

How to comment on a planning application

Anyone can comment on a planning application. Your opinion counts and your Council and Local Planning Authority (LPA) have a duty to listen to your opinion and base decisions on relevant planning rules and policies. Remember, planning officers at your Council are there to help and you can ask them for advice if you are unsure how to interpret a planning application.

Web:

[Advice - Wiltshire Council](#)

[Your guide to planning | Swindon Borough Council](#)

Email:

developmentmanagement@wiltshire.gov.uk

planningenquiries@swindon.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 456 0114 (Wiltshire)

What you need to do:

- Make a note of the planning reference number which will be something like PL/2022/XXXXX in Wiltshire and S/22/XXXX in Swindon. If you do not know this, you can look it up on the relevant local council website. ([Planning - Wiltshire Council](#) Home or [View or comment on a planning application | Swindon Borough Council](#)). You can search using a keyword, postcode or single line of address.
- Be aware of the deadline for responses. Comments which arrive late will not be given due consideration.
- Take a look at the planning application on the relevant local council website. ([Planning - Wiltshire Council](#) or [View or comment on a planning application | Swindon Borough Council](#)).
- Ensure you read through the application and supporting documentation to gain more information about the proposed development. There may be ecological reports and environmental impact assessments already submitted that address your concerns or inform your comment.
- Try to gain as much information about the proposed development as possible which can be done by reading the planning application and supporting documentation.
- Ensure that your opinion is presented in an effective, formal and polite way and provide as much supporting information as possible and reference law, policy and strategic guidance.

What should you be thinking about when reading through a planning application?

- Is the application for full or outline permission?
- Is the application accurate? For example are all local features shown? Are the maps up-to-date? Does the description of the site correctly describe how the area is currently used?
- Is the development on a site which has been allocated for development, within the Local Plan or Local Development Framework? These are documents published by your LPA which set out agreed planning policies for your area and are the background against which planning decisions are made.

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- **Wiltshire Core Plan Strategy-**
[Wiltshire Core Strategy - Wiltshire Council](#)
 - **Wiltshire Local plan which is currently under review-**
[Wiltshire Local Plan Addressing Climate Change and Biodiversity FINAL.pdf](#)
 - **Swindon Local Plan-**
[Swindon Local Plan 2026 | Swindon Borough Council](#)
 - **& revised draft-**
https://swindon-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/lpr/lps/local_plan_submission_revised_draft_plan?pointId=5464358
- If you think the site is important for wildlife, has an ecological survey been carried out? LPAs can request developers to carry out surveys if there are sufficient grounds to do so. If no wildlife information accompanies the application, you may wish to contact the planning officer to discuss this.
 - You can contact the Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre ([Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre \(wsbrc.org.uk\)](#)) and request a report detailing any wildlife information that they have for the area, though they do charge for this. Please note that limited records for an area does not automatically indicate that it is of low ecological value, it simply means that the WSBRC does not hold the records for this area. A desk top study from the WSBRC does not negate the need for an ecological survey by the applicant, and we would normally expect a record search to be undertaken by the applicant.
 - Have there been any previous planning applications or proposals for this site? If an application has been refused in the past the reasons may be still be valid. Alternatively, if you want to support the application, you could make suggestions to solve these issues.
 - Does the development site fall within or adjacent to any designated areas such as a Site of Special Scientific Interest or a Local Wildlife Site? You can check on a map here: <http://www.magic.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>
 - If the development falls within an AONB or National Park, does it align with the Management Plan for the Area? [Planning - Cotswolds National Landscape \(cotswoldsaonb.org.uk\)](#); [Planning - North Wessex Downs AONB](#); [Planning - Cranborne Chase AONB](#); [Home Page - New Forest National Park Authority \(newforestnpa.gov.uk\)](#)
 - Is there any additional information about the site that the LPA could use to assist them in the decision making process? Focus especially on local knowledge that the LPA may not be aware of.
 - What are the long term effects of the development? Will it help to achieve sustainable development in the area or will it set a precedent of unsustainable and unsuitable development?
 - What are the indirect effects of the proposal, on surrounding water courses and the wider environment? How does it contribute to or impact on the connectivity of surrounding habitats and wildlife corridors?
 - Is there a longer term ecological management plan for maintenance and upkeep of any newly created habitats such as woodland or grassland?

