

Public Art Officer comments:

PL/2026/02966 - Blackmore Farm, Sandridge Common, Melksham, SN12 7QS

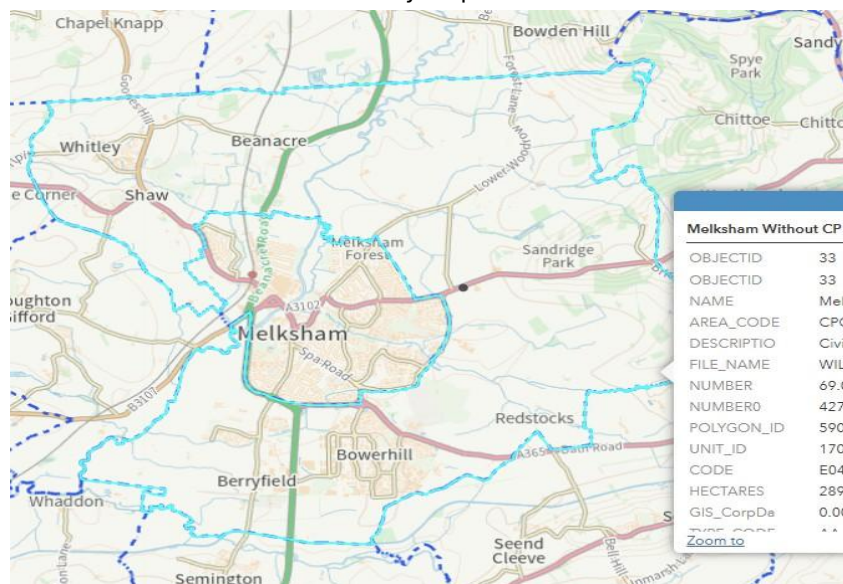
Outline planning application for the erection of up to 275 dwellings (including affordable housing), associated infrastructure, landscape and biodiversity enhancements, with all matters reserved except for the main access from Sandridge Common.

Background and context

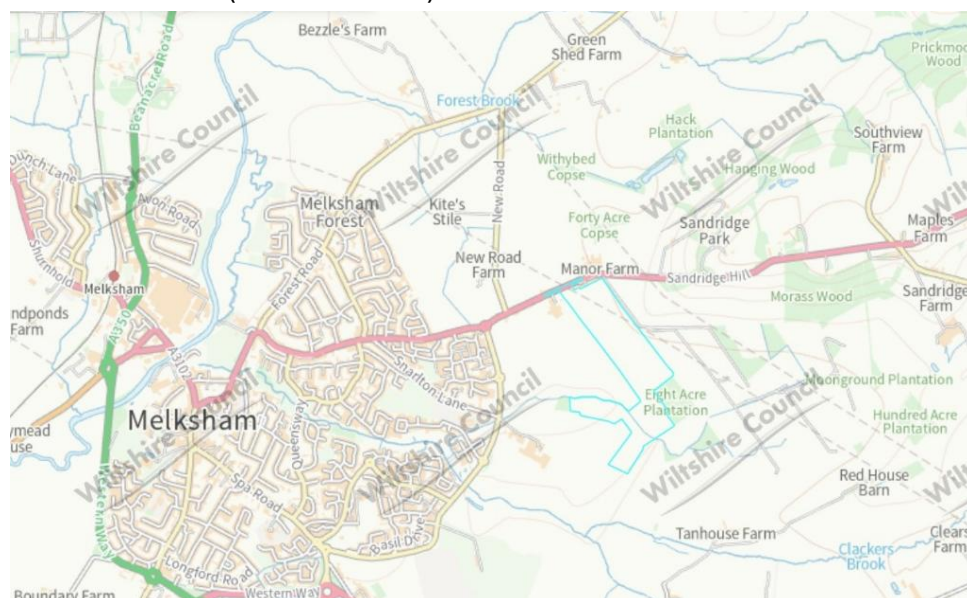
Melksham Without is a civil parish in Wiltshire that surrounds, but does not include, the town of Melksham. It has population of circa 7,500 which is spread across the villages of: Beanacre, Berryfield, Bowerhill, Shaw, The Spa, and Whitley, along with other rural settlements such as Sandridge.

