



## Cabinet

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### SUMMARY

Cllr Noeken Cabinet Member for Planning & Economic Development

#### REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTH WEST 2006-2026: POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR THE REGION

This report outlines the context for strategic planning in the South West region as set out in the Consultation Report prepared by the South West Regional Assembly. It also examines the three alternative development strategies that will provide the basis for the core development strategy. The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) is a new type of plan that is being introduced by the Government as part of the reform to the planning system introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

At this stage the Council is not required to choose a preferred strategy, although it may do so, but rather to provide comment on how these three different strategic approaches, or elements of them, would be of most benefit to the region over the next twenty years.

The following matters are discussed in the report: to Cabinet::

- The current Regional Planning Guidance 10 (RPG10);
- The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS);
- The Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS) – a regional context for the RSS;
- The main development issues facing the region;
- Guiding change and development over the next twenty years;
- Possible Development Strategies for dealing with future growth and change in the South West;
- Possible Development Strategy 1: No change in existing strategy – continue with RPG10;
- Possible Development Strategy 2: Strengthen RPG10 and concentrate more growth on a smaller number of Principle Urban Areas and immediate catchments;
- Possible Development Strategy 3: Differential approach recognizing the varying needs and potential of different parts of the region; and
- Planning implications of the three possible development strategies for Salisbury District Council.

It is recommended that the consultation report “Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006-2026 be noted and that the comments set out in Section 5 of this report should form the basis of a response to South West Regional Assembly.

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# REPORT

Planning & Econ Dev. Portfolio Holder - Cllr. J Noeken

## **REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTH WEST 2006-2026: POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR THE REGION**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION REPORT**

#### **1. Background**

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) is a new type of plan that is being introduced by the Government as part of the reform to the planning system introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. In some instances the RSS will address sub regional issues at County level.

The Regional Assembly has reached the stage of identifying different strategic development options for delivering the vision for the region.

The RSS will not be identifying specific sites as suitable for development, however, it will establish criteria for the distribution of significant housing, business, retail and leisure uses.

#### **2. The current Regional Planning Guidance 10 (RPG10)**

The current regional plan, Regional Planning Guidance 10 (RPG10) published in September 2001, sets the regional planning guidance for the South West to 2016.

Although its policies have begun to take effect, it is considered to be in need of review and revision. This is not only due to the reforms to the planning system as discussed below, but also the need to take account of changes in the region. These include an update of development estimates to support the region's economy and housing supply.

The Regional Assembly has engaged independent consultants to assess the impact of RPG 10 and to consider if its policies fulfil the new requirements relating to spatial planning. The assessment has concluded that RPG 10 was reasonably specific in some of its policies, notably those dealing with housing distribution elements of its spatial strategy, but not in other respects such as policies dealing with environmental protection, which were considered too general to be effective.

Based on its findings, the Regional Assembly is of the opinion that the RPG 10 core spatial strategy of focusing most new development in 11 Principal Urban Areas (PUAs) and other large centres, with development elsewhere just meeting local needs, is broadly correct. However, it is considered that the RSS needs to be more positive, explicit and prescriptive on a smaller number of matters that need a strategic view.

#### **3. The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).**

The South West Regional Spatial Strategy will be a statutory development plan that sits between national and local policy. It will provide a broad development strategy for the region and its major settlements. It will also provide the strategic planning context for Local Development Frameworks (such as that prepared by Salisbury District Council).

The current Consultation Document is confined to that part of the RSS that deals with the overall distribution of development in the region.

**a) The Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS) – a regional context for the RSS;**

The purpose of the IRS for the South West is to provide an ‘umbrella’ for a number of more specific regional strategies, each of which will contribute to achieving the high level aims and priorities agreed. It sits alongside the Regional Sustainable Development Framework that ensures coordinated support for economic, social and environmental aims. The RSS will be one of the main ‘delivery mechanisms’ for the IRS.

**b) The main development issues facing the region;**

The population in the southwest region has been growing for the last 30 years. There is no indication that this trend will cease during the period of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Individual choice of residential type and location in the region still favours low density development in more rural locations. A key challenge for the RSS and for private developers is to find ways of transforming urban living environments, to make urban living a more acceptable choice for a larger proportion of residents in the future.

The region has a major ‘affordability’ problem – in all cases housing needs to relate to economic prosperity and likely demographic change.

Under all of the three possible development strategies, demands arising from growth trends will be largely catered for by new development in the larger towns and cities in the region.

**c) Guiding change and development over the next twenty years;**

The ultimate strategic outcome for the region must be to deliver sustainable development – a better quality of life for today and tomorrow. The core development strategy, in supporting the IRS aims, should achieve economic prosperity and benefits to the community. New development should be sustainable, minimising waste and pollution. Residents should have an improved quality of life and basic requirements, such as affordable homes.

