

Title: Wiltshire Structure Plan 2016 Proposed Modifications / Regional Spatial Strategy Update

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Osborn – Portfolio Holder Planning

Reporting Officer: Mark Russell, Planning Policy Manager

Key Decision: No

Purpose

To approve a District Council response to the contents of the Structure Plan 2016 Proposed Modifications.

To receive an update on the first detailed proposals prepared by Wiltshire County Council for the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Background - Structure Plan

The Strategic Planning Authorities (Wiltshire County Council and Swindon Borough Council) have been developing a limited set of alterations to the existing Structure Plan, to provide strategic planning policy for Wiltshire up until 2016. This document will have a limited life, however, as it is due to be replaced by the Regional Spatial Strategy during 2007.

The District Council agreed a response to the draft deposit Structure Plan 2016 in December 2003. An Examination in Public was held during summer 2004 and the report of the Panel was published in October 2004 which made a series of recommendations for changes to the draft Plan.

The Strategic Planning Authorities have now produced Proposed Modifications for a further period of consultation ending on 7 October 2005. Depending upon the nature of the consultation responses received and the need for any further changes, either a further set of modifications will be produced, or the Strategic Planning Authorities will finally adopt the Structure Plan 2016.

Main Issues

A list of the Proposed Modifications is set out in Appendix 1. At this stage, comments should be restricted to the Proposed Modifications rather than on unaltered parts of the Plan.

Housing Supply

The deposit draft Structure Plan 2016, published in October 2003, proposed that 11,750 dwellings should be built in West Wiltshire between 1996 and 2016. The

Panel recommended in 2004 that the figure should be reduced to 11,500 dwellings and that the figure should be split to indicate how many of those dwellings should be built in Trowbridge. The Proposed Modifications retain the original figure of 11,750 dwellings, split between 5,000 in Trowbridge and 6,750 elsewhere.

The District Council previously objected to the level of housing supply because it implied that sites already allocated for development in the recently adopted District Plan 1st Alteration would have to be deallocated or rephased for release after 2016. This would undermine the Council's objectives of regeneration of the West Wiltshire towns, the vision for Trowbridge as the County town and meeting affordable housing needs within the District.

The Strategic Planning Authorities have rejected the Panel's recommendations for a further reduction of the housing supply on the grounds that one greenfield site, at Station Road, Westbury identified for deallocation or rephasing is required now to complete the western distributor road network, relieving Oldfield Road, Westbury of through traffic. This formed part of the District Council's evidence at the Examination in Public.

However, the overall figure of 11,750 dwellings will still, on the basis of existing housing supply figures, require the District Council to consider deallocations or rephasing of sites in the future.

The situation is complicated by the fact that the Proposed Modifications identify a separate figure for Trowbridge. Due to existing housing commitments, the potential oversupply is now entirely at Trowbridge. This not only undermines the Council's plans for Trowbridge but also appears to be contrary to the Structure Plan development strategy which identifies Trowbridge, together with Chippenham and Salisbury as strategic service centres for smaller scale growth outside of Swindon.

Employment Supply

The deposit draft Structure Plan 2016, published in October 2003, proposed that 140 hectares of employment land should be built in West Wiltshire between 1996 and 2016. The Panel recommended in 2004 that the figure should be increased to 150 hectares and that the figure should be split to indicate how much land should be developed in Trowbridge. The Proposed Modifications accept the higher figure of 150 ha, split between 35 ha in Trowbridge and 115 ha elsewhere.

The District Council previously objected to the level of employment supply because it implied no further employment allocations or permissions between 2003 and 2016. This would undermine the Council's objectives of regenerating and restructuring the local economy to reduce existing outcommuting from West Wiltshire.

Whilst the increase to 150 ha would appear encouraging, in fact this is simply the result of a recalculation of the existing supply and still means no further employment allocations or permissions up until 2016. The District Council's

argument for further strategic land at Trowbridge was rejected and the 35 ha represents existing commitments only.

