

**MINUTES of the Planning Committee of Melksham Without Parish Council
held on Monday 5th October 2026 at Melksham Without Parish Council
Offices (First Floor), Melksham Community Campus, Market Place, SN12
6ES at 7:00pm**

Present: Councillors Richard Wood (Chair), Alan Baines (Vice-Chair), David Pafford (Vice-Chair of Council), John Glover (Chair of Council), Mark Harris, Peter Richardson and Martin Franks.

Officers: Teresa Strange (Clerk) and Fiona Dey (Parish Officer)

In attendance: Wiltshire Councillor Alford (part)

On Zoom: None

207/26 Welcome, Housekeeping and Announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

As there were no new members of the public or businesses present, the usual housekeeping announcements were not repeated. Everyone present was aware that the meeting was being recorded and that the recording would be published on YouTube following the meeting and deleted once the minutes were approved.

There were no announcements.

208/26 Apologies

No apologies were received from committee members, as all members of the committee were present.

209/26 Declarations of Interest

a. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Franks declared a non-pecuniary interest in PL/2026/05555 Manor Farm, Sandridge Common (agenda item 6c) as he is a friend of the applicant.

During consideration of PL/2026/06103, Land at First Lane (agenda item 6h), Councillor Richardson declared that he lived at the adjacent Lagard Farm, which he considered relevant to the assessment of local heritage assets.

During the discussion of the Goods Vehicle Operator's Licence operating from Boundary Farm, Berryfield (agenda item 12), the Clerk drew attention to the Parish Council's existing land-leasing relationship with the farm, including the lease of land for the allotments and the farm's lease of Parish Council land.

b. Dispensation Requests

None received.

210/26 Consideration of Items in Closed Session

Under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and representatives of the press and broadcast media should be excluded from the meeting as required, as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

No items were identified as requiring consideration in closed session.

211/26 Public Participation

Standing Orders were suspended to allow public participation.

Wiltshire Councillor Alford

Land behind Melksham Oak: A request was made by Wiltshire Council Alford for consideration of the protection of land on the walking route from Melksham East towards the rear of Melksham Oak Community School. The land was reported to be owned by Wiltshire Council and used by residents, including dog walkers. Its value as a buffer between settlements was highlighted. The Clerk explained that its status and any existing biodiversity-related protection would need to be checked. Any proposal for Local Green Space designation would need to meet the relevant criteria and be considered through a future Neighbourhood Plan review.

Resolved: To place the request to protect land behind Melksham Oak Community School on a future Planning Committee agenda, including consideration of its suitability for designation as Local Green Space through the next review of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan.

First Lane and Top Lane applications: Wiltshire Councillor Alford reported initial contact with the Planning Officer dealing with the First Lane application (PL/2026/06103 – agenda item 6h).

He also updated Members on the separate proposal for six dwellings at Top Lane, Whitley (PL/2025/03513). Planning Officers were considering relevant appeal decisions and were expected to make a decision shortly. If approval were recommended, he had been advised that the application would be expected to go to the Western Area Planning Committee on 28th October 2026.

Melksham bypass: Members asked Wiltshire Councillor Alford to clarify whether funding for the Melksham bypass had been removed from the Wiltshire Council budget for the current financial year only or withdrawn completely. This followed comments from Wiltshire Council Highways on the East of Blackmore Farm application (PL/2026/02966), stating that there was no allocated funding for the bypass and that the indicative route carried little weight in the planning balance.

Councillor Alford recalled that the current-year funding had been reallocated pending confirmation of government/National Highways funding, rather than the project being abandoned, and that the bypass remained a priority. Members requested clarification of the position, supported by the approved budget and the relevant Wiltshire Council minutes.

Members were concerned that development (PL/2026/02966) on the indicative route could prejudice delivery of the bypass and the associated work towards trunking the A350. They referred to the Freight Action Plan, Wiltshire Council's published bypass information and the work already undertaken on the business case. The Clerk confirmed that these sources had been drawn to the highway officer's attention. Existing actions to contact the MP, National Highways and the Secretary of State were reiterated. The Committee sought clarification of Wiltshire Council's policy and funding position and the implications of permitting development on the route. Further consideration is recorded at minute 214/26(d).

Members also expressed concern about the loss of opportunities for elected-member scrutiny under the forthcoming scheme of delegation and the accuracy of the recorded decision on land north of Berryfield Lane. The latter matter was considered formally under minute 214/26(b).

Standing Orders were reinstated.

212/26 New Planning Applications

- a. **PL/2026/05489 – The Coach House, 489a Semington Road, Melksham.**
Regularisation of existing C3 residential use as a two-bedroom dwelling.

Comments: STRONGLY OBJECT

Members noted that the building was originally intended as a double garage with office accommodation. Residential occupation was subsequently permitted for a limited period in connection with project management of the adjoining development. Members were concerned that permanent residential use would undermine the purpose of that temporary permission. Members' observations indicate that little or no building work appears to have taken place on the adjoining site during the current year.

The site is already intensively developed, and the members felt that it cannot satisfactorily accommodate an additional permanent dwelling. Concerns were raised that the private amenity space appears inadequate, and inconsistent references to garden areas in the submitted information require clarification.

Members are also concerned whether the current occupation complies with the existing temporary permission and that the building meets the relevant requirements for residential accommodation. The absence of complaints on the planning portal should not be treated as evidence of compliance or acceptability

The loss of the two garage spaces raises further concerns about parking provision. The inclusion of parking spaces on a drawing does not, in itself, demonstrate that those spaces can be accessed and used satisfactorily. Wiltshire Council should establish that the proposed arrangements are workable and would not displace vehicles onto Semington Road, where parking already causes difficulties, particularly around the traffic-calming features.

A photograph of the New Inn car park and adjoining Semington Road (showing the development site) is submitted as supporting evidence. Reported to have been taken on a Friday at approximately 6.30pm, it illustrates demand for parking in this location and vehicles parked along the road, including near parking restrictions. It reinforces the need to avoid further displacement of parking onto the highway as there is also evidence that the X34 bus has been delayed due to obstruction by parked cars, and on occasion has hit several vehicles whilst gaining access.

Resolved: To request that Wiltshire Council investigate the continued obstruction of the public footway associated with the development adjoining the Coach House, Semington Road (18/07286/FUL) and take appropriate action to restore unobstructed public access.

- b. **PL/2026/05281 – 2 Brookfield Rise, Whitley** Single-storey granny annexe in the garden, constructed in timber on a concrete plinth.

Comments: NO OBJECTION, subject to a condition ensuring that the annexe remains ancillary to the main dwelling and is not let or used as a separate dwelling.

- c. **PL/2026/05555 – Manor Farm, Sandridge Common.** Two-storey and single-storey extensions linking the farmhouse and barn, double garage extension and porch extension.

Comments: NO OBJECTION.

- d. **PL/2026/04780 – 7 Park Road, Bowerhill.** Detached timber pergola.

Comments: NO OBJECTION.

- e. **PL/2026/05055 – Sandridge House, Sandridge Hill, Sandridge Common.** Oak-framed outbuilding for an incidental home gym and entertainment space.

Comments: NO OBJECTION, subject to a condition preventing conversion or use as a separate dwelling and retaining its incidental relationship to the main house.

- f. **PL/2026/05882 – 401 The Spa, Bowerhill.** Listed building consent for replacement of the polycarbonate conservatory roof with a Guardian Warm Roof insulated tiled roofing system.

Comments: NO OBJECTION.

- g. **PL/2026/05878 – 46 Wellington Square, Bowerhill.** Single-storey side extension providing ancillary residential annexe accommodation.

Comments: NO OBJECTION, subject to the accommodation remaining ancillary to the existing dwelling and not being let or used as a separate dwelling.

- h. **PL/2026/06103 – Land at First Lane, Whitley.** Permission in Principle for two self-build dwellings and associated works.

Comments: STRONGLY OBJECT

Melksham Without Parish Council strongly objects to this application. The Council maintains its concerns about residential development in this location and considers that the additional evidence from recent appeal decisions reinforces the grounds for refusal.

1. Open countryside and conflict with the development plan

Wiltshire Council identifies the site as open countryside, outside the settlement boundary. The proposed residential development would conflict with Core Policies 1, 2 and 15 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and Policy 6 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2 (JMNP2).

The application must also demonstrate compliance with the 2026 NPPF. Under Policy S5(1)(j), development addressing an evidenced unmet housing need must satisfy additional requirements, including being physically well-related to an existing settlement and capable of being accommodated by existing or proposed infrastructure. An unmet need does not, by itself, establish that this location is acceptable.

2. Erosion of the rural gap between Shaw and Whitley

The site contributes to the open rural gap separating Shaw and Whitley. Introducing dwellings, gardens, boundary treatments, lighting and domestic activity would urbanise this land and weaken the villages' separate identities, contrary to JMNP2 Policies 18 and 19.

The Parish Council draws attention to appeal 6003438, Land south of 214B Corsham Road, Whitley, particularly paragraphs 10–12. The findings concerning

erosion of settlement separation are relevant to this application. Landscaping would not remove the fundamental change from open countryside to residential use.

3. Respect for the made Neighbourhood Plan

JMNP2 became part of the development plan on 4th August 2025 and contains housing allocations intended to meet identified needs. The Parish Council considers that those allocations should be assessed across the whole plan area, rather than suggesting that each village must accommodate additional speculative development independently.

Appeal 6003438, particularly paragraphs 18–19 and 23, is relevant to this assessment. The Parish Council requests explicit consideration of NPPF Policy S6, which provides protection where a housing proposal conflicts with a neighbourhood plan made within the preceding five years and containing allocations to meet its identified housing requirement.

Members also identified a need for smaller homes enabling local residents to remain within the villages. The application has not demonstrated how the proposed self-build dwellings would meet that particular local need.

4. Self-build status does not outweigh an unsuitable location

The Parish Council recognises that self-build housing can contribute to meeting an identified need. However, this does not override countryside, settlement-separation or other planning harm.

Appeal 6007352, Land east of New Road, Melksham, dismissed on 30th September 2026, is particularly relevant. At paragraphs 26–31, the Inspector considered both the housing land supply shortfall and unmet self-build need but nevertheless dismissed the appeal. The proposal failed the requirement to be physically well-related to an existing settlement, and its benefits did not justify the identified harm.

The Parish Council requests that Wiltshire Council apply the same careful assessment to this application, whilst recognising that each site must be considered on its own merits.

5. Two dwellings can still cause significant countryside harm

The small number of dwellings proposed should not be treated as evidence that the effects would be insignificant.

In appeal 6007352, paragraphs 12–16, the Inspector found that introducing two dwellings onto open agricultural land would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area. The assessment of First Lane must similarly consider the complete residential use, including gardens, access, parking, boundaries and lighting, alongside the buildings themselves.

6. Listed-building settings

The Parish Council challenges the conclusion that the proposal would cause no harm to the settings of Lagard House, 120 First Lane and The Malt House. The assessment should explain how the surrounding open farmland contributes to the significance of these assets and how its residential development would affect that contribution.

Wiltshire Council should satisfy itself that the heritage assessment accurately identifies the effects on significance, including effects through setting, and apply NPPF Policies HE5 and HE6.

7. Non-designated heritage assets

The heritage assessment should also consider Lagard Farm and 78 Corsham Road, the former village shop, as potential non-designated heritage assets. Members also raised the potential relationship with Mavern House and the church, which should be assessed where their settings may be affected.

Their lack of statutory listing does not establish an absence of heritage significance. The Parish Council requests an assessment of their historic interest and relationship with the application site. Where non-designated heritage significance is identified, any harm should be considered under NPPF Policy HE7.

8. Archaeological interest

Members noted the reported discovery of medieval pottery and evidence of a furnace during archaeological investigations. The Parish Council does not consider that limited findings necessarily establish an absence of further archaeological interest.

Wiltshire Council's archaeologist should advise whether the work undertaken adequately establishes the site's archaeological potential and whether further proportionate investigation is required. NPPF Policy HE5(5) requires appropriate assessment and, where necessary, field evaluation where archaeological interest may be affected.

9. Flood risk, drainage and maintenance access

The Parish Council remains concerned about flooding in this location. Residents' evidence of repeated flooding, sewer backing-up and the behaviour of local ditches and watercourses must be addressed explicitly. Photographs submitted in connection with the previous application and continuing local observations should inform the assessment.

Particular concern relates to the proposed new watercourse alongside Lagard House. It must be demonstrated that this would not increase flood risk to neighbouring properties or adversely affect the listed building's setting.

The assessment should establish that workable drainage can be achieved, including adequate outfall capacity, safe access during flooding and continued access for maintenance of ditches, drains and adjoining boundaries. Existing maintenance rights must not be obstructed.

