

APPLICATION FOR FULL-PLANNING PERMISSION

CASE OFFICER REPORT

APPLICATION REFERENCE:	PL/2025/08695
APPLICATION TYPE:	Permission in Principle
SITE ADDRESS:	Land at Praters Farm, Sherston, Malmesbury, SN16 0PS
DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION:	PERMISSION IN PRINCIPLE FOR THE PROPOSED ERECTION OF UP TO FIVE DWELLINGS
RECOMMENDATION:	Refuse

SITE DESCRIPTION/CONTEXT

The application site comprises approximately 0.28 hectares of land associated with Praters Farm, located to the south of Easton Town Road (B4040) on the edge of Sherston, Malmesbury. The site is located outside of the established settlement boundary and is therefore situated within the countryside. Prater's Farm is no longer operational, with the lands and holdings long sold off/converted. The site remaining is a complex comprising a Grade II listed early and late 17th century farmhouse [NHLE: 1023233], a Grade II listed 17th century and 20th century reconstructed cruciform barn (now studio) [NHLE: 1023234], and a rectangular outbuilding located along the southern boundary. The site is level and currently forms part of the farm curtilage. It is enclosed by mature boundary trees and hedgerows on three sides. Existing residential properties lie directly opposite and adjacent along Easton Town Road. Access to the site is via Easton Town Road. Local services and bus stops can be accessed via the connecting pavement running along Easton Town Road.

Constraints

- **Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB):** The site is washed over by the Cotswolds National Landscape.
- **Flood Risk:** The site lies within Flood Zone 1.
- **Tree Preservation Order (TPO):** A TPO applies to a tree located in the northern corner of the site.
- **Adjacent Settlement Boundary:** The site lies immediately outside, but adjoining, the defined Limits of Development for Sherston.
- **No other national or local ecological or heritage designations apply to the site, and there are no known archaeological constraints.**
- **Agricultural Land Classification: Grade 3**
- **Heritage Assets:** Eastern boundary Grade II Listed Barn to the West of Prater's Farmhouse, Grade II Listed Prater's Farmhouse. South Eastern Boundary Former Farmyard of Home Farm listing Grade II Listed Out Buildings to the North of Home Farmhouse (Converted). It is within an area recorded as the site of a Medieval Deserted Settlement on the Swindon and Wilts HER (MWI2390)

PROPOSAL

The proposal seeks Permission in Principle for all matters reserved for the erection of up to five detached dwellings on land west of Praters Farm house and barn.

The supporting documents submitted provide some indicative details; however, these will be dealt with at the reserve matters stage. Details do advise that the development would comprise a maximum of five dwellings of two storeys or less, and would be representative of Cotswold vernacular. The scheme would retain existing boundary trees and hedgerows and would introduce a new vehicular access from Easton Town Road. An indicative layout plan accompanies the application, illustrating how the dwellings could be arranged within the site without encroaching into the wider countryside.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

Proposal / Summary
PL/2025/02862 - Conversion of existing studio (previously converted from agricultural barn) to studio with accommodation - Withdrawn by Applicant
PL/2025/03154- LBC - Conversion of existing studio (previously converted from agricultural barn) to studio with accommodation - Withdrawn by Applicant

RELEVANT LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

Statutory Legislation:

National Planning Policy:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
- National Design Guide

Development Plan:

The development plan for Wiltshire comprises the *Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS)* (adopted January 2015) and any made neighbourhood plans, which remain the principal statutory planning document guiding development across the county. In line with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Though the development plan is considered as a whole, those parts deemed to be particularly relevant to this application are listed below:

The adopted *Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS)*, with particular regard to:

- Core Policy 1 Settlement Strategy;
- Core Policy 2 Delivery Strategy;
- Core Policy 3 Infrastructure Requirements;
- Core Policy 13 Spatial Strategy Malmesbury Community Area
- Core Policy 41 Sustainable Construction and Low-Carbon Energy;

- Core Policy 43 Providing Affordable Homes
- Core Policy 45 Meeting Wiltshire's Housing Needs;
- Core Policy 48 Supporting Rural Life
- Core Policy 50 Biodiversity and Geodiversity;
- Core Policy 51 Landscape
- Core Policy 57 Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping;
- Core Policy 58 Ensuring the Conservation of the Historic Environment;
- Core Policy 60 Sustainable Transport;
- Core Policy 61 Transport & Development;
- Core Policy 62 Development Impacts on the Transport Network;
- Core Policy 64 Demand Management
- Core Policy 67 Flood Risk;

Saved Policies North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011 (2006)

H4 Residential Development in the Open Countryside

Emergent Draft Wiltshire Local Plan Policies

The Wiltshire Local Plan review is advancing through its preparatory stages and is currently being examined. In accordance with the advice set out in paragraph 49 of the NPPF, the emerging Plan is capable of carrying weight in decision-making.

