

Response to Planning Application: PL/2026/02266 - Land South of Park Street, Heytesbury

In response to the proposed planning application, I have outlined here several points which I feel the applicant has not considered. These points, which are of such an impactful nature to the surrounding environment, that the application falls short of the criteria to warrant approval.

1. The Wrong Location: Breaking the Settlement Strategy

First and foremost, this site is outside the "limits of development" for Heytesbury. Under the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) Core Policy 1 and Core Policy 2, new housing should be contained within the settlement boundaries of "Large Villages" like ours to protect the countryside. The "Tilted Balance Policy" referenced in the proposal does not overrule all other planning requirements and considerations. And I don't believe any exception to this has been clearly made in the proposal.

2. The Groundwater "Sponge" and Downstream Flooding

The biggest concern for those of us living downstream is the impact on the water table. The applicant's Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) looks at the site in isolation, but it fails to address the hydrogeology of the Wylfe Valley's chalk aquifer.

- **NPPF Paragraph 167** is clear: development must not increase flood risk elsewhere. This has not been considered at all by the applicant. The submitted Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) relies on surface-level mapping but fails to address the hydrogeology of the chalk aquifer. Recent data from the 2023-2026 period shows that groundwater levels in the Wylfe Valley frequently exceed the operational depth of standard soakaways. The development poses an unacceptable risk of 'groundwater surcharge,' where saturated ground conditions will force untreated or treated effluent to migrate laterally towards existing downstream residential properties.
- **The "New Water" Problem:** This development doesn't just move rainwater around; it creates "new" water. With no mains drainage, nine houses (roughly 31 residents) will use and then discharge about 4,725 litres of water every single day (based on the British Water 'Flows and Loads' standard of 150L per person). That is over 1.7 million litres of extra water a year being pumped into a meadow that is already saturated.
- **Recent Evidence:** In the last three years (2023–2026), we have seen exceptionally high groundwater levels. When the groundwater is high, "soakaways" stop working because the earth is already full. This extra 4,725 litres a day will have nowhere to go but sideways and downstream into our homes.

The bridge at Park Lane acts as a bottleneck for the river upstream from its location as its span is narrower than the natural water course of the River Wylfe. This effectively acts as a slow-release dam during periods of heavy rainfall and impacts the volume of water that can naturally flow through this tight channel. The housing development increases the chance of flooding to the existing properties, land, and winterbournes in the downstream catchment. Flooding in this area can be demonstrated over the years, which has been far more frequent in the last 13 years and typically leads to roads around the village becoming impassable at times as shown in the photographs below.

Park Lane



- Watermeadows adjacent to Park Lane



- River and pathway at Park Lane bridge



- Park Lane



3. The Nutrient Neutrality: This is a major technical hurdle the applicant hasn't cleared. Because we are in the Hampshire Avon catchment, any new housing must be "Nutrient Neutral" regarding phosphorus to protect the River Wylfe SSSI.

- **WCS Core Policy 50 (Biodiversity) and Core Policy 69 (Water Environment).**

Wiltshire Council has a "credit" scheme to help with this, but it is not available for speculative developments on greenfield land outside the settlement boundary. Unless the applicant can prove they have a private, "in perpetuity" way to scrub phosphorus from their drainage, which they haven't shown, the application is legally and ecologically unsound.

4. Protecting our "Dark Skies" and Landscape: We are right on the edge of the Cranborne Chase AONB, which is an International Dark Sky Reserve.

- **WCS Core Policy 51 (Landscape) and the AONB Management Plan (Position Statement 1 on Lighting).**

Adding nine houses means adding streetlights, security lights, and "glow" from large windows. This isn't just about a view; it's about preserving the "tranquillity" and the specific Dark Sky status of the AONB. The "urbanising" effect of this project would permanently damage that character.

5. Archaeology: The site is an "ancient water meadow" and part of the historic heart of the village.

- **WCS Core Policy 58 (Historic Environment).**

The applicant has not provided a professional archaeological survey. Given that Iron Age ditches were found right at the Park Street Gates and the site's proximity to medieval settlement areas, it is highly likely that significant remains exist under the surface. You cannot "build first and check later"—the survey is required now to assess the impact.

6. Ecology and Rare Species

Finally, the proximity to the River Wylfe SSSI and SAC means this isn't just a field; it's a buffer zone for rare species. The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal submitted by the applicant needs to be scrutinised for its timing—surveys done in the "wrong" season often miss protected species like water voles or specific bat flight paths that use the dark corridor of the meadow. I don't believe the proposal has fully explored the diverse ecology of the site in its reporting methodology.

Conclusion:

While the village understands the need for housing, it has to be the right houses in the right place. The adverse impacts of the application "significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits."

This site has been the focus of planning requests before, and many of the objections then still stand. Between the absolute lack of a phosphorus mitigation plan, the missing archaeological data, and the very real threat of 1.7 million litres of extra water flowing towards downstream neighbours every year, this application should be refused.