Historic evidence discussed by Members, including the land's longstanding pasture use, provides additional context for its wet characteristics. This should be considered alongside contemporary technical evidence.

10. First Lane's highway constraints and cumulative impacts

First Lane is narrow in places and experiences school-run parking, congestion and difficulties when buses pass. The Parish Council requests assessment of whether residential development can be safely accommodated in this location, taking account of those existing conditions.

The cumulative effects of other housing development, cable works, BESS proposals and substation works must also be considered. If the application

progresses, a coordinated construction traffic management approach would be required to address access, deliveries, school movements, buses and overlapping works.

11. Bat connectivity and ecological evidence

The Parish Council requests clarification of any relationship between the site and the Drews Pond Wood bat migration route, together with assessment of the role of local hedgerows and watercourses in bat movement.

The proximity of that route remains unconfirmed; the Parish Council is not asserting that it crosses the site. Wiltshire Council's ecologist should advise whether the submitted evidence adequately addresses connectivity and the potential effects of residential lighting.

12. The principle of development must be resolved at this stage

The Parish Council recognises that Permission in Principle concerns location, land use and the amount of development, with technical details considered subsequently. Its principal objection is that residential use of this land would harm its countryside character and its contribution to the separation of Shaw and Whitley. These are fundamental matters concerning the acceptability of the location.

Appeal 6003438, particularly paragraphs 2–5 and 10–12, is relevant to the consideration of countryside and settlement-gap harm at the Permission in Principle stage.

Detailed design and mitigation should not be relied upon to defer these fundamental objections. The Parish Council considers that the benefits of two self-build dwellings would not outweigh the identified harm and requests that Permission in Principle be refused.

213/26 Amended Plans / Additional Information

a. PL/2024/10345 – Land north of the A3102, New Road Farm

Comments:

Melksham Without Parish Council has considered the amended plans and supporting information, including the reduction from 295 to 286 dwellings and the revised housing mix. These comments supplement the Parish Council's previous representations. Although the withdrawal of the Environment Agency's objection is noted, several concerns remain unresolved.

1. Meeting before determination

Members considered that a meeting with the developer before determination would provide a better opportunity to resolve the outstanding matters than seeking changes after the Committee report had been published.

This request is consistent with **Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2 (JMNP2) Policy 5: Pre-application Community Engagement** and **NPPF Policies DM1 and DM3**, which promote early engagement and require applicants and planning authorities to work positively to identify and resolve key planning matters.

2. Affordable housing and housing mix

The Parish Council expresses strong disappointment at the reduction in affordable housing from 40% to 30%. Although the change follows the withdrawal

of the emerging Wiltshire Local Plan, it represents a significant reduction in the benefits previously offered by the development and its contribution towards meeting local housing needs.

Members also noted the reported reduction in one-bedroom affordable homes from 49 to 14. Smaller affordable homes are important locally, and the revised mix should be justified against the evidence contained in the **JMNP2 Housing Needs Assessment** and any more recent housing-needs evidence.

Four bungalows remain proposed, but none would be available on the open market. The Parish Council reiterates its request for a housing mix that includes open-market bungalows, providing opportunities for existing residents to downsize or secure accommodation suited to their changing needs.

NPPF Policy HO7 requires substantial weight to be given to homes that meet the evidenced accommodation needs of the community, including the needs of older and disabled people. **NPPF Policy HO8** requires development proposals to meet or exceed up-to-date development-plan requirements for the proportion and tenure mix of affordable housing. Wiltshire Council should therefore assess the revised housing mix against evidenced local needs and the applicable development-plan requirements, rather than accepting the reductions solely as a consequence of the emerging Local Plan's withdrawal.

3. Wheelchair-user and accessible/adaptable housing

The Parish Council is particularly concerned that the previously proposed **M4(3) wheelchair-user dwellings** have been removed and that **M4(2) accessible and adaptable provision** has been reduced to only ten dwellings.

The previous proposals identified M4(2) provision across all affordable homes, bungalows and certain ground-floor maisonettes. The amended scheme therefore represents a substantial reduction in accommodation suitable for people with mobility needs.

The Parish Council requests a clear justification for these changes and reconsideration of the provision. The development should provide a proportionate range of wheelchair-user and accessible and adaptable homes, informed by evidence of local need. Accommodation capable of future adaptation should not be treated as equivalent to accommodation designed from the outset for wheelchair users.

This is supported by **NPPF Policy HO7**, which gives substantial weight to the provision of homes meeting evidenced community needs, including those of older and disabled people. The distinction between **M4(2)** and **M4(3)** accommodation should be recognised clearly when the revised provision is assessed.

4. Local connection for affordable housing

The Parish Council reiterates its request for a local connection approach to the allocation of affordable housing, including an initial three-month period during which priority would be given to eligible people with a connection to Melksham and Melksham Without. The principle is already supported in the Government's Planning Practice Guidance, which allows local eligibility/local connection criteria to apply to First Homes for the initial marketing period.

The proposed allocation arrangements should be clarified and, where legally and practically achievable, secured through the appropriate agreement so that the development contributes directly towards meeting evidenced local housing

needs. This would support the objective of **NPPF Policy HO7** that new homes should contribute towards meeting the accommodation needs of the community.

5. Outstanding consultee comments

Members remain concerned that previous comments from the Police Liaison Officer and the landscape and conservation consultees do not appear to have been fully addressed.

In accordance with **NPPF Policies DM2 and DM3**, the decision-maker should be satisfied that sufficient information is available to assess the proposal and that all material concerns raised by consultees have either been resolved or appropriately addressed before the application is determined.

6. Footpath MELK103

The highway comments continue to refer to a £30,000 contribution towards **MELK103**, although that public right of way has been extinguished. The Parish Council requests clarification of the works that this contribution would now fund, their location and how they would deliver a useful and accessible connection.

Any replacement scheme should support **JMNP2 Policy 11: Sustainable Transport and Active Travel**, which requires major development to maximise sustainable transport and achieve safe and suitable movement for all users. It should also accord with **NPPF Policy TR4**, which gives priority to walking, wheeling and cycling and seeks safe, accessible and well-connected routes.

7. Bus route and service contribution

The Parish Council questions whether the proposed £75,000 contribution towards bus services is proportionate and sufficient. By comparison, approximately £750,000 has been secured from the Blackmore Farm development of around 500 dwellings. Although contributions must reflect the particular circumstances and impacts of each development, the substantial difference warrants a clear explanation.

The Parish Council also reiterates its request for clarification of the proposed looped bus route through the site, including its route, timing and delivery arrangements.

The provision should be considered against:

- **JMNP2 Policy 8**, which requires housing proposals to assess and address their necessary infrastructure requirements and to coordinate the delivery of infrastructure with the housing development;
- **JMNP2 Policy 11**, which requires sustainable transport modes to be maximised;
- **NPPF Policies TR3 and TR4**, which seek genuine transport choices, good access to public transport and layouts that maximise the catchment for bus services; and
- **NPPF Policy HC3**, which requires development generating significant additional population to provide the infrastructure necessary to make it acceptable.

8. Railway station improvements

Any contribution towards Melksham railway station should address the priorities identified in **JMNP2 Policy 11** and demonstrable current local needs. Policy 11 specifically supports improvements to the accessibility and quality of links between the wider town and Melksham railway station, together with improvements to the public realm around the station.

Members highlighted the importance of better passenger information, signage and wayfinding, including helping residents understand how to reach the station and when services operate. Contributions should not be directed towards further physical accessibility works unless it has first been demonstrated that these represent the appropriate current priority.

The use of the contribution should also be consistent with **NPPF Policies TR3 and TR4**, particularly the objectives of improving connections to public transport and enabling safe and convenient journeys by sustainable modes.

9. Equipped play area, allotments and ownership arrangements

The land-ownership plan continues to show the equipped play area and allotments transferring to a private management company.

The Parish Council reiterates its request to be offered first refusal on taking responsibility for these facilities. The transfer terms, commuted sums and long-term inspection and maintenance arrangements should be discussed and agreed before the Section 106 agreement is finalised.

The amount, quality, accessibility and long-term management of the facilities should be secured in accordance with **NPPF Policy HC3** and the objectives of **JMNP2 Policy 8**, ensuring that the infrastructure needed by the development is delivered and remains available to the community.

The request for first refusal is an ownership and management matter rather than a direct policy requirement, but it is relevant to demonstrating that the facilities have a robust and sustainable long-term management arrangement.

10. Community hub contribution and Section 106 agreement

The Parish Council requests sight of the updated Heads of Terms and draft Section 106 agreement, together with meaningful involvement in discussions before these documents are finalised.

Confirmation is still required of the proposed community hub contribution and the basis on which it has been calculated. In particular, the Parish Council seeks confirmation that the contribution has not been reduced on the assumption that the developer is also providing land for the community hub.

The necessary contribution should be assessed against **JMNP2 Policy 8** and **NPPF Policy HC3**, which require development to address the community facilities and infrastructure needs arising from the additional population. Any planning obligations should also satisfy the requirements of **NPPF Policy DM6**, including being necessary, relevant, precise and reasonable.

11. Noise assessment

The updated Noise Addendum remains outstanding. The Parish Council reiterates its request, first made on 1 December 2025, that the assessment include noise from the proposed heat pumps, including the cumulative effect of multiple units and the potential impact on existing and future residents.

This information is necessary to assess the proposal against **NPPF Policy P3: Living Conditions and Pollution**, which requires development to take account of the likely effects, including cumulative effects, of noise on health and living conditions. The policy requires unacceptable noise effects to be avoided or mitigated to an acceptable degree.

12. Nursery land

Confirmation remains outstanding that the proposed 0.4-hectare nursery site is sufficient to accommodate the proposed 100-place nursery, including the building, outdoor play space, landscaping, servicing, staff and visitor parking and safe access for all users.

This should be demonstrated before determination to ensure that the proposed education infrastructure is genuinely deliverable. The matter is supported by **JMNP2 Policy 8**, which requires necessary infrastructure to be assessed and delivered in coordination with the housing development, and **NPPF Policy HC3**, which requires development to provide the community facilities and public-service infrastructure needed to make it acceptable.

Resolved 1: To arrange a meeting with the developer to discuss and, if possible, resolve members unresolved concerns.

Resolved 2: To also submit the comments from the revised full application on the outline proposal PL/2025/09780.

b. PL/2026/01555 – Land at Blackmore Farm, Sandridge Common.

Reserved matters for 229 dwellings pursuant to outline permission PL/2023/11188.

The Clerk reported that numerous revised drawings had appeared without a formal reconsultation and that officers had queried this with Wiltshire Council.

Resolved: To approve the notes of the developer meeting held on 22nd September 2026 (Appendix 1).

Members considered the questions prepared for Full Council concerning including the required mobility hub facilities on the community hub land.

Members were concerned that locating development-wide mobility hub facilities, including Electric Vehicle (EV) charging on land intended for transfer to the Parish Council (community hub land) could constrain its future community use. They questioned whether alternatives had been properly assessed, including employment land or other visitor parking areas within the development, and whether retaining the maximum housing yield had influenced the proposed location.

The discussion distinguished between the mobility hub serving the wider, approximately 500-dwelling development and any EV charging that the Parish Council might independently choose to provide for a future community building. Members discussed management arrangements, maintenance, liability when equipment failed, access by the wider public and the possibility of operation by a specialist charging company. It was also reported that gas provision was being proposed because of electrical capacity constraints; clarification remained necessary as to whether sufficient capacity had been allowed for the community building and any chargers.

The Clerk reminded Members that the community land was due to be offered after occupation of 200 homes and that the immediate question was whether the

development's mobility hub should occupy some of that land. It was noted that the decision belonged to Full Council.

Recommendation: That the Parish Council reject the proposal to locate the development-wide mobility hub on the community hub land intended for transfer to the Parish Council, in order to retain flexibility for community use. This would not preclude separate consideration of EV charging associated with a future community building.

It was noted that pre-application enquiry ENQ/2026/01880 concerning alternative highway arrangements in relation to outline permission PL/2023/11188 had been submitted. No response had yet been received. The developer's apparent reluctance to implement alternative arrangements even if favourable advice were received was noted.

Bus strategies: Members considered the existing East of Melksham and wider Melksham bus strategies in the context of current applications. The Clerk emphasised that the proposed £750,000 contribution was intended to help establish a service over five years and encourage an operator to provide it. Uncertainty about provision during the early phases should therefore be challenged rather than accepted as a reason for omission. The strategies would continue to inform submissions and developer discussions; no separate revised strategy was formally adopted during the meeting.

214/26 Current Planning Applications

- a. **PL/2026/04916 – Land west of Semington Road.** Outline application for up to 225 dwellings.

Members noted the developer meeting scheduled for Wednesday 7th October 2026 at 3.00pm.