- Policy 1: Settlement Strategy
- Policy 2: Delivery Strategy
- Policy 3: Reserve sites and broad locations for growth
- Policy 4: Addressing climate change
- Policy 5: Securing infrastructure provision from new development
- Policies 6-20: Chippenham Area Strategy
- Policies 64 – 75: Economic, tourism, retail and transport
- Policies 76 – 84: Social, housing, community, public open space and wellbeing
- Policies 85 – 101: Sustainability, ecology, water and landscape, heritage, air quality

Neighbourhood Plan:

Sherston Neighbourhood Plan – Made May 2019

Objective 4

Supplementary Planning Documents and other Guidance:

- Wiltshire Design Guide (adopted April 2024)
- Wiltshire Local Transport Plan 2011-2026, adopted 2015 - including the Car Parking Strategy and Cycling Strategy, adopted 2015
- Wiltshire Council's Waste Core Strategy, adopted July 2009
- Wiltshire Council's Waste Storage and Collection: Guidance for Developers Supplementary Planning Document, January 2017

- Air Quality SPD (July 2023)
- Wiltshire Housing Site Allocations Plan, adopted 25 February 2020

ISSUES

The main issues that need to be addressed in this case include:

- Whether the development is acceptable in principle (CP 1 and 2)
- Whether the scheme would have an acceptable impact upon the reasonable living conditions of the adjoining occupants (CP 57)
- Whether the scheme would preserve or enhance the historic environment (CP 58)
- Whether the scheme would have an acceptable landscape impact (CP 51)
- Whether the proposal would have a negative effect upon highway safety, including if there is sufficient parking for the proposed development (CP 61 and 64)
- Whether there would be any harmful impacts upon protected species or priority habitats (CP 50)

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

WC Highways: Comments

The site is well related to existing development, and future occupiers would have similar access to local services as nearby properties. The location therefore accords with Core Policy 61 and NPPF guidance promoting development in sustainable locations. The site is not allocated in the Sherston Neighbourhood Plan, but proposed access arrangements provide adequate visibility within the public highway. Detailed design and access will be addressed at the Technical Details Consent stage.

WC Conservation: Objection on the following grounds

The proposed development would cause harm to the setting of Praters Farmhouse and the associated listed barn, both designated heritage assets of significant historic and architectural value. The introduction of up to five dwellings within the farmstead's immediate context would erode its rural character and diminish the legibility of the historic group. In accordance with Sections 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the NPPF, this harm cannot be justified and the site is therefore unsuitable in principle.

WC Archaeology: Comments

There is archaeological potential associated with the application area; earthworks likely associated with a medieval settlement lie approximately 250m to the south-east of the site. Therefore, should this application be granted permission in principle, its likely to advise archaeological mitigation when consulted at the technical details stage.

Cotswold National Landscape: Comments

No objection or support. Notes site within Cotswolds National Landscape; assessment must consider statutory duty to conserve and enhance natural beauty and relevant

guidance (Management Plan, Landscape Character Assessment, Position Statements.

Parish/Town Council: Objection on the following grounds:

Sherston Parish Council strongly objects to this application for permission in principle. It is a speculative development on a green field site on the edge of the village and in the Cotswolds National Landscape. The site is not approved for development within the made Sherston Neighbourhood Plan. It therefore contravenes planning policy.

REPRESENTATIONS

In accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended), the application was publicised by way of:

- A site notice displayed near the site;

This method was used to inform interested parties and provide a period of 21 days for comments to be submitted.

Below is a summary of the representations received during the consultation period. Only material planning considerations have been taken into account in the assessment of this application. Non-material issues, such as property values or private legal disputes, cannot be considered in the determination process.

