

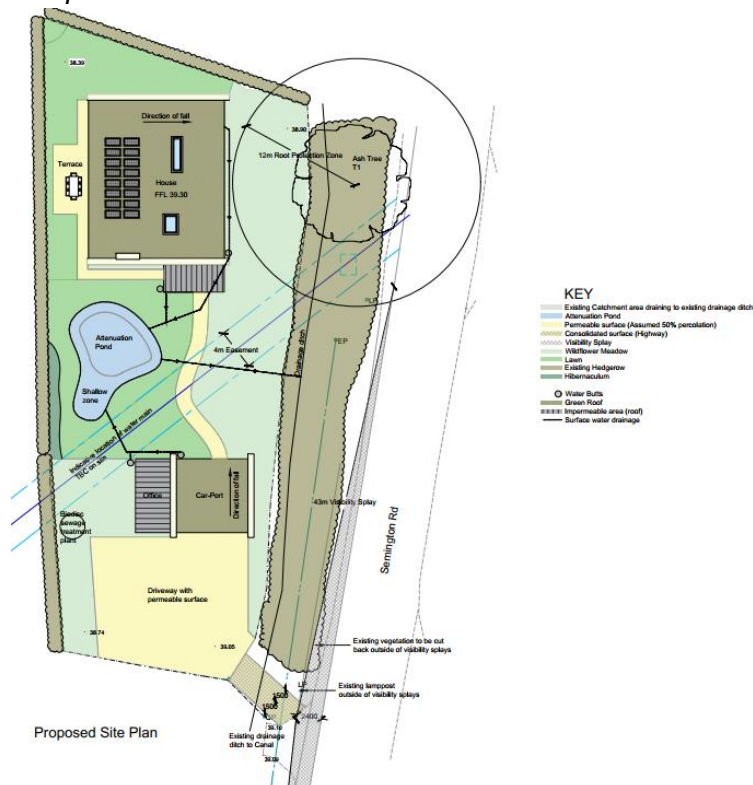
# APPLICATION FOR FULL PLANNING PERMISSION CASE OFFICER REPORT

|                                 |                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>APPLICATION REFERENCE:</b>   | PL/2026/02084                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>APPLICATION TYPE:</b>        | Full planning permission                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>SITE ADDRESS:</b>            | 554 Canal Bridge, Semington, Trowbridge, BA14 6JT                                                                                                                |
| <b>DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION:</b> | Proposed erection of 1no. high-quality, sustainable, single storey dwelling including car port, home office; new planting and biodiversity enhancement measures. |
| <b>RECOMMENDATION:</b>          | Refuse                                                                                                                                                           |

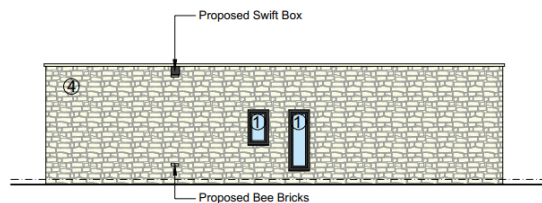
## PROPOSAL

The application seeks full planning permission for the erection of a single, self-build residential dwelling on land to the north of No. 554 Canal Bridge, Semington. The proposed development comprises a single-storey dwelling, described by the applicant as a high-quality, sustainable “eco-dwelling”, together with a detached car port and home office structure, associated residential curtilage, and new vehicular access from Canal Bridge. The submitted plans show that the dwelling would be centrally positioned within the site and set back from the highway, with the existing access from Canal Bridge upgraded and a new driveway provided. The development includes areas of hardstanding for parking and turning, together with associated landscaping.

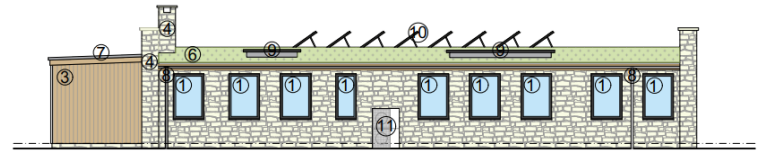
*Below: Proposed site plan:*



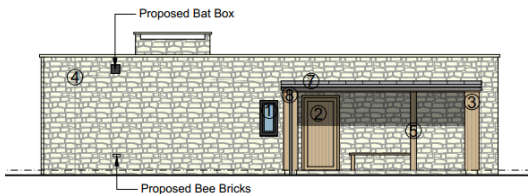
*Below: Proposed house elevations (and key)*



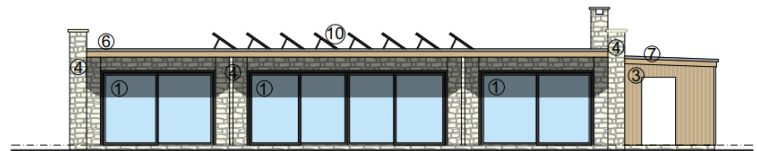
House - North Elevation



House - East Elevation



House - South Elevation

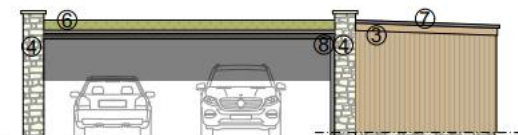


House - West Elevation -

### Key:

1. PPC Aluminium doors/ windows - Grey/ Black
2. Oak/ Idigbo front entrance door
3. Hardwood timber cladding
4. Drystone effect walls
5. Timber Frame
6. Sedum roof finish
7. Metal standing seam roof covering
8. Galvansied Rainwater pipe
9. Flushglaze roof window
10. PV Panels
11. Air Source heat pump

*Below: Proposed car port elevations*



Car-Port - North Elevation



Car-Port - East Elevation



Car-Port - South Elevation



Car-Port - West Elevation

The proposal incorporates a number of sustainability measures, including a sedum roof and use of natural/low-impact materials, the provision of a home office to support home working

and the use of sustainable drainage systems, including an attenuation pond and controlled discharge to a ditch along the eastern boundary.

