



# Melksham Neighbourhood Plan

## Steering Group Meeting

Date: Wednesday 3 May 2023  
Start: 6.30 pm

### Present:

#### Steering Group Members Present

Councillor David Pafford Chair (MWPC)  
Councillor John Glover (MWPC)  
Councillor Graham Ellis (MTC)  
Chris Holden (Melksham Community Area Partnership)  
John Hamley (MTUG)  
Councillor Mike Sankey (WC)  
Shirley McCarthy (Environment)  
Mark Blackham (Bowerhill Residents Action Group)

#### Officers

Teresa Strange (MWPC)  
Linda Roberts (MTC)

### Task Group Members:

Councillor Mark Harris (MPWC)  
Councillor Alan Baines (MWPC)

### Planning Consultants:

Vaughan Thompson (Place Studio)

**Via Zoom:** Lorraine McRandle (MPWC)  
Katie Lea (Place Studio) (part of meeting)  
James Essery (Place Studio) (part of meeting)

<b>MTC</b>	<b>Melksham Town Council</b>
<b>MWPC</b>	<b>Melksham Without Parish Council</b>
<b>WC</b>	<b>Wiltshire Council</b>
<b>MTUG</b>	<b>Melksham Transport User Group</b>

## MINUTES

### 1. Welcome & Housekeeping

Councillor Pafford welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through the fire evacuation procedures for the building and that the meeting was being recorded and published on YouTube until the minutes were approved.

### 2. To note apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Pat Aves, Melksham Town Council.

The meeting was informed due to other commitments, Colin Harrison had resigned from the group.

### **3. Declarations of Interests & Register of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4. Public Participation**

There were no members of public present.

### **5. To approve agenda item 16 to be held in closed session due to confidentiality**

Due to the confidential nature of business to be transacted, it was asked if item 16 regarding site selection could be held in closed session.

**Resolved:** For item 16 to be held in closed session and that members of the Housing Task Group present remain for this part of the meeting.

### **6. To agree Minutes of Meeting held on 22 February 2023**

**Resolved:** To approve and for the Chair to sign the minutes of the Steering Group meeting held on 22 February 2023.

### **7. To receive report following the public consultation events and survey in Feb/March**

Vaughan provided an update on the consultation which took place online, as well as consultations held on 9, 10 and 11 February, including the stakeholder event on 7 February for town centre businesses.

Vaughan explained the consultation focused mainly on the Town Centre Master Plan report, an evidence base, to provide the Neighbourhood Plan Policy 9 relating to the town centre, an opportunity to be updated and set out priorities for the town centre. It also provided opportunities and inspiration to shape ongoing master-planning work, which would take its own pathway into a set of priorities, projects, and initiatives driven by the Town Council. There was also consultation on Local Green Spaces, Heritage Assets and the Design Code and an update on housing.

Vaughan explained c200 responses had been received to the consultation, which provided a good background in supporting the Town Centre Masterplan and support for the town centre, which validated and ranked several priorities the Town Centre Masterplan had shed light on, as well as looking at opportunities for change and initiatives in the town centre.

As part of the Town Centre Masterplan, people were asked to comment on 3 areas of change for regeneration, which were either available or likely to come forward ie:

- Cluster 1: Campus/Blue Pool.
- Cluster 2: Old Library site, including the unoccupied Chinese restaurant recently acquired by Wiltshire Council
- Cluster 3: Cooper Tires/Avonside, up to the Station.

The Town Centre Masterplan put forward several opportunities and ideas in shaping these areas, with stakeholders also putting forward their own views/ideas.

The community felt the heritage of the town centre areas were of a high significance and a treasure to be conserved. It was felt the Masterplan should have a policy to assist with buildings of value and in poor condition, as well as an initiative to remove some unsightly buildings. Green spaces and greenery were a highly important aspect, linking to the park and river, which it was felt the Town Centre Masterplan did not emphasise as much.

On the Cluster Sites there was broad support for the masterplan being proactive on all areas, with support for affordable housing on the old library site and exciting ideas, including residential, for the Blue Pool site, as a potential allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan.

There was support for regeneration of sites over the river, including Cooper Tires. However, there was a mixture of opinion on this site, with some people suggesting different housing types, with others saying that there should be no more housing, which would need to be considered.

