

**PL/2026/00195 Land to the West of Westbury Road, Warminster.
Failure to undertake community engagement**

Objection.

Andrew Lee.

[REDACTED]

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1. A new application

The applicant for this site is trying to dress up their application as merely a resubmission of papers. The implication is that it is as if they had been submitted, withdrawn and now simply popped in again.

This is not a resubmission. This language is being used to mislead councillors.

The applicant submitted plans in 2021. That was a different planning application under a different planning application number. Those plans changed several times and in material ways until they were finally rejected by a Planning Inspector in May 2025.

This is a new planning application. It is under a new application number. A new planning application requires a statement of community engagement.

2. No engagement

The applicant has done nothing to engage with the local community on planning application PL/2026/00195.

The applicant openly states that their community engagement took place in respect of the previous planning application and that it took place in the spring of 2021. That is to say, 5 years ago.

Since then on The Woodlands alone 3 of 9 houses have changed hands. The people the applicant engaged with back in 2021 are going to be different to those who will be affected by the plans submitted in January 2026.

Many of these people have not been engaged with at all.

Since the 2021 planning application was decided, the applicant has done nothing to communicate its plans with the community.

In fact I would suggest they have gone out of their way to hide their new application from the public.

3. Private meeting

Aside from one paragraph that refers to a meeting in October 2025 the Statement of Community engagement submitted with this application, is substantially the same as the one submitted in 2021.

That October meeting is the only occasion on which the applicant has engaged with the community since 2021. And as I suggest in a moment, it was not actually engagement with the community at all.

Contrary to the implication in that para, the applicant did not ask to speak to Warminster Town Council, they asked specifically to speak to the Planning Committee of Warminster Town Council.

The meeting was expressly a private meeting, not a public meeting. I understand that this was at the request of the applicant. In any event it was not a public meeting, nor was it a meeting held in public and importantly, no members of the public were invited.

Because it was a private meeting, the understanding was that the matter was not for public consumption at that point. Had it been a public meeting, that might have been different.

The purpose of the meeting was not to inform the community, but to try and assess the inclination of the Planning Committee towards approving the applicant's plans.

As it happens, in a professional capacity, I learned of the meeting, and with the approval of the Planning Committee, but without the applicant's knowledge, I and a neighbour attended the meeting.

At that meeting the applicant stated that they had no intention of undertaking any form of public engagement. Various committee members expressed their dissatisfaction with that suggestion.

4. Opportunity missed

We are the only members of the public to have had any inkling that new plans were to be put forward.

There were reasons to believe the proposals discussed at the October meeting were uncertain. At that October meeting, the applicant assured councillors that an application would be submitted by the end of October 2025.

As you will be aware, it wasn't. It has taken a further 3 months to submit and in that time, there has been no communication with the public and (I believe) no further communication with the town council or ward member.

That intervening time could have been used by the applicant to undertake public engagement, without jeopardising the timetable they wished to work to with their application actually submitted in mid-January 2026.

The applicant has, by their own admission, an address list of 672 relevant addresses in Warminster. They also have the neighbours address list from their previous application.

Despite that they have not written once, not even a circular letter, to inform local people of their intention to submit a new planning application for their Westbury Road site.

5. There should be community engagement

As a result, the requirements of Wiltshire Council have not been met.

Your Community Involvement Document para 8.11 notes that *“we encourage developers and applicants to engage with local people and communities including Town and Parish Councils and with neighbours, when appropriate before submission of a planning application.”*

This might be in the form of a public meeting or display of materials when local people can make the developer aware of any views they have prior to the submission of an application.

A reasonable timeframe should be allowed by the developer for feedback. This will enable the developer to consider amending plans in response to such suggestions before submission.

Whilst Government have stated that such engagement is discretionary, it is strongly encouraged by the council prior to the submission of applications or ten or more houses.”

This application is for more than ten houses. No public consultation has taken place and there has been no opportunity for the public to give feedback. The applicant has been told by councillors that they are concerned by the lack of public engagement.

I should also point out that in terms of the NPPF, this is also contrary to NPPF 41 which states: “*Local planning authorities should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications.*”

6. Community wishes ignored

Not only has no community engagement taken place, but the applicant has ignored the express wishes of the community. This despite having been written to by the town council to clarify those wishes.

The new application refers throughout to an offer of a community centre.

I should point out that this is not the offer of a community centre (this was tested at the Planning Inquiry) at all. It is the offer of a patch of land with the expectation that the community will pay to build a community centre.

Secondly, the applicant has been told categorically by the Town Council that they do not wish for a community centre and there would be no value to having one at the proposed location on the applicant's site.

If this is an updated statement of community engagement, as it purports to be, why does it fail to take account, or even mention, the written communication they received stating the community does not want a community centre, but a different form of contribution from the developer?

I repeat that no community engagement with the public has been undertaken by the applicant for this application.

7. Remedies

I respectfully suggest that the applicant be asked to defer their application or at least delay it until a proper community engagement exercise has taken place.

If they refuse and I accept they cannot be forced to undertake the exercise, then the current application should be assessed on the basis that no public engagement has taken place and it should be judged accordingly.

That fact should also be on the record in case the application ends up either in Judicial Review or Appeal, so that the fact is made obvious to anyone subsequently reviewing the course of the application.