The scheme also includes ecological and landscape enhancements, such as the retention of existing boundary hedgerows, the creation of wildflower planting areas and provision of habitat features such as a hibernaculum and biodiversity planting.

Foul drainage would be via a package treatment plant, and surface water would be managed on site through a combination of permeable surfaces and attenuation features, in accordance with the submitted drainage strategy.

In summary, the proposal would result in the introduction of a single new residential unit within an undeveloped parcel of land currently in agricultural/paddock use.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION/CONTEXT**

The application site comprises a parcel of undeveloped land located to the north of No. 554 Canal Bridge, on the western side of Canal Bridge. The site lies approximately midway between Semington (to the south) and Berryfield (to the north) but sits outside the defined settlement boundaries of both and is therefore within the open countryside for planning purposes.

*Below: submitted location plan; and aerial view, with site indicated by red flag:*



The site forms part of a small field parcel surrounded by open agricultural land, with a small group of buildings located to the south-east. The application site is currently undeveloped grassland. It lies within an amber risk zone for great crested newts, although no statutory ecological or landscape designations affect the site. Hedgerows bound the site on three sides and include a mature ash tree within the eastern boundary, which has been identified as having potential suitability for roosting bats. The photographs below show the existing access into the site and the surrounding area.

*Below: Entrance to site from Canal Bridge*



*Below – approaching from the north*



*Below: View looking northwards into the site*



*Below: Looking west from the site entrance*



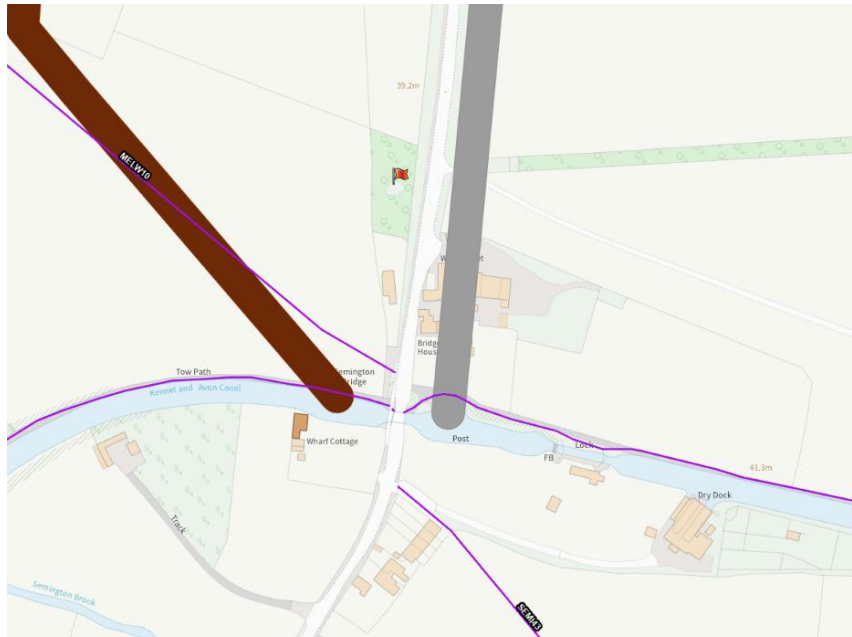
*Below: View from Bridge looking north towards site – 554 Canal Bridge is red brick gable end just visible. Site is beyond.*



