Working towards a core strategy for Wiltshire

Interim sustainability appraisal report

Non technical summary

Wiltshire Core Strategy Consultation June 2011
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1. **Introduction and background**

1.1 This document is the non-technical summary of the Interim Sustainability Appraisal Report that accompanies the Draft Wiltshire Core Strategy.

1.2 Wiltshire Council is in the process of preparing a Core Strategy document which, when adopted, will set the framework for future development across Wiltshire and replace the current local plans of the former Wiltshire district councils.

1.3 Sustainability appraisal is a process that is carried out as an integral part of developing the Core Strategy, with the aim of promoting sustainable development through the integration of social, environmental and economic considerations. It is a mandatory requirement and is subject to the same level of public consultation and scrutiny as the Core Strategy.

2. **Sustainability appraisal – purpose and requirements**

2.1 The purpose of sustainability appraisal is to promote the objectives of sustainable development within planning policy. This is done by appraising the social, environmental and economic effects of a plan from the outset and in doing so, helping to ensure that sustainable development is treated in an integrated way in the preparation of development plans.

2.2 The sustainability appraisal process is governed by European and national legislation, supported by government policy, which includes:

- The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act
- The requirements of European Directive 2001/42/EC (often known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive) which requires the preparation of an environmental report that considers the significant environmental effects of a plan or programme.

2.3 This sustainability appraisal incorporates the requirements of the SEA Directive, by combining the more environmentally-focused considerations of SEA with wider social and economic effects.

3. **Sustainability Appraisal context and objectives**

3.1 The context and objectives of the sustainability appraisal have been established during an earlier stage (often referred to as the scoping stage) of the sustainability appraisal process. This involved compiling background information needed before a sustainability appraisal can be undertaken. It established an evidence base for ongoing appraisal work and culminated in a framework of sustainability objectives (see section 6).
3.2 Key tasks in this evidence compilation included:

- identifying relevant policies, plans and programmes
- collecting baseline information
- identifying key sustainability issues in Wiltshire
- establishing sustainability objectives.

3.3 This evidence base work was published by Wiltshire Council in a Scoping Report in April 2010 after a comprehensive and wide ranging public consultation exercise. The Scoping Report, although a separate document, forms part of the environmental report required by the SEA Directive and is available to view or download from the council’s website.

3.4 The scoping work is subject to continual review as evidence becomes outdated and new information made available; the scoping report will be reviewed and updated prior to the submission version of the Core Strategy being published, to ensure that effects prediction and evaluation remains accurate and consistent.

4. How has the sustainability appraisal influenced the Core Strategy process?

4.1 The sustainability appraisal process has been, and will continue to be, undertaken in conjunction with the Core Strategy during the various stages of development, with the sustainability appraisal team and spatial planning team working together on policy development and appraisal of options. The sustainability appraisal team continues to be involved with a number of topic groups to progress policy in different areas.

4.2 The Sustainability Appraisal Report has summarised the findings of the sustainability appraisal that accompanied the ‘Wiltshire 2026’ document in October 2009. At that time, strategic policies were not being considered but the sustainability appraisal helped in the decision-making process to select strategic housing sites in Wiltshire. An example of this is the ongoing sustainability appraisal work regarding sites in Chippenham; further sustainability appraisal work was undertaken earlier this year on eight locations on the edge of the town and in the town centre and this has helped reduce the number of options now being considered to two. This report has recommended strong protection and enhancement measures for certain sensitive areas in Chippenham and this is reflected in the current proposed policy.

4.3 The Sustainability Appraisal Report has highlighted various likely significant effects of policies, suggested mitigation measures to reduce adverse effects and made recommendations on policy amendments and preferred options. The Core Strategy will take account of these recommendations and further information will be given in the sustainability appraisal at the next stage of the Core Strategy.
5. Developing and refining policies and ‘reasonable alternatives’

5.1 The SEA Directive requires assessment of the likely significant effects of implementing the plan, and “reasonable alternatives”. Developing options and alternatives is an important part of both the plan-making and sustainability appraisal process. For development plan documents such as the Core Strategy, the reasonable alternatives are the different options put forward during the preparation of the plan.

