

Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

URBAN DESIGN

Officer name:

James Weddell RIBA
Senior Urban Design Officer
Wiltshire Council

Date: 11.02.2026

Application No: PL/2025/10007

Proposal: Outline planning application for the erection of up to 77 dwellings, public open space, landscaping and sustainable urban drainage system, with vehicular access off Ashley Coombe. All matters reserved except for means of access.

Site Address: Land off Ashley Coombe, Warminster, Ashley Coombe, BA12 9QU

Case Officer: Steven Sims

Reference:

Drawings and documents indexed 12th December 2025 on application webpage, including:

- 2829-URB-XX-XX-DR-UD-9001 Rev 05 Illustrative Masterplan
- 2483-URB-XX-XX-DR-UD-9002 Rev 05 Parameter Plan
- Design and Access Statement revision A November 2025

Policy and guidance:

- Wiltshire Core Strategy, Core Policy 57 'Ensuring high quality design and place shaping' (abbreviated CP57)
- Wiltshire Local Plan Review - Pre-Submission Draft 2020-2038 (Regulation 19) (September 2023) (abbreviated WLPR)
- Wiltshire Design Guide – Wiltshire Council Supplementary Planning Document adopted 25th March 2024 (abbreviated WDG)
- National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG December 2024) (abbreviated NPPF)
- National Design Guide (MHCLG January 2021) (abbreviated NDG)
- Building for a Healthy Life (Homes England June 2020) (referenced in the NPPF) (abbreviated BfHL)
- Streets for a Healthy Life: A companion guide to Building for a Healthy Life (Homes England) (abbreviated SFHL)
- Warminster Neighbourhood Plan (Made March 2016) (abbreviated WNP)
- Warminster Neighbourhood Plan 2 (Regulation 14 consultation) (abbreviated WNP2)

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.

Observations

The site lies outside the current settlement boundary for Warminster (2020) and is not identified for development in either the emerging Wiltshire Council Local Plan (January 2023) or the Warminster Neighbourhood Plan 2 (WNP2). As such, the proposal is considered speculative at this stage.

Notwithstanding this, should the principle of development on this site be considered, I have the following comments on the development proposals. At this early stage no specific house designs have been submitted, and my observations are therefore generally related to the layout in outline.

Objection

- 1) Landscape buffers – The Green Infrastructure Parameter Plan identifies a 10-metre buffer containing shrub and tree planting, along with fencing, and these areas are excluded from development within the other Parameter Plans. The Illustrative Layout presents a variety of design responses to this constraint. The Planning Statement suggests that these ‘undeveloped’ buffer zones will function as bat corridors; however, this purpose is not defined within the Ecological Impact Assessment. Clear information on the purpose, design, and long-term management of these corridors is required, including indicative sections and maintenance descriptions.

If the 10-metre buffer is positioned to the rear of private gardens, measures will be needed to prevent general access. However, in accordance with WDG Expectation 6.2: *More Green and Blue Infrastructure*, existing significant trees and hedgerows should be retained *within public open space where possible, rather than behind private boundaries*, to ensure their long-term protection.

Public footpath WARM58 runs alongside the 10-metre buffer along the north-west site boundary. The Illustrative Masterplan shows this pedestrian route as poorly overlooked and inadequately lit after dark, aligning with the ‘red’ scenarios illustrated on pages 18-19 of BfHL, rather than the preferred ‘green’ examples shown on pages 16-17.

Recommendation: Additional detail should be provided on the purpose of the 10-metre buffer and how it will be integrated into a high-quality and safe design. The alignment of the public footpath WARM58 route through the site should also ensure a safe, attractive and enjoyable experience for all users.

- 2) Although indicative at this stage, the proposed layout does not provide a return loop and instead relies on access from an existing cul-de-sac. The internal street network is dominated by a single long cul-de-sac that serves multiple communal driveways, collectively accommodating a large number of dwellings. The reliance on private communal drives terminating in dead ends limits permeability and connectivity. This would not accord with WDG para 5.2.1 which states that ‘*Cul-de-sac development should be short with their turning head/far end visible from the junction with a through road*’.

The proposed layout would also not accord with Core Policy 57 (vii) and (ix) particularly regarding legibility and accessibility. The design necessitates reversing and turning movements at the ends of cul-de-sacs for both domestic and refuse vehicles, and relies on numerous bin collection points. These features may lead to operational inefficiencies and potential inconvenience and source of conflict for residents. This would represent BfHL what red looks like pages 18/19 and not ‘what green looks like’ pages 16/17 – ‘connected streets along the edges of a development’. The use of a continuous edge lane would be preferable, as private drives by their nature limit public access and connectivity afforded to cyclists and pedestrians.

