over another.

Q: How many acres is the site, as it appears to be the same size as Whitley village itself?

A: Will need to get back to you on the exact number of acres of the site.

Q: If this is the chosen site, how many battery storage units will be stored on it?

A: About 200.

Q: What is the battery storage capacity for each unit?

A: 250mw (4-hour battery system).

Q: What is the noise outage from each container?

A: Will have to investigate this, as the exact specification of the units has not been chosen as yet. The design team will get a specification sheet and will be able to find what the noise is cumulatively.

Q: The proposed site is on a slope down to Whitley; will the site have to be terraced?

A: Will either be levelled but a lot of groundworks would be required; or terraced, however, will need to understand the level of groundworks required for both.

Q: Where is access proposed from?

A: From the B3353. There is no other access proposed. There is a proposed access off of Littleworth Lane, which will be emergency access only.

Q: What will be the voltage of the AC connection from Hullavington to Melksham be?

A: It will be 400kv underground cabling, with smaller 33kv cabling in the site itself.

Q: If the site at Whitley is chosen for the battery storage, does this mean the cabling will go from there to the sub-station at Beanacre. If into the battery compound a transformer rectifier will be required to charge the batteries, which is substantial.

A: Correct and if there are no batteries on this sub-station the cabling will go direct from Hullavington to the sub-station and a transformer rectifier will be required to charge the batteries.

Q: Will there be security fencing and lighting?

A: There will be metal palisade fencing around the compound. There will be temporary lighting during construction and once constructed sensor/led lighting will be in operation.

Q: Feed from battery storage into Melksham sub-station will this be an AC connection and at high voltage or will the voltage change be in the sub-station?

A: Yes, feed from the battery storage into Melksham will be an AC connection. The batteries will be 33kv and there will be a transformer on site with a spec up to 400kv as connecting to the Melksham sub-station at 400kv.

Q: To connect to the battery storage to the sub-station will this require inverters, therefore more equipment to be installed on site?

A: Yes, an inverter will be required.

Q: How much of the hatched area shown on the plan of the site will have equipment installed on it and will there be planting to mitigate against the visual impact of the site?

A: Equipment will only be on part of the site to the North, with no intention of expanding the size of the site for the equipment. Yes, there will be planting, but what type this has yet to be agreed upon, as this needs to be appropriate for the landscape it sits in.

Q: If the batteries and equipment are to be located to the north of the site, this is higher and therefore would be more prominent in the landscape and therefore require more screening.

Q: There is potential for those north of Wiltshire and Whitley to have polarising views ie neither of them wanting a battery storage

facility in their area and suggesting it goes to the other area instead and therefore how will the wants and needs of both communities be reconciled and how will you come to a decision on the most appropriate site?

A: The consultation is being held to find the best design possible and feedback will play a role in informing the site taken forward, along with the findings of the various surveys taking place ie environmental assessment, it will not be a case of the site with the most objections is not put forward, but looking at trying to develop the best design which is as sensitive to the environment and communities as possible.

The idea of consultation is to get as much constructive feedback as possible from those who live in the vicinity to try and get the best design possible.

Q: What will happen if both communities say neither location is suitable what is the process of going ahead with the project?

A: The sites currently being proposed for the scheme have been selected following a site selection review process. However, more detailed work is required to understand if both sites remain suitable and once consultation feedback is received and technical reports completed, they will review which site is best for the battery storage facility and provide as sensitive a design as possible for the facility in whichever location.

The secondary location at Whitley came about following conversations as to the suitability of the site at Hullavington and whether alternative more suitable sites had been looked at.

Q: If this site at Whitley is not taken forward for battery storage, will it be used for solar panels instead?

A: No.

Q: There are several large quarries in the area, have these been looked at for storing batteries etc.

A: Aware of the various quarries in the area and will need to look at these from a structural engineering point of view regarding cable laying and structural loading.

