

Wiltshire Council Planning Consultation Response

URBAN DESIGN

Officer name:

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Application No: PL/2026/01383

Proposal: Full planning permission for the development of 90 dwellings with new access from Blind Lane, internal roads and footpaths, areas of open space (including play space), drainage, landscaping and associated plant and works.

Site Address: Land off Blind Lane, Southwick, Wiltshire

Case Officer: Julie Mitchell

Reference:

Drawings and documents indexed the 16th March 2026 on the application webpage.

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 202-2038 (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)
- The Southwick Neighbourhood Development Plan 2018-2036 (Made October 2021) (abbreviated SNDP)

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.

The examination of the emerging Wiltshire Local Plan has been paused and the weight to be afforded to any part of the emerging plan can be no more than very limited. A decision on how to proceed will be made by the Council in May 2026.

Observations

The application site comprises greenfield land located outside the Southwick settlement boundary as defined in 2020. The site is not identified as a draft allocation within the neighbourhood plan or the emerging Wiltshire Council Local Plan (January 2023).

Furthermore, the Wiltshire Local Plan *Planning for Trowbridge* Pre-Submission Draft 2020–2038 (Regulation 19 consultation, September 2023), which covers the relevant Community Area, directs major housing growth to extensions adjoining the built-up edge of Trowbridge, rather than to surrounding villages.

In this context, the proposal does not accord with the spatial strategy of the development plan and should therefore be regarded as speculative development.

If the principle of development were to be accepted in this location, the scheme would need to respond sensitively to its edge-of-settlement context. This includes reflecting the existing low-density suburban character of Southwick and forming two strong, legible rural boundaries to the settlement. The following comments therefore assess the proposal in the context of these requirements.

Objection

The development proposals would not meet the high quality design and place shaping requirements of CP57 nor would they meet the high quality locally relevant design requirements of the SNDP for the following reasons:

- 1) The proposed layout lacks a return loop and instead features a series of branching cul-de-sacs served by communal driveways. This configuration accommodates a substantial number of dwellings but significantly restricts permeability and connectivity across the site. The reliance on dead-end private drives conflicts with WDG paragraph 5.2.1, which advises that cul-de-sac development should be short, with the turning head clearly visible from its junction with a through road.

The proposed layout would also not accord with CP57 (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. These would represent 'what red looks like BfHL (pp 18-19) rather than the preferred 'what green looks like' (pp 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: To improve legibility and movement, the layout should incorporate a connected internal loop or edge lane, for example around the southeastern block, enhancing access for pedestrians, cyclists, and service vehicles'

- 2) The DAS identifies a clear street hierarchy intended to prioritise walking and cycling, with main streets connecting to shared streets, which in turn link to private drives and green routes. However, this hierarchy is not clearly expressed in the proposed layout, which instead adopts a conventional suburban arrangement with limited differentiation between street types. As a result, the intended hierarchy is neither legible nor functionally reinforced.

This lack of clarity is likely exacerbated by the absence of defined street typologies, such as cross-sections or other visual material, which would help to articulate differences in scale, function, and character between street types.

While the 'main street' incorporates verges and tree planting along parts of its length, this treatment is not applied consistently, particularly to the southern section. In addition, the shared streets have a similar carriageway width to the main street and include conventional footways on both sides, which undermines shared space principles and would not comply with WDG Expectation 5.6. The edges of the development are largely defined by turning heads and private drives, resulting in weak spatial enclosure and poor connectivity (see comment 1).

Recommendation: To establish a clear and coherent street hierarchy, the applicant should set out a series of design principles and typologies for each street type. These could be informed by the *Streets for a Healthy Life* framework and supported by street sections and illustrative diagrams. In particular, the main street should extend north and south and connect to shared streets or spaces, which should then feed into narrower edge lanes and private drives. All lower-hierarchy streets should also be planted with street trees, located within the public realm to ensure long-term maintenance and resilience. All streets should incorporate sustainable drainage features (see comment 3).

- 3) Although the development proposals include attenuation basins and swales, to accord with BfHL and WDG Green and Blue Infrastructure principles, 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 at the plot and street level to enhance visual quality, biodiversity, and site character.

- 4) The External Works Plan specify nearly all surfaces as Tarmac, resulting in extensive areas of impervious surfacing with little or no distinction. This approach reflects the "red" solution shown in Building for a Healthy Life BfHL, pp. 72-73), rather than the preferred "green" approach illustrated on pages 70-71. Further guidance within *Streets for a Healthy Life* (SfHL) also encourages varied surface treatments to create attractive, safe and legible street environments.

Recommendation: To address this discrepancy, parking bays, traffic-calming tables, shared streets and private drives should ideally use permeable block paving. This would provide a clear visual contrast with Tarmac, enhance character and legibility, deliver SuDS benefits by reducing surface water runoff, and contribute to a more attractive and sustainable public realm. An example of this approach is shown in the bottom-left image on BfHL page 70.

