

Date: 12 March 2026

Inspectors:

P. Mileham BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

G. Wildgoose BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

Programme Officer:

Ian Kemp

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Strategic Planning

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Dear Mr Mileham and Mr Wildgoose,

**Re: Wiltshire Local Plan Examination - Council Response to Inspectors' Letter of 27 February 2026**

Thank you for your letter of 27 February 2026, responding to the council's letter of 30 January and proposed programme of work.

While we recognise and respect your professional judgement, you will not be surprised to hear that we are extremely disappointed and frustrated at the conclusions you have reached and the limited options we have been given. The council has taken every reasonable step to prepare a Local Plan that we believe is capable of being found sound, despite extremely challenging circumstances, and a shifting national planning policy and legislative system.

We have sought to work constructively throughout the examination process and presented what we believed to be a reasonable and pragmatic way of addressing the concerns raised. It would not have been in our interests to have under or overstated how long this work would take and we were disappointed with the inference that we have not taken care to set out accurate and realistic timescales.

We have also committed to commencing work on a new Local Plan to ensure we are able to comply with statutory duties and meet our increased housing requirements. Alongside this we are also embracing the inevitable challenges of the new spatial development strategies, but that would have not prevented progress being made on our Local Plan. Withdrawing the Plan, which I should add has taken nine years to achieve this point using considerable resources, provides no benefit to the government aspirations for housing and economic growth, and only serves to disengage and frustrate communities and our political leaders.

The council is acutely aware of the importance of maintaining an up-to-date Local Plan, both for delivering sustainable growth, infrastructure and for providing certainty to our communities, partners, and investors. We have consistently demonstrated our commitment to achieving this, including through the significant work already undertaken to support the examination and our readiness to address the issues raised throughout the process.

We believed that your letter of 22 December 2025 fairly set out those matters that needed to be addressed and gave a clear steer that the issues were capable of being overcome in a reasonable period of time. It isn't clear why the position has changed so dramatically, when the work needed and timescales to carry out that work could have been anticipated.

We have considered your concerns regarding the scale of further evidence required, the procedural need for additional engagement and consultation, and the risks of running parallel processes alongside the preparation of a new Local Plan under the revised plan-making system. Both timelines that we presented in our 30 January 2026 letter were the result of careful consideration, cognisant of the risks. We had recognised and allowed for engagement with neighbouring authorities, infrastructure service providers and relevant statutory bodies.

In terms of some of the more technical aspects, the available pool of sites had been reviewed and was considered to be sufficient to enable further site allocations to be proposed without another call for sites exercise. Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessments were an integral part of completing the further work required and planned for at the appropriate stages.

Public consultation was always understood to be a necessary part of the examination. Of course, Inspectors have discretion as to when this consultation should be carried out. Your letter dated 22 December 2025 did not expressly request that public consultation be factored into our timeline and referred to public consultation taking place following the completion of the work.

We offered to discuss aspects of our response, particularly if any points needed clarification so that incorrect assumptions would not be made. We are disappointed that you did not take us up on this offer.

As you note, the decision on how to proceed is one that will need to be made by elected members. We are planning to take a report (recommending proceeding with one of your two options) to the scheduled Cabinet and Council meetings in May 2026 to ensure that a transparent decision can be taken. These are programmed for 6 and 19 May 2026 respectively. This will also start to pave the way for the new Local Plan that we are committed to delivering in line with Government expectations.

In summary, we acknowledge the challenges you have identified, including the potential for extended timescales and the operational pressures arising from overlap with the new plan-making system. Nonetheless, the prospect of withdrawing our Local Plan, which has undergone extensive preparation, community engagement and examination, is disappointing, not least because of the implications for plan-led decision-making during a period of substantial pressure on housing delivery and infrastructure planning.

The council remains firmly committed to ensuring that Wiltshire has a robust and up-to-date Local Plan in place as swiftly as possible, it is therefore regrettable that we find ourselves in this difficult situation. We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Nic Thomas.

Nic Thomas  
**Director – Planning, Economy and Regeneration**  
Wiltshire Council