

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

20 April 2010

Subject: **The Next Steps in Developing the Wiltshire Core Strategy**

Cabinet member: **Councillor John Brady –
Economic Development, Planning and Housing**

Key Decision: **No**

Executive Summary

This report sets out the next steps in the preparation of a draft Core Strategy for Wiltshire following the consultation undertaken late 2009 on 'Wiltshire 2026 - Planning for Wiltshire's Future', which generated a good response. It recommends that the responses are reported to the Community Area Boards (excluding south Wiltshire) during the May/June cycle of meetings and that further public consultation is undertaken to identify the best option for strategic site(s) at Chippenham. It also considers that issues surrounding proposals at the west of Swindon should be considered through a joint working party with Swindon Borough Council.

It is important that timely progress continues to be made in preparing a Core Strategy for Wiltshire in order to ensure that a sound framework is in place to clarify where, when and how new growth should be accommodated. The timetable for the draft Core Strategy needs to be reviewed in response to the Wiltshire 2026 consultation and further consultation in developing the draft Core Strategy should be targeted to ensure that it is effective and can be undertaken in an efficient way.

Proposal

That Cabinet:

- a) notes the overall outcome of the Wiltshire 2026 consultation exercise and approves feedback on the consultation responses to each Community Area Board (outside of south Wiltshire) during the forthcoming May/June 2010 cycle of meetings;
- b) approves that a further public consultation exercise be undertaken on the future development options for Chippenham;
- c) approves the establishment and operation of a joint working party with Swindon Borough Council to consider and advise on issues relating to the west of Swindon and other trans-boundary issues in accordance

with details to be agreed between the Service Director for Economy and Enterprise (with membership being agreed in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Housing) and Swindon Borough Council subject to prior approval by the Head of Legal Services (Wiltshire Council); and

- d) authorises the Service Director for Economy and Enterprise, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, to review and update the timetable for the Wiltshire Core Strategy and make this available on the Council's website at the earliest opportunity.

Reason for Proposal

To ensure that progress continues to be made on the preparation of an up to date planning policy framework for Wiltshire in line with the Council's statutory requirements.

Alistair Cunningham
Service Director, Economy and Enterprise

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

20 April 2010

Subject: The Next Steps in Developing the Wiltshire Core Strategy

Cabinet member: Councillor John Brady – Economic Development, Planning and Housing

Key Decision: No

Purpose of Report

1. To:
 - (i) Inform Cabinet of the overall outcome of the Wiltshire 2026 consultation exercise and seek approval for feedback on the consultation responses to be provided to each Community Area Board (outside of south Wiltshire) during the forthcoming May/June 2010 cycle of meetings;
 - (ii) Seek approval to undertake a further public consultation exercise on the future development options for Chippenham and establish a joint working party with Swindon Borough Council to consider issues relating to the west of Swindon; and
 - (iii) Seek approval to review the Core Strategy timetable and delegate authority to the Service Director for Economy and Enterprise, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, to make this available on the Council's website at the earliest opportunity.

Background

2. Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Council is required to prepare a Local Development Framework (LDF) for its area. Core Strategies are the principal Development Plan Documents in the LDF setting out a long term vision for the area and providing strategic policies and proposals to deliver the vision.
3. On 20 October 2009, the Cabinet approved 'Wiltshire 2026 - Planning for the Wiltshire's Future' for the purposes of public consultation. This document was an important step in the preparation of a Wiltshire-wide Core Strategy. It brought together the work undertaken by the former Wiltshire district councils and suggested how the employment and housing needs of north, west and east Wiltshire might be met in the period up to 2026. The document set out the Council's thinking based on the evidence

collected at that point in time and provided the opportunity for local communities to consider whether that understanding was right.

4. A separate core strategy for South Wiltshire, corresponding to the former Salisbury district area, has been prepared to address the pressing need for additional housing land in that area. This South Wiltshire Core Strategy is currently undergoing its examination before an independent planning inspector. It is anticipated that the spatially distinctive elements of the South Wiltshire Core Strategy will be incorporated into the Wiltshire-wide Core Strategy.
5. The public consultation on Wiltshire 2026 ran from 30 October until 31 December 2009, although responses received after the closing date have also been taken into consideration.

