

Wiltshire Housing Site Allocations Plan (WHSAP) Examination

MATTER 2: consistency with the Wiltshire Core Strategy

Written Statement on behalf of Lincoln College Oxford (ID 393560)

Summary and purpose

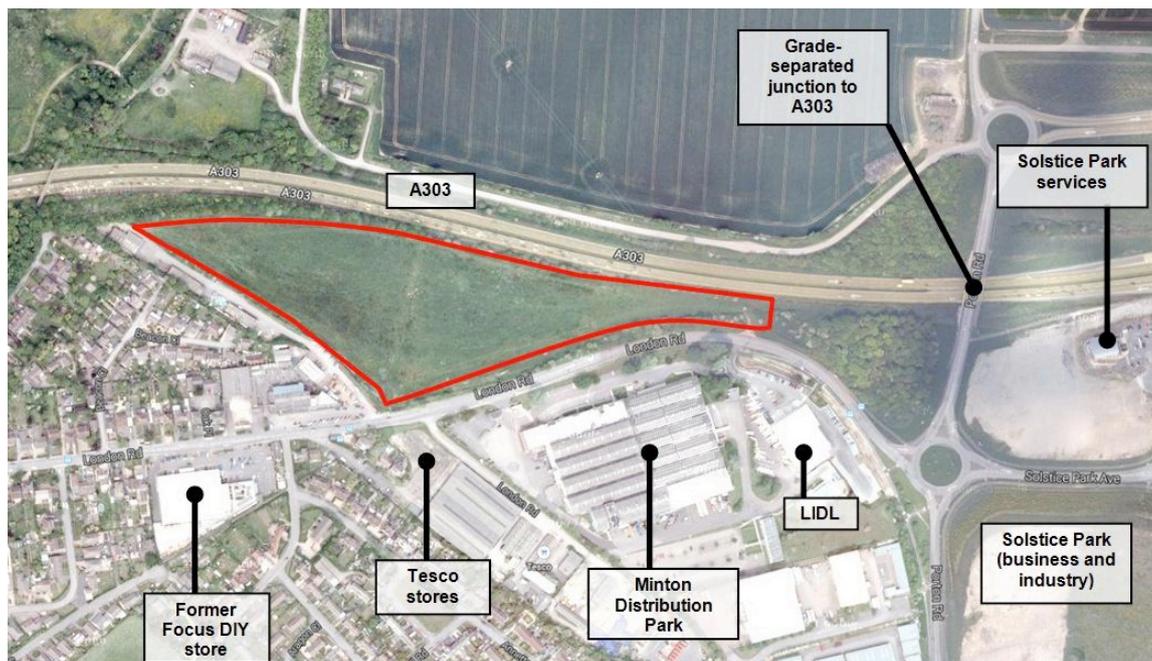
This document is submitted on behalf of Lincoln College (Oxford), to assist the Inspector in his examination of the approach in relation to the Amesbury Community Area ('CA').

Lincoln College objects to the WHSAP in relation to its provisions for the Amesbury CA, as they fail several of the Tests of Soundness prescribed under NPPF paragraph 35. In summary:

1. They are not **positively prepared**, failing to meet the objectively assessed need of the CA, with the total quantum of development falling far below the relevant target in the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS).
2. They are not **justified**, because they:
 - are not an 'appropriate strategy', having under-allocated against WCS policy for the Amesbury CA, allocating only around **16% of its housing requirement**
 - do not duly taking into account 'reasonable alternatives', particularly the alternative of allocating an amount of housing that reflects the requirement for this CA sought under the WCS
 - are inconsistent with (and directly contrary to) the evidence base
3. They are **inconsistent with national policy**, departing from various provisions in the NPPF concerning the need to significantly boost the supply of housing and to do so in accessible locations with good access to employment, services and facilities.

As a result of the above, the policies for the Amesbury CA cannot be found sound. However, the plan is capable of being made sound by means of including a further housing site, such as that at London Road, Amesbury (site ref 3379, identified in the location plan below), either in addition to or instead of the two small allocations at Durrington.

Figure 1: Location plan of site 3379, incorrectly excluded from the WHSAP



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Q2.1: The WCS contains housing figures at a County, HMA and settlement level. Which is the most appropriate scale at which to consider provision in order to assess consistency with the WCS?

The most appropriate scale to assess consistency with the WCS is at the Settlement and CA level, since these are the principal basis on which the WCS sets out housing figures. WCS para 1.18 states:

“The Core Strategy includes a strategy for each of the Community Areas of Wiltshire, setting out how it is expected that these areas will change by 2026, and how this change will be delivered. Aligning the Core Strategy with the Community Areas in this way offers the opportunity for place shaping to be embedded within the local community and the benefits of development to be realised at a local level.”

