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Report

Subject : Local Development Framework – ‘Our Place in the Future’
(Preferred Options stage 2) consultation

Report to : The Cabinet

Date : Tuesday 15 July 2008

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Cabinet Member for Planning: Councillor Clegg

Report Summary:

To inform councillors of the additional consultation period that for the preferred options document for the Core Strategy and to seek authority to commence this additional round of public consultation as resolved by full council at its meeting in April. Also to seek a revised timetable for submission of the Core Strategy as necessitated by the recent change in the planning regulations.

Background

The full Council have asked the Forward Planning Team to carry out an additional stage of consultation on the LDF Core Strategy, Preferred Options. The underlying reasons were twofold:

1. the level of public response to the level and location of growth being consulted on.
2. The need to carry out an Appropriate Assessment to inform the options.

The new regulations impact on the additional consultation process. One stage of consultation has been removed but we now have to consult for 6 weeks prior to submission to the Secretary of State whereas under the old regulations consultation took place immediately after submission. This basically, requires us to consult twice before submission, which in itself must be before the abolition of the Council in April 2009 and has a significant effect on the timetable for production of the submission draft. Nevertheless we have a standing Full Council resolution and a high level of public expectation that we will consult in a meaningful way prior to producing the Submission Draft

Implications of the Publication of New Regulations

Under the old regulations it had been agreed at the Full Council meeting to carry out a totally new round of consultation (a second Preferred Options), prior to submission. The new regulations now require further consultation on the submission draft by the Council **prior** to submission. This round of consultation does not provide the meaningful opportunity for the public to influence the content of the policies however. Representations on the draft are merely summarised and forwarded to the Secretary of State for consideration. The Council only has the option of making very minor changes to its proposals or, if it appears that the document is unsound, not proceeding with it.



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Because of the local decision, this means that the Council is committed to two further rounds of consultation, prior to the end of March. This deadline is set by the Administration of the Council wanting to submit the Core Strategy prior to abolition of the Council. To carry out the two rounds of consultation in the timeframe indicated, given the depleted resources of the team, is a very stern challenge. The amount of consultation events and the level of Parish Councils to demand officer attendance at their meetings needs to be carefully managed. We need to facilitate a 'self service' approach to discussions within the community by ensuring we provide the information to allow them to debate the issues in an informed manner.

What can we realistically achieve?

Given the time constraints, the sheer amount of data to analyse, the fact that two team members have left and the very high levels of public expectation which have been raised, we need to scale our ambition back to achievable levels. We no longer consider it possible to produce another comprehensive version of the Core Strategy Preferred Options. Indeed we feel it would be a waste of valuable resource to do so as it was only a small number of key issues which caused the majority of the representations. These issues were, unsurprisingly, based around the level and location of housing, the settlement strategy, the growth in jobs and to a lesser extent the retail future of Salisbury and Amesbury. The majority of the options were not controversial and brokered very strong support. For example the nature conservation policies. Given the level of support, it is proposed to focus our dwindling resources on the issues that clearly commanded the most public disquiet.

A Revised Approach

Instead of producing a document which repeats all of the content of the previous Preferred Options document (known as the Black Book), bearing in mind that about 80% met with strong support, it is proposed that the information be boiled down to focus clearly on the key issues which were those of most concern to stakeholders. Therefore it is proposed to consult on a simple magazine style document which incorporates the following information

Content of New Document

1. Foreword

By the portfolio Holder, setting the context, and highlighting key changes (such as deletion of the new settlement) up front.

2. Introduction

Explaining background, how to use the document and how to comment, including how we have used evidence and previous consultation to identify those issues around which there is general agreement and those which are still in need of further debate. The introduction will also refer the Appropriate assessment and explain where to find the document and summary and how to comment on it. This section will also set out how this consultation fits into the LDF process and indicate future stages.