- Outside the Limits of Development - The site lies beyond Sherston's defined development boundary, contrary to the spatial strategy.
- Conflict with Sherston Neighbourhood Plan (SNP) - The site is not allocated in the SNP, and the proposal bypasses the plan-led approach intended for community engagement.
- Lack of Community Consultation - No prior engagement with neighbours or wider community before submission, despite claims of willingness to consult.
- Harm to Landscape and Visual Amenity - Development would erode the rural character and special qualities of the Cotswolds National Landscape; site is not "surrounded by residential properties" as claimed.
- Impact on Heritage Assets - Adjacent to Grade II listed buildings (Home Farm and Prater's Farm), causing harm to their setting and curtilage.
- Loss of Amenity for Neighbouring Properties - Potential adverse impact on outlook and setting for multiple households near the site.
- Highway Safety Concerns - Poor visibility at the proposed access point, existing traffic issues at the crossroads, speeding concerns, and visibility.
- Tree Preservation Order (TPO) - Large tree under TPO near the access point compromises safety and viability.
- Inadequate Consultation Period - Late posting of site notice and insufficient time for affected neighbours to respond; request for extension.

- Impact on Settlement Pattern - Easton Town was historically a separate hamlet; adding five large houses would significantly increase its size and erode its distinct identity.
- Housing Affordability - Anticipated large, high-value dwellings would be unaffordable for local people, failing to meet local housing needs. Preference expressed for affordable housing on more suitable, plan-allocated sites.
- Density of Development - Five dwellings considered excessive for the small site; suggests 1–2 houses would be more appropriate.
- Loss of Green Space - Development would remove valued open land from the village.
- Impact on Biodiversity and Hedgerows - Concern that existing native hedgerows and trees, which provide habitat for wildlife (deer, birds of prey), cannot realistically be retained during development.

ASSESSMENT Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states:

"If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purposes of any determination to be made under the planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise."

In accordance with this statutory requirement, this application has been assessed against the relevant policies of the Development Plan, including the Wiltshire Core Strategy (2015) and, where applicable, any made Neighbourhood Plans. Consideration has also been given to the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as a material consideration in the assessment.

Principle of Development

As set out in paragraph 012 of the PPG, the matters to be considered when determining a permission in principle application are limited to location, land use and the amount of development. This application relates to the construction of up to 5 dwellings on a parcel of greenfield agricultural land located outside the defined settlement boundary of recognised settlement although it is acknowledged that the site is well located in relation to the built form of Sherston.

Policy Context

Core Policy 1: Settlement Strategy of the WCS establishes a hierarchy of settlements to guide where development should be focused. The policy prioritises growth in:

- Principal Settlements (e.g., Salisbury, Chippenham, Trowbridge) – main focus for strategic growth.
- Market Towns – support local services and employment; suitable for sustainable development.
- Local Service Centres – smaller towns and villages with a range of services; limited development supported.
- Large and Small Villages – development should be limited and respond to local needs.

- Outside the defined settlements – development is strictly controlled and generally not supported unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Core Policy 2: Delivery Strategy of the WCS sets out how development will be distributed and delivered across Wiltshire. The policy emphasises:

- Sustainable patterns of growth, reducing the need to travel and supporting local services.
- Development should be plan-led, aligning with the settlement strategy and supported by infrastructure.
- Windfall development (not allocated in plans) must still comply with the principles of sustainable development.
- Development outside settlement boundaries is generally not permitted, unless it meets specific policy exceptions (as set out in paragraph 4.25 of the WCS).

Together, CP1 and CP2 ensure that new development is strategically located, sustainable, and supports the character and function of Wiltshire's communities.

Assessment

The site, approximately 0.28 hectares associated with Praters Farm, lies south of Easton Town Road (B4040) on Sherston's edge, outside the settlement boundary and within the countryside. The proposal is for Permission in Principle for up to 5 dwellings on a greenfield site. *Given the details submitted, it is determined that the proposal does not satisfy any of the 'exception policies' listed in paragraph 4.25.*

Based on the above, this PiP proposal is considered to conflict with policies CP1, CP2 and CP13 of the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy 2015, which seek to prevent development in the open countryside and direct new housing to sustainable locations and through a plan-led approach.

In terms of national planning policy, the latest iteration of the NPPF substantive changes pursuant to the application of housing land supply which states

72. Strategic policy-making authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment. From this, planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was revised in December 2024, reintroducing the requirement to maintain a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites with an additional buffer applied in all circumstances. It also revised the Local Housing Need calculation, resulting in a substantial increase in the five-year housing requirement. When assessed against deliverable supply, the recalculation shows a significant reduction in housing land supply. The Council can currently demonstrate only 2.42 years of supply at a unitary authority level, representing a substantial shortfall.

