

Update on the Donkey Field

A big thank you from NWAG to residents who didn't get the message via Facebook, that Wiltshire County Council's Strategic Committee, had decided to defer the decision on the Donkey Field and you turned up to the council offices to offer support. Thank you so very much!

NWAG members attended the meeting having only the day before being notified, that the decision was to be deferred to January or February. We were advised that this was an 'exceptional' occurrence. Although the Council chairman advised visitors that speaking would not be necessary, three of Ark's representatives insisted on doing so. Interestingly, the chief revenue officer for Ark (Corsham) who was at the meeting, stated that the data centre could be built at one of ARK's sites in another area of the country or even in Belgium. Naturally we would welcome this, but we understand that ARK are still continuing to pursue the planning application.

He also inferred that Ark had invested millions of pounds into Corsham and our local community. NWAG checked this out with Corsham Town Council (CTC) and this is not the case. CTC were not aware of any specific investment into the local community. Wiltshire Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) has a ZERO rate for this type of development. Therefore CTC do not receive any income whatsoever from proposed data centres, or any of the others already built. Of course any charitable donations they may have made elsewhere, although the council were not aware of any, will be recovered by the company as a tax break.

After the meeting had concluded NWAG welcomed the Councils recognition that the additional information that we provided them, in a 17-page Rebuttal Letter. It raised serious legal and procedural issues that must be properly assessed, before any lawful decision can be made

NWAG also informed the Council in their rebuttal letter, that The Donkey Field has never been owned by the MOD and that it is not ex MOD land. Therefore it is not subject to Wiltshire core policy CP37 which applies specifically to the redevelopment of former MOD sites. Treating the land as ex MOD, materially misrepresented its planning status, and risked drawing incorrect conclusions about policy support for the Donkey Field to be built upon.

From a legal viewpoint, Ark's current planning application fails to comply with key elements of Wiltshire Core Strategy, the Neighbourhood Plan, the emerging Local Plan and the National Planning Policy. Ark bought the land with planning approval for housing as a speculative purchase deal and is now trying to turn it into an Industrial site. The previous housing application had various caveats on it e.g. it was only allowed to build two-story homes and all structures had to be built in Cotswold stone to 'fit in' with our existing historic village. The Ark application is totally out of place for a village setting, in places it is five stories high and it is built of steel and concrete. Even the MoD buildings further into Hawthorn are only three stories high, remain within the boundaries of the old MoD site and cannot be seen or heard from our village.

Given that Wiltshire is desperate for housing and doesn't have the five year land supply to meet the requirement, it would seem wrong that the Planning Authority would allow for a change of use, for it to be turned into an Industrial Site, something that has been refused on

every other planning application to build on the Donkey Field over the last 70 years! Does this mean that the permission to build 170 houses at the top end of Hawthorn, in the old MoD Rudloe site, will also suddenly transform into a huge data centre for Box parish to deal with?

Prior to the Strategic Meeting in December NWAG had only 5 days to send in their rebuttal letter to the Council. It was because of this letter, that the Council's legal team, decided that if the local residents took them to court for a Judicial Review, based on the current Ark application, a council decision in favour of the application would neither be a robust or safe. This was obviously a body blow to the planning department too, who were relying very heavily on unresolved matters by setting "post approval conditions". NWAG on obtaining legal advice that the planning officers reported raised a number of significant concerns relating to procedural fairness, the treatment of technical evidence, the interpretation of the previous 2021 appeals decision, compliance with strategy duties and the business of the recommendations presented to the Strategic Planning Committee was legally and technically flawed. Therefore, if the council were taken to court by local residents, the council would be on unstable ground; regardless of the planning officer's recommendations. The deferral decision was made so Ark have more time to provide the information that the council specialist departments and local residents have been requesting for the last two years.

So it seems that the next Strategic Meeting is on TUESDAY FEBRUARY 10th, at 10:30hrs but as yet it has to be put formally onto the agenda. It will be held at COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD. TROWBRIDGE BA148JN. However, there is always the possibility that the meeting will be cancelled, or the developer will withdraw the application.

To ensure that planning application will be on the Agenda, 5 working days before look up:

- Wiltshire County Council Strategic Planning council committee meetings.
- Then click onto, Strategic Planning Committee
- Then click on, More Information about Strategic Planning Committee.
- Finally click onto, Browse Meetings and Agenda for this committee

Then scroll down to Feb 10th 2026. If the word Agenda is showing, then click onto the date and scroll down the agenda to the planning section to see if PL/2024/05527 Land South of Westwells Road. Westwells. Neston SN13 9GB is on the agenda

If it isn't then check 5 days before the next meeting which is scheduled for March 24th.

Whatever the date NWAG are hoping that local residents will come along and help us stop this. The strength of your support will show the Strategic Board members that us residents are still pushing back against this Industrial build. Just recently in Indiana a hyper scale data centre was being proposed. It would have consumed millions of gallons of water a day, place heavy loads on the electricity infrastructure and disrupt quiet neighbourhoods with noise and light, providing minimal jobs to local residents whilst all along the private company would receive generous tax breaks. (Sounding very familiar?). Anyway, local residents all got together and on the day of the final hearing the chamber was packed wall-to-wall with residents quietly standing shoulder to shoulder in opposition of the build. The chamber was packed so tightly there was only standing room even though minutes before the decision, the applicant withdrew their planning application. What led to a 'win' against seemingly impossible odds wasn't money or lawyers or bullying tactics of developers but neighbours refusing to be put down! So if we all choose to act and stand very quietly side-by-side with our neighbours at the next strategic planning meeting, most probably on February 10th the Committee Members will be under no illusion that we really, really, don't want this

Industrial build here in our lovely village. It's not because we are NIMBYs, we are far from that, it's because we have significant concerns with regards to issues such as noise which a lot of residents are already suffering from the current 5 data centres, plus increased traffic and of course ongoing flooding issues. Wiltshire Council have a duty to stand by the Strategic Policies which have been written to protect small villages like ours. That's why they were implemented in the first place! The WCC Strategic Planning Committee have got a lot of issues to deal with and in most cases have little time to explore the details put in front of them by the Planning Authority. The evidence so far is that when presented with genuine issues in the form of a rebuttal letter, and clear public concerns, they will make balanced and appropriate decisions. Even in the face of the rant by the Ark senior revenue officer the Strategic Members deferred the decision, so clearly common sense prevailed. Residents pushing back and objecting in this way is not just for now, but also for future generations to come. Otherwise, it is them who will be asking why we just stood by and let this happen. NWAG have been working tremendously hard over the last two years to stop this, and now by us all standing side by side on the day of next Strategic meeting, it will certainly help.

If you wish to watch the rant of the chief senior officer from Ark just click on one of the links below;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5RTKfWyxtg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=n5RTKfWyxtg>

NWAG will keep you informed via Facebook of when the final meeting is going to be held. In the meantime please put Feb 10th into your diaries as that is the date it is all supposed to be happening. Or alternatively, around 5th February email Tara Hunt or Matt Hitch on committee@wiltshire.gov.uk and ask to be informed of the final date for this application.

Thank you and thank you for your ongoing support!
Neston **Westwells** Action Group (NWAG)