3. The issues, problems and challenges we have identified affecting Salisbury and south Wiltshire.

We will use the spatial vision and objectives as the format under which to tackle the issues the evidence indicates need to be tackled in Salisbury. The challenges we have previously identified have met with very strong agreement as those needing action (agreeing the action has often proved the difficult part). Where our previous proposals are strongly supported, (for example nature conservation options), we will say so in the new magazine and not go over them again in detail. However we will refer people to the Black Book and background information so they may comment further should they so wish and make it clear that we will have regard to these representations in producing the submission draft. We will focus on the very contentious areas, such as the level and volume of new housing. These spatial objectives will group the issues under the following headings:

(a) A place with a sustainable future, which has made great progress in addressing the causes of climate change

This will need a co-ordinated approach which underpins all of our land-use decisions. It will encompass the regulation of the location of new development, planning for the provision of meaningful choice in transport modes, the construction of truly sustainable new buildings, encouragement of retro-fitting of energy saving measures to our existing building stock, the use of renewable energy and doing what we can to minimise waste. ***This has been very***

strongly supported in the previous two rounds of consultation and does not need to be re-examined in too much detail in the next round

(b) Where south Wiltshire has agreed the role and functions of its settlements, and is comfortable with how places are evolving and are related to each other.

We need to define the role which each of our settlements provides for our communities and the roles they would wish them to fulfil in the future. We also need to define the functional relationship between settlements and communities to ensure growth is located in sustainable locations which affords the maximum benefit for housing, jobs and access to services. ***This is a very contentious area that the new document will focus on***

(c) Where everyone has access to a decent, affordable home

We will need to find 12,400 new homes in south Wiltshire to meet demand up to 2026. This will include ensuring that there is an appropriate mix of types, sizes and tenures, particularly to address affordable housing needs. This entails some very tough decisions to be taken, but the key strategic areas of growth is an issue that will not be avoided and will be set out and allocated in the Core Strategy, where the tough decisions should rightfully be taken. ***This is a very contentious area that the new document should focus on***

(d) The economy is thriving, providing a range of job opportunities to match a growing population and where traditionally strong sectors, such as scientific research and development, continue to be world leaders

This will entail the allocation of enough employment land to deliver 14,000 new jobs up to 2026. We will need to plan for a range of employment types and space requirements and make decisions on the sustainability credentials of potential sites. There is a need to nurture growth sectors specific to south Wiltshire such as the work at Porton Down and Boscombe Down, as well help maintain and develop the rural economy. ***This is quite a contentious area, especially concerning the location of new employment accommodation, that the new document should focus on***

(e) Where ongoing liaison through the Community Strategy tells us that people feel much safer and have good access to a range of services and leisure opportunities

We need to ensure that we can contribute to safety by ensuring new developments are designed to minimise crime and steps are taken to make existing settlements feel safer. We also need to try and address hidden pockets of deprivation and social exclusion, especially access to essential services in the rural areas, by carefully planning where services are provided and safeguarded. We should also ensure that growth is located to provide access to range of sport, leisure and cultural activities. ***This has been supported in the previous two rounds of consultation and does not need to be re-examined in too much detail in the next round***

(f) Where we have maintained and in places enhanced our natural environment and improved managed access for the benefit of all

This represents a real challenge to balance the sustainable growth that we are seeking regarding housing, jobs and services, while ensuring we don't compromise what respondents consider our greatest asset. This will need strong policies which robustly manage and protect the environment so that change is facilitated in a manner which does not compromise the most highly valued asset. ***This has been supported in the previous two rounds of consultation and does not need to be re-examined in too much detail in the next round***

(g) Where our heritage assets have been shown off to their full potential such as Stonehenge and Salisbury Market Place, and we can proudly hand on our built heritage in a better state than when we inherited it

This will require both a proactive response to enhance some of our heritage assets, such as Stonehenge and a regulatory approach which seeks to carefully control changes to our historic built environments to ensure their quality is not eroded. ***This has been supported in the previous two rounds of consultation and does not need to be re-examined in too much detail in the next round***

(h) Where tourism is a major sector of our economy, with much higher visitor numbers and longer stays in the area, facilitated by upgraded and improved visitor facilities and greater choice of accommodation

We need to plan carefully to ensure that we can attract greater numbers of tourists to make a growing contribution to the economy of south Wiltshire. There is a need to allocate new sites

for accommodation of all kinds, but especially at the upper end of the market, together with improved quality of visitor attractions, especially at Stonehenge. We need strategic policies which address the conflict we have witnessed in our City and some of our towns, between the growth of the night-time economy and the concerns of residents over the amount of anti-social behaviour. ***This has been supported in the previous two rounds of consultation and does not need to be re-examined in too much detail in the next round***