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- What are the pros and cons of the proposal? Some of the potential negative impact of the development may be addressed by suggesting that the LPA attaches conditions or obligations on any planning permission granted.

After you have all the information on the planning application and thought about the effects of the proposal, you can either:

- Support the application in full (for example, if it is for wildlife enhancements)
- Support the application but ask for details of the proposed development to be reconsidered and changed
- Take no action
- Register an objection to the application, but suggest action that could be taken to address your objection for example through amendments to the application or planning conditions
- Request that the application be refused planning permission

What do you need to think about when writing a response?

- Ensure that your letter is addressed to the case officer and clearly states the planning application reference number and address, and gives your name and address
- Be clear and courteous, stating whether you are objecting or supporting an application and the reasoning for this decision
- Keep the letter brief will help to ensure it is read and considered fully. Remember to attach supporting evidence
- Use sub headings to highlight individual points
- Ensure your letter is based on planning issues rather than personal opinion. Comments should not be of a discriminatory, defamatory or libellous nature. Comments will be posted on the portal and accessible by all.
- Photographs may help to illustrate your concerns
- In Wiltshire you can comment through the website: [Advice - Wiltshire Council](#), by email: developmentmanagement@wiltshire.gov.uk or by post to any of the three main council buildings:
 - Wiltshire Council, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire BA14 8JN
 - Monkton Park offices, Monkton Hill, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 1ER
 - Bourne Hill, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP1 3UZ

Submitting your comments or objections through the online electronic system is the easiest, most reliable way, and preferred by the Council

- In Swindon, comments can be submitted through the public access system: [View or comment on a planning application | Swindon Borough Council](#)

• If you are writing as part of an action group, encourage all members to make individual submissions. This will ensure that each one is counted as an individual response. You could offer support to members of the group by providing bullet points of all the issues they need to cover in their submissions

Strengthen your comments by including evidence and relevant legislation and law. There is plenty of information on legislation, policy and guidance relating to the protection of wildlife and biodiversity that may be relevant to your submission. See below:

Suggested national policy and legislation to quote, as appropriate:

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 states that a public authority "...must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity." This does not mean that they have to decide in favour of biodiversity, but they can be challenged if they do not at least consider it in the decision making process.

[ukpga_20060016_en.pdf \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 - The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied by Local Planning Authorities. The NPPF covers all aspects of planning policy, but much of the guidance relating to biodiversity can be found in Section 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Read through this and quote those section relevant to the application you are responding to.

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)-

[National Planning Policy Framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The Government provides guidance on applying the NPPF with regard to the Natural environment-

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment>

The Environment Agency State of the Urban Environment report contextualises the need for environmentally positive planning-

[The state of the environment: the urban environment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Natural England has produced guidance for planners on protected species-

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/protected-species-how-to-review-planning-applications>

There is specific guidance for developers and planners on best practice-

- [Living with beauty: report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [National Model Design Code - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Wild birds: advice for making planning decisions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

And all policy is intended to be geared towards fulfilling the 25 Year Environment Plan-

[25-year-environment-plan.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

[At a glance: summary of targets in our 25 year environment plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Suggested local Policy Documents to quote, as appropriate:

Protected sites & species considerations guidance for LPAs-

<https://www.gov.uk/topic/planning-development/protected-sites-species>

Wiltshire Council Biodiversity & Development info-

[Biodiversity and development - Wiltshire Council](#)

Wiltshire Core Plan Strategy-

[Wiltshire Core Strategy - Wiltshire Council](#)

Wiltshire Local plan which is currently under review-

[Wiltshire Local Plan Addressing Climate Change and Biodiversity FINAL.pdf](#)

Swindon Local Plan-

[Swindon Local Plan 2026 | Swindon Borough Council](#)