Officers had reviewed the Design and Access Statement against the Parish Council's initial comments and the Neighbourhood Plan. The initial response was considered comprehensive.

The Clerk highlighted that she was attending a discussion with Wiltshire Council's public open space/play officer on Wednesday, before the developer meeting, to clarify proposed play provision and ensure that requests were consistent.

Members recognised the need for properly evidenced Section 106 requests for community and transport provision in connection with this larger scheme.

- b. **PL/2025/00626 – Land north of Berryfield Lane**

Members considered the discrepancy between the recorded Western Area Planning Committee decision, its draft minutes and the building-height parameter plan. The Clerk had already raised the issue with the Planning Officer, providing recording timings, but had not yet received a response.

Resolved: To write formally to Wiltshire Council, including the Chair of the Western Area Planning Committee, requesting review of the recording and correction/clarification of the resolution, minutes and height parameter plan. If a satisfactory response is not received, to submit a written question for the Western Area Planning Committee meeting on 28th October 2026 and, if necessary, attend to raise the matter.

- c. **PL/2025/07391 – Land south of Western Way**; related discharge applications PL/2026/01378 and PL/2026/01660

The submission of pre-application enquiry ENQ/2026/01882 proposing alternative highway arrangements in relation to outline permission PL/2022/08504 and the reserved matters application was noted.

- d. **PL/2026/02966 – East of Blackmore Farm**

Members returned to the highway and bypass issues raised during public participation.

The Clerk reported that the original highway comments implied access to Eastern Way without explaining that this was not vehicular access. The officer had acknowledged the distinction in correspondence, but the original comments had not been amended. References to an Eastern Way roundabout also required clarification in the context of the proposed access arrangements.

Members remained concerned that this development (PL/2026/02966) on the indicative route of the bypass could prejudice the scheme

Resolved 1: To continue challenging and seeking clarity on the highway officer's comments

Resolved 2: To seek clarification of Wiltshire Council's adopted bypass and funding position, and pursue the existing planned correspondence with the MP, National Highways and the Secretary of State without delay.

- e. **PL/2025/06749 – Land north of Bath Road (A365), adjacent to Melksham Oak Community School**

There were no new updates.

- f. **PL/2026/03551 – Former Melksham Library, Lowbourn**

The application remains on the agenda as it concerns a Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2 site allocation.

Members reiterated the positive features of town-centre brownfield redevelopment for extra-care housing, reported as wholly affordable. They considered it important that debate about related parking at Union Street should not obscure those benefits.

- g. PL/2025/06105 – Land at Bowerhill Lane, Old Loves Farm

There were no new updates.

- h. PL/2024/09725 – Middle Farm, land off Corsham Road, Whitley

It was noted that, following confirmation from the Planning Officer that the Parish Council's specified criteria had been met, Councillor Alford had withdrawn the call-in request. Members hoped that the application could now progress promptly.

215/26 Planning policy

- a. **Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan** – matters for future review

Resolved: To include the following items to the list of items to be considered in a future review of the neighbourhood plan and to add them to the list of standard requests from the parish council:

- wheelchair-user M4(3) and accessible/adaptable M4(2) housing provision

- a local connection approach to affordable housing, possibly similar to that in the Royal Wootton Bassett neighbourhood plan.

b. Wiltshire Council Local Plan

Additional comments had been submitted under delegated powers seeking a local connection approach for affordable housing were noted.

Engagement meeting with Wiltshire Council: The Clerk reported that Monday 26th October 2026 at 5.30pm had been proposed for the meeting with Councillor Ian Thorn and the spatial planning team, alongside Melksham Town Council and Wiltshire Councillors. Confirmation was still awaited. Attendees had been agreed at the Planning Committee meeting on 14th September 2026 (Min 198/26 (c) resolution 2).

The Clerk would meet the Town Clerk and planning adviser Vaughan Thompson from Place Studios to clarify the preparatory work, including mapping and any joint working group, so that the councils could present their own proposals and priorities.

Brownfield sites: Members noted the submissions and the distinction between the public call for sites and the less detailed request to parish and town councils to identify previously developed or underused land. The Parish Council suggestions comprised Waney Edge café/car park, Whitley Farm, Woolmore Farm and land northeast of Melksham substation at Westlands Lane. An interested town landowner had been encouraged to complete the fuller call-for-sites form. Officers had also liaised with the Town Council concerning its list and possible future availability of sites such as Aldi, Lidl and Countrywide. The lists did not establish availability or viability.

The Clerk reported advice from the spatial planning link officer that the Cooper/Avon site could potentially be allocated in the Local Plan as well as the Neighbourhood Plan, adding weight to its redevelopment. Members supported exploring this with the Town Council and Vaughan, and at the meeting with Wiltshire Council, subject to checking the implications.

c. Wiltshire Area Localism and Planning Alliance (WALPA)

Councillor Pafford reported on the meeting held on 15th September 2026. The Clerk's briefing paper had been circulated in advance to the meeting organisers. He had encouraged continued engagement and a bottom-up approach involving neighbourhood planning bodies. Although some participants had initially been pessimistic, the discussion and subsequent report were positive. Councillor Ian Thorn had agreed to meet representatives from WALPA.

Councillor Pafford also reported that BBC Wiltshire had interviewed him for radio and online coverage of neighbourhood planning and the Local Plan. He had not yet seen the resulting coverage.

216/26 Proposed energy installations

a. Lime Down Solar

Councillor Richardson reported continuing activity on the Lime Down Solar project, including representations from a developer concerning a potential conflict between the proposed cable route and a separate Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) proposal at Boyd's Farm, north of Whitley. Members noted renewed concern among residents about the potential additional BESS scheme.

b. PL/2025/05552 – Land south of Brockleaze, Neston

Councillor Richardson reported that consultation had been extended again to 9th October 2026. He noted that local residents remained keen to meet the Planning Officer, and Wiltshire Councillor Alford was asked to continue pursuing that request.

c. Norrington Spring Park and Studley Solar Farm cable routes

Councillor Richardson reported that Norrington cable work had paused. The South Brook crossing by the school had not been completed during the school holidays and Middle Lane remains to be crossed.

There was no confirmed new information on the Studley route beyond the previously reported possibility of an alternative through farmland.

d. Wiltshire Council response to the Parish Council's twelve recommendations

The Clerk had paused further chasing while the Local Plan consultation was open, as the issue had also been included in consultation responses.

Resolved: To resume pursuing Wiltshire Council's response to the twelve recommendations.

217/26 Appeals

a. Appeal decisions

i. Outmarsh Farm – PL/2025/08409, appeal 6008970

Dismissal of the appeal concerning a static caravan for temporary residential use associated with agricultural operations was noted.

ii. Land east of New Road – PL/2025/09917, appeal 6007352

Dismissal of the appeal for two self-build dwellings and associated infrastructure was noted.

b. Whistle Mead Solar Farm – PL/2023/01914

Councillor Richardson reported on the Whistle Mead Solar Farm appeal hearing, which he attended on behalf of Community Action Whitley and Shaw (CAWS). Discussion focused principally on landscape and heritage, and Councillor Richardson presented evidence on cumulative impacts. He commended residents' detailed local evidence concerning flooding, road closures and difficulties accessing the site.

He expressed concern that Wiltshire Council's representatives had taken a neutral position on fire safety and that the developer had been unable to answer the Inspector's questions without its fire-safety expert present. The Inspector allowed a subsequent technical note to be submitted. No decision had been received

218/26 Goods Vehicle Operator's Licence – CJW Scaffolding (SW) Ltd, 620 Berryfield Lane

Members considered the public notice and guidance. No formal representation on the operator's licence was agreed as the parish council could only respond in the capacity as neighbour, and on environmental grounds.

Members discussed wider problems on Berryfield Lane, including use as a rat run, poor visibility of restriction signs, worn road markings, speeding and the

safety of the A350 junction. Options such as one-way operation or closure at the A350 end were discussed, but Members recognised the consequences for the farm and other businesses and considered that the landowner should first be consulted.

Resolved: To ask the Parish Steward to clear the vegetation obscuring the restriction signs on Berryfield Lane.

Wiltshire Councillor Alford left the meeting.

219/26 Planning enforcement and related concerns

Beanacre tree removal: The Clerk reported that residents had received an SSEN letter describing works to trim/remove branches near overhead lines but subsequently reported six trees being felled on the west side of the A350 between Westlands Lane and the bus stop to its south, near the public right of way. Photographs were considered. The Clerk had been unable to obtain an explanation through initial contact and had made a formal complaint seeking the reason for removal of the trees rather than branch trimming.

Outmarsh Farm: Members asked about the follow-up to the dismissed appeal and related site works. The Clerk advised that Councillor Andrew Griffin had already sought clarification of the next steps.

220/26 Section 106 agreements and developer meetings

c. Updates on agreements

i. Pathfinder Place:

There was no further update on the Section 278/Section 38 works. Members noted that adoption remained outstanding.

ii. Buckley Gardens:

The play area appeared to be open. The Clerk questioned who was responsible for inspection, maintenance and health and safety, as the Parish Council had not taken it over and responsibility for any management arrangements was unclear.

Resolved: The Clerk to contact the developer to establish whether the play area was formally open and who was responsible for its safe operation and inspection.

iii. Delegated Section 106 decisions:

No new decisions were reported.

d. Contact with developers

i. Living Space – land behind Townsend Farm, Semington Road Applications 20/07334/FUL (Phase 1) and PL/2022/08155 (Phase 2).

Members noted that works to form the bellmouth/permanent access had started approximately two weeks earlier.

Following an enquiry from a resident about affordable housing, officers had sought programme information. Living Space advised that Phase 1 occupation was expected in the first quarter of 2027 and archaeological work for Phase 2 was due to start towards the end of 2026. Members noted slippage against earlier expectations.

ii. Gompels warehouse

Resolved 1: To approve the notes of the developer meeting held on 22nd September 2026 (Appendix 2).

Resolved 2: To reiterate to the developer the Parish Council's support for a ghost right-turn lane on the A365 at the site access, given traffic speeds and cumulative development in the area.

iii. Wales & West Utilities gas-main replacement

Resolved 1: To approve the notes of the developer meeting held on 10th September 2026 (Appendix 3).

The Clerk reported a subsequent site meeting in Whitley with the utility company and flood wardens, addressing access, bus movements and highway pinch points. Positive resident feedback had been passed to Streetworks, and Members also commended reinstatement in Bowerhill.

At Mitchell Drive, the gas main's unexpected location in the carriageway would require a future road closure. Members emphasised the need to confirm suitable alternative bus routes during any Mitchell Drive closure.

Resolved 2: To seek confirmation of the future Wales & West Utilities programme for Mitchell Drive and bus diversion arrangements.

e. Transparency of draft Section 106 agreements and evidence for contributions

Members considered Wiltshire Council's response to the question on the evidence required to secure Section 106 contributions, following the omission of several Parish Council requests from the North of Berryfield Lane development.

Concerns remained about inconsistent NHS responses, cumulative highway impacts and the need for a holistic A365 assessment. Members supported further engagement with NHS Estates and the local GP partnership, early highway officer involvement, and development of justified, detailed costings for Berryfield Village Hall improvements. A further joint meeting with Melksham Town Council was sought to clarify intentions regarding burial provision.

Members also expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of early access to draft Section 106 agreements and the outstanding parish/town council engagement protocol, particularly ahead of changes to the scheme of delegation.

Resolved 1: To continue pressing Wiltshire Council for the protocol and early access to draft Section 106 proposals

Resolved 2: To pursue the healthcare evidence and further work needed to substantiate community infrastructure requests

Resolved 3: To seek a joint discussion with Melksham Town Council on burial provision.

Resolved 4: To raise transparency concerns with the MP and Wiltshire Councillor Ian Thorn, with the Clerk also seeking opportunities through NALC (National Association of Local Councils) and SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks).

Meeting closed at 9.15 pm.

Chairman, 12th October 2026

Appendix 1

NOTES OF MEETING WITH BARRATT REDROW on Tuesday 22 September 2026 at 2:30pm

Re: Blackmore Farm Reserved matters application PL/2026/01555 for 229 dwellings pursuant to outline permission PL/2023/11188

Present: Councillor Richard Wood (Chair of Planning - part)
Councillor Alan Baines (Vice Chair of Planning)
Councillor John Glover
Councillor David Pafford
Councillor Mark Harris

Wiltshire Councillor Nick Holder

Teresa Strange (Parish Clerk);
Fiona Dey (Parish Officer);

Peter Lawson (Turley, planning consultant for Barratt Redrow);
Cecilia Hughes (David Wilson Homes/Barratt Redrow);
Matthew Roberts (consultant).

