

**Semington Neighbourhood Planning**  
**Steering Group Meeting 3      December 7<sup>th</sup> 2021**  
**1930 to 2130      Semington Village Hall**



**AGENDA**

- 1 Welcome and apologies
- 2 Approving the minutes of meeting 2 on 9<sup>th</sup> November – Paper 3.1
- 3 Recording any declarations of interest in relation to the agenda
- 4 Matters arising from the minutes and update on activities – Paper 3.1  
updating the critical friends list
- 5 Introducing Place Studios consultants
- 6 Planning the 1<sup>st</sup> community consultation on February 12<sup>th</sup> feedback from the working group – Paper 3.2
  - i. Determining whether additions or changes should be made to the “Issues” and “ Stakeholders” lists;
  - ii. Deciding how, between now and the circulation of our agenda for January 5<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Steering Group will prepare a draft of vision, objectives and policy outlines around which consultation events might be programmed, for consideration at that meeting.
- 7 Thinking about Semington: feedback on how best to describe the parish? – Paper 3.3
- 8 Updating the budget – Paper 3.4
- 9 Noting the date of the next steering group meeting: January 5<sup>th</sup>. Business to include:
  - i. Considering a draft vision / objectives / policy document
  - ii. Updating plans for the first community consultation

## SNPSG Paper 3.1 Minutes and update on activities

- 2.1 Those steering group members attending: Vicky Bodman VB, Emma Day ED, Sheralyn Milburn SM, Bill Scott BS, Peter Smith PS, Hugh Turnbull HT, and Ian Williamson IW. David Way (Wiltshire Council) also attended.

Peter Smith welcomed members to the meeting and everyone introduced themselves.

- 2.2 The minutes of meeting 1 on 29<sup>th</sup> September were approved, and the updated information set out in the minutes were noted.
- 2.3 There were no declarations of interest in relation to the agenda.
- 2.4 Siobhan Chown's resignation from the steering group was noted with regret. It was decided not to try to replace her immediately, but to consider possible new members between now and the end of the next village consultation when villagers would likely have gained additional insight into the neighbourhood plan process. All agreed that having a member in their twenties or late teens would be helpful.

The Chair updated the critical friends list and noted that not everyone had yet responded. The group agreed that members would likely be added to during the neighbourhood planning process as particular needs arose.

The revised timeline was noted as was the fact that it would likely change again.

The group considered the two consultant tenders that had been received. All agreed that the quality of both bids was such that either organisation could be appointed. The weighting matrix was used to help evaluate the two proposals. After detailed discussion, it was unanimously agreed to invite Place Studios to act as consultants and to set up a contract. **Action VB** – Place Studios have agreed to be consultants to our neighbourhood plan bid.

- 2.5 It was agreed that PS and VB would then undertake initial discussions with the consultants in order to inform them of the steps already taken and the plans for an initial consultation in February. They will be invited to the next steering group meeting. **Action VB** – As indicated in the Place Studios bid, a bid has been made to Locality for funding in this tax year.
- 2.6 Possible budget headings and likely expenditure were explored. DW suggested that costs needed to accommodate three community consultations: [i] on vision / objectives and policy; [ii] on draft plans once created; and [iii] on the formal 6 week Regulation 14 consultation.

It was agreed to update the budget in the light of consultant costs with a view to feeding a figure (to include a contingency amount) into the parish council's budget planning. **Action BS / PS** – On-the agenda.

- 2.7 The paper, *Considering what's important to the village: initial thoughts about objectives* was discussed. DW reminded the group that a neighbourhood plan is a *land use* plan, and that the point of creating it is to create specific policies relating to land use in the parish that are not already features of the Wiltshire Local Plan. For example, policies might be written that relate to housing development, heritage, a landscape gap, travel (rights of way and the old A350), play areas and recreation, and communications. DW stressed the importance of focusing on what we *can* influence, not what we would ideally like to.

In the light of this guidance, and in recognition of the work done during lockdown and the existing 5 parish council themes, it was agreed that the first community consultation (February 2022) would need to focus on vision, objectives and policies and would present parishioners with our ideas rather than a blank slate on which they could contribute their ideas. **Action BS** (researching policies) – On-going.

These ideas to be used by the consultation planning group (meeting on November 10<sup>th</sup>). **Action PS / SM / HT** – Completed; report on the agenda.