& revised draft-

https://swindon-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/lpr/lps/local_plan_submission_revised_draft_plan?pointId=5464358

(Particularly relevant sections are: 7- Development Management Policies and Open Space and Green Infrastructure and 7.10- Landscape and Biodiversity)

Wiltshire Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy-

[Green and blue infrastructure - Wiltshire Council](#)

Swindon Green Infrastructure Strategy-

[Swindon Green Infrastructure Strategy | Swindon Borough Council](#)

Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan-

[Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan \(BAP\) 2008 \(link2nature.org.uk\)](#)

(See pp 129 – 142 for a list of Priority Species)

Mitigation and Enhancements

Often and for many reasons planning consent will be granted regardless of comments or objections, but may require ecological mitigation and enhancements measures to be included. Even if they don't have any bearing on the actual decision itself, putting suggestions in your comments can make it more likely that they will be conditioned as part of the development.

- Have the development proposals considered biodiversity net gain using the DEFRA Metric v3.0 [Biodiversity metric: calculate the biodiversity net gain of a project or development - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) or for small sites the new 'small sites metric' [The Small Sites Metric - JP040 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)?

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- What other ecological enhancements have been included within the development? Such as provision for birds, bats, bees, hedgehogs, reptiles etc.
- Do the proposal include a low lighting plan for nocturnal species such as hedgehogs and bats?
- Are there trees and hedgerows on the site? If so has every effort been made to retain them using the mitigation hierarchy rather than remove and replace? [compensation-and-mitigation-factsheet.pdf \(woodlandtrust.org.uk\)](#)
- Are areas of grassland to be seeded with a diverse mix?
- Have nesting bricks been included in building design? [CIEEM Nest Brick Info Sheet](#)

How can you gain support for your position?

- Contact your local Councillors and/or MP to see if they are prepared to support your comments;
- Talk to other local residents to ensure they are informed about the development.

What happens after I have submitted my response?

- You should receive an acknowledgement email immediately if submitted through the electronic system
- Ensure that your comments have been received by checking the application on the portal
- If you wish to follow the application, contact the LPA to find out when the application will go to Planning Committee
- You are entitled to attend Planning Committee meetings to hear the applications being considered (this may be online). Before attending you may wish to read the planning officer's report to the committee as this will tell you what information the committee is being given and what decision the officer recommends they make
- Up to three members of the public are given the opportunity to speak for and three against an application at Committee meetings, for up to 3 minutes each. This is strictly controlled so it is advisable to have pre-written speech

Councillors will not necessarily follow the Planning Officer's recommendations, so even if the Officer's recommendation is to approve, it is still worth making a representation.

The procedure for Planning Committee meetings Wiltshire:

[Planning Committee Procedure.pdf \(wiltshire.gov.uk\)](#)

The procedure for Remote Planning Committee meetings Wiltshire:

[Remote Planning Committee Procedure.pdf \(wiltshire.gov.uk\)](#)

Swindon Planning protocol:

[Planning Protocol 2019 | Swindon Borough Council](#)

Swindon Planning Committee details:

[Committee details - Planning Committee \(swindon.gov.uk\)](#)

Decision time

A decision on the application may be made at the Planning Committee meeting but this is not necessarily the end of the process. For example, if the application is refused permission by Planning Committee, the applicant has 28 days to decide whether they wish to appeal. If so, the process is repeated at appeal stage.

Do not assume your objections will automatically be represented at this stage. It is always best to resubmit your comments.

Appeals against a decision

Applicants can take their application to appeal if it is refused. In England, third parties, i.e. the general public cannot appeal against a planning decision. However, if you have made an objection to a planning application which is then refused and the developer appeals, you have the right to make further representations to this appeal, and if an inquiry is held, to appear at the inquiry to make your case. The Planning Inspectorate or LPA should get in contact with you with the details of what you have to do when the appeal is lodged. For more information about the appeals process see www.planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Was this information helpful? Feedback appreciated.

Last updated: June 2022