Application progress and revised design

The developer said the reserved matters application had been amended following two rounds of discussion with Wiltshire Council, including urban design and highways comments. The latest plans had been submitted several weeks earlier. The Clerk said the Parish Council had not yet considered them and would check whether it had been consulted; the next Planning Committee meeting was due on 5 October.

The revisions were described as refining the arrival area, adding a third character area with open space overlooked by dwellings, and simplifying the elevations and palette of brick, stone, render and roofing materials. Some homes remain two and a half storeys, with upper rooms largely within the roof. The developer said the layout must remain within the approved outline parameters.

Relationship with Sandridge Common homes

Members revisited residents' concerns about overlooking, privacy and the boundary treatment. The developer said the separation between facing homes was at least about 24 metres and reached about 27 metres in places, against a stated minimum of 21 metres. It described an additional landscaped strip of about five metres beyond the new homes' gardens, to be maintained by a management company; the gardens would still meet the minimum depth. The strip might be accessible but was not proposed as a formal footpath.

Members asked how the boundaries would be treated and whether an unlit strip between rear fences could create security or encroachment concerns. The developer said it would check the boundary treatment plan and that the management company would manage the strip. The developer said it had responded to the Urban Design Officer's comments. Members suggested the

separation measurements and five metre strip should be clearly explained when the revised scheme is presented to Wiltshire Council.

Phasing and connections

The 229 homes form the first reserved matters application within the approved Blackmore Farm outline scheme of up to 500 homes. The developer said the southern part of that outline site would come forward in a later reserved matters application, after further work including archaeology and biodiversity net gain. It expected the first 229 homes to take at least two years to build. Members stressed that the separate East of Blackmore Farm proposal should not be called “phase two” of this permission; it has no outline consent.

Members sought assurance that the two parts of the approved site would connect, and asked how future walking, cycling and possible highway links might relate to East of Blackmore Farm and the proposed Lidl. The developer referred to the approved outline documents and reserved connection rights, and offered to send a plan showing the intended links. The precise links to a separate future development remain subject to that application and its consent.

Bus route and stops

The developer described a proposed bus route through the site, with a temporary turning area for the first residential stage and a later turn within the employment area. Whether a service operates would depend on a bus operator; the developer said the route had been designed to accommodate one. A bus contribution and its timing are fixed by the outline agreement. Members questioned how a service would be secured early enough to influence travel habits and referred to the East of Melksham Bus Strategy and other developments’ contributions.

The developer referred to three stop locations. Shelter details for two stops had been submitted under a condition, while the mobility hub details were still under discussion. Members asked for shelters with effective weather protection, usable seating and clarity on real time information, and asked which operator had been consulted. The developer offered to provide further details of the shelters and operator consultation.

Community hub land and mobility hub

The developer confirmed that the whole parcel outlined for the community facility is approximately 0.4 hectares and is intended for transfer to the Parish Council under the section 106 agreement. The concept drawing showing a building, parking and a mobility hub was described as illustrative and intended to prompt discussion, not as an agreed building layout. The Clerk explained that the Council had discovered the discharge of condition submission by chance and could not comment through the usual online consultation process. The developer said discussions on that condition were effectively paused pending engagement with the Council.

The outline condition requires a mobility hub, including provision for electric vehicle and electric cycle charging and associated bus stops. The developer suggested that a small number of public vehicle chargers could serve visitors to the community centre, given that the proposed homes, including flats, would have their own charging. It said a third party would normally operate and maintain chargers, but siting them on transferred Council land could require a lease and agreement about ownership and responsibilities. Numbers, viability, electricity

capacity, phasing and the practical form of cycle charging remained unresolved. Employment land or another location was raised as an alternative; the developer said it had not ruled out other sites.

Members had differing views on the need for public chargers at the community facility. They emphasised that the centre could serve a much wider area than the new development and that its parking must work for its eventual uses. The indicative parking figure of up to 80 spaces depended on an assumed building size. Members preferred exploring a layout with the building and outdoor seating beside open/play space, and parking and landscaped areas on the other side, rather than a building opening onto a car park. No layout or mobility hub location was agreed.

The developer agreed that the Council could consider the options and respond around mid October, following discussion at Full Council. It would supply scaled dimensions of the 0.4 hectare site and the neighbouring open space. It was suggested that any committee report should make clear that the detailed community facility and mobility hub arrangements are still being worked through with the Parish Council.

Community centre delivery and funding

The Clerk asked when the Council would need to specify the position and requirements for utilities to the serviced site, including electricity, drainage and broadband. The developer said it needed the Council's requirements and would examine its construction programme and the section 106 wording; a reliable land transfer date could not yet be given. Members discussed coordinating the access road, school and centre so the facility could be built safely while construction continued. The approved height parameters were said to permit a two storey centre, subject to its later design and consents.

The Clerk said early section 106 funding would support design work and that further contributions were being sought from other east Melksham sites, alongside Community Infrastructure Levy funds. The Council was also seeking clarity from Wiltshire Council on historic funding associated with an earlier community centre proposal.

Members asked the developer to consider acoustic treatment of nearby dwellings so that the eventual centre's use, opening windows and doors, and reasonable hours would not be unduly constrained, drawing on Berryfield Village Hall experience. The developer agreed to discuss this with its technical director.

A3102 access and wider development

The Parish Council reiterated its preference for a roundabout over the consented ghost island/right turn access, particularly in light of cumulative traffic from other proposed development. It had sought pre-application advice about changing the junction. The developer said it intended to implement the existing outline permission and would not itself pursue a section 73 variation. It suggested that any roundabout needed for the separate East of Blackmore Farm proposal should be examined as part of that proposal, with any later changes to the adopted highway considered on their own merits. Members stressed the need for coordinated planning and assessment of cumulative effects.

The meeting concluded at approximately 4.00 pm.

Appendix 2

NOTES OF MEETING WITH GOMPELS ON TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2026 AT APPROXIMATELY 4:00PM RE: PROPOSED WAREHOUSE AT BOWERHILL

Present: Councillor Richard Wood (Chair of Planning)
Councillor Alan Baines (Vice Chair of Planning)
Councillor John Glover
Councillor David Pafford
Councillor Mark Harris

Teresa Strange (Parish Clerk)

Fiona Dey (Parish Officer)

Sam Gompels and Sasha A'Court (Gompels Healthcare)

Sam explained that the Reserved Matters submission was expected to be submitted in early October, subject to the remaining consultants completing work on the road design, drainage, landscaping and biodiversity net gain.

Sam showed the revised elevations. The proposed appearance uses a muted green at tree level, alternating shades of grey above to break up the length of the building, an anthracite finish to the office frontage and brick piers. Samples of the colours were circulated. Sam said the colours would appear lighter on the building than on samples. Members considered that the revised treatment would help the building blend into its setting.

The tree planting plan was still being prepared. Sam proposed younger trees, which he considered would establish more successfully, with some faster-growing willows and poplars providing earlier screening. He said some trees previously identified for retention had died following drought.

Sam had asked Wiltshire Council whether a ghost right-turn lane was required at the site access. He said the forecast average daily traffic was around 260 vehicle movements, below the threshold of 300 that he understood to apply, and that the road works would cost approximately £1 million. Members expressed a preference for retaining a right-turn lane in view of speeds on the road, the nearby proposed housing access and cumulative highway impacts.

Sam outlined changes to the site plan. These included a shallow off-site attenuation feature requiring a separate application; a wider, approximately 10-metre route around the building for fire appliances; revised roof drainage allowing more tree planting on the west side; and an increased bund to the south and west. A pedestrian entrance could connect to an extended footway and the bus stop if the highway design allowed.

Additional acoustic fencing was proposed at the north and east of the site, including where a bund could not cross the Wessex Water pipeline. Sam described the proposed insulated cladding used within the building and the work undertaken to model noise from the building and air-conditioning units, to limit the impact on neighbouring properties. He said the air-conditioning units would be

positioned and operated to meet the requirements being discussed with Wiltshire Council.

A bird management approach for the roof was discussed because of the nearby air ambulance operations. Sam said the air ambulance had reviewed the document and was content with it. The plans showed solar panels across the roof to allow for future installation, although the initial installation was likely to be smaller and sized mainly for the building's daytime electricity use. Battery storage was not proposed at this stage.

Sam said Gompels had progressed the Wessex Water main diversion along the eastern boundary. He described an optimistic construction start in spring or early summer 2027, with completion dependent on the programme and subsequent fit-out.

Members asked about employment. Sam said the business currently employed approximately 100 people, around 25 more than when the original figures were presented, and expected to create at least a further 75 jobs if its plans progressed. He said recruitment remained challenging despite continued growth and investment in warehouse automation.

The meeting concluded at 5:20pm.

Appendix 3

Meeting with Wales and West Utilities regarding gas-main replacement Programme in the Melksham Area held on Thursday 10th September 2026 at 10am at Melksham Without Parish Council Offices at Melksham Community Campus

Present: Councillor Alan Baines (Vice Chair of Planning)
Councillor David Pafford (Vice Chair of Council)
Councillor Mark Harris
Councillor Peter Richardson
Teresa Strange, Parish Clerk
Fiona Dey, Parish Officer

Hayley Bell, CEO Melksham Town Council

Mick Gallavin, Programme Controller Wales & West Utilities

Background and scope

Wales & West Utilities explained that the works form part of an OFGEN-governed 30-year programme. All cast-iron, ductile-iron and spun-iron gas mains up to and including 8 inches must be replaced or abandoned by 2032. Steel mains above 2 inches are outside the programme unless leakage or another condition justifies replacement. The works are maintenance of the existing network and are not driven by new housing development.

The Melksham package was brought forward from the following year because work in Warminster could not proceed where recently resurfaced roads were subject to an embargo. Wales & West Utilities apologised that the councils had not been consulted before the Melksham works began and said earlier engagement would normally take place.

How the work will be undertaken

- Where possible, new plastic mains will be inserted into the existing metallic pipes. Open-cut trenches will be used where insertion or moling is not possible because of pressure, ground conditions or service length.
- Cameras are used to locate property service connections. Individual services are then transferred to the new main. A property's gas supply may be interrupted on the day its service is transferred, but should be restored the same day.
- Vulnerable customers are identified through the priority register and door-to-door contact. Heaters and hotplates can be provided where needed.
- Every affected customer should receive a letter before work starts. Customers whose properties are unaffected do not normally receive a letter. Advance roadside signs are also used.

- Reinstatement should be completed within five days. Specialist reinstatement teams follow the pipe-laying teams and will return to repair grass verges and other disturbed areas.

Indicative programme

Area	Indicative timing	Notes
Halifax Road	To finish by the end of October	A section of about 90 metres near the school is expected to return during an Easter or summer school holiday next year.
Lowbourn area	To finish by 6 November	Includes work around King Street and Spa Road. Hospital and GP surgery access and Remembrance events must be considered.
Folly Lane and George Ward Gardens	To finish by 29 January	The team was expected to return on 28 September after completing work in Warminster.
Blackmore Road	Provisional restart 30 November; finish by end of March	The original team was removed following electrical cable strikes. Dates were to be confirmed.
Beanacre	1 February to 31 March	Works include Granville Road and Old Road. Coordination is needed with the play-area project, A350 traffic and local surface-water issues.

Local issues and concerns

Accessibility and highway safety

Members stressed that footway closures and temporary arrangements must remain usable by mobility scooters and other disabled users, particularly around Halifax Road where dropped kerbs are limited. Wales & West Utilities confirmed that a suitable walkway or crossing point should be provided. A request was also made for its drivers, including HGV drivers, not to park on pavements. The representative agreed to issue a reminder and invited photographs and vehicle registration details where problems occurred.

Cumulative works and communication

Members said residents were exasperated by consecutive and sometimes simultaneous utility works, including electricity, Openreach and other cable projects. Poor, late or unclear signs and diversion information had caused particular difficulty. Residents often did not distinguish between contractors, so shortcomings elsewhere could be attributed to Wales & West Utilities.

The councils asked for early, joined-up communication with them, Wiltshire Council, bus operators, schools, businesses and emergency and waste services. Wales & West Utilities agreed to keep the councils involved, said road closures normally require 12 weeks' notice and offered a direct contact for urgent site concerns.

Shaw and Whitley

Particular concern was raised about further disruption in Shaw and Whitley after extended utility works and bus diversions. The loss of the normal bus route had affected access to schools, work, Melksham and hospital appointments in Bath.

For any future Middle Lane closure, members asked that alternatives such as a shuttle bus, minibus or taxi arrangement be explored. Access for Pocock's poultry business must be maintained during its busiest pre-Christmas period. The representative agreed to check the traffic-management plan, visit the area and speak directly with the business.

Local flooding and drainage were highlighted as significant constraints. Members explained the role of local ditches and culverts, the history of surface-water and foul-water problems and the potential for heavy rain to affect works on the A365 and surrounding roads.

