



South Wiltshire Core Strategy

Topic Paper 7 Addendum 2:

Agriculture, Farm Diversification and Rural Economy

July 2009

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

TOPIC PAPER 7 ADDENDUM 2

AGRICULTURE, FARM DIVERSIFICATION AND RURAL ECONOMY

JULY 2009

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In June 2007 Salisbury District Council published Local Development Framework Topic Paper 7 'Agriculture, Farm Diversification and Rural Economy' ("The Topic Paper"). In February 2008, following consultation on options put forward within The Topic Paper, the Council published an Addendum to the Topic Paper ("The Addendum").
- 1.2 This second Addendum should be read in conjunction with both The Topic Paper and The Addendum and it is not therefore considered necessary to repeat background information, national and regional policy, examples of best practice and community aspirations contained therein in detail.
- 1.3 The Council's desired outcomes for this topic are to:
 - Maintain an employment base within the rural area.
 - Reduce the amount of rural to urban travel to work.
 - Protect the best and most versatile agricultural land to ensure it is available for food production.
- 1.4 The Topic Paper noted that the Salisbury area is pre-dominantly rural, and a large proportion of the population lives and works in these rural parts of the district. Examples of how development proposals might impact on the rural area have been explored and a series of options examined as to how the Core Strategy could assist in the continued viability of the agricultural industry and rural economy.
- 1.5 In summary, the options that were considered worthy of pursuing were as follows:
 - Positive promotion of farm diversification, including into businesses unrelated to farming, to enable farmers to increase their incomes.
 - Encouragement of small-scale business development in the countryside.
 - Protection of the best and most versatile agricultural land.
 - Re-use of redundant farm buildings for commercial enterprise/farm diversification schemes.
 - Encouragement of renewable energy crops.
 - Recognition of the importance that commercial equestrian activity makes to the rural economy.
 - Support of not only farmers but also local food production businesses.
 - Ensuring that agriculture uses water to the best effect.
 - Ensuring existing woods and forests are managed sustainably.
 - Expanding forestry to provide benefits for society and the environment.
 - Encouraging a wider economic use for woodland.

2 ISSUES AND OPTIONS

- 2.1 The suggestions listed above were included within the council's 'Our Place In The Future' Issues and Options consultation carried out in the summer of 2007.
- 2.2 The Addendum reviewed The Topic Paper, analysed the results of the public consultation on these options and examined relevant individual comments to ascertain if there were any additional areas that required investigation prior to the preparation of Preferred Options for this topic.
- 2.3 As far as the rural areas are concerned, there was strong support for a policy that supports new business development in the countryside, located near to larger settlements to minimise travel and car use, provided development is of a small scale and a design appropriate to the countryside.
- 2.4 There was also support for:
 - Allowing farmers more freedom to diversify into businesses not related to farming, as well as allowing agriculture-based diversification.
 - Encouraging farmers to re-use redundant farm buildings for commercial and business use, dependent on scale and location.
 - Supporting farmers through encouraging farmers' shops and markets.
- 2.5 Commercial equestrian activities also received support as this area makes an important contribution to our economy. Some respondents felt this should be left to market forces to dictate, although our view is that this approach would not necessarily facilitate positive outcomes.
- 2.6 The consultation also identified that Main Villages (NB: now defined as 'Secondary Villages' (see Second Addendum to Topic Paper 3)) should also be allowed to accommodate business development to enhance their sustainability. This should be provided in line with the strategy for dispersal of rural housing and employment.

3 **PREFERRED OPTIONS**

3.1 The proposals identified above were subjected to a number of tests including sustainability appraisal, deliverability and conformity with national and regional policy. As a result The Addendum identified the following as options that should be considered further:

