

Worton Neighbourhood Plan Overview

What is the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) ?

It is the Local Plan written by Wiltshire Council and it describes Wiltshire Council's plan for economic development in the county and the associated housing and infrastructure needed in support of this development for the period to 2026. The focus of the document is to put Wiltshire's economy in a strong position by encouraging development in the right locations at the right time and at an appropriate scale to support the economy. Most development is intended to be sited at the larger settlement sizes. The emphasis on all development is that it is sustainable.

What is sustainability?

Sustainability is the key mantra throughout all UK planning law and the WCS is no exception; the aim is to use land as sustainably as possible. The definition of sustainability is wide but essentially it is putting appropriate development in appropriate places to support communities. These are some of the commonly cited sustainability aims in the WCS:

- Protect and enhance the environment to avoid irreversible losses
- Use land efficiently and use previously developed land
- Minimise environmental pollution and reduce greenhouse gas emission
- Conserve and enhance the character of Wiltshire's rural and urban landscapes
- Provide a good quality and mix of housing for everyone's needs
- Promote self-contained communities (living near to where you work)
- Reduce the need to travel (particularly by private car) and promote more sustainable choices (walking, cycling, public transport)
- Ensure adequate provision of employment

From the WCS "...the way Wiltshire looks is a key strength....careful stewardship of our environmental assets so growth is complimentary and does not erode the very qualities that make Wiltshire so attractive..."

Isn't there a national housing shortage?

There is a need to build many more homes in some areas but the most sustainable options will be used first, which is why the south-east is under considerably more pressure than other areas of the country such as ours. Central government set a housing provision target for Wiltshire council; the council has then written their Local Plan to take account of all the National legislation and requirements in the local context. There is little sense in building homes where there is little work and poor services as this increases out-commuting, which is not sustainable, and may increase rural poverty and isolation for some.

What does this mean for Worton?

Worton is classified as a Large Village by the WCS. This is exactly what the WCS has to say about development in villages in Wiltshire:

At the settlements identified as villages, a limited level of development will be supported in order to help retain the vitality of these communities. At large villages settlement boundaries are retained and development will predominantly take the form of small housing and employment sites within the settlement boundaries. Small housing sites are defined as sites involving fewer than 10 dwellings. Development outside the settlement boundary will be strictly controlled. Relaxation of boundaries will only be supported where it has been formally reviewed through a subsequent DPD or a community led plan Neighbourhood Plan, which includes a review of the settlement boundary to identify new developable land to help meet the needs of that community"

and

Core Policy 1 of the WCS - Large villages and small villages. Large villages are defined as settlements with a limited range of employment, services and facilities. Development at large village and small villages will be limited to that needed to help meet the housing needs of settlements and to improve employment opportunities, services and facilities.

The WCS does not view housing development at villages as sustainable unless there is evidence of a community requirement for such development and that the development is supported by a Neighbourhood Plan. Part of this evidence will come from the information gathered in the village surveys and any feedback you have.

Why do we need a Neighbourhood Plan?

We don't. If we do nothing then the protections offered in the WCS should ensure that only sustainable development takes place in Worton. However, there are some advantages to having a NP, one of those being community self-determination in development terms. At the moment any developer can put any development proposal forward in any area of the village, however, they may be unlikely to succeed if it is not WCS compliant. The development of a community led NP is an open and rigorous process that should specify the preferred locations and sizes for development. Once enacted a NP offers strong and legally based planning guidelines for each community that has one. Neighbourhood Planning is strongly encouraged by Wiltshire Council and in National Planning legislation.

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Can't we say in our NP that we don't want any development?

No. Having a NP is an acceptance that some sustainable development will be required but it will be that needed to reflect each community's needs and evidence of this must be demonstrated.

How will the development level be decided?

The Neighbourhood Planning team has spent some time understanding the WCS and other planning documents and gathering information about our community's needs and the support levels for development through a variety of surveys. We have also had asked land-owners what land they may have available for development. A draft NP will be written that considers all the information and describes the development possibilities. Once this draft has been consulted on by the community and amended accordingly the NP will be put to a community vote.

What numbers of houses are we looking at for Worton?

The level of development will be a combination of that expressed by the community balanced against the WCS Core Policies (sustainability again) and the physical limitations of sites around Worton. The survey last year revealed that nearly 2/3 of the community preferred up to 14 houses; a further 20% chose the range 15-20 new houses. Potterne have a Neighbourhood Plan with 19 new homes specified, West Lavington has a draft Neighbourhood Plan for around 50 but they do have a very large employer (Dauntsey's school). The number of homes for Worton is unknown yet but if the NP is to succeed it is likely to match the community preferences with consideration of the issues mentioned previously (sustainability, community vitality, limitations of sites etc)

Will there be any social housing?

Social housing is now rather confusingly referred to by public bodies as 'Affordable Housing' (AH) and is generally provided by Wiltshire Council's registered housing providers (e.g. Aster). The term AH is unfortunate as it implies housing that people can afford - something most of us want! - but it really only means housing that is available through Wiltshire Council's social register, it includes socially rented housing and some schemes to purchase homes via joint ownership schemes.

The WCS and recent government white paper revisions provide guidance on the requirement for AH levels in new developments and dictate that new housing developments of more than 10 dwellings should have a mixture of open market and Affordable Homes. Worton is likely to have smaller sites than 10 but an advantage of a NP is that it can stipulate an AH requirement and support sites that are put forward by land-owners that do include small numbers or individual social housing provision.

What type of housing will we get?

The community showed a strong preference for 2 and 3 bedroom homes that are semi-detached. Single bedroom dwellings are not very efficient or sustainable in land usage; some 4 bedroom properties will likely be required for larger families and to aid the profitability of developing sites for the developers.

Who chooses where the housing goes?

The Neighbourhood Planning team will commission an independent and specialist NP surveyor to assess all the viable sites that have been put forward by land-owners. The surveyor will assess each site using the sustainability criteria available from the WCS and those found in other planning documents. When this is done the NP will put together proposals that match the evidence of development need and the community will then be consulted on these proposals. So really the community chooses its own solution, the NP team do the work in gathering the evidence and ensuring it is compliant with the NP process.

In West Lavington the NP team put forward 5 possible sustainable solutions and after community consultation put one solution forward that will now go for external examiner approval before a community vote. Potterne chose 5 small sites and Urchfont chose about 9 small sites.

Will my comments or feedback be taken into account?

Yes. All comments and feedback is recorded and considered. The survey showed that there are a variety of views as to the way forward for the NP but there does seem to be a general consensus that some development is appropriate so long as careful consideration is given to protecting the aspects of life in Worton that makes it such a pleasant place to live. An examiner nominated by Wiltshire Council will check to see that appropriate community consultation has been considered and that the draft NP is legally compliant with planning rules, documents and is sustainable.

How does the vote work?

Once all the consultation has been completed the community gets to vote on a whether it wants Wiltshire Council to use the draft NP when deciding any planning applications. The draft NP needs to be approved by more than 50% of the people that actually vote.

Richard Parsons
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