Vaughan explained AECOM would revise the draft Town Centre Master Plan (TCMP) and insert a narrative on the consultation. It would increase the emphasis on green/blue infrastructure and maintain the 3 cluster areas, with changes to what was proposed on them, in line with what the community wanted to see and also in step with some of the dialogue on the potential allocation sites. It will update and increase the inspirational imagery for the riverside environment and how areas over the river could be regenerated. This will be brought back for final sign off, as an evidence base, for hopefully the next meeting.

Once the report has been brought back to the Steering Group in a revised format it will go back to stakeholder consultees and then community communications via the Neighbourhood Plan website and Melksham News in June.

Shirley enquired if those people who had said no to housing in the town centre, were aware housing would be allocated elsewhere, such as green fields.

Vaughan felt this was a difficult question to answer, however suspected there was an “in principle” concern about housing coming to Melksham in general.

Councillor Pafford noted that whilst people often stated Melksham does not need more housing, this was not backed up by the recent Housing Needs survey, which showed this was not the case.

## **8. Local Green Spaces (LGS)**

The final short list was now drawn up with most of the landowners contacted, with site notices put up where contact had not been established.

Unfortunately, one site, the former golf course at Bowerhill had been left off the short list in error but the landowner had now been written to.

It was confirmed that no new recommendations for LGS had come forward following the recent consultation.

## **9. Heritage Assets**

James from Place explained the final short list had now been drawn-up with consultation underway on these.

During consultation, 4 new nominations had been put forward, however one was not put forward to the short list i.e., the turbine at Bowerhill as the feeling of the group was that this might be potentially moved to a museum, rather than staying at the current site and any designation would harm any future efforts to do this.

The final evidence base was nearly complete, which will need mapping, however access to this was proving difficult, with a solution being sought.

The Parish Clerk stated that during the Housing Task Group reviewing the AECOM Site Assessment report, it was felt there was potentially 2 new heritage assets to consider. One being the chimney and adjacent roofline at Avonside, given its conservation aspect and impact on the skyline. The other was 541 Outmarsh and adjacent site 1031, as it was noted as an update to the AECOM Site Assessment report that it had omitted to refer to the old canal line and railway line and therefore it was felt by the Housing Task Group that this industrial archaeology should be preserved.

**Resolved:** To send these through to James at Place for inclusion on the Heritage short list.

## **10. Sustainability/Climate Change:**

To note topic paper and draft new policy.

Update provided by Vaughan later in the meeting.

## **11. Landscape Buffer/Green Gap/Green Wedge evidence base**

Katie from Place explained a Green Gap/Wedge report had been undertaken by AECOM and reviewed by members of the Steering Group. A meeting had been held with representatives of Semington Parish Council and Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, who were also doing work around landscape sensitivities in Semington, with some collaborative working taking place.

A Green Wedge policy had been suggested by AECOM, with the supporting text being amended to make it shorter and more succinct and make specific reference to the green wedge between Semington and Berryfield, which in the report is not recommended to go forward because one of the edges is set against the parish boundary, which is the Neighbourhood Plan boundary. Supporting text has been added to explain the boundary is a very strong landscape boundary which aligns the methodology in the report, which states landscape features can form boundaries and the canal is the parish boundary to the South. Therefore, this green wedge will be included with the others recommended in the report. Reference will be made to cross boundary working with Semington, to support this green wedge, however, the Examiner may take a different view on this, however, it was felt worth putting forward for consideration.

## **12. Town Centre Master Plan (TCMP)**

The Town Clerk explained it was understood that technical support had been secured to undertake a car park survey but had recently been informed that this was not the case and therefore no work had been undertaken on this.

The Parish Clerk confirmed there was no sight of technical support or grant funding from the Government for Neighbourhood Plans at present. The Locality website detailed the Government's commitment to it continuing but applications were not permitted at present, and there were no scheme details.

Vaughan explained the Town Centre Master Plan report had highlighted the significance of car park management and the location of car parks, as part of the vitality of the town centre. Stakeholder and community engagement had also highlighted this as an important priority.

Members expressed that they felt a car parking study was important to inform decisions on site allocations in the town. Vaughan concurred as one of the sites that may be allocated is the former Library site which includes a car park and it would be important to understand its current use now the Library has relocated to set criteria for any potential development on the car park site, to ensure there will not be demonstrable harm to the town centre.

