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Dear Ms Clampitt-Dix

Chippenham Site Allocations Plan (CSAP) – Examination in Public

My Programme Officer has advised me of Ms Gibson's request for clarification on the nature of a January meeting. In order to address this question it is necessary to look further at the reasons why it became necessary to suspend proceedings.

The National Planning Policy Framework sets 4 tests for soundness. Significant questions arise in the case of the CSAP with regard to 2 of these tests:

- **justified** – the most appropriate strategy when considered against reasonable alternatives; and
- **effective** – deliverable over its period.

Without a satisfactory response to these questions the Plan cannot be found sound and so, ultimately, my recommendation would have to be non-adoption.

One of the documents available to this Examination is the Inspector's report on the Wiltshire Core Strategy examination. His report considered both of these aspects of soundness in some depth, at p47 examining whether the CS took a justified approach towards the Chippenham Community Area and will it be effective in terms of delivery. In respect of a justified approach he concluded, at para 222, that "*a number of concerns have been expressed at the way in which the Council has considered alternatives...*", and indicated that he shared those concerns. He goes on to state (para 229) that "*the SA (Sustainability Appraisal) does not inform robustly the equitable consideration of reasonable alternatives...*".

The penultimate paragraph of my letter dated 5 October indicated that there were significant questions to be answered regarding the site selection process and the SA. The first day of the hearings did look at these in some detail but doubts remain about the Council's willingness to consider reasonable alternatives. Both of these matters were of sufficient concern to question whether the Examination could continue without a pause for further evidence to be provided. These matters are considered in more detail in my letter of 16 November.

The second test of soundness concerns deliverability of the proposals and my letter provides detail of my concerns. In particular these relate to deliverability of the major items of infrastructure, and the CS policy requirement for 40% affordable housing provision in the Chippenham Community Area.

The necessary additional work which arises from the reasons for suspension involves, as a minimum, revisiting the following pieces of evidence:

- the Site Selection Report;
- the Sustainability Appraisal;
- the Transport and Accessibility evidence;
- the Viability Report.

The advice in Examining Local Plans Procedural Practice is that the Local Planning Authority should prepare a schedule and timetable of work involved in revisiting those areas of concern. The intention of the formal review meeting in January is simply to show that the work can be completed in the period up to 11 May so that the Examination may be resumed.

However, there is a possibility that the additional work will lead to significant changes to the spatial strategy, or its components and the conclusion from this might be that the Plan is so flawed that it is in effect irreparable – that the Main Modifications required would be so significant or extensive that they would amount to a rewrite of the Plan. In addition, the 3 further matters raised in my letter potentially involve new policies creating further significant changes.

At this stage there are serious doubts in my mind that the additional work would support the submitted Plan without substantial modification. In these circumstances it is possible I would have to advise that the appropriate action would be to withdraw the Plan under S22 of the PCPA 2004, as indicated in the penultimate paragraph of my letter of 16 November. To proceed further would involve risk to the Council that the Plan may eventually be found unsound. The Procedural Practice advises that it is no one's interest if time and money is spent on examination of a Plan that cannot be made capable of adoption (para 8.13).

Taking account of the above, the time from now up to the formal review meeting provides a valuable pause for the Council to give appropriate consideration to the advisability of continuing with the Examination.

Yours sincerely

Patrick T Whitehead (Inspector)