

Preferred options - frequently asked questions arising from consultation

This page contains answers to some frequently asked questions arising from the Core Strategy Preferred Options consultation in spring 2008.

What is the Local Development Framework and how does the Core Strategy fit into this?

The Local Development Framework is a new plan system introduced by the government, which will provide the guidelines and policies to control development that is currently provided in the Local Plan. However this new system will have a greater role in ensuring that community aspirations are pursued. Sustainable development will remain as the fundamental principle upon which all planning policies in the Local Development Framework will be based. The key objective is to maintain an appropriate balance in the district between social inclusion, economic growth and environmental protection.

The new Local Development Framework system has been designed to allow planning policies to be prepared and consulted upon on an issue by issue basis – providing much more flexibility. The Local Development Framework is therefore like a folder – sections in this can be reviewed through shorter, separate processes. As policies become outdated, they will be replaced quickly and seamlessly with new policies that have been consulted on and agreed. This differs significantly from the previous system, where the Local Plan was a single document prepared through one long process.

The first document to be produced as part of the Local Development Framework is the Core Strategy which will set out a strategic overview of development patterns in the district as well as key objectives which the council will seek to achieve through its detailed policy documents. It will set out the broad way forward for growth and will identify strategic areas for future development.

Details of all the documents to be produced as part of the Local Development Framework along with timetables are set out in the Local Development Scheme which is available on the council's website.

What is the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and how does this relate to the Core Strategy?

Undertaking a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) is a requirement of central government. This document aims to identify available land throughout the district, which could come forward for future development. It requires an assessment of the opportunities and constraints of sites submitted and an indication of the number of houses the site could accommodate, according to government requirements of 30 dwellings per hectare in rural areas and 50 dwellings per hectare in urban areas.

We are bound by the regulations to include new SHLAA sites that come forward throughout the consultation process. As set out in the methodology of the document, these sites will be assessed along with the others received prior to publication. The fact that a site is promoted and included in the SHLAA should not be considered tantamount to allocation. There is no judgment of the merits of the sites at this stage as that is our next task.

As detailed within the SHLAA report, the SHLAA does not make judgments as to what the policy approach in the Core Strategy or any other planning policy documents should be nor does it allocate land for housing. It simply provides an indication of the land that could come forward for development and forms an evidence base for the Local Development Framework. The SHLAA identifies all settlements where housing could be provided, not just the main urban areas, in order to look at all potential sources of supply. It will not make final judgments about whether or not a place would be appropriate for housing.

The draft SHLAA also includes all sites that have been put forward to the council by landowners / agents etc, with no discounting of sites. The consultation responses that are received will give the additional information that will assist with the discounting of unsuitable sites for the final SHLAA.

The next step will be to produce a final document, in which the full assessment of potential sites will be made. This document will clearly set out which sites we consider are deliverable and which are discounted. This document will then form a crucial part of the evidence base that will inform the final submission draft of the LDF Core Strategy.

So what happens to the consultation responses made on the Core Strategy Preferred Options and SHLAA?

The consultation responses made on the Core Strategy Preferred Options and SHLAA are a key part of the evidence base and will be used to inform the production of the Core Strategy Submission Draft. At the end of the consultation period all responses will be considered and a consultation methodology and output report will be produced which will detail how all responses have been considered.

How has the timetable for the production of this Local Development Framework been decided and agreed on and by whom?

The production of the Local Development Framework is being produced to a timetable agreed by the Cabinet in 2005, which was revised and subsequently agreed with Government Office for the South West (GOSW) in January 2007. This timetable is set out in a document called the Local Development Scheme. It sets out a clear timetable for document production and adoption, which accords with government regulations. This timetable has itself been the subject of consultation and is publicly available on the council's website.

How has the length of the consultation periods been decided?

Consultation has gone above and beyond that required by regulation and the Statement of Community Involvement adopted by the council in December 2006. During the 'Our Place in the Future' consultation in the summer of 2007 we extended the consultation period to reflect the fact it was taking place during the summer holidays and were aware that people may need more time to respond due to holidays. We have extended this current consultation from 6 to 8 weeks to ensure that everyone has time to respond.

What consultation measures have you taken and how effective has it been?

The consultations have also included attending over 50 events and sending letters to every household along with area committees, parish council meetings and exhibitions. Despite arguments to the contrary, our consultation has been a real success. As an example Southampton City Council had 200 responses and Thurrock, which has been cited as a national exemplar has received 800. Interestingly Wiltshire County Council received 37 responses on their Minerals Core Strategy. We have far surpassed this and have received detailed and engaging responses from a wide range of people, interest groups and stakeholders.