- Support for small-scale new business development in the countryside located near to larger settlements, to minimise travel and car use.
- For small-scale businesses to be allowed in the countryside there would need to be safeguards against development that leads to an increase in traffic in the countryside – the same is true of encouraging diversification.
- Only small business units should be allowed, that look like a farm so as not to disfigure the landscape, with no HGVs allowed in the country lanes, Scale and nature of development is important and should not be unlimited.
- Small-scale business could be equally as helpful in or near small villages as well as near to larger settlements.
- Main Villages (NB: now defined as ‘Secondary Villages’) should also be allowed to accommodate business development to enhance the sustainability of the village. This is what PPS7 promotes.
- Need to ensure that unreasonable business practices, in terms of sustainability, are not encouraged.
- Support for allowing farmers more freedom to diversify into businesses not related to farming and related to farming.
- Support and encouragement for farmers to re-use redundant farm buildings for commercial and business use.
- Policy should enable farmers to seek alternative income and encourage alternative job opportunities within the countryside.
- The farming community should be encouraged to farm and produce food and not diversify through desperation.
- Farmers will need to produce a lot more food in the future. A watch should be kept on how much they diversify. Suitable safeguards must be in place to prevent the farmer exploiting the freedom.
- Any re-use of redundant farm buildings should be worded to include reference to the potential impact on biodiversity that such an activity could result in for example bats and breeding birds.
- Need to ensure that converting farms to other forms of commercial use is not a means to converting it to housing or industrial use.
- Diversification and re-use of redundant farm buildings is good in principle but development must be of a scale that is appropriate for the location and not generate increased or unsuitable traffic.
- Encourage development of farmers markets and shops, cooperatives and ecommerce.
- Support for the fact that commercial equestrian activity makes an important contribution to our rural economy and should be encouraged.

3.2 The Council carried out consultation on a wide range of Core Strategy Preferred Options in the spring of 2008, of which those referred to below were of relevance to this topic.

- 3.3 The Prized Assets listed under Preferred Option PO2 included ‘A certain rural way of life, which appears to be under pressure, but one treasured and based on close-knit, caring communities and the keeping of traditions’.
- 3.4 Under Preferred Option PO15 the council proposed taking the following steps to maintain and enhance the rural economy:
- Striking a balance between reducing rural to urban commuting, whilst also not encouraging the urban population to commute to new employers in the countryside.
 - In some circumstances, allowing farmers to diversify by developing small-scale businesses on their land that are either related to farming or unrelated to agriculture such as holiday cottages or small-scale offices and the conversion of redundant buildings to commercial re-use.
 - Supporting local food producers.
 - Encouraging energy-efficiency in agriculture.
 - Supporting provision towards the needs of horse training, breeding and livery businesses and other commercial equine enterprises in the countryside.
 - Fostering the traditional country pursuits that make a significant contribution to our rural areas, such as fishing and shooting.
- 3.5 In addition, Preferred Options relating to delivery of employment in individual Community Areas included a proposal to provide opportunities for low-key, sympathetic employment development throughout the villages in each area, so that local job opportunities with shorter commuting distances are available. The relevant Preferred Options were as follows: PO42 (Stonehenge Community Area); PO53 (Mere Community Area); PO64 (Southern Community Area); PO75 (Nadder Community Area).
- 3.6 46% of respondents supported the list of Prized Assets identified under PO2. A further 40% neither supported nor objected to the list, but rather made comment on its content. It should also be noted that the asset of a rural way of life formed part of a list and none of the 14% of respondents who objected to this Preferred Option were against this individual element in principle. Analysis of comments made by objectors indicates that they were mostly concerned with the definition of the Prized Assets and how other Preferred Options would impact on them.
- 3.7 Comments made by respondents included the following:
- Rising food costs throughout the World give increasing importance to agriculture in south Wiltshire.
 - The Parish Council agrees that new planning should pay special attention to nurturing and protecting those prized assets unique to our district.
 - I endorse all the prized assets. However, some proposals give no consideration to a rural way of life and risk ruining part of the countryside, which is a prized asset.

- A ‘rural way of life’ will cease to exist with a development of 2500 homes at Firsdown.
- Of course prized assets must be safeguarded.
- If assets such as these are to be preserved, attempts at development over them must be resisted.

3.8 52% of respondents supported the steps suggested under PO15 to maintain and enhance the rural economy. A further 12% neither supported nor objected to the list, but rather made comment on its content. Analysis of comments made by the 36% of respondents objecting to this Preferred Option indicates that the majority were not necessarily against this option in principle, but rather were concerned with definition and precise wording of subsequent policies.

