

BISHOPSTONE PARISH COUNCIL – MEETING ON 7 JULY

Agenda Item 15 – Wiltshire Core Strategy

1. It is unusual to circulate papers before meetings of the Parish Council. However, on this occasion it might be helpful to provide some background for the item on the Wiltshire Core Strategy and related matters.

The Issues

2. There are two issues for consideration:

- (a) **whether to submit a response to the public consultation on the Wiltshire Core Strategy.** The strategy proposes that no further development be allowed in Bishopstone. If the Council is content with that position then no further action is necessary. On the other hand if there is a desire for there to be flexibility to allow some new developments (such as the past policy of allowing infill developments) then comments need to be submitted by 8th August.
- (b) **whether it is desirable, in the slightly longer term, to conduct a survey questionnaire of the village** on its future and on the need for a Parish or Neighbourhood Plan.

Background

3. By law Wiltshire Council have to decide planning applications in accordance with the policies set out in their development plan. Whilst they do consult when a planning application is made, including adjoining landowners and the Parish Council, it is the policies in the development plan which have the greatest weight in determining whether planning permission is granted.

4. This may be illustrated by reference to the situation as it has been over the last few years. Currently the development plan for the Bishopstone area is the old Salisbury District Council Local Plan. In that plan the boundary of the village was defined by a “Housing Policy Boundary”. Inside the boundary limited infilling developments (such as those currently under construction in Croucheston) were allowed, but development outside the boundary (ie in the open countryside) were not, unless they could be justified as needed for a farm worker.

Why are things changing?

5. A number of things have happened:

- (i) the, then, Government introduced a new development plans system in 2004 and most local authorities, including Wiltshire, are currently replacing old development plan(s) with a new set of plans, which includes a central document called a “Core Strategy”;
- (ii) when Wiltshire Council was created the policies in the old district local plans were retained pending the preparation of a new development

plan for the county. But, because Salisbury District was already well advanced with renewing its plan the work on that was continued as the South Wiltshire Core Strategy. That strategy has already been consulted on and has been through its public examination, though with some elements left to be settled once the strategy for the rest of Wiltshire was prepared. It is that “Wiltshire Core Strategy” that is now the subject of consultation.

- (iii) In the meantime, the current Government has started changing the development plans system again in the “Localism Bill” which is currently before Parliament.

Because the policies on small settlements in the South Wiltshire Core Strategy were, in effect, left to be settled in the core strategy for the rest of the county the current consultation is important for Bishopstone.

What does the Core Strategy say?

6. The aim of the core strategy is to focus development in sustainable locations, as defined by the availability of local services such as a school or a shop. As currently proposed the policies in the Core Strategy:

- (a) remove all Housing Policy Boundaries;
- (b) establish a list of places (Principal Settlements, Market Towns, Local Service Centres, Large and Small Villages) where various levels of development will be allowed;
- (c) state that outside the defined list of settlements development will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances.

Bishopstone is not a defined “small village” so no development will be allowed. Both Broad Chalke and Coombe Bissett are defined small villages where infill development will be allowed. No doubt there will be those in the village who would be happy for it to remain just as it is. Others may feel that without some gradual change and renewal there is a risk that the village will stagnate. The flexibility provided by the current policy, for a small number of new houses to be allowed in the village, has had the effect of bringing new people into the village and of providing contributions from developers (R2 money) to improve village facilities.

7. If the Council is happy for no further development to happen than no action is required. However, if it thinks it desirable for flexibility to be maintained then it may wish to submit comments in response to the current consultation. It should be noted that this is the start of the process. Wiltshire Council may decide to revise its strategy following consultation. It will then be considered at a public inquiry in front of a Planning Inspector.

Do we need a Parish or Neighbourhood Plan?

8. It is unfortunate that the Parish Council has no information from the community on which to base any response to the current consultation. In 2008 work began on the preparation of a Parish Plan (Parish Plans are non-statutory plans that set

out the wishes of the community on issues that it considers important for the future of the village). The first step was to have been a questionnaire survey which would have asked questions like: is it desirable to enable further new development to happen in the village, is there a need for some additional affordable housing for rent for young people unable to buy locally, what other facilities does the village need etc?

9. Consideration of whether to produce a Parish Plan has been overtaken by the “Localism Bill”, currently before Parliament. In this the Government proposes the introduction of “Neighbourhood Plans”. The Wiltshire Core Strategy makes much of the potential for local communities to produce Neighbourhood Plans – which, if agreed in a local referendum, could provide for some new housing even if the Core Strategy says that there should not be any. However, it is probably unrealistic to expect small parishes like Bishopstone to produce a Neighbourhood Plan as envisaged in the legislation.

10. Nevertheless the village could still proceed to produce a Parish Plan. The Council may therefore like to consider whether it would be desirable to conduct some sort of survey of village opinion on issues such as those outlined at the end of para 8 above in order to establish a way forward.

11. If there is interest in doing this, proposals can be brought forward for consideration at the meeting on 1 September. The Council might like to be aware that the Village Hall Management Committee has, as part of the conditions laid down by the Big Lottery Fund for its grant, to conduct a survey of the village in the Autumn on such issues as the range of new activities they would like to see provided in order to encourage greater use of the hall. It would be feasible to combine these surveys into one exercise.

Questions for consideration

- (i) does the Council wish to make a response to the consultation on the Wiltshire Core Strategy; and
- (ii) does the Council wish preliminary work to be done on a possible survey of the village on its future in order to decide whether to produce a Parish or Neighbourhood Plan so that a decision can be taken on that at the September meeting?

Mike Ash
Parish Clerk