

Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

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Application No: PL/2023/03359
**Construction and operation of anaerobic digestion facility,
ancillary infrastructure and construction of new access
from Ashton Road
Land West of Ashton Road, Ashton Keynes, Wilts, SN6 6QT**

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

Recommendations:

☐	No Comment
☐	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. Section 66 requires 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.

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 214-216 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 210 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.

National Planning Practice Guidance provides guidance on interpreting the NPPF.

The Council's Core Strategy Policy CP58 'Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment' requires that "designated heritage assets and their settings will be conserved, and where appropriate enhanced, in a manner appropriate to their significance."

Wiltshire Council's Core Strategy Policy CP57 'Ensuring high quality design and place shaping': A high standard of design is required in all new developments, including extensions, alterations, and changes of use of existing buildings. Development is expected to create a strong sense of place through drawing on the local context and being complementary to the locality.

Site and assets considered: The application site consists of a broadly rectangular field located immediately west of Ashton Road in an agricultural area, approximately 2km north of the village of Ashton Keynes. The Site is formed of one complete field and a portion of a second field immediately to the south, which are bound to the east by Ashton Road. Both fields which form the site are in arable use, and the fields are divided by an intermittent hedge and low trees. A shallow drainage ditch lies on the northern side of the divide between the two fields. The Site is bound by hedges on all sides except the southern boundary which bisects the southern field. Further shallow drainage ditches are present outside the north and eastern boundaries. An unsurfaced access track runs along the outside of the western boundary.

Proposal: The proposal seeks construction and operation of anaerobic digestion facility, ancillary infrastructure and construction of new access from Ashton Road

Relevant planning history: N/A

Issues: impact on the setting of listed buildings.

Information considered/provided: Paragraph 207 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 applications are accompanied by a "Heritage Statement" which provides sufficient information to understand the impact of the proposals and is proportionate to their scope. The requirements of the NPPF are therefore met in this respect.

However, paragraph 208 also provides for the local planning authority to make its own assessment of impact and the following heritage recommendations are offered on this basis.

Assessment: This is my third consultation response and follows on from amended plans. The plans do not change my previous assessment of this proposal.

There are several Listed Buildings within a 2 km radius of the Site with a number clustered in South Cerney to the northeast and Ashton Keynes to the south / southeast. The closest Listed Buildings include:

- Four Grade II properties forming part of Cotswolds Community and including Ashtonfields Community Hall and Chapel, Reception Offices, attached staff rooms and Ashtonfields farmhouse lying circa 0.58 km to the southwest of the Site; and
- Walnut Tree Farm (Grade II) circa 0.65 km to the northeast.

The following three further design refinements have been made since the previous iteration of this proposal:

- Reducing the height of the Chicken Manure Processing Building by 3.5m, from 13m to 9.2m to further minimise the overall visible massing of the Proposed Development when viewed in the early years from Ashton Road and the nearby public footpath (prior to the growth of mitigation planting);
- Including a native willow screen behind the proposed perimeter fence along a section of the site access bellmouth to reduce visibility of the Main Gate Kiosk and Staff Offices from passing traffic using Ashton Road;
- Adding a native wildflower meadow adjacent to the northwest corner of the Site to maximise biodiversity net gain

There would be a change in the setting of the grade II listed buildings at Ashtonfields Community Hall as a result of some screened intervisibility between the upper storey of the building and the top of the silage clamps. This would result in minor adverse change that would erode the setting to a slight extent, however this would not amount to harm to the listed buildings, as the elements of their setting which contribute to the significance would be preserved.

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.

The impact of the proposals on heritage assets will be neutral and the requirements of current conservation legislation, policy or guidance are considered to be met and there is therefore no objection to the approval of the application.