*Below: Looking towards the site from fields to the west PROW MELW10*



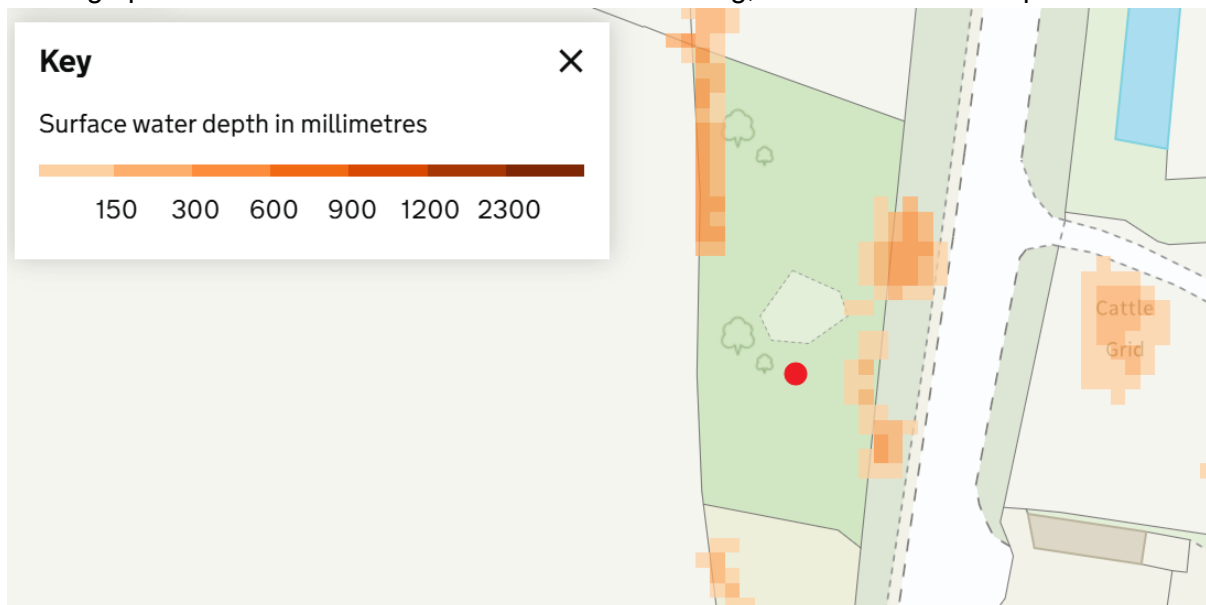
The site is situated between the historic route (marked in grey on the plan below) and restored route (in dark brown) of the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal, with public footpaths running along the canal corridor and across fields approximately 75m to the south, as shown below:



The nearest listed building is Wharf Cottage, located to the south on the opposite side of the canal. The site does not lie within a Conservation Area, a designated national landscape or within the green belt.

In archaeological terms, the site contains a recorded World War II anti-tank gun emplacement within the application red line.

The Environment Agency flood maps confirm that the site is located within Flood Zone 1, although parts of it are at risk from surface water flooding, as shown on the snip below:



There is no identified risk of groundwater emergence, however.

## PLANNING HISTORY

| Proposal / Summary                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| W/83/00461/FUL - Full planning permission Decision - Approve with Conditions Date: 7/6/1983 – Two storey extension to cottage                                   |
| W/91/01001/FUL - Full planning permission Decision - Refused Date: 22/10/1991 – Vehicular access to paddock                                                     |
| W/83/00917/FUL - Full planning permission Decision - Approved Date: 27/9/1983 – Extension to form garage and alteration to vehicular access                     |
| 16/06564/OUT - Outline Planning Decision - Refused Date: 12/1/2017 – Outline application relating to access - Erection of two detached dwellings and new access |
| W/11/01254/OUT - Outline Planning Decision - Withdrawn Date: 17/5/2011 – Erection of four bedroom dwelling and creation of new access                           |

## RELEVANT POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

### 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 remains 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 15 Spatial Strategy Melksham Community Area
- Core Policy 50 Biodiversity and Geodiversity;
- Core Policy 51 Landscape
- Core Policy 57 Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping;
- Core Policy 60 Sustainable Transport;
- Core Policy 61 Transport & Development;

### Neighbourhood Plan:

## Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2

- Policy 6 (Housing at Defined Settlements)
- Policy 18 (Landscape Character)
- Policy 19 (Separation of Settlements)
- Policy 20 (Locally Distinctive, High Quality Design)

### 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

## ISSUES

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

- Whether the development is acceptable in principle
- Whether the scheme constitutes high quality design
- Whether the scheme would have an acceptable impact upon the reasonable living conditions of the adjoining occupants
- Whether the scheme would have an acceptable landscape impact
- Whether the proposal would have a negative effect upon highway safety, including if there is sufficient parking for the proposed development
- Whether the site can be adequately drained without increasing flood risk elsewhere
- Whether there would be any harmful impacts upon protected species or priority habitats

## CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Melksham Without Parish Council: Objection on the following grounds:

*“Melksham Without Parish Council acknowledged the sustainability measures proposed but expressed concerns regarding:*

*• Loss of open countryside within the green gap/wedge Berryfield and Semington, contrary to Policy 19 (Separation of Settlements) and Policy 18 (Landscape Character) of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2, which seek to protect the open countryside that maintains the separation and distinct identity of settlements and preserves the rural character of the area. Members considered that the proposal would erode the openness of the canal-side landscape and contribute to incremental encroachment into the countryside. It considers the canal to be the edge of Semington village.*

*• Concern that the proposal represented an unsustainable form of development in a location heavily reliant on private car use, contrary to Policy 11 (Sustainable Transport*

*and Active Travel) of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2. Members noted the limited accessibility to services, facilities and public transport and considered that the site did not promote sustainable travel choices.*

- Concern regarding the inappropriate and incongruous design of the proposal within the rural canal-side setting, contrary to Policy 20 (Locally Distinctive, High Quality Design), Policy 18 (Landscape Character) and Policy 21 (Local Heritage) of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2. Members considered that the scale, form and appearance of the proposed dwelling and associated domestic features would fail to respond positively to the character of the surrounding landscape and historic canal environment.*

- Concern that approval of the proposal could create a precedent for infill and sporadic residential development within the surrounding countryside and green wedge, undermining the objectives of Policy 19 (Green Wedges) and Policy 18 (Landscape Character) of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2.*

- Members also considered that the site did not constitute genuine infill development and that the proposal would instead represent isolated encroachment into the open countryside, contrary to the spatial principles and settlement objectives of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2, including Policies 6 (Housing at Defined Settlements), 18 (Landscape Character) and 19 (Separation of Settlements)."*

Further comments were received from Melksham Without Parish Council on 02/07/2026 following consideration of the applicant's response to the Parish Council's original objection.

