



Meeting	Full Council
Date	27 March 2024
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 the Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan since the previous update report in January 2024.

2.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Councillors will recall the previous report, presented to Full Council on 27 January 2024, which updated Councillors on the Examination of the Neighbourhood Plan (which commenced in September 2023), including the Town Council's responses to the Examiner's comments and queries.

3.0 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN UPDATE

3.1 The Independent Examiner, Andrew Matheson, produced his Examiner's Report on the Neighbourhood Plan on 31 January 2024. He was satisfied that the Plan as modified would meet the 'basic conditions' and legal tests of a neighbourhood plan, concluding:

"I recommend to Wiltshire Council that, subject to the incorporation of modifications set out as recommendations in this report, it is appropriate for the Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan to proceed to referendum."

3.2 The Examiner, in his Report, remarked:

"Chippenham Town Council is to be congratulated on their extensive efforts to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for their area that will guide development activity over the period to 2038."

He went on to explain:

"The Neighbourhood Plan proposes a local range of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the Chippenham Neighbourhood Area. There is an evident focus on safeguarding the very distinctive, local character of the area whilst accommodating future change and growth. The Plan has been underpinned by extensive community support and engagement. The social, environmental and economic aspects of the issues identified have been brought together into a coherent plan which adds appropriate local detail to sit alongside the Wiltshire Core Strategy."

3.3 The main policy modifications to the Plan, as recommended by the Examiner were, as summarised:

- Policy SCC1 (Net Zero Carbon Development) - Some changes to text to reduce the obligation to provide net zero carbon development but with the majority of policy text to remain.
- Policy GI2 (Local Green Spaces) - 21 of the 49 proposed Local Green Spaces not considered to pass the test of 'particular local significance' in the NPPF and 20 of the spaces relocated to a new Policy GI3: Green Amenity Areas, which proposes these spaces as being *“integral to the functioning of the residential areas in which they are located and should be retained.”* Local Green Space WW (Open Space Adjacent to Long Close/Hardens Mead) deleted as found to be *“indistinguishable from the adjacent agricultural fields and has no identifiable ‘particular local significance’”*. Detailed Local Green Space maps moved from Appendix 9 to a new Annexe.
- Policy GI4 (Trees, Woodlands & Hedgerows) - Buffer zone between new development and the edge of woodland/tree belt reduced from 20m to 15m. Proposals to demonstrate a future tree canopy cover of 6% increase from existing site baseline, as opposed to total of 20% cover overall on the site.
- Policy GI5 (Green Buffer) - Policy deleted on the grounds that *“CSAP Policy, which is expected to be sustained within the Local Plan Review, would not be “strengthened”, and indeed might be weakened, through confusion arising from differences in boundaries and reasoning referenced in the CSAP and the Neighbourhood Plan.”*
- Policy TC1 (Bath Rd Car Park/Bridge Centre Site) - Policy text moved to a new Annexe 6 (Design Brief Parameters for site) and 'General Design Principles' text moved to form new policy text.
- Policies T4 (Access for Disabled People and those with Reduced Mobility), T5 (Waymarking Signage on the Footpath and Cycle Network) and part E1 (Circular Economy) - Moved to the Chippenham Design Guide as new sections or paragraphs.

3.4 On 4 March 2024 Wiltshire Council published a Decision Statement (proceeding to referendum) confirming it was satisfied that the draft Neighbourhood Plan, as modified, would comply with the legal requirements, and meets the Basic Conditions, and therefore could proceed to referendum. The Decision Statement sets out the list of modifications required to be made to the Plan, which largely follows the Examiner's recommended modifications.

3.5 A referendum date of 23 May 2024 is scheduled and will be held by Wiltshire Council Elections team. Further details will follow.

3.6 A Referendum Version of the Neighbourhood Plan, incorporating the recommended modifications, is currently in the process of being created, with input from Ice House Design (design and formatting) and Pear Mapping (revised maps). This will be published on Wiltshire Council's Neighbourhood Planning webpages at least 28 days before the referendum date, alongside an Information Statement from Wiltshire Council and all

correspondence between the Town Council, Wiltshire Council and the Examiner during the Examination.

3.7 A project timeline is attached in **APPENDIX A** of this Report, with a one month delay to the timeline due to the Examination taking longer than expected. Based on current timescales the Plan is therefore likely to be ‘made’ at the end of May 2024.

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 2023/24, in addition to payroll costs, there is a Capital/EMF budget of £17,000 to cover design, consultant and professional fees, to be charged against Community Infrastructure Levy income, and an additional Income & Expenditure budget of £3,300 to cover other items such as website and print costs.

6.2 £15,152 has been spent to date on consultant fees, mostly for the production of a Viability Assessment, including a much smaller amount on planning consultant fees. £1014 has been spent on printing/production of Neighbourhood Plan hard copies, £768 on changes to the Neighbourhood Plan website and £2660 on design & formatting the Plan and revising maps for Submission and Referendum Versions of the Plan. A further £2896 is committed for revising the Referendum Version of the Plan and associated Annexes.

7.0 CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The climate and ecological impacts of the Neighbourhood Plan are set out detail in the Environmental Report of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which accompanies the Plan. It was judged that the Neighbourhood Plan policies would result in ‘*minor positive effects*’ in relation to air quality, biodiversity, climate change, land, soil and water resources.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 That Councillors note the contents of this Report, which is for information purposes only.