

Melksham Town Council

Minutes of the Economic Development and Planning Committee meeting held on Tuesday 18th February 2025

PRESENT: Councillor S Rabey (Chair)
Councillor A Griffin (Vice-Chair)
Councillor P Alford
Councillor P Aves
Councillor G Ellis
Councillor C Stokes

IN ATTENDANCE:

OFFICERS: Andrew Meacham Committee Clerk

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: A number of members of the public were present and one member of the press was present.

257/24 Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

258/24 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Stokes declared an interest in relation to planning application PL/2025/11426 as a caseworker for Brian Matthews MP. Councillor Stokes remained in the meeting and took part in the debate on this item.

259/24 Public Participation

Representative of Gompels on PL/2024/11426.

Gompels has been in Melksham since 1967. Company has given back to community, eg Skate Park, mental health Helpline, sports club sponsorship and charity donations. Application is critical to growth of company. Will create 275 new jobs and safeguard around 600 existing jobs.

Have been looking for new site for 6 years and various sites have been considered. No other available sites are of suitable size or location. Other towns are not viable options due to increased commute time for vital existing staff and the increased travel and child care costs.

Building is lower profile than other similar buildings and smaller footprint than the school down the road. Thousands of trees will be planted for screening and biodiversity. Recent independent landscape assessments have concluded it will have

non-significant impact on the area. Gompels will do what they can to mitigate impact and speed up screening.

Current site is carbon neutral and net contributor to the grid. It is expected that the new site will be as well. Acknowledges residents concerns but the development will not smell, will not attract vermin and will use virtually silent electric forklifts. It will generate 10 times less traffic than a housing development.

Planning policy 1.6 – Planning for job growth and meeting the needs of businesses are central to strategy. This plan puts in place policies that will help both attract new inward investment and help existing businesses meet their aspirations in Wiltshire.

Policy 2.4 Wiltshire Local Plan draft. Wiltshire needs to have a resilient, buoyant and green economy in order to boost the local economy and provide high-quality, accessible employment opportunities. The plan enables development to take place and encourages economic vitality providing local jobs for Wiltshire population.

Policy 87 of the revised NPPF states *'Planning policies and decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors. This includes making provision for:*

b) storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales ... especially where this is needed to support the supply chain, transport innovation and decarbonisation; and c) the expansion or modernisation of other industries of local, regional or national importance to support economic growth and resilience.'

Asks the committee to consider that this proposal is for the future of generations of Melksham residents who need and expect that there is a strong local economy and a broad range of local jobs.

Representative of a group of Bowerhill residents on PL/2024/11426.

Disappointed to see some of negative comments towards Gompels. Acknowledges Gompels has done a lot for the town and is part of the community. However, also understands why residents are upset.

Has spoken frequently with Gompels and resident and has visited local residents. Feels that Gompels have been forced into application after wasted time and money trying to acquire other appropriate sites.

Suggested Christie Miller or land south of existing warehouse as alternative sites. The Chair pointed out that the committee can only consider and comment on the application before them.

Former Resident of Bowerhill on PL/2024/11426.

Acknowledge the contribution Gompels make to Melksham. Reluctantly opposes application.

Wiltshire Core Strategy Policy 34. The scale and design of this application is out of keeping in so far as it is inconsistent in scale with the location and it detracts from residential amenity.

Melksham Neighbourhood Plan Policy 21, the significance of heritage assets within the area.

Referenced Bowerhill Sports Fields which the applicant has only recently considered and dismissed as unviable. This site has not been offered for consideration for either residential or commercial use in either the Wiltshire Local Plan or the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan. In his view renders the application speculative and granting it would set a precedent.

Applicant has filled in ponds on the site which would have contained wildlife. (This assertion based on personal experience of digging a pond when living in area).

Two elements to the warehouse business. Pick & Pack of individual orders for delivery to customers and Break Bulk, the delivery of bulk stock from suppliers. Possibly main reason additional space is required. MWPC meeting was informed deliveries arrive mainly on containers from Southampton, stacked floor to ceiling, to be unloaded onto pallets which are wrapped, labelled and racked. This task is not a high quality job.