There should be a reduction in the need to travel, high quality design and improved urban environments. Rural communities should be protected from unnecessary development, where appropriate.

**4. Possible Development Strategies for dealing with future growth and change in the South West:**

**a) Possible Development Strategy 1: No change in existing strategy – continue with RPG10;**

- Most new development at the eleven Principal Urban Area (PUAs): Bath, Bristol, Weston-super-Mare, Bournemouth/Poole, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Swindon, Exeter, Plymouth, Torbay and Taunton. Currently about 42% of the region’s population lives in the PUAs. Over 50% of new physical development will happen at these centres under this strategy option;
- Some growth proposed at other designated centres (including Salisbury); and
- In smaller towns and key centres in rural areas, development will be for local needs only.

By the year 2026, under this strategy it is predicted that the pattern of settlement would look very much as it does today.

Sustainable Strengths: High density urban living is resource efficient and provides opportunities for investing in environmental improvements. Economic activity would be likely to be concentrated in the PUAs. Opportunities to access to services should increase.

Sustainable Weaknesses: Pressure on habitats and landscapes close to PUAs – Rural services could be lost and affordable housing not delivered in smaller communities. Deprived areas outside the PUAs may not benefit from economic activity.

**b) Possible Development Strategy 2: Strengthen RPG10 and concentrate more growth on a smaller number of PUAs and immediate catchments;**

- Fewer large urban areas designated as capable of significant new development – investment concentrated in those centres. Focussing on the centres able to accommodate growth and with the greatest economic potential;
- Other PUAs and designated growth centres will be developed but at a lower rate; and
- Some development elsewhere, but minimal, strictly controlled, perhaps affordable housing only.

By the year 2026, under this strategy it is predicted that half of all new development in the South West during the previous twenty years would have taken place at the PUAs with the greatest strategic growth potential.

Sustainable Strengths: Highest development densities – most resource efficient.

Sustainable Weaknesses: More pressure on habitats and landscapes close to main growth centres. Loss of rural services, reduced economic activities outside PUAs. Existing trends in health inequalities between north east and south west of the region could be increased.

**c) Possible Development Strategy 3: Differential approach recognizing the varying needs and potential of different parts of the region.**

- Most growth will remain at the PUAs, with modest growth in other identified significant centres. This strategy recognises the diversity of the region and provides a different strategy emphasis to deliver the IRS and respond to local needs; and
- The important contribution of ‘market’ towns at key locations is recognised whilst not distracting from the role of the major urban areas. This will be carefully controlled through housing allocations to individual Districts and clear locational guidance.

By the year 2026, under this strategy, it is predicted that a considerable proportion of the total growth in the South West region would occur in the north of the region at PUAs. It is also possible that a more decentralised pattern of growth would be likely to develop.

Sustainable Strengths: Recognises differences within the region. More likely to lead to economic activity that matches local market strengths and delivers affordable housing. Should lessen the impact of development on habitats, landscapes and the historic environment. May help to reduce health inequalities between the north east/south west of the region.

Sustainable Weaknesses: Loss of more ‘greenfield’ land and less efficient use of resources. Some increase pollution in rural areas likely. Traffic could increase if ‘self containment’ of settlements not achieved.

**5. Planning implications of the three possible development strategies for Salisbury District Council**

The Regional Assembly will be evaluating the possible development strategies against a number of key tests. These tests include that the RSS should reflect different needs and issues across the region, should be realistic and not depend on pushing people into unpopular locational choices.

The purpose of the consultation report is to obtain views on the approach to development that would best meet the future needs of the South West, its people, its businesses and its environment.

All three strategies, to some degree, concentrate development in Principle Urban Areas, this being the most sustainable way of accommodating the bulk of the region’s growth over the next twenty years. The differences between the strategies appear to come from the variation in population growth in the PUAs and the amount of proposed development for the smaller towns and cities in the region. A development strategy that reflects the different needs and issues across the region, rather than being narrowly focused on a few major growth centres, is more likely to be beneficial to Salisbury District.

