

JOINT STATEMENT FROM MELKSHAM TOWN COUNCIL AND MELKSHAM WITHOUT PARISH COUNCIL ON PLANNED PROJECTS FOR SHURNHOLD FIELDS

MAY 2025

Shurnhold Fields is a mini country park style public open space located off Dunch Lane. There are a number of benches for people to sit and rest, as well as a World War I memorial wood, with each circular area representing each year of the war and each tree representing a Melksham area fallen WWI soldier. There is also an orchard area where rare Wiltshire Heritage apples and pears species are grown. The South Brook runs along the north boundary of the fields, and a Right of Way (MELK37) through the middle of the two fields with a small footbridge over the South Brook.

Shurnhold Fields is jointly owned by Melksham Without Parish Council and Melksham Town Council and is maintained by a fantastic group of volunteers known as the Friends of Shurnhold Fields who complement the work undertaken by the two councils.

The space was originally the playing fields attached to George Ward school and transferred by Persimmon Homes to the two councils after the completion of the George Ward housing development, with a sum of some £90k for the ongoing maintenance of the fields. The councils met in May 2018 and agreed the vision and objectives for development of the playing fields, which was quickly followed by a meeting of residents in June 2018, who went on to form the Friends of Shurnhold Fields volunteer group.

To be fully accessible to all residents of both the town and parish, it was agreed from the onset that there would be a car park installed at some point, as well as meeting the request of the Highways Authority (Wiltshire Council) to improve and move the access off the highway for public use. Plans for this were drawn up and the contract went out to tender with a contractor chosen in September 2021. Land drainage consent was obtained and the Planning Authority, Wiltshire Council, confirmed that the parish and town council did not require separate planning permission for the works as covered by The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 Part12 Development by Local Authorities, which extend to parish councils. It is noted that the planning permission for George Ward Gardens included rugby pitch facilities on the playing fields, with a car park, so a previous precedent had been set.

The councils required Environment Agency consent for the car park and whilst these discussions and applications commenced, Wiltshire Council were also in discussion with the Environment Agency over flood prevention measures, which culminated in the award of some £90,000 of funding to Wiltshire Council for these works on Shurnhold Fields, to the rear of houses in Dunch Lane, who had previously suffered from internal property flooding. For several reasons, it was agreed that the work on the car park and access improvements, and the flood prevention measures would be best combined as one project. This was so the work could be done together to limit

the impact, and timescales, of two simultaneous projects taken place and so less areas restricted from public access for a shorter period. It also is more practical to have just one contractor working on site at any one time. As well as economies of scale from using materials from the car park excavation for the flood prevention bund, it also is the best environmental use of materials, so the car park spoil was not waste material to be removed, and then new materials purchased and brought into site. This is common practice for ground work projects, with the best environmental aspects incorporated, and meets the requirements of waste transfer and management regulations. With Wiltshire Council kindly agreeing to take on the car park and access works as part of their wider project, with that part funded by the town and parish council as a capital improvement project (so separately funded from the maintenance sum) and a £5k grant from the Melksham Area Board, an Environment Agency permit was obtained covering the scope of works for both projects.

Wessex Water recently installed mains drainage at Westlands Lane in Beanacre, and as part of their offsite biodiversity measures were looking to install a local wildflower meadow, their ecology team investigated several local sites in community use and public ownership, and plan to install at Shurnhold Fields in the future, when the weather conditions and season are right, and following the works undertaken by Wiltshire Council. The location of the wildflower area has been agreed with the Friends of Shurnhold Fields.

A number of queries have been raised about the flood prevention measures and the car park and access improvements recently and the following hopefully answers all the questions, queries and concerns that have been raised by residents and the Friends volunteer group, in writing, and at the public meeting hosted by Melksham Town Council on 12th May 2025.

Questions raised:

Community Engagement

Are these proposals or is it a fait accompli? Will our concerns be addressed or are the plans within "permitted rights" and will all go ahead regardless of concerns from the local residents?

You have not consulted with residents, you are simply being a council of people (many of whom were elected unopposed as there was no one else to vote for) who are just doing stuff to people. There has been no community engagement. You have barely informed residents, let alone consulted, involved, collaborated or empowered!

