



WEDMORE PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of a Meeting of the PLANNING COMMITTEE held at the Council Rooms, Grants Lane, Wedmore

On at Tuesday 14th May 2024 at 7:30pm

Present: *Councillor Beacom, Councillor Farley, Councillor Loughrey.

In Attendance: Lindsey Baker (Clerk) Pete Brown representing (50/24/00020) 1x Member of the Public.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Tinney, Councillor Blackshaw

2. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE HELD ON 4TH APRIL 2024

Councillor addressed the committee and confirmed everyone had read the minutes from the previous meetings.
It was accepted as an accurate record and the minutes signed.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None to declare.

4. MATTERS ARISING AND INFORMATION FOR COUNCILLORS

None

5. PLANNING APPLICATIONS – TO BE CONSIDERED INCLUDING: -

50/24/00014/

Proposal: *Siting of a static caravan to be used for storage in connection with the existing farm.*

Location: *Land to the North of, The Old Parlour, West of, Church Lane, Blackford, Wedmore, Somerset, BS28*

Applicant: *Mr S Bosley*

The Clerk displayed the application and a discussion ensued.

RESOLVED: A 'NO OBSERVATION' Comment was submitted to the Portal for Somerset Planning North by The Clerk.

50/24/00016/JMS

Proposal: *Proposed Conversion of Existing outbuilding into Guest Annex and Workshop.*

Location: *Coldnose House, Coldnose, Bagley, Wedmore, Somerset, BS28 4TG*

Applicant: *Mr R Becker*

The Clerk displayed the application and a discussion ensued.

RESOLVED: A 'COMMENT' was submitted to the Portal for Somerset Planning North by The Clerk.

We would like to highlight the conditions attached to Policy D12, which emphasise the importance of retaining a clear dependency and functional link between the annexe and main dwelling, as well as ensuring adequate parking and amenity facilities for the needs of both the annexe occupants and the residents of the main dwelling, for this reason, the Parish Council would like to see that the occupation of the accommodation be restricted by condition so if the application is granted, in the future it cannot be used for long term rental, or holiday letting.

50/24/00020/SKN

Proposal: *Conversion of a barn to a 1no. dwelling, including alterations to the roof and the formation of the associated parking and garden.*

Location: *Walnut Tree Farm, Heath House, Wedmore, BS28 4UJ*

Applicant: *Mr R Hole*

The Clerk displayed the application and a discussion ensued.

RESOLVED: A 'COMMENT' was submitted to the Portal for Somerset Planning North by The Clerk.

The Parish Council would like the applicant to confirm which plan is correct – Both the proposed block plan and the location plan should mirror each other. The parking area shown on the proposed block plan will need to include the

private access between the lawn and the dutch barns for vehicles to utilise the parking spaces, which it currently does not.

50/24/00021/DD

Proposal: Hybrid (full and outline) application. Full application for the erection of 26 No. dwellings and formation of access, associated open space, landscaping and parking. Outline application with some matters reserved for 4 No. self-build plots.

Location: Land At, Combe Batch, Wedmore, Somerset, BS28

Applicant: C&P Developments (Wedmore) Ltd

The Clerk displayed the application and a discussion ensued.

RESOLVED: An 'OBJECTION' Comment was submitted to the Portal for Somerset Planning North by The Clerk.

OBJECTION!

Wedmore is one of only four villages in the district to be granted the title of 'outstanding heritage settlement'.

In 2005 the Village produced a 'Village Design Statement' which was adopted by Sedgemoor District Council in 2013 as supplementary planning guidance. This remains relevant and should continue to guide planning decisions. Sedgemoor District Council, as the local planning authority, designated a Neighbourhood Area for the whole of Wedmore Parish in September 2016. The Sedgemoor Local Plan 2011-2032 was formally adopted on the 20th of February 2019 and the policies relating to the distribution of housing are considered to be up to date. Following the successful referendum on 2 May 2019, Sedgemoor District Council has formally 'made' the Wedmore Neighbourhood Development Plan, the development plan is the starting point for decision-making and paragraph 12 of the NPPF explains "Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted." In this case, there is a clear conflict with the provisions of the development plan, therefore this indicates that permission should be refused.

