



Meeting	Full Council
Date	22 March 2023
Report Title	Neighbourhood Plan Update
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1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report seeks to update Councillors on the progress of Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan since the previous update report in January 2023.

2.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Councillors will recall a previous report providing an update on the Neighbourhood Plan, which was presented to Full Council on 11 January 2023. This report explained that the focus of recent Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group meetings had been to review and agree responses to the comments received during the original Regulation 14 public consultation on the Draft Plan, and to modify the Plan accordingly in response to these comments.

2.2 The previous report explained the strategy for repeating the Regulation 14 public consultation with the original version of the Draft Neighbourhood Plan but with the addition of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

3.0 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN UPDATE

3.1 At the February Steering Group Meeting, the Group reviewed and agreed responses to the comments received on Housing Policies H1-H2 and Economy Policies E1-E2. The Neighbourhood Plan was modified accordingly in response to these comments. At the March Steering Group Meeting, the Group revisited Policy T3 on Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure, the Vision & Objectives and Chapters 1-3, and made some minor additions and alterations to the Plan. The Steering Group have completed responses and amendments to the Plan and it will now be sent for design/formatting.

3.2 The repeat Regulation 14 public consultation on the Draft Plan commenced on 21 February 2023 and will end on 5 April 2023. It has been advertised on Neighbourhood Plan and Town Council social media platforms, by posters in Town Council noticeboards and by news posts on the Neighbourhood Plan and Town Council websites. All 700+ contacts on the Neighbourhood Plan mailing list were notified of the consultation. A hard copy of the Plan, Annexes, Appendices and SEA has been made available to view in the Town Hall reception during the consultation period.

3.3 The SEA, which forms part of the repeat Regulation 14 Consultation, concluded that the Draft Plan would likely to lead to *significant positive effects* in relation to community wellbeing and *minor positive effects* in relation to air quality, biodiversity, climate

change, land, soil and water resources, landscape and transport. The SEA concluded that the Plan would likely lead to *neutral effects* in relation to the historic environment, with the potential for amending Policy TC1 to deliver *minor positive effects* in the long term.

- 3.4 The revised version of the Neighbourhood Plan was sent to Wiltshire Council Spatial Planners in February 2023 and favourable comments were received in respect of how the Plan had been amended to address their comments to the original Regulation 14 Consultation. Wiltshire Council Have highlighted three areas for further discussion with them prior to submission of the Plan: Policy TC1 on the Bath Road/Bridge Centre Car Park Site as it relates to heritage aspects, Policy GI2 on Local Green Spaces as it relates to the proposed designation of Area WW (Land adjacent to Hardens Mead) and technicalities in relation to our Plan and the Emerging Wiltshire Local Plan as it relates to Sustainability & Climate Change Policies.
- 3.5 Comments received from developers and Wiltshire Council Spatial Planning as part of the original Regulation 14 Consultation queried the viability of development schemes having to comply with Neighbourhood Plan Policy SCC1 on Net Zero Carbon Development and Policy SCC2 on Sustainable Design & Construction in particular. The Steering Group decided that it would be prudent to carry out some viability testing on these policies as evidence, so that they were not open to challenge at the Examination stage of the Plan, and ultimately deleted by the Inspector.
- 3.6 Quotes were sought from two consultancies who offered expertise in the niche area of planning viability and net zero carbon uplift. The chosen lead consultant, McBains, specialises in delivery of net zero (energy, carbon) & sustainability and partner with Three Dragons who specialise in planning viability testing. McBains and Three Dragons advised that Policies SCC1 and SCC2 of the Plan could not be tested for viability in isolation and recommended a full viability testing of all the Neighbourhood Plan policies to ensure that robust viability evidence could be provided at Examination in the event that the Plan's policies were challenged.
- 3.7 The cost of the viability assessment is £14,400 and work has already commenced by the consultants. They have committed to work to shorter than usual timescales, given the Town Council's ambition to submit the Plan to Wiltshire Council in May in keeping with the Neighbourhood Plan timeline. They have committed to providing the Town Council with a final viability report by 30 April 2023. Depending on the outcome of the viability report further amendments may need to be made to Neighbourhood Plan policies prior to submission of the Plan to Wiltshire Council.
- 3.8 The Neighbourhood Plan timeline is attached in **APPENDIX A**. The repeat Regulation 14 consultation commenced on time in February 2023, albeit towards the end of this month. Given the 6 week consultation period ends in the first week of April this explains the one month delay to the timeline when compared to the previous version presented to Full Council. Based on current estimates the Plan will be submitted to Wiltshire Council in May 2023
- 3.9 Once submitted to Wiltshire Council, the Town Council loses control over the timeline. Although tight on timescales, if all goes speedily and smoothly with the remaining stages of plan making (the Regulation 16 public consultation then Independent Examination), the Plan referendum could be held in early November 2023 and the Plan 'made' before the end of the year. If there are delays in the stages referred to, the referendum would also be delayed until early 2024 and the Plan 'made' in the first quarter of 2024. This

is because Wiltshire Council do not hold elections/referendums between 15 November - 15 January annually.

4.0 CONTRIBUTION TO CORPORATE PLAN PRIORITIES

4.1 The development of a Neighbourhood Plan will contribute to the following corporate priorities:

- Provide and develop facilities and services that are accessible, inclusive and promote health and well-being.
- Play an active role in the future development of the town through collaboration with partners, stakeholders, and our community.
- Help to create a future that is carbon neutral, environmentally sustainable and resilient to the impact of climate change.
- Maintain and create opportunities to enhance our green spaces and provide a clean and safe environment.
- Provide and develop facilities and services that promote Chippenham as an attractive and vibrant market town and celebrate its rich history, heritage, and culture.

5.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Steering Group continues to be supported by the Head of Planning, Planning Consultant(s) (external support), Administrative Officers, the Council's Communications & Customer Services Manager and Corporate Management Team.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 For the financial year 2022/23, in addition to payroll costs, there is a Capital/EMF budget of £34,000 to cover print/design, consultant and professional fees, to be charged against Community Infrastructure Levy income, and an additional Income & Expenditure budget of £3,000 to cover other items such as website and postage.

6.2 To date this financial year, £2207 has been spent on Planning Consultant fees, and £604 on yearly maintenance, hosting, domain registration and SSL certificate for the Neighbourhood Plan website. There is committed expenditure of £5032 for design/formatting of the Plan, changes to the Neighbourhood Plan website and Planning Consultant fees. There is an additional committed expenditure of £14,400 for consultant fees on the viability assessment.

7.0 CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 This report is providing an update on Neighbourhood Plan progress for Councillors to note and therefore does not have any direct climate or ecological impacts.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That Full Council notes the content of this Report, which is for information purposes only.