

CABINET

20 October 2009

**WILTSHIRE CORE STRATEGY-
PUBLIC CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

Executive Summary

The consultation document, 'Wiltshire 2026 - Planning for Wiltshire's Future', brings together and develops the work previously undertaken by the former district councils for their individual Core Strategies. The document relates to the east, north and west of Wiltshire due to the proposals for south Wiltshire being prepared to a quicker timescale. The consultation is programmed to commence on 30th October 2009, ending on 31st December 2009. The consultation process will allow for open and honest discussions about where and how future growth could be accommodated in this part of Wiltshire, providing the opportunity for local communities to inform the Council's current thinking and build its understanding of local issues.

The response to the consultation will help inform the development of a Core Strategy for Wiltshire, which is programmed to be prepared in draft form by September 2010, at which point further representations will be invited on the soundness of the draft Core Strategy.

Proposal

To request that the Cabinet:

- (i) Approves the content of the draft document, 'Wiltshire 2026 - Planning for Wiltshire's Future', for the purposes of public consultation commencing on 30th October 2009 and ending on 31st December 2009.
- (ii) Authorises the Service Director for Economy and Enterprise in consultation with the Cabinet Member to make the necessary amendments to finalise the document for public consultation, and to finalise the associated background papers including Sustainability Appraisal to support the consultation document.

Reason for Proposal

To ensure that progress continues to be made on preparing an up to date planning policy framework for Wiltshire in line with the timescale set out in the Wiltshire Local Development Scheme and statutory requirements.

ALISTAIR CUNNINGHAM

Service Director, Economy and Enterprise

GEORGINA CLAMPITT-DIX

Head of Spatial Planning

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WILTSHIRE 2026, PLANNING FOR WILTSHIRE'S FUTURE
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Purpose of Report

1. To:
 - (i) Seek approval for the document, 'Wiltshire 2026 - Planning for the Future of Wiltshire', for the purposes of public consultation as part of the preparation of a draft Core Strategy for Wiltshire.
 - (ii) Set out the arrangements for public consultation.

Background

2. The Local Development Scheme (LDS) for Wiltshire, approved by the Implementation Executive in December 2008, sets out the timetable and documents that will be produced by Wiltshire Council to update planning policy within the county. Government policy requires core strategies to be produced in a timely and efficient manner in order to ensure the supply of housing, employment land and other developments to meet need. The LDS and Corporate Plan indicate that the Council will consult on the spatial strategy for the distribution of housing and employment growth as part of the Wiltshire Core Strategy preparation towards the end of 2009.
3. Core Strategies are the principal Development Plan Document (DPD) in the Local Development Framework (LDF) setting out a long term vision for the area and providing strategic policies and proposals to deliver the vision. Under current legislation, within Wiltshire they must conform to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West and subsequent DPDs prepared as part of the LDF must conform to the Core Strategy. This is the first step in updating the policies within the Local Plans relating to the north, east and west of Wiltshire. The policies and proposals for the south of Wiltshire are being prepared to a different timescale with the publication draft Core Strategy for this area being approved for consultation by Cabinet on 15 July 2009. Submission of this document to the Secretary of State will be considered at Full Council on 10 November 2009.
4. Once adopted, the spatially distinctive elements of the adopted South Wiltshire Core Strategy will be integrated into the Wiltshire Core Strategy. The Wiltshire Core strategy will therefore in effect supersede the South Wiltshire Core Strategy.

Main Considerations for the Council

5. In accordance with Regulations, the Council is required to consult widely to inform the preparation of a Core Strategy. The former district councils of Kennet, North and West Wiltshire undertook initial consultations on issues and options relating to their areas. This work has now been pulled together and developed in order to allow further consultation on key elements of a Core Strategy. A further round of consultation is programmed for Spring 2010 that will focus on specific policies within the document relating to issues such as affordable housing and planning obligations. The programme within the LDS will need to be reviewed following the outcome of the consultation process to determine whether the timetable is still reasonable.

Consultation Document

6. The proposed consultation document is enclosed separately to Cabinet members only, available on the Council's website with a hard copy available on request. This will need to be finalised in order to make it ready for consultation including the insertion of appropriate questions.
7. The document does not cover all the content that will be within the draft Core Strategy but is an important stage in its preparation. The document sets out the Council's current thinking based on evidence collected to date. This consultation provides the opportunity for local communities and others to consider whether this understanding is right. In summary, the proposed consultation document sets out:

- (i) The role and function of the main settlements of Chippenham, Trowbridge, Bradford-on-Avon, Calne, Corsham, Devizes, Malmesbury, Marlborough, Melksham, Tidworth and Ludgershall, Warminster, Westbury and Wootton Bassett. For each of these settlements and Community Areas within which they are located a number of key issues and opportunities that need to be planned for are identified, together with proposals as to how the main settlement should change by 2026 in light of these, and what the Core Strategy should deliver.

