

**WILTSHIRE COUNCIL
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
SOUTH WILTSHIRE CORE STRATEGY
EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC**

**MATTER 4 : CORE POLICY 1
DISTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT
OTHER SOURCES OF LAND FOR
DEVELOPMENT**

**ON BEHALF OF
AMESBURY PROPERTY COMPANY**

Pegasus Planning Group
Querns Business Centre
Whitworth Road
Cirencester
Gloucestershire
GL7 1RT

Telephone: (01285) 641717 Facsimile: (01285) 642348

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Q4.6 Employment

The emerging RSS acknowledges that there are opportunities for some job growth at locations such as Amesbury but states that the key strategic aim is to extend and enhance Salisbury as an employment and retail centre. Porton Down, Boscombe Down and Solstice Park are all in the Amesbury area and are all allocated for employment in the Salisbury District Local Plan. However, while the first two of these locations are treated as saved local plan sites the latter is not. Why is this?

4.6.1 Pegasus Planning Group have made representations to the Core Strategy Proposed Submission Draft (July 2009) on behalf of the Amesbury Property Company and covered many of the issues in response to this question.

4.6.2 Amesbury Property Company generally supports the South Wiltshire Core Strategy and notes its overall soundness. However, further changes to the Core Strategy are sought to improve its effectiveness, consistency with national policy and for clarification/updating purposes.

4.6.3 The main issues in response to this question are:

- Wiltshire Council support Solstice Park, this has been strengthened recently by its approach to the planning applications for the Regional Distribution Centre and the Data Centre.
- The Core Strategy (including recent amendments) strengthens the role for Amesbury and encourages self-containment
- Policy E8A Solstice Park should be saved
- Quantitative versus Qualitative provision of employment land
- Will retention of the Solstice Park allocation harm the Core Strategy?

Wiltshire Council support Solstice Park, this has been strengthened recently by its approach to the planning applications for the Regional Distribution Centre and the Data Centre. Solstice Park has planning permission

4.6.4 Wiltshire Council officers supported the Regional Distribution Centre (RDC) and the Data Centre planning applications at Solstice Park – these development uses will take up large areas of employment land at Solstice Park without having any adverse impact on Wiltshire Council's interpretation of the RSS employment strategy for South Wiltshire which is focused on directing economic development at Salisbury City.

- 4.6.5 Wiltshire Council have considered the planning applications and both the RDC and the Data Centre applications are now subject to resolutions to approve.

The Core Strategy strengthens the role for Amesbury and encourages self-containment

- 4.6.6 Amesbury is the second largest settlement in the area and:

“Because of the level of services, shops and jobs that Amesbury provides, it will be the focus of significant strategic growth outside Salisbury.”¹

- 4.6.7 The Core Strategy identifies Amesbury and its immediate hinterland for significant housing growth, some 2,650 dwellings of which some 1,960 would appear to be directed to Amesbury itself. The effect of this growth is for Amesbury and its immediate hinterland settlements to accommodate 41.4% of the projected outside Salisbury SSCT 6,400 dwellings.

- 4.6.8 In this regard, it is clear that Amesbury is recognised as having an important service centre role in a Regional context and a high level of housing growth to meet that role.

- 4.6.9 Although it is not within the Salisbury SSCT, and cannot be classified as an SSCT (as these are identified in RSS 10), it nevertheless has an important function as a service centre, Amesbury is recognised in the Core Strategy as having a more significant role than the Local Service Centres. Amesbury is regarded as being in a higher category than a Development Policy “B” settlement which applies to the Local Centres. It therefore has a unique role in the settlement hierarchy for south Wiltshire. Amesbury Property Company supports this strategy for Amesbury.