Recommendation: Provide a return loop and ensure that foot and cycle connections are integrated from the ends of communal driveways into the wider site network. This is necessary to

improve permeability, support active travel, and deliver a legible and connected movement framework in line with adopted design guidance.

- 3) Layout – The proposed layout for the eastern field creates an inward-facing development in which rear gardens adjoin the open spaces to the north, east and south. This arrangement does not align with current design guidance, which expects buildings to front onto public open spaces to ensure natural surveillance, activate the public realm and create safer, more welcoming environments. Both BfHL and the WDG emphasise this principle: BfHL calls for “well-overlooked public open spaces with strong levels of natural surveillance”, while WDG requires that “all POS should be well overlooked by the principal elevation of buildings”

Recommendation: Reconfigure the layout so that all areas of public open space are addressed by the principal elevations of buildings, with active frontages providing natural surveillance and improved street-level activity.

- 4) Identity – The DAS states that *“the existing topography of the land allows for the creation of a plateau that maximises views and enhances the site’s aesthetic appeal.”* As this plateau will also be visible from surrounding footpaths, highways and open countryside, it presents a clear opportunity for a design response that positively reflects the local rural context.

The rural character of the area is defined by relatively narrow building depths, 1½–2-storey building heights, and an irregular pattern of farmsteads and small clusters arranged on varied plot shapes. In contrast, the proposed layout - characterised by regular street patterns, uniform plot dimensions and standardised house types - adopts a suburban development model that does not correspond to this established rural form.

To avoid reinforcing a suburbanised settlement edge, the scheme should instead pursue a looser, more fragmented arrangement that draws on local rural typologies, as illustrated by the example on NDG page 20 (top right). This approach would better integrate the development with both the proposed open spaces and the wider landscape setting.

Recommendation: As the site is highly visible and forms part of the settlement edge - particularly the eastern field - the design should more clearly reflect local rural character. A more sensitive response will require a comprehensive analysis of the surrounding context, supported by high-quality design precedents that demonstrate how rural typologies can be contemporarily interpreted.

- 5) The proposed attenuation basin appears as a simple grassed depression with an engineered character, lacking the naturalistic qualities expected of integrated landscape features. This design presents a poor visual impression and does not meet the expectations of CP57 (ii).

In accordance with WDG expectations 6.3 and 6.5, attenuation features should be designed to blend into the landscape, avoiding the appearance of artificial depressions. A more appropriate approach would distribute water volumes across the site using a combination of wetlands, rain gardens, small ponds, and permeable surfaces.

Incorporating these elements at the plot and street level would not only enhance the visual quality of the development but also ensure the drainage strategy aligns with local design guidance and contributes positively to the site’s character.

Recommendation: Revise the drainage strategy to ensure full compliance with DEFRA SuDS National Standards (June 2025) and align with WDG expectations for green and blue infrastructure. Incorporate BfHL principles by introducing naturalistic features such as rain gardens, swales, and wetlands to enhance visual quality, biodiversity, and site character.

- 6) Wiltshire is part of the recently created Western Forest which is a new National Forest for the nation whose aims and objectives are to substantially increase canopy cover across its geographical area. The aims and objectives of National Forests are planning consideration under para 152 of the NPPF (2024).

Recommendation: To achieve full compliance with CCNP Policy NE4 and strengthen integration with the wider landscape, woodland planting should be introduced along the northern, eastern and southern boundary and within the adjacent open spaces. This will soften the settlement edge, enhance biodiversity, and create a more natural transition to the surrounding countryside.

- 7) Building heights – The Building Heights Plan proposes dwellings of up to 9 m (typically 2 storeys) adjacent to existing development, with areas of up to 11 m (typically 2½ storeys) along the eastern and southern edges. During pre-application discussions, this variation was explained on the basis that taller buildings would be located on lower slopes.

However, the tree survey plan within the Arboricultural Impact Assessment, which overlays the Illustrative Layout onto the topographical survey, indicates that the southern part of the site is similar and in places higher than the adjacent existing development. It also shows that the eastern edge sits at a similar level to the existing dwellings. In contrast, the lower slopes are located to the north.

Recommendation: As there is no clear relationship between the proposed taller building heights and the site's lower slopes, a revised approach to height distribution is recommended. Building heights along the edges of the development should be limited to 1½-2 storeys to respect the rural character of this prominent location. The remainder of the site should generally be limited to 2 storeys. Occasional 2½-storey buildings could be incorporated within the central area of the development, where they can serve as focal points at key corners or at the end of important internal vistas.