- 2.8 The paper *Thinking about Semington: how shall we describe the parish?* was discussed. This was part of a draft structure for the final report. It was agreed that this pen picture of the village now needed to

be shared more widely before being used in the community consultations. It will be forwarded to critical friends and members of the parish council who will be asked their views on it as a description of the parish, including ideas on what might be added, or removed. **Action BS – Completed.**

- 2.9 The dates for the next steering group meetings were agreed as 7/8 December, 4/5 January, 1/2 February (to be decided once Place Studios availability is known). **Action BS** (to book dates with Gerald Taylor) – **Completed; dates are: December 7<sup>th</sup>, January 5<sup>th</sup>, February 2<sup>nd</sup> (all 1930 to 2130).**

Saturday February 12<sup>th</sup> was selected as the date for the first consultation and the village hall has been booked from 1000 to 1500.

- 2.10 Business for the next meeting to include:

- Meeting consultants
- Plans for the first community consultation
- Feedback on the *Thinking about Semington* paper consultation

*Drafted November 11<sup>th</sup> 2021*

**Purpose**

We were originally given the task of preparing the process, timeframe, events and paperwork needed to consult with the village so that we could tease out the vision, objectives and policies for our Neighbourhood Plan (NP). This purpose has changed to a focus on what information we need to gather so that our consultants are well briefed prior to launching the village consultation. That is the information that this report aims to present.

**Context**

Any NP consultation activity within Semington needs to be informed by the information gathered in recent village consultations. Three such consultations have happened in the last 14 months:

1. July 2020 – a village questionnaire was delivered by newsletter to all 400 homes in the parish asking for views on what people would like to see improved and whether they were able to help. The ideas generated led to the Parish Council adopting a draft framework of 5 themes and spelling out the activities needed to support each of these.
2. October 2020 – the draft framework was sent out to all homes, together with a parish council vision and goal, for comment before the parish council adopted the framework at its October 2020 meeting.
3. August 2021 – a drop in session was held at the village hall where parishioners were able to find out more about neighbourhood planning and say what issues mattered to them. This was augmented on 31<sup>st</sup> July by a stall at the village fete with the same aims.

In each of the above, questions were open ended and not themed. But the answers did lead to an understanding of the issues, small and large, that were important to villagers. Although some issues which arose would not meet the NP **Land Use** criterion (e.g. anti-social behaviour, dog mess, mixed gender choir), most did.

The NP steering group, at its 9th November 2021 meeting, discussed how all this information might shape the next round of consultation, to be held in February 2022, which will focus on shaping vision, objectives and land use policies. It knew that Place Studio had just been appointed as our NP consultants, and would bring expertise in community engagement techniques.

With all this in mind, the Consultation Working Group met on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2021 to begin the groundwork for the February consultation. It felt that it could best help by preparing a brief for our consultants to consider by:

- Listing, within broad groupings, the issues that villagers have said matter to them; and
- Identifying the known stakeholders and community groups within the parish whom we will need to reach through our community consultation.

We hope that Place Studio will be able to use this information to advise on how best to reach the various community groups, and on how to analyse the responses.

**What are the issues that villagers have said matter?**

Land Use Issue	Are these the things that matter?
Housing & Development	Affordable housing, market housing, settlement boundary, heritage, building design, allocation sites, village character
Green Buffer & Environment	Green space between Semington, Trowbridge and Melksham, canal, Brook/streams, flood prevention, landscape, sewerage/drainage, rural setting
Recreation & Well-being	Play areas, allotments, rights of way, recreation/sports facilities, landscape
Communications	Broadband speed/reliability, post office
Sustainability	Biodiversity, carbon footprint, climate change, wildlife corridors, renewable energy, recycling
Business & Employment	Actively rural mindset, canal, garage, pub, farming, Turnpike business park, ILC, care home, florist, homeworkers
Transport & Traffic	Bus provision, cycle routes, traffic issues, parking, pedestrian safety, location and style of signs, bus gate

## Who are our stakeholders?

### Residents

It is clear that all 400 homes and about 1000 people who live in Semington civic parish are key stakeholders. We have to ensure that all are included in our efforts to engage the whole community in our consultations about what matters to them. These residents will include a range of age and harder to reach groups, where some thought will be needed as to how best to engage with them (e.g. younger children, young adults, travellers, through to vulnerable people without internet access).

But some of our stakeholders are not residents. And many, whether resident or not, have interests that span different stakeholder groups. So another important part of our consultation efforts will need to focus on how we can reach these other stakeholders. The list below is a first cut of who these are.