The Parish Council maintained its objection to the proposal. Members noted that the applicant had challenged the Parish Council's interpretation of Policies 6 and 19 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2 (JMNP2), but considered that a recent appeal decision (Appeal Ref: 6003438) relating to land south of 214B Corsham Road (PL/2025/08613) reinforced the weight that should be afforded to these policies.

The Parish Council remained of the view that the site contributes to the separation between Berryfield and Semington and expressed concern that approval of the proposal could lead to further encroachment into the countryside between the settlements.

#### WC Highways: Mixed:

The Local Highway Authority was consulted on the application and initially raised concerns regarding both the sustainability of the site's location and the detailed design of the proposed access.

In its initial response, the Highway Authority noted that the site lies outside the defined settlement boundary and raised concerns that future occupiers would be likely to be reliant on the private car, with limited opportunities to access services by sustainable modes of transport. It was advised that the proposal appeared to conflict with Core Policies 57, 60 and 61 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and national policy which seek to reduce the need to travel, particularly by private car.

In addition, initial concerns were raised in respect of the proposed access arrangements, including the absence of visibility splays, the need for improvements to the access to bring it up to a suitable standard for residential use, and the requirement to ensure that surface water would not discharge onto the public highway.

Amended plans were subsequently submitted to address these access-related matters. Following review of the revised information, the Highway Authority confirmed that the amendments had addressed the previously identified concerns in respect of highway safety and access design.

The Highway Authority therefore raises no objection subject to conditions, with matters relating to access works, visibility splays, parking and turning, surfacing, and surface water drainage to be secured by condition.

Overall, while the proposal is considered acceptable in highway safety terms, the Highway Authority's initial concerns regarding the sustainability of the site's location are noted and remain material to the overall planning balance.

WC Archaeology: No objection

*"Thank you for your consultation. There are no archaeological issues that I would wish to raise in this instance."*

WC Ecology: Initial objection

The Council's Ecologist reviewed the application and supporting ecological information and initially raised an objection due to insufficient information at that stage:

The site is not located within, or adjacent to, any European designated sites. However, the surrounding area is considered suitable for protected species, including bats and great crested newts (GCN). In particular, the site lies within close proximity to multiple waterbodies, including ponds within 250m and a section of the old canal, and contains habitats capable of supporting GCN during their terrestrial phase.

The submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal identifies the potential presence of GCN and recommends further survey work. However, no survey results or mitigation strategy have been submitted. The Ecologist advises that GCN are a European Protected Species and, as such, sufficient information must be provided to demonstrate that the development would not result in harm to the species, in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and Core Policy 50.

To address this issue, the applicant is required to provide either:

- the results of great crested newt surveys and a mitigation strategy, or
- a signed Impact Assessment and Conservation Payment Certificate under the District Level Licensing (DLL) scheme.

Until this information is provided, the Ecologist maintains a holding objection.

In addition, the Ecologist notes that the site and surrounding area provides suitable foraging and commuting habitat for bats.. It is therefore recommended that a sensitive lighting scheme is secured by condition.

The proposed biodiversity enhancements, including habitat creation and provision of features such as bat and bird boxes, are supported and could be secured by condition if the application were to be approved. Similarly a sensitive lighting scheme would need to be secured by condition as any external lighting has the potential to adversely affect species using the site.

The Ecologist advises that the proposal is exempt from mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements, as it comprises a self-build development meeting the relevant criteria.

Following the submission of the Ecologist's consultation response, the applicant submitted a Great Crested Newt District Level Licensing Impact Assessment and Conservation Payment Certificate countersigned by Natural England on 30/06/2026. This information was received by the Local Planning Authority the day before determination and therefore has not been subject to further consultation with the Council's Ecologist. However, the submitted documentation appears to address the specific information requested by the Ecologist in respect of great crested newts and has been taken into account in the officer assessment below.

#### WC Drainage: No objection subject to conditions

The Council's drainage team has reviewed the application and raises no objection subject to conditions. They have confirmed that the site is located within Flood Zone 1 and is identified as being at low risk of flooding from fluvial, surface water and groundwater sources.

A surface water drainage strategy has been submitted which proposes the use of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), including attenuation and discharge to an existing ditch on the eastern boundary.

However, the drainage team advises that further technical details are required, which can be secured by condition. These include:

- Confirmation of the drainage layout and discharge arrangement;
- Provision of pre- and post-development exceedance routing to demonstrate no increased flood risk;
- Confirmation that discharge rates can be reduced.

Subject to the submission and approval of this additional information, the drainage team raises no objection to the proposed development.

#### WC Rights of Way: No comments received

## **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:

- Neighbour notification letters sent to adjoining and nearby properties;
- A site notice displayed near the site;

These methods were used to inform interested parties and provide a period of 21 days for comments to be submitted.

No representations had been received at the time of writing.

## **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**

#### *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 and listed below:
  - Additional employment land (Core Policy 34)
  - Military establishments (Core Policy 37)
  - Development related to tourism (Core Policies 39 and 40)

- Rural exception sites (Core Policy 44)
- Specialist accommodation provision (Core Policies 46 and 47)
- Supporting rural life (Core Policy 48)

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 lies outside the defined settlement boundaries of both Semington and Berryfield as set out in the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy. As such, it is located within the open countryside where Core Policies 1, 2 and 15 of the development plan seek to control new residential development.