Main Considerations for the Council

Overall Consultation Response

6. Overall the consultation was successful with formal written responses received from some 800 individuals and organisations, collectively comprising several thousand separate points. Significant numbers of comments were also made through the exhibitions and workshops. The consultation has provided further evidence that will enable the Council to develop its understanding of the issues facing Wiltshire's communities. Although the responses are currently being analysed in detail, from the initial analysis it is clear that there are no fundamental issues to the proposals presented with the exception of the strategic site options at Chippenham and west of Swindon.
7. It is proposed that an overview of the responses received in relation to each community area (outside of south Wiltshire) should be presented to each Community Area Board during the cycle of meetings beginning in May 2010.

Chippenham

8. From the consultation response we have a better understanding of the issues surrounding the potential growth of Chippenham. While there was considerable opposition to the level of development proposed for the town, new evidence was also submitted to suggest that development should take place to the south of the town. Many of the respondents considered that the alternative options, particularly the option of a southern expansion of the town, are comparable to, if not better than the preferred option, particularly in terms of its overall sustainability and viability. In order to identify the best option for a strategic site(s) at Chippenham it is proposed that a further consultation, incorporating a finer grain analysis, be undertaken within the Chippenham area. It is intended that the detail of this consultation will be brought to Cabinet for approval in early summer.

West of Swindon

9. For the west of Swindon, Wiltshire 2026 built upon an earlier targeted consultation undertaken in February 2009 (agreed to be undertaken by the Implementation Executive, 10 December 2008). As a result of these two stages of consultation, the Council has a sound understanding of the issues surrounding the growth of Swindon in Wiltshire and the substantive opposition to the development of 3,000 additional dwellings.
10. Notwithstanding the future status of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), there is still uncertainty as to whether the area of search at west of Swindon will form part of the RSS when (and if) it is finally published. The Government Office for the South West has commissioned additional Sustainability Appraisal work to test the reasonable alternatives for the areas of search, including west of Swindon, within the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the RSS. The outcome of this work is still not known and it is unclear whether there will be the opportunity to comment on the findings.
11. In light of the above, it is not necessary to undertake a further round of public consultation in developing proposals for the draft Core Strategy in relation to the west of Swindon. Instead, it is recommended that a working party between Wiltshire Council Councillors (possibly of the Wootton Bassett and Cricklade Community Area Board and Councillors from Swindon Borough Council, supported by officers, is established in order to consider these and other trans-boundary issues further. It is intended that the working party would operate on an informal basis having a technical and advisory role only. This form of joint working is highly encouraged particularly in terms of achieving outcomes and efficient use of resources. The more detailed arrangements would be agreed between the authorities by way of delegated authority to the Service Director for Economy and Enterprise in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning and Housing. These details will be subject to approval by the Head of Legal Services (Wiltshire Council).

Core Strategy Timetable

12. The Wiltshire 2026 consultation document outlined a vision for Wiltshire together with strategic policy objectives, and indicated the possible distribution of housing and employment sites. Once the consultation response and further evidence has been taken into account, the next stage in preparing the draft Core Strategy process is the preparation of draft strategic policies, which will ensure the implementation of the objectives.
13. The October Cabinet report anticipated that a further round of public consultation would take place in spring 2010 to focus on strategic policies for the draft Core Strategy. However, in light of the substantive evidence gathered through the consultation response (and in addition to the proposed consultation in paragraph 8) it is proposed to undertake targeted consultation, working with key stakeholders, including Town and Parish

Councils. This will be a more appropriate mechanism for testing draft policies and further proposals than undertaking a further wholesale public consultation exercise that would contribute towards consultation fatigue and be an inefficient use of resources.

