



Melksham Neighbourhood Plan

Steering Group Meeting

Date: Wednesday 22 February 2023

Start: 6.30 pm

Present:

Steering Group Members Present

Councillor David Pafford Chair (MWPC)

Councillor John Glover (MWPC)

Councillor Graham Ellis (MTC)

Councillor Pat Aves (MTC)

John Hamley (MTUG)

Councillor Mike Sankey (WC)

Shirley McCarthy (Environment)

Mark Blackham (Bowerhill Residents Action Group)

Colin Harrison (Business)

Officers

Teresa Strange (MWPC)

Lorraine McRandle (MWPC)

Task Group Members:

Councillor Mark Harris (MPWC)

Councillor Alan Baines (MWPC)

Planning Consultants:

Vaughan Thompson (Place Studio)

MTC

Melksham Town Council

MWPC

Melksham Without Parish Council

WC

Wiltshire Council

MTUG

Melksham Transport User Group

MINUTES

1. Welcome & Housekeeping

Councillor Pafford welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through the fire evacuation procedures for the building.

2. To note apologies

Apologies were received from Chris Holden who may be late to the meeting and Linda Roberts, Town Clerk.

3. Declarations of Interests & Register of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Public Participation

One member of public was in attendance to observe the meeting.

5. To agree Minutes of Meeting held on 25 January 2023

Councillor Pafford highlighted Item 8 in the minutes, relating to the Draft Design Codes should read as follows:

'Resolved: To approve the draft Design Codes.'

Resolved: With the above amendment, to approve and for the Chair to sign the minutes of the Steering Group meeting held on 25 January 2023.

6. To receive verbal feedback on the public consultation events w/c 6 February

Councillor Pafford informed the meeting the recent public consultation events had been well attended with lots of questions raised. The Town Centre stakeholder event had also gone well and was attended by a representative of the Melksham Business Growth Group who would feedback on the event to other businesses. Lots of people had seen information on the consultation in the local press and had responded and therefore he felt it had been a worthwhile exercise and thanked those involved, particularly the two Clerks.

Councillor Ellis reiterated Councillor Pafford's thanks and also thanked the various facilitators involved and confirmed the events had been very busy, with lots of public interest. The maps of 'What you Treasure' and 'Priorities for Improvement' had been particularly popular. With regard to the Town Centre Masterplan, one of the key things which kept coming up was improving the riverside, with Gloucester Docks cited as an example. There was also keen interest in Cluster 1: The Civic and Campus Cluster. There had been quite a bit of concern at additional housing and facilitators spent the time to explain the Neighbourhood Plan cannot stop housing, but can at least influence where it is.

The Parish Clerk explained the events had been very popular and well attended, with 87 responses to the consultation received already. 350 paper surveys have been taken away to date and hopefully these would be completed and returned in due course. Angell Motors had won the bottle of Champagne following the draw after the events.

With regard to advertising the Neighbourhood Plan consultation in the Melksham News, the Parish Clerk explained information had gone out the previous week and another advert would be going out on 2 March as a reminder, including information on the Area Board meeting being held on 8 March, which included a Neighbourhood Plan workshop.

The Parish Clerk reminded everyone the consultation closed on 19 March.

7. To agree next steps regarding the Town Centre Master Plan (TCMP)

a) Collation of comments collected and paper surveys

The Parish Clerk explained consideration still needed to be given to how to record and analyse the information included on the various post-it notes people had filled in during the consultation events.

b) Engagement with AECOM for input into draft TCMP report

The Parish Clerk explained whilst the draft Town Centre Masterplan had already been undertaken by AECOM, following the consultation the views from the public would be collated by officers and fed back to AECOM for them to then produce a final draft report on the Town Centre Masterplan.

c) Approval by Town Council (meeting 27 February)

Councillor Ellis explained it would be difficult for the Town Council to approve the plan ahead of time, without seeing the final draft of the plan.

The Parish Clerk explained it might be useful at the Town Council meeting to provide an analysis of what people had been saying, which could be arranged, if this was felt to be useful. Councillor Ellis agreed this would be useful.