5.2 Given the duty on authorities preparing Core Strategies to contribute to sustainable development, Wiltshire Council began developing options from the start of the Core Strategy preparation process. The sustainability appraisal has been involved from an early stage in this development of options, and working with the public and stakeholders, including local strategic partners and the SEA consultation bodies has had a major role in identifying and refining options.

5.3 In the Sustainability Appraisal Report, for each policy area being considered, it is clearly indicated which option or options are more favourable in sustainability terms, and recommendations are made as to which options should be taken forward. These recommendations have clear links to the appraisal work undertaken, and potential amendments to policy options are suggested.

6. Assessing the significance of effects

6.1 The SEA Directive requires an assessment of “likely significant effects…taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan or programme”. It is, therefore, necessary to assess those effects of the Core Strategy that are likely to be significant, not all possible effects.

6.2 In the Sustainability Appraisal Report, the social, environmental and economic effects of all Core Strategy policies have been predicted and evaluated for their significance. Prediction of effects involves identifying what changes might occur to the sustainability baseline over time – these changes are then evaluated for their likely significance, in terms of their probability, duration, frequency, geographical area and size of population likely to be affected. The value and vulnerability of certain areas and populations also affects the evaluation.

6.3 A sustainability appraisal framework, presented in Appendix B of the main report, forms the basis for the assessment of significant effects. It consists of 17 objectives – these are different in concept and purpose from the objectives of the Core Strategy, though there is a degree of overlap. They are not necessarily intended to be achievable, but are more aspirational in nature, and address the full cross-section of sustainability issues, including social, economic and environmental factors. The 17 objectives follow:
### Sustainability theme | Sustainability appraisal objective
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Biodiversity | 1. Protect and enhance all biodiversity and geological features and avoid irreversible losses
2. Ensure efficient and effective use of land and the use of suitably located previously developed land and buildings
3. Promote sustainable waste management solutions that encourage the reduction, re-use and recycling of waste
4. Use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner
5. Protect people and property from the risk of flooding
6. Improve air quality throughout Wiltshire and minimise all sources of environmental pollution
7. Minimise our impacts on climate change and reduce our vulnerability to future climate change effects
8. Protect, maintain and enhance the historic environment and archaeological assets
9. Protect and enhance the character and quality of Wiltshire’s rural and urban landscapes, maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place
10. Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, and ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures
Healthy communities | 11. Provide a safe and healthy environment in which to live
12. Reduce poverty and deprivation and promote more inclusive and self-contained communities
13. Improve equality of access to, and engagement in local, high-quality community services and facilities
Education and skills | 14. Raise educational attainment levels across the authority and provide opportunities for people to improve their workplace skills
Transport | 15. Reduce the need to travel and promote more sustainable transport choices
16. Encourage a vibrant and diversified economy and provide for long-term sustainable economic growth
17. Ensure adequate provision of high-quality employment land and diverse employment opportunities to meet the needs of local businesses and a changing workforce
Population and housing | 18. Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, and ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures
Historic environment | 19. Protect, maintain and enhance the historic environment and archaeological assets
Landschapes | 20. Protect and enhance the character and quality of Wiltshire’s rural and urban landscapes, maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place

### Likely significant effects of the Core Strategy

#### 7.1 Biodiversity and habitat fragmentation
The Sustainability Appraisal Report has predicted and described the likely significant effects of implementing the Core Strategy and it has found that significant effects, both positive and negative, are likely in a number of areas. Follows is a brief summary of likely significant effects from implementing the Core Strategy:

- **Biodiversity and habitat fragmentation** – the Core Strategy contains strong policies to protect and enhance biodiversity but the level of housing and employment provision proposed is likely to have some adverse effects on wildlife habitats. Greenfield development is more likely to cause such impacts but development on brownfield sites, especially ones that have been redundant for long periods, may also have impacts. Development may lead to direct loss of some important habitats but effects are more likely from indirect effects such as recreational pressure and air/noise/light pollution.

