



STRATEGIC AND TECHNICAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 24 MARCH 2026

Present: Cllrs Duncan Sowry-House (Chair), Belinda Bawden, Matt Bell, Richard Crabb, Scott Florek, Spencer Flower, Craig Monks, Pete Roper, David Taylor and David Tooke

Apologies: Cllrs Toni Coombs and Belinda Ridout

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Philip Crowther (Legal Business Partner - Regulatory), Eleanor Godesar (Senior Planning Officer), Felicity Hart (Minerals and Waste Planning Manager), Antony Nash (Senior Democratic & Governance Services Officer), Martin Peacock (Senior Landscape Architect) and Megan Rochester (Senior Democratic & Governance Services Officer)

37. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 25th November 2025 were confirmed and signed.

38. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests were made at the meeting.

39. Registration for public speaking and statements

Representations by the public to the Committee on individual planning applications are detailed below. There were no questions, petitions or deputations received on other items on this occasion.

40. P/FUL/2025/04692 – Wessex Farm, Sherborne Causeway, Shaftesbury, SP7 9PX

The Case Officer presented the application with a visual presentation, including site plans and aerial photographs, identifying the location and summarising the proposal and relevant planning policies. Members were informed that Wessex Farm and the main operational area were situated north of the A30, and that a new access road was proposed to the west of the existing access to avoid residential dwellings and the farm complex.

Key planning constraints were outlined, noting that the site was near several listed buildings, with the Motcombe Conservation Area located to the north. An explanation of the proposed anaerobic digester facility was provided, accompanied by site photographs from multiple viewpoints and illustrations of the site layout,

elevations, and feedstock building. A breakdown of the proposed feedstock and predicted annual energy production was presented. Landscape considerations were summarised, with visualisations showing that while initial landscape and visual harm was expected, this would not be significant by year 15 due to robust proposed planting. In relation to heritage, seven nearby listed buildings were identified, and members were advised of predicted impacts and mitigation through landscaping.

Highways matters were addressed, with the new access expected to generate 32 daily vehicle movements, increasing to 69 during the harvest period. The development would result in no more than a 1.31% increase in vehicle movements (calculated on increase to the existing AM peak hour traffic) on the A30 Sherborne Causeway, and the widened entrance and passing places were considered to improve highway safety for residents and Wessex Farm. The ecological assessment confirmed the site had no designations and consisted of arable land. Impacts on neighbouring amenity were outlined, and members were advised that the proposal would be carbon neutral and aligned with Dorset Council's climate and ecological emergency objectives. Protection of trees would be secured through an Arboricultural Method Statement. The recommendation was to grant planning permission subject to conditions set out in Section 16 of the officer's report.

Public Participation

Cllr A Hollingshead spoke in objection, noting the Town Council's opposition and concerns about the site's position on the slope of Shaftesbury. He highlighted the lack of an acoustic barrier, raised issues with the Transport Plan, and expressed concern about visual impacts from Castle Hill, stating that the development would detract from the landscape. While acknowledging supporting documents and officer advice, he maintained that a large industrial facility would harm community infrastructure and residents' quality of life, urging the Committee to refuse the application if any doubt remained.

Mrs K Tippins explained that she lived at Long Cross beside the A30, close to the proposed site. She asked Members to refuse the application, stating that it represented a 6-hectare industrial-scale waste facility rather than farm diversification. She considered the applicant's assumptions on existing HGV movements to be unsupported and said the development would introduce new heavy traffic onto a hazardous section of the A30. She also raised concerns about odour, noting that anaerobic digestion was inherently odorous and that no evidence had been provided to show nearby homes would not be affected. She stated that the proposal would cause industrial-scale harm to the rural landscape, including views from Castle Hill, and that mitigation through future planting was insufficient. She further noted that no Environmental Impact Assessment had been required despite the site's proximity to watercourses and an SSSI. Mrs Tippins concluded that key impacts on highway safety, residential amenity, landscape character and environmental risk had not been properly assessed or shown to be acceptable, and she respectfully asked the Committee to refuse.

Mr T Pope spoke on behalf of the applicant, stating that the proposal provided a safe agricultural use supporting renewable energy, carbon capture and net-zero

aims. He confirmed that environmental protection and impacts on neighbouring facilities had been fully assessed and noted that the site lay outside national landscape designations. He advised that access was safe and suitable, aligned with the strategic road network, with continuous GPS tracking in place. He highlighted proposed hedgerow and tree enhancements to reduce visual intrusion and protect views and heritage assets, alongside biodiversity net gains, and stated that enforceable planning conditions would secure acceptable land use.

