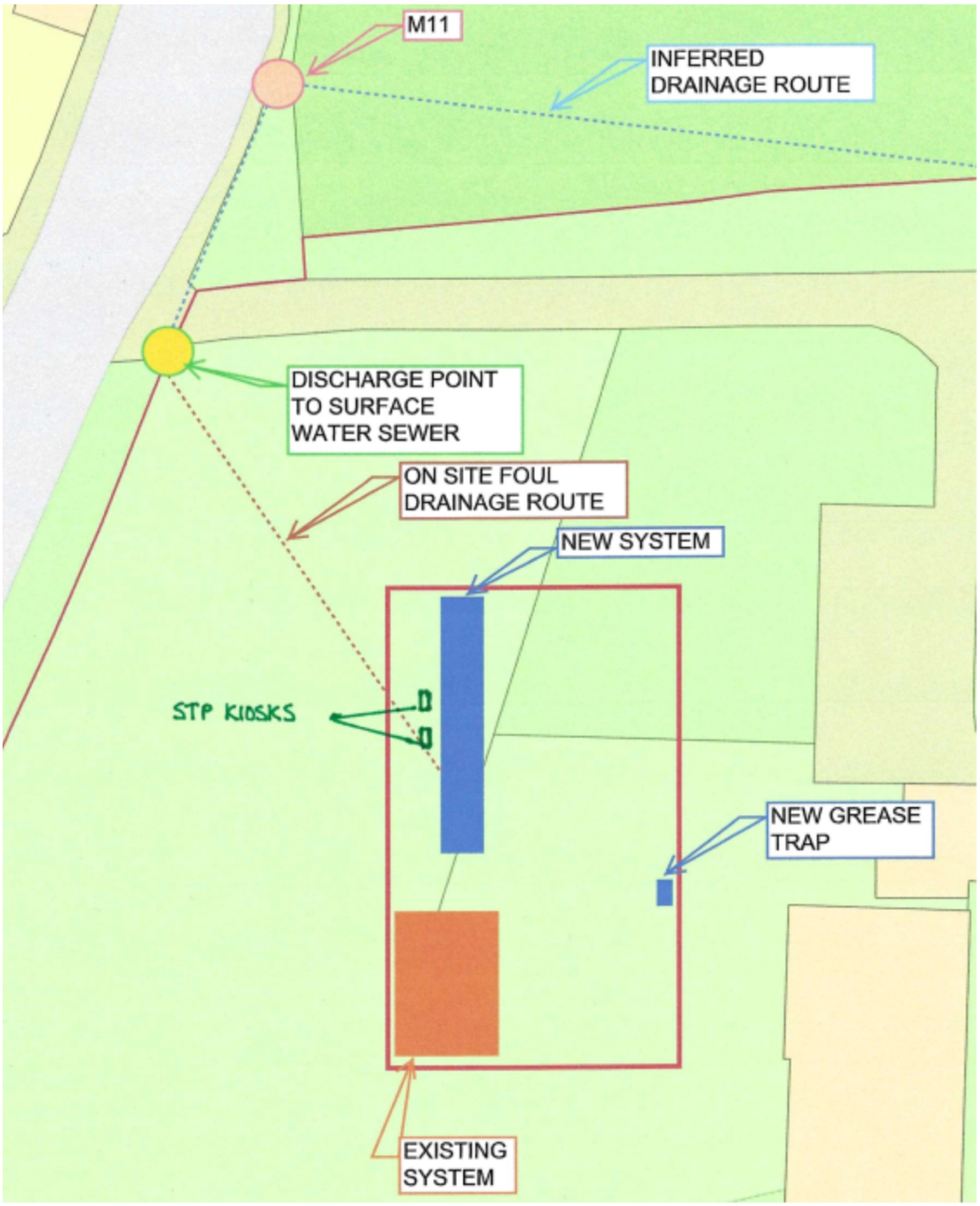
CASE OFFICER'S REPORT

Application Reference:	PL/2023/05863
Application Type:	Full planning permission
Site Inspection:	
Consultation ends:	13 September 2023
Case officer:	Verity Giles-Franklin