In addition, all footpaths through open spaces should be permeable and have a distinctive surface finish (not 'mown path'). However, the final specification should follow the Landscape Officer's advice, to whom I defer.

- 5) In some locations, frontage car parking dominates the public realm, significantly limiting opportunities for meaningful landscaping and reducing the quality of the pedestrian environment. This approach reflects the 'red' examples in *Building for a Healthy Life* (BfHL, pp. 72-73), where car-dominated layouts result in weaker streetscapes. It conflicts with the 'green' principles (pp. 70-71), which promote greener, healthier, and more visually attractive street environments and should therefore be reconsidered.

Recommendation: Frontage parking should be mitigated through the provision of green relief spaces at a minimum rate of one planting bay for every four parking bays. Where frontage parking is arranged in groups and footpath widths fall below the required minimum of 1.8 m, as set out in WDG Expectation 5.4.7, additional planting should be provided to the rear of parking bays to protect pedestrian comfort and improve the public realm.

- 6) The turning head located in the south-east corner of the site currently dominates the entrance along the existing public footpath (SWCK14), detracting from what should be an attractive pedestrian and cycle gateway into the development. While visitor and cycle parking is provided, its current arrangement results in a vehicle-dominated environment at a key point of arrival.

A more sensitive and legible entrance could be achieved by relocating the turning head to a small parking court to the rear of plots 40 and 41. This approach would allow visitor and cycle parking to be designed as part of a calmer, more pedestrian-focused space using permeable block paving. In addition, plots 40 and 41 would benefit from an improved relationship with the adjacent open space.

Recommendation: Relocate the turning head and associated parking to the rear of plots 40 and 41, enabling a more sensitively designed visitor and cycle parking area and creating a more positive relationship with the play area and the public footpath.

- 7) The Vision for the development, as outlined in the DAS and accompanying diagrams, emphasises strong connections to Southwick Children's Park and the Primary School as key destinations for cyclists, parents, and children. These connections should be supported and strengthened through the provision of a controlled crossing on Blind Lane, which would encourage active travel and help create safe and enjoyable streets, in line with the stated Vision.

Recommendation: Further consideration should be given to the provision of controlled crossings on Blind Lane and Wesley Lane in order to support safe routes to the school and the surrounding open countryside. Any final proposals should be agreed in consultation with the Highways Officer.

- 8) Higher density development is shown in two locations, justified on the basis of proximity to the existing settlement and the creation of a more urban character. However, this justification appears to support primarily the concentration of affordable housing - which may be more appropriately distributed throughout the site - rather than reflecting a broader consideration of how density should reflect the existing context and inform street hierarchy and place shaping.

As a result, the main street, which would typically accommodate higher density to reinforce its role within the spatial hierarchy, has instead been defined as an 'edge of settlement' condition.

The concentration of affordable dwellings within the two identified areas has also led to an unacceptable form of development in the south-west corner of the site. This area is dominated by frontage parking (see comment 5) and reduced garden sizes, which detract from overall residential amenity and character. The south-west corner should be redesigned to strengthen its relationship with Blind Lane. The second area, designed as a small courtyard, would benefit from enhanced landscaping between and around parking bays, alongside improved surface materials. Both locations would benefit from a reduction in density.

Recommendation: The spatial and street hierarchy of the proposed development should be reconsidered. Higher-density development should be focused along the main street and at the site

entrance to reinforce legibility and activity, with lower-density development arranged within well-designed small courtyards and along the countryside edges of the site.

- 9) Surrounded by the open countryside on two sides if this site is to be considered suitable for development a clear transition between the existing suburbs and the rural edge is required.

However, the proposed access road and private drive arrangement introduces a dense, formulaic suburban layout typical of volume housebuilders, which is at odds with the site's rural setting. In line with NPPF paragraph 129(d) on achieving appropriate densities, development should maintain the prevailing rural character - defined by varied plot sizes and building forms, relatively small-scale and well-spaced 1½ to 2-storey buildings, dispersed farmsteads, and the intervening landscape that shapes the area's intrinsic vernacular.

Recommendation: Rather than reinforcing a suburban-style urban edge, the layout should adopt a looser, more fragmented structure consistent with the rural character. This approach would also facilitate better integration with both the site's landscape rationale and the wider landscape. Reference can be made to the NDG (p.20, top-right image), where contemporary forms successfully draw from local rural typologies.

In this context, barn-style residential forms, arranged in farmstead, close, or relaxed courtyard groupings, would be more appropriate - particularly along the site's edges. Such an approach would help prevent settlement coalescence, maintain rural character, and preserve the distinct identity of the surrounding dispersed rural settlements.