The absence of a five-year housing land supply is a material consideration. In accordance with Paragraphs 78 and 11(d) of the NPPF, where there is a shortfall, the most important policies

for determining the application are considered out of date. This triggers the presumption in favour of sustainable development unless (i) policies in the NPPF that protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a clear reason for refusal, or (ii) the adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the NPPF as a whole.

Within paragraph 14 of the Framework, reference is made to paragraph 69, which states that “authorities should establish a housing requirement figure for their whole area, which shows the extent to which their identified housing need... can be met over the plan period.” Since 2020, when the Wiltshire Core Strategy became more than five years old, the local housing need for Wiltshire has been calculated on a county-wide basis rather than by local area. Given the housing land supply deficit, it is not considered reasonable to apply full weight to older neighbourhood plans. Due weight is given to the housing land supply position; however, material planning considerations and the planning history of the site also carry weight.

The site falls within the Sherston Neighbourhood Plan area, which was made in 2019 and is therefore more than five years old. Under paragraph 14 of the NPPF, the specific protection that gives significant weight to recently made neighbourhood plans applies only where the plan is less than five years old and contains policies and allocations to meet its identified housing requirement. As Sherston’s plan is older than five years, this protection does not apply. Nevertheless, the plan remains part of the development plan and its policies continue to carry weight, albeit reduced, depending on their consistency with the NPPF. Conflict with the neighbourhood plan is therefore a material consideration but does not automatically override the presumption in favour of sustainable development triggered by the housing land supply shortfall.

However, the presumption in favour of sustainable development—outlined in paragraph 11 of the NPPF—must be applied with particular regard to the key policies referenced in Footnote 9, which include those relating to designated sites, heritage assets, and areas at risk of flooding. Of particular relevance is the site’s location within a National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). Paragraph 176 of the NPPF confirms that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes, which are afforded the highest status of protection. This policy constraint is a clear reason for refusal under Footnote 7 of the NPPF.

In this context, while the principle of delivering housing in this location could help address the significant housing shortfall, the harm to the character and quality of the National Landscape carries substantial weight. On balance, the identified harm, combined with reduced but relevant conflict with the Sherston Neighbourhood Plan, is considered to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the scheme. Accordingly, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply.

Design and Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

Policy Context

Core Policy 57 of the WCS requires high-quality design that:

- Enhances local character.
- Responds to the natural, historic, and built environment.
- Retains important features (e.g., trees, hedges).

- Supports sustainable construction and compatibility with surrounding uses.
- Creates safe, legible, and accessible spaces.

Section 12 of the NPPF emphasises design that is:

- Visually attractive.
- Functionally effective.
- Contributes to the quality of the built environment.

The Wiltshire Design Guide encourages sensitivity to local character, materials, and architectural styles and supports modern living standards while maintaining aesthetic and functional quality.

Building for a Healthy Life Framework promotes healthy, inclusive, and sustainable places. The document encourages:

- Walkability.
- Access to green space.
- Active design principles for well-being.

Assessment

The application seeks Permission in Principle (PiP) for residential development, which is limited to consideration of location, land use, and the amount of development. The site is currently a greenfield parcel enclosed by mature hedgerows and trees, with agricultural land to two boundaries and a road along the northern edge. Opposite the road lies existing residential development, while to the east are further dwellings, including listed buildings forming Praters Farm and the converted farmyard of Home Farm. The indicative information provided advises that the proposal is for up to five two-storey, large family homes, each with associated access, parking, and private amenity space.

Matters relating to detailed design, materials, layout, scale, and massing would be addressed at the Reserved Matters stage. However, given the site's position on the edge of the village, its topography, location within a designated National Landscape (AONB), and proximity to listed buildings forming Praters Farm and the converted farmstead of Home Farm, it is likely that two-storey dwellings would appear out of character in this context. Extending built development on this side of the village would also erode the visual separation between the historic farmsteads and the designated settlement, leading to a sense of coalescence that would harm the area's rural character and setting. Similarly, objections have been received from both local residents and the parish council, raising substantive concerns regarding the scale, layout and siting of the proposed development in this setting.

