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Report

Subject : South Wiltshire Core Strategy Preferred Options stage 2
consultation – Output Report

Report to : The Cabinet

Date : 25 February 2009

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Cabinet Member for Planning: Cllr Clegg

Report Summary:

To inform councillors of results of the additional consultation undertaken for the preferred options, the influence this will have on the key elements of the emerging strategy and the next steps in the process, including implications of the Transitional Regulations that came into effect in November 2008. The outcomes of the Planning Inspectorate Frontloading Visit will also be explained together with their implications on future areas of work on the strategy

A Commitment to Listening - Participation in the LDF process

The Full Council asked the Forward Planning Team to carry out an additional stage of consultation on the LDF Core Strategy, Preferred Options. This was carried out between 1 September and 24 October with over 60,000 copies of the consultation document distributed to every household and business in the district, as well as additional copies being placed in libraries. Exhibitions were also held in each community area, and 2 in Salisbury. Independently facilitated community fora, aimed at Members, were held by the consultancy PPS.

Over 2,500 responses were received on the latest consultation and they should be understood in the context of previous stages of consultation carried out. The whole process has been designed to ensure that participation of the local communities and those with a stake in the area have a meaningful opportunity to help shape the strategy. Cumulatively the process has included the following:

- Consulting each household in the district directly at least three times. That's over 150,000 letters.
- Attending over 100 events such as public meetings, to try and engage the communities
- Addressing school assemblies and setting up dedicated Yeahbut webpages, resulting in over 100 representations from under 16's.
- Travelling throughout the District on the mobile library service to take the message out to the communities
- Receiving representations from over 8,500 parties

The participation process has been successful and stands favourable comparison with any LDF work carried out nationally.

The Messages from the Community

The consultation has identified some real tensions within the local communities. While the spatial vision and strategy put forward, based on dispersed managed growth to meet local needs has been supported by the overall majority of respondents to the process, the latest stage of consultation results show that this is a finely balanced issue.

Q1: Should we take the suggested steps to meet the identified needs?

Yes: 53%

No: 47%

Q2: Do you agree with the dispersed growth approach?

Yes: 54%

No: 46%

Previous stages of consultation have demonstrated a greater level of support for our proposals on these issues.

With regard to the strategic sites suggested in the latest consultation process, there is an overall 'no' to the housing sites proposed while there is quite strong support for the employment sites suggested.

Q3: Do you agree that these sites are appropriate to meet our [housing] needs?

Yes: 49%

No: 51%

Q4: Do you agree that these sites are appropriate to meet our employment needs?

Yes: 72%

No: 28%

The central tension within the communities that has been revealed and has been consistent throughout the LDF process, is that between seeking to achieve the levels of new housing and jobs needed to secure the future prosperity of the area, without overdeveloping and eroding the very character that makes the area so attractive in the first place. There is also clear concern about the ability of essential infrastructure to support the growth.

How the voice of the communities will influence the Strategy

It is a key role of the Core Strategy to reconcile the pressure in a manner that, as far as possible, mediates local concerns. We accept that not everyone will agree with all of the proposals but the strategy will be based on a proportionate and considered response to the diverse range of views expressed.

Although we should be very happy with the number of representations we received, it is important to emphasise that the production of policies to go within the LDF is not a straight popularity contest or referendum. While the views we received are rightly an important material consideration, there are other issues which equally need to be taken into account.

Therefore, all of the options that were seen to be preferred through the whole consultation process need to be evaluated against a range of other criteria to see if they represent viable and deliverable options. These other criteria include alignment with National and Regional policy, assembly and analysis of evidence, sustainability assessments, capacity of infrastructure, environmental protection, consideration of options and deliverability. An important core value has been the need to ensure that this document sets out clear strategic thinking.

To give examples of how the the strategy has evolved to respond positively to the voice of the communities so far, the following points are salient:

- The option of a new settlement anywhere in the District will not be pursued
- There is clear evidence and overwhelming support for the retention of the 40ft Rule, which protects the historic roofscape and spire views In Salisbury. As a result this policy remain and will not be diluted.
- There has been support for a strategy based on dispersed growth with a focus on initial delivery of housing and jobs on key strategic sites around Salisbury and Amesbury as they represent the most sustainable locations.
- There has been strong support across the board for the redevelopment of Churchfields, especially from the business sector. The Core Strategy will include the pre-requisite policy change to allow this to happen.

- Conserving the natural and built environments are a top priority for respondents and this will be reflected in new and robust policies
- A strong message has been received that there are concerns over the ability of the essential infrastructure (including transport networks and drainage) to support the strategic growth being planned. In response to this, officers have been working closely with infrastructure providers to ensure that no site is included for development unless it has been unequivocally demonstrated how essential infrastructure improvements will be delivered in a timely manner to support it.