3.9 Comments made by respondents included the following:

- Need to maintain all traditional country pursuits. There is little more traditional than hunting. Hunting must also be fostered.
- I agree strongly with this Preferred Option. I think some thought should be given to developing farm buildings to provide new houses if relevant and sustainable also.
- The special rural character of our area needs to be maintained as far as possible.
- No public funds should be used to support blood sports, which will always be controversial.
- The policy is insufficiently robust and will fail to have any impact on current levels of loss of facilities.
- The proposed restrictive nature of preventing farmers to diversify is contrary to government guidance: greater flexibility to be provided.
- Wiltshire is a rural county and the indigenous population needs to be encouraged to stay and make a living in the countryside.

3.10 The results of consultation on the Preferred Options for delivering employment in the various Community Areas are summarised below, in order to avoid repetitive blocks of text. In each case a straight support for the Option is in the minority. However, it should be noted that in each case the provision of opportunities for low-key, sympathetic employment development throughout the villages in the area formed part of a list, and not all of the respondents who objected to the Preferred Option were necessarily against this individual element in principle.

3.11 Furthermore, significant numbers of respondents neither supported nor objected to the list, but rather made comment on its content. Following analysis of comments made by those objecting, a summary of their key concerns has been noted in each case.

3.12 PO42: Stonehenge Community Area

Support:	28%
Comment:	50%

Object: 22%
Key Concerns: Allocation of higher-level, strategic employment sites.

Comments made by respondents included the following:

- Development of local employment and new housing developments is desirable to develop communities and reduce commuting.
- We support the identified strategy for delivering employment opportunities in the Stonehenge Community Area.

3.13 PO53: Mere Community Area

Support: 33%
Comment: 21%
Object: 46%
Key Concerns: Any large allocations for employment in the area.

Comments made by respondents included the following:

- Only allow low-key businesses to develop, otherwise there is a possibility that Mere will develop into an ugly industrial landscape.
- This Preferred Option sounds good, particularly with respect to the 'shorter travel to work distances', but I consider that the aims are too optimistic, as the number of jobs created within each category is likely to be small.

3.14 PO64: Southern Community Area

Support: 36%
Comment: 14%
Object: 50%
Key Concerns: Any large allocations for employment in the area.

Comments made by respondents included the following:

- With the current climate of approaching 'economic depression' we should not be even considering enlarging the employment community.
- Any development in employment must not affect the rural way of life by, for example, inappropriate building or taking employees away from the rural industries such as farming, game keeping etc.
- Broadly support, but industrial growth is likely to be opposed due to lack of suitable available land.

3.15 PO75: Nadder Community Area

Support: 33%
Comment: 30%
Object: 37%
Key Concerns: Access and any large allocations for employment in the area.

Comments made by respondents included the following:

- Employment in villages is important but just allocating areas, or even buildings, for it is not enough.
- Employment land should be in proportion to the size of Tisbury's population.
- I support employing current members of population in Tisbury area but bringing in more industry will put undue pressure on roads and could impact on the AONB.

3.16 The Council undertook a second stage of Preferred Options consultation in the autumn of 2008. The consultation document again referred to the proposal that the Core Strategy should include policies to provide opportunities for low-key, sympathetic employment development, throughout the district, offering local jobs that discourage commuting.

3.17 Although a specific question regarding this topic was not asked at this second stage of consultation, there was an opportunity for respondents to make additional comments, including on previous Preferred Options. These responses have been examined and it is considered that no new issues requiring further investigation have been raised in respect of this topic.

APPENDIX ONE: SUGGESTED POLICIES

Taking into account the rigorous processes, consultation and analysis undertaken by the Council and outlined above, it is considered appropriate to include the following policies within the Core Strategy.

The draft policies do not include references to general design criteria such as impact on visual amenities, biodiversity, water resources, access and traffic generation as these should flow from the Design Topic Paper.

Policy A: Farm Diversification

Proposals for farm diversification schemes (both on-farm and off-farm) that support farm incomes will be permitted provided that:

- The proposal benefits the local Community Area economy;
- The proposal will not prejudice the viability of nearby village shops;
- The buildings are appropriate in scale, form, impact, character and siting to their rural location and are of a high design standard;
- Wherever possible new or replacement buildings should be located within or adjoining an existing group of buildings;
- The proposal does not result in inappropriate levels of traffic generation; and
- There is no adverse impact of the activity or any building associated with the activity on either the landscape, the local built environment or nature conservation interests:

Policy B: Change Of Use Of Buildings

The change of use or replacement of buildings in the open countryside to appropriate alternative business, community or employment uses will be supported, provided that:

- The existing building is not the result of a temporary planning permission;
- The building is not made of flimsy prefabricated materials and is constructed in a permanent manner, which enables its conversion without substantial reconstruction;
- The building is not visually intrusive or inappropriate to its setting and can be adapted without detriment to its external appearance or harming its setting;
- The proposal does not involve additional development or require future extensions which would not be permitted under the Local Development Framework; and
- The proposal supports the local Community Area economy.