It would be highly unrealistic to suggest that Salisbury should aspire to PUA status and local environmental constraints are too severe to allow it, even if it were desirable and feasible. However, the recent Report of the Panel that conducted the Examination in Public into the Draft Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan did recognise that Salisbury had a strategic role and would become more self-contained through further economic growth. What is therefore required is a regional development strategy that allows Salisbury to meet its likely needs over the next 20 year period. A list of these needs is likely to comprise:

- An adequate supply of affordable housing, both in Salisbury and the bigger towns and villages, and the ability to provide local homes for local people in the smaller settlements;
- An adequate supply of ordinary market housing (if a shortage of supply is not to drive up prices even further);
- A reasonable quota of employment land. Without the ability to bring forward new employment land, the local economy could stagnate and go into decline. Some indicators suggest that this is already happening in Salisbury. Some ability to create small-scale employment opportunities in the villages could also contribute to their self sufficiency and sustainability;
- Continuing investment in public infrastructure (such as roads and other services) to support a reasonable level of employment and housing growth;
- The ability to diversify and add to Salisbury's 'offer' as a retail and service centre. This is essential if Salisbury is to remain in any way competitive with nearby, bigger rivals, particularly Southampton, Portsmouth, Bournemouth and Poole. All of these centres have recently completed major regeneration projects and Salisbury would be at a commercial disadvantage if it were not allowed the opportunity to respond. Proposals to redevelop the Central car park or other sites in the city centre could be affected adversely;
- The maintenance of a healthy rural environment, with vibrant and diverse communities. Without an adequate supply of jobs, services and affordable houses, the rural area would become even more the preserve of the better off and elderly. The definition of sustainability needs to encompass smaller local communities, some of which (like Tisbury) have the potential to be highly sustainable. The justification for concentrating the majority of development in PUAs is understood, but this needs to be balanced and should not ignore the needs of the remainder of the region. There must be the danger otherwise that the objective of minimising the growth in car travel would not be met, as more people chose (or were forced) to live in the countryside and drive to work or to access services. Those without cars would be particularly disadvantaged.
- The scope for using Market and Coastal Town Initiative funding, particularly for the settlements of Amesbury and Wilton. Possible Development Strategy No 2 could undermine this, as the regeneration of these local centres and their economic needs would not be recognised as a priority.
- The development of a vision that emphasises the local distinctiveness of Salisbury and informs redevelopment opportunities. The vision will encourage innovation and creativity on the part of the District Council and its economic partners.
- The optimisation of existing linkages between Salisbury and nearby key settlements and the development of existing centres of excellence in the fields of research, science and technology.

The consultation document offers the choice of three alternative development strategies, so the question is which of them best fits the aspirations listed above? In one of the possible strategies, Possible Development Strategy 2, the majority of growth would be concentrated in a small number of Principle Urban Areas and other designated centres (but not Salisbury). Under this development strategy, Salisbury would be likely to be perceived as merely a local service centre for the surrounding District. This strategy would concentrate economic activities in the PUAs and while this would provide for an increase in jobs and health provisions within these areas, Salisbury and the smaller towns and villages in this District could find it difficult to compete and may stagnate. Officers do not believe that this strategy is likely to be acceptable.

Possible Development Strategy 1 (a continuation of RPG10) and Possible Development Strategy 3 (a differential approach) do seem to recognise Salisbury as a local service centre. Possible Development Strategy 3 also recognises the key differences in the size of, and linkages between, towns across the Region. Although most growth in the region would remain in the PUAs, the contribution of smaller towns at key locations is acknowledged in this development strategy, and it would be more likely to lead to economic activity that matches local market strengths. As the Council is currently looking for ways to expand economic activity, this could be the preferred strategy. It is also possible that this is the only strategy where the possible future regeneration of the City Centre would be considered as an important contribution to the wider regional economy.

It is, however, very difficult, on the basis of the information provided, to say whether Strategy 3 would be more desirable from the District's perspective than Strategy 1. It should be noted, for example, that Strategy 3 suggests the need for housing allocations for individual Districts and these could be small and remove any flexibility that the Council might otherwise have. Rather than seeking to make awkward choices between unclear alternatives, it is suggested that the Regional Assembly is advised:

- (a) that Strategy 2 is not supported; and
- (b) on the basis of the information provided in the consultation document, the Council believes that Strategy 3 is likely to have the most favourable consequences for Salisbury District. However, it is not entirely clear that this would be the case. The key message that the Council would wish the Regional Assembly to consider is that the District Council wishes to achieve the planning objectives listed above, which it believes would be in the best interests of both the District and the Region. The Regional Spatial Strategy that emerges from the current consultation exercise should support the Council's aspirations and not have the effect of frustrating needed local development.

## 6. Recommendation

It is recommended that the consultation report "Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006-2026" be noted and that the comments set out in Section 5, above, should form the basis of the response to South West Regional Assembly.

### Background Papers:

Salisbury District Local Plan (June 2003)

### Implications:

- **Financial** : None at this stage
- **Legal** : None at this stage
- **Human Rights** : None at this stage
- **Personnel** : None at this stage
- **Community Safety** : None
- **Council's Core Values** : Excellent service, thriving economy, fairness & equality, open council & willing partner, communicating with the public, supporting the disadvantaged, protecting the environment.
- **Ward(s) Affected** : All.