

REPORT PC26.110 Response to Local Plan Scoping Consultation

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1. REPORT SUMMARY

A report to Councillors regarding a submission for the Wiltshire Local Plan Scoping Consultation.

2. BACKGROUND

Wiltshire Council submitted a draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination in November 2024. The Planning Inspectors rejected the Plan in March 2026 and offered two courses of action: to withdraw the report or else to receive a final Inspectors' Report formally recommending non-adoption due to fundamental flaws in the spatial strategy. Wiltshire Council voted to withdraw the Plan in May 2026.

Wiltshire Council has now adopted central government's new 30-month Local Plan making system which will start officially on 30th October 2026 and is preceded by an invitation to landowners, individuals, parish councils, and developers to submit potential sites for house building, and by the first public consultation (from 2nd to 30th September 2026) on what the new plan should contain.

3. SUMMARY

The public consultation offers the Parish Council an opportunity to influence the early stages of policy development. There will be a further public consultation on the draft strategy and choices between 7th April and 19th May 2027 and a final public consultation on the publication-ready plan between 15th March and 10th May 2028. In the two latter periods of consultation the Parish Council will be responding to what Wiltshire Council has drafted. In this initial consultation we have an opportunity to influence the content of what is drafted.

Below are a series of responses to the questions listed in the public consultation. The responses have been formatted (I hope) for ease of copy and paste directly into the Planning Policy Portal.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- a) That Councillors resolve to agree the Parish Council should submit a response to the public consultation on the Local Plan.
- b) That Councillors resolve to agree the wording of the responses below.

Question 1: Key Challenges, Priorities and Opportunities for Wiltshire

What are the key local challenges, priorities and opportunities relevant for the future development of Wiltshire?

1. Coalescence vs. Settlement Identity:

Managing intense urban growth pressure on the fringes of principal settlements like Salisbury is a primary social and planning challenge. Settlements like Laverstock, Ford, Bishopdown Farm, Old Sarum, and Longhedge form a distinct network of historic and modern communities. The parish residential stock has trebled from approximately 1,250 homes in 1991 to over 4,150 homes, consuming over 120 hectares of greenfield land. The Wiltshire Baseline Survey of Area (2026) documents continuous urban edge expansion into the countryside, bringing an acute, ongoing risk of spatial and visual coalescence with Salisbury City. The Local Plan must establish explicit policy barriers against this geographical and political encroachment.

2. Overwhelmed Infrastructure Capacity:

Laverstock and Ford Parish suffers from severe congestion on the A345, A36, and local distributor roads. Key constraints include the absence of viable new transport corridors east of Salisbury, limited active travel and public transport infrastructure, and severe deficits in local NHS GP and dental capacities. Infrastructure modelling must evaluate the cumulative impact of recent growth at Longhedge and Old Sarum against the hard environmental and physical limits preventing major new road infrastructure east of Salisbury.

3. Environmental and Landscape Limits:

The area hosts exceptionally fragile, internationally protected natural assets. These include the Hampshire Avon SAC (and the River Bourne feeding it), the chalk downlands of Cockey Down SSSI, and the historic setting of the Old Sarum Airfield Conservation Area. The Wiltshire Baseline Survey highlights that 77% of SSSI river units in the county are in an unfavourable condition, zero reaches have a good ecological status, and the county faces serious water stress. Halting environmental degradation and protecting the landscape setting of the Salisbury skyline (see below) must act as definitive, non-negotiable policy thresholds to development capacity.

4. Opportunities for Green Infrastructure:

The newly designated Western Forest landscape initiative provides a milestone opportunity. Integrating local chalk downlands into this wider network will boost urban-edge biodiversity, improve community health outcomes, and provide a definitive natural limit to urban encroachment.

Question 2: Shaping the Spatial Strategy

How do you think we should meet development needs and where should we focus growth?

1. Exclusion of Sensitive Chalk Downlands:

Wiltshire holds 55% of the UK's remaining chalk grassland. The eastern chalk downland ridges of Cockey Down SSSI and Laverstock Down possess exceptionally high landscape and visual sensitivity due to their extreme exposure within the Salisbury basin and from

Scheduled Monuments like Old Sarum and Figsbury Ring. Built development here would fragment priority habitats, worsen recreational pressure on the Hampshire Avon catchment, and breach NPPF 2026 Policy S5 regarding countryside protection. Following the Inspectors' Post-Stage 2 Hearings Letter (December 2025), which declared the previous "Salisbury Area New Community Area of Search" unsound due to deficient Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) evidence, the spatial strategy must explicitly exclude these downlands from development.

2. Adherence to the Brownfield-First Hierarchy:

Wiltshire Council must utilize its powers under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 to bring forward major brownfield opportunity areas within Salisbury City instead of greenfield extensions. High-density urban regeneration should be targeted at:

- The Maltings, Central Car Park, and the Salisbury Train Station Area (for sustainable urban living).
- Churchfields Employment Area (for upgrading and industrial intensification utilizing direct rail connectivity).

Redeveloping these underutilized or contaminated central assets complies with NPPF 2026, Policy S4 (Mitigating greenfield loss) and reflects the exceptionally low local need for affordable housing inside the surrounding rural parish of Laverstock and Ford. Compact, transit-oriented extensions should only be explored on land of low environmental value within walking distance of well-connected stations.

