

STROUD LOCAL PLAN REVIEW
ADDITIONAL HOUSING OPTIONS CONSULTATION
COTSWOLDS CONSERVATION BOARD RESPONSE
16 DECEMBER 2020



N.B. Actual response submitted via online questionnaire.

QUESTION 1: Which strategy option(s) would you support, if additional housing land is required?

Q 1a Option A – Intensify (i.e. provide additional housing within the boundaries of the strategic urban extension sites already identified in the Draft Plan, by increasing housing density).

Yes/no? Please explain your reasons.

YES.

In principle, the Cotswolds Conservation Board ('the Board') supports Option A. We support this option for a number of reasons. For example, as identified in the Sustainability Appraisal, this option could help to:

- limit the need to travel by private vehicle and associated impacts relating to air quality and climate change;
- prevent the stagnation of rural services;
- prevent significant negative effects in terms of local character, the historic environment and community cohesion;
- limit the need for increased greenfield land take;
- limit impacts relating to biodiversity, landscape character and the historic environment.

However, the Board recommends that this intensification should primarily be implemented at the urban extension sites that are not located close to the Cotswolds National Landscape (i.e. Hunts Grove, South of Hardwicke, Sharpness, Sharpness Docks). This recommendation is made on the assumption that intensification at these sites would not cause adverse effects on the nearby national and international nature conservation designations.

The Board would not support intensification of the urban extension sites at Stonehouse, Cam North East and Cam North West.

As you will be aware, we have previously objected to the Stonehouse allocation (in our response to the Emerging Strategy consultation, dated 18 January 2019). This objection has partially been addressed by removing draft allocation PS19b (the section closest to the Cotswolds National Landscape boundary) from the proposed allocations. The District Council's subsequent evaluation of landscape and visual issues for sites within or near the Cotswolds National Landscape (October 2019) identified a range of mitigation measures to ensure that the site is suitable for housing and employment, in the context of its location in the setting of the National Landscape. These measures include planting a woodland copse in the north-east corner of the site and providing development in the eastern parcel that is of a low density rural character. Intensification would not be compatible with these mitigation measures.

The Cam North East and Cam North West urban extension sites are located approximately 2km and 3km, respectively, from elevated views on the Cotswold Way National Trail on Cam Long Down, within the Cotswolds National Landscape. Both sites are clearly visible from this viewpoint, in particular, Cam North West (albeit that Cam North West would be viewed with Cam North East in the foreground, once both sites are developed). As such, both sites will need appropriate landscaping,

both along the eastern edges of these developments and within the developments in order to mitigate these visual impacts to an acceptable degree. Intensification would not be compatible with these mitigation measures.

The Sustainability Appraisal indicates, in paragraph 1.22, that this option would result in some development within the Cotswolds National Landscape. However, given that all of the urban extension sites are located outside the National Landscape, it is not clear why this might be the case.

Q 1b Option B – Towns and villages (i.e. look for further housing sites at the smaller Tier 2 towns and Tier 3 larger villages in the District).

Yes/no? Please explain your reasons.

NO.

One of the main reasons why the Cotswolds Conservation Board does not support Option B is that the Sustainability Appraisal (paragraphs 1.23 and 1.24) identifies that Option B is likely to perform relatively poorly on a number of fronts. For example:

- a high number of residents are expected to live further from the majority of job opportunities in larger settlements and therefore will need to travel further to work – this would have negative implications with regards to climate change;
- it is likely that requiring a higher number of sites at smaller settlements could impact the existing character and community networks at these locations;
- there are a number of Tier 2 and 3 settlements which are in close proximity to national or international nature conservation designations;
- many of the Tier 2 and 3 settlements fall within the Cotswolds National Landscape.

With regards to this last bullet point, 50% of the District's Tier 2 and Tier 3 settlements are located in the Cotswolds National Landscape, with a further 16% located adjacent to the National Landscape boundary. As such, two-thirds of these settlements are located either in the Cotswolds National Landscape or adjacent to it.

The Board recognises that the settlements in the Cotswolds National Landscape and its setting should not be preserved in aspic and that some level of development may be appropriate to meet needs arising within those settlements and within the wider National Landscape, particularly with regards to affordable housing provision and maintaining and enhancing local amenities and services.

However, development within the Cotswolds National Landscape and its setting should be compatible with the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape. At the plan-making stage, one of the key mechanisms for achieving this is to avoid allocating sites on land parcels that have been assessed as having high or high/medium landscape sensitivity for housing and / or employment.