The plans have been in place for a number of years now, with all the permissions in place. The public meeting on the 12th May was the opportunity for residents to ask questions of the Wiltshire Council drainage team running the flood prevention works. The plans for a car park and improved access, and flood alleviation, have been in the plans from the very first meeting of the two councils, and then the public, since May 2018. The Friends of Shurnhold Fields have been kept informed at all stages. There have been articles in the Melksham News, updates in newsletters, grant applications to the Area Board, discussions in council meetings, several AGMs of the Friends with council reps in attendance. In fact, the parish and town council have been chased for progress on the car park by the Friends several times.

Have any councillors who voted for these plans to be approved even visited the site? **Many of the councillors of both the Town and Parish Council have visited the site, as well as a variety of officers from both councils and Wiltshire Council. The parish and town council were briefed on the proposals by the Wiltshire Council Project Manager for the project, in March 2024 and September 2024, with notes from those presentations going to formal town and parish council meetings.**

The Bund Proposals.

How high is the bund? **The crest height is 400mm/16 inches. See drawings provided.**

What steps will be made to ensure the privacy of people's homes/gardens - will this bund enable people to walk along the top ridge and peer into people's homes? **The height of the bund is 16" and so not making a significant difference from the ground height.**

At present any flooding in the gardens comes from below ground, not directly running off the fields - will the bund stop this?

The bund is designed to stop the flow of surface water overflowing from the watercourse, and is the cause of flooding of internal properties on Dunch Lane. The ground water that oozes up into the gardens has not caused flooding to property. The compaction of the ground and the building of the bund will stop a lot of the transmission of the ground water into gardens. Following the flooding to property in 2014, residents of Dunch Lane indicated on mapping where the water flows came from, and it was surface water flooding.

Flooding can be fixed without the car park

- (a) The flooding that puts the houses at risk is mostly not coming from southbrook – it is coming from the centre of the field at the NE end, near the bench and bin. The water flows in from the field NE of Shurnhold Fields, not from the brook
- (b) That water flows centrally into the field
- (c) All you need to do to fix it is empty out the gulley that runs from behind the bench to the park entrance. I am amazed you haven't done this already because these houses are at risk of flooding due to your inaction.
- (d) When the brook overflows, there's not much anyone can do about it

Bund. The proposed bund causes many problems:

- (a) Residents lose access to Shurnhold Fields from their back gates
- (b) Some residents need disabled access
- (c) A french drain along the back fences flowing into the culvert at the entrance would be sufficient
- (d) It would be ugly

Issue number 1 is the flooding. Residents in the room were largely satisfied at the proposal of a bund to help alleviate flooding. There are still some concerns regarding rising water, the direction of the water and the clearing of gullies and ditches. However the overall consensus was that a bund is acceptable to residents.

The culvert has not been cleared out - when the FOSF team asked for this work to be carried out we were told there were more vulnerable areas to be cleared.... so why spend huge amounts of money on bund plans when the basics haven't been maintained? **The parish council have undertaken land registration checks and written to the adjacent landowners to remind them of their riparian ownership responsibilities to keep watercourses clear. The original car park tender for the parish and town council to complete the works included digger work for these ditches to be cleared.**

As the bund will be a mound, who will maintain this as it cannot be mowed? The narrow strip between the properties and the bund will also require strimming regularly, or it will remain an eyesore all year round. How often will this be carried out - who by? **The parish and town council retain overall responsibility for the maintenance of Shurnhold Fields and undertake the annual grass cut, as well as other maintenance tasks. There are many areas of uncut grass on**

Shurnhold Fields, with some areas only cut once per year. The bund can be sown with grass seed or wildflower seed. The strip between the bund and houses will not be so narrow that it can only be accessed by a strimmer.

Disabled residents who back onto the fields would no longer be able to access the fields from their gardens due to the bund. Access that they have enjoyed and used for many years. **Residents can still access the fields from gates to the rear of their garden. They will need to navigate along the grass strip between their rear boundaries and the bund, but there are no paved footpaths on Shurnhold Fields and so the surface will be no different than elsewhere that they are accessing.**

Car Park Proposals

Many local residents are very unhappy with these proposals.