Containers are already driving past the site. Designated route for traffic from Southampton Port into Wiltshire is either A36 and A350 or A34 to Newbury and M4 to Chippenham. Applicants know that deliveries are using A360 which is inappropriate. Deliveries may bypass Devizes and come through Worton and Seend. There was a serious accident on the A365 recently and there have been incidents in recent years.

Suggests a Break Bulk Distribution Centre could be established in Swindon, Chippenham or elsewhere in Melksham if a site was available. There are third party logistic providers in Swindon who could undertake the whole operation. Pick & Pack could continue in Bowerhill and trailers could move bulk stock to Bowerhill and return completed orders to the Distribution Centre.

Councillors are elected to represent residents. Undoubtedly a difficult application to decide, but should take note of and support the overwhelming opposition to the application.

Representative of Melksham Without Parish Council on PL/2024/11426.

90 members of the public present at MWPC meeting. MWPC recognised conflict between the need to retain employment and the views of local residents. On balance

MWPC unanimously resolved to have no objection to the application but to express serious concerns about some aspects and therefore request conditions or mitigations.

Adopted Cores Strategy. Proposals for employment developments outside the principal settlements, market towns and local service centres will be supported that are adjacent to these settlements and seek to retain or expand businesses currently located within or adjacent to the settlements.

Emerging Local Plan. Proposal for employment development will be supported on unallocated sites within or adjacent to principal settlements etc, where they are appropriate to the role and function of the settlement and would not undermine the delivery of strategic employment allocations.

Emerging neighbourhood Plan. Any proposals for development in a Green Wedge will only be supported where they:

- a. are in conformity with adopted Development Plan Policies for development outside of the settlement boundaries;
- b. demonstrate delivery of economic, community and/or environmental benefits which outweighs any harm to the role and function of the Green Wedge (individually or cumulatively) as set out in section 1
- c. minimise and mitigate urbanising effects, such as artificial lighting and traffic movements; and, d. retain (where possible) and add screening trees and hedgerows....

MWPC above all wish to safeguard and expand employment in Melksham. There have been complaints about housing development without an increase in infrastructure. Wiltshire Council view is that better infrastructure will come from contribution from developers. MWPC aware of imbalance between housing and infrastructure.

A number of big employers have been lost from the area and there is a shortage of employment. Many “out commute” taking money out of the local area. Wiltshire Council have been criticised for not providing enough employment land. Local Plan provides 5 hectares. Talks with local employers leads MWPC to the conclusion that 40 hectares are required. Agree that Christie Miller **would have been** the ideal site but the decision has been made on this site. Wiltshire Council cannot force landowners to make land available for employment and industrial development. Land owners prefer housing.

MWPC asked for mitigating conditions. Larger, mature trees to give coverage in a shorter period. More architectural appeal in the building design. Graduated colour scheme. Down lighting so not intrusive.

On balance MWPC believes employment must be protected and on this basis voted no objection with mitigation.

Local Resident on PL/2024/11426.

Objections not NIMBYism. Understand Gompels need to expand and frustrations with previous sites. Should not be a trade off.

Gompels should change their approach. Have amalgamated multiple businesses into the business case for jobs. States 275 jobs but application papers show 100 created at this site with no details of the terms, 50 for A N Other and 265 for Knorr Bremse. They have recently announced redundancies and are moving engineering abroad. They may be willing to move into the vacated site but there is no commitment to extra jobs.

Application argues jobs for Melksham people but representation tonight uses an employee in Westbury as argument against locating in Chippenham. Disputes the commute figures given in Gompels presentation.

On MWPC comments, the application does not in his opinion conform with all the requirements of the policy, in particular scale, size and impact on neighbourhood amenity. How can it be determined that the application brings economic benefit that outweighs other objections?

Application is the wrong size and in the wrong place and Gompels should be helped to find a suitable alternative.