The Parish Clerk explained as an additional piece of work, Place, the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan Consultants had provided a quote to the Town Council, to help the Town Council, if they wished, to help get the best out of the technical support with regard to the Town Centre Masterplan and moving forward with the next steps.

d) Engagement with Wiltshire Council's Economic Regeneration team

Vaughan explained he had discussed with both Clerks, prior to the Town Centre Masterplan being finally approved, having a meeting with Wiltshire Council representatives, including Economic Regeneration, Property and Spatial Planning, as key stakeholders, who could be influential in the Town Centre Masterplan. Therefore, had suggested rather than meet them all individually to have one meeting, as this would help with the co-ordination within Wiltshire Council as well.

The Parish Clerk explained that various Melksham Area Board members, Melksham Town Council and representatives from the Steering Group would also be invited to the meeting, with support from Place.

Councillor Pafford invited comments from representatives of the Town Council on this strategy. Both Councillors Aves and Ellis felt this was a good way forward, as did the Steering Group.

Resolved: In the absence of the Town Clerk, for the Parish Clerk (with the approval of the Town Councillors present) to liaise with the relevant parties in arranging a meeting with key stakeholders from Wiltshire Council.

8. To agree arrangements for Melksham Area Board Wednesday 8 March with a Place Shaping agenda including the Melksham NHP current consultations

The Parish Clerk explained an Area Board meeting was due to be held at the Campus Library on 8 March. Originally, the Clerks had asked if they could have a slot before the meeting to hold another consultation event, but following discussions, the meeting had evolved into a Place Shaping event, with workshops on the Town Centre Masterplan, other aspects of the Neighbourhood Plan as well as one for Area Board Place Shaping as part of the meeting.

The Parish Clerk suggested the facilitators who had helped at the recent public consultation events could assist at the meeting, as it provided a consistent message and sought a steer from the group if they were happy with this approach.

Those present were happy with this approach. Councillors Aves and Ellis gave their apologies as they would be unavailable on 8 March. Councillor Glover stated he would be able to attend but only until 8.15pm. Both Councillors Baines and Harris stated they would be happy to attend. The Parish Clerk suggested approaching Town Councillor Rabey to see if she was available to assist, as well as ascertain if other Town Councillors might be available.

Councillor Pafford suggested it would be useful, if at the Town Council meeting on 27 February, Town Councillors be invited to attend the meeting as their input would be useful. The MTC representatives agreed to raise this.

9. Landscape Buffer/Green Gap/Green Wedge evidence base

a) To review and validate the draft AECOM Green Gap and Wedge Study

Councillor Pafford noted the following amendments:

Page 61, photograph 1: view of green wedge looking **East** from Corsham Road, Whitley appeared not to be the correct. Councillor Sankey suggested it should say **West**.

Page 72 para 4.19: stated ...The Eastern boundary follows **Portal Way (A350)**. However, this was not correct as the A350 was not called Portal Way and therefore should state just **the A350**.

It was queried whether the Portal Way reference was correct with the Parish Clerk agreeing to investigate this.

Page 77 - Settlement Character: The following sentence was incorrect:

'The settlement boundaries identified in the Wiltshire Core Strategy identify Melksham and Bowerhill as separate market towns.'

It was noted in the Wiltshire Core Strategy Melksham and Bowerhill were considered as the same housing area, however, they were not separate market towns. This statement was also reiterated on page 81.

Resolved: To validate the draft AECOM Green Gap and Wedge Study with the above amendments.

b) To consider comments from Wiltshire Council on potential for strategic green gaps and response

Councillor Pafford noted the AECOM Green Gap & Wedge Study identified 8 potential green gaps. Whilst supporting 6 of them it had not felt that the criteria was met for the gaps between Bowerhill & Semington and Bowerhill & Seend Cleeve, due to changes in parish boundaries between these areas. The advice given was to seek the support of Wiltshire Council in allocating these as strategic green gaps in the emerging Local Plan.

A response had been received from David Way, Senior Spatial Planning Officer stating that Wiltshire Council were not looking into or intending to designate any strategic landscape gaps around Melksham, stating any landscape gaps were looking to come forward just through neighbourhood plans.

David had also stated Melksham and Bowerhill was a strategic area for growth and if the Steering Group were to designate a landscape gap to the South or South-East of Bowerhill this could prevent future growth opportunities and may conflict with the bypass route.

With regard to the gap between Semington and Berryfield/Bowerhill the Parish Clerk explained the parish boundary went right up to the canal which effectively was where Semington started. Co-incidentally Semington's Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group were currently working on their Neighbourhood Plan with Place and had commissioned their own landscape survey which they had shared.