The site falls outside the Development Boundary of Wedmore and is not a strategic allocation within the Sedgemoor Local Plan or the Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Wedmore. It is therefore within the countryside where residential development is restricted. As no other policy in the development plan facilitates the proposal it would conflict with the spatial approach to the location of residential development defined within the Local Plan. The Parish Council feel there are no material circumstances that outweigh the adverse impacts of a new residential development in this location. The proposed housing development, on an open field, including the partial removal of an ancient hedge to provide vehicular access and visibility splays, would have a harmful urbanising effect on the character and appearance of the area and the prominent gateway and historic conservation of the village. This alone would therefore be contrary to Policy WED1, WED5, and WED6 of the Wedmore Neighbourhood Plan, Policy CO1 and D26 of the Sedgemoor Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 135.

Wedmore Village is identified in the Sedgemoor Local Plan as a Tier 2 settlement which should accommodate a minimum of 116 new houses by 2032. However, four major developments within the village since 2018, have resulted in 155 properties being built and occupied, with a further 18 near completion. This development far outweighs the amount listed in the National Housing Policy (NHP) Allocation of new housing as demonstrated in the Sedgemoor Local Plan and the Wedmore Neighbourhood Plan the allocation has been used up and is now surplus until 2032. The Parish Council would like to point out that within the parish there are other developments pending decision that have affordable homes included, such as that of Paradise Barton at Blackford.

The Parish Council consider that the proposed development would result in an excessive and disproportionate quantum of development in an unsustainable location that has limited capacity to accommodate further housing growth. Regarding paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the proposal does not constitute sustainable development and is unacceptable in principle. Owing to several other factors, outlined below in the other reasons for objection the harm of the proposal would, in this case, significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

DESIGN AND INFRASTRUCTURE CONSIDERATIONS:

Inhabitants of Wedmore appreciate the facilities and services our community has to offer and that it attracts people into the village centre. However, one disadvantage of this popularity is the increase in traffic and congestion in the centre of the village. Access to public transport is limited and consequently, there is a very high reliance on car usage, with nearly two-thirds of households owning two or more cars. The design and designation of the proposed development take no consideration of employment possibilities in the area, and the over-utilisation of the local facilities and infrastructure places additional pressure on the local resources, which are already severely stretched. This proposal is based on an outdated Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) therefore resulting in misalignment with current local housing needs and infrastructure capacity.

TRAFFIC / HIGHWAY SAFETY

After analysing the data collected from the SID placed at Combe Batch from January – March 2024. Incoming traffic to Wedmore on Combe Batch is a similar pattern to Cheddar Road with 55% exceeding the 30mph speed limit and an 85%ile figure of 35.8mph. The Parish Council feel it is reasonable to say that this would cause problems at the proposed entrance

to the development (a short distance away from the SID post). **The speed of traffic and congestion are major concerns of residents.**

- The application fails to demonstrate that the proposed development would not result in a severe residual cumulative impact on the road network. The access arrangements are not satisfactory and would create unsafe conditions for pedestrians and other road users. The proposal of a pavement adjacent to the development will potentially increase the likelihood of collisions as it will encourage future residents to walk the highway beyond the footpath. We believe for these reasons the proposal is contrary to Policy D14 - Managing the Transport Impacts of Development and paragraphs 110, 111, 112 and 113 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021.
- Additional traffic resulting from new housing has been minimised by considering the locations where people can walk or cycle rather than use the car. This proposal is not within these designated sites and cannot prove that they provide, or contribute to, the accessibility and safety improvements in POLICY WED8 –TRANSPORT STRATEGY. The proposal does not overcome the congestion within the area nor the safety aspects of the additional traffic on the highway accessing schools, and other residents in the area.
- The Parish Council is also concerned about an increase in pedestrian/cyclist movements to the village centre, the Primary School and Middle School along a highway lacking adequate footways with additional danger to all users of the road.

