



# South Wiltshire Core Strategy

## Matter 2

### Core policy 1

#### The Distribution of Development - Settlement Hierarchy

Ref: RN/SWCS/M2

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**Question 2.1. Why a Six Tier Settlement Hierarchy?** *The distribution of development in Policy CS1 is based on a six tier settlement hierarchy. What is the basis for this settlement hierarchy?*

- 1.0 The emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (“RSS”) (EIP library reference: RPP/02) provides Development Policies (“DPs”) for three tiers of settlement, but acknowledges that settlements within the lowest tier (DP C) have ‘widely different characteristics and relationships with other settlements and the surrounding countryside’ (paragraph 3.5.1).
- 1.1 The area covered by the South Wiltshire Core Strategy (“CS”) is predominantly rural and a blanket policy relating solely to DP tiers of settlement would not have taken due heed of the different characteristics of the settlements in the area.
- 1.2 This view is supported by Planning Policy Statement (“PPS”) 12: ‘Creating Strong Safe and Prosperous Communities Through Local Spatial Planning’ (EIP library reference: NPP/12 A), which requires that the vision contained in the CS ‘should be informed by an analysis of the characteristics of the area and its constituent parts...’ (paragraph 4.2).
- 1.3 The following explains the evidence gathered to justify why a six-tier hierarchy is appropriate and Core Policy 1 is in conformity to the draft RSS. The Council considers that the approach is spatially distinctive for the CS, given the characteristics of the area:
  - The city of Salisbury dominates the area and is identified as a DP A settlement (i.e. Strategically Significant City or Town (“SSCT”)) in the RSS. Its role and function is explained in more detail in paragraphs 3.10 to 3.14 of Addendum 2 to Topic Paper 3 (“TP 3”) (EIP library reference: TOP/03 C).
  - Given the basis for the settlement hierarchy (see response to question 2.2 below), Amesbury (supported by MoD establishments and the Garrison Villages of Bulford and Durrington) is a unique settlement that does not conform to the DP A category but is fundamentally different from other DP B settlements within South Wiltshire: MoD ‘Super Garrison’ proposals for this area further support this. The role and function of Amesbury and the Garrison Villages is explained in more detail in paragraphs 3.15 to 3.20 of TP 3.
  - The Local Service Centres (“LSCs”) of Downton, Mere, Tisbury and Wilton equate to DP B settlements. They have traditionally provided service hubs to rural ‘Community Areas’ used by the Council to inform its Sustainable Community Strategy. The role and function of the LSCs is explained in more detail in paragraphs 3.21 to 3.32 of TP 3.
  - Secondary Villages equate to DP C settlements, with the assessment of their function and available facilities representing detailed work required to identify the differences between settlements at this level, as acknowledged in the RSS (paragraph 3.51).
  - Small Villages also equate to DP C settlements, again with the assessment of their function and available facilities representing detailed work to identify the differences between settlements at this level, as acknowledged in the RSS (paragraph 3.5.1).
  - Although a sixth-tier of Other Settlements and The Countryside is identified, this is not a level of settlement where new development would

be supported. This category is included for the avoidance of doubt over the status of very small settlements in the hierarchy – particularly those where Local Plan Housing Policy Boundaries (“HPBs”) and/or Housing Restraint Areas (“HRAs”) would be removed in the event of the CS being adopted.

**Question 2.2. The Choice of Settlements.** *Have the right settlements been allocated to the right levels in the settlement hierarchy?*

