

**Wiltshire Council**

**Cabinet**

**16 December 2014**

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**Public Participation**

**Item 7 – Adoption of Wiltshire Core Strategy**

**Question from Mr Patrick Kinnersly, Secretary of the White Horse Alliance**

**Response by Councillor Toby Sturgis, Cabinet member for Strategic Planning, Development Management, Strategic Housing, Property, Waste**

**Question1**

- (i) Will the council confirm that it fully accepts the Core Strategy inspector's instruction to remove the safeguarding of the route of the A350 Westbury Eastern Bypass and will not in future seek to revive a project that no less than three planning inspectors have now advised against or rejected outright over the past decade?

Response:

- (i) As set out in the Cabinet Report, the recommendation is for Council to accept the Inspector's modification to replace the 'saved' policy on the A350 Westbury Eastern Bypass with Core Policy 66 'Strategic Transport Network'.

**Question2**

- (i) Will the council now accept the inspector's recommendation that the Special Landscape Area (SLA) designation should be retained for the Wellhead Valley and the escarpment of Salisbury Plain?
- (ii) Following the deletion of the council's intended safeguarding of the eastern bypass route, will the council therefore now act on its 'desire', noted by the inspector at Para 405 of his report, 'to be involved in any such discussions with Natural England and other bodies' regarding the

potential of this area to become an extension to the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

- (iii) Is the council now able to improve the chances of gaining national protection for this landscape by letting Natural England know, without further delay, that it supports the proposal?

Response:

- (i) The Council has proposed to continue to save local plan policies on SLAs (including the SLA covering the Wellhead Valley), subject to results of an evidence based review which is due for completion in 2015 and will inform the Partial Review of the Wiltshire Core Strategy. The Inspector accepted the proposal, stating that "... *the retention of existing Special Landscape Areas are warranted on an interim basis, albeit their thorough review should form part of the Landscape Strategy in due course*" (paragraph 157).
- (ii) The Council still intends to engage in any boundary modification process relating to the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB if and when such a process is commenced by Natural England. However, to date no such process has been initiated by Natural England as the legally responsible agency.
- (iii) The Council has not yet received any evidence or studies on a proposal from Natural England. The Council is therefore not in a position to consider or reach a firm conclusion on the proposals and would not wish to prejudice any forthcoming engagement with the process, if and when it is initiated by Natural England.  
The Councils role in the boundary reviews of AONBs' is one of consultee.

**Question 3**

- (i) Will the council follow its own supplementary planning document on conservation of bats linked to the nearby European Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and subject the greatly enlarged Ashton Park urban extension and the related distributor road system to assessment against its own planning guidance?
- (ii) In view of the evidence submitted to the Examination in Public of the draft Core Strategy by Professor Altringham on behalf of the WHA, will the

council reassess the risk that breeding colonies of bats protected by European law will not survive recreational pressures on their habitats at Green Lane and Biss woods resulting from the Core Strategy plan to locate large human populations next to these woods?

- (iii) Will the council also assess the barrier and severance effects on these bat colonies of what appears to be a new eastern bypass for Trowbridge now under construction across likely commuting corridors for bats between woodland roosts east of Trowbridge and the hibernation roosts around Bradford-on-Avon and Bath?

### Response

- (i) The Council's SAC guidance calls for early engagement, robust evidence and bespoke mitigation measures when dealing with development in certain areas of the County, including the Ashton Park site. The Council has been in extended, ongoing negotiations with the developers, consultants and Natural England regarding the proposals for Ashton Park for several years in order to ensure that any impacts upon bats are understood and mitigated, as intended by the SAC guidance.
- (ii) Updates to the Habitats Regulations Assessment undertaken since the Examination in Public hearings (August 2013 and April 2014) have taken into account all evidence received through the examination process, which included the evidence submitted and presented by Professor Altringham. In light of all such evidence, the Habitats Regulations Assessment process has concluded that the Wiltshire Core Strategy would not affect the integrity of the bat populations at Green Lane and Biss woods, and Natural England concurs with that conclusion.

The Inspector considered both Professor Altringham and the Council's perspective on protected species in relation to the strategic allocation at Ashton Park. His findings are set out in the report.

- (iii) The Hilperton relief road was consented several years ago and was subject to full environmental assessment at that time, which included an assessment of impacts upon bats. That assessment did not identify any of the qualifying species associated with the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC, and as such that project would not have any likely significant effect upon those populations either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

#### **Question 4**

- (i) Will the council consider lowering the proposed 50 mph speed limit on this road in order to reduce risks to the conservation of bats and to the safety and tranquility of residents in the new urban extension?

#### **Response**

- (i) Speed limits are set in accordance with established local and national policy. The proposed speed limit along this length of road will be determined in accordance with the relevant statutory procedure.

#### **Question 5**

- (i) What plans does the council have for identifying, creating and funding the 'green infrastructure' required to provide these protected commuting corridors?

#### **Response:**

- (i) With specific reference to the Ashton Park development, the green infrastructure required to protect significant bat commuting corridors will be identified through survey work, incorporated into the masterplan and provided by the developer. In the long term, these will be protected and favourably managed secured by a planning condition / obligation. The land may transferred and managed in the long term by either the Council, a management company or another third party, or a combination of these parties, details of which will be secured through S106 negotiations.