Core Policy 1 directs new development to the Principal Settlements, Market Towns and Local Service Centres identified in the settlement hierarchy, whilst Core Policy 2 sets out a delivery strategy that seeks to concentrate growth within these defined settlements. The application site does not fall within any defined settlement boundary and does not represent allocated land for development. Consequently, the proposal conflicts with the spatial strategy of the development plan.

Core Policy 48 allows for limited residential development in the countryside where it can be demonstrated to support rural life, for example through rural exception schemes or accommodation required for rural workers. The proposal does not meet any of the specified exceptions under this policy and therefore also conflicts with Core Policy 48.

Particular weight is also attached to Policy 19 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan, which was made in August 2025 and therefore forms part of the statutory development plan. Policy 19 specifically identifies the land between Berryfield and Semington as an area where the separation between settlements should be maintained. The policy states that development proposals which would result in the loss of, or an unacceptable reduction in, the contribution that land makes to the separation of the settlements concerned will not be supported.

The application site lies within the area of open land separating Berryfield and Semington. Whilst the proposal relates to a single dwelling, it would introduce residential development into an undeveloped parcel of land that presently contributes to the visual and spatial separation between the two settlements. The proposal is therefore considered to conflict with Policy 19 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan.

Policy 18 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan is also relevant. The policy requires development to respond sensitively to settlement edges and the transition between settlements and the countryside, maintain the separate identity of settlements, and conserve or enhance the character, openness and tranquillity of the open countryside.

The application site occupies an undeveloped parcel of land at the transition between the existing built form and the surrounding countryside. The proposal would extend domestic development into this currently open area and would diminish the contribution that the site makes to the rural setting of Semington and the separate identity of the neighbouring

settlements. The proposal therefore conflicts with Policy 18 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan.

The application proposes a single, self-build dwelling, described as a high-quality and sustainable “eco-dwelling”. While the design approach, scale and proposed use of sustainable materials are noted, these factors do not alter the fundamental policy position in relation to the location of the development. The main consideration remains whether residential development is acceptable in this location, rather than the detailed design or environmental credentials of the proposed dwelling.

The Council is currently unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land, with a supply position of approximately 2.8 years. As a result, the relevant policies for the supply of housing, including the spatial strategy set out within Core Policies 1 and 2, are to be considered out-of-date. In these circumstances, the presumption in favour of sustainable development as set out in paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework is engaged.

Accordingly, planning permission should be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies of the Framework as a whole.

The proposal would deliver a single additional dwelling, which attracts weight in favour of the development in the context of the current housing land supply shortfall. However, the contribution of a single dwelling is modest. Additional limited weight is afforded to the proposed sustainability measures and biodiversity enhancements, although these are largely site-specific and do not outweigh the locational constraints of the site.

In this case, the site occupies a parcel of undeveloped land within the countryside between two settlements, contributing to their visual and spatial separation. The development of this land for residential purposes would conflict with the core spatial strategy and would erode the open character of the area. This harm carries moderate weight in the planning balance, notwithstanding the reduced weight to be afforded to the development plan policies due to the housing land supply position.

When applying the tilted balance, it is considered that the adverse impacts of the development, in terms of its conflict with the spatial strategy and its contribution to the erosion of the separation between settlements, would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the limited benefits associated with the provision of a single dwelling and the site-specific sustainability measures.

Accordingly, the proposal is considered to represent an unsustainable form of development and is unacceptable in principle.

## **5 Year Housing Land Supply**

The Council's latest Housing Land Supply Statement confirms that Wiltshire is currently unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land, with a supply position of approximately 2.8 years.

As a consequence, the relevant spatial strategy policies relating to the supply of housing must be regarded as out-of-date and the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained within paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF is engaged.

Whilst Policies 18 and 19 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2 were adopted in August 2025 and form part of the up-to-date development plan, recent appeal decisions within Wiltshire have confirmed that the presumption in favour of sustainable development remains engaged in circumstances where the Council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land. Accordingly, the application has been assessed on the basis that paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF applies.

However, this does not render the development plan irrelevant. The degree of weight to be attributed to any conflict with development plan policies is a matter of planning judgement. In this case, significant weight continues to be afforded to the conflict with the spatial strategy, having regard to the site's countryside location and the proposal's conflict with Policies 18 and 19 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2, which seek to maintain the separation between Berryfield and Semington and conserve the openness and character of the countryside.

The implications of the housing land supply shortfall and the tilted balance are considered further within the Planning Balance section below.

## **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 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.

### *Assessment*

The application site comprises an undeveloped parcel of agricultural land forming part of a wider, open rural landscape between Semington and Berryfield. The surrounding area is characterised by flat, open fields with limited tree cover or built form, interspersed with watercourses including the nearby canal corridor and River Avon, which contribute to the openness and landscape character of the area.

Whilst the site is not subject to any national or local landscape designation, Policy 18 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan places importance on the protection of settlement settings, the maintenance of the transition between settlement edges and the countryside, and the conservation of the openness and tranquillity of the countryside. In this respect, the site performs an important role as undeveloped land at the edge of the settlement and contributes to the wider open character of the area between Semington and Berryfield. It is part of an open and largely undeveloped landscape, where the absence of built form conveys the sense of separation between settlements and the rural character of the area. The introduction of a residential dwelling, together with associated domestic paraphernalia, access and garden areas, would result in the urbanisation of a currently undeveloped field parcel.

