



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
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**Your ref:**

J0054138

**Our ref:**

PCU/EIASCY/Y3940/3377957

**Date:**

16 April 2026

Dear Nicky Brock

**Request for a Screening Direction  
Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017**

**Proposal for Residential Development of up to 315 dwellings at Malmesbury Road/  
Common Hill/ Stones Lane, Cricklade**

I refer to your client's request dated 10 February 2026, made under 6(10) of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017(S.I. 2017/571) ("the 2017 Regulations") for the Secretary of State's screening direction on the matter of whether or not the above development is 'EIA development' within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations.

The above development falls within the description at paragraph 10(b) (Urban Development Project) of Schedule 2 to the 2017 Regulations, with more than 150 dwellings proposed and the overall area of development exceeds 5 hectares and is surrounded by a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation at proximity. Therefore, the Secretary of State considers the proposal to be 'Schedule 2 development' within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations.

Having taken into account the selection criteria in Schedule 3 to the 2017 Regulations the Secretary of State considers that the development is likely to have significant effects on the environment, see the attached written statement which gives the reasons for direction as required by 5(5) of the EIA Regulations.

Accordingly, in exercise of the powers conferred on him by regulation 7(5) of the 2017 Regulations the Secretary of State hereby directs that the proposed development described in your client's request and the documents submitted with it, **is 'EIA development'** within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations.

Any application for planning permission for this development must be accompanied by an Environmental Statement. Under regulation 2 of the 2017 Regulations, an Environmental Statement must contain, for the purpose of assessing the likely impact on the environment, the information specified in that regulation. I recommend that you refer to the Regulations before and during the preparation of the Statement.

I am sending a copy of this letter and written statement to the Wiltshire Council.

Yours sincerely

*Mike Hale*

**Mike Hale**

Head of Environmental Casework

*This decision was made by officials on behalf of the Secretary of State, and signed on his behalf*

Town & Country Planning (EIA) Regulations 2017  
**Secretary of State Screening Direction – Written Statement**

|                                       |                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Application name:                     | Proposed Residential Development of up to 315 dwellings at Malmesbury Road/ Common Hill/ Stones Lane, Cricklade<br><br>(LPA Reference: PL/2026/00218) |
| SoS case reference:                   | PCU/EIASCR/Y3940/3377957                                                                                                                              |
| Schedule and category of development: | Schedule 2 – 10(b) Urban Development Projects<br>(ii) More than 150 dwellings<br>(iii) The overall area of the development exceeds 5ha                |

**Full statement of reasons as required by 5(5)(a) of the 2017 EIA Regulations including conclusions on likeliness of significant environmental effects.**

The Secretary of State ("SoS") has considered whether the above proposal is likely to have significant environmental effects. He has undertaken this screening, taking into account the criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 and having also had regard to Planning Practice Guidance ("PPG") where the following are indicated as main matters relevant in the consideration of development in this category: physical scale of such developments, potential increase in traffic, emissions and noise.

Furthermore, he has screened having regard to impacts on public rights of way, ecology, biodiversity, heritage and archaeology, landscape and visual doing so also in cumulative terms.

*Schedule 3 selection criteria for Schedule 2 development refers:*

*1 (a) – (g) regarding characteristics of development*

The proposal is at the screening request stage and Wiltshire Council (the Local Planning Authority) failed to adopt a screening opinion within the statutory timescale; therefore, limited information is available. The SoS notes that the requestor intends to submit further details with the subsequent planning application.

The proposed development is to erect up to 315 dwellings and provide a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace ("SANG") with associated access and infrastructure. The proposed residential development density is 35-40 dwellings per net developable hectare, with a mix of housing typologies and sizes including apartments and houses. Vehicular access is proposed off Common Hill to the south with an emergency access off Stones Lane.

The site comprises of four agricultural fields, with one sitting to the north of the Stones Lane (the 'northern site'); while the remaining fields lie between Stones Lane and Malmesbury Road/Common Hill (the 'southern site'). The total site area is approximately 20.75 ha, where the northern area of the site (3.53ha) is only proposed for SANG with no dwellings; the southern site includes a 7.87ha residential area and 9.25ha greenspace. The SANG is provided in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulation 2017 due to the proximity to North Meadow and Clattinger Farm Special Area of Conservation ("SAC").

