

Response from North Wiltshire District Council 17/01/07

General Note

This response given by North Wiltshire District Council should be placed in the context that North Wiltshire is a largely rural district of 129,000 population comprising a single large market town, Chippenham and five smaller towns. Chippenham contains a well used railway station along the main Bristol to London line and the District is bisected by the M4 motorway. Its position between the growth area of Swindon and the historic city of Bath directly influences its economic and social position.

It is economically vibrant although it is in a transitional stage between the decline of manufacturing industry and the growing modern service industries. Its exceptional rural attributes attracts substantial inward-migration of both population and businesses.

Questions for stakeholders

This response comments only on some of the questions for stakeholders. Each question to which a response is made is set out in bold italics, with the District's response underneath.

Overall

Do local authorities have the powers they need to effectively undertake their place-shaping role, particularly with regard to pursuing economic prosperity?

The requirement of Section 24 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act that Local Development Frameworks must be "in conformity" with the Regional Spatial Strategy will hamper the ability of local authorities to respond swiftly to changes in economic conditions. Whilst this power was conferred upon Structure Plans under the previous system, the RSSs will be less flexible and thus over-simplify the economic conditions of their constituent parts.

This District would wish to have this power removed and to rely upon the "have regard to" duty under section 19 of that Act.

Eddington Transport Study

Governance

- ***Can local authorities work effectively in partnership to deliver transport outcomes or are new/reformed institutions necessary?***

Local Transport Plans as prepared by the County Councils are not well integrated into the place making powers of District Councils. There should be a clear precedence in plan making such that the Local Development Framework incorporate LTPs as local development documents and that Authorities are expected to prepare these, where relevant, jointly with the Highway Authority.

Barker Review of Land Use Planning

Governance

- ***What specific measures are needed to ensure that local planning authorities have appropriate flexibility over issues of solely local impact? Are there particular implications from the Review's recommendations on the use of green belt land?***

The requirement of Section 24 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act that Local Development Frameworks must be "in conformity" with the Regional Spatial Strategy will hamper the ability of local authorities to respond swiftly to changes in economic conditions. Whilst this power was conferred upon Structure Plans under the previous system, the RSSs will be less flexible and thus over-simplify the economic conditions of their constituent parts.

This District would wish to have this power removed and to rely upon the "have regard to" duty under section 19 of that Act.

This District lies partly within the edge of the Bristol/Bath Green Belt. Whilst it would be true to say that there is an element of commuting from the western fringes of the District to Bath and Bristol, there is no evidence to suggest that there has been a significant increase in long distance commuting as a result. Other factors are more likely to be important such as the ease of access to the M4 motorway and the relatively low cost of motoring.

In consequence we believe that the erosion of the Green Belt at its edges will have little impact upon reducing the pattern of movement either in terms of the sustainability of such activity or upon economic efficiency.

- ***What different approaches could be taken to enable strategic decisions to be taken at an appropriate spatial level? Can local authorities work effectively in partnership across wider areas to do this or are new/reformed institutions necessary?***

There should be encouragement to work across existing boundaries, facilitated by regional agencies working together. For Wiltshire, this is as much about the inter-regional boundary South West/South East as across county boundaries.

- ***What role should local authorities have in relation to a future independent Planning Commission, and how should they best work with local communities on their concerns and potential benefits?***

The Planning Commission should be required to comply with the approved Statement of Community Involvement relating to the local authority concerned. A liaison system would need to be set up to ensure that all processes and procedures are followed and for intelligence gathering to be effective.

Funding

- ***What would be the most effective and practical means of creating incentives for local authorities to support appropriate growth?***

The most effective incentive is to allow the local authorities concerned to retain the benefits of such growth for their constituents. This would involve removing the threat of Planning Gain Supplement as it has been described so far and to retain all or a proportion of Business Rates.