3. Strategic Settlements and Coalescence Boundaries:

In accordance with NPPF 2026, Policy S2, the Local Plan should formally define a "Settlement Coalescence Buffer Zone" to maintain the physical separation and distinct identity of communities. The spatial strategy must integrate and map fixed, legally secured "Green Buffers" on the digital Policies Map:

- Green Buffer 1: Separating Old Sarum/Longhedge from Salisbury City.
- Green Buffer 2: Separating Laverstock Village from Salisbury City.
- Green Buffers 3 and 4: Protecting Ford Village from Riverdown Park and the Old Sarum Airfield Conservation Area.

Question 3: Informing Locally Specific Policies

What do you think locally specific policies could and should cover in the Wiltshire Local Plan?

1. Enhanced Water Efficiency and Nutrient Neutrality:

Mandate a maximum water consumption standard of 80 litres per person per day for all new development, enforced via compulsory rainwater harvesting and greywater recycling systems. The standard national Building Regulation override (110 litres per day) is insufficient to restore the critically failing Hampshire Avon and River Bourne catchments, which suffer from severe water stress and toxic nutrient pollution.

2. Settlement Identity and Strategic Landscape Gaps:

Restrict development inside designated strategic gaps between Salisbury City and the settlements of Laverstock, Ford, and Old

Sarum. Only non-built landscape uses (such as agriculture or nature conservation) that maintain absolute physical separation should be permitted.

3. Salisbury Skyline and Protected Vistas:

Restrict all future building heights within the Salisbury basin and its immediate transitioning parishes to a maximum of 12 metres. This preserves the pre-eminent feature of the Salisbury Cathedral spire, protects the historic medieval "chequer" character, and safeguards sensitive approach vistas from the north (A30) and east (Clarendon Way).

4. Absolute Escarpment and Chalk Downland Protection:

Prohibit built development of any scale on or directly affecting the immediate skylines and slopes of locally valued downlands, specifically Cockey Down SSSI and Laverstock Down. This prevents suburbanisation and visual intrusion. All nearby edge developments must implement strict dark-sky-friendly lighting designs to protect wildlife and align with the Cranborne Chase International Dark Sky Reserve network.

Question 4: Evidence Requirements

What evidence do you think is needed to inform the Plan? Do you have thoughts on how it should be prepared?

In accordance with NPPF 2026, Policy PM8, all evidence must be up-to-date and proportionate. The following baseline data gaps must be addressed before drafting the final spatial strategy:

1. Fine-Grained Settlement Coalescence & Landscape Sensitivity:

Commission an updated, area-wide assessment at a 1:25,000 scale. The Wiltshire Baseline Survey (2026) notes a severe data gap, with the current landscape character assessment dating back to 2005. Site-specific sensitivity mapping (in line with Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21) is urgently required for the Salisbury-Laverstock fringe to identify "valued landscapes" and legally justify the boundaries of the proposed Strategic Gap policy.

2. Salisbury & Fringes Heritage Capacity Study:

A dedicated study is required to understand how development interacts with the settings of the cathedral, Scheduled Monuments, and Old Sarum, ensuring housing targets are balanced with historic asset protection.

3. Phosphate and Nitrogen Sub-Catchment Budget Modelling:

Granular mapping and source apportionment data are required for the local river catchments to support the statutory Habitats Regulations Assessment and ensure that surface water run-off maintains true nutrient neutrality.

4. Up-to-Date Recreational Visitor Surveys:

Gather new, granular data to map exact visitor origins and recreational footfall pressure within the functional sustenance zones of European designated sites. The current baseline lacks

visitor trend data for the Trowbridge Woods and Salisbury Plain SAC/SPA zones, leaving mitigation strategies legally vulnerable.

5. Sub-Surface Archaeological Mapping:

Commission detailed, localized archaeological capacity studies in coordination with Historic England to map the international significance of sub-surface Palaeolithic remains and the wider settings of the Woodbury Ancient Villages and Old Sarum Scheduled Monuments.

Question 5: What the Wiltshire Local Plan Should Contain?

Do you have any further thoughts on what the Wiltshire Local Plan should contain?

1. Integration of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS):

The Local Plan must formally map the recovery priorities and habitat corridors identified in the Wiltshire and Swindon LNRS. Legally mandated Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) targets should be raised to a minimum of 20% for developments intersecting high or medium/high sensitivity landscapes to properly buffer fragmented chalk grassland habitats.

2. Digital Inventory of the Green-Blue Infrastructure (GBI) Network:

Move away from text-based assumptions and include an interactive, map-based framework linking community asset data directly to the Create and Update a Local Plan (CULP) service. This digital ledger must explicitly safeguard successful community-led natural assets, such as the Castle Hill Country Park, the River Bourne Community Farm, and the Laverstock Water Meadows.

Question 6: How Should We Engage?

Please provide your thoughts on how we should engage with you in the preparation of the Wiltshire Local Plan.

1. Early, Transparent Stakeholder Workshops:

In accordance with NPPF 2026, Policy PM7, Wiltshire Council should execute early engagement workshops using Project Initiation Documents (PIDs) shared directly with Town and Parish Councils before finalizing Gateway 1 readiness assessments.

2. Hybrid, Accessible Communication Systems:

While digital platforms and interactive GIS mapping are vital to maximize reach, traditional communication channels must be maintained. Localized physical exhibitions and direct post alerts are essential to prevent the digital exclusion of the 22.9% of the local population aged 65+ who wish to shape their communities.