(i) Salisbury's place as a retail centre that offers something different from the mainstream has been enhanced and cemented

It is clear that Salisbury has an important role as a retail centre and that is based on the balance it provides between supplying the everyday needs of people and the niche or specialist retailing experience for which it has a good reputation. Our evidence and consultation feedback shows that it needs to develop in a sensitive manner to attract more 'high street' names while also protecting its unique character. Policies will be framed which will allow the evolution and growth of the retail sector in a manner which strikes this balance. We will also develop policies which aim to provide a good range of retail choice in convenient locations throughout south Wiltshire. ***This is quite a contentious area, where more clarity and agreement from third parties should be sought.***

(j) Where developers accept a transparent and equitable means of making a contribution to a "Community Chest" which helps them pay their fair share for the additional demands their development will place on infrastructure and services.

We will develop policies based on a tariff system which will represent a fair and equitable means of ensuring that developers make a reasonable contribution to the added pressure that their development may place on local services and infrastructure. This will be developed in line with latest government guidance. ***This has been supported in the previous two rounds of consultation and does not need to be re-examined in too much detail in the next round***

(k) Where high quality design is expected and delivered as a matter of course and new buildings which complement the south Wiltshire vernacular traditions enhance the visual appeal of the district.

A proactive policy framework will be put in place which will ensure a consistent delivery of high quality designed buildings through the planning process, based on 'frontloading' by publishing advice and giving help to prospective applicants through to the robust scrutiny of planning applications. ***This has been very strongly supported in the previous two rounds of consultation and does not need to be re-examined in too much detail in the next round***

(l) A place where challenges such as flood risk, waste and reducing pollution and providing transport choices have been tackled head-on and no longer represent a major difficulty for the area

We will ensure that a planning policy framework is in place which delivers the essential infrastructure improvements and environmental mitigation measure necessary to keep pace with the levels of growth. ***General support but transport is very contentious and needs to be further debated.***

Format

A slim 10 to 20 page magazine will be sent to every household, outlining how to get involved, exhibition dates and majoring on the key unresolved issues, such as the new settlement. It will be clearly cross-referenced to the evidence base and outcome of previous consultation to indicate why we are giving some issues a greater priority than others. It will be headlined under the branding of 'Our Place in the Future'

Timetable

A draft timetable for delivering the new Core Strategy arrangements, as requested by full Council, is included as Appendix 1.

Assessment of Current Consultation and Soundness.

It is important to emphasise that the consultation just closed has been very successful indeed. While we did consult on a number of radical options, which drew a pretty hostile reception, the fact is that communities did find out about them and had a good opportunity to comment. To underline this, we have had in excess of 2000 representations from separate individuals, as

compared to Plymouth City Council (often cited as an exemplar of sound process) who at the same stage received only 171 representations, Crawley, some 232, and Tanbridge some 53.

While we will learn lessons and use additional techniques, it is important to acknowledge the effectiveness of the process as based on the techniques set out in the adopted Statement of Community Involvement.

Revision to Local Development Scheme

This is the project plan which sets out which parts of the LDF are to be produced by when. The resolution of the full Council is to depart from this by some 6 months. We need to ensure that we make it clear that the LDS has been amended and it is suggested that this is publicised in the press and also the household magazine (see below). A 6 month delay in our LDS has been agreed with the Government Office South West, who will support the adoption of a Core Strategy for South Wiltshire, prior to work on one for the whole of Wiltshire.

Consultation Techniques

All of the techniques used in the previous two rounds will be repeated. They have proved very successful and have produced results which are a national exemplar.

In addition to all of the previous techniques, it is proposed that additional measures are taken to try and address some of the specific concerns that have been raised, especially at full Council

1. Householders' Magazine

Should Cabinet approve the new timetable, the new style magazine consultation document will be sent to all households in the District, clearly setting out the new timetable, list of events, key issues and access channels from which they may find out more information.

2. Members' LDF eBulletin

A monthly email to all Members, informing them of progress and updating them on key events and conclusions as they unfold.

3. Seminar Briefings

Once we have drawn meaningful conclusions from a proper analysis of the present consultation process, we propose a series of update seminars for key groups in the City Hall. There would be a 'heads up' in advance of the commencement of the consultation proper and would comprise three sessions, one for all elected Members, one for Parish and Town Council representatives and a final open one for anyone to attend. They would give early information on such issues as the (potential) removal of the Firsdown and Winterslow proposals.

