

MINUTES of a Special Planning Meeting of Melksham Without Parish Council held on Monday 5th March 2012 at Crown Chambers, Melksham at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Cllr. Mike Mills (Chairman); Cllrs. Alan Baines; Rolf Brindle; Paul Clark; Gregory Coombes; John Glover; Pat Nicol; Mike Sankey and Richard Wood.

Apologies: Cllrs. Don Millard; Elizabeth Bean and Maurice Hubert. It was noted that Cllr. Petty always declared an interest in planning matters as a member of Wiltshire Council and thus was unlikely to attend.

459/11 **Declarations of Interest:** Cllr. Coombes declared an interest in PA W12 00287 for a Conservatory at 87 Corsham Road as a neighbour of the applicant. The Financial Officer also declared an interest in this application as an acquaintance of the applicant's adjoining neighbour and her husband had been contracted to work in the past for both the neighbour and the applicant. Cllr. Rolf Brindle declared an interest as a landowner living in The Spa near to one of the proposed sites for future housing development. Cllr. Paul Clark declared an interest in PA W12 00301 for an extension at 67 Beanacre, as a neighbour of the applicant. The Clerk declared an interest in W12 00354 for B2 use at Reeds Yard, Bradford Road, when this application was discussed, as the site was in the parish of Broughton Gifford where the Clerk was a parish councillor.

460/11 **Public Participation:** No matters were raised.

461/11 **Wiltshire Core Strategy Submission Document January 2012:** The Council reviewed the first two chapters of this document and made comments as follows:

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

PAGE 3:

1.1. The balance still was not right. There were too many houses proposed with not enough employment.

1.2. The document read as though Wiltshire Council was trying to "sell" the idea of development. Why was out-commuting to places like Newbury being commended?

1.3. It had been difficult to secure Sainsburys and Asda despite the fact that these companies brought new employment. Many people had been more upset about the resulting tree-felling. It was agreed that while some development did result in a loss of trees, the Council's policy was to support sustainable development which respected the natural environment – the two aspects should be complimentary not in conflict.

1.3. While great emphasis was being placed on regeneration of the major centres of Chippenham, Trowbridge and Salisbury, Wiltshire Council was forgetting that smaller market towns such as Melksham and the villages needed regeneration too. Villages in particular needed some housing in order to stimulate the rural economy.

There had been very little development in Shaw and Whitley for the past 40 years. Those who had once moved into the then new Kennedy Avenue development were now drawing their pensions. Some rural families were under great stress, with relatives using every room of the house. This was hard particularly if one had a disabled dependent.

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1.6. This was not a “bottom-up” Strategy but was being controlled from the top; and was “top-down”. There was concern that Neighbourhood Plans were not being used to inform Wiltshire Council what the local community felt about development. Policy was being imposed on the community as a result of central Government mandates regarding the number of houses to be built in Wiltshire. This went against the idea of a “Big Society” where people could influence their area. Local residents would say “What’s the point?!”

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1.8. The Heading above this Clause needed to read “A Strategy that **will deliver** the objectives of the Wiltshire Community Plan...” not “A Strategy that will help to deliver the objectives of the Wiltshire Community Plan...”

1.9. Similarly this Clause should state “This Core Strategy sets out policies and proposals that **will deliver these priorities**”, not “This Core Strategy sets out policies and proposals that *will make an important contribution* in delivering these priorities”. The Core Strategy had to do more than just make a contribution.

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1.12 This paragraph gave incorrect information. It gave the impression that Area Boards welcomed members from all representative groups in the community whereas the only members were the local Wiltshire Councillors. The rest are in partnership but without any vote or say in the decisions.

1.13 The last sentence of this paragraph states that the “benefits of development” were to “be realised at a local level”. In Wiltshire there were hardly ever any benefits because all the funds were taken by Wiltshire Council to build roads. This would not change until town and parish councils were made party to the final Section 106 Agreements.