Roundabouts and strategic routes

The Lowbourn and Spa Road roundabouts were recognised as difficult locations because of their layouts, traffic volumes and proximity to the hospital and GP surgery. The Farmers Roundabout area was also highlighted as a busy A350/A365 route with a history of flooding and repeated disruption from development-related utility works. Existing gas-main records did not match what had been found on site, so further investigation was required before work could be programmed.

Members asked that any reinforcement work associated with nearby development be identified before replacement work begins, to avoid the road being excavated twice. The needs of residents at the nearby mobile-home park, bus users and roundabout sponsors should also be considered.

Other matters

Wales & West Utilities clarified that the recent issue on Corsham Road was low gas pressure rather than a gas leak. The necessary response had delayed removal of temporary traffic lights after the planned completion date. The issue had been resolved and dealt with internally.

Members also raised incomplete reinstatement of road markings and a zebra crossing on Corsham Road following another utility's works. Wales & West Utilities offered to raise this with an industry contact if the responsible contractor could be confirmed.

The possible future replacement of a medium-pressure metallic main near Whitehall Garden Centre was mentioned. This is not currently part of the mandatory programme but has been raised by Wiltshire Council because of recurring gas escapes. Any work would be expected next year at the earliest and would require careful traffic planning.

Communications

It was agreed that Wales & West Utilities' communications team would contact the council and prepare information suitable for local press and social media. The information should explain why the work is required, make clear that it is unrelated to new development, identify affected areas in an accessible way, and reassure residents that directly affected properties will receive a letter.

Meeting closed at 11.35am

Melksham Without Parish Council Wiltshire Local Plan Scoping Consultation

Submission Version - Melksham Without Parish Council (MWPC)

Friday 25th September 2026

Question 1 - What are the key local challenges, priorities and opportunities relevant for the future development of Wiltshire?

Melksham Without Parish Council considers that one of the principal challenges for the new Local Plan is ensuring that future growth is plan-led and infrastructure-led, rather than continuing through a succession of individual developments which cumulatively place increasing pressure upon existing communities and infrastructure.

This is particularly important in the wider Melksham area, where substantial development has already taken place and further housing is built, under construction, permitted, allocated, subject to live applications or known through pre-application activity.

The starting point for planning future growth should therefore be a transparent understanding of everything already built, committed and reasonably foreseeable.

The Council considers that the new Local Plan should establish a long-term vision for what the wider Melksham area should become over the next 15-20 years. Housing, employment, transport, education, healthcare, community facilities, water and drainage, utilities, energy, digital connectivity, green infrastructure, recreation, heritage and local character, and settlement separation need to be planned together rather than dealt with separately.

MWPC's own priorities are based upon taking a holistic view, joining up the dots and looking at the bigger picture, with a particular commitment to securing the right infrastructure, including community facilities, health and education provision.

Cumulative growth

A key issue for Melksham is cumulative impact.

Development should not be assessed only site by site. The Local Plan should consider the combined effects of:

- development already completed;
- development under construction;
- existing planning permissions;
- sites allocated or proposed through the withdrawn Wiltshire Local Plan, together with allocations in the made Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan;
- live planning applications;
- significant known pre-application proposals;
- reasonably foreseeable changes to existing sites, including brownfield land likely to become available during the Plan period as a result of business closure, relocation, restructuring or redevelopment; and
- other reasonably foreseeable development.

This should be a forward-looking exercise, not simply a snapshot of land formally available at the date the evidence is prepared.

Where there is credible evidence that a significant site is likely to change use or become available within the Plan period, that potential should be taken into account in the spatial strategy and cumulative assessment.

In Melksham, previous experience with the former Cooper Tires site demonstrates why this matters. Plans for closure meant that the future availability of a very significant brownfield site could reasonably have been foreseen during the previous plan-making period. Current proposals involving relocation of existing businesses and supermarkets may similarly create future brownfield opportunities which should be reflected in long-term spatial planning.

The cumulative effects of growth should be considered across:

- highways and junctions;
- public transport;
- rail;
- walking and cycling;
- education;
- healthcare;
- drainage and water supply;
- utilities;
- energy infrastructure;
- digital infrastructure;
- community facilities;
- open space;
- sport and recreation;
- landscape;
- heritage and local character;
- green infrastructure;
- settlement identity and coalescence;
- air quality; and
- construction impacts.

Cumulative impact should include not only the combined scale and pressure created by development, but also the need for consistency and coordination between adjoining or related sites. Separate applications should not result in fragmented or conflicting access arrangements, junction designs, walking and cycling links, public transport provision, community infrastructure, open space, landscaping or other mitigation.

Where developments are adjoining or functionally related, the Local Plan should require coordinated masterplanning and, where appropriate, consistent design parameters, access arrangements, infrastructure standards and delivery mechanisms so that the combined development functions as one coherent place rather than a collection of disconnected schemes.

This is particularly important where several developers are promoting adjoining or nearby sites. On the ground they form one expanding community even if the planning system deals with them through separate applications.

Infrastructure delivery

Infrastructure capacity and delivery are a particular priority.

Historic experience in Melksham demonstrates that housing can be occupied substantially in advance of associated schools, play provision, community facilities and transport improvements. The new Plan therefore needs clear infrastructure requirements, phasing and trigger points, together with realistic funding and delivery mechanisms and transparent monitoring.

MWPC has previously raised the importance of monitoring planning obligations and ensuring that infrastructure is delivered in step with development rather than after communities are already established.

The Local Plan and Infrastructure Delivery Plan should distinguish clearly between infrastructure which is merely identified and infrastructure which has a credible route to delivery, including:

- who will deliver it;
- estimated cost;
- funding source;
- developer contribution mechanism;
- land requirements;
- dependencies;
- phasing;
- trigger points; and
- monitoring.

The experience of the Melksham Cemetery extension and the Melksham Bypass demonstrates why this matters. MWPC has previously queried what inclusion within an Infrastructure Delivery Plan means in practice if there is no certainty that funding will be allocated or the project delivered.

Education

Education must be treated as strategic infrastructure and should encompass the whole education pathway:

- early years;
- primary;
- secondary;
- SEND;
- post-16 and further education, including sixth-form, college, vocational and apprenticeship provision; and
- higher/university-level education.

School-place planning should be forward-looking and cumulative rather than based principally upon a snapshot of current spare places.

Wiltshire's own School Places Strategy says that commissioning should begin with a thorough understanding of the needs and aspirations of the local community and should involve strategic planning based upon evidence and clear implementation processes.

It also recognises the importance of sufficient choice of school places and a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting the needs of existing and new communities.

This is particularly important for Melksham because Wiltshire's previous School Places Strategy identified that substantial Local Plan growth would create a significant shortfall in secondary places and that future secondary provision would require careful consideration.

MWPC therefore considers that the new Local Plan should revisit the long-term secondary education strategy for Melksham and properly test alternatives, potentially including:

- a new secondary school;
- satellite provision;
- alternative post-16 arrangements which release capacity;
- further expansion where evidence demonstrates that this is educationally and operationally appropriate; or

another strategic solution.

It should not simply assume further expansion of Melksham Oak without testing reasonable alternatives.

The evidence should separately address early years and SEND requirements as well as mainstream school places.

Further and higher education

The Local Plan should also consider education beyond school age.

There is university-level provision within Wiltshire through Wiltshire College & University Centre and partnerships with higher education providers. The issue is therefore not that Wiltshire has no higher education provision, but whether the range, location, capacity and accessibility of further and higher education will meet future population, employment and skills needs.

For Melksham specifically, MWPC has previously raised concern that local young people have limited post-16 choice and need to travel outside the town for college provision.

The Local Plan should therefore consider:

- access to post-16 and further education;
- sixth-form and college provision;
- apprenticeships;
- vocational and technical training;
- higher and university-level education;
- skills required by existing and future businesses;
- whether satellite or specialist provision could be appropriate in major growth areas; and
- sustainable transport links to existing provision elsewhere.

Education and employment planning should be considered together so that skills provision supports the economic strategy.

Employment

Employment provision is another major concern.

MWPC considers current employment land provision in the Melksham area to be woefully inadequate in relation to the scale of housing and population growth which has already taken place and is proposed and has anecdotal knowledge of the hectares needed to accommodate current growth aspiration of local companies, of which the 5 hectares allocated in the withdrawn Local Plan was completely inadequate.

The Local Plan should therefore identify and safeguard a substantially greater supply of appropriately located employment land in the Melksham area.

This should not simply be assessed as a county-wide number of hectares. Evidence and policy should consider:

- the actual amount of employment land available locally;
- its quality and suitability;
- occupancy and vacancies;
- losses of employment land;
- existing business requirements;
- expansion requirements;
- inward investment;
- changing employment patterns;
- business relocation opportunities;
- the type of employment land required;
- accessibility by sustainable transport;
- freight requirements; and
- the relationship between population growth and local job growth.

A better balance between homes and jobs would reduce out-commuting, strengthen the local economy and make sustainable transport planning more achievable.

Transport and connectivity

Transport needs to be planned with growth, not after housing sites have been selected.

This includes:

- the A350;
- A365;
- A3102;
- key junctions;
- rural routes affected by displacement;
- the proposed Melksham Eastern Bypass;
- bus services;
- rail;
- walking and cycling;
- freight;
- HGV parking and driver facilities;
- routes to schools;
- access to employment; and
- cross-boundary travel.

The Local Plan should be prepared in direct alignment with Wiltshire's Local Transport Plan, LTP4, so that land-use planning and transport planning are one coordinated process.

The Local Plan should also align with Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs), the Bus Service Improvement Plan, Melksham and east Melksham bus strategies, rail strategies, freight work, school travel plans and other relevant transport evidence.

Where an LCWIP or other transport strategy identifies a scheme required to support growth, that should feed directly into Local Plan site requirements and, where appropriate, section 106, CIL or other infrastructure funding.

Public transport information

Public transport infrastructure should include not only routes and services but also the information necessary to make those services usable.

MWPC has a current objective to extend Real Time Information at bus shelters across the parish.

The Local Plan should recognise modern passenger information as part of sustainable transport infrastructure, including appropriate real-time information at bus stops and shelters serving significant new development.

Bath & Wiltshire Metro and rail

MWPC supports the principle of improved strategic rail and public transport connectivity through the Bath & Wiltshire Metro concept, without at this stage endorsing every technical detail of a particular scheme.

The concept seeks to link future growth more closely to the rail network, including better Melksham rail provision, more walkable communities and less reliance on private cars. It also links rail improvement with brownfield regeneration opportunities such as the former Cooper Tires site and Upside Yard.

The Local Plan should therefore safeguard opportunities for future rail improvement and ensure that improved transport provision is considered at the earliest stages of deciding where development should go.

Freight and Bowerhill

Freight requires specific consideration.

MWPC has raised concerns about the cumulative effects of freight routing in and around Bowerhill and the A365, particularly alongside Melksham Oak, housing growth, employment development and the proposed Eastern Bypass.

MWPC has also been seeking suitable HGV parking and driver facilities at Bowerhill Industrial Estate for a number of years.

If additional employment land is to be provided, the freight and servicing infrastructure necessary to support it must be planned at the same time.

Healthcare

Healthcare capacity must be treated as a strategic and cross-boundary infrastructure issue.

The Wiltshire baseline recognises that the NHS Bath, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board covers Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire and includes the Royal United Hospital at Bath. It also notes that the ICB and its partners are well placed to identify the implications of Local Plan growth for healthcare infrastructure and services.

This matters particularly for Melksham and west Wiltshire because acute healthcare demand does not stop at Wiltshire's administrative boundary.

The Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust has stated in a planning consultation response for development at Whitley that it serves around 500,000 people across Bath and North East Somerset, West Wiltshire and the Mendips and that it was operating at maximum capacity.

The same representation stated that housing development has both individual and cumulative short- and long-term impacts upon the Trust's services and facilities.

It also explained that existing acute and planned healthcare infrastructure cannot absorb additional population growth without impacts upon service quality.

For the particular Whitley development of 22 dwellings, the RUH sought a section 106 contribution of £24,986 towards the additional demand generated.

The Local Plan should therefore assess healthcare on a functional catchment basis, involving:

- the BSW ICB;
- local GP and primary-care providers;
- Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust;
- community-health providers;
- other hospital providers serving Wiltshire residents; and
- neighbouring authorities including Bath & North East Somerset Council where appropriate.

Government 10 Year Health Plan

Healthcare evidence and infrastructure planning should also look forward to changes occurring during the Local Plan period.

The Government's 10 Year Health Plan for England: Fit for the Future is based around three major shifts:

- hospital to community;
- analogue to digital; and
- sickness to prevention.

Wiltshire's own baseline already refers to the Plan and recognises its emphasis on shifting care into communities, digital services and prevention.