The Emerging Core Strategy

The Core Strategy is a strategic document providing broad guidance on the scale and distribution of development and the provision of supporting infrastructure. It contains 'higher level' policies for delivering the spatial vision, guiding broad patterns of development. It also allocates enough strategic housing and employment growth sites to ensure the ongoing 5-year supply of new homes and jobs in the area (this is a Government requirement under PPS3). No further policy documents are required to facilitate delivery of these strategic sites. The emerging strategy will also set out how subsequent development will be provided to meet our longer term needs. The Core Strategy also contains policies setting out the criteria to be taken into account by the Local Planning Authority in determining proposals for development and the use of land and buildings.

The key elements of the Strategy will be as follows:

(a) Identification of sites

A systematic appraisal of the area has been undertaken to identify how the growth needed to provide people with a decent affordable home and good economic prospects, can be accommodated without eroding the very character that makes this area of the Country so attractive to begin with. The key strategically important sites that have emerged from the consultation and analysis and are likely to form the basis of the strategy are as follows:

- Fugglestone Red Phase 2
- Hampton Park
- Old Sarum
- Land off Netherhampton Road, Netherhampton
- Archers Gate, Amesbury
- UKLF Wilton
- IMERYS Aggregates Site, Wilton Road
- Churchfields

(b) Land Uses

We have listened very carefully to the feedback from the community and have also worked closely with land owners regarding the viability of the sites outlined. Importantly we must seek the most sustainable locations and solutions for accommodating the growth. As a result, it is highly likely that the emerging strategy will be based seeking mixed use developments at all of the sites identified, meaning a mix of residential and employment opportunities. This will help create the opportunity to provide local jobs which may cut down on travel, it will help avoid a single impact of employment in any one location, and it will help make the site economically viable to develop.

The potential decant of land uses from Churchfields has proved a contentious issue, and the emerging strategy will attempt to provide meaningful choice for existing businesses to relocate to. It is unlikely to be the case that the land at Netherhampton Road will be solely a major employment park, but more likely a mixed-use development such as at the other strategic sites. The recent closure of the IMERYS aggregate works on Wilton Road, while highly regrettable, does offer the opportunity to relocate some of the heavier industrial uses to that site, which is discreet and well serviced. Discussions with the Owners and County are ongoing.

(c) Delivery and Implementation of strategically important sites

The strategy to be set out in the Core Strategy has to be deliverable. That is, it has to be

designed to be realistic, achievable and based on realities not on hope or aspirations alone. To underpin delivery, such work is being carried out to try and test the emerging strategy's achievability. Indeed where it is not possible to prove deliverability, then the options will not be pursued as they will not meet the tests of soundness. The Forward Planning Team is working with land owners, developers and their agents to seek tangible evidence of their intention to deliver developments within a specific timetable. Key areas of this work are:

- Working closely with essential infrastructure providers to identify barriers to development and agree measures needed to mitigate them
- Working in partnership with consultees and communities to identify environmental or social improvements needed due to the impact of a development in order to ensure the delivery of high quality places.
- Carrying out detailed feasibility work on strategic sites, to assess the impact of providing essential infrastructure and environmental improvements on the viability of the development and hence setting standards for delivery, such as affordable housing levels.
- Contingency planning to ensure that even should some sites not come forward as envisaged, that the strategy has enough flexibility to ensure there is still an adequate supply of housing and jobs to meet local needs.

(d) Protection of our environment

It is important to emphasise that, while the emerging strategy is likely to be based on an agenda of carefully managed growth, the outstanding quality of our environment needs to be fully recognised. New policies are being developed that will improve the protection of our beautiful natural areas and built heritage. These policies will be designed to be effective and deliverable. A series of indicators to monitor their effectiveness are also under development.

(e) Frontloading the development process, 'development management' and bringing certainty to the planning process

The Core Strategy is being designed to remove much of the uncertainty, conflict and inordinate delays that can characterise the planning process, thereby delivering the much needed local homes and jobs that will sustain the future of South Wiltshire, when they are needed. This process is about ensuring that the plans in Core Strategy can be put into practice, so that all parties have certainty about where, how and when the strategic growth will be accommodated and how we will plan for resilient communities and environmental protection. The allocation of sites in this document will be the result of in-depth multi-party pre-application discussions, involving the landowner/developer, local community and essential infrastructure providers, to identify and agree measures necessary to remove the barriers to delivery, achieve effective place shaping and deliver the desired outcomes. In each case the allocations in this document will be backed up by evidence and a series of master plans to demonstrate deliverability.

(f) Relationship with other plans and strategies

Care is being taken to ensure that the Core Strategy aligns with and is in conformity with other plans and strategies that operate in the area. This is a key test of soundness. The Strategy will be designed to be complimentary and add a local spatial dimension to other policies but not simply repeat them. Key documents include:

- National planning policy
- Regional Spatial Strategy
- Sustainable Community Strategy
- Community produced strategies such as Parish Plans and Village Design Statements
- Salisbury Vision and Amesbury Vision
- Heritage strategies such as Conservation Area Appraisals and the Stonehenge World Heritage Site Management Planning Policy Guidance
- Forward work programmes of essential infrastructure providers, to align delivery.
- Plans and strategies of key consultees such as Wessex Water's Water Resource Management Plan.

