

Agenda Item No. 6

Title:	West Wiltshire Core Strategy – Issues and Options Consultation
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Mounde – Economic Development and Planning
Reporting Officer:	Jim Sherry – Planning Policy and Conservation Services Manager
Key Decision:	Yes

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to:

- i) update Members on the results of the Issues and Options consultation undertaken between December 2007 and February 2008; and
- ii) to seek authority for the Planning Policy and Conservation Services Manager, to develop an outline Spatial Strategy for West Wiltshire, based on the consultation responses, to be recommended to the Implementation Executive for inclusion in the Wiltshire Core Strategy, subject to the portfolio holder's approval.

Due to the size of the Consultation Responses document, this has been circulated to members of the cabinet and copies have been placed in the Members Room.

Background and Key Issues

The Council is currently preparing the West Wiltshire Core Strategy. This work will be merged with similar processes being undertaken by the other District Councils within Wiltshire to form a single Wiltshire Council Core Strategy. This is a key document in the new Local Development Framework and will set out the spatial vision and objectives for Wiltshire. It will contain: a spatial strategy; core policies covering key areas (e.g. housing, employment, town centres) and a monitoring implementation framework. The document will set out the key environmental protection policies which operate within the area and will explain how development, proposed within the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South West, will be broadly distributed through the County. The Core Strategy is the main planning tool by which the spatial objectives of community strategies and plans can be delivered.

A West Wiltshire Issues and Options paper was subject to public consultation between December 2007 and February 2008. This document focussed on possible spatial strategies for the District, for example considering the relative roles and functions of the main settlements within West Wiltshire. Questions were also asked which related to spatial growth options within the main towns,

along with other topic areas, such as employment, retail and the environment. The results of this consultation are reported in Appendix 1. The preferred strategy identified through the Issues and Options consultation was Option 3 and this is reflected in the suggested outline spatial strategy shown by Appendix 2.

In addition to considering the results of the Issues and Options consultation, the Core Strategy must also conform to the Draft RSS for the South West. This document outlines a housing allocation for West Wiltshire of 12,300 dwellings for the period up to 2026. It is suggested that at least 6,000 new homes will be provided for within Trowbridge, which is designated as a Strategically Significant City or Town (SSCT).

As part of the required evidence base to support the Core Strategy work, a Joint Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) was undertaken in early 2008. This work covers the areas of North and West Wiltshire and Kennet District Councils, and was commissioned jointly by the three Districts, along with Wiltshire County Council. The purpose of this study was to establish whether there are sufficient suitable sites either currently available, or likely to become available in the foreseeable future, to meet the Councils' dwelling requirements as prescribed by the Draft RSS.

It is important to highlight that to meet the Draft RSS housing allocations for the next twenty years, the majority of the sites put forward for possible development, would either need to be developed, or else suitable alternatives identified to replace them. This has implications for interpreting the results of the Issues and Options Consultation. The responses to the spatial growth options within the West Wiltshire towns, did for example, include some strong opposition to some locations being used for future development. In particular, development north of Hilperton and on land between Hilperton and Trowbridge, were unpopular options. If development on these sites is to be avoided, suitable alternatives will need to be found. No recommendations are currently being put forward for specific development sites and further detailed site assessment work will need to be undertaken before these can be made. However, it is important to highlight the potential unpopularity of some of the development sites under consideration.

The Core Strategy should also address a range of other topic areas beyond that of housing allocations. Social and economic infrastructure will need to be developed to keep pace with housing development and ensure the character of the West Wiltshire towns is maintained. The Draft RSS states that 37 hectares of employment land should be provided for in the Trowbridge and Warminster Travel to Work Area up to 2026. The West Wiltshire Economic Needs Assessment suggests that 52 hectares of employment land will be needed in the same period. Although recommendations on employment land allocations are not being put forward at present, this does also serve to highlight the need to find alternative development land, if some options are to be rejected during the process.

An Outline Spatial Strategy has been developed, along with indicative housing allocations for the main settlements within West Wiltshire, in accordance with both the Issues and Options Consultation responses and the Draft RSS. These are outlined within Appendix 2.

Effects on Strategies and Codes

Work on the West Wiltshire Core Strategy is being closely coordinated with the other Wiltshire District Councils and the County Council. It is intended that the separate Core Strategies will be combined to form a single Wiltshire Council document. When adopted, the Core Strategy will form part of the Local Development Framework for Wiltshire. It will replace many of the planning policies currently contained within the Wiltshire Structure Plan 2016 and the West Wiltshire District Plan 1st Alteration.

Risk Management Implications

The timetable for completing the Core Strategy in Wiltshire is prescribed by the Government Office for the South West and little flexibility exists in this process. It is therefore important that Local Government re-organisation does not delay the production of the Core Strategy, which forms a vital part of the planning process. The work underway in West Wiltshire is in advance of the other Wiltshire Districts and so flexibility should be retained within the outline strategy to ensure consistency is maintained in the future Wiltshire Core Strategy.

Finance and Performance Implications

The financial resources of the existing councils will be brought together to enable the preparation of the Wiltshire Core Strategy. At this stage, it appears likely that the existing Councils will have to bear the cost of an additional public consultation exercise which will outline the strategic housing and employment land allocations for the forthcoming Core Strategy.

Legal and Human Rights implications

Draft Regulations¹ published by the government in June 2008 will transfer the role of local planning authority (for plan making) from West Wiltshire District Council to the Implementation Executive. The transitional arrangements require the Implementation Executive to submit a Local Development Scheme (LDS) to the Secretary of State by the end of September 2008. The LDS will contain a list of local development documents and a programme for their production. Work undertaken by the four Wiltshire district councils will feed into the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

When the Draft Regulations were published, it was anticipated that they would come into force during September 2008. However, due to unforeseen complications, it is uncertain when the Regulations will come into effect.

¹ The Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008

There are no other direct legal or human rights implications. This report feeds back the outcome of the latest public consultation, as required by the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004, as amended by the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2008. The further consultation exercise which is now being suggested is intended to provide the opportunity for residents throughout Wiltshire to be informed of the change from the preparation of individual district Core Strategies to one for the whole county area.

The Next Steps

It is important the outline spatial strategy is made available for public consultation as early as possible to avoid delay in the production of a single Wiltshire Council Core Strategy. The next steps will be to work up the outline Spatial Strategy ready for public consultation.

Recommendation

Cabinet are asked to consider the report and to:

- i) note the development of the evidence base concerning the results of the Issues and Options consultation;
- ii) give authority for the Planning Policy and Conservation Services Manager to develop an outline Spatial Strategy for West Wiltshire, based on the consultation responses, to be recommended to the Implementation Executive for inclusion in the Wiltshire Core Strategy, subject to the portfolio holder's approval.

Background Papers

West Wiltshire Core Strategy Issues and Options Paper, West Wiltshire District Council, December 2007.

Statement of reasons for key decision	Requirement of constitution
Required to take the Core Strategy preparation process to the next stage in the light of the Issues and Options public consultation responses	Councillors have had the opportunity to shape the emerging Core Strategy at each stage in the preparation process
Date of Implementation (not less than 5 days after date of decision)	If the meeting is held on 3 September, then 5 (working) days later makes it 10 September