Q: What will the colour of the batteries be in order they blend in with their surroundings? What improvements will there be regarding biodiversity, in line with Neighbourhood Plan Policy. What will the longevity of the facility be and will there be a bond in place to convert the site back to what it was? What flood mitigation will there be and what flood risk assessments will be undertaken.



A: With regard to appearance this will be like the ones located close to the sub-station therefore, shipping containers in appearance. The outward treatment can be any colour and can look at the most appropriate colour to fit in with the landscape and this can be secured as part of a planning condition.

In terms of biodiversity, they are only in the early stages at present and still undertaking ecology surveys. Therefore, they need to understand what is on the site already to consider what biodiversity improvements are appropriate and welcome feedback on suggestions on what this could be.

There will be a bond in place, meaning there would be no scenario where the site would be left and no mechanism or money in place to remove it at the end of its life.

Flood mitigation will be as stated previously, the hardstanding will not be entirely impermeable and will be more gravel sub base, with batteries on a hardstanding plinth with no continuous concrete block.

Q: The roofs will be hard surfaces and not impermeable?

A: The flood risk and drainage team will consider including surface water run-off.

Q: Will there be a community benefit from the site and will it be a one off or an annual payment for the duration of the scheme?

A: Yes, there will be a community benefit fund as part of the scheme, which could contribute towards projects in the area, they are open to discussing the most appropriate project/s to assist. Whether it will be a one-off payment or annual payment has not yet been decided but could be either, depending on the market at the time a planning application is submitted.

It was highlighted drainage at Whitley is a problem as it experiences a lot of surface water flooding, including quite recently, with internal property flooding experienced in the village earlier this year. There is an active group of flood wardens on call when there is a storm and generally called upon to deploy pumps and barriers to certain properties close to the Southbrook which is close to the village. This brook does not just cause problems in the village but in other areas as well, further downstream in Melksham. There is a problem with the outflow from the brook into the main river. Therefore, additional run off from the site will cause flooding problems and capacity problems within the watercourse and is something which needs careful management. The Environment Agency is constantly monitoring the water course flows, as it is a very flashy catchment and increases significantly during heavy rain.

There is an opportunity to improve the situation by using the south part of the site to slow the flow of water into the village and discussions with Wiltshire Council's Drainage Team would be useful in understanding the drainage issues in this area and appropriate mitigation.

Q: Do we need another solar farm, given the proliferation of solar panels in Wiltshire, particularly to the north, and why Wiltshire?

A: The Government has a target to deploy 30gw of solar by 2025 and 70gw by 2050. However, solar is not the only answer to the energy crisis and is part of the renewable energy mix and part of the solution. There are several applications across the country for solar farms of similar scale and tend to follow the National Grid network all over the country.

Q: As part of any planning application, given previous experience of traffic chaos during construction of a local solar farm, can a detailed construction management plan be put in place.

A: Discussions have taken place with Wiltshire Council and they have said they would like to see details of construction traffic management with any application.

Q: When will the next stage of consultation take place.

A: It is anticipated the next stage of consultation will be in the Autumn.

Stage One consultation will take place between 14 March and 26 April with various Community Events taking place in both Malmesbury, Chippenham, Corsham area and one at Shaw Village Hall on Thursday, 11 April 2pm-6pm. There will also be 2 webinar events taking place on Wednesday, 27 March 5.30pm-7pm and Wednesday, 17 April 5.30pm to 7pm, which has been extensively advertised. A postcard drop has taken place and delivered to 11,480 houses in those areas affected.

There is a dedicated website and would encourage people to leave their details so they can receive updates on proposals and next steps following initial consultation:

A 20-page project booklet has also been produced on the project and consultation information there will also be printed feedback forms available for people to use.

Throughout the consultation there will be a project freephone line available and a dedicated email address and online feedback form available.

Keen to brief any community groups on proposals moving forward, if requested.

At this early stage need to understand issues and take all feedback issues raised and together with findings from assessments/surveys this will be fed back into the preliminary environment impact report, the core document which will be published to support the next stage of consultation.