Within the Cotswolds National Landscape, the majority of land parcels around Tier 2 and Tier 3 settlements have been identified as having high or high / medium landscape sensitivity for housing and / or employment. This is demonstrated by using the Tier 2 settlements as a case study, as outlined below.

Three out of the six Tier 2 settlements in the District (i.e. 50%) are located in the Cotswolds National Landscape and one (Nailsworth) is located adjacent to the National Landscape boundary. The landscape sensitivity of the land parcels around these four settlements is outlined below:

- **Minchinhampton:** Six out of the eight assessed land parcels around Minchinhampton have been assessed as having high or high / medium landscape sensitivity for housing. The two other parcels, on the east side of Minchinhampton, have been identified as being medium sensitivity. One of these medium sensitivity land parcels is currently going forward as an allocated site. The other medium sensitivity land parcel did have a draft site allocation but this is potentially being withdrawn, in line with the Board's recommendations, because of landscape and visual concerns.
- **Nailsworth:** Although Nailsworth, itself, is located outside the Cotswolds National Landscape, most of the 11 assessed land parcels are located within the National Landscape. 10 of these land parcels have been assessed as having high or high / medium landscape sensitivity for housing. One land parcel has been assessed as having medium landscape sensitivity for housing. The most suitable section of this land parcel is currently going forward as an allocated site.
- **Painswick:** All six of the assessed land parcels around Painswick have been identified as having high or high / medium landscape sensitivity for housing. One field in one of these land parcels was identified as being suitable for housing and this is currently going forward as an allocated site.
- **Wotton-under-Edge:** All seven of the assessed land parcels around Wotton-under-Edge have been identified as having high or high / medium landscape sensitivity for housing.

This clearly demonstrates the limited scope for identifying or allocating suitable sites for housing in or adjacent to settlements in the Cotswolds National Landscape and / or its setting.

A more refined landscape sensitivity assessment, based on individual fields rather than relatively large land parcels, may help to identify small sites that have a lower landscape sensitivity. Such sites may be suitable for small-scale development that addresses evidenced needs arising within that settlement and its locality, particularly with regards to meeting affordable housing needs and maintaining and enhancing local community amenities and services.

The Tier 2 and Tier 3 settlements that are not in or adjacent to the Cotswolds National Landscape may well have a larger number of land parcels that have a lower landscape sensitivity and may be more suitable for development. As such, if Option B is selected, it may be appropriate to focus potential, additional housing provision in these settlements.

Also, if Option B is selected, priority should be given to Tier 2 and Tier 3a settlements (i.e. accessible settlements with local facilities) in order to reduce the need to travel by car.

Q 1c Option C – Additional growth point (i.e. a new growth point, potentially located along one of the main movement corridors within the District (A38, A419, A4135) where most future transport improvements will be located).

Yes/no? Please explain your reasons.

YES (C1 -A38 corridor). NO (C2 - A419 and C3 - A4135 corridors).

The Cotswolds Conservation Board recognises the potential benefits of Option C, which would perform most favourably against many of the Sustainability Appraisal objectives, as outlined in paragraph 1.25 of the Sustainability Appraisal.

The consultation document has identified the A38 corridor as having more potential than the A419 or A4135 corridors. The Board agrees that the A38 corridor would be the most suitable location as this would have the least potential for adverse impacts on the Cotswolds National Landscape and would be relatively unconstrained by heritage assets.

The Board would not support a new growth point within or adjacent to the Cotswolds National Landscape. This is because such growth point would not be compatible with the requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that the scale and extent of development in AONBs should be limited. We would also be concerned about potential increases in traffic movements on the A4135 and A419 through the Cotswolds National Landscape that would result from such a growth point and the impact that this might have on the tranquillity of the National Landscape.

Q 1d Option D - Wider dispersal (i.e. Wider dispersal of new housing to include small sites at Tier 4 villages, as well as indemnifying additional sites at Tier 2 and 3 settlements).

Yes/no? Please explain your reasons.

NO.

One of the main reasons why the Board does not support Option D is that it is not compatible with the principles of a settlement hierarchy, in which development is steered towards those settlements that are accessible by public transport and which provide local facilities. Such a hierarchy plays a key role in helping to maintain vibrant communities and in minimising car travel. By extension, it also plays a key role in mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Additional negative impacts associated with Option D, as identified in the Sustainability Appraisal, include:

- likely to increase greenfield land take at more rural locations;
- could potentially affect the existing character of a high number of more rural settlements.
- scores lowest in Table 2 of the Sustainability Appraisal, out of all the options, in relation to:
 - historic environment;
 - climate change;
 - vibrant communities.