1.14 This paragraph talks about Wiltshire’s “quality of investment” being key to attracting investment. There was nothing “quality” about taking away all the green fields for development. The environment was not being valued for itself but was being used as a sales tool to attract investment. The distraction of investment destroyed the quality of life for everyone else. In contrast the villages were not being allowed even natural development and so were being fossilised. Villages needed some workshops to prevent this.

CHAPTER TWO: A SPATIAL PORTRAIT OF WILTSHIRE AND THE KEY CHALLENGES IT FACES

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2.1 There are two World Heritage sites in Wiltshire, so “site” should be “sites”. There were also areas of high deprivation in Melksham, Westbury and Trowbridge. The last sentence stating that “Wiltshire enjoys strong sub-regional links” and accepting that London, Bristol, Swindon, South Wales and the South Coast (!!) were “within commutable distance” goes against the whole principle of having sustainable communities. The word “Enjoys” should be “suffers”. Out-commuting, with all the adverse effects of stress, congestion and pollution, should not be subtly accepted and encouraged. The map gave the impression Wiltshire was the centre of the commuting world.

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2.2 Far better rail transport links are needed to link the market towns to major centres Melksham is only 10 minutes away by rail from Trowbridge or Chippenham and yet there are only two trains per day making it impossible for rail travel to work.

2.4 Melksham itself is badly in need of regeneration

2.10 There is no “perhaps” about this! Reducing levels of out-commuting from many Wiltshire settlements **is** the most important challenge. It will not be addressed unless more employment is provided both in the towns and villages. Wiltshire has lost significant employers such as Virgin and Vodafone because they have chosen to move to areas where there are subsidies to help employment. As a result a lot of jobs have been lost in Trowbridge.

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2.7 Self-containment needs to be improved both in the towns and villages. Apart from providing choice, providing easy rail transport links between market towns and the main centres is also a key element. The potential of Melksham’s railway station has not even begun to be used to help the local economy.

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2.10 Climate change is partially man-made and more effort is needed to avoid contributing factors.

2.10 The future weather extremes to come of wind, excessive rainfall and flooding need to be taken into account now in choosing development sites. Sites prone to flooding such as behind the Spa should be avoided. No development at all should take place on flood plains. Each potential site should be tested in accord with sustainability principles.

2.15 Decent and affordable homes should be primarily for local people

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2.13 More affordable housing should be built where there is higher demand in main Chippenham, Trowbridge and Devizes

2.14 There will be a higher proportion of older people everywhere in the country. Many young people are not having families because of the shortage of housing and cost of living. In many partnerships both partners work to pay the mortgage.

2.16 Villages will only become more self-sufficient and have a sense of purpose and identity if they are given limited development, affordable housing and employment. Many have already lost vital community-building facilities such as a local Post Office. There needs to be pro-active encouragement and grant aid given to local councils so that they can help local communities regain lost amenities.

2.17 The open space per capita allowance of 1 Ha per 1,000 population that is mentioned in the Habitats Topic Paper is too often conveniently ignored when new development is considered.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SPATIAL VISION FOR WILTSHIRE

PAGE 15

3.1 This refers to “exceptional standards of design” which sounds wonderful but the new housing to date over the last 10 years at least has been desperately banal and exceptionally boring. How will design standards be improved? We applaud the reference to housing and employment being “in response to local needs” The Neighbourhood Plans should be the vehicle for identifying local needs and for ensuring that affordable housing is for local people.

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3.4. How exactly will the potential of tourism to be realised? Heritage sites such as The Spa in Melksham are not fully appreciated and there is now only one Conservation officer for the whole county. The villages too have several Listed buildings.

The key objective to tackle out-commuting is applauded but just building more and more houses will not tackle this problem. The lost industries in villages need to be restored and there must be leisure and employment opportunities in the villages as well.

In the past, sites which once thrived through employment such as the GEC site in Melksham have been used up for housing, until there is no development land left in Melksham

No measures have been included to help promote smaller businesses. It is important that new economic sites are placed next to existing employment sites and networking between companies is encouraged so that they can support each other.