Conclusion

While this Permission in Principle application is limited to establishing whether the site is suitable for residential development in terms of location, land use, and scale, it is concluded that development on this site would be out of character and would cause harm to the setting of nearby heritage assets and the rural character of the locality. These impacts weigh heavily against the proposal in the planning balance.

Impact on Heritage Assets

Policy Context

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 16 (Listed Building Consent)/Section 66 (Planning Permission) 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.

Paragraph 58B of the Planning Act 1990 requires that in considering whether to grant planning permission or permission in principle for the development of land in England which affects a registered park and garden, the LPA must have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the asset or its setting.

Section 72(1) of the Act 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 for planning. Chapter 16 of the NPPF 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment' sets out the Government's high-level policies concerning heritage and sustainable development. In particular:

Paragraph 208 requires LPAs should “avoid or minimise any conflict” between the heritage asset’s conservation (which includes achieving its optimum viable use) and any aspect of a proposal.

Paragraph 210 requires local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable new uses and of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

Paragraphs 212 requires “great weight” to be given to an asset’s conservation “irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.”

Paragraph 213 advises that harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset should require “clear and convincing justification”.

Paragraphs 213-215(214-216) require a balanced approach with any harm which would be caused being weighed against the potential public benefits which might be achieved.

Paragraph 220 advises that not all elements of a Conservation Area or World Heritage Site will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site should be treated either as substantial harm or less than substantial harm as appropriate.

The 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 and non-designated heritage assets and their settings

will be conserved, and where appropriate enhanced, in a manner appropriate to their significance and encourages proposals which improve the condition of heritage assets at risk.

The Council's Core Strategy CP 57: Ensuring high quality design requires a high quality of design in all new developments. The policy requires applicants to "demonstrate how the proposal will make a positive contribution to the character of Wiltshire through (amongst other things) responding to the value of the natural and historic environment and being sympathetic to and conserving historic buildings and landscapes. Development is required to respond positively to the existing 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.

Assessment

The application site lies immediately adjacent to Praters Farmhouse and its associated Threshing Barn, both Grade II listed buildings of significant historic and architectural interest. These assets derive their significance from their vernacular form, historic walling fabric, and group value, which is reinforced by their rural setting within the former farmstead. The proposed development of up to five dwellings within the adjacent agricultural field would introduce built form into an open area that currently contributes to the legibility and character of the historic farm group.

In this case the, the introduction of multiple dwellings would erode the rural character of the site and diminish the contribution the open field makes to the setting of the listed buildings. The scale and suburbanising effect of the proposal would result in harm to the significance of these heritage assets, contrary to the statutory duty and national and local policy requirements. The Conservation Officer has advised that the introduction of multiple dwellings would cause harm to the setting of the listed buildings and supports refusal of the proposal on these grounds.

Conclusion

The proposed development would cause harm to the setting of Praters Farmhouse and the associated listed barn by disrupting their historic farmstead context and diminishing their rural character. This harm carries great weight in the planning balance and has not been justified by any public benefits. Accordingly, the site cannot be considered suitable in principle for housing-led development under the Permission in Principle route, and the proposal conflicts with Sections 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Chapter 16 of the NPPF, and Core Strategy Policies CP57 and CP58.

Highways Impacts and Parking

Policy Context

Transport implications are a key factor in assessing planning applications, especially for larger developments. Proposals must demonstrate:

- Safe and suitable access for all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and those with mobility impairments.
- No severe residual impacts on the surrounding highway network.
- Promotion of sustainable travel, reducing reliance on private vehicles.
- Adequate parking and cycle provision, in line with adopted standards.

- Protection and enhancement of public rights of way and active travel routes.

Relevant policies include Core Policies 60–64 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, supported by the Wiltshire Local Transport Plan, Car Parking Strategy, and Cycling Strategy. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and LTN 1/20 (DfT) provide further design guidance for active travel infrastructure.

Proposals must also ensure safe access for refuse collection vehicles and comply with the Wiltshire Council Waste Storage and Collection SPD (2017).

Where necessary, Transport Assessments or Statements should be submitted to evaluate impacts and identify mitigation. Planning conditions or legal agreements may be used to secure off-site improvements, travel plans, or contributions to sustainable transport infrastructure.