The proposed dwelling is single-storey in scale and designed to reduce visual prominence, and it is acknowledged that the development would not be unduly dominant in isolation. Boundary planting and landscaping would also assist in partially assimilating the development into its immediate surroundings over time.

However, notwithstanding these design and mitigation measures, the development would nevertheless introduce built form into an open, exposed landscape which currently has a distinctly rural and undeveloped character. Given the relatively flat topography and limited screening within the area, the proposal would be visible within the wider landscape and would alter the character of the site from agricultural land to a domestic curtilage.

As such, the proposal would result in harm to the character and appearance of the countryside, albeit at a localised level.

### *Conclusion*

The proposal would introduce built development into an open and undeveloped parcel of land, resulting in a harmful change to the character of the site and the wider rural landscape. While the scale and design of the dwelling would limit its visual impact to some degree, this does not outweigh the fundamental change in land use and character that would arise from the development.

Accordingly, the proposal is in conflict with Core Policy 51 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the aims of the NPPF to recognise and protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the

countryside. It would also conflict with Policy 18 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan, which places importance on the protection of settlement settings.

## **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 proposal seeks the erection of a single-storey dwelling, together with associated outbuildings, within a currently undeveloped parcel of land.

The submitted details indicate a contemporary design approach, incorporating a low-profile form, natural materials and a sedum roof. The inclusion of these elements reflects an intention to deliver a development that is sympathetic to its rural setting and incorporates sustainable construction principles. As such, in terms of immediate visual impact, the proposal is relatively modest in scale and the single-storey form limits its prominence within the wider landscape. The retention of existing boundary hedgerows and the introduction of additional planting would assist in assimilating the development into its surroundings over time.

Notwithstanding this, the site currently forms part of an undeveloped parcel of land which contributes to the open, rural character of the area between Semington and Berryfield. Whilst the design of the dwelling itself is acceptable, the introduction of built form into this location would result in a change to the character of the site from undeveloped land to domestic use.

However, given the scale of the proposal and its design approach, the degree of visual harm arising from the development itself is considered to be limited. The proposal would not give rise to unacceptable impacts in terms of design quality or immediate visual appearance when assessed against Core Policy 57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and relevant national guidance.

### *Conclusion*

The proposal is considered acceptable in terms of design quality and its immediate impact on the character and appearance of the area. While the development would introduce built form into an undeveloped parcel of land, the scale and form of the dwelling would limit its visual impact and would not, in isolation, justify a refusal of planning permission solely on design grounds.

### **Amenity**

#### *Policy Context*

Core Policy 57 (Point vii) of the Wiltshire Core Strategy requires development to respect the amenity of existing occupants and ensure appropriate amenity levels for future residents.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), particularly Paragraph 135, reinforces the need for development to provide a high standard of amenity for both existing and future users.

#### *Assessment*

The application site is located on land to the north of No. 554 Canal Bridge and is situated at the edge of a row of development. The site is bounded by open agricultural land to the north and west, with the public highway to the east, and the adjacent residential property of No. 554 Canal Bridge to the south.

Given this context, the site benefits from a relatively open setting, with limited potential for direct impacts on neighbouring residential properties. The proposed dwelling is single-storey in scale and is positioned such that there would be an adequate degree of separation from the adjoining property.

In terms of potential impacts, the development is unlikely to give rise to unacceptable levels of:

- overlooking or loss of privacy;
- overshadowing or loss of light;
- overbearing impact.

The relationship with the neighbouring dwelling is such that any impacts would be limited and within acceptable levels for a development of this nature.

The proposal would also provide an appropriate level of private amenity space for future occupiers, consistent with the scale and nature of the dwelling.

Overall, it is considered that the proposal demonstrates an acceptable relationship with neighbouring properties and would not result in significant adverse impacts on residential amenity, in accordance with Core Policy 57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the provisions of the NPPF.

### *Conclusion*

The proposal is considered acceptable in terms of residential amenity, with no significant adverse impacts identified for either existing or future occupiers. The development therefore complies with Core Policy 57 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and relevant national guidance.

## **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).

### *Assessment*

The application proposes the construction of a single residential dwelling served via an existing field access, which is to be upgraded to provide a suitable residential access.

The Local Highway Authority initially raised concerns regarding both the sustainability of the site's location and the detailed design of the proposed access. In particular, it was noted that the site lies outside the defined settlement boundary and that future occupiers would be likely to be reliant on the private car to access day-to-day services and facilities, raising concerns in relation to Core Policies 57, 60 and 61 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and national policy seeking to promote sustainable transport.

In addition, concerns were raised in respect of the access arrangements, including the absence of visibility splays, the need for improvements to the access to bring it up to an appropriate standard, and the need to ensure that surface water would not discharge onto the public highway.

Amendments were subsequently submitted to address these issues. The revised plans include appropriate visibility splays, improvements to the access design, and additional detail in respect of surfacing and drainage. Following review of the amended scheme, the Highway Authority confirmed that the previously identified concerns relating to highway safety and access design had been satisfactorily addressed.