### Stakeholder Groups

### Contact name and contact details

Somerset Arms

Semington Dock

Farmers

Landowners

Kennet and Avon Canal Trust

Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal Trust

Turnpike Industrial Estate businesses

Other small local businesses

(we should build a directory of local  
Businesses and skills)

Church

Village Hall

Parish Council

School

School PTA

Fete committee

Semington slog

Women's Institute

Football clubs

Canal users

Independent Living Centre

Other clubs and societies: skittles teams, book club, phoenix club, Thursday coffee morning group, Semingtones singers, camera club etc (apologies to any missed).

As a possible model of how we might use word of mouth/local knowledge to engage hard to reach groups, Sheralyn has identified a possible pool of young people from primary school through to A level, who might be willing to become involved in NP at some, as yet unidentified, level. Ian has also found two possible youth contacts, and Emma has good contacts with the village primary school. From this, we could well have the building blocks for youth engagement.

### Decisions

The Steering Group is asked to:

1. Determine whether and additions or changes should be made to the "Issues" and the "Stakeholders" lists;
2. Decide how, between now and the circulation of our agenda for January 5<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Steering Group will prepare a draft of vision, objectives and policy outlines around which consultation events might be programmed, for consideration at that meeting.

Hugh, Sheralyn and Peter

November 29<sup>th</sup> 2021

<b>Report Section 2 Introduction to Semington</b>
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**2.1 Semington**

*“Under elms near Semington the threshing-machine boomed, its unchanging note mingled with a hiss at the addition of each sheaf. Otherwise the earth was the rooks’, heaven was the larks’, and I rode easily on along the good level road somewhere in between the two”.*<sup>1</sup>

Semington is a *large village*<sup>2</sup> within the Melksham Community Area and lies between Melksham and Trowbridge in the heart of West Wiltshire. The parish comprises Semington village and the settlements of Little Marsh and Littleton with other houses and farms dotted across the area. The village High Street used to be the route of the A350 but is now a no-through road except for cyclists, buses and emergency vehicles. The village is surrounded by low intensity agricultural land, mainly on flood plains and mostly set to open pasture. The Kennet & Avon Canal, and Semington Brook are important features of the village and there are many footpaths, bridleways and byways in and around the parish. The village has many active clubs and societies, businesses and farms as well as a busy village hall, active church, popular school and welcoming pub. Semington Parish Council meets monthly and aims to support the life of the community and encourage the ongoing evolution of the character of the village, in line with its published Framework.<sup>3</sup>

**2.2 A Brief History of Semington**

Semington is an old settlement and people have lived here since at least the 12th century. Earlier habitation in the area is indicated by the discovery of Romano-British pottery fragments near Whaddon. The early history of Semington is closely bound up with the ancient manor (and nearby modern parish) of Steeple Ashton and was once part of the Whorwellsdown Hundred. The land belonged to Romsey Abbey prior to the Dissolution when it was acquired by Sir Thomas Seymour who forfeited it to the Crown in 1549 when he was executed for treason. In 1894, Semington and Littleton, together with nearby Whaddon were brought together as a new civil parish, with Whaddon subsequently being transferred to Hilperton parish.

**Illustrate with old maps**

The parish sits in the valley of Semington Brook, which rises on Salisbury Plain and joins the River Avon at Whaddon. The Brook has been the northern boundary of the parish for centuries and formed part of the southern border of the Forests of Chippenham and Melksham that date from 1228. Semington village is surrounded by farmland and its farmhouses date from the 1500s. Melksham Forest covered a 33 square mile area stretching from Calne in the north-east to Semington in the south-west, and during the 13th century, King John hunted in the Forest. The settlements around Melksham were then mainly made up of small farm groupings, and Semington village is still surrounded by farmland with its farmhouses dating from the 1500s. The large open fields in Semington were extensively enclosed by the end of the 16th century and by 1813 only two small open areas remained. The most prominent landowner in Semington after enclosure was the Duke of Somerset when arable farming constituted around 16% of the land. Pasture and meadow primarily for sheep farming, which had been increasing in the area from the late Middle Ages, was the pre-eminent type of farming in Semington itself.

During the Second World War, Semington lay on an important anti-invasion line of defence. An anti-tank trench was dug around the south of the village, starting at Semington Brook to the east and ending at the canal to the west. Concrete bollards and pillboxes were also built and the remains of a few of these are still visible. Evacuees from London arrived to be lodged with local families and go to school. Nearby Melksham camp accommodated both British and American Air Force personnel and aircraft and gliders operated from Keevil airfield. Semington had its own Home Guard unit.