(g) An evidence based approach

In order to demonstrate that the proposals in the Core Strategy are truly deliverable, a detailed collation, production and scrutiny of evidence is being used to get to the reality of the situation. This means using evidence to identify the challenges faced by the area and not basing the strategy on supposition or anecdotal evidence. It also means ensuring that the desired outcomes to address the challenges can realistically be delivered and are not based on wishful thinking. We have gathered this evidence from a wide variety of sources and carried out our own surveys. The Team have scrutinised over 1500 separate pieces of evidence, including international, national and local studies and reports.

(h) Flexibility and Contingency

As the Core Strategy is being produced, we live in increasingly difficult economic times. Some in the community have questioned why we are bothering at all, when growth is unlikely. We feel the opposite is true and that in such times we need to work even harder to try and bring some certainty to stakeholders that we can deliver the jobs and homes needed in the area.

Given the uncertainty, this strategy has been designed to be flexible and to have contingency. No one site is essential to meet either the meet the PPS3 requirement for a rolling five year supply of housing, or for the overall 15 years requirement of housing or jobs.

Implications of the Publication of New Regulations:

The Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) (No.2) Regulations 2008' came into force on 28 November 2008. The Regulations make all successor councils responsible for discharging, in advance of the reorganisation date (1 April 2009), the functions under Part 2 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This means that the Implementation Executive has become responsible for discharging the forward planning functions of the district councils, in particular the preparation of local development documents and the LDS. It is Wiltshire Council who will ultimately make the decision of whether to approve the Core Strategy for submission to the Secretary of State.

Next Steps:

The Spatial Planning Team is now in the middle of analysing all of the information it has collated over the past 3 years, including the voice of the communities. They are working hard to produce a Core Strategy which attempts to strike an appropriate balance between managed growth to meet local needs with conservation of our natural and built environment. The new timetable approved by the Implementation Executive of Wiltshire Council indicates that the Submission Draft will be consulted on for a 6 week period in June 2009 prior to its submission to the Secretary of State.

It is positive that both the IE and Government Office South West have agreed with the merits of continuing with the Core Strategy in South Wiltshire in order to ensure that pressing local needs, especially for housing and jobs, can be met in the most timely fashion. It also means that the very successful consultation and evidence base work can be fully used and inform the outcomes. It clearly vindicates the support given to the process by the current Administration and cross-party LDF Management Group, who have identified the need to carry on with the work, because of the economic, social and environmental challenges we face in South Wiltshire.

Planning Inspectors Frontloading Healthcheck:

Salisbury was chosen as part of a national initiative whereby a Senior Planning Inspector audited the Core Strategy to assess progress. Salisbury were amongst only a handful of councils chosen nationally for this and the results were extremely helpful. The good news is that the Inspector did not raise any fresh areas of concern that officers were not previously aware of. He focussed on the need to prove that the strategy can be delivered, work which officers are already fully engaged in. Key messages from the Inspector were as follows:

- Ensuring the 20 year horizon of the strategy is clearly communicated

- Clearly identifying the essential infrastructure required to deliver strategically important sites
- Ensuring the plan contains contingency so that it doesn't become reliant on any one site
- Ensuring the settlement strategy is based on evidence and not elements of wishful thinking
- Ensuring levels of affordable housing are set after viability testing has been completed
- Ensuring the benefits of good spatial relationships are not missed when striving for sustainable development
- Ensuring the document is based on a clear strategy and is not simply a reaction to local public opinion.

These are all areas of ongoing work for the Forward Planning Team and will be addressed in the Submission Draft of the document. Despite some claims to the contrary, the Inspectors visit was enormously positive and he gave much encouragement to the team to carry on and finalise the work thus far undertaken. He was clearly impressed with the levels of consultation, the depth of evidence and the way that Salisbury District Council had project managed the task. His role was to advise us on how to ensure this work can best be capitalised on.

Finally:

The transitional regulations do mean that the Cabinet will not ultimately be the decision making body for the Core Strategy. However, due to good progress made and the support of the IE and GOSW, the work has not been wasted. Though the process has and continues to be challenging and controversial (choosing development sites in a highly constrained environment such as Salisbury is never going to be easy), officers would like to take this opportunity to thank Cabinet for all its support and help regarding the Core Strategy and to reassure members that they will continue to work flat out to realise the very best outcomes for the people of south Wiltshire.

Recommendations:

- (a) That Cabinet note the results of the consultation and the influence they are having on shaping the emerging strategy.
- (b) That Cabinet recommend to the Implementation Executive of Wiltshire Council that they draw on the totality of the consultation process and evidence thus far gathered, to demonstrate that the views expressed at all stages have been taken into account in moving to final proposals.
- (c) That Cabinet welcome the findings of the Inspectors Frontloading Assessment and recommend to the the Implementation Executive of Wiltshire Council that they are fully taken into account when considering the content of the Submission Draft of the Core Strategy.

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
Our Place in the Future. Another opportunity to have your say. September 2008

Salisbury District Council. Local Development Scheme adopted January 2007
Salisbury District Council. Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

Implications:

Legal: None

Financial: None.

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: There has been 3 rounds of public consultation on the core strategy.

Parish Affected: All