Are there any serious implications for the council not having an adopted plan?

There are a number of implications of stopping work on the LDF process:

- We will not be meeting our statutory obligations as a council placed on us under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 ; the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004; and the Town and Country Planning (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2004.
- The **Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)**, once adopted, forms part of our statutory Development Plan. Therefore the housing and job numbers for the area will be set.
- Allocated land in the current **Local Plan** will expire in 2011, meaning we have no allocated sites to take us forward to deliver the requirements within the RSS. This will result in a policy vacuum and would not provide new houses, but lead to uncontrolled development. There would be less control over the ability to deliver affordable housing due to there being no policy in place.
- The LDF requires an Sustainability Appraisal and Appropriate Assessment. It is the very best way to build in the principles of sustainability and environmental protection to all land use decisions.
- The LDF is the spatial expression of the **Community Strategy**. By not progressing we would be ignoring the voice of our communities.
- The delivery of projects such as the **Salisbury Vision** would be stifled which could undermine Salisbury's role as a retail centre.
- Important local projects such as the planning for the future of Wilton once the MOD leave the UKLF HQ would not be put in place, placing at risk the future well being of the town.

It is also important to emphasise that by carrying out this process now, the people of south Wiltshire are having a healthy debate and will take decisions at the local level. Failure to take this opportunity could lead to decisions being taken via Planning Inspectors, which have less local accountability and understanding.

How was the number of copies of the Preferred Options to be printed decided and are more being printed?

As I am sure you can appreciate, the production of the Core Strategy has had to be balanced with the prudent expenditure of taxpayers' money.

The number of Core Strategy Preferred Options copies printed was based on an estimate using the Forward Planning team's experience of the "Our Place" consultation that took place in summer 2007.

During this current consultation, the district council was required to send approximately 200 copies to statutory consultees, which included all district council members and parish councils. Six public meetings and exhibitions were originally arranged at the beginning of the consultation period (although additional meetings/exhibitions have since been arranged) and approximately 90 copies were estimated for each exhibition/meeting, based on the experience of similar exhibitions during the Our Place consultation last summer. The estimate also allowed for copies of the document to be made available in the planning office and six libraries across the district.

No one who has requested a copy of the Core Strategy has been denied a copy. In the interests of sustainability and prudent use of taxpayer's money, the Core Strategy is available on the web, to view in the planning office and in local libraries. However, notwithstanding this, a further 1000 copies were printed to cope with demand.

Can you explain the methods used to ensure elected councillors and parish councils were kept informed?

The Core Strategy Preferred Options were approved by Cabinet for consultation in December 2007. Prior to this Cabinet meeting, the Cabinet papers including the Core Strategy Preferred Options were circulated to all district councillors so that they could then disseminate the information to the people who they represent as they considered appropriate. During the 'Our Place in the Future' consultation in summer 2007 all parish councils were informed of the consultation and were offered the attendance of a forward planning officer at their parish council meeting to explain the process and when and how they would be consulted on the next stage and how they can respond. Prior to this, parish councils were given a presentation at the parish council seminars to inform them of the Local Development Framework process and the Core Strategy and when they would be consulted. A Housing Summit was held in late 2007 where councillors were invited along to take part in identifying suitable broad locations for future development.

Publicity measures being used to advertise the consultation include:

- Individual notification to every household in the district
- Repeated adverts in the local press
- A four page wrap in the Avon Advertiser
- All people who commented on the Our Place in the Future (other than those who commented anonymously) have been directly notified
- All elected councillors and parish councils have been sent consultation packs
- A radio advertising campaign
- A series of exhibitions and evening meetings throughout the district
- The area committees are being consulted
- A range of focus groups, and technical consultative meetings are being held
- A series of summits such as the Salisbury housing summit and Wilton summit are being held.
- All documents are publicly available free of charge from the Planning Office, local libraries, website or on request.

The document includes the option of a ‘new settlement’. What is the idea behind this and what is the government’s view?

The government’s national policies are set out in Planning Policy Statements. Policies set out in PPSs need to be taken into account by regional planning bodies in the preparation of regional spatial strategies.