A prominent parish feature is the Kennet and Avon Canal. This was begun in 1794 in order to provide a navigable link between Newbury and Bath. The section from Foxhangers (below Devizes) to Bath, including the construction of a wharf at Semington, was completed by 1804 and the canal was opened throughout its length in 1810. Its main traffic was coal. The Wilts and Berks Canal, completed in 1810, began at a junction with the Kennet and Avon at Semington and was a route to Abingdon via Melksham and Swindon. When the Wilts, Somerset & Weymouth Railway opened in 1848, traffic on the canals began to terminally decline.

<sup>1</sup> Edward Thomas was commissioned to take a bicycle ride from London to the Quantocks, and to write a book about it. The book: *“In Pursuit of Spring”* was published in April 1914. In Chapter VI, after leaving Trowbridge, Thomas passes the Lion and Fiddle at Hilperton and then wrote the passage quoted.

<sup>2</sup> In the Wiltshire Council Core Strategy (p. 43) Large Villages are defined as settlements with a limited range of employment, services and facilities. The Holt Neighbourhood Plan suggests that, typically, a large village will have a combination of a population of 1000 plus, with local employment, a shop, a PO, a primary school, church(es), a village hall, pub(s), a mobile library, reasonable transport links, some leisure and recreational facilities, and developable land.

<sup>3</sup> [semington.org.uk/parish-council/framework-themes](http://semington.org.uk/parish-council/framework-themes)

Although the station on the Devizes to Trowbridge branch line was called Semington Halt, the line of the railway has always been north of the parish. The route was lost in the 1960s Beeching cuts.

**Illustrate with canal photos**

In 2002, a book called *Semington Past and Present* was produced by the Semington History Project Group, and edited by Gabrielle & Doug Firmager. Copies are available from the Post Office in the Village Hall. An extended history of the parish can be found on the Wiltshire Community History pages of the Wiltshire Council website.<sup>4</sup>

### **2.3 The Parish today**

Around one thousand people live, work and go to school in the Parish of Semington. Semington is linked by road and rights of way to the nearby towns of Bradford on Avon to the west, Devizes to the east, Melksham to the north, and Trowbridge to the southwest. These towns are important to Semington as centres of employment, commerce, transport, secondary schooling, further education, health and leisure. Although well connected to these towns, the village is separate, and both geographically and culturally distinct from them all.

**Illustrate with west wilts map**

The character of Semington is actively rural. In and around the parish, there are five working farms and several other agricultural small holdings, with much of the land being used for non-intensive pasture. The village, which lies to the south of the Kennet & Avon canal, was once dominated by the A350 running through its heart, but the opening of a bypass in 2004 provided a welcome respite, and since then the village has been actively rebuilding its rural character. The High Street is increasingly the heart and hub of the village; the place where people gather at the village hall, the pub or around the Christmas tree. The architecture of the High Street, with its attractive blend of old farmworkers' cottages, grander houses and the C18<sup>th</sup> pub, is a key element of the rural character of the village. There are 33 listed buildings in the parish.

Semington is well connected, with the A361 and A350 providing road and rural bus network links to neighbouring towns and further afield. Like many Wiltshire villages, it has multiple rural rights of way. The byway to the west and the old road to the north provide cycle, equestrian and pedestrian access to Trowbridge (via Hilperton) and Melksham respectively. The canal and its towpath also offer pedestrian and cycle access to Trowbridge, Devizes and beyond, as well as to multiple footpaths and minor roads for circular walks and cycle rides.

**Illustrate with village images**

The community of Semington is active, with over 20 clubs and other groups covering a wide range of interests. There are also multiple small businesses, from farms to garages and narrow boat servicing to the small businesses at the Turnpike. A wide range of community institutions including the primary school, the Independent Living Centre, the church, village hall and the Somerset Arms and the crematorium actively support the community and bring in visitors.

The parish is fortunate to have several buildings and structures of significant historical interest, including the 14<sup>th</sup> century St George's church<sup>5</sup>, the Victorian Poor Law workhouse<sup>6</sup> the Brunel aqueduct on the canal, multiple pill boxes and other WW2 relics, Georgian and earlier stone houses, many of which are located in the village. There are others in the surrounding countryside including the 18<sup>th</sup> century Littleton Mill which was burnt down in 1802 during a protest against the introduction of gig and shearing frames. The parish has a number of notable houses built in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The village school began in 1859 but now has modern buildings. The village Hall, built in 1933 and recently refurbished, is at the heart of the village, both geographically and socially.