- 10) While the scheme proposes new planting along the boundaries of the site, it does not fully capitalise on opportunities for more substantial woodland creation. Wiltshire forms part of the newly established Western Forest, a National Forest initiative that aims to significantly increase canopy cover across the region. The objectives of National Forests are a material planning consideration under NPPF (2024) paragraph 152.

Recommendation: To support the aims of the Western Forest and meet the expectations of NPPF paragraph 152, the development should incorporate more extensive woodland planting along the boundaries – particularly the eastern boundary. Increasing the width and continuity of landscape buffers in these locations would contribute more meaningfully to long-term canopy enhancement and regional forest objectives.

- 11) Some street/street corner return elevations and street/open space corner return elevations have attractively placed and proportioned windows utilising house types that are consciously designed for this purpose (Meadowvale, Valeside and Lakeshore for example), but there are the following exceptions below. These would represent 'what red looks like' BfHL (pp 54-55) rather than the preferred 'what green looks like' (pp 52-53), and WDG expectation 4.2.8. *'Where buildings are on a corner both public elevations should be designed as 'frontages' and have windows from habitable rooms in them'.*

- Mooring – has a side door but no windows
- Hollyview – has a first floor bathroom window only
- Woodmount – has a first floor ensuite window only
- Willowcrest – has a lounge and first floor bathroom window, however it is not designed as an attractive 'frontage'
- Standish - has a first floor bathroom window only

- Alderwood – has no windows in the return elevation
- Glenside - has a first floor bathroom window only

Recommendation: In order to comply with WDG 4.2.8, the return elevations of the above house types should be redesigned as active and attractive frontages, with habitable room windows provided. This approach would improve the visual quality of the proposed development and strengthen natural surveillance of the adjoining public realm.

- 12) The Southwick Neighbourhood Development Plan 2018–2036 (made October 2021) does not include a specific assessment of the character and appearance of built form within the village or its rural setting. Much of the village comprises relatively indistinct twentieth-century housing development. However, a small number of earlier houses and farmsteads demonstrate a stronger local identity, drawing on intrinsic local stone, red clay pantile roofs, and stone front boundary walls addressing roads and lanes. This locally distinctive approach aligns with the emphasis placed on historic context and identity within the WCS, WDG, NPPF and NDG.

The proposed development should respond to this context through a carefully considered use of materials that reinforces spatial and street hierarchy. For example, the Main Street and the outer edges of the development should predominantly use stone, with occasional rendered dwellings to reflect the prevailing character along Blind Lane. Lower-order streets and courtyards could incorporate orange-red brick, again with occasional rendered dwellings. Materials should be applied consistently so that they ‘wrap’ around buildings rather than being limited to principal elevations. Roofing materials should also be coherent, with red clay pantiles used for brick and stone buildings and slate tiles for rendered dwellings.

Recommendation: The Materials Plan should be revised to demonstrate how material choice supports the spatial and street hierarchy of the proposed development reinforcing design quality, legibility, and sense of place, rather than adopting a dispersed or inconsistent approach. In addition, buff brick is not a characteristic material of the central Wiltshire area (WDG, paragraph 3.1.10) and should not be used as a substitute for stone.

- 13) WDG paragraph 9.3.5 states that “the interface between a private rear plot boundary and an adjacent public or shared space (including highways, public open space (POS) and parking courts) should generally use robust masonry walls or decorative metal or timber railings, as opposed to close-boarded or panel fencing.”

The submitted Enclosures Plan does not accord with this expectation, as it indicates 1.8 m high close-boarded or panel fencing along all such interfaces. This form of boundary treatment is not considered appropriate where private rear gardens adjoin public or shared spaces and fails to meet the design expectations set out within the WDG.

It is preferred that plot boundaries along the perimeter of the development and key streets are formed by 1.8 m high stone walls, reflecting the material used at the site entrance feature. These could be combined with proposed species-rich mixed native hedge planting to be maintained at min 2.0m high as shown on the Soft Landscape Layout. In other locations, such as within parking courts, robust brick boundary walls to match the facing material of the main dwellings would be acceptable. Low stone walls along the main street front gardens would further help to reinforce a sense of place.

Recommendation: To ensure compliance with WDG paragraph 9.3.5, all boundaries interfacing with public or shared spaces should be revised to comprise robust masonry wall treatments, with the Enclosures Plan amended accordingly.

Conclusion

It is appreciated that that density of development being proposed is not high, but it is indicative of an urban edge not a rural one and it is not representative of the character of the location. Consequently, the indicative layout does not demonstrate sufficient regard for the rural setting of this site.

Taking account of the character of this area, the adjoining streets and rural roads, the Design and Access Statement and the Masterplan have failed to demonstrate that this quantity of development can be achieved with regards to the design quality principles outlined in Core Policy 57.