Assessment

The site lies on the northeastern edge of Sherston at Easton Town. Sherston is identified as a Large Village within the Wiltshire Local Development Framework and has a defined settlement boundary. Although the site is outside this boundary, it is adjacent to it, and the proposed dwellings would be no further from local services than existing properties within the boundary. Therefore, the proposal is not considered contrary to Core Policy 61 or NPPF guidance promoting development in locations with sustainable transport options.

It is noted that the site is not allocated within the Sherston Neighbourhood Plan, which identifies appropriate development sites in line with local policy and NPPF guidance.

Concerns have been raised regarding highway safety and potential poor visibility due to existing boundaries and mature trees, particularly as the proposal would require the creation of a new access. However, following consultation, the WC Highway Authority advises that access arrangements within the PiP site can achieve adequate visibility splays within the adopted public highway. Should Permission in Principle be granted, detailed design and access matters will be addressed at the Technical Details Consent (TDC) stage.

On this basis, the proposal could potentially accord with the provisions of Core Policies 62 and 64 and the objective of the NPPF.

Ecology and Biodiversity

Policy Context

The ecological impact of development is a key planning consideration, especially for larger schemes. Proposals must assess and address potential effects on:

- Protected species
- Priority habitats
- Ecological networks
- Green and blue infrastructure

Core Policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy requires development to:

- Avoid harm to ecological assets.
- Deliver measurable Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), in line with the Environment Act 2021.
- Support habitat restoration and connectivity.
- Integrate biodiversity into site design.

The Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2022–2030) promotes nature recovery, ecosystem services, and habitat connectivity through development.

Unless exempt, National policy requires a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for major developments, demonstrated via:

- Biodiversity Metric calculations
- Ecological assessments (e.g. PEAs, Phase 1 surveys, protected species surveys)

Assessment

In this instance, the application is submitted as a Permission in Principle (PiP), which limits consideration to the location, land use, and amount of development. Should the application be approved, the applicant would be required to submit a Technical Details Consent (TDC) application, at which stage full details of the scheme would be assessed. This would include demonstrating compliance with relevant environmental and planning requirements, including the provision of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in accordance with the Environment Act 2021 and associated guidance. The applicant would need to provide appropriate ecological assessments and mitigation proposals at the reserved matters stage to satisfy BNG requirements.

Landscape and Visual Impact

Policy Context

Core Policy 51 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy requires development to:

- Protect, conserve, and enhance landscape character and quality.
- Respect local distinctiveness, key views, and visual receptors.
- Give particular weight to impacts on National Landscapes (formerly AONBs) and locally valued landscapes.

The Wiltshire Design Guide SPD (2024) promotes a context-led approach, encouraging integration with natural features and settlement patterns while avoiding visual intrusion.

The Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2022–2030) supports landscape protection through green infrastructure, habitat connectivity, and nature-based solutions.

The NPPF emphasises the need to protect and enhance valued landscapes, particularly those with scenic, historic, or ecological significance. Planning decisions should:

- Recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
- Safeguard key views, local distinctiveness, and landscape settings.

- Ensure development is well-integrated into its surroundings and avoids visual intrusion, especially in sensitive or designated areas.

Landscape impact must be considered alongside biodiversity, heritage, and green infrastructure objectives, with mitigation measures encouraged where harm cannot be avoided.

The site is washed over by the Cotswold National Landscape.

Paragraph 189 of the NPPF requires that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.

Under Section 245 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, LPAs and other relevant authorities must now “seek to further” the statutory purposes of National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), replacing the previous duty to merely “have regard to” them.

This is an active duty, requiring authorities to take reasonable and proportionate steps to support the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, special qualities, and key characteristics of these designated areas when exercising any function that affects them.

Assessment

Permission in Principle (PiP) is restricted to consideration of location, land use, and the amount of development, with all other detailed matters—such as design, layout, scale, and materials—addressed at the Technical Details stage. However, the proposed detail set out in the supporting statements and plans is assessed below.

The site lies within a designated National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), which is afforded the highest level of protection under national policy. Paragraph 176 of the NPPF requires that great weight be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in these areas. The site currently forms part of an open greenfield setting on the northeastern edge of Sherston, contributing to the rural character and the visual separation between the historic farmsteads and the main settlement.

Introducing up to five dwellings in this location would result in a noticeable encroachment of built form into the countryside, diminishing the openness and rural qualities that define the AONB. The scale and massing of two-storey dwellings, as indicated in the submitted details, would likely appear prominent given the site’s topography and its relationship to the village edge. This would lead to a harmful change in the character of the landscape, eroding the transition between the settlement and the wider countryside.