These changes fall directly within the timeframe in which the Local Plan will operate.

The Local Plan should therefore consider what this changing health model means spatially for Wiltshire and the Melksham area, including possible requirements for:

- GP provision;
- community and neighbourhood health facilities;
- diagnostics;
- outpatient care;
- preventative-health infrastructure;
- digital healthcare;
- transport access; and
- continuing acute-hospital provision.

The move towards community-based healthcare should not be used to assume that acute capacity will cease to be a concern. The RUH evidence already demonstrates pressure arising from west Wiltshire housing growth.

Digital connectivity - including healthcare

Reliable high-speed broadband should therefore be treated as essential infrastructure.

It is important for:

- home working;
- rural businesses;
- inward investment;
- education;
- skills and training;
- access to public services;
- social inclusion; and
- increasingly, healthcare.

MWPC has previously expressly identified high-speed broadband as a priority for rural areas, particularly for people working at home and for attracting employment.

Obtaining higher-speed internet access across the parish is also one of MWPC's current long-term objectives.

The Government's shift from analogue to digital healthcare strengthens this requirement. Poor connectivity could increasingly become a barrier to accessing health services as well as employment and education.

The Local Plan should ensure that new housing and employment development is provided with appropriate high-speed digital infrastructure from the outset and should also consider gaps affecting existing rural communities.

Settlement identity, boundaries and coalescence

Settlement identity is a major concern.

Further incremental growth should not cause Melksham, Bowerhill, Berryfield, Shaw, Whitley, Beanacre and surrounding rural communities gradually to merge into one another.

The Local Plan should consider settlement classification, settlement boundaries and strategic separation together rather than treating them as unrelated matters.

MWPC has highlighted that around 1,300 homes east of Melksham are either already approved or progressing through the planning system, yet are outside the current Melksham and Bowerhill settlement boundary.

The emerging settlement pattern therefore cannot be understood simply by looking at historic settlement boundaries.

There is also a specific issue with Berryfield. It is identified as a Small Village in the adopted Core Strategy, where only very limited development would normally be anticipated, but it has no defined settlement boundary and has nevertheless experienced substantial development.

MWPC considers that the new Local Plan should examine whether smaller settlements such as Berryfield and Beanacre should have defined settlement boundaries, providing greater clarity over the extent of the settlement, the distinction between the built-up area and surrounding countryside and how future development should be managed.

Shaw and Whitley

MWPC welcomes the fact that the recent Settlement Facilities Survey has assessed Shaw and Whitley separately.

MWPC considers that this approach should continue through the new Local Plan.

Although Shaw and Whitley are grouped together as a Large Village in the adopted Core Strategy, they are distinct settlements with different character, facilities, identities and development pressures.

MWPC therefore considers that Shaw and Whitley should be treated as separate settlements in the new Local Plan.

Strategic separation around the Melksham area

The evidence should assess the remaining physical separation between settlements across the wider Melksham area, not just between Melksham and Bowerhill.

Particular attention should be given to the gaps between:

- Melksham and Bowerhill;
- Melksham and Berryfield;
- Berryfield and Semington;
- Bowerhill and Seend; and
- Whitley and Gastard/Chapel Knapp, and the rural communities further to the north where development pressure could erode their separate identity.

Development has progressively reduced some of these gaps and that settlement identity, settlement boundaries and strategic separation must therefore be considered together.

Where land continues to perform an important separation function, the evidence should identify it clearly and assess the appropriate mechanism for protecting it, including strategic gaps, green wedges or other suitable policy tools.

Some important gaps cross parish and neighbourhood-plan boundaries and therefore cannot always be protected comprehensively through one neighbourhood plan.

As an example of the kind of thing that MWPC are looking for their area, the open land separating Holt, Bradford on Avon and east Trowbridge, has Green Belt designations which perform a strategic separation function across administrative boundaries.

Additional neighbourhood-plan evidence on strategic separation

Several of these gaps are already supported by detailed neighbourhood-plan evidence.

JMNP2 Policy 19: Separation of Settlements specifically protects the separation between Whitley and Shaw, Shaw and Melksham, Beanacre and Melksham, and Berryfield and Semington. Its supporting evidence identifies the importance of both physical and perceptual separation and recognises that Shaw, Whitley, Beanacre, Bowerhill, Berryfield and Melksham have their own character, history and sense of place, distinguishable through the intervening countryside.

The submitted JMNP2 had also sought separation protection between Melksham and Berryfield and between Melksham and Bowerhill. The Examiner considered that these were different in character from the other separation areas and that the settlements had already coalesced elsewhere. Importantly, however, he expressly stated that this conclusion related only to the assessment of Policy 19 against the basic conditions and did not amount to a judgement on the development potential of those areas.

The recent Land North of Berryfield Lane application considered by Western Area Planning Committee on 19 August demonstrates why this issue could be addressed strategically through the Local Plan. In that officer report, Wiltshire Council relied on the Examiner's findings and concluded that Melksham and Berryfield were already coalescing and that there were insufficient grounds for blanket local landscape protection of the remaining countryside between them. The same report nevertheless recognised that a remaining countryside gap still exists and said that, through landscaping and open space, the "spirit" of the Green Wedge could at least be retained.

This demonstrates the limitation of relying on individual development-management decisions to protect settlement identity. Once a gap has already been reduced by previous permissions, it becomes increasingly difficult to resist further incremental development on coalescence grounds alone.

MWPC considers that the new Local Plan should look at these issues afresh at the strategic level. The fact that some coalescence has already occurred should not automatically mean that further erosion is acceptable. In some locations, the remaining open land may become more important, rather than less important, because it is the last land performing a meaningful separation function.

Accordingly, in addition to the gaps already identified above, particular attention should also be given to:

- Melksham and Shaw;
- Melksham and Beanacre;
- Shaw and Whitley; and
- Beanacre and the rural communities further to the north, where development pressure could progressively erode settlement identity and rural setting.

The new Local Plan should reinforce existing JMNP2 protections while also reconsidering, at the appropriate strategic scale, the remaining separation between Melksham and Berryfield and between Melksham and Bowerhill. Where earlier development has already reduced a gap, the remaining open land may become increasingly important in maintaining settlement identity, rural setting and a legible settlement pattern.

Rural communities

Rural communities should not simply be treated as extensions of the nearest town.

Their own needs should be considered in relation to settlement identity, local services, employment, transport, digital connectivity, education, drainage, utilities, housing, heritage, landscape and community facilities.

Evidence should also be forward-looking. A facilities survey showing what exists today does not necessarily demonstrate what will remain available throughout a 15-20 year planning period.

Wiltshire Council has confirmed that its current Settlement Facilities Survey is a snapshot of existing facilities and does not capture future facilities associated with planned development that has yet to receive permission. That is understandable for the purpose of the survey itself, but the wider Local Plan evidence base must subsequently take account of committed growth, emerging communities and reasonably foreseeable future provision.

Open space, sport, recreation and young people

Open space should be considered alongside sport and recreation rather than simply as an amount of undeveloped land.

The evidence base should bring together the relevant Open Space Assessment, Playing Pitch Strategy and local evidence and consider future requirements arising from population growth.

This should include:

- amenity green space;
- accessible natural green space;
- informal recreation;
- children's play;
- facilities for teenagers and young people;
- allotments;
- football pitches;
- cricket;
- rugby;
- hockey;
- artificial grass pitches;
- 3G pitches;
- changing facilities;
- ancillary facilities;
- accessibility;
- pitch quality; and
- long-term management.

MWPC's current objectives specifically include facilitating the identified need for additional 3G pitch provision in the Melksham community area and increasing facilities for children and young people.

The Local Plan should therefore ensure that the needs of older children and teenagers are not overlooked in favour of only traditional equipped children's play.

Provision should be based on evidence of quantity, quality and accessibility and should translate into clear land and contribution requirements for new development.

Community facilities and community safety

New communities need proper community facilities.

Village halls and community centres should be designed into development from the outline/masterplanning stage with adequate site area, access, parking, relationship with neighbouring housing, servicing and flexibility of use.

MWPC has practical experience of community facilities becoming difficult to deliver appropriately because these details were not resolved early enough.

Public-realm and development design should also support community safety and help design out crime and antisocial behaviour.

Cemetery and burial provision

Cemetery and burial provision should be recognised as essential community infrastructure.

Wiltshire's existing infrastructure framework already identifies new or expanded cemetery provision in Melksham as necessary to meet burial-space needs arising from cumulative development.

Current evidence demonstrates extremely limited remaining capacity at Melksham Cemetery.

The Local Plan should therefore consider traditional burial, natural burial, ashes/interment, cemetery extension, new cemetery provision, crematorium provision where justified, land safeguarding, costs and delivery mechanisms.

An infrastructure need should not disappear simply because funding has not yet been allocated.

Question 2 - How do you think we should meet development needs and where should we focus growth?

MWPC does not support a spatial strategy based principally upon successive outward extensions to existing towns.

Wiltshire should instead prepare an infrastructure-led, place-based spatial strategy which:

1. understands everything already delivered and committed;
2. takes account of reasonably foreseeable development and land-use change;
3. identifies existing infrastructure deficits;
4. establishes remaining infrastructure headroom;
5. determines the infrastructure needed for further growth;
6. protects settlement identity and strategic gaps;
7. maximises appropriate brownfield and regeneration opportunities;
8. plans employment alongside housing;
9. integrates transport and land-use planning; and
10. only then identifies the most sustainable locations for additional development.

For the wider Melksham area, Wiltshire should begin with a comprehensive map showing completed development, development under construction, permissions, sites identified through the withdrawn Wiltshire Local Plan, JMNP2 allocations, live applications, known significant pre-applications, current and foreseeable brownfield opportunities, employment land, schools, health facilities, transport, utilities, heritage and local character, landscape, open space, green infrastructure, settlement boundaries and strategic gaps, and safeguarded infrastructure corridors.

This is particularly important because approximately 1,300 homes east of Melksham are already approved or progressing through the planning system outside the existing Melksham and Bowerhill settlement boundary.

A long-term plan for the wider Melksham area

The scale and complexity of growth around Melksham warrants consideration of a strategic masterplan, Area Action Plan or equivalent place-based framework. For the wider Melksham area, a strategic masterplan or equivalent framework could identify defined growth or infrastructure zones, with development within those areas making proportionate contributions towards the strategic infrastructure required to support cumulative growth. This would help ensure that infrastructure is planned and funded across the wider area, rather than each development being considered in isolation and only contributing to the impacts arising directly from its own site.

The question should not simply be where the next housing allocation can be fitted around Melksham.

The question should be: What should the wider Melksham area look like at the end of the Plan period, and what infrastructure, employment, services and environmental protections are necessary to make that outcome sustainable?

Existing settlements

Growth around existing settlements should only occur where cumulative effects can be supported. Land availability alone should not determine where growth goes.

Growth should be limited where it would result in settlement coalescence, prejudice the proposed Eastern Bypass, worsen unacceptable highway congestion, create unsustainable school journeys, overload healthcare, create drainage or water-capacity problems, increase car dependency, harm landscape, heritage or local character, overload community, recreation or sports infrastructure, or worsen an existing infrastructure deficit without a credible delivery solution.

Brownfield and regeneration

The Local Plan should maximise suitable brownfield and regeneration opportunities.

This must be a forward-looking assessment, not a snapshot restricted to sites that happen to be vacant or marketed when the evidence is prepared.

The Plan should consider currently vacant or underused land, former industrial land, town-centre opportunities, riverside opportunities, businesses known or reasonably likely to close or relocate, supermarket and commercial relocations which could release existing sites, sites likely to become obsolete or underused during the Plan period and other previously developed land reasonably expected to become available.

The former Cooper Tires site is an important Melksham example of why long-term planning should take account of foreseeable site changes rather than waiting for land formally to become vacant.

Business relocation may sometimes provide a double benefit: releasing an existing brownfield site for regeneration whilst allowing the business to expand or modernise at a more suitable employment location.

New settlement

MWPC considers that Wiltshire should genuinely assess the option of one or more new settlements.

MWPC does not consider it sustainable simply to continue expanding existing towns in successive directions. If Wiltshire's housing requirement is sufficiently large, a properly planned new settlement may provide an alternative to continual outward expansion or "donuting" of existing towns.

However, it should only be considered genuinely sustainable if it is of sufficient scale to function as a proper community and is comprehensively planned with strong rail and/or high-quality public transport, a proper centre, shops and services, substantial employment, primary and secondary schools, early years and SEND provision, healthcare, community facilities, sport and recreation, open space and green infrastructure, utilities, high-speed broadband, walking and cycling networks and sufficient housing to sustain those services.

A new settlement must not simply be a very large housing estate where supporting infrastructure is promised later.