As part of the process must account for all the feedback received and provide a summary of issues raised and show regard to those issues in developing the final proposal, if issues raised have not been taken on board and clarify why not.

The Clerk informed the meeting the council was using social media to inform people of proposals and printing posters. However, asked if some feedback forms and booklets could be made available for places such as Whitley Reading Rooms and Sprockets Café, Top Lane for those who might not be online, noting it would also be useful to publish the consultation in the local Connect Magazine.

e) **To consider a formal response to the public consultation:**  
[www.limedownsolar.co.uk/](http://www.limedownsolar.co.uk/)

**Unanimously Resolved:** To submit the following comments to the public consultation:

Melksham Without Parish Council **strongly object** to the proposals for the battery storage at the proposed site north of Whitley.

**Planning policy and planning decision precedent**

As per the precedent of the planning application very recently refused (21/3/24) for a battery storage facility at Land at Somerford Farm, Brinkworth (Planning application PL/2022/02824) by Wiltshire Council. The proposed battery storage facility and ancillary development will result in uncharacteristic and harmful landscape and visual effects. The loss of existing agricultural land and replacement with a new urban industrial use is considered to have an unacceptable adverse landscape effect on the quiet rural tranquillity and character of the surrounding fields and more importantly, on the very close existing residential development.

The proposal is thereby objected to by reason of its size, scale, design, appearance as it would have a harmful impact on the landscape character and appearance of the area in conflict with Core Policy 51 ii, iv, vi v11 and Core Policy 57 I, iii of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and Paragraphs 135 and 180 of the NPPF.

The parish council considers that this proposal conflicts with Policy 86 in the Wiltshire Council draft Local Plan (Reg 19 version, Sept 2023) as above.

In addition, the parish council considers that this proposal conflicts with Policy 2: Renewable Energy in both the adopted Melksham Neighbourhood Plan and the emerging draft Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2 (Regulation 14 version October 2023) as proposals are only supported if it can be demonstrated that:

- a. the siting and scale of the proposal is appropriate to its setting;
- b. the proposal will not result in adverse impacts on the local environment which cannot be satisfactorily mitigated;
- c. the proposal does not create an unacceptable impact on local amenity and safety;
- d. the proposal does not have an unacceptable degree of impact on a feature of heritage, natural or biodiversity importance.
- e. there are direct benefits to the local community.

Proposals for **energy storage** will be supported, where it meets one or more of the following:

- a. it is located on or near, existing or proposed renewable energy generation sites;
- b. it alleviates grid constraints; and
- c. it enables the delivery of further renewable developments.

In addition, for clarity, there are lots of planning policies supporting green energy if they meet the policy criteria, but they relate to solar panels. Battery installations are not “green energy”.

### **Flood Risk**

The villages of Shaw and Whitley suffer from surface water flooding regularly; with regular instances of internal flooding of properties that are well documented. The volunteer flood wardens are regularly deployed to protect properties with sandbags and pump out water to prevent property flooding. There is telemetry installed in the watercourse opposite Shaw School to inform the Environment Agency and the flood wardens. The catchment area is “flashy”, it comes very quickly, and leaves quickly but with devastation often left in its place. There are concerted efforts to install flood mitigation measures as part of community benefits in planning obligations as well as new Environment Agency funding to help with flooding of properties further downstream at Dunch Lane. BART (Bristol & River Avon Trust) have installed natural flood management measures north of Whitley. Wiltshire Council’s drainage team have installed a drainage scheme on Corsham Road and First Lane in the last ten years.

The community and stakeholders are working hard, and together, to minimize the risk of further flooding in the two villages and it is felt that

the hard surfaces of the battery storage units, and the hardstanding concrete slabs that they will sit on will dramatically raise the risk of flooding to properties in Shaw and Whitley and further downstream.

### **Size**

The proposed battery storage site is huge, and we understand it will be the largest in Europe and will completely alter the feel of the village and surrounding countryside. From the indicative plan it looks as though is the same size as the village itself. The size of any flood attenuation would also have to be very large scale and give an industrial feel; with some 50 acres of hard landscaping.

