

Cabinet

7 November 2023

Wiltshire Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation response

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr D Walsh, Planning

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: Dorset Council response to the consultation on the publication version (Regulation 19) of the Wiltshire Council Local Plan.

Recommendation: That Cabinet:

- a. acknowledge the key issues upon which a detailed response will be made to the Wiltshire Local Plan consultation as outlined in this report.
- b. agrees that the responses to these key issues be finalised in consultation with the portfolio holder.

Reason for Recommendation: To input into the Wiltshire Local Plan as it moves towards examination thereby fulfilling the Council's obligations under the Duty to Cooperate.

1. Background

- 1.1 On 27 September 2023, Dorset Council received notification of the regulation 19 consultation on the Wiltshire Local Plan. This is the final consultation stage in the production of the Wiltshire Local Plan prior to submission to the Secretary of State for examination in public. As such, it is important that a response is made to the consultation so that Dorset

Council is able to demonstrate engagement in the production of the Wiltshire Local Plan as legally required by the Duty to Cooperate.

- 1.2 The Wiltshire Local Plan sets out the strategy for managing growth in the Wiltshire Council area. The strategy focuses growth at the principal settlements of Trowbridge, Chippenham and Salisbury. It also seeks to ensure that the market towns and local service centres will become more self-contained with the aim of seeing a reduction in the need to travel across the plan area. Mere and Tisbury are the local centres closest to Dorset with Salisbury being the closest principal settlement.
- 1.3 The Wiltshire Local Plan makes provision for approximately 36,740 homes which meets the Local Housing Need figure, calculated using the government's standard method, in full. Provision is also made for approximately 160ha of new employment land.
- 1.4 Local Service Centres and Large villages may see new housing within their settlement boundaries, but sites outside of these boundaries should be identified through neighbourhood plans. In rural areas development should respond to local circumstances and therefore only limited types of development will be acceptable.
- 1.5 Earlier in the preparation of the Wiltshire Local Plan, consultation has taken place. Dorset Council, and its predecessor councils, have responded to these consultations and have had ongoing discussions with Wiltshire Council about the content of the local plan and the content of the Dorset Council Local Plan. It is agreed by both councils that there are limited issues of a strategic nature that affect both local plans and as such discussions have focused on where cross-boundary issues exist. These are primarily in the north of Dorset and focus on the area around the towns of Shaftesbury and Gillingham.
- 1.6 The two main issues raised as part of previous consultations were:
 - a. Raising awareness of the strategic growth at Gillingham but the constrained nature of Shaftesbury where there are very few opportunities for additional growth.
- 1.7 Discussions with Wiltshire Council have concluded that opportunities for meeting the growth needs of Shaftesbury and the northern parts of Dorset should focus on opportunities within Dorset before considering those in Wiltshire. The detailed evaluation of strategic opportunities for growth in

the northern parts of Dorset will take place through the ongoing production of the Dorset Council Local Plan.

b. The reserved corridor for an eastern bypass for Shaftesbury which would pass into Wiltshire.

1.8 The Department for Transport are exploring options for a strategic route connecting the M4 to the Dorset Coast which may negate the need for the protected bypass corridor. Once this work has concluded, the need for the protection of an eastern by-pass for Shaftesbury will be reviewed.

2. **Regulation 19 Consultation**

2.1 Due to the tight timescale for preparing a response to the Wiltshire Local Plan, the key issues where a response to the consultation is considered necessary are set out below. An initial proposed response on these issues is included in Appendix 1. The final detail will be prepared and agreed with the portfolio holder prior to submitting to Wiltshire Council.

2.2 The protection of the bypass corridor for the A350 at Shaftesbury has been removed from the Wiltshire Local Plan with a policy (Policy 75) highlighting the importance of the corridor and the relevance of strategic studies being undertaken by National Highways. The replacement wording is seen as sufficient to enable any future road schemes in this area to come forward if evidence suggests it is needed. As such the approach proposed put forward by Wiltshire is supported.

2.3 Previous consultations have highlighted the level of growth that is coming forward in the northern part of Dorset with the intention of ensuring Wiltshire Council were able to understand the implications of this development for their area. It is not considered necessary to make this point again.

2.4 Similar to the above, growth in the rural parts of south west Wiltshire were highlighted as an area where there could potentially be cross-boundary issues. Having reviewed the proposals in the Regulation 19 Local Plan, the level of growth anticipated in this area is unlikely to be of a strategic scale that needs further consideration through the Local Plan.

2.5 Policy 75 also highlights the importance of the strategic bus network as part of the Strategic Transport Network. The network shows a cross-boundary bus route between Gillingham and Mere. It is important that close working between the councils on the provision of bus routes through

enhanced partnerships is maintained to ensure a connected approach to bus provision. This coordination will be important in helping to minimise the impact of any additional traffic arising from growth in the south western Wiltshire and northern Dorset area.