There is too much emphasis on broadening the economies of Chippenham, Trowbridge and Salisbury while the high streets of the smaller market towns like Melksham are being forgotten.

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3.5. The objective of self-containment needs to be broadened to take into account the smaller villages.

3.6 Given the huge problem of out-commuting, the Strategy needs to be as much based on employment needs as the number of houses. 37,000 homes is gross over-subscription for a rural county like Wiltshire.

The cost of the 40% affordable housing will fall on the other 60% houses, making them too expensive for the local economy to support. Surely Wiltshire needs fewer houses and more jobs. The houses will follow naturally when employment requirements demand them.

Local communities have very few benefits from housing and these in no way compensate for the loss of the environmental amenity and the resulting high unemployment because housing capacity outweighs jobs creation.

The key outcomes for building resilient communities need to include provision for elderly people who are becoming a larger part of communities.

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3.8 – 3.9 The Parish Council supports the enhancement of the natural and historic environment; and especially wish to see public open space being pro-actively protected. Melksham has no multi-functional Green infrastructure. The Government is offering opportunities through Landscape Conservation grants, to create new parks and forests. Melksham itself needs a country park area for it's rapidly expanding population to enjoy and where better than in the buffer between Melksham and Bowerhill. This could run through to the unused farm fields at Wool more Farm which could be planted up with new trees, using available Government grants.

Although the Strategy mentions maintaining Wildlife Corridors within new development, what happens at the moment is that the real wildlife moves out as soon as the diggers appear, leaving a more sterile area with just trees and bushes in it. We would like planners taking a more active role in protecting wildlife and ensuring a more sensitive approach is taken to retain wildlife habitats within planning application sites.

It is as important to retain the environmental setting of historic heritage buildings as the buildings themselves. Space for example is very important around the historic landscape of The Spa, to ensure the three magnificent edifices are properly appreciated.

Unfortunately new development in no way enhances Wiltshire's distinctive built heritage. It is far more inspiring when it is left alone. Sites of archaeological importance need to be protected from all development. Period.

The key outcomes mentions that the quality and quantity of Wiltshire's groundwater will be improved. How?

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3.10 As stated anticipated climate changes will increase flooding. Unfortunately new development does not address this issue but rather exacerbates it.

The essential infrastructure is not to date "provided in a timely manner" at present. What changes will be made to ensure it is?

Parish Council would like to know what is meant by securing green infrastructure, libraries and cultural facilities on a priority basis. At present these seem to have the lowest priority.

For any partnership to be effective it needs to involve local councils and communities as well as providers and developers.

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3.10 The first key outcome on Page 20 needs to be deleted as it is pretty meaningless.

Much more needs to be done in order to achieve a major shift to sustainable transport. The roads through West Wiltshire, despite many years of improvement programmes are now overloaded and congested more than they have ever been. Building new roads or encouraging new development in order to fund another section of a new road does little to help this as the extra residents bring with them many more private

vehicles and just add to the problems. The A350 commuting corridor would be best served by a full proper rail service to link the five West Wiltshire towns to each other and the major employment centres of Bath, Swindon and Bristol. At present rural bus services are being reduced due to cuts in subsidies. There will be no shift unless the public can see a viable alternative way to travel.

More cycleways are also needed so that everyone can see that it is safe to use cycles for short work journeys or shopping. Then parents and children will cycle to school, rather than use cars. A whole new network of cycleways is needed and that can only happen with a modal shift in terms of Wiltshire Council's own transport priorities.

In view of predicted increased flooding, no development all should be permitted in areas where there is any risk at all.

Resolved: *The Council make representations to Wiltshire Council about the Core Strategy Submission Document, based on the comments above and send a copy of the letter to MP Duncan Hames.*

462/11 **MELKSHAM AREA STRATEGY**

The Council then examined the Melksham Area Strategy.