The Development Strategy

The overall strategy remains much as it did in October 2003. Namely, to concentrate growth at Swindon, with smaller scale growth at Chippenham, Salisbury and Trowbridge, with limited development elsewhere to meet local needs. The District Council supported this strategy, but argued for more clarity as to the specific roles of the three service centres.

The Proposed Modifications include further encouragement for the provision of new employment land to attract new economic activity at the three service centres and particularly at Trowbridge town centre. However, as identified above, the Plan makes no new employment land provision for Trowbridge.

In spite of the proposed housing supply reduction at West Wiltshire, the strategy states that the development of previously developed land for housing should not be inhibited solely on the grounds that the housing supply has been met on other sites. Although references are made to retaining a balance of land uses at settlements, this encouragement for further housing development on land within towns may have implications for the future protection of employment land.

Transport

The Proposed Modifications have deleted the references to safeguarding a route for a Melksham bypass and have replaced this with references to improvement works to the A350 at Melksham, to be identified through further study work.

Following discussion at the Examination in Public, the Proposed Modifications now include an additional reference to improvement works to the A350 at Yarnbrook, to be identified through further study work.

The Proposed Modifications delete references to the A36 Codford-Heytesbury Improvements.

The Key Diagram now identifies the Strategic Planning Authorities' preferred eastern route for the Westbury bypass.

Financial Implications

There are none.

Legal Implications

There are none.

Options

Housing Supply

This Council has consistently argued for a future level of housing at West Wiltshire which reflects existing housing commitments, especially at Trowbridge. The Proposed Modifications fail to meet these objectives and therefore continued objection would be consistent with this Council's previous position.

Employment Supply

This Council has consistently argued for a future level of employment land development at West Wiltshire which reflects existing commitments, but provides for some growth, especially at Trowbridge. In spite of the wording of the Development Strategy, the Proposed Modifications fail to provide for growth at Trowbridge and therefore objection would be consistent with this Council's previous position.

The Development Strategy

This Council has consistently supported the proposed development strategy. However, the actual housing and employment land supply proposed for West Wiltshire is at odds with the strategy. The deallocation of housing sites at Trowbridge and the lack of any new employment allocations in West Wiltshire runs contrary to the objectives of the strategy. The potential loss of existing employment land within settlements to housing developments should be resisted by references in the strategy to protecting needed employment land.

Transport

The references to improving the A350 at Melksham and Yarnbrook are consistent with the aims of the Western Wiltshire Sustainable Transport Strategy which this Council supports. Whilst further studies will be required, this Council should encourage the County Council to bring these forward for full public consultation at the earliest possible occasion.

Other Issues - Regional Spatial Strategy Update

In addition to completing the work on the Structure Plan, which provides planning policy for Wiltshire up to 2016, the Strategic Planning Authorities have also been preparing first detailed proposals for the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), which will provide regional planning policy for Wiltshire up to 2026.

These plan preparation processes are entirely different but similar themes are apparent within each.

Set out in Appendix 2 is the County Council's submission to the South West Regional Assembly regarding proposed District housing levels up to 2026.

The County Council has voiced similar concerns to the District Council in the past regarding the potential over concentration of development in the future Regional Spatial Strategy at Swindon (and other major urban areas) and the potential lack of future investment in the market towns.

Nevertheless, the County Council is proposing a distribution of housing between the Districts and Swindon which will see a long term decrease in the rates of housing provision in West Wiltshire, Kennet and North Wiltshire, a small rise in Salisbury and a large rise at Swindon. For example, 800 units a year in West Wiltshire (2001-2006) declining to 480 units a year (2021-26).

The issue is whether this shift provides sufficient flexibility for West Wiltshire to achieve its housing and other spatial objectives, such as market town regeneration.

