Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

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Officer's Name: Jemma Foster
Officer's Title: Planning Officer

Application No: **PL/2023/05617**
Proposed Erection of 9 Dwellings at the Former site of the Labour Club, Melksham and associated works.
3 Lowbourne, Melksham, SN12 7DZ

Please find following comments in respect of the above application(s).

Recommendations:

x	Comment (for reasons set out below)
	Support
	Support subject to conditions (please set out below)
	Object (for reasons set out below)
	No objections

Scope of comments: the following comments relate to the built historic environment.

Policy: From the point of view of the historic environment the main statutory tests are set out within the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Sections 16 (LBC) and 66 (PP) require that **special regard** be given to the desirability of preserving listed buildings, their settings or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 also requires the Council to pay **special attention** to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of designated Conservation Areas.

The NPPF outlines government policy, including its policy in respect of the historic environment. Section 16 of the NPPF 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' sets out the Government's high-level policies concerning heritage and sustainable development. Paragraphs 201-3 of the NPPF require a balanced approach with any harm which would be caused being weighed against the potential public benefits which might be achieved. Paragraph 197 requires local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

The Council's Core Strategy 'Core Policy 58: Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment' requires that designated heritage assets and their settings will be conserved and where possible enhanced. It is also required that distinctive elements of Wiltshire's historic environment, including non-designated heritage assets, which contribute to a sense of local character and identity will be conserved, and where possible enhanced.

The Council's Core Strategy CP 57: Ensuring high quality design requires a high quality of design in all new developments. Proposals are required to "demonstrate how the proposal will make a positive contribution to the character of Wiltshire through:

i. enhancing local distinctiveness by responding to the value of the natural and historic environment, relating positively to its landscape setting and the existing pattern of development…
ii. the retention and enhancement of existing important landscaping and natural features…
iii. responding positively to the existing townscape and landscape features in terms of building layouts, built form, height, mass, scale, building line, plot size, elevational design, materials, streetscape and rooflines to effectively integrate the building into its setting.

Site: The site lies within Melksham's Conservation Area. The site used to house a late nineteenth century stone and brick three storey building to the south of the site and a single storey extension built in the late 1960's. The 1960's single storey part of the development was demolished in 2016 and the nineteenth century building has just been demolished to make way for the extant consent (13/07076/FUL).

Proposal: This planning application is for the erection of eight two bedroom properties and one four bedroom property, with all associated works.

Relevant planning history: PL/2022/01197 - variation of condition 19 of 13/07076/FUL to allow for an amended building footprint – APPROVED 06/03/2023.
13/07076/FUL - The demolition of the former Labour Club to build 17 two bedroom apartments – APPROVED 16/01/2015

Issues: Impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area

Assessment: Paragraph 194 requires that applicants describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. This should include sufficient information to provide a clear understanding of the significance of the heritage asset and its setting and the potential impact of any proposals on that significance. In this case, the application is accompanied by a "Heritage Statement" which provides sufficient information to understand the impact of the proposal and is proportionate to the scope. The requirements of the NPPF are therefore met in this respect.

However, paragraph 195 also provides for the local planning authority to make its own assessment of impact and the following heritage recommendations are offered on this basis.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the proposal is more sympathetic to the conservation area than the extant consent, with a much reduced massing. There are a number of architectural details which are considered lacking in quality and which could be improved to create a more sympathetic scheme in the conservation area. These are set out below (no order of priority):

- Plots 1 – 8 are very top heavy with an unduly eep roof form and prominent dormer windows – it would help the scheme if the units were less roof dominated and the dormers were smaller. It would also assist the scheme if chimneys could be provided to provide more roofscape interest
- Plots 1 – 8 - red brick is proposed for these elevations and what appears as recon stone window heads. It would make more of a convincing scheme if redbrick 1 ½ rubbed heads were used instead of the recon stome heads. Also could blind windows be used on plot 1 at ground and first floor to create some visual interest in the gable end.
- Plot 9 – this block will visually terminate the view from the street. At the current time this has mixed architectural messages and is confused between a 'Town House' and a suburban estate house. From a townscape point of view it would be better to provide a traditional classical town house with sash windows, central panelled door with fanlight and a two storey canted bay. Chimneys are also important to provide roofscape interest. Hierarchy and correct proportions in window heights steeping smaller up the building would also provide a relief to the somewhat repetitive suburban windows.

I am very happy to work with the designer to try and make a difference to this proposal and make a higher quality product.

Summary & conclusion: The NPPF confirms that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). It makes clear that any harm to a designated heritage asset requires clear and convincing justification.

As such design amendments are requested to enhance this scheme and better relate the proposal to the character and appearance of the conservation area.