However, with regard to Seend, this was not so easy as their Neighbourhood Plan was already approved and made and having had conversations with the ex Chair of Seend Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, they were not looking to review their plan at present. With Melksham Without's boundary only reaching as far as the old railway line in the middle of a field and not up to the canal.

The Parish Clerk suggested that as Wiltshire Council would not be allocating landscape gaps in the Local Plan that it could be used as evidence for the Examiner of why they therefore needed to be allocated in the neighbourhood plan.

Vaughan clarified a neighbourhood plan could not make designations outside its boundary which created a fundamental problem in terms of the whole green gap. The best scenario was to work with Semington on some kind of joint green gap policy formulated to include in each neighbourhood plan, in order to protect the gap in each area. If this did not work there were still options at Semington, in looking at different ways to protect the green space in terms of views, setting of the heritage assets and a number of other settlement boundary protections at Semington and at Bowerhill.

The gap between Melksham Neighbourhood Plan area and Semington was the most important of the settlement gaps because it is closer with more development interest on the edges of both settlements. The gap between Seend was more difficult, and therefore Vaughan's advice was to optimise the green gap protections in the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan area based on the evidence support and settlement boundaries and unless there was a change in circumstances in Seend, did not see a possibility of having green gap policies back-to-back as with Semington.

Members discussed that there was still merit in seeking a landscape gap/wedge between Bowerhill and Seend Cleeve, just in case a proposed A350 bypass route was not in this direction, or at all, and the opportunity had been missed.

Vaughan advised one of ways to deal with this issue was to get the review made, get a development strategy made and to push Wiltshire Council to get their development strategy made. There were a number of themes which were being progressed by the review and therefore we are in a good position to move these to Regulation 14 relatively soon and advised to carry on and not to get distracted into other areas of policy development at this point, as it would add time and delay the making of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Resolved: The steering group to take the advice of the Neighbourhood Plan consultant and to continue reviewing and renewing the neighbourhood plan which would provide evidence for any future development proposals; building on the strength of work completed by AECOM, Place Consultants and the Steering Group.

c) To review neighbouring Semington NHP Steering Group's Landscape and Visual Appraisal report and any response

Resolved: To thank Semington Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for sharing their extensive Landscape & Visual Appraisal report. To express the

Steering Group's desire to work collaboratively with them to progress the best outcome for a landscape gap between the two settlements.

The Parish Clerk explained that with regard to Seend, she had left it that once the Green Gap & Wedge Study had been published, the Steering Group would share the report with Seend Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, suggesting the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group would also like to work collaboratively with Seend.

Resolved: To also write a similar letter to Seend Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group with a copy of the Green Gap & Wedge Study.

d) To agree next steps:

i. To consider any sites to put forward for Local Green Space designation or Green Infrastructure?

As an example, the Parish Clerk explained when walking from Melksham to Bowerhill through the fields along the A350, via the Right of Way, that there was a clear desire line through the fields; and so perhaps this could be classed as green infrastructure as a much more pleasant and direct route through the industrial estate and as there was no option to walk alongside the A350. Once on that walk, there is lots of evidence of dog walkers and residents using those fields for leisure, and so could also be considered as a Local Green Space.

A layered approach of designations might be appropriate for some of the Green Gaps/Wedges identified and the group may wish to consider some of the green wedges for layers of designation too; or the best designation to be ascertained.

Vaughan explained that validating the AECOM report gave the opportunity to use it as a baseline piece of evidence to find the best way forward of protecting spaces. These other layers could be looked at but the Local Green Space designation whilst giving a stronger level of protection, required more evidence that it met the designation; it would be useful to have Katie Lea from Place be involved in that exercise.

Resolved: To form a Green Gaps Task Group to undertake an exercise with Katie Lea of Place to review the Green Gaps identified for any further designations. Councillors Pat Aves, Alan Baines and John Glover to form the working party, with the possible need/scope for more volunteers.

ii. To agree to publish and use the final version as evidence for planning applications etc

Resolved: To agree to publish and use the final version as evidence for future planning applications with immediate effect.

iii. **To include the report and produce an exhibition board on Green Gap/Wedge evidence/policy for the Neighbourhood Plan segment at the Area Board meeting**

Resolved: To agree to include the published report and produce an exhibition board on Green Gap/Wedge evidence/policy for the Neighbourhood Plan segment at the Area Board meeting.

10. Programme Update

a) **To note delay in publication of the draft Local Plan at Regulation 19 stage to Q3 2023** <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/1086/Local-Development-Scheme>

The group noted the delay in the publication of the draft Local Plan Regulation 19 stage to Quarter 3: July, August, September 2023

b) **To note new timespan of the Local Plan, now until 2038 (previously 2036) and corresponding change to the Melksham NHP timespan**

Members noted the new timespan of the Local Plan and Melksham Neighbourhood Plan #2 until 2038.

c) **To note expected date of Site Selection evidence report from AECOM and to arrange next steps (Housing Task Group meeting to review?)**

The Parish Clerk explained the report was due week commencing 28 February and therefore the Housing Task Group would want to review and check it for factual errors prior to it seeking validation at the next Steering Group.

The Parish Clerk stated AECOM only wanted collated comments back from one source and sought a best way forward.

Vaughan explained the Steering Group needed to be getting on with selecting the sites and therefore making sure the report was correct needed to be done in the first instance prior to being signed off in order for it be used for site selection.

The Housing Task Group were confirmed as Councillor Pafford as lead, Councillor Richard Wood, Councillor Baines, Councillor Harris, Councillor Aves. It was suggested if Town or Parish Council representatives were unavailable for the meetings, they arrange substitutes.

Resolved: For all Members of the Housing Task Group to have a copy of the Site Selection Report and to report any factual errors back to the Parish Clerk to forward to AECOM in order the Housing Task Group can review and

validate the final report on Wednesday, 22 March at 11.00am and start site selection.

To hold the next Steering Group meeting on Wednesday, 5 April at 6.30pm to consider the sites put forward by the Housing Group.

d) To note update following SEA (Strategic Environment Assessment) meeting with AECOM

The Parish Clerk explained herself, the Town Clerk and Katie Lea of Place had had a promising conversation with AECOM regarding the SEA, in that rather than waiting until the end of the programme for AECOM to review the policies, sites and evidence they were happy this information was sent through as it was available. The main thrust of this work is to look at whether reasonable alternatives have been considered.

e) To note current progress against Programme and expected date for Regulation 14 consultation

Vaughan confirmed that the agreed programme had been to aim for a formal Regulation 14 consultation in April/May 2023, with a view that revisions and then submission to Wiltshire Council could take place as soon as possible in July. The reason for this timeline was that the current NHP#1's NPPF paragraph 14 protection¹ ran out at the beginning of July and there was some weight attributed to the draft revised NHP as it followed the submission 16 process; particularly related to the housing site selections.

Vaughan envisaged that at the beginning of April the Steering Group should be able to make significant decisions about the remainder of the outstanding Neighbourhood Plan content. This included the new green gaps/wedges designations, green infrastructure, and any new Local Green Space designations as well as the recommended strategy in terms of site allocations. The SEA process would run after this, and would lead to a final draft version of NHP#2 to formally consult on at Regulation 14 stage². This process took time and even with rapid progress would mean that it was not likely to be undertaken until the end of May or even June and is reliant on the SEA work to be undertaken by AECOM. These means that submission to Wiltshire Council would be after July, in August/September time.

There would therefore be a gap between the protection of NHP#1 running out on 8th July and the new NHP#2 gathering weight as it went through the variety of processes and procedures to become a made plan; with the prospect of a lack of 5-year housing land supply in Wiltshire.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100575/9/NPPF_July_2021.pdf

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/637/regulation/14/made>

However, the Government had been consulting on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) including extending the protection of Paragraph 14 from 2 years to 5 years with all current information available at present indicating that these changes would be immediately implemented in Spring 2023. Therefore, there was a prospect that the current neighbourhood plan could go from potentially losing its protection in July to actually extending it for another 3 years; until July 2026.

Vaughan suggested that if this happened the Steering Group should continue pressing on with the review, but noting that it would not be so time critical to progress from NHP#1 to #2. It would create the opportunity for the Steering Group and councils to consider precisely when they wanted to undertake the Regulation 14 consultation as they could wait for the Local Plan publication due in the summer to see the Spatial Strategy and site allocations for the area before committing to the NHP sites.