Site Address:	Beechfield House, Beanacre, Melksham, SN12 7PU
Proposal:	Replacement of an aged and dilapidated sewage handling tankage with the installation of a new grease trap, Bioficient 55 sewage treatment plant with twin final effluent pump chamber and associated interconnecting pipework and inspection chambers.
Recommendation:	Approve with Conditions

Proposal and Site Description: This application is seeking planning permission for the removal of an existing non-mains sewage tank and the installation of a replacement package treatment plant, new grease trap, and associated connecting pipework, inspection chambers and kiosks. The replacement package treatment plant would predominately be underground (with the expectation of the control kiosks) and would have "*less above-ground items*" than the current system, with reference to the completed application form. The new package treatment plant would be installed in a different location, closer to the existing kitchen garden, as shown on the below extract taken from the submitted revised block plan:



The replacement sewage treatment plant would be connected to an existing drainage system, which with reference to the submitted application form is via a surface water sewer on the highway verge near the A350 and this has been confirmed on the submitted revised block plan drawing. The existing discharge does not benefit from an approved environmental permit, though it is intended that the replacement system would operate to modern standards and would provide betterment to the existing discharge. The proposed replacement sewage system would however be subject to an Environmental Permit, issued by the Environment Agency and the applicant has confirmed that a Bespoke Permit for the discharge of the treated effluent from the proposed package treatment plant has now been issued.

The proposed replacement package treatment plant would serve the Grade II listed Beechfield House (and separately Grade II listed stable building), which was formerly a large dwelling but is now a 24-bed hotel located between Melksham and Beanarce. The sewage treatment plant system is located within the curtilage and garden grounds of a Grade II listed building.

Policies

National Context: National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF); Planning Practice Guidance (PPG); Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (delete if appropriate)

Local Context: The adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) 2015, namely core policies (CP): CP57 - Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping; CP58 - Ensuring the Conservation of the Historic Environment; CP67 - Flood Risk; the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2020 - 2026, 'made' July 2021

Saved policy U1a - Foul Water Disposal of the Wiltshire District Plan 1st Alteration 2004

Key Issues: impact on the setting and significance of the designated heritage asset; neighbouring amenity; drainage matters

Consultation Responses

Melksham Without Parish Council: No objection

Wiltshire Council Conservation: No objection - Initially, concerns regarding the visual impact of the new system were raised but following a visit to the site, the Conservation Officer provided the following updated response:

"*Whilst the majority of new system is subterranean, the visual concern was focused on the above ground elements, such as the kiosks: due to the location within the site, the works will be hard to distinguish within the grounds from the main approaches and experience of the house, being set far back from the main frontage, within a mature garden. Although they are not ideal, it is accepted that there is a need for the sewage facilities to be updated and therefore there are limited options to achieve this. The new elements associated with this updated system are probably not going to be highly intrusive into the setting overall to introduce harm and therefore I now support the proposals, subject to them remaining screened by natural vegetation*".

Wiltshire Council Drainage: No objections raised, however the initial comments received from the council's drainage department requested clarity regarding the discharge point(s) were and for these to be shown on the proposed block plan. This information was requested from the applicant on 9 August 2023 and a revised block plan showing this detail was submitted.

Wiltshire Council Public Protection: No objections raised

Representations

Third-party representations: No letters of objection received

Planning Considerations and Assessment

Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 require that the determination of planning applications must be made in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Heritage and Visual Impacts: In terms of the historic environment, the main statutory tests are set out within the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Section 66(1) requires that special regard be given to the desirability of preserving or enhancing listed buildings, their settings or any features of special architectural or historic interest that they possess.

The Framework also requires that 'great weight' be given to the conservation of heritage assets and advises a balanced approach with the public benefits which may result from proposals being weighed against any harm caused. In particular, paragraph 199 advises 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. This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. Paragraph 200 leads on to require that any harm or loss of significance should require a clear and convincing justification.

Policy CP57 of the adopted WCS not only requires a "*high standard of design*" for all new developments, but criterion iv requires new development to be "*sympathetic to and conserve[e] historic buildings and historic landscapes*". CP58 of the adopted WCS similarly sets that the new development "*should protect, conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment" and that designated heritage assets and their settings should be "conserved, and where appropriate enhanced in a manner appropriate to their significance*".