EFFECT ON LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREA

Wedmore village has its own Conservation Area, and the Neighbourhood Plan area contains a large number of Listed Buildings which are an indication of the historic and architectural quality of the area. Wedmore was one of the first conservation areas to be designated in the County in 1971. The current conservation area designated by Sedgemoor District Council in 1991 includes Combe Batch. The protection of the conservation area is one of the prime concerns of residents. 'New development should respect its historical fabric by adopting the following design principles: Locations for new buildings should follow the traditional settlement pattern and respect the integrity of the historical settlement form. The layout and design will pay special regard to the setting of adjoining Listed Buildings and to preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (Policies WED5 and WED6)' This proposal is contrary to Policies WED5 and WED6 of the Wedmore Neighbourhood plan as well as D26 of the Sedgemoor Local Plan and NPPF- Considering Potential Impacts. The proposed development is in a prominent location by reason of its elevated position and location on the rural edge of the settlement which would detrimentally impact on the transitional rural approach to the village. The infilling of development along the frontage of Wells Road as proposed, due to the elevated position, would result in an urbanising appearance, out of keeping with the rural character of the furthest extent of the Conservation area impacting the appearance of this edge of the settlement site. The development would therefore conflict with paragraph 135 of the NPPF, Local Policies D2 - Design, D19 - Landscape of the Local Plan, D26 - Historic Landscape, and NHP Policy WED5- Design. NPPF Considering potential impacts paragraph 200 states that 'any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.'

NATURE CONSERVATION / ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The lack of employment opportunities locally means that new residents will still need to undertake significant private journeys by car to reach all other amenities. The proposed development thereby undermines the Council's sustainable transport ambitions and Somerset's climate emergency targets.

The Parish Council would also like to highlight that Somerset Council and Sedgemoor District Council have declared a climate emergency and the loss of the agricultural field and greenfield site will have an impact on the biodiversity of the area. The current site is climate resilient and represents a vital green space for future generations. The proposed development compromises this resilience and the ecological legacy of our village.

- The Parish Council have listened to the concerns raised by residents about the effect the proposed development will have on the endangered species including Bats, Badgers, Birds, and Bees. The Parish Council feel that insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that the proposals would not have an adverse effect on protected species. In all cases development will need to demonstrate that there are no significant adverse impacts on biodiversity interests or the historic environment as set out in the Sedgemoor Local Plan Policy D20: Biodiversity and Geodiversity, Policy D23: Bat Consultation Zones and Policy D26: Historic Environment. The proposals are therefore contrary to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Paragraph 180 of the NPPF.
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG): The application fails to demonstrate a net gain in biodiversity, as mandated by the Environmental Act 2021(Updated April 2024) it will have a detrimental impact on biodiversity and the environment, as highlighted by the detailed calculations and assessments provided by Clarkson Woods. The Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) principle, enshrined in the Environmental Act 2021, mandates that developments should result in a measurable improvement in biodiversity. However, the data presented clearly indicates that this development fails to meet the required standards.

Key Concerns:

Loss of Habitat Units:

- On-site baseline: Habitat units of 10.66 and Hedgerow units of 6.98.
- Post-intervention: Habitat units reduce to 7.70, a loss of -27.74%. Although Hedgerow units slightly increase to 8.13 (16.58% increase), this marginal gain does not compensate for the significant habitat loss.
- River Units: 0.00% net change, indicating no improvement or creation of river habitats.
- Impact on Species: The development will destroy crucial habitats, including agricultural land, bramble scrub, rural trees, and a green field site. This site supports a variety of species, including grass snakes, badgers, and numerous endangered and rare bats (Greater Horseshoe Bats, Barbastelle, Lesser Horseshoe, Serotine, Noctule, and Myotis species). Disruption of these habitats will result in significant biodiversity loss.
- Irreplaceable Rural Tree: The development will affect Rural Tree T4, which is part of a priority traditional orchard habitat of national importance. This tree, among others, provides essential roosts for protected bats, underscoring the site's critical ecological value.
- Off-site Mitigation: Offsetting is only considered viable when BNG cannot be delivered on-site. The proposed off-site mitigation at Rughill, purportedly owned by a director of Clarkson Woods, raises questions about ownership and the integrity of the mitigation process.
- Off-site baseline habitat units are 10.40, increasing to 19.16 units post-intervention, yielding an off-site net change of 84.34%. While this shows an improvement, it is insufficient to justify the on-site losses.
- Total Net Changes: Combined on-site and off-site interventions result in a total net change in habitat units of 4.18 (39.2% increase) and hedgerow units of 1.16 (16.58% increase).