- 2.0 The evidence base supports the approach to defining the settlement strategy. The right settlements have therefore been allocated to the right levels in the settlement hierarchy.
- 2.1 PPS 3: Housing (EIP library reference: NPP/03) states the Government’s policy that that new housing should be ‘in suitable locations, which offer a range of community facilities and with good access to jobs, key services and infrastructure’ (paragraph 36).
- 2.2 Although published after the submission of the CS, PPS 4: Planning For Sustainable Economic Growth (EIP library reference: NPP/04 D) indicates the Government’s continuing desire for this approach by encouraging the concentration of most rural development on LSCs (Policy EC6.2).
- 2.3 Specific references to services and facilities in those sections of PPS 3 and 4 imply that the existing size (i.e. population) of settlements is not a critical factor in determining where new development should be located: indeed size or population is not referred to in this context in either case.
- 2.4 We have found no evidence to support the notion that new housing in lower tier settlements would, in it’s self, encourage the provision of new services and facilities. Furthermore, our view is that using population as a criterion for the settlement hierarchy might only exacerbate problems where a settlement already has a low number of services and facilities.
- 2.5 The CS settlement hierarchy is therefore based on the provision of Basic Facilities within settlements. In TP 3, ‘Basic Facilities’ are defined as those that not only provide a service to the settlement in which they are located, but also to surrounding smaller settlements and a rural hinterland. This includes schools, general food shops, separate post offices and journey to work transport (paragraphs 2.10 to 2.13).
- 2.6 The number of Basic Facilities in each settlement in South Wiltshire was initially determined by the information contained within the Council’s Rural Facilities Survey for the area (EIP library reference: STU/10), backed up by officers’ own research and local knowledge.
- 2.7 It is acknowledged that, for instance, schools, shops and post offices might open or close, or transport routes might be changed. However, this is considered unlikely to change the status of settlements in the top three tiers of the hierarchy, and there will be an opportunity to assess the specific levels of development suitable in lower tier settlements when a Site Specific Allocations (“SSA”) Development Plan Document (“DPD”) is produced, subsequent to the adoption of the CS (the timetable for this DPD is under review at the time of drafting).

**Question 2.3. Why Choose this Distribution Strategy?** *Policy CS1 adopts a strategy of distributing development between various settlements in the South Wiltshire with Salisbury taking the bulk of new housing and employment, a significant amount directed to Amesbury and more modest amounts in other settlements. Why was this strategy adopted rather than the options of a new settlement or an urban extension as referred to in paragraph 1.9 of the CS?*

3.0 At the Preferred Options (“PO”) stage, the Council put forward (in PO 8) three possible scenarios for the distribution of development in South Wiltshire, beyond the level of development required in the RSS for the SSCT of Salisbury:

- Scenario 1: A new settlement of up to 2500 dwellings to the north east of Salisbury, with the balance of new development distributed across South Wiltshire.
- Scenario 2: The distribution of all the new development across South Wiltshire.
- Scenario 3: An urban extension to Firsdown, with the balance of new development distributed across South Wiltshire.

3.1 Scenarios 1 and 3 were rejected following the PO stage, having taken into account consultation responses. In particular, the Government Office for the South West stated that the CS ‘would seem to be at a significant risk of being unsound if either [of these Scenarios] were to be submitted as firm proposals of the plan’.

3.2 Objections to, and concerns about, Scenarios 1 and 3 were also raised by a large number of other respondents, including other Statutory Consultees: the Local Highway Authority, South West Regional Assembly, English Heritage, Highways Agency and Natural England.

3.3 In pursuing Scenario 2, the bulk of the distributed development has been centred on Salisbury because of its dominant role in the South Wiltshire Housing Market Area (“HMA”) and parts of Dorset and Hampshire. Salisbury is the only SSCT in South Wiltshire, and the allocation to the city of at least 6000 dwellings is required in RSS Policy HMA 11. Although the city itself has several constraints, its capacity for accommodating growth in a sustainable manner is far beyond that of any other settlement in the area.

3.4 Taking into account the basis for identifying proposed levels of growth in individual areas and settlements (see response to question 2.4 below), the dominance of Salisbury is such that the allocation to the city of a significant number of additional dwellings, over and above the Policy HMA 11 figure, is appropriate. This is further supported by the city’s location in the wider area: comparison shows that, with the exception of Barnstaple, Salisbury is the most isolated SSCT from other settlements in this category within the South West, and therefore represents a centre for a relatively larger area compared to other SSCTs. The justification for the levels of housing proposed in and around Salisbury is explained in TP 3 (paragraphs 6.7 to 6.11).