### **Fire Safety**

There are several concerns about fire risk. That the batteries will ignite, and then be very difficult to extinguish. They are very close together, and the fire could easily spread, with no means of fire engines to gain access between the batteries. Anecdotal evidence to date is that the fires need water on them for days, not hours, to put them out (as evidenced by fires in electric cars which are not allowed to be unattended for 2/3 days). This will have a huge impact on the community, with the toxic fumes, but also the impact of the water used then running off to heavily increase the surface water flooding potential. The water runoff will be contaminated by the lithium and will flow into the water course and saturate the ground. There are also anecdotal concerns raised at the risk of explosion from these type of electric storage batteries; these are physically much larger in scale compared to the fires in electric cars and scooters that are reported in the press with regularity. The parish council are keen to see any comments submitted by the Fire Service, and hope that they have been contacted for their submission to the current consultation.

Concerns are also raised about the widescale use of lithium on the site, with no research into possible long term harm of the lithium as it's a new technology.

Please provide more details of the risk management of the site, who will maintain the installation and what processes will be put in place? Will the batteries be monitored and tested for any change in temperatures, moisture content in the batteries for example? And if so, what is the plan to address any increased risks?

### **Noise pollution**

There will be 200no. unit operating at 65Db each, which we understand will give a combined noise level of 88Db in a flat area. For comparison, the noise level coming from the M4 is 85Db, and this will be the noise inflicted on residents of Top Lane. Due to all the hard surfaces and sharp edges the noise will bend and defract and will be quieter for

some residents but noisier for others, and will feel like a Chinook helicopter overhead with the “pulsing/beating ” sound/feeling that brings. The noise will be very different in character to the noise of the natural environment currently experienced.

### **Operation/Future Use**

More clarity is required on the future use and operation of the battery storage site. What security measure will it have? Will it be storing energy created from solar farms some 12 miles away, with what seems to be inefficient ways of transferring/transforming the energy before it finally reaches the Beanacre substation? Can you explain the potential need for a substation in Whitley, please? And if there will still be a requirement for one if the battery storage is to be located elsewhere in Wiltshire?

There are concerns that the site will be used to download cheaper electricity during off-peak times to feed into the grid during busier times. This means that there would be noise in the middle of the night and not during the daylight hours – can you confirm that is not the case?

Can you confirm the details of the planned longevity of the site, and that a bond will be put in place to remove all signs of the battery storage at the end of its operation? What safeguards are in place if the ownership changes during the lifetime of the project? Pretty much all of the solar farms in the parish have changed ownership, and some more than once, so this seems to be a common occurrence.

### **Heritage**

The Roman road, the Wansdyke, the Grade II listed buildings and their setting, evidence of medieval farming and the other items of historic interest in the villages will all be impacted by the proposals. Archaeological investigations will need to be undertaken as part of evidence gathering to inform the decision-making.

### **Biodiversity & Wildlife**

There will be an inevitable impact on the wildlife and biodiversity of the site. This is not fields of solar panels with compatible uses of agriculture, wildlife and biodiversity; this is fields of metal boxes full of live electrical equipment, sitting on concrete pads and gravel. The requirement for biodiversity net gain, which came into force in February 2024, cannot surely find a realistic way to be put in place for an increase of 10% on what is already a site rich in biodiversity.

## **Wellbeing**

The well-being of residents in the village of Whitley and the surrounding villages has already been impacted. The prospect of this proposed battery storage site is already making residents feel anxious and spoiling their quiet enjoyment of where they live. The thoughts of the impact of the delivery and construction period; the impact of any final installation on the daily life of residents – on their daily dog walk on the adjacent Right of Way, the view out the window, the feel of the village - are already being keenly felt.