The consultation will confirm whether the issues and opportunities identified are correct, and whether the proposed response to address these is right. Where the Council's evidence is limited on particular issues, the consultation can be used as a means to develop the Council's understanding in order to ensure that issues can be properly addressed within the draft Core Strategy.

- (ii) Based on the role and function analysis of each settlement, the document shows how the levels of economic and housing growth within the Proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (RSS) could be provided and justified for Wiltshire based on the individual needs of different settlements. This

includes proposals ('preferred options') for the location of strategic sites for additional housing and where possible employment growth at the main settlements (see Annex 2 of Appendix 1). The consultation document will outline why these sites could be identified within the Core Strategy.

The preferred options are based on the information currently available to the Council. The consultation will develop the Council's understanding of the suitability, or otherwise, of taking forward these sites into the draft Core Strategy and overall levels of growth for individual places.

- (iii) Smaller towns (including Pewsey and Cricklade) and villages where some additional growth will be appropriate are identified, together with the overall level of growth that these settlements should collectively deliver. Fewer settlements are now identified compared to those currently set out within the Local Plans.

Comments will be invited on whether these settlements are the only settlements on which more limited growth outside of the main towns should be focused, and whether the overall level of growth outside of the main towns for each Community Area is reasonable.

8. The consultation document draws upon a number of draft documents. These are currently being finalised but will be made available for public scrutiny at the time of the consultation. The relationship of the documents to the consultation document is explained below:
 - (i) *Wiltshire Sustainability Appraisal Report, October 2009* - Sustainability Appraisal is undertaken at each stage leading up to the preparation of a Core Strategy in order to help ensure that plans are sustainable and negative impacts are avoided through an appraisal of options.
 - (ii) *Habitats Regulations Assessments, October 2009* - In order to protect the integrity of internationally important wildlife sites, European law requires Habitats Regulations Assessments to be undertaken where proposed plans could have a significant effect.
 - (iii) *Wiltshire Vision and Strategic Objectives, October 2009* - This paper pulls together the information from each of the district councils including Salisbury to set out how the overarching vision and strategic objectives for Wiltshire were identified. In considering each Community Area the consultation document starts to draw upon these objectives and considers what local outcomes are required to deliver them. These will effectively form the guiding principles used in developing the draft Core Strategy beyond this consultation.

- (iii) *Spatial Strategy, October 2009* - This paper sets out detailed analysis about the role and function of individual places within Wiltshire and levels of growth that could be accommodated. The consultation document in effect summarises the detail of this paper.
 - (iv) *Strategic Sites, October 2009* - This paper sets out the methodology that has been developed to identify strategic sites. It contains: maps that identify all available potential development sites (as set out in the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and within the Wiltshire Workspace and Employment Land Strategy); sieve maps showing constraints at settlements; and over appraisal of different options at individual settlements together with justification for the preferred option. The outcomes of this paper are summarised in the consultation document.
9. The draft documents are being worked on and will be finalised and made available prior to the meeting of Cabinet.

Consultation Arrangements

10. During September and early October, Officers have either been attending Community Area Board meetings or statements have been made at meetings to raise awareness about the forthcoming consultation and publicise events.
11. It is proposed that the consultation be launched at the Wiltshire Assembly on 30th October and run for a period of almost 9 weeks until 31st December 2009. Measures to publicise and encourage people to respond to the consultation across north, east and west Wiltshire that ensure compliance with Regulations include:
- The consultation document and supporting information will be available for inspection at Council offices and libraries and on-line.
 - Exhibitions will be held in each of the 14 Community Areas during November and early December, at which officers will be available to explain the proposals and answer questions.
 - Workshops will also be held for each of the 14 Community Areas (hosted by the Community Area Board) with invited representatives including members of the relevant Community Area Partnership and Area Board, Parish and Town Council representatives and other community groups. These will generally take place on the same day as the exhibitions.
 - A Newsletter will be distributed to all Parish and Town Councils and made available at information points.
 - Letters of notification will be sent to all relevant consultees on the Council's database.
 - Posters will be distributed to Town and Parish Councils to display in their areas and to other organisations to display on public notice boards (such as supermarkets or GP surgeries).
 - Formal public notices in local newspapers circulating in the area.

