

Date: 30 January 2026

Inspectors:

P. Mileham BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

G. Wildgoose BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

Programme Officer:

Ian Kemp

Strategic Planning

Wiltshire Council

County Hall

Bythesea Road

Trowbridge

Wiltshire

BA14 8JN

Sent by email: ian@localplanservices.co.uk

Dear Mr Mileham and Mr Wildgoose,

Wiltshire Local Plan examination - response to Inspectors' post Stage 2 hearings letter

Thank you for your letter dated 22 December 2025, received on 29 December 2025, following the Stage 2 hearing sessions, setting out your initial views on the next steps of the Wiltshire Local Plan examination¹. We would like to express our appreciation for the constructive guidance you have provided throughout the process to date and take comfort that you consider that the matters you have identified could be overcome. We are grateful to you for adopting a flexible approach to examining Wiltshire's Local Plan as recommended in the Minister's 9 October 2025 letter to the Planning Inspectorate's Chief Executive². We look forward to continuing to work with you to resolve outstanding matters and to achieve an adoptable Plan as soon as possible.

Having carefully considered the issues and actions which you have identified, we have taken steps to put in place the resources and necessary governance structure to allow us to undertake the work necessary to progress the examination expeditiously. We agree with your comment (paragraph 25 of your letter) that it is now unlikely that the Plan will be adopted until 2027. However, we are committed to ensuring adoption as soon as possible.

The details of how we intend to proceed, in response to your letter, have been set out in our 'Proposed Programme of Work', as an attachment to this letter. We have broken the actions you have identified down into workstreams to make it easier to monitor and keep track of progress. You will note that two alternative timelines are proposed, and the reason for this is set out below.

Given the interrelated nature of the work proposed, in many instances the work does not easily break down into discrete items, particularly those that relate to the Spatial Strategy. As such, whilst we have endeavoured to indicate in the Proposed Programme of Work when specific items will be complete, we are suggesting that information relating to progress will be provided within the monthly progress updates. The Proposed Programme of Work seeks to address all of the matters raised in your letter and ought to be largely self-explanatory. However, we draw attention to the following aspects of particular note.

First, under the heading 'Housing Need and the Housing Requirement', your letter requests a rebase of the start of the plan period and recalculation of the Local Housing Need using the input variables at the point of the Plan's submission. The calculation equates to a Local Housing Need of 1,917 dwellings per annum for the rebased Plan. The implications of this for the actions set out in the letter will be incorporated in the work programme.

¹ [Examination Document ID12](#)

² [Matthew Pennycook letter of 9 October 2025](#)

Second, we note in your summary of actions at paragraph 33 of your letter that one of the main tasks, under the heading 'Potential for Plan Period Extension', is to "*Assess and set out the implications of extending the Plan period to meet the minimum 15-year plan period envisaged by the NPPF making the Plan period run to 2042*". Since the hearing sessions, we have given careful consideration to the implications of extending the plan period by a further four years. Our initial assessment is that this would be complex and likely result in significant main modifications being proposed to address the higher number of homes (and potentially land for employment) over the extended plan period, as recognised in paragraph 6 of your letter.

We consider that retaining a 2038 end date for the Plan would provide a much higher degree of certainty that the issues raised can be addressed expeditiously. While technically possible to prepare the evidence to support a plan period to 2042, this would be more complex and time-consuming and therefore inevitably delay the examination. We are also mindful that the work would need to be undertaken without the level of consultation and engagement that we would normally undertake with local communities in the earlier stages of the plan making process.

The attached Programme of Work includes details of work required for both scenarios, retaining the 2038 end date (Option A) and extending to a 2042 end date (Option B). As will be seen, the 2038 option runs to September 2026, while the 2042 option runs to December 2026. It goes without saying that projecting an accurate timeline for Option B has been more challenging.

The council remains of the view that the preferred solution would be to retain the 2038 end date. We recognise the issues raised at paragraph 24 of your letter but consider that it would be preferable to proceed promptly to adoption of a plan with a 2038 end date, rather than delaying to provide for a 2042 end date. If you remain concerned about retaining a 2038 end date, the council considers that these would be best addressed by a main modification to provide for an early review. As discussed at the hearing sessions, commitments to early reviews are contemplated as mechanisms for addressing soundness concerns in both the Planning Practice Guidance³ and the Planning Inspectorate's 'Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations'⁴.

The council considers that avoiding the delay that extending the plan period to 2042 would entail is also supported by the revisions to the plan-making system coming into force this year. We discussed at the hearing sessions, in the light of the transitional arrangements in the December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework, the likelihood that we would need to be starting work on a new local plan through the new plan-making system straightaway. Since then, the Government has made it clear that they will set out in regulations final 'backstop' dates for when plan-making must legally have commenced, and "*local planning authorities covered by the NPPF transitional arrangements will have to commence formal plan making (Gateway 1) by 31 October 2026, while those that have a plan that is already over five years old must commence by 30 April 2027.*"⁵ We are also mindful that, in parallel to this, we will be working with our Wessex partners on a new Spatial Development Strategy and, as you will appreciate, would wish to ensure that our plan-making functions are exercised efficiently.

While the regulations have not yet been published, we have recently received a letter from MHCLG (attached to this letter) confirming the expectation that because the housing requirement in our Plan, as submitted for examination, would meet less than 80% of the standard method Local Housing Need, we would be required to start a local plan early in the new plan-making system by publishing our notice to commence plan preparation by 30 June 2026 and our Gateway 1 self-

³ See the section on Plan-making, at paragraph: 050 Reference ID: 61-050-20190315.

⁴ Paragraph 6.13.

assessment by 31 October 2026. This provides further comfort that the council will not delay planning to meet needs in the post-2038 period if it adopts the Plan with its current 2038 end date.

For those reasons, the council's preference would be to pursue Option A (maintaining the 2038 end date) rather than Option B (extending the plan period to 2042) in the Proposed Programme of Work. However, we welcome your views on that issue.

Third, with regard to your request (at paragraph 32 of your letter) for an update on progress on the emerging Gypsies and Travellers Development Plan Document (DPD), we updated the Local Development Scheme in September 2025⁶. A copy of this has been provided to the Programme Officer for the document library. The updated timetable reflects the need to undertake further work to ensure compliance with national planning policy and the revised definition in the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (December 2024). It includes a further Regulation 19 consultation in the summer with submission programmed for December 2026. We would be happy to update you on progress on this emerging DPD as part of our monthly progress updates.

Fourth, we have not included consultation activity within the Proposed Programme of Work as you have indicated in paragraph 34 of your letter that this will follow completion of the work. In terms of dates for monthly updates, these are as follows: 27 February, 31 March, 30 April, 29 May, 30 June, 31 July and 28 August (and if necessary, 30 September, 30 October and 30 November).

We are committed to working collaboratively to secure a sound and effective Local Plan for Wiltshire. We hope that this letter and the Proposed Programme of Work provide the clarity you require. We look forward to learning your views on whether we should pursue Option A or B in the Programme of Work, and if you have any other issues, please do not hesitate to raise them with us.

Yours sincerely



Nic Thomas
Director - Planning, Economy and Regeneration

Attachments:

Wiltshire Local Plan Examination Proposed Programme of Work, 30 January 2026
Implementation of reforms to the plan-making system, MHCLG, 15 January 2026

⁵ Matthew Pennycook Statement made on 27 November 2025

⁶ Wiltshire Local Development Scheme September 2025