## **Detailed plans**

The community and parish council are keen to understand more of the detailed plans, information is very scant at the moment. Will the land be terraced as it's a sloping site? Will there be sluices and drains to deal with the surface water across the land? Will there be screening? What scale of planting and will it be mature planting from the onset? What colour will the batteries be?

## **Loss of greenfield**

There are concerns that the industrial feel of the installation will mean that it will always be treated as such, with the potential for more industrial use at the end of life of the battery site, and not a return to agricultural land. There has been no industrial history on this site.

The parish council, through its joint Neighbourhood Plan review with the neighbouring town council, and the support of the community through its recent neighbourhood plan consultations have a long-held ambition and policy of "brownfield first" – as do Wiltshire Council through their planning policy. Can you please confirm that you have thoroughly investigated brownfield sites as reasonable alternatives? There are lots of old quarry sites, old military sites and ex-RAF bases in the areas that you are looking at, have these been examined and if so, why have they been discounted in favour of greenfield sites, including this one in Whitley?

## **Agricultural land**

The land is currently farmed and is in active use for food production with new protections being brought in for food production with the recent Levelling Up & Regeneration legislation. Promoting a solar energy project as a green solution whilst increasing food miles in the locality seems counterproductive.

This land has been farmed for generations and for many years by the current tenant farmer.

## **Light pollution**

There are concerns relating to the light pollution at the site. For both the neighbouring residents and the established wildlife. Presumably, the security lighting will be triggered by motion sensors. And by the local wildlife, including the badgers, rabbits, and deer that are regularly seen on the fields? This is very impactful on nocturnal wildlife, and is known to affect migrating wildlife, affect pollinators (butterflies and bees) as well as impact on the amenity of the neighbouring residents. .

## **Impact on local facilities**

Concerns have been raised about the impact on the local facilities and businesses. The Pear Tree Inn and Spindles bike shop/Sprockets Café both on Top Lane attract visitors from all over the locality and further afield for the accommodation at the Pear Tree and holiday rentals in the village. Visitors come for the views from these venues, and the surrounding countryside, and these will be impacted by the countryside and landscape being altered beyond recognition as so widescale. The local estate agent has already reported two house sales in the village that have fallen through since the start of the consultation, as a direct result of the proposals and others on hold. Residents have chosen to live in the village for the views and neighbouring countryside amenities and are upset at the prospect of that changing, and the lowering of their house prices as a result, if they then decide to relocate. Some of the existing residential development is only 100m from the proposed site; this is wholly inappropriate and not justifiable to be in such proximity.

## **National Infrastructure & Process of Application**

More information is sought on the whole process of a national infrastructure project with a decision by the Secretary of State. Can you please provide more details of the process, how the community and local stakeholders can engage with the process etc?

An explanation of how this proposed national infrastructure project is provided and funded by a private overseas investment company is something that residents have raised as a query. Is the landscape being altered forever for national infrastructure needs or the benefit of overseas shareholders?