- 2.6 Since the earlier consultations, Dorset Council have taken control of a strategic education site to the east of Shaftesbury known as Coombe House School. This site provides teaching for children with special educational needs and as such is not open to the general public. Within the Wiltshire Local Plan, the site is designated as an Open Space and Play Facility under Policy 84 Public Open Space and Play Facilities. This policy seeks retention of these spaces and their enhancement when development takes place. The policy is not relevant to Coombe House as the sports facilities exist to serve the school rather than the public. The policy is therefore not relevant to this particular site and it is recommended that the designation be removed.
- 2.7 The Wiltshire Local Plan proposes a requirement for 20% Biodiversity Net Gain. This requirement does go beyond the legal minimum of 10% Net Gain and therefore may have implications for the future development that may be necessary to respond to the needs of this education facility. It is likely that the opportunities for delivering Net Gain on the site are sufficient to meet the 20% requirement, but this may have implications for the level of development that could be achieved, and the costs associated with that development.
- 2.8 The Wiltshire Local Plan also proposes a dark skies policy where light pollution will be minimised. This is similar to the approach that Dorset Council is considering through its local plan and therefore the proposal is supported in principle. However, consideration needs to be given to areas where lighting is required to enable the proper functioning of a site. For the Coombe House School, there may be a need for external lighting in the future to enable the sports facilities to be used year-round. Provision should therefore be made within the policy to enable this.

3. **Next steps**

- 3.1 Once the Local Plan consultation has concluded on the 22 November, Wiltshire Council will look to submit the Local Plan to the Secretary of State for examination in public. An Inspector will be appointed to undertake an examination of the Local Plan at which there may be

opportunities for Dorset Council to respond on any of the points raised through this consultation.

- 3.2 After the examination in public and should the Wiltshire Local Plan be found sound, Wiltshire Council will be able to adopt their Local Plan to help guide development across their area.

4. **Financial Implications**

Costs associated with the preparation of a response to the Wiltshire Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation will be met from existing budgets.

5. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainable development includes an environmental, social and economic objectives with the balancing of these being the role of the planning system. As such, the proposals within the Wiltshire Local Plan will have considered the implications for the Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology.

6. **Well-being and Health Implications**

Local Plans, such as the Wiltshire Local Plan, are required by national planning policy to aim to deliver healthy, inclusive and safe places.

7. **Other Implications**

The content of a local plan is wide ranging however there are not considered any significant implications that warrant a detailed response other than those identified in this report.

8. **Risk Assessment**

HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

9. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

As this is a response to a consultation by Wiltshire Council, an equalities impact assessment is not considered necessary. Wiltshire Council have undertaken an equalities impact assessment of their local plan.

10. **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Suggested response to the Wiltshire Local Plan

11. **Background Papers**

Wiltshire Council Local Plan consultation page: [Current consultation \(Reg 19\) autumn 2023 - Wiltshire Council](#)

Appendix 1:

Dorset Council work closely with Wiltshire Council on strategic planning matters that have implications that cross the boundary between the two authority areas. We intend to continue this working relationship so that the growth proposed through the councils' local plans can be planned for appropriately. This continuing dialogue will include the important issue around the coordination of bus routes through enhanced partnerships.

Dorset Council acknowledge the wording of Policy 75 and welcome the recognition of the A350 as part of the Strategic Transport network within the policy. Dorset Council also welcome the reference to the importance of the National Highways Strategic M4 to South Coast Study. The wording of the policy is considered to give sufficient flexibility to allow any improvements to the A350 corridor within Wiltshire as a result of this study or any other mechanism. Dorset Council therefore support the removal of the reserved bypass corridor for the A350 at Shaftesbury and the inclusion of the wording of Policy 75 related to this.

The levels of growth in the northern parts of Dorset and the corresponding growth proposed in south western Wiltshire have been discussed previously. No significant issues associated with this growth have been identified during these discussions. Ongoing discussions around the provision of bus routes are however considered essential to deliver a coordinated approach to their delivery.

Dorset Council own a strategic education site to the east of Shaftesbury known as Coombe House School which provides teaching for children with special educational needs. As such, the campus is not open to the general public other than at specific times with access limited to pre-booked activities. Policy 84 of the Wiltshire Local Plan designates the site as an Open Space and Play Facility however there is no public access to the

site. As such, the policy is not relevant to Coombe House site and the designation should be removed.

The requirement for 20% Biodiversity Net Gain goes beyond the legal minimum of 10%. The implications of this requirement for development at Coombe House School may impact negatively on the provision of enhanced facilities at the site. Safeguards should be built into the policy to ensure that the delivery of essential infrastructure, including education facilities, is not put at risk by the policy requirement.

The proposed dark skies policy is similar to the approach that Dorset Council is considering through its local plan. Consideration needs to be given in the policy to areas where lighting is required to enable the proper functioning of a site. For Coombe House School, external lighting may be necessary to enable the sports facilities to be used year-round.