The Highway Authority therefore raises no objection subject to conditions securing the provision and retention of access works, visibility splays, parking and turning areas, appropriate surfacing, and measures to prevent surface water discharge onto the highway. In terms of parking provision, the proposal provides adequate on-site parking and turning space, which is considered sufficient for a development of this scale.

Notwithstanding the above, while the proposal is acceptable in highway safety terms, the site's location outside of established settlement boundaries means that opportunities for sustainable travel are limited. Future occupiers would be likely to rely predominantly on the private motor vehicle to access services and facilities, which weighs against the proposal in transport sustainability terms.

### *Conclusion*

The proposal is considered acceptable in terms of highway safety, access, and parking, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

However, the site's location results in a development which is poorly related to services and facilities and reliant on the private car, and this weighs against the proposal in the overall planning balance when assessed against Core Policies 60 and 61 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and national policy.

## **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.

### *Assessment*

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been submitted in support of the application, which identifies that the site comprises a small grassland field bounded by hedgerows and supports habitats of local ecological value. The site is not subject to any statutory ecological designations, although it lies within a wider landscape capable of supporting protected species, including bats and great crested newts (GCN).

The Council's Ecologist has reviewed the submitted information and initially raised a holding objection due to insufficient information in respect of GCN. In particular, whilst the submitted appraisal identified the potential presence of GCN and recommended further survey work, no survey results or confirmed mitigation strategy had been provided. As GCN are a European Protected Species, the Local Planning Authority must be satisfied that the proposal would not result in harm to the species prior to determination.

Following the Council Ecologist's consultation response, the applicant submitted a Great Crested Newt District Level Licensing Impact Assessment and Conservation Payment Certificate countersigned by Natural England on 30/06/2026. The submission addresses the Council Ecologist's previous concerns in respect of great crested newts and indicates that the ecological impacts of the proposal can be addressed through the District Level Licensing process.

However, this additional information does not alter the Council's assessment of the proposal in principle and does not affect the recommendation.

The Ecologist has also confirmed that proposed biodiversity enhancements, including habitat creation and provision of features such as bat and bird boxes, are acceptable in principle and could be secured by condition.

The site is identified as being exempt from mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements, as it constitutes a self-build development meeting the relevant criteria.

### *Conclusion*

The proposal has been supported by ecological information, including a Great Crested Newt District Level Licensing Impact Assessment and Conservation Payment Certificate countersigned by Natural England. The ecological impacts of the proposal are therefore considered capable of being appropriately addressed through the District Level Licensing process and by condition. Accordingly, the proposal is considered acceptable in ecological terms and complies with Core Policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

## **Flood Risk and Drainage**

### *Policy Context*

Core Policy 67 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and NPPF paragraphs 170–182 require:

- Avoidance of increased flood risk.
- Use of appropriate mitigation measures.
- Application of the sequential and exception tests for developments in Flood Zones 2 or 3.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are required for all major developments and must:

- Manage runoff near its source.
- Improve water quality.
- Support biodiversity and amenity.
- Be integrated into the site layout and green infrastructure.

### *Assessment*

The application site lies within Flood Zone 1 and is therefore at low risk of flooding from fluvial sources. A surface water drainage strategy has been submitted in support of the application. This proposes the use of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), including the capture and reuse of surface water via water butts, attenuation within a pond, and discharge to an existing drainage ditch along the eastern boundary of the site.

The Council's drainage team has reviewed the proposals and raises no objection subject to conditions. While the overall drainage strategy is considered acceptable in principle, further technical information is required to demonstrate that the development will not increase flood risk on or off site. This includes details of the drainage layout, exceedance routing, and confirmation of discharge rates.

The implementation of an appropriate surface water drainage strategy, including the use of SuDS, could be secured by condition should the application be approved. Subject to this, it is considered that the proposal would comply with national guidance and Core Policy 67 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, which seeks to ensure that development does not increase flood risk and incorporates sustainable drainage measures.

### *Conclusion*

Overall, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of drainage and flood risk, subject to conditions.

## **PLANNING BALANCE**

At the heart of the NPPF there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development requiring local planning authorities to approve development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; and where there are no relevant development plan policies,

or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, permission should be granted unless (taken from paragraph 11d of the NPPF):

- The application of policies in the NPPF that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing development proposed; or
- any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole;

Having regard to paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF, and noting that the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land (approximately 2.8 years), the presumption in favour of sustainable development is engaged.

## **Benefits of the Proposal**

### *Provision of Market Housing*

The delivery of new housing is a benefit which attracts weight in the planning balance, particularly in the context of the Council's current housing land supply shortfall.

**Benefit:** Provision of one additional dwelling

**Weight:** Moderate weight

While this contribution is acknowledged, the delivery of a single dwelling represents a modest addition to housing supply and does not, in itself, carry substantial weight.

## **Identified Harms**

### *Conflict with Spatial Strategy and Settlement Separation*

Whilst Wiltshire Council cannot currently demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land, this does not render development plan policies relating to the principle of development irrelevant. In this case, the proposal conflicts not only with the spatial strategy of the Wiltshire Core Strategy but also with Policy 19 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan, a recently adopted development plan policy specifically intended to maintain the separation between Berryfield and Semington.