Furthermore, the development would reduce the physical and visual separation between listed buildings at Praters Farm and Home Farm and the designated settlement, creating a sense of coalescence that undermines the historic pattern of development.

Conclusion

As such, it's determined that these harmful impacts would conflict with NPPF objectives to protect valued landscapes and heritage settings, and with Core Policy 51 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, which seeks to conserve and enhance landscape character.

Loss of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land (BMV)

Policy Context

BMV land includes Grades **1, 2, and 3a** under the Agricultural Land Classification system. It is considered the most productive and sustainable for food production.

Paragraph 187(b) of the NPPF emphasizes the need to protect BMV land from unnecessary development and recognises the economic and environmental value of BMV land.

Natural England Guidance recommends consultation for developments involving 20 hectares or more of agricultural land but that smaller developments still require assessment if BMV land is involved.

Assessment

WC aerial photography shows that the site's land has been maintained as grazing land for the past 25 years, though it has not necessarily been utilised. The site is classified as Grade 3 agricultural land under the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) system. Grade 3 land falls within the lowest category of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land, as defined by Government guidance. This grade represents land with moderate limitations affecting crop choice, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting, and yield levels. Where more demanding crops are grown, yields are generally lower or more variable than those achieved on Grades 1 and 2 land. While the site is technically within the BMV category, its limitations mean it is less productive than higher-grade land. In line with the NPPF and the Government's guidance on assessing development proposals on agricultural land, the presence of Grade 3 land is a material consideration, but the degree of weight will reflect its lower versatility compared to higher grades.

Conclusion

Although the site has been retained as unimproved grazing land and is modest in scale, it still has agricultural value due to its soil quality and could be utilised for small-scale livestock grazing or feed production in the future.

Conclusion

While this Permission in Principle application is limited to establishing whether the site is suitable for residential development in terms of location, land use, and scale, the planning balance must be considered in light of the NPPF. Paragraph 11(d) is engaged because the Council cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, introducing the presumption in favour of sustainable development. However, this presumption does not apply where policies in the NPPF protecting areas or assets of particular importance provide a clear reason for refusal.

In this case, the site lies within a designated National Landscape (AONB), where great weight must be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty. Development would

erode the rural character, harm the setting of listed farmsteads, and reduce the separation between historic assets and the settlement, leading to coalescence. These impacts carry substantial weight and, on balance, are considered to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of contributing to housing supply. Accordingly, the tilted balance does not indicate approval, and the presumption in favour of sustainable development is disapplied.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Planning Permission be REFUSED.

1. The site lies outside the defined settlement boundary for Sherston and is not allocated for development in the Sherston Neighbourhood Plan. Core Policy 1 directs new housing to sustainable locations within settlement boundaries to protect the countryside and maintain a plan-led approach. Development outside these boundaries is generally restricted to specific exceptions, which do not apply here. Although the Sherston Neighbourhood Plan is more than five years old, it remains part of the development plan and identifies appropriate sites for growth. Introducing housing on an unallocated site would undermine the spatial strategy and conflict with Core Policy 1 and NPPF objectives to promote sustainable patterns of development and respect locally prepared plans.

2. The site lies within a designated National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), which is afforded the highest level of protection under national policy. The proposed development would introduce built form into an open rural setting, resulting in a harmful change to the character and appearance of the landscape. This would conflict with Paragraph 176 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which requires great weight to be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty, and with Core Policy 51 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

3. The proposed development would harm the setting of Praters Farmhouse and its associated Threshing Barn (both Grade II listed) by introducing suburban built form into an open field that currently contributes to their historic farmstead character and rural context. This change would erode the legibility and significance of these heritage assets, contrary to the statutory duty under Sections 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to give special regard to preserving listed buildings and their settings. The harm has not been clearly or convincingly justified and conflicts with Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraphs 208, 210, 212, and 213), which require great weight to be given to the conservation of heritage assets and for any harm to be justified, as well as Core Strategy Policies CP57 and CP58, which seek high-quality design and the conservation of the historic environment.

4. The introduction of up to five two-storey dwellings in this location would appear incongruous with the established rural edge and historic farmstead pattern, leading to coalescence and loss of local distinctiveness. This is contrary to Core Policy 57 (Ensuring High Quality Design) and NPPF guidance on achieving well-designed places.