The TCMP itself can agree that car parking is a critical part of the vitality of the town centre and needs a car parking study. Consideration will need to be given how this will be financed if there is no Government funding/Technical Support as there are other consultants, other than AECOM who could do this work.

It was queried if Wiltshire Council had data/modelling on car parking usage which could be used.

Vaughan explained that whilst Wiltshire Council may have this information, any car parking study would start with a desk top study before undertaking additional surveying.

It was noted there is other free parking in the town, which would also form part of a car park study, not just Wiltshire Council car parks.

**Resolved:** To enquire with Wiltshire Council if car park data was available, which could be used as part of a car parking study.

### 13. Design Code/Guide

Vaughan updated the meeting on the relatively low feedback from the consultation on the Design Codes/Guide. One comment received stated the guide lacked clarity of guidance on how future development should be and that it was more of a commentary of what existing development was like. There had also been several comments stating Melksham did not need more housing with concerns about the lack of infrastructure

Vaughan explained Wiltshire Council would be allocating some housing in the Local Plan. There would be an opportunity for the town and parish council, with the input of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to make representation, at Regulation 19, about the requirement for necessary infrastructure to accompany any growth in housing numbers of a strategic nature. It was likely any strategic site allocated would be of a size to support a strategic level of infrastructure on the site itself and would make infrastructure contributions in connecting them into the town.

Vaughan explained the Design Code was not about an infrastructure delivery plan but about high quality design.

Councillor Glover stated the Government had stated there should be no gas boilers installed from a certain date, however, most houses had gas. There were plans to try and produce hydrogen, and whilst it cannot be done in a 'green way' at present, this may not be the case in the future. He felt it was short sighted to remove the potential for gas and should keep/install piping to enable this in the future. Therefore, he queried if there should be a requirement for piping etc be installed in new developments, rather than retrofit in the future at a cost to the householder.

The Parish Clerk explained Wiltshire Council now had a Climate consultant who commented on planning applications and even with proposals for ground source heat pumps etc on a recent planning application had felt the applicant had not gone far enough. The Steering Group welcomed this direction of travel and change of focus by Wiltshire Council.

Councillor Pafford stated the language used in the Neighbourhood Plan should be in step with Wiltshire Council i.e., in encouraging this type of development, rather than enforcing it. It was noted proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) may give more clarity on this.

Vaughan explained the Design Guide and Code was not just for large scale development but to inform small scale proposals as well. The policy will say that development has to reflect and demonstrate local character. Therefore, the Design Guide commentary is on the local character in order to draw upon and be able to assess proposals against it. However, with larger scale development there is scope for master planning principles that can be enshrined in policies themselves, and therefore would still look for development that respected local character but would be more direct about types of homes, points of access, landscapes to be preserved and what site-specific qualities the community would like to see.

Rules were required to govern large scale development and this was where design guidance came in, to be able to influence local distinctiveness and weave these into large scale proposals.

- **To consider request from Melksham Without Parish Council for their revised list of requests for new developments to be included in the Design Guide**

The Parish Clerk explained the Parish Council had a list of requests they asked developers for at pre app stage, which had been shared with the Town Council, and asked if the Steering Group were happy this was included as part of the Design Guide.

The Parish Clerk noted the comments made earlier regarding the provision for hydrogen and future proofing for ground source heat pumps which would be added to the list for Melksham Without Parish Council to consider at a future meeting.

Councillor Glover informed the meeting that the Parish Council had recently learnt the play area specification for new developments in West Wiltshire was lower than elsewhere in Wiltshire, as the policy related to a saved West Wiltshire District Plan and asked if a minimum size for Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAP) could be specified.

The Parish Clerk clarified the 'calculator' for working out the level of play area provision in a new development, noting, hopefully this situation would be resolved when the Local Plan was updated.

**Resolved:** The list of requests to developers at pre app stage is included within the Design Guide.

- **To note new Wiltshire Council guide to Design Codes for Neighbourhood Plans**

Noted.

- **To note plans for a Wiltshire Council's County Wide Design Code to follow later in the year**

Noted.