We envisage using the City Hall main auditorium, at which point we would also hand out packs to attendees, especially Parish Councils, containing posters and flyers to help them spread the word about the forthcoming consultation.

4. Community Forum

We propose to hold a series of round-table discussions, with local members and Parish Councils about the issues they see as the most important within their community plan area and to discuss the emerging preferred options for that area. Given current staff shortages, external facilitation will be required for these events.

5. Encouraging Community Discussions

While resources will not allow officers to attend every parish or stakeholder meeting across the District, these should be strongly encouraged. It is proposed to produce information packs with publicity material that Parishes and other interest groups will be provided with free of charge to publicise their events. The information packs will contain a simple summary of the proposals for the particular community area, and will, importantly, define the parameters within which the process must be considered. We must try and ensure that we are not writing blank cheques for communities or raising the expectation that they can dictate that no growth ever occurs in their areas. Because of the staff shortages we must encourage '**self-service**' in Parish Council meetings, as we will not have the resources for officers to attend on request as previously.

Post-Consultation

A period of reflection will be required to analyse the responses and to revise the document. The revised version will be the Submission Draft, which under the new regulations will need to be consulted on prior to submission of the document to the Secretary of State.

Cabinet Debate and Full Council

Cabinet, will see the text of the new consultation document as an appendix to this report and are asked to approve it for consultation. Following the consultation Cabinet will have their opportunity to have a full debate on the proposals in the submission draft, if the revisions to the timetable are accepted, in early December. After this debate there will be a further period in order to allow officers to make any revisions requested by Cabinet and produce the final Submission Draft for consideration by full council before the final round of consultation. The draft timetable envisages that this document will be the subject of further public consultation in the New Year, prior to its submission to the Secretary of State in March.

Recommendations:

- (1) That Cabinet authorises the 'Our Place in the Future' magazine for public consultation for a period 8 weeks commencing on 1st September 2008. A report will be brought back to Cabinet in due course outlining the outcomes of the consultation.
- (2) That cabinet accepts the revised timetable highlighted as Appendix 1, as a pragmatic response to the new planning regulations while meeting the Corporate priority of submitting a Core Strategy for Salisbury prior to abolition of the Council.

Background Papers:

Topic papers and Supplementary Topic Papers on the following subjects:

Agriculture	Infrastructure
Biodiversity	Planning obligations
Conservation	Pollution and waste management
Delivery and implementation	Retail
Design	Settlement strategy
Flooding	Supporting communities
Housing	The economy
Tourism and leisure	Transport

Vision for Salisbury - Area development framework, final report April 2007.

Statement of Community Involvement, adopted December 2006.

Wiltshire compact, Code of Practice on Communication and Consultation, September 2005.

Wiltshire compact, Code of Practice on Equality and Diversity, September 2005.

Salisbury District Council, Communications Strategy 2004 – 2007.

Salisbury and South Wiltshire - Our Place in the Future (consultation booklet)

Salisbury and South Wiltshire – Our Place in the Future (questionnaire)

Our Place in the Future – Interim Sustainability Statement

Our Place in the Future – Interim Appropriate Assessment

Salisbury and South Wiltshire, Our place in the Future. Results of consultation

Core Strategy preferred options. A plan for Salisbury and south Wiltshire 2006-2026

Salisbury District Council. Local Development Scheme adopted January 2007

Salisbury District Council. Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

Implications:

Legal: None

Financial: The cost of the additional consultation required by full Council, together with consultation on the submission draft, will be outside the limits of current budgets by approximately £55,000, however this sum can be funded as a one-off through the use of the LABGI (Local Authority Business Growth Incentive) scheme.

Personnel: None

Environmental: these considerations are at the heart of the development of a set of new planning policies

Human Rights: None at this stage

Council's Core values: Excellent Service; Fairness and Equality; open, learning Council and a willing partner; communicating with the public; supporting the disadvantaged.

Consultation Undertaken: This report is seeking to approve the document for public consultation.

Parish Affected: All

Appendix 1 - Revised timetable for delivery of the Core Strategy

Appendix 2 - Schedule of consultation

Appendix 3 - Text of new consultation document

Appendix 4 – Preferred Option Output Report – will be available via web link