Councillor Glover left the meeting (8.13pm) and suggested Councillor Baines join the meeting as his substitute. Councillor Baines subsequently joined the meeting.

11. To approve future spend, quotation for additional work by Place/AECOM if appropriate, latest invoices and note current financial report

The Parish Clerk explained that both her and the Deputy Town Clerk had gone through and updated the expenditure spreadsheet to date on NHP#2 and circulated to the steering group to review.

The Parish Clerk explained Place's quote for the NHP#2 work was £21,743 and broken down into various headings, £10,000 of this was funded via a grant from Locality, with the difference being split between both councils.

A subsequent estimate from Place of £3,300 had been approved in November for the Town Centre Masterplan work.

Total Invoiced To Date	Total outstanding to Invoice
£18,702.56	£6,340.44

The Parish Clerk explained in terms of the £10,000 grant from Locality, of that, £5,463.50 had been spent to date with £4,537.50 still to come from the grant to be used against the site assessment work being undertaken by AECOM.

The Parish Clerk reminded the group that any grant funding had to be spent by the end of March 2023 which it would be, otherwise it would have to be returned to Locality. Unfortunately, at present, there was no indication grant funding would be available in the next financial year from the Government via Locality.

In terms of total spend to date on NHP#2 this was £24,185.20 since 1 April 2022, with £18,702.56 with Place and the other £5,500 relating to Land

Registry searches, adverts in Melksham News, exhibition boards and printing etc.

The Parish Clerk stated it needed to be borne in mind that the group had been successful in obtaining various technical support packages from AECOM, amounting to £1000s, in order to undertake the Neighbourhood Plan Review. Therefore, whilst it has been a cost for both councils, the overall work, including volunteer hours, amounted to significantly more than spent on undertaking the review.

The Parish Clerk explained the £6,340.44 outstanding to invoice from Place included Regulation 14 work including reviewing comments received and any subsequent policy tweaks, however, there may be some other costs, such as advertising the Regulation 14 consultation, and public consultation events.

With regard to the latest invoice from Place of £3,596.65 (ex VAT), this figure had been included in the Total Invoiced to Date figure of £18,702.56. The Parish Clerk explained this included £3,025 for Town Centre Masterplan support and confirmed Place had undertaken 3 days more work than anticipated and stated in their original budget estimate, some of this extra work included extrapolating information from the Town Centre Master Plan and distilling it into bite size piece of information to produce the information boards for the consultation events.

The Parish Clerk clarified the figures shown on the spreadsheet did not include VAT as this can be claimed back.

Resolved: To approve the invoice from Place of £3,596.65 ex VAT (Invoice No: 6039)

12. To consider requests for inclusion in NHP#2 from Melksham Without Parish Council:

Councillor Pafford explained the Parish Council had several things that they repeatedly requested on planning applications and therefore were suggesting that these could perhaps be policies in NHP#2. Following discussions with Vaughan, it was felt that these were better suited to incorporate into the Design Code, rather than Plan policy. These included:

- The provision of bird, bat and bee bricks, reptile refugia and hibernacula within a housing development, in order to increase biodiversity.
- Policy regarding applications for annexes to have a condition that they not then be used as separate dwellings.

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

The Parish Clerk explained the Terms of Reference had been back and forth between both councils, and suggested this be deferred to a future meeting in order to be sure that the various amendments had been captured.

14. To agree date and venue of Next Meeting of Steering Group

As discussed above, the next Steering Group meeting would be held on Wednesday 5 April at 6.30pm at Melksham Without offices.

15. To consider comments to submit to the Government's current NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) consultation - deadline 2 March

Councillor Aves explained she had already formulated a response to the consultation on behalf of the Town Council but would check if any additional comments had been made after it had been circulated to members of the Council's Economic Development Committee for comment.

The Parish Clerk explained Melksham Without Parish Council were due to look at the consultation (58 questions in total) at a Planning Committee meeting the following week and asked if the Steering Group wished to make a response separately or were happy for both councils to submit their respective responses.

The Parish Clerk suggested the Steering Group may wish to welcome Paragraph 14 protection being extended from 2 years to 5 years and the removal of the 5-year land supply. The Parish Clerk agreed to forward the parish council's responses to the to the Town Council.

Resolved: To respond to the consultation welcoming changes which strengthened the neighbourhood planning process.

Meeting closed at 8.29pm

Signed
Chair, 3 May 2023