WCS para 4.20 confirms that although strategic housing requirement is set out at a higher level, it is the case that *“in order to support the most sustainable pattern of growth, in line with the principles defined in Core Policy 1, indicative requirements are provided for each Principal Settlement, Market Town and by Community Area [...]”*. Similarly, WCS para 4.26 affirms that:

“In order to direct development at a strategic level to the most suitable, sustainable locations and at appropriate times, the area strategies contain an indicative housing requirement for each Community Area including the Principal Settlements and Market Towns and, in the South Wiltshire HMA, the Local Service Centres.”

(WCS para 4.26)

A degree of flexibility is acknowledged in the WCS as being necessary, and we accept that the housing requirements set out in WCS Table 1 for individual settlements and CAs are “indicative”. However, it is plain that the WCS establishes a firm policy basis and a target for the amount of development expected at the individual settlement level. Hence, in considering the consistency of the WHSAP with the WCS, settlements and CAs must be the starting point.

2.4 In light of the above, does the WHSAP make adequate overall provision to ensure the delivery of the minimum housing requirement as set out in the WCS?

On a purely arithmetic basis, the WHSAP appears to provide adequate overall provision to fulfil the minimum requirement of the WCS at the county and the Housing Market Area. But the important point (as the Inspector’s question implies) is about whether the allocations will actually ensure delivery.

Wiltshire Council is now in the invidious position of having fallen well below the 5-year housing supply in the Southern Wiltshire HMA, as confirmed at appeal as recently as December 2018¹. This is not the first time supply in a Wiltshire HMA has fallen below five years: the North and West Wiltshire HMA had fallen below in 2016, as confirmed at appeal².

Astonishingly, this WHSAP is now at least four years behind schedule when compared against the 2014 LDS, which had sought adoption by July 2015³, and this delay to the plan has been a major contributing factor in the Council’s failure to secure an adequate housing land supply across much of the county.

¹ Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/W/18/3200041: Land off Firs Road, Alderbury, Salisbury, Wiltshire.

² Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/W/15/3141340: Land to the North of Holt Road and Cemetery Lane, Bradford on Avon

³ <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/wcs-exam78b-wiltshire-local-development-scheme-final-jan-14.pdf>

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It is therefore not enough for the WHSAP simply to allocate housing sites up to a purportedly sufficient amount across the HMA level, without regard to how this is distributed. Individual CAs and settlements within the HMA have different characteristics and sub-markets, and, as the WCS envisages, it is important for each to make its own contribution towards the disaggregated targets set out in WCS Table 1.

Unless the WHSAP provides a diverse range of sustainably located sites across the major settlements, and, as a minimum, meets the targets for each locality established in WCS Table 1, it risks failing to fulfil its central role of maintaining a housing land supply.

The draft Allocations plan has an intended end-date of March 2026, and thus by the time it is adopted (late 2019 at the earliest if found sound) it will have an effective period of barely six years. This directly contradicts the NPPF's requirement for authorities to identify a supply of specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth up to years 11-15.

Modifications involving additional provision, particularly at Amesbury, are therefore required to the plan to ensure that it fulfils the NPPF tests of soundness.

3.1 Is the overall distribution of housing allocations consistent with the spatial strategy set out in the WCS?

No. Allocations made to the Amesbury CA fall dramatically below the WCS requirement and we direct the Inspector to CATP01 (Amesbury Community Area Topic Paper), Table 2.3, entitled "*Housing requirements for Amesbury Community Area*". As this table shows, there remains an 'indicative residual requirement' of **277 dwellings**, comprising:

- **121** at Amesbury/ Durrington/ Bulford
- **96** within the remainder of the Community Area.

In response, the WHSAP proposes to allocate **just 60 dwellings in the Amesbury CA**, of which 15 are already the subject of a planning permission. This net allocation of 45 dwellings amounts to just **37%** of the requirement for Amesbury/ Durrington/ Bulford, falling to **16% of the requirement for the whole CA**. Since the WHSAP proposes no allocations other than at Amesbury/ Durrington/ Bulford, the latter is a legitimate comparison to make.

The proper role of the WHSAP should be as a **positive** tool to plan for the amounts of development that the WCS seeks in each location, but the WHSAP makes only a small gesture towards the Amesbury CA requirement. WC attempt to justify this by reference to the degree of flexibility between CAs that is alluded to under WCS para 4.30 (quoted at WHSAP para 2.18). However, the passage the Council quotes here contradicts their approach to the Amesbury CA. The flexibility under WCS is included precisely in order to help achieve the overall target at HMA level and thus sustain a housing supply at that geographic level. Instead, WCS interpret the flexibility as enabling them to suppress delivery at Amesbury CA, for no discernible reason.