Cllr P Mouncey spoke on behalf of Motcombe Parish Council in opposition to the application, stating that it conflicted with the Neighbourhood Plan and would harm the character and tranquillity of the countryside, including views across the Blackmore Vale. He raised concerns regarding biodiversity, environmental impacts and existing flooding issues, noting that increased traffic could worsen surface-water flooding and affect local watercourses. He reported that neighbouring residents shared concerns about air quality, light pollution and reduced privacy. He also highlighted highway safety issues, explaining that the A30 was served by narrow country lanes with difficult junctions, limited visibility and a history of accidents, and therefore was not safe for all road users. He urged that the application be refused.

Cllr V Potheary, the local ward member, noted the recent opening of an anaerobic digestion facility in Wincanton, nine miles from the site, and questioned whether this had been accounted for in the applicant's business plan. While supporting green energy initiatives, she stated that the proposal would have an unacceptable landscape impact and did not meet the North Dorset Local Plan requirement for development to enhance its surroundings. She emphasised the need to give proper weight to heritage assets, noting that eleven designated assets appeared to have been overlooked, and raised concerns regarding biodiversity. She urged the Committee to refuse the application and support the community's view.

Members questions and comments

- Members asked what work had been undertaken to accommodate HGV movements associated with the proposal, and how visibility for all road users had been assessed and assured
- sought clarification on what odour-mitigation measures had been put in place, noting that the applicant had stated feedstocks would be transported in enclosed HGVs.
- concerns expressed regarding both traffic impacts and potential odour issues arising from the proposed operations.
- Members queried the origin of the large vehicles serving the site and requested clarification on the routing assessment, given that the impact extended beyond the A30 and affected smaller rural roads and country lanes.
- Sought clarification on how officers apply the quantitative planning balance in assessing planning applications and whether it had been undertaken for the proposal
- What proportion of HGV movements had been calculated as a percentage of overall traffic rather than HGVs alone

- Over how many days during the harvest period had traffic movements been anticipated
- What mitigation measures had been proposed to prevent pollution of nearby watercourses
- Requested a breakdown of vehicle types, particularly the percentage of tractor movements and whether those loads would be sealed
- Queried the periodical review of the management of the site to ensure it was being managed and operated appropriately
- Clarification was sought on whether the site lay within the designated dark skies area.
- Hours of operation
- What capacity existed for any materials to be stored on site
- Members requested clarification of Condition 24, particularly why no restriction had been applied to the delivery of feedstock during the harvest period.
- How surrounding parishes would be engaged, and whether a requirement could be included for the applicant to participate in an annual liaison committee to review transport, road impacts and related operational matters.
- Cllr Matt Bell noted that Dorset was a rural county and highlighted how the proposal supported the agricultural network and delivered public benefit, recognising that while the rural landscape needed to be maintained, such facilities were widely used within the farming community and helped to reduce risks to watercourses by ensuring that slurry was managed appropriately.
- Cllr Belinda Bawden commented that the proposal reflected modern recycling practice by converting a waste product into a useful fertiliser, noting that fertiliser costs had been significant and that the process offered both economic benefit and a reduction in pollution risk.
- Members sought clarity on the effect of the proposed review mechanism and whether it would allow parish councils to comment on any issues arising during the operation of the site.

Having had the opportunity to discuss the merits of the application and an understanding of all this entailed; having considered the officer's report and presentation; the written representatives; and what they had heard at the meeting, a motion to **APPROVE** the officer's recommendation to GRANT, was proposed by Cllr Duncan Sowry-House, and seconded by Cllr Matt Bell, subject to conditions set out in Section 16 of the officer's report and an additional condition requiring liaison every six months with surrounding parish councils within a 15-mile radius.

Decision: To grant for the reasons set out in Section 16 of the officer's report and an additional condition requiring liaison every six months with surrounding parish councils within a 15-mile radius. The final wording of the additional condition be delegated to officers.

41. **Urgent items**

There were no urgent items.

42. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Decision Sheet

Duration of meeting: 10.03 - 11.41 am

Chairman

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