These figures are misleading as they mask the substantial on-site losses and potential long-term negative impacts.

Critical Questions:

- Is the land better than what was there before? The substantial loss of habitat units suggests it is not.
- Should we assign a monetary value to nature? This raises ethical concerns, as the intrinsic value of ecosystems and species cannot be adequately captured in monetary terms.
- Is the entire process objective? Potential conflicts of interest and insufficient on-site compensation measures indicate possible biases and shortcomings in the process.
- How does it factor in climate resilience? The current green landscape contributes significantly to climate resilience, which the development threatens to undermine.
- What happens if the developer goes bankrupt? There are no clear safeguards to ensure long-term maintenance and monitoring of the BNG commitments over the required 30 years.

OUTDATED HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT (HNA):

The most recent HNA, conducted by NEMS in October/November 2022, is now approximately 2 ½ years old. According to Mr. Duncan Harvey, the Housing Manager at the time, the HNA provides only a snapshot in time and is often outdated even before it is published. This indicates that the current HNA is likely outdated and does not accurately reflect the present housing needs.

As a result, the lack of up-to-date data on affordable housing contravenes Policy T2b, which requires current identification of local housing needs for affordable housing.

Mismatch with Homefinder Data: According to Homefinder data, 50% of the housing requirement is for one-bedroom accommodations. The proposed development does not address this specific need, indicating a misalignment with actual housing requirements.

While it is acknowledged that some housing in the new development will be affordable rent rather than social rent, the rationale behind this change is unclear and needs further explanation.

Recent Local Developments: Over the past 2 years, several developments in Wedmore and nearby areas have included affordable housing, yet these have not been fully utilised by local residents. For example:

- Cross Farm 1: 24 out of 55 homes designated as affordable were not taken up by locals.
- Wedmore Grange: Provided 10 out of 35 affordable homes.
- Paradise Barton: Set to provide 3 out of 10 affordable homes.
- In Cheddar, located just 3.9 miles away, Holwell Lane is nearing completion with 36 out of 90 homes designated as affordable, supported by good infrastructure and local services.

Key Question: Where is the actual need for more affordable housing? Given the surplus of affordable homes in recent developments that remain untaken by locals, it is questionable whether there is a genuine need for additional affordable housing in the proposed development.

To conclude the Parish Council OBJECTS VEHEMENTLY to this proposal.

The Parish Council is particularly concerned that the application has been submitted only 13 weeks after a previous almost identical application was strongly refused by Somerset Councillors. This new application is contrary to numerous policies in the Wedmore Neighbourhood Plan, which has been community-led. It has been designed to guide the future development, regeneration, and conservation of the parish. The Plan contains a vision, aims, planning policies, proposals for improving the area and site allocations. The purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to guide development within the Parish and provide guidance to any interested parties wishing to submit planning applications for development within the designated Neighbourhood Area. The Parish Council therefore believes that as a community we have justification for these objections, endorsed by not only the Local Plan but also the National Planning Framework.

Taking the conflict with the housing strategy of the development plan as the starting point and adding the concerns about highway safety, flood risk, harm to the character and appearance of the area, and the loss of versatile agricultural land, these matters amount to overriding reasons for refusal and cannot be outweighed by benefits.

The Parish Council believes that this objection is reflective of matters that are of considerable importance to Wedmore, its residents, businesses, and community groups. The Parish Council believes that by creating a Neighbourhood plan the community have had the opportunity to guide development within our neighbourhood. Anything other than the refusal of this application makes the adoption of a Neighbourhood Plan a mockery. Ridiculing our communities and the places we live!

50/24/00034/JMS

Proposal: Application to determine if prior approval is required for a proposed erection of a single storey extension, extending 6.46m from the rear West elevation.

Location: Old Rhine Farm, Blakeway, Wedmore, Somerset, BS28 4UB

Applicant: Mr and Mrs Smith

The Clerk displayed the application and a discussion ensued.

RESOLVED: A 'NO OBSERVATION' Comment was submitted to the Portal for Somerset Planning North by The Clerk.

Date of next meeting – TBC

There being no further business the meeting was declared closed at 7:45PM