#### **14. Plan Drafting**

Vaughan went through the various suggested revised objectives, policies and priority statements, as well as the suggested wording for new policies, which would be approved at final sign off, noting there was still an opportunity to amend these prior to sign off, if the Steering Group wished.

Vaughan suggested the relevant working groups could review and suggest amendments in the first instance, prior to being submitted to the Steering Group for comment and validating. However, there would be an opportunity after Regulation 14 consultation to refine these if necessary, following feedback.

**Resolved:**

1. To note the report.
2. For all steering group members and relevant task group members to review the revised objectives, policies and priority statements and forward amendments over the following weeks, to enable a revised draft to be produced for the next Steering Group meeting for sign off.

#### **15. Programme Update**

- a) To review current variables that could influence the current programme:**

- i) End of current NPPF Paragraph 14 protection in July**

Vaughan went through the various drivers for the review, which were influencing the programme, such as the refreshment and extension of Paragraph 14 (NPPF) in order to protect the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan area against speculative development. In order to achieve this the NP#2 would be allocating land in Melksham to



make a meaningful contribution towards the likely housing target for Melksham. Currently looking at allocating 200 homes in the Plan, with a current target of 90 in Shaw in Whitley.

**Timetable:**

- Look at completing evidence base, including draft allocation of sites to be agreed.
- Landowner engagement, relating to the draft proposed allocations and to help inform the decision the Steering group and two councils will validate, on what the landowner commitments are.
- Community communication in updating people where the Neighbourhood plan is and giving early warning of upcoming Regulation 14 consultation.
- Revising policies, objectives and priority statements.
- Working to turn NHP#1 to NHP#2, up to publication quality to Regulation 14.
- Consultation to commence in July.
- Need for completion of the SEA (Strategic Environmental Assessment) by AECOM which whilst well advanced cannot be completed until the housing allocation is decided. Wiltshire Council will also need to make a resolution on whether the Neighbourhood Plan requires a Habitable Regulation Assessment once the housing allocation/sites have been agreed.

Vaughan explained Regulation 14 consultation would take place between July and September. Whilst consultation would usually be 6 weeks, as this period covered the school summer holidays suggested an extended period of consultation until September. Between now and Regulation 14 there would be communications with the community, which would not be consultation, but updating people on what the Neighbourhood Plan is up to and what is happening. Therefore, people will be able to have their say on the allocation of sites etc.

By Christmas it was hoped to submit the plan to Wiltshire Council, in order to undertake Regulation 16 consultation and prepare for Examination and then Referendum and hopefully plan made following a yes vote.

Vaughan went through the various uncertainties and opportunities:

- It had been hoped NHP#2 would have been completed before Paragraph 14 protection ran out in July, therefore this did create some risk of speculative development.
- Revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The changes proposed extended the protection period of paragraph 14 from 2 years to 5 years.

Unfortunately, these revisions will not be announced by the Government in the short term. It was understood there had been a significant amount of feedback to the consultation and therefore the revisions would not be coming out on schedule which was disappointing.

Vaughan explained as soon as the NPPF changes were implemented, this would change the planning consent landscape. Therefore, if these changes come in late, after July, given planning applications took a while to consider, weight is given to what the NPPF says when a decision is made on a particular planning application, not when it is submitted bearing in mind decisions were still outstanding on several large planning applications.

Councillor Sankey left the meeting at 20.03pm.

With regard to Wiltshire Council's Local Plan, this was due to go to Cabinet in 2023 for approval, prior to consultation in the Autumn, with adoption in Quarter 4 2024. This will set out a strategic strategy for the Neighbourhood Plan area. As the Local Plan moves forward, it will help clarify strategic policy for the Neighbourhood Plan review and help being more robust about directing development of a strategic nature through an emerging plan.

### **Cooper Tires**

Vaughan explained at present only part of the site had been put forward for potential allocation in the plan. However, the site would be closing and potentially proposals coming forward during the life of the Neighbourhood Plan and Local Plan. Whilst it had come forward too late for consideration in the Local Plan, there was an opportunity to allocate Cooper Tires in the Neighbourhood Plan, if it was available. Therefore, there is an opportunity to speak to Cooper Tires, to ascertain if this is possible and contact was being made with them to arrange a meeting.

Vaughan explained if any of these things happened it would mean substantial implications for the draft review of the Neighbourhood Plan, and therefore recommended the Steering Group reconvene to discuss how best to respond to these matters as they arise.