The Council also attempt to justify the lack of allocations by reference to Neighbourhood Plans as a route to bring sites forward. However, as set out by CATP01, table 2.4, only one Neighbourhood Plan has been made, identifying 32 units (16 of which have been granted permission⁴) and no other villages have passed beyond the Area Designation stage. As such, there is no foreseeable supply from NPs of substance in the Amesbury CA. In the context of a

⁴ Application ref 17/00842/OUT

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national housing crisis and the lack of housing supply in the Southern Wiltshire HMA, this is an indefensible position and plainly fails the NPPF tests.

3.2 Is the distribution within each HMA consistent with the WCS?

3.3 Is the approach set out in Stages 1 and 2 of the site selection process justified? In particular, has a consistent and justified approach been taken to excluding specific locations from the scope of the exercise, including:

- **Principal Settlements, Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Large Villages**

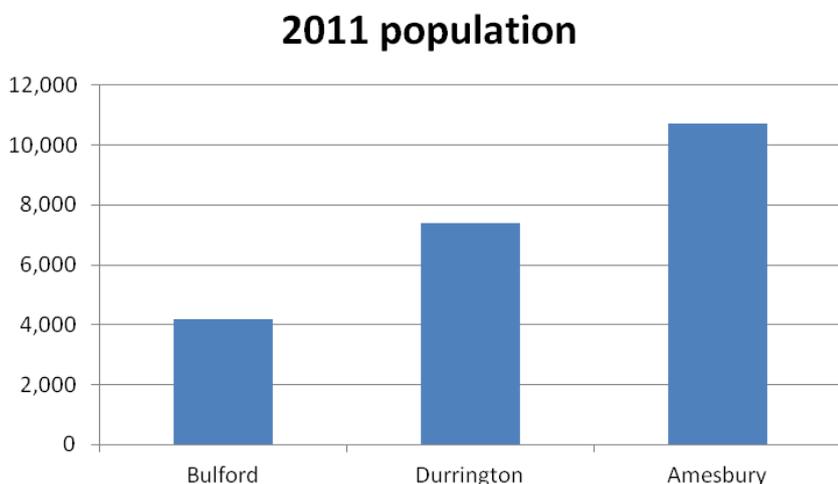
As noted, the WHSAP makes only a small gesture towards the residual housing requirement in the Amesbury CA but, insofar as the two small allocation sites at Durrington (H3.5 and H3.6) could be described as being ‘distributed’, the answer again is plainly no.

Although Durrington is a reasonably large settlement, to allocate two sites there (and none anywhere else in the CA, including Amesbury) runs counter to any reasonable understanding of the WCS settlement hierarchy. Whilst Amesbury, Durrington and Bulford are combined for the purpose of housing targets (WCS Core Policy 4), Amesbury is self-evidently better placed to deliver residential development in a sustainable manner, given the diverse range of higher-order services, facilities, and economic opportunities that are available in the town. These notably include:

- substantial areas of allocated employment land (Solstice Park and Boscombe Down), in comparison with none at either Durrington or Bulford;
- substantial high street frontage with range of specialist shops as well as professional services including banks/building societies;
- several major supermarkets (whereas Durrington and Bulford have only local convenience stores)
- major public library, police and fire stations, and greater range of schools
- greater range of locations accessible by public transport.

Amesbury’s population is also considerably higher, as illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 2: Comparison of the populations of Amesbury, Bulford and Durrington



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Overall Amesbury is plainly the pre-eminent settlement of the grouping with Durrington and Bulford, and hence should be the primary focus of WHSAP allocations within the Amesbury CA, but none are made.

3.4 Are the differences between overall provision identified in the WHSAP and the WCS justified? Should any shortfalls in provision within particular settlements be compensated for with development in other locations?

The answer to the first question is no. If the number of homes in the WHSAP (either collectively, or in any given area) is lower than the WCS then this is self-evidently a failure and the plan cannot be found sound. As the WCS makes clear:

*“1.4 The Core Strategy sets out the strategic vision for delivering sustainable growth over the period up to 2026. However, it is not the only development plan document in the planning policy framework for Wiltshire. The council is committed to bringing forward a **suite of plans designed to support the Core Strategy which collectively deliver the aspirations for growth across Wiltshire.**”*

*1.5 The Local Development Scheme includes a commitment to delivering site allocations plans for Chippenham and wider Wiltshire. These plans will address issues relating to housing delivery **to ensure a surety of supply throughout the plan period, in accordance with national policy, and help to complement neighbourhood planning.**”*

The interconnection between the WCS and WHSAP is therefore clear. The former establishes overarching matters including the amount and distribution of development along with strategic allocations, and the latter has (or at least should have) the role of supporting this by providing necessary additional allocations in order to meet the 2006-2026 targets for each area, in full. If anything the WHSAP should look to deliver the full target for each area or settlement, plus a buffer for flexibility, but perversely WC advocate the reverse stance, explicitly aiming to allocate fewer in the Amesbury CA. This cannot be considered a sound approach in any circumstances, much less where there is not a 5 year housing land supply.