It was noted that for the purposes of both employment and housing, Bowerhill was being considered part of the town. Councillors referred to the last Inquiry into the District Plan when the Inspector had supported retention of the rural buffer between Bowerhill and Melksham and Bowerhill having its own settlement boundary. The Parish Council and local community had already made clear to Wiltshire Council that Bowerhill did not wish to be part of the town and the rural buffer should be kept.

It was also noted that Wiltshire Council had already indicated its support for the new housing allocation south of the East of Melksham Development in an earlier document. This was to provide a Melksham Eastern Bypass adjacent to the East of Melksham development, to join up with Western Way. Land for a dual carriageway along the edge of the distributor road had already been reserved in preparation for this. However such a road would cut off Bowerhill from the town and the new Melksham Oak Community School would be on the wrong side of it. (*See also Min. 463/11 re Hallam Land Exhibition*).

Bowerhill was not even mentioned on the main Melksham Area Map which was insulting given that it was the largest village outside the town with a population of more than 3,000 residents. Bowerhill village had its own primary school, Village Hall, pub, fish and chip shop, hair dressers, core church, playing field and other facilities. It was a large village and should be recognised as such.

The income from Bowerhill Council Tax helped to support the other villages in the parish.

PAGE 85 MELKSHAM AREA STRATEGY

5.77 This paragraph referred to the need for town regeneration. However the villages also needed regeneration in terms of both employment and more affordable housing. There was mention of GP surgeries being under pressure in the west of the town but there were none in this area. There was also mention of A350 going through the town

and having regional significance. The A350 ran around the edge of the town, not through it.

5.78 There was emphasis on Melksham being a strategic employment growth area with Bowerhill as a main employment area. Bowerhill as an employment area served not only Melksham but the rest of the community area as well, including the villages.

5.80 Priority was being given both to improving Melksham's centre and in improving employment at Bowerhill.

The need for strong cycling and walking linkages between new development and the town was identified. There also needed to be strong and safe cycling linkages between the town centre and the villages.

The need to protect the historic environment of the Spa from development was welcomed. The Spa would celebrate its bi-centennial Anniversary in 2015 and to mark this event it should be made a Conservation Area, as requested by the Parish Council three years ago. To retain its unique historic character, there should be no new development behind or in front of it, on the fields either side of Pathfinder Way

Melksham needed its own Community Park and the rural buffer between Bowerhill and the town should be preserved in perpetuity as a Community Park.

This open space, so close to the Spa was part of the historic landscape surrounding the Spa and helped to enhance the setting of the Spa.

For this reason, the Parish Council objected to any industrial allocations being placed in the rural buffer. Wiltshire Council appeared to be reserving the Christie Miller Rugby Field and surrounding land for a Waste Transfer Station. However a major waste facility needed to be sited at Westbury or Thingley next to the railway so that waste could be shipped in and out by rail, rather than road. The land between Bowerhill and the Melksham to Semington Diversion, marked on its eastern limit by the old RAF hangers and on the western limit by the A350 Diversion, would be better utilised as new high quality business premises and with a number of units a better income would be earned for the county.

The open space lost by developing this land, once the old Running Track and the Golf Course would be partially compensated if the rural buffer were to be made more accessible as a Community Park.

More large-scale expansion of Melksham should not take place without the re-opening of an Accident and Emergency Department in Melksham. The Parish Council considers this facility essential to the health and safety of the Melksham area, especially with plans to expand the industrial area at Bowerhill. The existing Melksham Hospital site is well-placed to serve Bowerhill as well as the town and the A36 Diversion gives excellent access to Bath RUH if required.

There is mention of the need to conserve Grade II Listed Buildings in Melksham which the Parish Council supports. It should however be noted that the villages also have many Listed Buildings which also need to be protected and enhanced.

There is reference to the need to improve the railway station and examine whether the frequency of rail services could be increased. Please note the time for examining whether rail services should be increased is well and truly passed. There is no question that rail services need to be increased. This has been known since early 1990s. Melksham needs a decent railway serviced right now. The question is how soon this can be provided and how it will be funded.

