

Re: Planning Application PL/2026/04916

As the member elected to Wiltshire Council for the division that includes Berryfield, on 16 September 2026 I requested that this application be determined by a planning committee and not delegated to a planning officer for decision. In doing so, I make no suggestion that any officer decision would be incorrectly made. However, I consider that in the context of the number of new dwellings already approved for development within Berryfield and the degree of local sentiments surrounding this and other recent applications, it is right and proper that the matter be discussed and determined in a public forum.

In July 2026 our government issued new regulations relating to the National Scheme of Delegation on planning matters which substantially restrict the ability of all local planning authorities including Wiltshire Council to decide applications. The relevant legislation is contained in The Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026 (SI 2026 No.854).

This application is for 225 new dwellings and is therefore a Schedule 2 application for the purposes of the Regulations. Schedule 1 applications may not be decided by a planning committee and must be determined by a planning officer, but a Schedule 2 application may be considered by a planning committee if certain conditions are met.

Introduction

The proposed development is for up to 225 new dwellings on a site of 11.2 hectares of agricultural land in the settlement of Berryfield, to the south of Melksham. The site currently comprises three fields with associated mature hedgerows and trees. It additionally includes redundant poultry farm buildings and other possibly former WW2 military structures. The site is crossed by two public footpaths and intersects the proposed route for reconstruction of the Wilts & Berks Canal for a distance of approximately 350 metres crossing the entire site. That reconstruction project remains the subject of an undetermined planning application W/12/01080/FUL and is acknowledged and factored within the design of this subject application.

Reasons for comment:

A. Issues of economic, social or environmental significance to the local area:

1. Wiltshire Council's Department of Children Services (Education) submitted a Planning Consultation Response to this application on 02 September 2026. That identified a requirement arising from the proposed development for 27 early-years places, 64 primary-school places, and 45 secondary-school places (total

136 places). The Response lists several primary schools within a 2-mile safe walking route of the proposed development, but later states “**there are no places currently available across the in-area primary schools**” and “**there is no spare capacity across the designated schools for this development**”.

2. In addition to the social issues arising from this shortfall in available educational provision within a 2-mile safe walking distance, the consequences will include resident parents using motor cars to transport their children to more distant schools. This will in turn have adverse economic impacts for the occupying family units and adverse environmental impacts from increased motor car use on local roads within Berryfield and the adjacent town of Melksham.
3. If approved, the proposed 225 new dwellings will be expected to accommodate at least the same number of adults seeking employment. At 15 September 2026, www.jobs.service.gov.uk listed 72 vacancies within 3 miles of Melksham. However, many of these are field based or actually at locations significantly more distant from the town. It is accepted that these figures are subjective and a snapshot in time, but in the absence of a Wiltshire Local Plan which includes realistic employment growth opportunities, the capacity for these new residents to obtain local employment is in severe doubt. If significant numbers consequently have to commute to work elsewhere, this will also diminish economic contributions locally and adversely impact traffic congestion and air quality.
4. The significant planning implications relating to the Melksham canal link are stated at B.2 below. In addition to those material planning considerations, the proposed restoration of the canal would bring transformative benefits to the wider Melksham community. Additionally, the creation of additional locks, weirs, and other water control structures on the River Avon at Melksham would substantially improve river-water control and downstream flood management towards Holt, Staverton, and Bradford on Avon. Any planning application that might jeopardise those economic, social, and environmental outcomes must be considered in the widest possible scenario.

B. Significant planning matters having regard to the development plan and any other material considerations.

1. Wiltshire Core Strategy, Core Policies 1 & 15 define Berryfield as a Small Village with no settlement boundary. However, it did not form as a traditional English village but grew as a string settlement along the main road south of Melksham toward the more traditional form of village at Semington. The Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan 2 (JMNP2) which was made in August 2025 is an element of the “development plan” for the purposes of Reg. 5(3) b). **Policy 6 of JMNP2**

directs housing development to be prioritised within defined settlement areas and the application site lies outside the defined area for Berryfield.

2. Wiltshire Core Strategy, Core Policy 16 states specifically that “The proposed route for the Melksham link canal, as identified on the proposals map, will be safeguarded from inappropriate development.” As noted above, this remains the subject of an undetermined planning application W/12/01080/FUL and is allowed for within the design of this subject application. Nevertheless, due to the significance of the proposed canal restoration project generally, and specifically the Melksham link between the River Avon at Melksham and the Kennet & Avon Canal at Semington, the implications of this application must be considered in a wider context.
3. **Cumulative Effect; Berryfield:** Census Data from the year 2000 notes Berryfield as having 475 households ([Berryfield](#)). Since then planning permission has been granted for an additional 461 new dwellings, representing a 97% increase. This application for a further 225 units and another would result in at least a 145% growth of the community to 1164 households within 10 years. It is acknowledged that s106 and CIL money from a recent development funded a village hall, but the community lacks local retail facilities and none are envisaged.
4. **Cumulative Effect; Melksham:** In addition to the proximal impact on Berryfield, this development forms part of a wider cumulative effect on the combined areas of Melksham Without Parish Council containing Berryfield, and Melksham Town Council. This area has seen several planning application refused by Wiltshire Council since 2025 but subsequently overturned on appeal. When the already approved developments, together with current applications and others realistically expected to follow are built out (in the next 5 years?), the combined area will grow by about 2500 new homes and 6000 new residents. The two GP surgeries within the town currently have around 30000 patients and these new homes will increase demand by 20%. Unfortunately, there are no plans to increase health service provision. Similarly, there are no plans for increased employment opportunities for the new residents locally, so they will commute by road, further increasing traffic congestion and adverse impacts on air quality. The time has come to pause, and take a “big picture” view of significant developments such as this and consider the broader needs of local communities and the people who already live within them, or who want to join in future.
5. **Highways Impact:** A 145% growth in the number of households within a 10 year period inevitably results in an overall similar increase in vehicle movements on local roads, from a combination of private cars, buses, and delivery vehicles.

Additionally, HGVs servicing the construction requirements of the developments in progress further add to immediate and intense traffic loading on Semington Road, the sole route in and out of Berryfield, and has already contributed to significant degradation of the road surface. The road has traffic-calming measures in place and forms part of the primary route for bus services in both directions south of Melksham. Melksham Without Parish Council commissioned a holistic review of travel arrangements on Semington Road from Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (formerly Sustrans). Their report made several recommendations for improvements to that transit route, which should be fully considered before determining this application. Wiltshire Highways has not yet commented on the application.

Andrew Griffin

Wiltshire Councillor, Melksham Without West & Rural

21 September 2026