At the regional level, the **Regional Spatial Strategy** identifies broad strategic locations for new housing developments so that the need and demand for housing can be addressed in a way that reflects sustainable development principles. However, with reference to the Salisbury district, this does not explicitly refer to a new settlement for Salisbury district. However, nor does it state that the housing requirement for this district could not be met through the development of a new settlement. The location of a settlement on the A30 in Winterslow close to the world-class employers at Porton Down, would also match jobs to houses, ensuring that people have the opportunity to live in close proximity to where they work and would also deliver affordable housing to meet the needs of the local population and

ensure people have the opportunity to stay living in the area. In selecting this option, a systematic approach of a wide range of issues was undertaken including landscape, infrastructure, government guidance and matching housing to employment and this revealed the area to be one of the possibilities to accommodate growth. Therefore this option, after detailed consideration and backed up by evidence, has been included as **one of three** growth options for accommodating future housing in the district.

Future expansion plans at Porton Down are mentioned throughout the document as a reason for promoting housing in particular locations. What exactly are the plans for Porton Down in the future?

Officers have been in discussion with Porton Down and whilst details cannot be disclosed at this point, officers are aware that there are long term plans for Porton Down well into the plan period that will be covered by the LDF. While it is clearly impossible to make people who work at Porton Down also live in any future housing that is provided there, the point is that the provision of new housing in this area will provide the opportunity for workers to live close by to their employment. This reflects the government's objectives set out in national planning guidance (PPS1 and 3), which seeks to create sustainable communities, including enabling people to live near to their places of work. Furthermore, development in this location will also provide an element of affordable housing to meet the needs of local people and ensure that they have the opportunity to continue living in the area.

Why have landowners been approached and how will sites for development be decided?

As well as consulting on the Core Strategy Preferred Options, the district council is also currently consulting on a document called the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, or SHLAA. All local authorities are required by the Government to produce such a document, which sets out sites that could potentially be developed for housing and will form part of the evidence base to support the Core Strategy and other Local Development Framework documents.

The SHLAA does not make judgements as to what the policy approach in the Core Strategy should be **nor does it allocate land for housing**. It simply provides an indication of the land that could come forward for development and forms an evidence base for the Local Development Framework. Furthermore, the SHLAA identifies all settlements where housing could be provided, not just the main urban

areas, in order to look at all potential sources of supply. It will not make final judgements about whether or not a place would be appropriate for housing.

This document is currently in draft form and comments are invited.

Landowners have been informed of the possible inclusion of their sites in the interests of deliverability; without landowners on board, there would bring into question the rationale behind identifying a site as an allocation.

What is the timetable for the “Site Specific Allocations” stage of the Local Development Framework? Do sites become ‘specific’ before or after the ‘Final Options’ are sent in June 2008 to the Minister?

National guidance (PPS12) states that specific land allocations should not be set out in the core strategy but in the Site Specific Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD). However, since this guidance was published, the new Planning White Paper has been produced and is currently going through parliament. This White Paper encourages councils to provide enough strategic sites in their Core Strategies to ensure housing delivery in the district over the next 10 years. The reason for this is to provide certainty that the housing requirements of the district can be met, at least in the short term. The dichotomy between the current legislation and emerging White Paper over which document should make the site specific allocations is the subject of ongoing discussions with the Government Office. Specific, non-strategic site allocations will be set out in the Site Specific Allocations DPD, the first consultation on which is due in the autumn 2008.

Are there any further opportunities to have a say after 25 April 2008?

Yes there are. The submission draft will be subject to debate by the [Cabinet](#)¹⁴ and then Full Council prior to submission and a further period of public consultation at which stage all parish council organisations and individuals will be asked for their further comments.

The current consultation on the Core Strategy Preferred Options is the opportunity for councillors, parish councillors and major stakeholders to make representations **now** and I would strongly urge all parties not to wait but to give us their comments at this stage.

The Core Strategy Preferred Options is being taken to all area committees for their consideration. Parish councils were given prior notification of the Core Strategy Preferred Options consultation. Parish councils were first informed of the imminent Core Strategy Preferred Options consultation in the middle of January 2008. This letter informed parish councils that the consultation was due to start on 14 February 2008. A second letter sent at the end of January 2008 informed parish councils that there would be a two week delay in the start of the consultation period to 28 February. A third letter was sent out just after the consultation period began, and the Core Strategy Preferred Options consultation document was included with this letter.

Other statutory consultees were sent a copy of the consultation documents at the beginning of this current round of consultation.