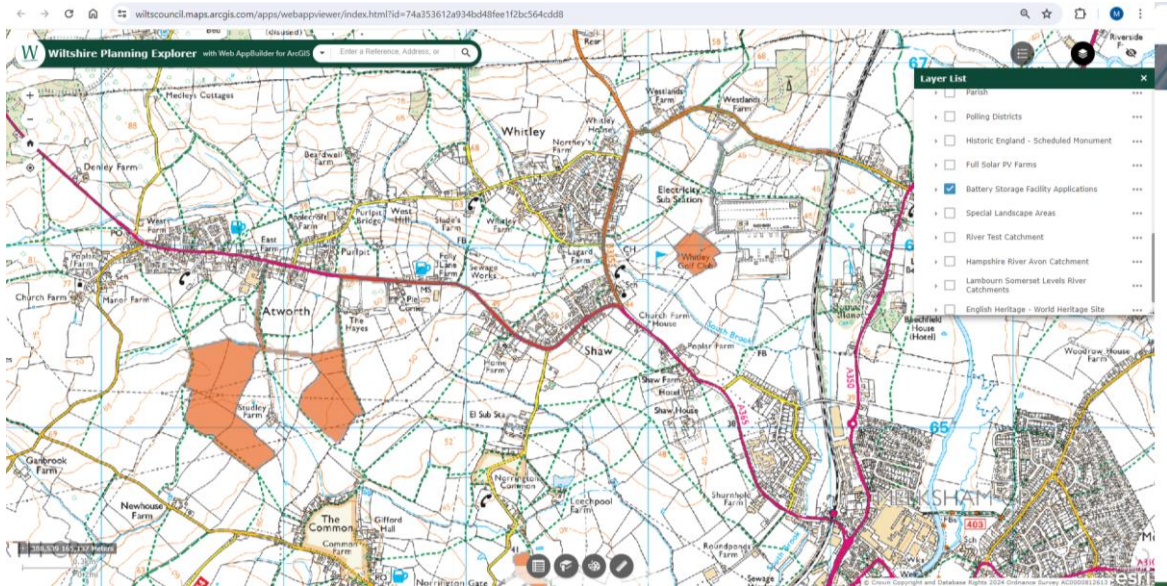
## **Landscape**

As mentioned at the beginning of the comments under the policy heading, the harmful impact on the landscape is detrimental, and because of its raised elevation, and assumed terracing on site, will be very prominent in the surrounding area. This is highly inappropriate.



## Cumulative effect

Concerns are raised about the cumulative effect of the sheer amount of battery storage facility installations in the surrounding area. Residents feel that at every turn on walks on Rights of Way, they see a sea of solar panels or battery storage already. Please see below a snapshot from the Wiltshire Council online mapping with the current battery storage installations surrounding Whitley.



Likewise for the cumulative effect of the amount of solar farms in the area.



## Delivery and construction

A very detailed delivery and construction method programme and plan will presumably be required as part of any application but the parish council and

residents are clear that any agreed plan must be adhered to, with a suitable penalty clause arrangement in place if the construction is not to plan to act as a strong deterrent. Unfortunately, the delivery of the solar farm at neighbouring Norrington (W/12/02072/FUL) brought the area to a standstill for days, with it regularly reported on the national traffic bulletins on the radio. Due to a short timescale for a deadline to be connected to the grid with financial implications for the developers, the construction and delivery plan was ignored. Deliveries were continuous through the night, with foreign drivers knocking on residents' doors in the small hours of the night seeking directions. This is unacceptable and there seemed to be no recourse to halt this impact on the residents and the major highway delays in the area. There is currently a battery site being installed southwest of the Beanacre substation, which has raised numerous issues and visits to the site and residents' gardens due to the impact the installation is making on the residents; particularly noise from machinery which is currently being investigated by Wiltshire Council's public protection environmental health team to establish if its still construction noise or the finished installed equipment noise (17/04116 & PL/22/02615 refers).

The parish council are seeking more than reassurance, but tangible measures to ensure that this type of impact on the local community cannot happen in the future for any proposed installations.

It is understood that the access to the site will only be via Goodes Hill, with only emergency access via Littleworth Lane which is used constantly for access to the Right of Ways MELW65 & MELW72 with many visitors to the area parking in Littleworth Lane to access the RoW as it's a popular dog walking area.

### **Vibration & Weight**

Concerns have been raised about the weight of the battery storage units on site and any potential vibration, especially as the area is littered with historic underground quarries and a network of tunnels.

### **Community Benefit**

Proposals for any proposed community benefit, if the Secretary of State is minded to the approve the application, will be considered by the Full Council at their next meeting, as out of the remit of the Planning Committee.

**482/23**      **Current planning applications:** Standing item for issues/queries arising during period of applications awaiting decision.

- a) **Blackmore Farm (Planning Application PL/2023/01949).  
Outline permission with some matters reserved for demolition of agricultural outbuildings and development of up to 650 dwellings; land for primary school; land for mixed use.**

To note this application has been refused by Wiltshire Council.