Issue number 2 is the car park. Not a single person in the room tonight is in favour of a car park. This car park will bring additional traffic to the area which may increase the perceived issue of parking on Dunch Lane. An issue that the Town Council representative was unable to say how many times has had a formal written complaint, unable to say whether it had ever been to LHFIG or the former CATG. We were not told what the views of a Highways Officer were, what schemes have or have not been proposed such as single or double yellow lines. It was agreed though that it was highly unlikely the go to solution was create a purpose built car park.

A car park will attract ever more litter from the likes of McDonald's, Subway, Greggs – this is already thrown all around Dunch Lane at the bridge. This will in turn bring more rats to the properties, how will you deal with the litter and pest control?

A car park, particularly one without a gate will encourage over night parking and anti-social behaviour. It will be used as over spill from residents on Dunch Lane and George Ward Gardens without off street parking and then the perceived issue of parking on the bend will continue.

Ultimately you will – sorry WE WILL – end up with Gypsies and Travellers in the field. It will be a repeat of the Christie Miller fields, Running Track and anywhere else there has been a movable bollard in recent years.

Many Highways Officers will argue that parked cars along the road actually act as a traffic calming measure, Dunch Lane can occasionally be used as a rat run and on occasion a car parked on the road on an ad hock basis will reduce the speed of passing traffic.

Putting in a car park brings additional footfall, in the past fortnight there have been 2 separate issues of BBQs with alcohol and 2 further incidents of motorcross bikes in the field. This will increase as a result of a car park that will encourage more people to the area.

It was unanimously agreed in that room tonight that not a single resident in attendance wants a car park and not a single person in that room told a Councillor otherwise when they were out canvassing. One Councillor even confirmed to me on the doorstep that other residents had told her they are opposed to the car park.

They feel this will attract more antisocial behaviour than they have previously experienced - drug related issues, large parties, barbecues and fires and recently motorbikes on the field. A car park will encourage this.

This car park will bring additional traffic to the area which may increase the perceived issue of parking on Dunch Lane.

The car park does not benefit local residents

- (a) It benefits people who drive to the park, most local people walk there.
- (b) A few people drive there from Shurnhold and occasionally people come from other parts of Melksham. There is enough parking for them at the moment

The car park might be a liability

- (a) Teenagers/boy racers may use it in evenings, and may drop litter there, and may create noise for local residents, e.g. car radios
- (b) There is a risk of Gypsies or Travellers moving in

Footfall

- (a) A new car park encourages more people to use the facility, which is great, BUT
- (b) Shurnhold fields becomes a bog in winter – it can't take any more footfall than it gets already (this winter was exceptionally dry, most years you have to walk carefully because its so slippery and much of the grass is gone on the walkways)
- (c) Therefore a car park will attract more people than the fields can cope with

There is no evidence that unauthorised encampments, parties, drug taking will happen as a result of a car park. The nearby Shaw Playing Field is off the busy A365, and has a car park, open space with picnic tables and no gate. We are not aware of any of the issues that you have concerns of. The car park design at Shurnhold Field has a barrier gate design and stock proof fencing and a bund designed to prevent access on the fields from vehicles and motorbikes from the carpark.

We understand that since the public meeting on 12th May, some residents and members of the Friends group have suggested that the Dunch Lane play area should have its fence relocated and a gravel layby be created there instead of

a purposely designed car park on Shurnhold Fields. It is not clear to the parish and town council how the residents feel that this will not cause the issues you outline here, but not in the lockable car park.

The entrance to the car park is directly opposite the walkway from the George Ward Housing estate. This poses a safety issue. There will be cars coming from all directions and no safe refuge to cross to.

Danger on the bend

- (a) Single yellow lines with perhaps 8:30-16:30 around the bend would be sufficient to stop parking near the bend
- (b) Remember that cars parked here somewhat act as traffic calming, since this can be a rat run
- (c) We are already changing it to 20mph which alleviates most danger

This is the reason for moving the access off the highway, please see drawings.

Having a carpark will attract more people, which in turn will over spill onto the road.

Shurnhold Fields is for the residents of both Town and Melksham Without, as well as visitors. Public open spaces are run for the benefit of the local community, and not just those who live in very close proximity. There are already complaints of cars parking on Dunch Lane, and why the councils do not widely advertise Shurnhold Fields, until a car park is in place.