Housing and employment

Housing distribution should be influenced by employment opportunities. Places which take substantial housing growth should not become increasingly dependent upon residents travelling elsewhere for work.

For Melksham, further housing growth should be accompanied by a significant improvement in the amount, range and accessibility of employment land.

Education should influence growth locations

The ability to provide sustainable education infrastructure should influence the spatial strategy. Housing should not be allocated first with school places addressed afterwards.

The location and scale of growth should be considered alongside existing school capacity, future pupil yield, the location of new provision, safe walking and cycling routes, secondary-school strategy, SEND and post-16 and further education provision.

Sustainable transport

Growth should be focused where meaningful sustainable transport can actually be provided.

A site's sustainability should not be determined by a numerical connectivity score without understanding what that score means in practice.

Assessment should include actual bus frequency, evening and Sunday services, reliability, rail frequency and reliability, safe walking and cycling routes, access to jobs, schools, healthcare and shops/services, and connectivity with adjoining development.

Transport interventions needed to make a location sustainable should be identified before allocation, with a credible funding and delivery mechanism.

Question 3 - What do you think locally specific policies could and should cover in the Wiltshire Local Plan?

The new-style Local Plan is intended to concentrate on matters which genuinely require a Wiltshire or local approach rather than repeating national policy. MWPC considers the following particularly appropriate.

Strategic Separation Policy

The Local Plan should contain a Strategic Separation Policy identifying and protecting important gaps between settlements.

This is particularly necessary where gaps cross parish or neighbourhood-plan boundaries and cannot be fully protected through one neighbourhood plan.

For the Melksham area, particular attention should be given to the gaps between Melksham and Bowerhill; Melksham and Berryfield; Berryfield and Semington; Bowerhill and Seend; and Whitley and Gastard/Chapel Knapp, and the rural communities further to the north where development pressure could erode their separate identity.

The policy should protect the separate identity of Melksham, Bowerhill, Berryfield, Shaw, Whitley, Beanacre and surrounding rural communities.

It could use strategic gaps, green wedges or another suitable locally specific mechanism.

Relationship with JMNP2 separation policy

The Strategic Separation Policy should recognise and reinforce existing neighbourhood-plan protections. In the Melksham Neighbourhood Area, JMNP2 Policy 19 already identifies the separation between Whitley and Shaw, Shaw and Melksham, Beanacre and Melksham, and Berryfield and Semington.

The Local Plan should also consider separation areas which could not be carried through JMNP2 because they required a wider strategic approach. In particular, the remaining gaps between Melksham and Berryfield and between Melksham and Bowerhill should be reassessed in the context of cumulative development, settlement identity and the risk of further incremental coalescence.

The fact that settlements have already grown closer together should not automatically mean that the remaining open land has no strategic value. In some cases, the remaining separation may become more important precisely because previous development has already reduced it.

Cumulative Growth and Infrastructure Coordination Policy

This should be a separate policy from Strategic Separation.

A Cumulative Growth and Infrastructure Coordination Policy could require:

- related development to be assessed cumulatively;
- coordination between adjoining or nearby sites;
- consideration of completed, committed, proposed and reasonably foreseeable development;
- consistent and coordinated access, junction, walking, cycling and public transport arrangements where sites are adjoining or functionally related;

- cumulative assessment of education, health, drainage, utilities, open space, community infrastructure and other mitigation;
- coordinated masterplanning and consistent design parameters where appropriate; and
- explicit links between growth, infrastructure capacity, funding, phasing and delivery.

The aim should be to prevent separate planning applications from producing fragmented or contradictory infrastructure and place-making outcomes.

Settlement boundaries and hierarchy

The Local Plan should establish a clear relationship between settlement classification and settlement boundaries.

It should consider whether smaller settlements such as Berryfield and Beanacre should have defined settlement boundaries.

Shaw and Whitley should also be considered separately rather than automatically continuing their historic combined classification.

First Homes local connection

The principle of a local connection requirement for First Homes is already supported in the Government's Planning Practice Guidance, which allows local eligibility/local connection criteria to apply to First Homes for the initial marketing period.

The withdrawn Wiltshire Local Plan referred to the Wiltshire Council Allocations Policy local connection test applying for the first three months from when a First Home is first marketed. That previous Wiltshire approach was more local than simply requiring a connection somewhere within the county, with priority operating at town/parish or neighbourhood-plan-area level.

MWPC asks that the new Wiltshire Local Plan retains this locally focused approach, so that First Homes are initially prioritised for qualifying people with a genuine connection to the local area in which the development is taking place.

Infrastructure-led development

Strategic development should have clearly defined requirements for transport, education, healthcare, utilities, drainage, community facilities, sport, open space, broadband and other necessary infrastructure. Delivery should be linked to appropriate occupation triggers.

Infrastructure monitoring

Planning obligations and infrastructure requirements should be transparently monitored. The public should be able to understand what was secured, how much money has been received, what it is for, when infrastructure is due and whether it has been delivered.

Strategic masterplanning and parameter plans

Major and interrelated sites should be comprehensively masterplanned. Essential infrastructure, community facilities, walking and cycling routes and connections should not be allowed to disappear or become compromised through piecemeal applications.

Employment land

A locally specific policy should require an appropriate balance between housing and employment and should ensure that employment land is provided in the right locations, in sufficient quantity and for the right types of employment use.

For Melksham, additional appropriately located employment land is particularly important, but the Local Plan should avoid allocating land in a way which does not reflect actual local business and employment needs.

The evidence should identify the type of employment space required, including whether there is demand for manufacturing, warehousing and distribution, industrial uses, offices, smaller business units, expansion space for existing employers and other specialist employment uses.

Employment allocations should then be matched to appropriate access, servicing and transport infrastructure.

The experience at Blackmore Farm is relevant. Employment land there was constrained in the type of use that could realistically be accommodated because the appropriate access for larger industrial, manufacturing or warehouse uses could not be secured from the Eastern Way roundabout.

The result demonstrates why it is not sufficient simply to allocate a number of hectares as "employment land" if the access arrangements, planning use and site design mean that the land cannot meet the actual employment needs of the area.

The Local Plan should therefore ensure employment provision is based on the right amount, right type, right location and right access.

Transport safeguarding

Strategic transport and infrastructure corridors should be safeguarded, including the proposed Melksham Eastern Bypass, the Melksham Link Canal and land necessary to enable future rail and public transport improvements.

LTP4 and LCWIPs

Local Plan policies should align with LTP4 and relevant LCWIPs. Where identified walking or cycling infrastructure is necessary to support a development, appropriate delivery or contributions should be secured through section 106, CIL or other funding mechanisms.

Schools and safe routes

The Local Plan should ensure that school provision and safe routes to school are planned at the same time as housing. Land and contributions should be secured early rather than waiting until existing capacity has been exhausted.

Digital connectivity

New housing and employment development should incorporate reliable high-speed broadband/fibre infrastructure from the outset. The importance of digital connectivity now extends beyond employment and home working into education, public services and increasingly digital healthcare.

Sport, recreation, playing pitches and allotments

Policies should support delivery of needs identified through Wiltshire's Open Space Assessment, Playing Pitch Strategy and relevant local evidence. Provision should include, where evidence demonstrates need, football, cricket, rugby, hockey, 3G/artificial pitches, children's play, youth provision, informal recreation, allotments and accessible natural green space. Developer contributions should be linked clearly to evidence of need and actual delivery.

Community facilities

Village halls and community centres should be properly planned at outline/masterplan stage with sufficient land, access, parking and appropriate relationships with surrounding housing.

Cemetery and burial infrastructure

Where evidence demonstrates need, the Local Plan should identify or safeguard appropriate land for cemetery, burial and related provision.

Dark skies and lighting

Rural character and ecological corridors should receive appropriate protection from unnecessary light pollution.

Trees and hedgerows

Policies should address long-term management as well as initial retention.

Community safety

Design policy should promote safe, overlooked public spaces and routes and support designing out crime and antisocial behaviour.

Heritage and local character

MWPC considers that Shaw, Whitley and The Spa warrant further assessment of their historic character, including whether Conservation Area designation or another appropriate form of protection would be justified.

Neighbourhood Plans

The Local Plan should work positively with made Neighbourhood Plans, including JMNP2, and use their evidence rather than unnecessarily duplicating it.

Question 4 - What evidence do you think is needed to inform the Plan? Do you have thoughts on how it should be prepared?

Evidence should be current, transparent, cumulative and forward-looking.

It should not merely describe conditions at one date in 2026 if development already permitted or progressing will materially change those conditions before or during implementation of the Local Plan.

Existing robust evidence should be reused and updated where appropriate, including neighbourhood-plan evidence and work already undertaken by different Wiltshire Council services.

Whole-area Melksham evidence

A comprehensive wider Melksham evidence map should show completed development; construction; permissions; sites identified through the withdrawn Wiltshire Local Plan; JMNP2 allocations; live applications; known significant pre-applications; current brownfield sites; reasonably foreseeable future brownfield opportunities arising from closure, relocation, restructuring or redevelopment; future land availability; employment land; transport infrastructure; bus corridors; rail; walking and cycling networks; schools; healthcare; community facilities; sport and recreation; utilities; drainage; water; energy infrastructure; digital infrastructure; landscape; heritage and local character; green infrastructure; settlement boundaries; settlement gaps; safeguarded corridors; and flood risk.

Use of existing JMNP2 evidence

Existing robust evidence should be used rather than recreated. For sites promoted within the JMNP2 area, the site-selection process should also expressly assess proposals against the made Neighbourhood Plan's vision, objectives and relevant policies. Where Wiltshire Council proposes an approach which departs from JMNP2, the evidence and reasons should be transparent.

Forward-looking land availability and brownfield evidence

Brownfield evidence should not be limited to land that happens to be vacant, marketed or formally available at the point the study is undertaken.

The evidence should identify significant sites which are reasonably likely to become available during the Local Plan period because of known business closure, relocation, restructuring, changing operational requirements, supermarket or retail relocation, redevelopment, or land becoming obsolete or underused.

The former Cooper Tires site demonstrates the importance of this approach in Melksham. Long-term spatial planning should anticipate credible and foreseeable changes rather than waiting until a significant site is already vacant.

Settlement hierarchy and settlement-boundary evidence

The settlement hierarchy evidence should not rely solely upon a snapshot of facilities which exist today.

Wiltshire Council has explained that its Settlement Facilities Survey is a factual snapshot of current facilities and does not capture future provision associated with planned development which has yet to be granted permission. That may be appropriate for the narrow purposes of the survey itself, but it is not sufficient on its own for a Local Plan which must look many years ahead.

The subsequent evidence base should therefore take account of committed development, live major applications, sites progressing from the withdrawn Local Plan, emerging communities, future facilities associated with those communities, changes in settlement form and reasonably foreseeable development during the Plan period.

This is particularly important east of Melksham, where approximately 1,300 homes are already approved or are the subject of live applications yet sit outside the current Melksham and Bowerhill settlement boundary.

Berryfield and Beanacre

The evidence should consider whether smaller settlements without defined settlement boundaries are more exposed to development pressure.

Berryfield is a particular example. Although identified as a Small Village, it has experienced substantial development despite having no defined settlement boundary.

MWPC considers the Local Plan should assess whether Berryfield and Beanacre should have defined settlement boundaries, providing greater clarity over the extent of the built-up area, the relationship with surrounding countryside, settlement identity and how future development should be managed.

Strategic separation around the Melksham area

The evidence should assess the remaining physical separation between settlements across the wider Melksham area.

Particular attention should be given to the gaps between:

- Melksham and Bowerhill;
- Melksham and Berryfield;
- Berryfield and Semington;
- Bowerhill and Seend; and
- Whitley and Gastard/Chapel Knapp, and the rural communities further to the north where development pressure could erode their separate identity.

MWPC has highlighted that development has progressively reduced some of these gaps and that settlement identity, settlement boundaries and strategic separation must therefore be considered together.

Where land continues to perform an important separation function, the evidence should identify it clearly and assess the appropriate mechanism for protecting it.

Shaw and Whitley

The evidence should assess Shaw and Whitley separately. Although historically grouped together in the Core Strategy, the recent facilities work has shown that they can be assessed individually. MWPC considers this should continue through the settlement-hierarchy review because the two settlements have different character, facilities, identities and development pressures.

Housing

Housing evidence should transparently show completions, commitments, permissions, allocations, windfalls, neighbourhood-plan allocations, sites progressing from the withdrawn Local Plan and realistic delivery assumptions.

The evidence should avoid double-counting and should make clear how much growth the wider area has already absorbed before identifying a further requirement.

Employment

Employment evidence should be prepared at an appropriately local level.

For Melksham it should assess existing employment land, occupancy, availability, quality, losses, business requirements, likely expansion, inward investment, employment sectors, potential relocation, commuting patterns, job growth, the relationship between housing/population growth and local employment, and the type of employment use actually required.