#### 7.2 Landscape and rural character
Changes to rural character and landscapes will result from proposed development in edge-of-town locations. This is most likely from
the larger urban extensions proposed in Trowbridge and Salisbury but also likely in other settlements. Impacts may also occur if development takes place at a number of brownfield sites in a particular settlement and careful consideration of final use and design/layout considerations will be required.

7.4 **Transport** – housing and employment growth will increase need to travel and increase traffic volumes. The Core Strategy contains policies promoting sustainable transport but increases in road traffic are likely with the level of growth proposed. Cumulative effects of new housing and employment development in recent years along the A350 corridor, together with that proposed for future years, may mean that dualling of the A350 in certain locations may be needed. There are also cumulative effects of development in settlements such as Devizes as population increase has increased road traffic leading to congestion, particularly at peak times.

7.5 **Water resources** – there will be increased pressures on water resources from population growth, in terms of need for water abstraction from watercourses and indirect pollution such as increases in phosphate discharges from sewage treatment works. Likely increased pressures if predicted impacts of climate change result in warmer, drier summers.

7.6 **Local economy and employment** – proposed growth levels could significantly benefit the local economy, of Wiltshire in general and of individual settlements. There will be important secondary effects for local businesses from a larger potential market. Housing and employment growth can increase self-containment, reducing out-commuting and significantly improving services such as public transport if critical thresholds reached.

7.7 **Housing** – levels of housing provision proposed will increase the range and choice of modern housing stock, including affordable housing. This can also benefit rural communities by giving people the opportunity to live in their own community and increase viability of local businesses such as pubs and shops.

7.8 **Community services and facilities** – the cumulative impact of new housing growth can place pressure on existing services and facilities such as healthcare services, community support services and education. However, growth can also help fund new services and facilities or new infrastructure than can greatly improve recreational or sporting opportunities. It is important that growth is supported by appropriate infrastructure provision and levels of funding for community services.

7.9 **Air quality and environmental pollution** – impacts on air quality and increases in noise and light pollution can result from development, as well as loss of tranquillity. Indirect effects of growth include transport related emissions which are the cause of most of the AQMAs in town centre locations in Wiltshire.

7.10 **Climatic impacts** – increases in greenhouse gas emissions that are recognised as being one of the causes of climate change - likely to increase from energy use in the home and from industry and rising traffic volumes. Increased development must be
accompanied by effective mitigation to reduce energy use overall, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce the need to travel/increase travel choice.

8. Potential mitigation measures

8.1 The Sustainability Appraisal Report has included consideration of mitigation measures to reduce or avoid adverse effects and ways of maximising the positive effects. It has been shown in the report that it is possible to reduce or avoid many of the predicted adverse effects of implementation; the Core Strategy contains strong policies in the areas of biodiversity, energy efficiency and renewable energy, historic environment, landscape and infrastructure to enable effective mitigation to be put in place. Mitigation measures to address what are considered to be the key significant adverse effects of the Core Strategy are listed below:

8.2 Biodiversity and habitat fragmentation – development can potentially lead to direct or indirect loss/damage to biodiversity and wildlife habitats. Consideration should be given to avoiding development where adverse effects are likely on designated sites, protected and/or notable species and ancient woodland. Development of brownfield sites would often lead to less impacts and this is preferred. Where development of greenfield sites is necessary, mature trees and ecologically important hedgerows should be retained wherever possible, appropriate buffer zones should protect any ecologically important areas and biodiversity should be enhanced overall throughout.

8.3 Landscapes – many areas of Wiltshire come under a national or local landscape designation such as an AONB or Special Landscape Area (SLA). Many of the proposed strategic development sites do not fall within these areas but because the majority of them are large greenfield sites on the edge of urban areas, there is potential to significantly change the current rural character. Any development should be sensitive to the rural character of these areas with high quality design considerations and appropriate landscaping. Many of these strategic sites are also large enough to incorporate significant areas of Green Infrastructure which could include substantial biodiversity enhancement.