The SoS considers that the scale and the characteristics of development as a whole is unlikely to result in significant effects. Whilst this will inevitably comprise a physical change to the locality, the SoS does not consider that a significant environmental effect is likely in terms of the use of natural resources, the production of waste or the risk of major accidents and/or disasters relevant to the development concerned.

## 2 (a)-(c) (i) – (viii) regarding location of development

The site is situated at a semi-rural area, with: Cricklade Town Centre with built-up residential area east; further agricultural fields surrounding north and west; and hotels and leisure/ recreation use south.

The site is in agricultural use. The northern site is classified as Grade 4 agricultural land (poor quality); whereas the southern site is provisionally classified as Grade 3 (good/ moderate quality), but its sub-grade has not been identified. There are tree belts and hedgerows growing along the periphery of the site.

The northern site sits to the north of Stones Lane and the southern site lies between Stones Lane and B4040 Malmesbury Road/ Common Hill. Stones Lane serves a few farms and properties out to the west of the site. A disused railway sits to the east of the northern site and forms part of the National Cycle Network route 45 between Chester and Salisbury via Swindon.

A section of Public Rights of Way ("PRoW") labelled Footpath CRIC 30, which runs in an east-west direction between Stones Land and Footpath CRIC 31, crosses the northern extent of the southern site. Footpath CRIC 31 connects between B4040 and the northern end of Stones Lane, lies approximately 460m to the west of the southern site.

The entire site is within Flood Zone 1, representing the lowest probability of surface water flooding. It falls within the Drinking Water Safeguard Zone (Surface Water), but not within the Drinking Water Protected Areas nor Source Protection Zones. No watercourses are present on site, however there is an unnamed watercourse running along the western boundary of the northern site. River Thames lies 350m to the northeast of the northern site; River Churn lies 730m to the further northeast.

There are no statutory ecological designations on or immediately adjacent to the site, however the site is surrounded by a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest ("SSSI") and SAC, at proximity, including:

- North Meadow & Clattinger Farm SAC (485m, north)
- Cotswold Water Park SSSI (800m, west), which is the UK's largest marl (lime-rich) lake system comprises more than 170 lakes
- Upper Waterhay Meadow SSSI (1.6km, west)
- North Meadow, Cricklade SSSI (400m, east)
- Elmlea Meadows SSSI (600m, northwest)
- Stoke Common Meadows SSSI (3.7km, southwest)
- Wildmoorway Meadows SSSI (3.2km, northwest)
- Pike Corner SSSI (4.7km, west)
- Distillery Farm Meadows SSSI (6.5km, southwest)
- Ravenroost Wood SSSI (8km, southwest)

These statutory ecological sites also support a wide range of rare and protected species, for example, Cotswold Water Park SSSI supports a number of waterbird species; North Meadow Cricklade SSSI supports a wide range of rare and scarce meadow species; Elmlea Meadows SSSI contains the nationally scarce fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*) and the rare downy-fruited sedge (*Carex tomentosa*).

The site does not fall within or near to any National Landscapes. However, it is situated within the National Character Area 108 - Upper Thames Clay Vales.

There are no heritage assets present on or around the site. The closest designated heritage asset to the site is the Grade II listed Hailstone Farmhouse, located approximately 660 m to the west. The site appears to have remained undeveloped since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the applicant states that it

is likely that the site has never been subject to any major disturbance beyond medieval ridge and furrow cultivation evidenced in Light Detection and Ranging survey data.

### ***3(a) – (h) regarding characteristics of potential impact***

The Secretary of State has considered the likely significant effects of the development on the environment in relation to the characteristics of the development and the location of the development with regard to the impact of the development on the factors specified in regulation 4(2), taking into account—

- (a) the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact (for example geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
- (b) the nature of the impact;
- (c) the transboundary nature of the impact;
- (d) the intensity and complexity of the impact;
- (e) the probability of the impact;
- (f) the expected onset, duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact;
- (g) the cumulation of the impact with the impact of other existing and/or approved development;
- (h) the possibility of effectively reducing the impact.

### ***Ecology***

The development site is surrounded by a number of SSSIs and SAC at proximity. Natural England ("NE") has been consulted, and they consider that the proposed development has potential likely significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites and further consideration is required.