It is appreciated that the existing system is concealed within the grounds by established vegetation and is located within a less formal part of the site. This proposal seeks to locate the new sewage system in a revised location, to the north of the existing system, which is not as effectively screened by existing vegetation.

It is noted from the submitted details that the majority of the new system would be subterranean, with the exception of the control cabinets and top of the inspection chambers. The applicant's agent has confirmed that the new system would include two kiosks that would measure 1.21m wide, 1.26 high and would be 0.51m deep and these would be located to the north of the existing sewerage system to be removed and to the west of Beechfield House.

With due regard to the size and location of these above ground elements, the council's Conservation Officer has commented to say that the proposed works would be *"hard to distinguish within the grounds from the main approaches and experience of the house, being set far back from the main frontage, within a mature garden*". Whilst the kiosks would not benefit from

as much natural screening as the existing system, the new sewage treatment system would be sited within an existing garden area of the site and due to their overall size, the proposal is not considered to cause material harm on the setting or significance of the listed building and would therefore comply with the aforesaid legislation and planning policy.

Neighbour Amenity: Core policy CP57 requires in criteria vii for developments to have "*regard to the compatibility of adjoining buildings and uses, the impact on the amenities of existing occupants, and ensuring that appropriate levels of amenity are achievable within the development itself, including the consideration of privacy, overshadowing, vibration, and pollution (e.g. light intrusion, noise, smoke, fumes, effluent, waste or litter)*".

Criterion f) of paragraph 130 of the Framework meanwhile requires the creation of "*places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users*".

The replacement system is not considered to result in any adverse impacts on the amenity of the hotel guests compared to that currently experienced by the existing system. The new replacement system would meet modern requirements and standards, which would ensure that the system would not cause a nuisance. Due to the distance in separations between the proposed location of the replacement package treatment plant and closest neighbouring properties (which are located the other side of the A350), the proposal would not have an adverse impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties, due to its location and as such the proposal complies with CP57 of the adopted WCS.

Drainage and Flood Risk: Policy CP67 of the adopted WCS also requires proposals for all new development to "*include measures to reduce the rate of rainwater run-off and improve rainwater infiltration to soil and ground (sustainable urban drainage) unless site or environmental conditions make these measures unsuitable*".

Furthermore, saved policy U1a of the West Wiltshire District Plan 1st Alteration 2004 states that new developments would only be permitted "*where adequate foul drainage, sewerage and sewage treatment facilities are available or where suitable arrangements are made for their provision*".

The council's drainage department have confirmed that the proposal would not have any impact on the surface water drainage of the site but the proposal does have a potential environmental impact and potential for it to cause foul flooding if the system is not appropriately managed. The applicant has provided a revised block plan drawing which confirms the location of the outfall locations which would utilise an existing discharge point and the applicant has confirmed that the Environment Agency has submitted a Bespoke Permit for the discharge of the treated effluent. It is therefore considered that the proposal would not exacerbate flood risk on or off site.

Conclusion: Approve subject to conditions

Conditions: (3)

1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

REASON: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

Drawing nos: Location Plan; DS1269P, Grease Separator; 404316, Kiosk (Blower and Control Panel) - Bioficient 55; DS1176P, Twin Effluent Pump Chamber Sales Drawing, as received on 17 July 2023; TQRQM23223165625747, Revised Block Plan, as received on 26 October 2023; DS1341, Kiosk Elevations, as received on 1 October 2023

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

3 The existing sewage treatment plant shall be removed from the site within one month of the new sewage treatment plant being brought into use and the land being restored to its former condition.

REASON: In the interests of the character and appearance of the area and to preserve the setting of the listed building

Informatives: (2)

1 Any variations to an existing environmental permit would likely require the prior consent of the Environment Agency and therefore the applicant is advised to contact the Environment Agency directly. Further guidance is available at: Check if you need an environmental permit - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) or at the National Customer Contact Centre on 03708 506 506 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm) or by emailing enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk.

2 Any alterations to the approved plans, brought about by compliance with Building Regulations or any other reason must first be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority before commencement of work.