Regarding the second question, it could only be justifiable for the WHSAP to compensate for shortfalls in one place with development elsewhere, if a genuinely evidence-led approach underpinned the site selection process and it was demonstrated that there are no reasonable alternatives in the higher-order settlements. However, the Council has not done so in Amesbury.

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4.1 Have the site allocations been undertaken on a consistent basis having regard to the strategic objectives and policies of the WCS, the policies of the NPPF and the evidence base?

4.2 Were reasonable alternatives considered and tested? Are the reasons for selecting the preferred sites and rejecting others clear?

We appreciate that the Inspector is not intending to give specific consideration of omission sites, however the above questions require specific consideration of site 3379, owned by the College.

'Reasonable alternatives'

In the case of the Amesbury CA, **reasonable alternatives have clearly not been considered and tested**. It is self-evident that providing the full WCS requirement would be a 'reasonable alternative'. On the other hand, to expressly select an option that provides only a small fraction of the area target is not a reasonable alternative to take, and yet that is precisely the option WC has selected.

Consideration of site 3379 (the College site) under the Sustainability Appraisal

Although the candidate site allocations have ostensibly been reviewed on a consistent basis, the outcomes are perverse and the **Sustainability Appraisal has provided a flawed basis for site selection**. A summary of how the College site (3379) has been assessed in comparison to the two allocated sites, is included overleaf. From this it is apparent that across the majority of criteria, site 3379 is assessed to have the equivalent overall effect as either of the two sites in Durrington proposed for allocation. In only one instance is site 3379 assessed to have a more negative effect than both of the other sites (criterion 4, relating to air quality).

However, this was on the basis of no empirical data and, in response, the College has undertaken its own air quality monitoring, with a report of findings being included at **Appendix 1**. This has identified pollutant concentrations significantly below annual mean national health-based standard and objective level (40 µg/m³), even along the northern face, along the A303 Amesbury Bypass. The assessment therefore concludes that **air quality on the site complies with national, regional and local air quality standards** and any mitigation, if considered necessary, could be enforced by means of appropriate planning conditions, consistent with paragraph 54 and 55 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Conversely, in under two SA criteria the College site is assessed to have a more positive effect. These are criterion 8, relating to the provision of housing, and criterion 10, relating to reducing the need to travel and promoting more sustainable transport choices. Overall, it does not follow from the SA assessment that the College land at Amesbury should be excluded from the Allocations plan and that the two Durrington sites should have been selected.

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Consideration of noise

Compared with the SA, the Amesbury CA Topic Paper appears to offer a slightly different explanation as to why the College land was omitted, stating:

“The site has a number of key constraints that ultimately make it undeliverable. The impact of noise from the A303 is not considered possible to mitigate. New evidence was submitted through the Summer 2017 consultation. The noise assessment confirmed the difficulty in mitigating noise impacts from the A303 and the conclusion that development of this site is not among the most sustainable options”

However this is simply not a correct interpretation of the empirical data submitted previously by the College (and included with our Regulation 19 representations). Overall, the assessment has demonstrated that by the use of suitable mitigation measures and careful design of facade performance, layout of the site and internal layout of the dwellings, **acceptable noise levels can be achieved both internally and externally**. These measures are incorporated directly into the proposed illustrative masterplans. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) states the following in relation to noise:

“Local planning authorities’ plan-making and decision taking should take account of the acoustic environment and in doing so consider:

- *whether or not a significant adverse effect is occurring or likely to occur;*
- *whether or not an adverse effect is occurring or likely to occur; and*
- *whether or not a good standard of amenity can be achieved.”*

The empirical evidence on noise assembled on behalf of the College in relation to site 3379 confirms that a good standard of amenity can be achieved, and hence the basis for omitting the site falls away. Although this will require suitable mitigation and design measures, this is not unusual and can be accommodated by means of planning conditions at the application stage.

Conclusion and remedy

The allocation of the College land (site 3379) for residential-led development would contribute to the social, economic and environmental ‘dimensions’ of sustainability demanded by national and local planning policy, as acknowledged at least in part by the Council and much of its evidence base. The Council’s rationale for omitting the site is weak, and not supported by evidence.

The opportunity should therefore be taken in this Allocations Plan to proactively bring the Amesbury site forward and resolve the shortfall in allocations in the Amesbury CA whilst more closely aligning the distribution of allocations with the settlement hierarchy, and promoting a more sustainable pattern of development as required under the NPPF.