NE specifically indicate that the proposed development has the potential for adverse effects on four ecological designations - Cotswold Water Park SSSI, Elmlea Meadows SSSI, North Meadow Cricklade SSSI, and North Meadow & Clattinger Farm SAC. From the information on the NE's website, these designations are subject to various types of pressures, including pressures from invasive non-native species, pollution, recreational impacts, freshwater impacts, natural resources exploitation and land management. NE consider that, due to the known pressures on the abovementioned designated sites, they would expect recreational impacts from the proposals to be assessed.

Given the proposed development is situated at a highly ecological sensitive location surrounded by a number of SSSIs and SAC at proximity, and based on the advice from NE, the SoS considers there is likely significant impact from the ecological perspective and further assessment via EIA is necessary.

### ***Biodiversity***

The designated sites mentioned in the above ecology section support a wide range of species including rare and protected species. For example, Cotswold Water Park SSSI encompasses more than 170 lakes and supports a number of rare waterbird species (e.g., great crested grebe, little egret and little ringed plover); North Meadow, Cricklade SSSI and Elmlea Meadows SSSI both support the nationally scarce plant (*Fritillaria meleagris*, Fritillary).

NE consider that as they do not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, they are unable to advise whether this proposal is likely to affect such populations to such an extent as to require an EIA. However, they establish the likelihood of environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats that may be sufficient to warrant an EIA.

Based on the available information, the SoS considers that the surrounding ecological sensitive sites contains a wide range of rare/ scarce species of flora or fauna. Due to the site proximity to these highly sensitive ecological sites, the SoS considers there is likely significant impact on the sensitive species, and it needs to be further assessed in EIA.

### ***Transport***

The strategic road network in the vicinity includes the B4040 Malmesbury Road/ Common Hill immediately to the south, the B4553 to the east through Cricklade Town Centre, and the A419 along the eastern edge of Cricklade Town Centre.

During construction, there will be an increased number of vehicles travelling to and from the site, including Heavy Goods Vehicles ("HGVs"). However, neither the duration of construction period nor the associated traffic volume is indicated in the screening direction request. Due to insufficient information, the SoS considers a precautionary approach should be adopted and further assessment is required through the EIA process for construction traffic impact on existing road network.

During operational phase, the applicant estimates that there will be additional 175 vehicular trips generated in the highway peak hour periods; and 1,460 vehicular trips over the day (12-hour period). The applicant anticipates that 80% of the operational traffic would head east towards Cricklade town centre, subsequently dispersing onto either B4113 or A419; while the remaining will distribute west towards Malmesbury. Although the applicant states that a Transport Assessment will be undertaken to support the forthcoming planning application, the SoS considers that the information provided does not demonstrate whether the increase in vehicle numbers would adversely affect the existing capacity of the strategic road network. While significant effects on the capacity of nearby transport routes are unlikely from the development in its own right, this matter has been further considered in cumulative terms below and cannot be ruled out at this screening stage and should be assessed through EIA.

### ***Public rights of way***

A section of PRoW (Footpath CRIC 30) crosses the north extent of the southern site. From the screening request, it is unclear whether Footpath CRIC 30 would be retained during the construction and operation phases. If Footpath CRIC 30 is obstructed, it is likely that the public would divert along B4040 Common Hill/ Malmesbury Road to the south of the site, where there is no pedestrian pavement, giving rise to potential road safety concerns.

As the impact on Footpath CRIC 30 cannot be fully determined due to insufficient information, the SoS considers a precautionary approach should be adopted and further assessment is required through the EIA process.

### ***Heritage and Archaeology***

Historic England ("HE") has been consulted, and they consider that there appears to be minimal impact on the historic environment and therefore an EIA would not be required in relation to the historic environment.

In terms of archaeology impact, the submitted Historic Environment Assessment concludes that the Historic Landscape Character of the site is of moderate heritage value; while the proposed development has the potential to disturb archaeological remains where present would result in a localised change to the Historic Landscape Character of the site. The report states that the effects would be spatially contained and would not result in significant adverse effects on the wider historic landscape or on designated heritage assets.