As with Option B, a large proportion of the settlements in Tiers 2-4 are located within the Cotswolds National Landscape or adjacent to the National landscape boundary (55% and 14% respectively (or 69% combined)). This increases to 62%, 10% and 71%, respectively, for Tier 4 settlements alone. As such, Option D would potentially have significant implications for the Cotswolds National.

As with Option B, the Board recognises the need for some level of development within the different settlement tiers. However, for Tier 4 settlements within the Cotswolds National Landscape, this should primarily be very small-scale developments that meet evidenced affordable housing needs specific to that settlement (where this can be delivered without exceeding the capacity of the landscape to accommodate this development).

Many of the Tier 4 settlements within the Cotswolds National Landscape are very small settlements, in particularly sensitive and / or tranquil parts of the National Landscape. As such, even relatively

small-scale developments could have a significant adverse impact and would potentially constitute major development in the context of paragraph 172 of the NPPF (for which there is a presumption against planning permission being granted).

As with Option B, settlements in Tiers 2-4 that are not located within – or adjacent to – the Cotswolds National Landscape may be less sensitive to development.

Q 1e Option E – Would you support a hybrid / combination option? (See Q2)

Yes.

Q 1f Option F – Can you suggest another strategy / spatial option for the identification of additional housing land? Please describe it.

No comment.

QUESTION 2

If you answered yes to Q1e above, please explain which of the spatial options (A- D) you would like to see combined in a hybrid strategy, and why?

The Cotswolds Conservation Board would like to see the strategy that is most compatible with the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Cotswolds National Landscape.

A potentially suitable combination might be as follows:

- 1 Option A but not intensifying the strategic urban expansion sites at Stonehouse, Cam North West and Cam North East.
- 2 Option C: a growth point along the A38, rather than along the A419 or A4135.
- 3 Option B (for Tier 2 and Tier 3a (i.e. focussing on settlements that have good public transport connections):
 - Within the Cotswolds National Landscape - focussing on meeting evidenced affordable housing needs within the locality and maintaining and enhancing local amenities and services (where this can be delivered without exceeding the capacity of the landscape to accommodate this development).
- 4 Option D (for Tier 3b and Tier 4):
 - Within the Cotswolds National Landscape - focussing on meeting evidenced affordable housing needs arising in relation to the specific settlement (where this can be accommodated without exceeding the capacity of the landscape to accommodate such development).

QUESTION 3

Do you support the approach of identifying a reserve site or sites, if housing development on the sites that will be allocated in the Local Plan should fail to come forward as envisaged?

YES, in principle, as this should help to reduce the risk of potentially harmful, speculative development proposals. However, the identification of such sites should be compatible with points raised in the previous questions.

This question seems to be the most suitable location to raise the crucially important issue of the need to differentiate between housing need and housing requirement.

Housing Need v Housing Requirement

The Additional Housing Options consultation paper and supporting documents repeatedly conflate the issues of housing need and housing requirement. For example (with underlining added for emphasis):

- *In August 2020, the Government published a consultation document which proposed changes to the way the Government calculates the minimum housing requirement for each local authority area in the country.¹*
- *In the Emerging Strategy we published in 2018, we identified that Government requirements would mean the delivery of housing at a rate well beyond anything seen in Stroud District's living memory.²*
- *In autumn 2017, it was assumed that the housing requirement for Stroud District would be the Government figure of 635 houses per annum.³*
- *The four additional strategic growth options set out by the Council in the Additional Housing Options consultation paper (October 2020) consider how an increased housing requirement of 786 dwellings per annum (or 15,720 dwellings for the 20 year period) might be met.⁴*

In all of these examples, what is referred to as the housing **requirement** is actually the assessed housing **need**. For example, the Government's consultation document⁵, referred to in the first bullet point, did not propose changes to the way the Government calculates the minimum housing **requirement** for each local authority. It proposed changes to the way the Government calculates the minimum housing **need**.

This is a hugely important distinction, which fundamentally affects the way in which housing provision is planned, discussed and delivered. It also fundamentally affects the extent to which the pressure for more housing over-rides – and adversely affects - other considerations such as the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), including the Cotswolds National Landscape.

As the Government's consultation document itself states:

- *The standard method provides the starting point for planning for housing and does not establish the housing requirement.⁶*

¹ Page 1 of the consultation paper.

² Page 3 of the consultation paper.

³ Sustainability Appraisal, paragraph 1.13.

⁴ Sustainability Appraisal, paragraph 1.17.

⁵ Changes to the Current Planning System.

⁶ Changes to the Current Planning System, paragraph 3, page 8.