Vaughan explained as the Plan progressed, more weight would be added to the Neighbourhood Plan, which was why it was suggested and agreed to bring various bits of evidence into play now.

**b) To note current progress against Programme and agree timescale for Regulation 14 consultation**

Vaughan gave an update on progress against the programme and explained it was previously hoped the Steering Group would get to Regulation 14 by now but unfortunately it had not met the target, being 2 months behind.

Whilst the Steering Group and Working Groups had worked hard to progress the plan, the main reason for the delay was due to AECOM's very thorough Housing Site Assessment Report being received 2 months later than expected. The Housing Group had worked hard to catch-up with a review of the document.

**Resolved:** To continue progressing the review, to enable Regulation 14 consultation to take place in July. With a 'back stop' position, if the Local Plan or National Planning Policy Framework revisions are implemented in the meantime or the Local Plan Review is published, the Neighbourhood Plan take a pause in order to bring back to the Steering Group in order to review the programme.

**c) To agree date and venue of Next Meeting of Steering Group  
Suggested date Weds 7<sup>th</sup> June**

It was noted to go out to Regulation 14 in July, the Steering Group and then both councils, as qualifying bodies, needed to approve the draft NP#2, at their June meetings.

**Resolved:** For the next Steering Group meeting to be held on Wednesday, 7 June.

Councillor Pafford reminded those present of the confidentiality of the information to be discussed.

**16.C Site Selection**

- **To receive update on current sites/housing task group work and meeting with Officers/Place with AECOM Tues 2<sup>nd</sup> May**

**In Closed Session**

Chris Holden left the meeting at 9.27pm.

## 17. Finance:

- a. **To approve future spend, quotation for additional work by Place/AECOM if appropriate, latest invoices and note current financial report (to year end 31/3/23).**

To approve the following invoices:

<b>Place:</b>	<b>£5,573.12</b>
£4,659.27 net (£4,537.50 from the Grant, £121.77 for the councils to pay) plus £913.85 VAT to be reclaimed	
<b>Wiltshire Council (Campus room hire for consultation):</b>	<b>£ 313.66</b>
£261.38 net plus £52.28 VAT to be reclaimed	

The MWPC Clerk added that since the Steering Group last met in February, and looked at the spreadsheet of spend for the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 that the only additional spend was the two invoices just approved, plus £48.75 for the additional Green Gaps consultation boards.

This gave a total spend of £29,034.60 for the year 2022/23 (of which £10,000 came from the Locality grant) with £19,034 split between both the Town and Parish Council at a 70/30 split.

**Resolved:** To approve invoices of £5,573.12 and £313.66 for Place and Wiltshire Council respectively.

- b. **To note no visibility of future Locality funding or Technical Support for 2023/24**

Members noted there was currently no visibility of any further Government grant funding or technical support for 2023/24. Therefore, any future spend would be coming from both councils.

The Parish Clerk explained there was still an element of work to be done under Place's original approved quote, in order to get the Plan to Regulation 14 consultation. As some of the work done to date had not been straight forward the Clerk made the Steering Group aware there may be an additional invoice for this work, over and above the quote approved, which will be paid for by both councils.

It was noted both Council's had approximately £2,000 each, in their respective budgets for the 2023/24 financial year for Neighbourhood Plan costs.

## 18. To approve the revised Terms of Reference as approved by both qualifying bodies

It was agreed to defer this item to a future meeting.

**19. To note resignation of Colin Harrison, Business representative, from Steering Group and agree next steps**

Members noted Colin Harrison had resigned.

Councillor Pafford explained he had spoken to both Clerks and felt, given it was late in the day, as far as the Neighbourhood Plan review was concern and it would be difficult to get a new member up to speed, felt it best to defer seeking a replacement for Colin for now, unless there was a delay to the Plan for the various reasons discussed earlier in the meeting.

**Resolved:** Not to seek an additional representative at this time, but seek additional representatives, if there were a delay in progressing the review.

To write a letter of thanks to Colin Harrison for his input to the plan over the years.

**20. To note comments submitted to the Government's current NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) consultation by Steering Group & Wiltshire Council**

Noted.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm

Signed.....  
Chair, 7 June 2023