HE consider the site still has the potential for archaeological remains to survive but they have never been identified. HE states that if EIA is not required for the development, HE expect any planning application to be supported with geophysical survey and archaeological evaluation trenching, which helps inform any mitigation required through design.

Based on the available information and advice from HE, the SoS considers that potential impacts on heritage and archaeology are unlikely to be significant to the extent that it necessitates an EIA.

### ***Landscape and Visual***

In terms of the potential landscape impact, NE consider that the proposed development may have environmental impacts on the local landscape character and recommend seeking advice from the LPA. However, the LPA has not provided a screening opinion on this proposal.

The proposed development would result in a change in landscape character from agricultural land to residential use, resulting in a loss of openness. The site is enclosed by existing hedgerow and vegetation, the applicant also states that there is potential for the proposed development to offer grassland and hedgerow enhancements, which is likely to provide some degree of screening for the proposed development. In addition, the site does not fall within or near to any National Landscapes. The SoS considers the loss of openness, and the associated landscape impact, are considered to be limited to a local extent and unlikely to be significant in EIA terms.

In terms of visual impact, there is a likelihood of visual impact due to the change in land use from agricultural to residential. As mentioned above, the existing hedgerow and vegetation along the site boundary, together with the proposed hedgerow enhancements, is likely to provide some degree of screening for the proposed development, which helps soften the potential visual impact.

From long-distances it is likely that the proposed development will be viewed as an extension of the existing settlement from Cricklade Town Centre. With the presence of intervening features, including B4040 Common Hill/ Malmesbury Road and Stones Lane, the SoS considers that the visual impact arising from the proposed development would be softened and its extent is likely to be localised. Therefore, it is considered that the residual visual effects are unlikely to be significant in EIA terms.

### ***Cumulative effects***

PPG also requires the SoS to take into account the potential cumulative impacts of a proposal. It states that each application (or request for screening opinion) should be considered on its own merits. It goes on to state that there are occasions where other existing or approved development

may be relevant in determining whether significant effects are likely as a consequence of a proposed development.

The SoS has considered the cumulative effects between the proposed development and the permitted residential development of up to 140 dwellings (Application no.: PL/2022/02452), which is located to the immediate northwest of the northern site, and its reserved matters application is currently under consultation.

Cumulative effects are likely to arise from the following environmental aspects:

*Ecology and Biodiversity* - Given the approved scheme and the proposed development are surrounded by a number of SSSIs and SAC in the vicinity, the cumulative impacts on the designated ecological sites and the rare/ scarce species of flora or fauna should be further assessed in EIA, including cumulative recreational impacts on the SSSIs and SAC.

*Traffic* – The Transport Assessment submitted for the approved scheme of 140 dwellings indicates that nearly 80% of the traffic generated would head east towards Cricklade town centre. Given that the proposed development is more than double the scale (up to 315 dwellings), and a similar proportion of traffic would be directed towards the town centre, the SoS considers the impact on the capacity of the existing road network is likely to be significant and would need to be further assessed in cumulative terms.

*Landscape and Visual* – As both the approved residential scheme and the proposed development are located to the west of Cricklade town centre, it is considered that they will be perceived as an extension of the existing settlement of Cricklade. The change from a semi-rural setting to residential development, resulting in a loss of openness, is likely to give rise to cumulative landscape and visual impacts, although these are expected to be localised.

In conclusion, cumulative effects arise from the approved scheme, and the proposed development cannot be ruled out at this stage and further assessment through EIA is needed.

### ***Other matters***

Given the mitigation proposed and having considered all available information, there are no other issues amongst those not specifically addressed above which indicate a likelihood of there being significant environmental effects from this proposal.

### **Overall conclusions**

The Secretary of State has had regard to the characteristics of the development, the location of the development and the types and characteristics of potential impacts as set out above. Based on the available information and implications of the proposal, the Secretary of State considers there is likelihood of significant effects such that EIA is required.

In reaching this view the Secretary of State has carefully considered the information put forward by the applicant and consultation responses from Natural England and Historic England.

This direction does not affect any duties of the requestor under other legislation, including The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

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|-----------------------------------------|-----|
| Is an Environmental Statement required? | Yes |
|-----------------------------------------|-----|

|      |               |
|------|---------------|
| Name | Jamie Kam     |
| Date | 16 April 2026 |