8.4 Water resources – growth and population increase will increase demand for water and predicted effects of climate change may add to this. There is a need to reduce the effects of water abstraction on Wiltshire’s rivers and those outside the authority area by incorporating strong measures to increase water efficiency and to reduce water use in the home and in industry. Any further growth would need to be assessed for impacts on groundwater and sufficient capacity within the sewerage network and avoid possible pollution to watercourses.

8.5 Climatic factors – all development should meet high levels of energy efficiency and consider meeting the majority, if not all, of the energy and heat demand through renewable or low carbon forms of generation. There is strong potential for mitigation of climate change impacts at many of the proposed strategic sites and potential to provide renewable forms of energy and heat on site, and to link in with adjoining residential/employment areas. Consideration should be given to climate change
adaptation through building design and layout and through measures to deal with surface water and flood risk.

8.6 **Transport** – levels of growth are likely to significantly increase traffic volumes throughout Wiltshire. Strong promotion of (and investment in) public transport and walking/cycling routes will be necessary at any future location for housing and employment growth with safe and convenient routes linking with town centres. There will be a need for new road infrastructure but this should avoid further congestion in town centres. Future dualling of the A350 may also be required.

9. **Overall sustainability of the Core Strategy**

9.1 The Sustainability Appraisal Report has investigated the likely significant effects of implementing the Core Strategy and it has found that significant effects, both positive and negative, are likely in a number of areas.

9.2 Impacts that will be difficult to mitigate fully, resulting from the level of growth proposed and proposed locations for development, and which will require innovative solutions, investment and community involvement, are likely to relate to the following sustainability objectives:

- Ensure efficient and effective use of land and the use of suitably located previously developed land and buildings.
- Use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner.
- Improve air quality throughout Wiltshire and minimise all sources of environmental pollution.
- Minimise our impacts on climate change and reduce our vulnerability to future climate change effects.
- Protect and enhance the character and quality of Wiltshire’s rural and urban landscapes, maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place.
- Reduce the need to travel and promote more sustainable transport choices.

9.3 However, significant benefits can be expected in relation to the following sustainability objectives:

- Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, and ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures.
- Improve equality of access to, and engagement in local, high-quality community services and facilities.
- Encourage a vibrant and diversified economy and provide for long-term sustainable economic growth.
- Ensure adequate provision of high-quality employment land and diverse employment opportunities to meet the needs of local businesses and a changing workforce.
9.4 These benefits can be considerably enhanced by ensuring that development takes place in consultation with local communities that will be affected the most from new development and ensuring that appropriate infrastructure is in place to meet the needs of local communities.

10. Consultation

10.1 The Sustainability Appraisal Report has been published for formal public consultation alongside the Wiltshire Core Strategy. The consultation includes the statutory environmental organisations Natural England, English Heritage and Environment Agency, as required by the SEA Directive and a wide range of other stakeholders and community organisations.

10.2 It is recommended that public and stakeholder involvement on the sustainability appraisal is carried out at each stage in the development of the Core Strategy, in order to ensure that policies meet the objectives of sustainable development. A Sustainability Appraisal Report was published alongside the ‘Wiltshire 2026’ document and consulted on from October to December 2009.

10.3 Consultation has also previously been undertaken on the scope and level of detail of the sustainability appraisal (Scoping Report) from January to February 2009 and the results taken into account in a revised version published in April 2010. Seeking the views of the statutory environmental organisations on the scope and level of detail to be included in the Environmental Report is also a requirement of the SEA Directive.

11. Next steps

11.1 This is an Interim Sustainability Appraisal Report and the process of assessing Core Strategy policies will continue after the results of this public consultation stage have been taken into account. The results of the public consultation will inform the next iteration of the sustainability appraisal.

11.2 It has been stated in each Community Area section that further appraisal work is needed to assess housing numbers and amounts of employment land in each Community Area, and reasonable alternatives to these figures. These findings will be published in the next stage of the sustainability appraisal that will accompany the Core Strategy Submission document. This will also include any additional appraisal work of any significant amendments that may be made to the Core Strategy.