The area has historical links. The eastern part of the parish, bounded by the Avon to the west and the Semington Brook to the south, was once part of the royal forest of Melksham whose bounds were first set in 1228.

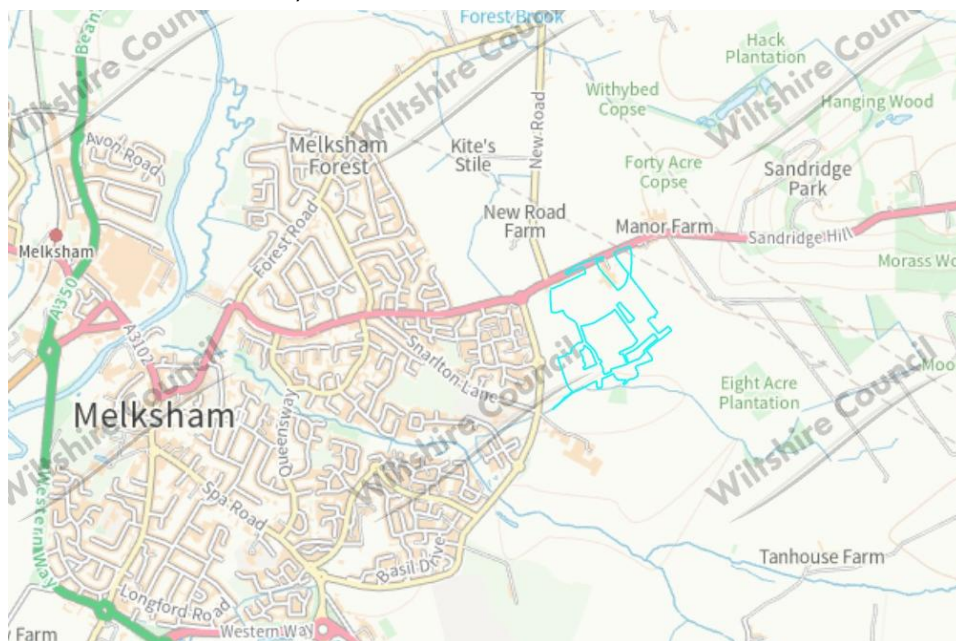
Melksham Without Parish boundary map:



The proposed site of 275 dwellings lies within Melksham Without - to the east of Melksham Town - PL/2026/02966 (Gleeson Land):



There is another application directly adjacent to the proposed site - PL/2026/01555 (BDW Trading Ltd / David Wilson Redrow SW) which sees Phase 1 Reserve Matters for 229 dwellings (out of 500 dwellings approved at Outline PL/2023/11188):



You will note that a Public Art contribution has been agreed for this development.

The Public Art Officer has a good working relationship with this Developer and has already had positive discussions with them regarding secured contributions for other developments in Wiltshire.

This application for 275 dwellings, combined with the current reserve matters application for 229 of 500 dwellings equates, relatively speaking, to a disproportionate amount of development within this parish.

This level of development - as identified in objections against the scheme - can disrupt the established character, identity, and social balance of a settlement.

We would therefore seek a public art contribution to integrate the developments, create a cohesive/linking identity, and address identity merge with Melksham Town.

- **We note Melksham Without Parish Council's comments from 25/6/2026:**

Stance: Object – “Melksham Without Parish Council considered the outline application alongside comments previously submitted during the developer's consultation exercise.

They reiterated their previously raised concerns, including access, the route of the proposed Melksham Bypass, the speculative nature of the development and the cumulative impact of further housing growth on local infrastructure, including healthcare provision, transport networks and community facilities. Members considered that the proposal conflicted with the strategic principles of Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2 (JMNP2), particularly those relating to infrastructure planning, sustainable transport and coordinated development.