There will be a further consultation period once the Core Strategy has been submitted to the Secretary of State. This is in accordance with at the submission stage Regulation 28 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004. In accordance with this and the district council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), councillors, parish councillors and major stakeholders will be consulted again at this stage.

The growth in housing will need to be supported by a growth in jobs. What plans are there to bring employment to the region?

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) sets the housing figures for the region based on household projections produced by the government. It also sets out the number of jobs to be provided across the region, based on an analysis of economic growth requirements and technical forecasts. The RSS is produced by the South West Regional Assembly, has been subject to public consultation, and will be subject to further public consultation in the future. We would suggest that if any one is unhappy with the level of growth in the RSS they contact the South West Regional Assembly direct and ask how they may have their views taken into account.

The RSS sets out the number of jobs that the district is required to provide, expressed in terms of hectares of land. In order to provide opportunities for attracting new employment to the district, it is of utmost importance that the right amount and type of employment land is provided in the right locations across the district; without this, there would be no incentive for new employers to come to the

district. It is also important to provide employment land for existing world class employers that are already in the district, such as at Porton Down. By ensuring the right amount and type of employment land in the right locations through the LDF, the implementation of the regional economic strategy will be facilitated.

What background evidence has been produced, where is it available and have members been made aware of it?

Alongside the Preferred Options consultation document, there are a number of documents drawn up by Forward Planning and by consultants, including 16 Topic Papers and addendum papers and a methodology output report, which councillors have been briefed on. All the Topic Papers and associated Addendum papers were fully referenced as key background document when the Core Strategy Preferred Options went to Cabinet¹⁴ and are published on the website. As referred to above, all Cabinet papers are circulated to all district councillors.

What quality control measures have the council employed to ensure they are meeting their statutory obligations?

In preparing the Local Development Framework, the district council must accord with the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 and guidance set out in Planning Policy Statement 12 on consultation procedures. It must also accord with the district council's Statement of Community Involvement, which itself was prepared in consultation with the local community and district councillors and has been the subject of a formal public examination led by an independent inspector in August 2006. Legal advice has been sought at each key stage in the production of the Core Strategy Preferred Options through Counsel. Throughout the production of the Core Strategy the team has been liaising closely with Government Office for the South West who have acted as a 'critical friend' and given advice at every stage. Soundness testing of the Preferred Options has also been undertaken according to the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) guidelines, to ensure that the document is sound. This report is available on the website.

The council would be acting ultra vires ('beyond strength'; beyond or exceeding its authority) if it did **not** carry out the LDF process, as it is a statutory requirement of all local councils.

When talking about densities in the region of 30 to 50 dwelling per hectare are potential impacts on areas fully considered?

Of course, one should not fall into the trap of believing that higher densities equate to poor and overcrowded development. There are many examples of high quality and well-designed developments around the district, which makes the best use of land and in fact many post-war council estates are actually very low density. Designing buildings that respect the vernacular context is the key, rather than pursuing some arbitrary argument on densities. No two sites are ever the same and each site should always be treated on its own merits and that includes identifying an appropriate density.

In this respect the Salisbury District Council's design guide called *Creating Places* might be of interest to you and you can find it at our website.

Many communities have put much time and effort into producing documents to help shape their future. Were Parish plans, such as TisVis, village design statements and community plans taken into account during the production of the document as they express the wishes of communities?

All such documents formed a key part of the evidence base, which has informed the production of the Core Strategy Preferred Options. The information contained was used to produce the themed Topic Papers which form the foundation of the process and are available on the website. Many of the aspirations of the communities are articulated within the options set out in the Preferred Options under the area visions. In this way the Core Strategy should be seen as a key vehicle for delivering this valuable community work, not a threat to it.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Study shows that some settlements have had a large number of sites put forward. How can people be assured that these settlements will not be swamped?

We are bound by the regulations to accept new SHLAA sites that come forward throughout the consultation process. As set out in the methodology of the document, these sites will be assessed along with the others received prior to publication. The fact that a site is promoted and included in the SHLAA should not be considered tantamount to allocation. There is no judgment of the merits of the sites at this stage as that is our next task. The Preferred Options make it clear that we do not see large scale development as being appropriate in our smaller

settlements, which we consider should only take very modest growth to protect their character, while allowing the delivery of some locally needed affordable housing.

In summary just because a third party has promoted a site, it does not mean it is suitable for development. That is the next stage of the process officers will carry out.