- 4.6.10 The Panel in their report on the RSS for the South West recognised the role that Amesbury has in provision of employment land. Paragraphs 4.11.12 – 4.11.14² in particular at paragraph 4.11.13 which states that:

“In the light of all these factors, it is the Panel’s view that the City centre is the best location to accommodate growth in the

¹ South Wiltshire Core Strategy Proposed Submission Document – July 2009. Paragraph 5.3 B Amesbury and the Garrison Villages. Core Document SWCS/01 A

² Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West Panel Report – December 2007 Core Document RPP/07

office sector, with more expansive uses and some other specialist growth sectors being accommodated at the Amesbury locations (Solstice Park and Porton Down), where the Panel notes there are sizeable existing commitments to 2011. Our policy recommendation SR11.2 leaves scope for such distribution through the LDF process." (My underlining)

4.6.11 The Secretary of State in the Proposed Changes to the RSS partially accepted the Panel's recommendation to Policy SR11.2 but introduced a new single Policy HMA11 for the Salisbury Housing Market Area including the Salisbury SSCT. This incorporated the text of proposed Policy SR11.2 with amendments to clarify that the figure of 37ha of employment land applies to the Salisbury TTWA and to delete references to areas outside Salisbury. The figures therefore apply to the wider TTWA.

4.6.12 Amesbury Community Area contains the majority of allocated employment land in south Wiltshire (outside the Salisbury SSCT) including Solstice Park which is a £250 million Business Park, and Porton Down which is an international centre of excellence in employment terms for biological research and health protection. Together with existing housing allocations (saved Policy H.9 Archers Gate) and the proposed strategic housing at Kings Gate, the development of the employment land will assist in implementing the vision and spatial strategy for the Amesbury Community Area.

Local Plan Policy E8A Solstice Park should be saved

4.6.13 Policy E8A of the adopted Local Plan should be saved in order to be consistent with the strategy to plan for self-contained settlements (para 5.3 and 5.18 of the Core Strategy Proposed Submission Document³).

4.6.14 The suggestion that Solstice Park is now, in effect, in the wrong place and too large, might have some credence if Amesbury was only identified for limited housing growth, or that the Solstice Park allocation has the propensity to attract large numbers of jobs but neither is likely to be the case on the basis of 8 years of marketing, the businesses which has established at Solstice Park and the interest currently shown by the market.

4.6.15 Amesbury Property Company considers that there is no justification for excluding Policy E8A from the saved policies, it should be reinstated alongside Core Policy

³ South Wiltshire Core Strategy: Proposed Submission Document – July 2009 Core Document SWCS/01A

12 for Porton Down (and saved Policy E8B Boscombe Down). Development at Solstice Park will continue to contribute to the overall strategy and provides for managed growth to support the delivery of new homes to meet local needs in the Amesbury Area which supports the self-containment of the settlement.

4.6.16 Development at Solstice Park supports the strategic allocations discussed in Matter 3.1, in particular Kings Gate Amesbury and Archers Gate.

4.6.17 It is not clear what the exceptional circumstances are that merit the continued support of existing employment land allocations at both Porton Down and Boscombe Down and not Solstice Park. It seems likely that both Porton Down and Boscombe Down are specialist employment sites in secure locations and are saved for these reasons. However, they will not meet the wider employment needs of the HMA which Solstice Park will meet, but we recognise that they nevertheless will generate economic activity. Paradoxically, and as will be seen later, Solstice Park will also provide for specialist economic growth sectors (albeit within the “open” market) as recognised by the RSS Panel.

4.6.18 The retention of Solstice Park as an allocation creates for some flexibility in serving a wide range of employment market needs. Its location on the A303 will meet certain sectors of the market which the Salisbury city emerging employment allocations would probably not, in all likelihood, be able to serve.

4.6.19 Solstice Park also serves to support the “saved” allocation of Boscombe Down (Policy E8B) by maintaining the opportunity for this land to be properly accessed via Solstice Park by a high quality access directly to the A303. Consequently any threat to the long term employment use at Solstice Park will undermine the attractiveness of E8B by providing the opportunity for it to be properly accessed through Solstice Park. Appendix 1 provides a plan of Solstice Park which shows the original link road protected in the Solstice Park consent which will be replaced by an alignment on the eastern boundary of the site (for which full planning consent has been given).