There appears to be no turning space in the car park, people will need to reverse out onto the road if they have entered and the car park is full. **Cars will be able to reverse into the access route and then leave the car park in a forward gear. The plans have been drawn up with Highways Authority involved in the process.**

Having lights for a carpark is not appropriate for nature reserves/wildlife/country parks. **There are no proposals for lights in the car park.**

Taking land from a "country park" for car parking isnt a green option. People should be encouraged to walk. **Shurnhold Fields is for the residents of both Town and Melksham Without, as well as visitors. Public open spaces are run for the benefit of the local community, and not just those who live in very close**

proximity. Land is not being “taken” from the green space, its always been part of the proposals from the onset.

An issue that the Town Council representative was unable to say how many times has had a formal written complaint, unable to say whether it had ever been to LHFIG or the former CATG. We were not told what the views of a Highways Officer were, what schemes have or have not been proposed such as single or double yellow lines. It was agreed though that it was highly unlikely the go to solution was create a purpose built car park

Shed proposals

FOSF need a shed to operate - at present, the mowers are in a residents premises with only two of the volunteers able to access it. We have no storage for tools. **There are plans for a secure tool shed to be provided on site for the Friends to use.**

Why does the shed need to be located in the car park? This raises a security risk.

The shed is being located in the lockable car park area, with height restriction barrier to prevent access by vehicles, overlooked by dwellings for additional security. Supplied with a water source for the use of the Friends.

The shed position on the plans is where the main area of the field floods - will the bund stop this flooding? How likely will the shed get flooded? How will the mower get in/out of the shed?

The shed will be located on appropriate foundations, with access across the new porous crushed stone hardstanding, and via the car park through route to the maintenance gate for that purpose. The car park surface and access track will be porous Nelon Netpave 50 or PERFO -AK surface.

We require double doors and easy access with reasonable turning space, with a notice board on one side of the shed, is the mower access to the shed via the pedestrian foot path? **The shed size needs to be assessed if the Friends have purchased a mower that is a of a bigger size than that of when the scheme was drawn up. The shed to be the style used by the Melksham Cricket Club next to the Melksham Campus, who use it to store their mowing equipment.**

Our insurance states we cannot use the mower within a few metres of people. A carpark will be teaming with people? **The car park will have 10 car parking spaces and has the route of the Rights of Way running through the fields, it is unlikely to be “teaming” with people, but will have the public using the facilities.**

General maintenance of the mower, filling up with petrol etc cannot take place in a carpark. There is no space around the shed? **Why can this not take place in the carpark? Close to the Shed?**

Shed size? The plans state 12x8? This will not be large enough for two mowers/trimmer and wheelbarrows etc. **Can the Friends please supply the size of shed requirements please.**

Crushed stone footpath? This surrounds the shed. Is this suitable for mowers to drive over? **It is an area of hardstanding and not gravel.**

As requested many times - the shed of a suitable size, should be positioned away from the entrance, in the far corner with maybe a fenced area to ensure getting in and out of the shed and any maintenance can be carried out in a quiet area, a safe zone.

Surely a £15,000 mower would be safer behind the locked gate and bollards rather than in an open car park? Having the shed situated in a far corner of the fields it would be less vulnerable to thieves.

Issue number 3 is the site of the maintenance shed for the Friends of Shurnhold Fields. Siting a lock up in a public access car park that may now not even have a gate is significant risk for their expensive machinery. There have been a large number of garage and van break ins on the George Ward Garden estate and surrounding area in the last 12 months, it is a significant security risk to place the lock up in such an accessible position. What are the views of Wiltshire Police on this matter? The Fields of Shurnhold Fields have a solution that is being ignored.

Proposed Shed

- (a) A shed in the car park would be a target for burglary.
- (b) The proposed shed is not big enough for the tools and mowers we have already
- (c) Residents are in general grateful for the facility that Shurnhold Fields provides them, and feedback suggests they would be accommodating towards placing a shed near the back fences at the Southern corner of the field.
- (d) It would need a ramp to drive the mower out, but would need to be high enough to avoid flooding

The parish and town council can look at the request re the shed relocation, can the Friends please supply the optimum size/s required?