Appropriate alternative uses will include: forestry, local food businesses, energy crops, tourism and leisure initiatives that capitalise on the unique assets of the area, retail activity principally related to the sale of produce from either the farm exclusively, or both the farm and the Community Area within which it is located, and community facilities, including (but not limited to) education, rural IT connectivity, buildings associated with public open space, biodiversity or geodiversity interests, rural transport or infrastructure initiatives, or horse riding establishments;

Policy C: New Agriculture, Forestry and Horticulture Development

Development essential to meet the needs of agriculture, forestry and horticulture will be supported in the countryside provided that the development:

- Would be inappropriate or impracticable in an urban area;
- Is directly related to a nearby holding or group of holdings; and
- Includes measures to prevent the pollution, over-abstraction and degradation of watercourses and groundwater sources.

Policy D: Protection of Agricultural Land

The best and most versatile agricultural land (DEFRA Grades 1, 2 & 3a) will be protected from development. Exceptions will be supported where either sufficient land in lower grades is unavailable, or lower-grade land that would otherwise be suitable has an environmental value recognised by a statutory landscape, wildlife, historic or archaeological designation which outweighs the agricultural considerations.

If Grade 1, 2 or 3a does need to be developed, and there is a choice between sites in different grades, development will be directed towards land of the lowest grade.

Policy E: New Equine and Country Pursuit Development

Proposals for development that is required to allow viable commercial equine or country pursuit businesses to meet their future aspirations will be permitted provided that:

- New buildings are of sympathetic scale and design to their location;
- The existing infrastructure is adequate to support the new development; and
- There will be no detrimental impact on the amenities of existing residents.

TARGETS

No increase in rural areas of those seeking Job Seekers Allowance.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

NOMIS labour market statistics.

DELIVERY RESPONSIBILITY

Wiltshire Council.

APPENDIX TWO

CHANGES AS A RESULT OF SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL, HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT AND EDITING REFINEMENT

This initial policy text was then subjected to a Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment as well as editing refinement and advice from parties such as GOSW. As a result of this the following amendments were made to the text to ensure conformity with both European Directives as well as ensuring central and regional policy are not repeated and future editing ensured.

The SA noted that the policies would cover a wide range of interrelated issues:

Farm diversification aims would generally have positive effects for social inclusion and the varied economic objectives. However, a reference was made to energy crops, which do not require planning permission although associated buildings might. Whilst bio fuels may progress renewable energy objectives they also reduce the amount of land available for food production and monoculture has adverse effects on biodiversity.

The policy text regarding reuse or replacement of buildings in the open countryside does not give sufficient guidance on the replacement of buildings. PPS7 makes it clear that replacement should be favoured where it would bring about more environmental and sustainable improvements than conversion. This was not made clear in the policy and could lead to development solutions that are not the most sustainable option.

The part of the policy concerning development essential to meet the needs of agriculture, forestry and horticulture would have significant benefits and effects for the economic objectives, which seek to provide a diverse economy which includes the rural economy.

The protection of agricultural land would have positive benefits for climate change and health objectives. There would also be some benefits for climate change and transport issues as home production of food reduces food miles.

Proposals for development required to allow viable commercial equine, forestry and country pursuit businesses to expand would have positive effects on the rural economy.

Therefore, the effects of the policy were mainly assessed to be positive, although clarification of two points was suggested:

- There should be clarification of the reference to energy crops.
- The policy should clarify the circumstances under which replacement buildings in the open countryside will be allowed, so that there is not a proliferation of new buildings in the countryside, which may be at the expense of retention of traditional buildings.

No requirement was identified for examination of this policy at the appropriate assessment stage of the HRA.

The matters addressed were incorporated into a single policy: Supporting The Rural Economy (Core Policy 32 of Draft 3 of the Submission Document). However, following iteration, the policy was deleted from Draft 7 as it was considered to represent a development management policy, which will be delivered in due course through a Wiltshire-wide DPD.