Concern was again expressed that the proposed development could prejudice the future delivery of an eastern bypass for Melksham, contrary to long-standing planning aspirations, the JMNP2 Priority Statement supporting an eastern bypass, and Policy 17 of the withdrawn Wiltshire Local Plan. Policy 17 states that development should not undermine the delivery of an A350 bypass to the east of Melksham. Although the policy does not

safeguard a specific route, it clearly demonstrates that an eastern A350 bypass for Melksham is recognised and supported in principle, and that development should not compromise its future delivery.

Members acknowledged that the developers had amended the plans for the site adjacent to Lopes Close; however, they remained concerned about separation of the proposed Lopes Close element from the remainder of the development and shared the residents' overlooking and amenity concerns.

The comments previously submitted during the developer's consultation exercise have been submitted alongside these comments"

- **We also note Melksham Town Council's comments from 26/06/2026:**

"When considering this application the Planning Committee of Melksham Town Council was aware of the position and concerns of Melksham Without Parish Council. The Town Council fully supports and endorses the comments of the Parish.

- *The effect on the A3102*
- *Level and type of affordable housing provision – only 30% provision when the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan calls for a minimum of 40%*
- *Absence of bungalows*
- *Public transport viability*
- *Connectivity*
- *Potential isolation of parts of the development*
- *Safety concerns over proximity to Battery Storage System at Sandridge Solar Farm*
- *The site is not one allocated under the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan*
- *Layout constrained by overhead powerlines and proximity to the Grade II listed Blackmore House*
- *Access – proposed as t-junction with no separate right-turn lane. Preference is for a roundabout.*
- *The preferred Melksham by-pass route passes through the site"*

Rationale

In the context of a relatively large amount of development, the provision of public art is justified as a proportionate and necessary measure to both mitigate its impact, and support successful integration.

Public art provides a means of embedding locally responsive elements that can reflect the area's history, culture and environment, helping development to feel assimilated rather than imposed.

Our guidance on public art was adopted by Cabinet in 2024, and the Council is able to demonstrate a robust methodology benchmarked against several other authorities. There is an identified specific site-based requirement as a result of this development, and we can point to several appeals where public art contributions have been found compliant and secured.

You will note the recent Secretary of State decision dated 28 July 2026 re: PL/2024/07097 - Land South of Snarlton Farm, Snarlton Lane, Melksham, SN12 7QP - APP/Y3940/W/25/3373278 which agrees with the submitted CIL compliance statement that references the public art contribution (as does the agreed S106):

Planning obligations

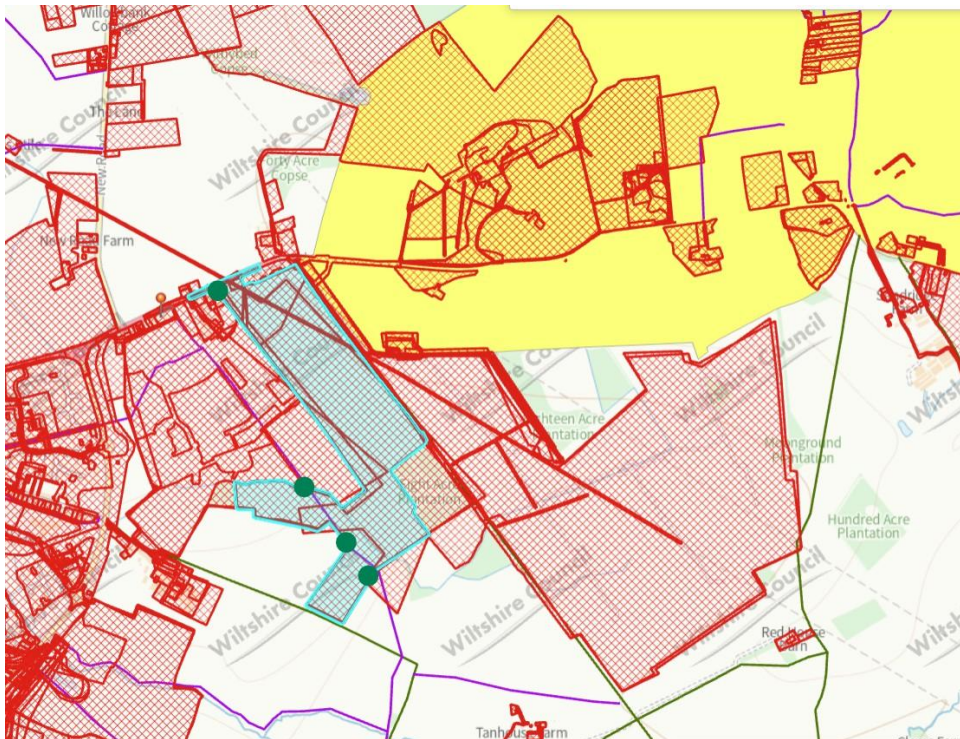
32. The Secretary of State has had regard to the Inspector's analysis at IR12.76-12.80, the planning obligation dated 5 February 2026, paragraph 58 of the Framework, the Guidance and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations 2010, as amended. For the reasons given at IR12.79, she agrees with the Inspector's conclusion that the obligation complies with Regulation 122 of the CIL Regulations 2010 and the tests at paragraph 58 of the Framework.