Employment evidence should distinguish between different uses and assess whether allocated sites are genuinely capable of accommodating the types of businesses for which there is local demand, including the necessary highway access, servicing, HGV movements and other infrastructure.

It should not be assumed that land allocated nominally for employment will meet identified need if site access or planning restrictions mean it can only accommodate office-type uses when the local requirement is for industrial, manufacturing or warehousing space.

The Blackmore Farm experience demonstrates why the relationship between employment use and suitable access should be established before land is relied upon as part of the employment supply.

Education

Education evidence should assess cumulative demand arising from existing development, construction, permissions, allocations, live applications, future strategic growth and the Plan as a whole.

It should not rely solely upon current surplus places. The Local Plan should forecast when capacity will be exhausted and plan land, funding and delivery in advance.

Evidence should separately assess early years; primary; secondary; SEND; post-16 and further education, including sixth-form, college, vocational and apprenticeship provision; and higher education and skills.

The earlier School Places Strategy identified a significant future secondary-place issue for Melksham. The new evidence should therefore test reasonable alternatives for secondary provision rather than deferring the issue until capacity has already been used.

Further/higher education and skills

The evidence base should assess further education, higher education, university-level provision within Wiltshire, apprenticeships, vocational and technical training, specialist skills provision, future workforce needs and sustainable access to provision.

It should consider whether areas experiencing substantial population and employment growth require additional local or satellite provision.

Transport

Transport evidence should align explicitly with LTP4, LCWIPs, the Bus Service Improvement Plan, local Melksham bus strategies, rail studies, freight strategies, school travel work, strategic highway studies and cross-boundary transport evidence.

Cumulative modelling should include the A350, A365, A3102, key junctions and relevant rural routes.

Active travel and LCWIPs

For each growth area the evidence should identify relevant LCWIP or other walking/cycling schemes and establish what is required, estimated cost, land requirements, delivery body, priority, timing and appropriate contribution mechanisms.

The purpose should be to translate strategy into actual infrastructure delivery through site requirements, section 106, CIL or other funding as appropriate.

Public transport

Evidence should assess not just whether a bus route passes a site but the actual quality and usability of the service, including frequency, reliability, evening services, Sunday services, interchange, access to rail, RTI/passenger information and long-term funding and delivery.

Connectivity Tool

Wiltshire should explain how the DfT Connectivity Tool and associated scores will be used. Numerical scores should be transparent and tested against real-world conditions including actual bus and train timetables, journey frequency, service hours, safe walking and cycling routes, barriers, and access to employment, schools, healthcare and day-to-day services.

Freight

Evidence should assess HGV routing, effects upon Bowerhill, A365/A350 interactions, industrial-estate access, HGV parking, driver welfare facilities, displacement caused by restrictions elsewhere and the relationship with the proposed Eastern Bypass.

Health and healthcare

Healthcare evidence should be prepared on a functional catchment basis.

It should include GP capacity, primary care, community health, acute care, hospital capacity, pharmacy, health workforce, demographic change, ageing, population growth, funding, developer contributions and cumulative demand.

Existing planning-application representations from health providers should be treated as evidence rather than repeatedly rediscovering the same issue site by site.

The RUH has already stated in relation to development at Whitley that it serves West Wiltshire and that new housing has individual and cumulative effects upon its services.

The Trust also states that population growth from development cannot simply be incorporated into its funding arrangements when Local Plan housing trajectories and planning permissions arise.

The Local Plan evidence should therefore involve BSW ICB, RUH Bath, local GPs, community-health providers, other hospital providers and neighbouring authorities including BANES where appropriate.

Future health model

The evidence base should also align with the Government's 10 Year Health Plan for England. Wiltshire's own baseline identifies the national direction towards community-based care, digital services and prevention.

As these changes will occur within the Local Plan period, the evidence should consider future requirements for neighbourhood healthcare, community-health centres, diagnostics, outpatient services, prevention, GP/primary-care provision, digital health, acute hospital capacity and accessible transport.

The national move towards community care should not be used as a reason to disregard existing acute-care pressures.

Digital connectivity

The evidence should map broadband speeds, fibre availability, rural gaps, employment-area gaps, mobile connectivity where relevant and future infrastructure requirements.

Digital connectivity should be assessed against the needs of businesses, home workers, education, young people, public services and digital healthcare.

As the health system moves further towards digital access, reliable broadband increasingly forms part of the infrastructure necessary to give communities practical access to healthcare.

Water, drainage and flood risk

Evidence should assess cumulative water supply, wastewater, sewer capacity, surface-water drainage, groundwater, flood risk and climate-change impacts. Infrastructure constraints should genuinely influence the spatial strategy.

Energy and utilities

Evidence should address electricity-grid capacity, gas where relevant, renewable-energy infrastructure, BESS, National Grid infrastructure and capacity required to support growth.

Open space, sport and recreation

The Local Plan evidence should update and bring together Wiltshire's Open Space Assessment, Playing Pitch Strategy and relevant local evidence.

It should assess quantity, quality, capacity, accessibility, current deficiencies, future population growth, land requirements, improvement requirements, costs and delivery.

This should include children's play, youth facilities, informal recreation, allotments, football, cricket, rugby, hockey, grass pitches, artificial pitches, 3G pitches, changing facilities and ancillary provision.

For Melksham this should specifically take account of the identified need for additional 3G pitch provision, together with cricket and other playing-pitch requirements and the needs of children and teenagers.

Where an evidence base identifies a need, the Local Plan should translate it into site requirements, land safeguarding and/or developer contribution requirements rather than leaving it in a separate strategy document.

Heritage and local character

Further evidence should examine Shaw, Whitley and The Spa, including whether Conservation Area designation or another appropriate form of protection would be justified.

Heritage evidence should also feed into the wider spatial strategy rather than being considered only when individual applications are submitted.

Cemetery and burial provision

Evidence should update remaining cemetery capacity, projected demand across the Plan period, traditional burial, natural burial, ashes/interment, potential extension land, new cemetery options, crematorium provision, land availability, costs and delivery.

Infrastructure deficit and headroom

The evidence should establish not only what infrastructure a future development creates a need for, but what existing infrastructure deficit already exists, how much capacity has been consumed by historic development, what committed capacity is already allocated, what remaining headroom exists and what infrastructure must be delivered before further growth can sustainably be accommodated.

Cumulative concentration of development and infrastructure

The evidence should also identify areas where particular forms of development or infrastructure are already concentrated. Assessment should consider the existing burden upon a place or receiving system, the remaining environmental and infrastructure capacity and the additional pressure created by further development. This is particularly relevant where housing, energy and grid infrastructure, transport works and other major development affect the same communities, roads, landscapes, water systems or services.

Infrastructure Delivery Plan

For strategic infrastructure, the IDP should identify the project, why it is needed, cost, responsible body, funding source, developer contribution mechanism, land required, phasing, delivery trigger, dependencies and realistic likelihood of delivery.

Projects should not simply appear on a list without a credible route to implementation.

Question 5 - Do you have any further thoughts on what the Wiltshire Local Plan should contain?

MWPC considers that success should not be measured simply by the number of homes delivered.

A successful Local Plan should demonstrate that growth results in properly connected, well-served, distinctive and sustainable communities, with the necessary employment, transport, social and environmental infrastructure delivered alongside housing.

For the wider Melksham area, the Plan should provide an integrated strategic framework, potentially through an Area Action Plan, strategic masterplan, place-based framework or equivalent mechanism.

This should establish what the area is intended to look like at the end of the Plan period rather than allowing its form to emerge from successive unrelated applications.

The Local Plan should contain meaningful measurable outcomes covering not just housing completions but also employment land delivered; the right type of employment land delivered; local jobs; schools and school capacity; post-16, further and higher education access; healthcare; transport infrastructure; bus and rail provision; walking and cycling schemes; RTI/public transport information; high-speed broadband; community facilities; children's and youth facilities; playing pitches and sport; open space; water and drainage; utilities; cemetery capacity; heritage and local character; settlement separation; and timely infrastructure delivery.

The Plan should also be forward-looking in its approach to land availability. Sites which are reasonably expected to change use or become available during the Plan period should be considered as part of the strategic picture rather than only once redevelopment becomes imminent.

Where infrastructure identified through an existing adopted or recognised planning framework remains necessary, that need should not disappear from the new Local Plan unless updated evidence demonstrates that it is no longer required.

The Local Plan should also work positively alongside made Neighbourhood Plans. JMNP2 is part of the Development Plan and contains extensive recent local evidence which should inform the strategic framework.

Question 6 - How should we engage?

MWPC considers that engagement should be early, continuous, place-based, accessible and genuinely capable of influencing the Plan.

Engagement should not principally take place after preferred spatial options or packages of sites have already been formed.

Town and parish councils hold significant local knowledge. In areas such as Melksham they have also invested substantial time and resources in neighbourhood planning, infrastructure evidence, transport work, planning application monitoring, community engagement and understanding cumulative impacts.

They should therefore be involved early enough to influence growth strategy, site selection, settlement hierarchy and boundaries, infrastructure requirements, transport, education, healthcare, employment, strategic gaps, landscape, heritage and community infrastructure.

Regular Melksham round-table

MWPC strongly supports the proposed regular Local Plan round-table for Melksham.

Cllr Ian Thorn has proposed that this involve both Melksham parishes, the Wiltshire Local Plan team, local Wiltshire councillors and other locally relevant participants and that it should meet regularly in Melksham throughout preparation of the Local Plan.

MWPC considers these discussions should involve relevant Wiltshire services when necessary, including Strategic Planning, Transport Planning, Highways, Education, infrastructure, environment, health partners and other services relevant to the issues being discussed.

This should help avoid housing, transport, schools, employment and infrastructure being considered in separate departmental silos.

Public engagement in growth areas

Areas expected to accommodate significant development should have dedicated public engagement.

MWPC previously raised concern that Melksham was omitted from the first programme of public events despite the scale of development pressure and high local interest. Cllr Thorn subsequently confirmed that one of the consultation events at the next stage would be held in Melksham. MWPC welcomes that commitment.

Accessible local venues such as the Melksham Community Campus should be used. Market-day sessions can also reach residents who would not normally attend a formal planning event.

Local media

Wiltshire Council should proactively use established local media.

For the Melksham area this should specifically include Melksham News. It provides an established local means of reaching people who may not routinely visit Wiltshire Council's website or consultation portal.

Its sister publications serving Warminster and Westbury provide an existing community-media network which could also assist Local Plan engagement elsewhere in west Wiltshire.

Wiltshire should similarly identify trusted local newspapers and community publications in other parts of the county.

Town and parish council channels

Wiltshire should actively use local council and community communication networks, including town and parish newsletters, websites, social media, community noticeboards, Area Boards, local community groups, schools and colleges, businesses, transport-user groups, neighbourhood-plan networks, voluntary organisations, sports clubs, village halls and other trusted local networks.

Digital and face-to-face engagement

Engagement should use a mixture of online consultation, interactive mapping, webinars, social media, workshops, exhibitions, public meetings, printed material, community newspapers and face-to-face events.

The scoping document itself recognises the value of combining digital and in-person engagement and ensuring that people who cannot easily access digital tools are not excluded.

Accessibility and seldom-heard groups

Particular attention should be given to people who may be less likely to respond to a traditional planning consultation, including people without good digital access, older residents, younger people, families, people with disabilities, rural residents, people in rented accommodation, residents in areas experiencing deprivation, commuters, home workers and people whose first experience of planning is usually when an application appears close to their home.

Consultation timescales

Consultation periods must allow meaningful democratic participation.

Town and parish councils need sufficient time to receive and understand consultation documents, seek views locally, place the matter on a public meeting agenda, debate it in public, obtain further information where necessary and agree a formal response.

Key workshops and briefings should therefore occur early enough within consultation periods to inform council responses.

Feedback after consultation

Wiltshire should clearly explain after each consultation stage who was consulted, how consultation was undertaken, the main issues raised, what was changed as a result and, where suggestions were not accepted, why.

That feedback loop is essential if residents and local councils are to see that engagement is genuinely helping shape the Local Plan rather than simply recording responses.

Audit trail for community evidence

Meaningful engagement should include a clear feedback loop. For substantive representations made by town and parish councils, neighbourhood-plan bodies and community organisations, Wiltshire Council should provide a transparent audit trail showing the issues and evidence submitted, how they have been considered and whether they have influenced the emerging strategy, policy or site-selection decision. Where a substantive request or item of evidence has not been accepted, the Council should explain why.

This is particularly important where communities have already invested substantial time and resources in preparing neighbourhood-plan or technical evidence. Such work should inform the new Local Plan rather than communities being required to recreate it without first understanding how the existing evidence has been assessed.