Appendix 1

Quantitative versus Qualitative provision of employment land

4.6.20 Whilst Solstice Park has been marketed for 8 years, it has, in the main, attracted distribution or specialist uses (e.g. an RDC or Data Centre). A qualitative

economic assessment of Solstice Park's taking account of market forces, would have revealed little likelihood that the quantitative oversupply of employment land (i.e. in excess of the 37 hectares included in the RSS) would generate a scale of new jobs on such a scale as to threaten the direction of growth to Salisbury as proposed in the RSS. As a result any breach to the RSS quantitative growth strategy should, in reality, be more appropriately assessed in terms of how such an excess may help to widen local choice and meet locational employment needs.

4.6.21 Marketing has revealed Solstice Park to have a defined attractiveness for specialist uses which could not be accommodated in Salisbury itself. The Panel Report recognised that specialist growth sectors should be accommodated at the Amesbury locations (Solstice Park and Porton Down) and that Amesbury would need to maintain a continuing supporting role and that only locally generated growth should be provided for elsewhere in the HMA, in order to minimise travel pressures.

Will retention of the Solstice Park allocation harm the Core Strategy?

4.6.22 Attached at Appendix 2 is the Socio Economic Report that was produced in support of the planning application for the Regional Distribution Centre. The socio-economic statement was prepared to accompany the planning application by Kenmore Capital Portfolio Ltd for a Regional Distribution Centre (RDC) at Solstice Park, Amesbury.

Appendix 2

4.6.23 Evidence provided in support of the recent planning application shows that:

“the RDC will not prejudice the longer term employment needs of Amesbury, taking into account market demand, the location of the site and the availability of other sites;

the RDC and Solstice Park will contribute to the balanced growth of housing and employment in the Housing Market Area required by the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy;

the RDC and Solstice Park will provide an appropriate scale and range of employment for Amesbury;”

4.6.24 Solstice Park's economic advantages should be recognised and the Policy saved, in view of the character of the current oversupply of employment land. The

oversupply would provide for a degree of flexibility but not to the detriment of the LDF Core Strategy. The Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan ⁴ has taken a liberal approach to the scale of employment land provision proposed. It recognised that it was necessary to provide a choice of sites, and to allow for possible variations in employment densities, in the proportion of future employment growth located on employment land and reasonable market needs. It was also recognised that the allocation of land in itself was seldom sufficient to actually achieve development so an oversupply of land was not seen as being unsustainable.

4.6.25 The RSS supports economic growth and development in settlements commensurate with their role and function, needs and potential. Policy HMA11⁵ states that provision should be made for about 13,500 jobs in the Salisbury TTWA and the provision for about 37ha of employment land during the plan period. The Structure Plan meaning of the word “about” in relation to the requirement was intended to provide some flexibility for employment provision across the area. The adopted Salisbury Local Plan provided for a surplus of employment land but given the historically low take up rates it was not expected that all of this land would actually be taken up and developed. The over provision allows a choice of sites and therefore avoided the risk of a shortage of sites acting as a deterrent to companies seeking employment development opportunities in the area.

4.6.26 Appendix 3 provides marketing evidence which has shown that employment development at Solstice Park will not compete with the strategy to secure increased employment growth at Salisbury of B1 uses. Development at Solstice Park meets different employment needs from those required in Salisbury.

Appendix 3

4.6.27 The adopted Local Plan Policy E8 states that:

“A vehicular link between the Boscombe Down site and the E8A site will be safeguarded to ensure it is not prejudiced by development.

⁴ Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan 2016 Core Document CPP/02

⁵ South West RSS Proposed Changes – July 2008 Core Document RPP/01

4.6.28 The former Salisbury District Council Employment Land Review (2007) clearly recognises the area in terms of its contribution to the local economy.

“Amesbury is the second largest settlement in the Salisbury district and is considered (Salisbury District Local Plan 2003) to offer potential for major new employment growth to support the existing local population and future planned growth. The district’s largest new employment land allocation is located at Solstice Park, east of Amesbury town centre. The development also includes a 140 bedroom hotel, a proposed private sports and leisure club, a petrol filling station and several restaurants.” (para 5.1.5)

4.6.29 The Employment Land Review refers to the major employment interest for Amesbury is the 18 hectare Solstice Park.

4.6.30 The Wiltshire Workspace and Employment Land Strategy ⁶ (WWELS) - refers to the Salisbury Core Strategy (Preferred Options)⁷ confirming the intention to allocate the next phase of development at Solstice Park. The WWELS also reports that in recent years Salisbury has experienced increasing demand for both office and industrial accommodation, but the market has been unable to meet needs due to the paucity of supply.