- A consultation pack will be sent to all Parish and Town Councils and on request to other community groups. This will include a DVD containing a short video providing an overview of the importance of the Core Strategy as well as the consultation documents.
 - In addition, as required, Officers will meet with members of Town Councils to discuss the proposals for growth at the main settlements.
12. Appropriate arrangements will also need to be made for the south Wiltshire area to ensure that the Council's statutory obligations for consultation are met. However, this will need to reflect the fact that significant consultation has already taken place in this part of Wiltshire in relation to the South Wiltshire Core Strategy.

Next Steps

13. Following the consultation, all comments received will be published on the Council's website. In addition, feedback on the views received in respect of each Community Area will be made available to the relevant Community Area Board. The views received on the consultation will help to inform the development of a draft Core Strategy, which will be prepared next year, prior to coming before Councillors for consideration September 2010.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

14. The Core Strategy will have implications for the physical, economic and social environment of Wiltshire. It is therefore essential that the policies and proposals seek to deliver development in a sustainable manner. A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment has been undertaken on the consultation document that will be the subject of public consultation alongside it. A Habitats Regulations Assessment has also been undertaken. Both documents help shape the consultation document and will be updated as work continues on a draft Core Strategy in order to ensure that negative environmental impacts are avoided and sustainable development delivered.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

15. When the Core Strategy is submitted for public examination by an independent Planning Inspector, Regulations require that it is accompanied by a formal Equalities Impact Assessment. The Core Strategy will need to take into account the needs of the whole community. The consultation process will seek to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to inform the preparation of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

Options and Risks Assessment

16. The Council has a statutory duty to prepare a Core Strategy. The options considered are to continue to make progress in line with the published programme within the Council's LDS or to delay proceeding in light of the delay to the RSS.

17. Recent announcements by the Government have cast doubt over the soundness of the emerging RSS and indicated further delay in its preparation. Despite the uncertainty that this brings, it is nevertheless considered to be important that progress continues to be made to prepare a draft Core Strategy for Wiltshire, for a number of reasons:
- (i) Local Plans, originally only intended to cover the period up to 2011, are becoming increasingly out of date. It is a statutory requirement to prepare a Core Strategy. The work currently undertaken will provide a sound evidence base for the development of new policy for Wiltshire.
 - (ii) The Core Strategy once adopted will create the right framework to deliver economic growth, ensuring Wiltshire is well positioned to attract investment as the economy improves.
 - (iii) 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.
 - (iv) An infrastructure delivery plan is being prepared alongside the Core Strategy to clarify how infrastructure will be made available to meet the needs of Wiltshire's communities. In the absence of this work, Wiltshire will lose the ability to ensure developers and service providers deliver the necessary infrastructure to support communities and future growth.
 - (v) Delay at this stage would mean that the evidence base underpinning the Core Strategy will become increasingly out of date, which places the risk of the Core Strategy being found unsound when it does reach examination leading to increased costs and abortive work.
18. A draft Core Strategy is not due to be published until September 2010 at the earliest when representations will need to be invited on the soundness of the document. This means that the Council will have the ability to consider any further changes to the draft RSS that may occur between now and September next year and have the flexibility to react to any other changes that may require the emerging proposals within the draft Core Strategy to be revisited.

Financial Implications

19. The cost of preparing the consultation document and associated material, and making arrangements for consultation will be met from existing 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

20. The preparation of a Core Strategy in accordance with the Council's LDS is a statutory duty. The public consultation exercise is being designed in accordance with best practice and legal requirements. The Secretary of State has powers of intervention where local planning authorities fail to comply with duties relating to the LDF.

Conclusions

21. Publication of the consultation document 'Wiltshire 2026 - Planning for Wiltshire's Future', will ensure that progress continues to be made on the preparation of a draft Core Strategy for Wiltshire in line with the timescales within the LDS and Corporate Plan. The consultation document has been prepared to stimulate discussion and to help build the evidence that will underpin the draft Core Strategy for Wiltshire. The purpose of public engagement at this stage is to allow for Wiltshire's communities to be involved in shaping how future growth will be accommodated to meet Wiltshire's needs. The consultation arrangements outlined in this report will ensure that public engagement is achieved in the most effective manner.
22. Delay at this stage is not considered an option due to the risks involved. The absence of a Core Strategy would mean that development would not necessarily take place in a sustainable manner, and might lack key infrastructure. The preparation of a Core Strategy would enable the Council to assess the overall need for infrastructure in order to enable its provision at the right time and in the right place for the benefit of the local community.

ALISTAIR CUNNINGHAM

Service Director, Economy and Enterprise
Tel. No. 01225 713203

GEORGINA CLAMPITT-DIX

Head of Spatial Planning
Tel. No. 01225 713472

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Background Papers

See paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Report.