- b) Blackmore Farm (Planning Application PL/2023/11188): Outline permission for demolition of agricultural outbuildings and development of up to 500 dwellings; up to 5,000m<sup>2</sup> of employment (class E(g)(i)) & class E(g)(ii)); land for primary school (class F1); land for mixed use hub (class E/class F); open space; provision of access infrastructure from Sandridge Common; and provision of all associated infrastructure necessary to facilitate the development of the site.**

No update to report.

- c) Snarlton Farm (Planning Application PL/2023/07107); Outline planning application with all matters reserved except for two pedestrian and vehicle accesses (excluding internal estates roads) from Eastern Way for the erection of up to 300 dwellings (Class C3); land for local community use or building (incorporating classes E(b), E(g) and F2(b) and (c)); open space and dedicated play space and service infrastructure and associated works.**

Members noted the applicant, Catesby Estates had withdrawn the application to enable them to carry out further technical work.

- d) Land at Pathfinder Way, Bowerhill. Reserved Matters application (PL/2023/08046) pursuant to outline permission 16/01123/OUT relating to the appearance, landscaping, layout and scale of the proposed primary school (including Nursery and SEN provision).**

No update to report, however, landscaping work to the north of the proposed school site, as part of the Pathfinder Place development was currently taking place following its omission being raised via Planning Enforcement.

- e) Land rear of 52e Chapel Lane, Beanacre (PL/2023/05883). Erection of 3 dwellings, with access, parking and associated works, including landscaping (outlie application with all matters reserved – Resubmission of PL/2022/06389)**

No update to report.

- f) Land rear of Townsend Farm for 53 dwellings (PL/2022/08155).**

Members noted this application had been refused at a Strategic Planning Committee meeting on 6 March 2024.

- g) 178a Woodrow Road, Forest, Melksham (PL/2024/01559).**

The Clerk explained this was on the agenda in case there was

anything to report, with an update received from the developers earlier in the meeting.

- h) Westlands Farm, Westlands Lane, Whitley (PL/2024/01377 & PL/2024/01378. Variation of conditions 1 (approved plans), 2 (soft landscaping) and 7 (Construction Traffic Management Plan) on PL/2022/02615.**

Again, this was on the agenda in case there was anything to report, but nothing at present.

**483/23 Planning Enforcement: To note any new planning enforcement queries raised and updates on previous enforcement queries.**

- a) Buckley Gardens, Semington Road (PL/2022/02749)**

With regard to construction vehicles using Shails Lane, Planning Enforcement have investigated and informed the parish council the estate roads had now been installed, along with contractor parking and a semi-permanent compound and welfare establishment and since in place there had been no access from the development land onto the access track leading to Shails Lane and hopefully this resolved the issue.

With regard to work starting early on site, Planning Enforcement confirmed whilst operators may come on to site prior to 8.00am they did not actually start working until 8.00am as per the planning conditions.

With regard to mud on the road from the development, a Highways Technician had been in touch to say he was aware of the issue and had liaised on several occasions with the site manager, who in turn has made sure there was a sweeper present all day every day, if the need was warranted.

Planning Enforcement had also investigated and having visited the site on several occasions in recent weeks felt the situation was satisfactory and therefore had closed the file on this matter.

Whilst it was appreciated recent weather conditions had not helped the situation, it was felt the method of cleaning the road had not helped the situation and resulted in mud being spread across the road.

The parish council were pleased that a swift response had been made following the complaint by residents of the watercourse running a dirty colour, and the simple solution of hay bales in the watercourse to filter the water.

## **484/23 Planning Appeal**

### **a) 489a Semington Road (Annex).**

Members noted the Planning Inspector had upheld the decision of Wiltshire Council to refuse a Certificate of Lawful Use or Development (PL/2023/02893) with regard to the use of the annex at 489 Semington Road as a separate dwelling.

Planning Enforcement were also aware of the outcome of the decision of the Planning Inspectorate particularly as the dwelling was being advertised for rent and they were in touch with the applicant's agent to see what their intentions were.