Local Resident on PL/2025/00283.

Concerned at lack on openness and consultation by Wiltshire Council. No Green Notices. Application refers to home for 4 children, then later 4 young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. This is different from a Children's Home. Notifications only sent to immediate neighbour, two houses opposite and two in St Margarets Gardens. Should have been wider consultation, including nursery in St Margarets Gardens. When work was done the front was tarmacked and now asking for dispensation on biodiversity giving that as a reason.

Does not object to the use of the home but objects to Wiltshire Council not following its own rules and the lack of consultation and Green Notices.

260/24 Minutes

The minutes of 28th January 2025 having previously been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by Councillor Rabey.

261/24 Planning Applications

262/24 PL/2024/11426

Members all expressed sympathy with the views of residents but explained that planning decisions were bound by the National Planning Policy Framework. Members expressed some concerns about the location and design but also acknowledged the lack of employment.

Possible mitigation of the impact on neighbours was discussed, including

Larger, more mature trees planted at this stage, to provide some immediate cover and give full coverage in a shorter time period.

More architectural appeal in the design, rather than a basic functional warehouse.

Graduated colouring on the warehouse to help it blend in to the landscape and make it less jarring to residents.

External lighting be downlighting.

Any other mitigating conditions that are considered suitable in addition to the above.

It was proposed by Councillor Alford, seconded by Councillor Griffin and

RESOLVED not to object to the application but to request Wiltshire Council to impose conditions to mitigate as suggested.

263/24 PL/2025/00390

Members could see no issue with the application so as the hedgerows were replanted.

It was proposed by Councillor Alford, seconded by Councillor Stokes and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED not to object to the application.

264/24 PL/2025/00283

Members had concerns about some aspects of the internal lay out and car park but it was noted that this was an application for change of use, not retrospective for work done.

Members were unhappy about the apparent lack of a Green Notice and consultation with the community.

Members recognised that there was a need for such accommodation.

It was proposed by Councillor Alford, seconded by Councillor Stokes and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED not to object to the application but to express concern about the Green Notice and the need for more openness in engaging with the community.

265/24 PL/2025/00176

It was proposed by the Deputy Mayor Councillor Rabey, seconded by Councillor Griffin and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED not to object to the application.

266/24 PL/2025/00979

It was proposed by the Deputy Mayor Councillor Rabey, seconded by Councillor Aves and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED not to object to the application with the condition that a Tree Warden confirmed the procedure would not harm the tree.

267/24 Planning Decisions

268/24 PL/2024/08832

The decision was noted.

269/24 PL/2024/11449

The decision was noted.

270/24 PL/2024/01069

The decision was noted.

271/24 PL/2024/10702

The decision was noted.

272/24 Lime Down Solar Park

The decision not to use Whitley as a site was noted. It was noted that the proposed route of the trench would affect the local area in the short term.

273/24 Local Highways and Footpath Improvement Group (LHFIG) Issues

274/24 Bank Street

Members noted that the foundations made the erection of railings problematic. It was confirmed that the matter was already with LHFIG and was awaiting the outcome of a Safer Roads assessment.

No further action by this committee at this time.

275/24 Neighbourhood Plan

The item was noted. Councillor Ellis advised that the inspector had visited and submitted a list of questions.

276/24 Temporary Road Closure Notifications

The Temporary Road Closure Notification was noted.

277/24 Parish Steward

A request was made for the bus stop at Avonside to be cleaned on the inside. It was noted this was the responsibility of Melksham Town Council.

Councillor Stokes asked for clarification on responsibility for Skylark estate. Councillor Alford confirmed the main road had been adopted and was the responsibility of Wiltshire Council. Smaller side roads were still the responsibility of Green Flag.

278/24 Speed Indicators

No report was available at this time. It was noted that the SIDs did not show a speed if a vehicle was not speeding. The Chair urged members to report any issues they notice to officers.

279/24 Date of Next Meeting 11th March 2025

Meeting Closed at: 8.30 pm

Signed:

Dated: