

Malmesbury Town Council

(ENGLAND'S OLDEST BOROUGH - CHARTER GRANTED 880)



THE TOWN HALL
MALMESBURY
WILTSHIRE
SN16 9BZ

Telephone: (01666) 822143
Facsimile: (01666) 826166
E-mail: administration@malmesbury.gov.uk

Joint Letter to Wiltshire MP's

13th August 2020

Michelle Donelan – Conservative – Chippenham
John Glen – Conservative – Salisbury
James Gray – Conservative – North Wiltshire
Danny Kruger – Conservative – Devizes
Andrew Murrison – Conservative – South West Wiltshire

CC: Robert Buckland – Conservative – Swindon South
CC: Justin Tomlinson – Conservative – Swindon North

Dear Member of Parliament

The Future of Neighbourhood Planning in Wiltshire

We strongly support the concept of Neighbourhood Planning, introduced in the Localism Act 2011, and each of the councils that have signed this letter has fully engaged with the process of creating and maintaining Neighbourhood Plans. Neighbourhood Planning has worked well, not least because of community involvement and engagement.

We are writing to you now because the future of each of our Neighbourhood Plans and the future of Neighbourhood Planning in Wiltshire is under threat and we need your urgent support.

On 27 May 2020 Wiltshire Council's Strategic Planning Committee passed planning application 19/11569/OUT by Gleeson Limited for up to 71 houses at Filands in Malmesbury.

This application had been rejected before. The land sits outside of the areas agreed for housing development as set out in the Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan and is strongly opposed by Malmesbury Town Council. It fails Core Policies 1, 2, & 13 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the policies of the Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan. It should have been rejected again.

However, it was passed because:

- (i) Wiltshire Council has failed to maintain a five-year supply of land for housing development across Wiltshire as a whole, and
- (ii) Following changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2019, Neighbourhood Plans are only considered in the circumstances of a failure in five-year land supply if the Plan was made less than two years previously (NPPF para 14).

The Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan is over two years old. It was adopted in February 2015 and has currency to 2026. It - like every Neighbourhood Plan in Wiltshire and the UK - took significant time and volunteer effort to create. Reviews are equally time consuming.

But the Malmesbury Neighbourhood Plan, like **every other Neighbourhood Plan in Wiltshire that includes consideration of housing that is approaching, or is over, two years old**, is now, in effect, null and void for as long as Wiltshire Council does not have a five year land supply for housing and the related recent changes in the NPPF have currency. While this is the case, the rationale for community engagement in bottom-up place shaping and Neighbourhood Planning has been hugely reduced.

We would therefore request your support to address this situation. We believe that effective action is more likely to be achieved nationally and in Wiltshire if our Wiltshire MPs are seen to be working together on this matter of regional and national importance. Specifically, we request that you jointly:

- (i) Press for an urgent government review of the recent changes to the NPPF that are undermining made Neighbourhood Plans in Wiltshire; specifically:
 - a. The dropping of the NPPF Section 14 requirement that, to be taken into consideration, Neighbourhood Plans must be less than two years old,
 - b. Removing the changes to the definition of planning areas that, in Wiltshire's case, has made the whole unitary authority the planning area in place of the more meaningful North, South, East and West sub-divisions, and
 - c. Reversing the changes to the methodology for the calculation of land supply for housing which have so tipped the control of the calculation into the hands of developers.
- (ii) Establish and maintain direct enquiry and contact with Wiltshire Council on this matter; specifically regarding:
 - a. The steps Wiltshire Council is taking to evaluate and address land supply issues without simply filling any shortfall contrary to the provisions of agreed Neighbourhood Plans, and
 - b. The professional and practical support being offered by Wiltshire Council to Neighbourhood Plan groups across the county to maintain volunteer engagement and to avoid the collapse of public participation and support for Neighbourhood Planning processes while the five-year land supply for housing in Wiltshire is open to challenge.

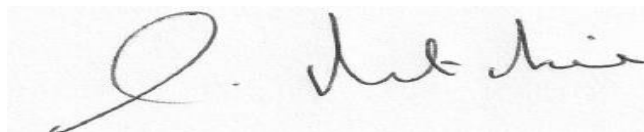
The creation and maintenance of Neighbourhood Plans has required many hours of effort by dedicated public-spirited volunteers. This was in keeping with the ethos of the 2011 Localism Act. If it is now seen that such plans are effectively meaningless after just two years, it is very unlikely that people will volunteer in a similar manner in the future.

Thank you for your support and action on this matter.

Please do let us know you will take these steps on behalf of the communities we represent, and please do keep us informed of the progress you are making.

We are, in addition, aware of the changes being proposed by the Government to the overall framework of planning in England in the White Paper 'Planning for the Future' issued on 6th August. If these proposals are implemented, they will have a huge impact on the future of Neighbourhood Planning. However, it will take years before these proposals could become effective and they will have no effect on protecting our communities from unwanted developments while the current situation persists. We would, nonetheless, also like to discuss the White Paper proposals with you as a matter of urgency, and before the closure of consultation, and we would like to invite you to jointly meet with us via a Zoom conference in early September. Please do let us know that you are happy to join such a call and we will progress with suitable arrangements.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'C. Ritchie', on a light-colored background.

Campbell Ritchie
Mayor, Malmesbury Town Council

For and on behalf of the undersigned Wiltshire Town and Parish Councils

Dave Wingrove, Ashton Keynes Parish Council
Alex Kay, Bradford on Avon Town Council
Richard Tucker/Isabel McCord, Bremhill Parish Council
Bob Tallon, Brokenborough Parish Council
Mark Edwards/Robert Merrick, Calne Parish Council
Sarah Glen, Calne Without Parish
Andy Conroy/Nick Murry, Chippenham Town Council
David Harmes, Chirton & Connock Parish Council
Steve Abbott, Corsham Town Council
Peter Gilchriest, Crudwell Parish Council
Andy Geddes/Simon Fisher/Richard Ormerod, Devizes Town Council
Chris Hall, Downton Parish Council
Melvyn Hourigan, Great Somerford Parish Council

Ernie Clark, Hilperton Parish Council/ Staverton Parish Council
Steve Siddall, Holt Parish Council
Andy Oliver, Idmiston Parish Council
Keith Webster, Lyneham & Bradenstoke Parish Council
Campbell Ritchie, Malmesbury Town Council
Peter Cairns, Susie Price, Mervyn Hall & Shelley Parker, Marlborough Town Council
Russell Wilsmer, North Bradley Parish Council
Richard Moody, Oaksey Parish Council
Peter Deck, Pewsey Parish Council
Robert Hunt-Grubbe/Richard Clark, Potterne Parish Council
Ray Thomas, Purton Parish Council
Martin Smith, Sherston Parish Council
John Eaton, Southwick Parish Council
Roger Budgen, St Pauls Without Parish Council
Sandra Harry, Janet Amos, Gemma Murray, Tisbury Parish Council
Graham Hill, Trowbridge Town Council
Ian Cunningham, Westbury Town Council
Tony Nicklin, Warminster Town Council