On the one hand, the proposed figures do appear to provide for the delivery of the housing supply identified in the District Plan 1st Alteration with some modest provision for new allocations in the longer term, especially at Trowbridge. The proposed level for the District is set at the maximum level identified by the County Council in their modelling work and assumes that inevitably part of the housing demand that would otherwise be satisfied in Bath and the remainder of the ex-Avon area will continue to be provided at West Wiltshire. An additional allowance of 500 dwellings has been made to help address housing affordability problems.

On the other hand, the proposed figures are below the levels based upon ONS migration projections and, perhaps more importantly, do not reflect the levels required to satisfy all of the housing needs identified in this Council's housing needs surveys and assessments.

On balance, the figures appear to be a realistic first draft, set within the climate of increased concentration of development in the future at Swindon, Bristol, etc. and the fact that a generous housing supply alone cannot meet the needs of the more disadvantaged groups in society. The County Council's conclusions on the provision of affordable housing, that continued and enhanced support from Government for social housing providers is imperative, should be supported.

Summary of Proposed Housing Supply Levels

Set out below is a summary of the overall housing supply levels in West Wiltshire, taken from actual completions and policy levels set out in the District Plan 1st Alteration, the Structure Plan 2016 and working drafts for the RSS.

Table 1: Summary of Proposed Housing Supply in West Wiltshire

	Actual supply (April 2004)	District Plan 1 st Alteration (2004)	Structure Plan 2016 (Mods 2005)	Regional Spatial Strategy (SWRA "First cut")	Regional Spatial Strategy (WCC Proposals)

				July 2005	September 2005
Timescale	1991-2004	1991-2011	1996-2016	2006-2026	2006-2026
Policy Figure Completions	8632	About 14000	11750	7087	10500
Average annual completions	664	700	588	354	525

The table shows:

- Actual annual housing completions are close to the target set out in the District Plan 1st Alteration.
- The Structure Plan proposed modifications target will ensure a reduction in the future levels of housing completions.
- The County Council's proposals for the RSS, whilst still requiring a reduction in supply, will provide for a level significantly above the levels identified by the initial Regional Assembly work.

It may appear curious that the Structure Plan proposed modifications level (11,750 dwellings) may require the deallocation or rephasing of allocated sites in the District Plan 1st Alteration, whilst a lower level proposed by the County Council for the RSS (10,500 dwellings) may not. This is because they are based on different timescales and reflects the relatively high levels of housing commitments between 1996 and 2004 which are included within the Structure Plan 2016 figures.

Conclusions

The Wiltshire Structure Plan 2016 will, when adopted, provide strategic planning policy for West Wiltshire for a limited period until the Regional Spatial Strategy is adopted in 2007. Proposed modifications to the development strategy and transport policy sections should be supported but housing and employment levels of supply for West Wiltshire continue to fall short of levels which reflect existing commitments and do not provide for further enhancement of the role of Trowbridge as a strategic service centre.

This Council has, together with the County Council and other District authorities, previously objected to Regional Spatial Strategy options which provide little scope for further development, regeneration and investment at our market towns. The County Council has now produced first detailed proposals for future housing levels which provide some scope for meeting local needs in West Wiltshire and achieving modest growth at Trowbridge to fulfil its enhanced sub-regional role.

The Regional Assembly will be considering these proposals and producing a first draft RSS in October 2005, with stakeholder consultation in November 2005. Officers will prepare a report for Cabinet at that time. One of the major considerations in that report will be the extent to which the RSS takes account of the emerging Regional Economic Strategy and the views from Wiltshire.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (i) approves the development of a detailed response to the Structure Plan Proposed Modifications consultation on the basis of the contents of this report ;
- (ii) delegates authority to the Portfolio Holder to finalise this Council's response to the Structure Plan;
- (iii) supports the County Council's first detailed proposals on the District housing allocations for the Regional Spatial Strategy;
- (iv) requests a future report on the first draft Regional Spatial Strategy and the final draft Regional Economic Strategy.

Human Rights

There are no human rights implications.

Background Papers

File Ref: Structure Plan 2016 / Regional Planning

File Location: Planning Policy and Conservation Section

Plain English