4.6.31 The report anticipates that the greatest demand will be for modern industrial and warehouse accommodation driven by a combination of local businesses needing to upgrade their ageing accommodation and new business start ups. Salisbury has one of the oldest stocks of employment accommodation in Wiltshire.

4.6.32 The WWELS refers to a market review and economic review of the market towns and identifies seven towns which have a key role in terms of providing employment space and it recommended that the future of these towns to provide employment space be supported – Amesbury was one of the seven towns. The potential of Amesbury is set out on page 43 of the WWELS and in Appendix 4.

“Solstice Park offers substantial potential, unmatched compared to other market towns, to accommodate employment.” Appendix 4 of Core Document STU/13 A.

⁶ Wiltshire Workspace and Employment Strategy – final report August 2009 Core Document ref STU/13 A

⁷ Core Strategy Preferred Options Consultation Document and Response form – Core Document ref CON/10

- 4.6.33 There is much evidence to support the need to retain the Policy for Solstice Park and to indicate that its contribution to the supply of employment land will not prejudice the implementation of the Core Strategy given its particular attraction to the specialist sectors of the market.
- 4.6.34 The Council's Changes to the Core Strategy Submission Document - ref SWCS/13 B add some further text to Section 8 "Applying the Spatial Strategy to Amesbury Community Area" and would seem to underpin Solstice Park as part of the self containment of the town. The Proposed Changes⁸ only further support the need to retain the saved Policy E8A. Amesbury Property Company supports these changes but would like to see the retention of saved Policy E8A as set out below so as to consolidate it as a longer term development opportunity.
- 4.6.35 The following updated wording is suggested for adopted Policy E8A:

Core Policy 12A Solstice Park

"Land to the East of Porton Road, known as Solstice Park, is allocated for Employment and Leisure Development. Provision will be made within the site for a link road to the saved Boscombe Down allocation. Proposals for leisure development will also be permitted on the site subject to their being no adverse effect on the vitality and viability of Amesbury Town Centre."

- 4.6.36 The reason for the policy is that Solstice Park is allocated for employment development in the adopted Salisbury Local Plan under Policy E8A and this Policy seeks to save that allocation and support the continued growth of Amesbury in a sustainable way. A Development Brief has been approved for the site and Outline Planning Permission has been granted for employment uses. Infrastructure has been implemented in accordance with that Local Plan Policy and a number of extant unimplemented planning permissions exist for employment and leisure development. As a result, not all the original Local Plan wording is now relevant. The above Policy maintains the thrust of the strategy for Solstice Park including allocating some leisure development and providing for the Boscombe Down Link Road to serve the Boscombe Down allocation (E8B) which is proposed to be saved in the Core Strategy.

⁸ Changes to the South Wiltshire core Strategy Submission Document – November 2009 Core Document ref SWCS/13 B

Conclusions

- 4.6.37 The Amesbury Property Company strongly believes that the fact that Policy E8A has not been included in the Core Strategy Proposed Submission Document is an omission which should be rectified. Saved Local Plan Policy E8A, should be retained and included in the Core Strategy, given that both the existing and the proposed strategic housing allocations, and the overall objective of delivering growth in a sustainable manner in the Amesbury Community Area.
- 4.6.38 Failure to save the policy will undermine the development of Solstice Park and ironically the neighbouring Boscombe Down allocation (E8B) which is intended to be served by access through Solstice Park. The continuing allocation of Solstice Park will meet wider employment needs which are unlikely to be met in Salisbury and also enables the access link road to Boscombe Down to be built. The RSS Panel Report recognised the specialist role that the commitments (i.e. Solstice Park) in Amesbury will make to the wider economic growth in the area. It did not seek to deter Wiltshire Council from retaining the commitments as allocations in the LDF Core Strategy.

Appendix 1 Plan of Solstice Park

Appendix 2 Socio Economic Report produced to support the Solstice Park planning application

Appendix 3 Marketing Evidence for Solstice Park