### **b) 89 Corsham Road, Whitley (PL/2023/03257).**

Members noted the Planning Inspector had upheld the decision of Wiltshire Council to refuse planning permission for a proposed side extension to the property.

### **c) 16 Halifax Road, Bowerhill.**

Members noted the Planning Inspector had allowed the appeal by the applicant against Wiltshire Council's decision to refuse planning permission for the erection of fencing to the side and front of the property and granted planning permission.

## **485/23 Planning Policy**

### **a) Neighbourhood Planning**

#### **i) To note the draft Steering Group minutes of 28 February 2024.**

Members noted the minutes of the Steering Group meeting held on 28 February 2024.

#### **ii)C To receive update on NHP#2 and consider additional budget requirements to get plan to Examination.**

**THIS ITEM WAS HELD IN CLOSED SESSION.**

#### **ii) To reflect on responses to planning applications for monitoring of the Neighbourhood Plan.**

The Clerk explained this was a standing item, as a 'catch all' in case something was highlighted as needed raising as part of the Neighbourhood Plan review whilst responding to planning applications.

**b) Biodiversity**

- i) To note planning practice guidance on biodiversity net gain.**  
[www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain)

Members noted planning practice relating to biodiversity net gain on new developments came into force on 12 February 2024.

- ii) To note actions contained in the Council's Biodiversity Policy in relation to the consideration of planning applications.**

Noted.

**c) National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) changes.**

Members noted the correspondence to Michelle Donelan MP from Michael Gove MP, Secretary for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities. This was in response to a specific query raised when the parish council met Michelle Donelan on how planning applications that were approved at Committee pending approval under delegated powers when the s106 was signed, and those that had not been legally engrossed should be treated if in the "limbo" period when the changes to the NPPF were made. Decisions in this matter had already taken place since the advice was requested.

**d) To consider a response to the Government consultation on proposed changes to Permitted Development Rights (closes 9 April):**

The Clerk informed the meeting various changes to permitted development rights were proposed, including householders being able to extend their properties even further without having to seek planning permission and to install EV charging points and ground source heat pumps without planning permission.

**Recommendation:** Not to submit a response to the consultation.

**e) To consider a response to the Government proposals on a series of measures aimed at 'accelerating' the planning service (closes 1 May). [www.slcc.co.uk/an-accelerated-planning-system-consultation/](http://www.slcc.co.uk/an-accelerated-planning-system-consultation/)**

It was agreed to defer this item to a future Planning Committee meeting to allow more time to consider a response.

**f) To note Wiltshire Council has formally adopted the Wiltshire Design Guide [www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/6110/Wiltshire-Design-Guide](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/6110/Wiltshire-Design-Guide)**

Noted.

**486/23 S106 Agreements and Developer meetings: (Standing Item)**

**a) Updates on ongoing and new S106 Agreements**

**i) Pathfinder Place:**

The committee were reminded it had been agreed to remove the left turn only arrow on the Pathfinder roundabout (coming from Bowerhill).

The Clerk informed the meeting she had reminded Taylor Wimpey they had agreed to plant a replacement memorial tree and install a plaque in commemoration of a Bowerhill resident.

**ii) Buckley Gardens, Semington Road (PL/2022/02749: 144 dwellings)**

Members noted the correspondence from a resident adjacent to the site concerned building seemed to be close to his property.

**iii) Land to rear of Townsend Farm for 50 dwellings (PL/2023/00808)**

No update to report.

**iv) Land South of Western Way for 210 dwellings and 70 bed care home (PL/2022/08504).**

Members noted the update earlier in the meeting with regard to this as part of the update on the neighbourhood plan review (NHP#2).

**b) To note any S106 decisions made under delegated powers**

None to note.

**c) Contact with developers**

Members accepted the confidential notes of the meeting held with BBA Architects on 18 March 2024.

Meeting closed at 20.38pm

Signed:.....  
Chair, Full Council, 22 April 2024