Public Art contributions provide a policy compliant mechanism that would help to mitigate the impact of this development – and support addressing the merge of Melksham Without Parish with Melksham Town - while also assisting integration with existing and incoming communities.

This is essential in the context of Melksham Without to create sense of place and so as not to undermine community cohesion with regards to WCS CP57 & NPPF para. 96 and para. 98.

Potential locations

Four potential locations (TBD) have been identified along the western boundary of the proposed site (green dots). Three of which connect with a RoW which can further assist with intergration, cohesion, place-shaping, and enable a scheme accessible to as many people as possible:



Contribution threshold

- Development of 50 dwellings and more
- £300 per residential dwelling

Indicative figure

Using planning obligations, the indicative public art contribution figure for a site of 275 dwellings would be £82,500 (see: threshold and calculation) to be commuted prior to commencement to Wiltshire Council's Arts Service to devise and manage the scheme/s.

The Public Art Officer encourages early engagement from Developers regarding sites/schemes that may be incorporated into the Development or the vicinity of the Development (publicart@wiltshire.gov.uk).

Contribution calculation

To provide a consistent, sustainable and transparent approach for our Public Art programme, our communities and Developers, Wiltshire Council has held its 'fixed per dwelling' figure since its implementation in 2009.

The 2009 figure was calculated* using the internationally established Public Art funding mechanism, Percent for Art** i.e. **up to 1%** of capital costs derived from an average build cost per residential dwelling in England. In this case, taking a conservative approach of 0.5% and the lower end of a typical standard newbuild.

*[*build cost per dwelling (RICS) x average floor space per dwelling (English Housing Survey) = lower end of average cost per dwelling (c£60,000 in 2009) x 0.5%]*

*[**Percent for Art is an internationally established funding mechanism implemented by authorities, development corporations and housing associations for the commissioning of public art. Normal practice is for up to 1% of capital costs to be allocated for public art]*

Summary

Public art is widely recognised within the planning system as a key component of place-making, contributing to distinctive, higher quality environments that go beyond purely functional design and instead create places that reflect local identity and aspirations.

Public art also plays an important role in supporting community cohesion and well-being by creating shared spaces and experiences that bring together existing and new residents, acting as a bridge between communities and helping to foster a sense of belonging.

Community involvement in the delivery of public art schemes encourages participation and dialogue, strengthening social connections, and helping communities adapt to change.

More broadly, it supports and contributes to civic pride, legibility and the usability of public spaces, while reinforcing a shared identity and delivering long-term social value.

As such, public art should not be viewed as decorative but as a legitimate planning tool that supports the assimilation of new development, and the creation of cohesive, inclusive communities.

As per our public art guidance and process it is possible to adopt a more effective and strategic approach to aid integration and support cohesion in accordance with the WCS CP57 and the NPPF:

To support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, the NPPF recognises ‘cultural wellbeing’ as a ‘social objective’ - one of the three overarching objectives in achieving sustainable development.

2. Achieving sustainable development

8. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):

*b) a **social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being*

8. Promoting healthy and safe communities

96. Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;

b) are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas

98. To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

b) take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community