

## COUNCILLORS BRIEFING NOTE

### No. 169

**Service Area:** Economic Development and Planning    **Further Enquiries to:** Alistair Cunningham

**Date Prepared:** 14 December 2013

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### Wiltshire Core Strategy – Examination Update

Following Council approval the draft Wiltshire Core Strategy (the Plan) was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination in July 2012. The examination in public, by an independent Planning Inspector, subsequently took place between 6 May 2013 and 18 July 2013.

Since the close of the hearing sessions, consultation on the Plan has been undertaken on further proposed modifications that arose during the course of the examination. The implications of new Government policy on renewable energy were also included in the consultation, which ended 9<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

The council has now received a letter from the Inspector with his preliminary findings seeking the views of the Council on a six matters. These are:

1. Wiltshire's housing requirement
2. Level of affordable housing
3. Gypsy and Traveller accommodation
4. Strategic allocations at Chippenham
5. Settlement boundaries
6. Town centre boundaries

The Inspector has also stated that the matters above are not exhaustive of those that will be addressed by his final report.

The Inspector acknowledges in his opening paragraphs that he recognises the importance of having a sound plan in place as soon as possible and is working towards this end. He also states that: "*many aspects of the plan appear justified, positively prepared, consistent with national policy and likely to be effective in their implementation*".

The matters raised by the Inspector are summarised below. The full letter is attached and will be available on the council's webpage from today.

#### **Wiltshire's housing requirement**

The Inspector considers that on the balance of evidence provided by objectors the Council's objectively assessed housing need, at a level as low as 37,000 homes, does not appear justified.

The Inspector's interpretation of the evidence leads him to find that the objectively assessed housing need across Wiltshire should be in the region of 44,000 homes for the plan period. However, the Inspector goes on to refer to the Council's sustainability appraisal which identifies the broad acceptability of between 35,800 and 42,100 homes and expressly states that he is minded to find that the housing requirement should be expressed as a minimum figure towards the upper end of this range (at least 42,100 homes), and invites suggestions as to how this can be established in the Core Strategy.

In order for the plan to be made sound a modification will be required to reflect an overall increase in the housing requirement for Wiltshire. The Inspector indicates that this could be achieved through modifications to the plan to show the distribution of 42,100 dwellings across the three Housing Market Areas and the distribution of development within the community areas. Rather than proposing additional allocations be made within the plan to meet the higher requirement, he considers that this could be done through the early production of a Sites Allocation Development Plan Document.

### **Level of affordable housing**

The Plan presented for examination proposed a requirement of 40% affordable housing on sites of more than five dwellings. The Inspector is concerned that the evidence does not justify this figure, with particular reference to the Council's Affordable Housing Viability Assessment prepared by consultants in 2011. He considers that the figure is too aspirational and will be too challenging to secure in practice, placing at risk delivery of key elements of the plan (e.g. delivering energy efficiency in new homes) and unreasonable burdens on development.

The Inspector is seeking confirmation of whether evidence exists to support a lower figure than 40% or if this is not the case, to undertake a review of the evidence to justify alternative lower figures that will be viable.

### **Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation**

The Plan is required to outline the number of Gypsy and Traveller pitches to be delivered within the plan period to meet Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs. The Inspector has considered objections to the plan that the need is underestimated and requested further work to be undertaken to ensure the plan has a robust indication of necessary pitch provision.

The Inspector recognises that the plan should also identify a supply of specific sites for pitches over the next five years and give broad locations for the remainder of the plan period to be in conformity with national policy. However, he indicates that he is satisfied that this can be achieved through the programmed Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocation Development Plan Document.

### **Strategic Allocations at Chippenham**

The Inspector has highlighted concerns raised by an objector to the plan, Chippenham 2020 (site promoter of an area to the east of Chippenham which is not included in the submitted plan). The Inspector considers that the assessment of options including the Chippenham 2020 site within the Sustainability Appraisal, particularly in relation to informing the transport effects of proposals, was not equitable and the justifications put forward by the council were unconvincing. The Inspector

concludes that this is sufficient to undermine the justification for the strategic allocations within the Core Policy 10 'Spatial Strategy: Chippenham Community Area'.

The Inspector is therefore considering modifications which would remove all strategic allocations at Chippenham to avoid undue delay to the progress of the submitted plan. He suggests that the council could then produce a Site Allocation Development Plan Document for Chippenham which identifies sites to meet its development requirement, underpinned by a revised Sustainability Appraisal.

### **Settlement boundaries**

The Plan carries forward the settlement boundaries defined within the current district local plans and the adopted South Wiltshire Core Strategy. However, the Inspector has raised concerns that these boundaries require reviewing and updating. The Inspector also recognises that a wholesale review of boundaries would likely place a disproportionate delay on the adoption of the submitted plan. He therefore suggests that a timely review of the settlement boundaries could be undertaken through the Site Allocations Development Plan Document.

### **Town Centre boundaries**

National planning policy states that councils should define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas. The council proposed that this work would be undertaken as part of an early review to the Plan, once adopted. As such, the Plan as presented relies upon the saved policies contained within the extant local plans published by the previous district authorities.

The Inspector has sought clarification as to the preferred method and timing of the town centre boundary review to ensure that these matters can be swiftly resolved.

### **Next Steps**

The matters raised by the Inspector will require careful consideration, which will include revisions to the council's Local Development Scheme in order to provide confidence to the Inspector that a number of matters can be resolved swiftly through other development plan documents. This would avoid unreasonable delay to the adoption of the Plan.

Members will be updated with the response to the Inspector in a subsequent briefing note.