3.5 The amount of proposed development centred on Amesbury reflects its unique position in the settlement hierarchy, and relates to the number of Basic Facilities it provides in relation to both Salisbury and the LSCs, as well as its defined town centre, significant employment opportunities and location

adjacent to the A303. The justification for the proposed level of development in Amesbury is also explained in TP 3 (paragraphs 6.17 to 6.25 and 7.4).

- 3.6 Wiltshire is a rich and varied place and the challenges within it vary accordingly. Therefore, the CS is rooted in the distinctive character of specific places and tailored to solving their particular sets of problems.
- 3.7 To align policy solutions to areas where issues are arising, a detailed assessment of the diverse character of the settlements of South Wiltshire has been undertaken. The findings and conclusions of this assessment are included in TP 3 and have led to the distribution of development in rural areas based on existing Community Planning Areas. These areas were originally devised to reflect 'natural' communities in terms of real patterns of local life (shopping, employment, schooling etc). The evidence set out in TP 3, and the community research it draws on, confirms that the functional relationships identified in the community plans for these areas are still very relevant.

**Question 2.4. Proposed Levels of Growth in Settlements.** *Broadly speaking, have the right levels of growth been allocated to various settlements?*

- 4.0 As stated in the response to question 2.3 above, a minimum level of allocation of development to the SSCT is required in RSS Policy HMA11. The implication of this (supported by RSS Key Diagram Inset 11) is that the balance of dwellings required to meet the total set out in the Salisbury HMA by RSS Policy HD1 should be distributed across the area covered by the CS.
- 4.1 The starting point for calculations of how housing numbers should be allocated was a Local Housing Needs and Market Survey, prepared for the Council in 2006 (EIP library reference: STU/03). Sections 15.13 to 15.18 of the survey report set out identified needs on a Community Area basis.
- 4.2 As the settlement hierarchy is based on the availability of Basic Facilities, this criterion has also been used to inform the distribution of the balance of growth required by the RSS, beyond the identified local needs, in terms of Community Areas as well as individual settlements. A full explanation of this is contained in TP 3 (sections 5 to 7).
- 4.3 At this time, proposed numbers of dwellings have only been identified for the tiers of LSC and above. This is a sound approach to the CS, reflecting the fact that it provides an overarching strategy to the plan area as a whole.

**Question 2.5. Removal of Housing Policy Boundaries.** *Core Policy 1 states that new development will not be permitted other than in named settlements. The effect of this would be to remove the possibility of infill development, small scale development and redevelopment from a number of villages which previously had housing policy boundaries defined within the Salisbury District Local Plan. What is the justification for this? Why were these particular villages selected as being unsuitable for development?*

- 5.0 Appendix IV (page 9/156) of the CS Sustainability Appraisal Report (EIP library reference: SWCS/03) confirms that Core Policy 1 sets out guidance for a sustainable pattern of development.

- 5.1 Taking into account the basis for producing the settlement hierarchy, a number of settlements have been identified as being inappropriate to support development in a sustainable manner. Some of these settlements have HPBs/HRAs, which would be removed if the CS were to be adopted.
- 5.2 Some consultation respondents have suggested HPB/HRAs should be retained in particular settlements. However, justification has not been offered as to why these individual settlements might have been 'misplaced' using the settlement strategy criteria, nor as to why a particular settlement should be treated differently from another in the same tier.
- 5.3 Notwithstanding this, it is recognised that there may be scope for more work to be carried out in drawing distinctions between the lower tier settlements, particularly in terms of making provision for allocating small housing exception sites on the basis of identified local needs.
- 5.4 In resolving to submit the CS, Members of the Council agreed to undertake a subsequent full review of the application of HPBs and HRAs in the smaller settlements in South Wiltshire (and equivalent across Wiltshire) as part of the development of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, which will ensure a consistent approach to infill development across the county.