14. Taking into account the proposal to undertake further consultation at Chippenham and the substantive response to the consultation requiring analysis, the programme for the Wiltshire Core Strategy needs to be reviewed in consultation with the Government Office for the South West. Government policy requires any slippage to the agreed timetable (i.e. as set out within the Council's Local Development Scheme) for core strategy preparation to be publicised. The timetable is currently being updated. As such, it is proposed that delegated authority is given to the Service Director for Economy and Enterprise, in consultation with the Cabinet Member, to make this available on the Council's website at the earliest opportunity.
15. In addition, consideration will need to be given to the programme to refresh Wiltshire's Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) that is currently being developed. Given the relationship of the Core Strategy and the SCS, developing the draft Core Strategy and 'refreshed' SCS together will enable us to ensure that the key spatial planning objectives for the area continue to be aligned with the priorities identified in the SCS. Clearly this needs to be tempered with the requirement for the Core Strategy to be in accordance with Government policy.
16. It is anticipated that we will be able to bring a draft of the Core Strategy to Cabinet in early 2011. More detail of the revised timetable will be circulated to all Councillors via a briefing note and published on the Council's website during May.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

17. The Core Strategy will have major implications for the physical, economic and social environment of Wiltshire. To ensure that it fully incorporates sustainability principles, it is being prepared in tandem with a Sustainability Appraisal, as well as a Habitats Regulations Assessment.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

18. The Core Strategy seeks to take account of the needs of all the members of the Wiltshire community. A full Equalities Impact Assessment will be prepared and accompany the Core Strategy when it is submitted for examination.

Options and Risk Assessment

19. The Council has a statutory duty to prepare a Core Strategy. The options concern the level of public consultation to be applied to the further stages of the process. It is suggested that the course set out in this paper best fits the need to continue to make progress with the preparation of the Core

Strategy, while seeking to take account of the need to involve the Wiltshire community and statutory consultees.

20. It is particularly important the progress continues to be made with the Wiltshire Core Strategy. New housing land needs to be identified in order to ensure that an appropriate amount of housing supply is available, and economic growth is supported. The Core Strategy will provide a clear strategy for where, how and when new housing should be provided. Without a supply of suitable land, Wiltshire is vulnerable (particularly at Chippenham) from speculative applications from developers and at risk of the appeal process and associated costs. Risks include development which undermines the Council's strategic vision (emerging by way of the Core Strategy). Such development may not provide key infrastructure and/or fall below expectations of sustainability.

Financial Implications

21. The cost of preparing the additional consultation document and the arrangements for the additional consultation will be met from existing and agreed budgets. Failure to prepare a Core Strategy may result in a substantial funding gap in the provision of future schools, roads, open space and other infrastructure.

Legal Implications

22. The preparation of a Core Strategy in accordance with the Council's Local Development Scheme (including the time scales within it) is a statutory duty. The public and targeted consultation proposed is being designed in accordance with best practice, including the Council's own recent experience, and with advice received from the Government Office for the South West. The Secretary of State has broad powers of intervention where local planning authorities fail to comply with statutory duties in relation to the LDF.
23. Joint-working arrangements with Swindon Borough Council by way of a party operating on an advisory basis only do not need to be formally constituted pursuant to a statutory framework, although a memorandum of understanding should be agreed between the authorities, the details of which should first be approved by the Head of Legal Services of Wiltshire Council.

Conclusions

24. There has been a good response to the Wiltshire 2026 consultation document. It is proposed that the responses for each Community Area (excluding south Wiltshire) are reported to their respective Community Area Boards during the May/June cycle. In addition, the consultation has indicated the need to undertake further public consultation within the Chippenham area to identify the best option for strategic site(s) at the town. Although proposals at the west of Swindon remain contentious further consultation is not considered appropriate at this stage, instead it is

proposed that the issues surrounding these should be considered through a joint working party with Swindon Borough Council.

25. In light of the substantial consultation response and proposal to undertaken further consultation in the Chippenham area the timetable for the Core Strategy should be reviewed. However, to minimise the delay in developing a Core Strategy for Wiltshire, further consultation in developing the draft Core Strategy should be targeted to ensure that it is effective and can be undertaken in an efficient way.

Alistair Cunningham
Service Director, Economy and Enterprise

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Background Papers

Responses received to the Wiltshire 2026 consultation exercise