**Harm:** Departure from the development plan and erosion of settlement separation.

**Weight:** Significant weight.

### *Landscape and Visual Impact*

The site forms part of an open and undeveloped parcel of agricultural land within a wider rural landscape characterised by flat, open fields with limited built form. The introduction of residential development would result in the urbanisation of this land and a change in character from agricultural to domestic use.

**Harm:** Erosion of rural character and visual intrusion into the open countryside.

**Weight:** Moderate weight

## *Transport Sustainability*

The site is located outside of established settlement boundaries and is not well related to services and facilities. It is acknowledged that there is access to the cycle network along the canal, however future occupiers would be likely to rely primarily on the private car for day-to-day needs. Whilst the proposal is acceptable in highway safety terms, this reliance on private vehicles weighs against the proposal in sustainability terms and is contrary to the aims of Core Policies 60 and 61.

**Harm:** Unsustainable location with reliance on private car travel  
**Weight:** Limited to moderate weight

## *Neutral*

In assessing the overall planning balance, it is also important to identify those matters which are acceptable and policy-compliant, but do not weigh for or against the proposal.

The following matters are considered to attract neutral weight:

- Highways safety and access – no objection subject to conditions
- Drainage and flood risk – acceptable subject to conditions
- Ecology and biodiversity – outstanding information required, but capable of being resolved and not determinative in this case
- Design quality – acceptable in isolation and not harmful
- Residential amenity – no significant adverse impacts identified

## **OVERALL BALANCE**

The proposal would deliver a modest benefit through the provision of one additional dwelling in the context of a housing land supply shortfall. However, this benefit is limited in scale.

This must be weighed against the identified harms, in particular:

- the conflict with the spatial strategy and development plan;
- the erosion of the rural character of the site; and
- the unsustainable location of the development.

Taken together, these harms are considered to carry significant weight.

When assessed against the policies of the NPPF and the development plan as a whole, it is concluded that the adverse impacts of granting planning permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal.

## **CONCLUSION**

The proposed development seeks the erection of a single dwelling within an undeveloped parcel of land located outside the defined settlement boundaries of Semington and Berryfield. While the proposal incorporates a well-considered design approach and is acceptable in terms of matters such as residential amenity, highway safety, drainage, and ecology, these considerations do not outweigh the fundamental issue of principle.

The site forms part of an open area of countryside which contributes both to the rural character of the area and to the physical and visual separation between Berryfield and Semington. Policies 18 and 19 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan specifically seek to maintain that separation and conserve the openness and character of the countryside between settlements.

The introduction of residential development in this location would also conflict with the spatial strategy of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and would result in the encroachment of built form into the open countryside, eroding its character and appearance.

In addition, the site is poorly related to services and facilities, and future occupiers would be likely to rely predominantly on the private car, contrary to the objectives of sustainable development set out in national and local policy.

Whilst the benefits of the proposal, including the provision of a single additional dwelling, are acknowledged, these are limited in scale. When considered against the identified harms, and having regard to the presumption in favour of sustainable development, it is concluded that the adverse impacts of granting planning permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

Accordingly, the proposal is considered to represent an unsustainable form of development and planning permission should be refused.

**RECOMMENDATION: That Planning Permission be REFUSED for the following reasons:**

#### **1. Principle of Development / Spatial Strategy**

The proposed development, due to its location outside the defined settlement boundaries of Semington and Berryfield within the open countryside, represents an unsustainable form of development that is contrary to the spatial strategy set out in Core Policies 1, 2 and 15 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

The proposal would result in the unjustified encroachment of residential development into the countryside and would fail to support a sustainable pattern of growth. The site is poorly related to services and facilities and future occupiers would be likely to rely predominantly on the private motor vehicle, contrary to Core Policies 60 and 61 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Furthermore, the proposal would erode the physical and visual separation between Berryfield and Semington, contrary to Policy 19 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan, which seeks to maintain the separation between those settlements. The proposal would also fail to conserve the openness of the countryside and maintain the transition between settlement edge and countryside, contrary to Policy 18 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan. When assessed against paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework, the adverse impacts of the development are considered to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

## **2. Landscape and Countryside Impact**

The proposed development would introduce built form, domestic curtilage and associated paraphernalia into an undeveloped parcel of agricultural land that contributes to the open and rural character of the area. The development would result in the urbanisation of the site and would harm the character and appearance of the countryside, which is characterised by open fields and limited built form.

As such, the proposal is contrary to Core Policy 51 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, Policy 18 of the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2 and the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework, which seek to recognise and protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

### **INFORMATIVE**

For the avoidance of doubt the following plans and documents have been taken into account in the assessment of this application: -

- Site plan 4515 - al-1-02C received 13 May 2026
- 4515 - Design and Access Statement - 2026-05-08 received 8 May 2026
- Existing and Proposed Site Block Plan - Showing SuDs 4515 - al-1-02 received 22 Apr 2026
- Surface Water Drainage Strategy received 22 Apr 2026
- SuDs validation checklist received 22 April 2026
- Flood Risk Map 10 Apr 2026
- Location Plan received 27 Mar 2026
- Proposed Elevations and Floor Plans - House and Office / Car Port 4515 - al-1-03A received 27 Mar 2026
- Preliminary Ecology Appraisal received 27 Mar 2026
- Application Form received 27 Mar 2026
- DLL-ENQ-WILT-00152 - 554 Canal Bridge, Semington - Countersigned IACPC with Annex 3 map received 2 July 2026