The Town Council was arguing that retail units should all be in the town centre. However there were no sites left to put large retail units such as Currys or B&Q. Even if they were placed adjacent to Hampton Park, this was still much closer to Melksham than similar units at Trowbridge and Chippenham which were sited at least two miles away from those town centres.

PAGE 88 CORE POLICY 15: SPATIAL STRATEGY – MELKSHAM COMMUNITY AREA

The Parish Council strongly OBJECTS that Bowerhill has been left off the list for larger villages and is not even mentioned on the map. What an insult to such a thriving and sustainable community!! It is a separate village with all the amenities of a village and therefore should be put in the correct category. It is not and never does wish to be part of Melksham.

PAGE 89 DELIVERY OF HOUSING

The Parish Council supports there being at least one strategic housing site for Melksham and advocates that this should be to the north of A3102, as a logical extension northwards from the existing larger development east of Melksham.

The Parish Council wishes to question the number of new units planned for Melksham. For the last 20 years, the town has seen huge growth on the eastern side. Existing established communities such as Snarlton Lane are feeling stressed and under pressure by so much development in such a short time. A period for consolidation is now needed.

For the reasons given above, the Parish Council would support a very limited number of houses being adjoined to the existing development east of Melksham in the south. To develop any further southwards would compromise the rural buffer and the integrity of the Grade II listed Buildings in the area, such as The Spa and Woolmore House.

As the villages also need regeneration, the Parish Council suggests that the remainder be increased from 110 to 150 band that these be spread throughout the villages

Of all the various bids for housing in the Melksham Community Area, the Parish Council would support the proposal for 76 houses north of A3102. Not only is this site a logical extension northwards from the existing new development, but access straight on to A3012 is easy, it would be close to both the primary and secondary schools, existing shops and church and the town and on an established bus route.

Hallam & Bloor Proposals for 400 new homes south of existing East of Melksham development - Exhibition 16th February: The Clerk sought

clarification of the Council's policy in respect of a future Eastern Bypass. The Exhibition papers stated that:-

“ The development includes an extension of the “eastern Relief road” providing a connection from the A3102 in the north to the B3112 in the south”

It was noted that land along the existing outer distributor road had already been reserved for dualling that route. Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) had introduced a weight ban on the London Road for HGV traffic to try to get lorries to use the A350 rather than A36 and this made the situation more complex.

Councillors emphasised that they did not support this route as an Eastern Bypass for the town because

- a) Bowerhill which was the main industrial site for Melksham (as well as the rest of the Community Area) would be split off from the town
- b) The road would split Bowerhill residential community from the town and its facilities and make it more difficult to access the town
- c) The route would split the communities of the Spa
- d) The location of the new Secondary School would be on the wrong side of any Bypass and pupils would have to cross a major route to go to school
- e) An Eastern Bypass needed to bypass Beanacre to give the village traffic relief as well as Melksham. This development would only fund a small section of the overall route needed
- f) A recent traffic survey had shown that most of the traffic was local and travelling to/from Trowbridge rather than being “strategic”.

It was agreed that the Bypass route could not be planned piecemeal and financed through housing developments, as attempted by Wiltshire Council. The road infrastructure needed to be planned more holistically, through a proper Roads Enquiry which took into account traffic routes throughout the area. An Enquiry was needed to establish the best alignment.

It was agreed the Council would support only a limit of 200 new homes to the south of the present development and that these should be accessed via the existing distributor road.

Resolved: *The Council reply to Hallam Land Management to:*

- a) *explain the Council would support only a limited number (200) of new houses to the south of the present development*
- b) *The Council did not support another section of road being constructed for a possible future Eastern Bypass for the reasons given above (a-f)*

Planning Applications: The Council considered the following planning applications:

W/12/00287 Ms G Moules, 87 Corsham Road, Whitley. Proposed conservatory.