The relatively light agricultural use of the farmland around Semington, with much of it set to grazing and grass cropping, together with the dew ponds and the water courses of the canal and brook, provide attractive habitats for wild flora and fauna. Deer, foxes, badgers, hares and rabbits are complemented by herons, kingfishers, kites, kestrels, sparrow hawk, ravens and buzzards, pipistrelle bats and great crested newts. Water voles and even otters have been seen in the brook, as well as less welcome mink. The canal is well stocked and draws people from afar to fish, while Semington Brook hosts a wide range of smaller fish and the occasional trout. Wildflowers are found throughout the area and ancient hedgerows are evidenced by the variety of species they host.

There are a number of significant landscape perspectives within the parish. The most prominent lie along the Kennet and Avon in each direction including not only the waterway itself but also the many bridges and buildings

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<sup>4</sup> [history.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/getcom2.php?id=198](http://history.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/getcom2.php?id=198)

<sup>5</sup> [historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1262412](http://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1262412)

<sup>6</sup> [workhouses.org.uk/Melksham/](http://workhouses.org.uk/Melksham/)

and other canal infrastructure. Then there is the Brook as it meanders its way through the parish from Littleton towards the Avon. There are extensive and unencumbered views to the east from the southern end of the High Street across the parish with the iconic Roundway Down in the background. To the east of the village the fields run out towards Hilperton giving open views alongside the canal. The images on the parish council website show all these features.<sup>7</sup>

## **2.4 Housing Development in the Village**

Up to the end of the Second World War, most housing in the village was concentrated along the High Street from its junction with Pound Lane up to the Kennet & Avon canal, and along Church Street. Other significant properties were near the old turnpike where the A361 and the old A350 now cross, and along St George's Road at the workhouse complex. Between 1801 and 1841 the population of the parish increased from 265 to 570 people, although numbers were swelled by the people who moved to the Melksham Union workhouse which had been opened in 1839. The population of the parish was in the range 400 to 500 from the 1841 census to that of 1931. Numbers then gradually increased to 930 in 2011.

**Illustrate with housing layout maps**

Council housing was added along Pound Lane after the war, with the period from the 1960s to the millennium seeing further housing along there and along St George's Road and Church Street. Recent times have seen further building along St George's Road and at the Turnpike. Most of these developments have been small scale, have included affordable housing, and have had the support of the parish council and villagers in response to evidence of housing need. There have also been attempts by property developers to build large numbers of houses outside the village settlement boundary. That these were unsuccessful is a tribute to the determination of villagers to retain influence over what happens to the village.

## **2.5 The Planning Context for Semington**

The Plan has been prepared with regard to the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 as well as guidance set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance 2019.<sup>8</sup>

As well as having regard to national policies and guidance, the Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with policies in the Wiltshire Core Strategy/Local Plan. The Wiltshire Core Strategy was adopted in January 2015. The Core Strategy was prepared containing policies and principles on how the county will develop through to 2026. The situation is changing, however, because Wiltshire Council is currently reviewing the Core Strategy and it will then become the Wiltshire Local Plan. A review is required because the Government encourages local planning authorities to revisit their Local Plans every five years. Wiltshire Council formally consulted on the draft new Local Plan in 2021, and a new Local Plan is expected to be in place in 2023.

The draft plan gives Semington a new build allocation of 25 dwellings in the period 2016 to 2036. At the time of writing, the parish has 52 housing units in the pipeline.

In August 2020 the government published its 'Planning for the Future' White Paper, though none of its recommendations have yet become enshrined in legislation or guidance.

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<sup>7</sup> [semington.org.uk](http://semington.org.uk)

<sup>8</sup> <http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/>



SNPSG Paper 3.4 Updated Budget

<b>Draft Budget 2021/23</b>	<b>To April 2022</b>	<b>To April 2023</b>	<b>To April 2024</b>	<b>Total</b>
Village hall hire	6 x 45 = £270	12 x 45 = £540	6 x 45 = £270	£1,080
Printing etc	20 + 160 = £180			£500
Place studios initial input	£240	0	0	£240
Website Email fees	6 x 5 = £30	12 x 5 = £60	6 x 5 = £30	£120
Maps: parish on line	£72			£72
Task 1				£825
Task 2				£6,050
Task 3				£1,925
Task 4A				£2,750
Task 4B				£525
Task 5				£275
Task 6				£1,650
Task 7				£825
Examining / Referendum				£1,650
Consultant travel				£380
Contingency				£1,800.00
<b>Total</b>				<b>£20,667</b>
<b>Tasks</b>				
Task 1: Project Management				
Task 2: Evidence				
Task 3: Consultation Activities				
Task 4A: Draft Plan				
Task 4B: Desktop Publishing of Regulation 14 Plan				
Task 5: Regulation 14 Support				
Task 6: Post Regulation 14				
Task 7: Preparation of Submission Documents				