Comments:- *There is no objection in principle. However the Council does OBJECT that this particular is built right up to the boundary, thus preventing the next door neighbour being able to erect a similar building on his property. This goes against Wiltshire Council's own policy to ensure in attached dwellings, that an extension does not compromise the potential of the neighbouring property to expand in a similar way.*

W/12/00301 Mr & Mrs Staniforth, 67 Beanacre, Wilts SN12 7PY. Proposed two storey extension & Car Port

Comments:- *The Council have no objection to this application as long as sympathetic materials are used in the construction.*

W12/00313 (retrospective) Mr Ian Gazzard, Persimmon Home (Wessex)

Proposed Sale signage for existing development

Comments:- *The Council OBJECTS to the excessive signage which is if felt needs to be reduced by at least 50%. While one sign on the roundabout approach may be acceptable, having so many on the A3102 roundabout is a real distraction to drivers. The Parish Council requests that signs should also be removed on the eastern rural side of the new road.*

W/12/00354 Reeds Yard, Bradford Road, Melksham. Proposed use of land and buildings for vehicle servicing and repairs. Use Class B2 (*Site in Broughton Gifford parish*)

Comments: *No objections subject to it being servicing and repairs only.*

NB We note this is in the Broughton Gifford parish but thank you for consulting us as it is close to the boundary of the land jointly in both parishes

465/11 **Appeal re two bungalows on garage site at Halifax Road:** The Council noted a drawing received from the applicant Paul Walsh which was to accompany a Reserved Matters planning application for two bungalows to replace the garages 24 – 45 Halifax Road, Bowerhill, following the successful Appeal. This was noted.

466/11 **Planning Correspondence**

a) **Shaw and Whitley Pre-School:** A request for permission to re-position a shed 10 ft x 12ft within the site of the Pre-School Garden was received from the Chair of the Pre-School Committee. The Council noted a letter with plan received from Richard Bean of the Shaw Playing Field Management Committee. This explained the details of the proposal and informed that the Management Committee had approved the request for the shed unanimously. It was also noted that the Pre-School Committee had agreed to erect the replacement fencing at the front of the Pre-School Garden by the end of 2012
Resolved: *The Council approve the site for the shed and mention in reply that the replacement fencing should be in place by end 2012.*

b) **W11/ 02436/WCM, Sahara Sandpit Appeal Inquiry 3rd July 2012. Import, processing, handing & storage of materials and retention of weighbridge & ancillary activities:** The Council noted that an Appeal Hearing had been arranged at the Council Chamber for 3rd July 2012 at 10.00 a.m. No objections had been made to the planning application
Resolved: *No objections be made to the Appeal.*

b) **Housing development proposal on land between Berryfield and Melksham Town, East of Semington Road (Site 648):** The Clerk reported that a representative of Mark Chard & Associates had visited the Council Office to let the Council know of a proposal to build 240 units on land just south of the Mobile Home Park. The developer would be submitting his proposals as part of the Core Strategy process and the development was deliverable within 11 – 15 years. The site included part of the Sewage Buffer Zone but the agent had been informed this was no longer a reason not to develop. It was agreed that the Parish Council would not support this proposal because this the area was outside the Village Policy Limit for Berryfield, was backland development and eroded the rural buffer between Berryfield and the town. It was noted that there were a plethora of proposals for development

sites around Melksham due to the absence of any strategic sites for development in the draft Core Strategy.

Resolved: *The Council reply to Mark Chard & Associates to make clear this proposal would not be supported by the Parish Council for the reasons as detailed above.*

c) **PA W/12/00259/FUL 45B Westlands Lane, Beanacre. Pond and Storage Shed** *Retrospective application*

Letter received from Wiltshire Council to inform that the location for this planning application had been incorrectly identified. It should have read "Land North East of 45B Westlands Lane" (instead of land adjacent 52C Chapel Lane). This was noted.

Meeting closed at 9.30 p.m.

Chairman, 19th March 2012