This statement reflects the Government's guidance on 'Housing and economic needs assessment'⁷, which states that:

- *Assessing housing need is the first step in the process of deciding how many homes need to be planned for. It should be undertaken separately from ... establishing a housing requirement figure and preparing policies to address this such as site allocations.*⁸

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) specifies that '*strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment*'⁹ (my emphasis) but this does not necessarily mean that the housing requirement should be as large as the identified housing need, as outlined below.

Housing need is an unconstrained assessment of the number of homes needed in an area.¹⁰ In contrast, current Government guidance specifies that '*plan-making bodies should consider constraints*'¹¹ when determining the housing requirement for their area. Even the Planning White Paper's proposed standard method for establishing housing requirements (which is different to the proposed standard method for calculating housing need) '*would factor in land constraints*'.¹² In other words, the housing **requirement** figure for a local authority area will potentially be **constrained**, whereas the housing **need** figure is **unconstrained**.

Government guidance specifies that housing requirement assessments '*should reflect the policies in footnote 6 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out the areas where the Framework would provide strong reasons for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area.*'¹³ The policies in footnote 6 of the NPPF include those relating to AONBs, such as paragraph 172 of the NPPF.¹⁴ Government guidance makes it clear that the NPPF's '*policies for protecting these areas may mean that it is not possible to meet objectively assessed needs in full through the plan-making process*'.¹⁵

Government guidance states:

- *If there is clear evidence that strategic policies cannot meet the needs of the area, factoring in the constraints, it will be important to establish how needs might be met in adjoining areas through the process of preparing statements of common ground, and in accordance with the duty to cooperate. If following this, needs cannot be met then the plan-making authority will have to demonstrate the reasons why as part of the plan examination.*¹⁶

Therefore, in summary, rather than simply accepting the identified housing need as the basis for housing provision within their area, a local authority should identify a housing requirement figure that takes into account relevant constraints, such as those identified in footnote 6 of the NPPF (including AONBs). Where these constraints mean that there is a shortfall between the housing requirement figure and the housing need figure, the next step should be to identify if this shortfall might be met in neighbouring local authority areas. Even if this shortfall cannot be met in neighbouring authority

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>. Paragraph 001.

⁹ National Planning Policy Framework. Paragraph 60.

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>. Paragraph 001.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment>. Paragraph 002

¹² Planning White Paper, page 27: Proposal 4.

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment>. Paragraph 002.

¹⁴ Case law has clarified that the whole of paragraph 172 is covered by footnote 6 (e.g. Monkhill Ltd v Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government [2019] EWHC 1992 (Admin)).

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#landscape>. Paragraph 041.

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment>. Paragraph 025.

areas, the constraints may provide sufficient justification for having a housing requirement figure that is less than the housing need figure.

Taking all of the NPPF footnote 6 constraints into account, it may well be that the Stroud District area does not have the capacity to accommodate the additional housing need identified using the draft standard method (or even the housing need identified using the current standard method). As such, taking into account the points outlined above, the spatial strategy options and additional sites identified in the Additional Housing Options consultation may not actually be necessary, even if the proposed standard method comes into force.

The points outlined above are particularly significant in a local authority area like Stroud District where approximately half of the area and half of the settlements lie within the Cotswolds National Landscape.

We strongly urge the District Council to use the correct terminology with regards to 'housing need' and 'housing requirement'. We also strongly urge the District Council to ensure that its housing requirement figure fully takes account of relevant constraints (particularly those constraints identified in Footnote 6 of the NPPF, including AONBs), rather than automatically treating the housing need figure and the housing requirement figure as one and the same thing.

QUESTION 4

Which strategy option(s) would you support, if a reserve site (or sites) is required?

Note: Option A – Intensify cannot be used as a means of identifying an additional reserve site.

Q 4b Option B – Towns and villages yes/no? Please explain your reasons

Q 4c Option C – Additional growth point yes/no? Please explain your reasons

Q 4d Option D – Wider dispersal yes/no? Please explain your reasons Q 4e Option E – Would you support a hybrid / combination option? (See Q5)

Q 4f Option F – Can you suggest another strategy / spatial option for the identification of a reserve site / sites? Please describe it

The Board's recommended strategy options would broadly reflect those suggested in response to question 1 (with exception of Option A).

QUESTION 5

If you answered yes to Q4e above, please explain which of the spatial options (B- D) you would like to see combined in a hybrid strategy, and why?

No comment.

QUESTION 6

What should trigger a reserve site (or sites) coming forward?

- A delay in an allocated Local Plan site receiving planning permission? yes/no
- Failure to deliver housing at the build rates set out in the Local Plan? yes/no
- Another trigger (please specify) Please explain your reasons.

No comment.

QUESTION 7

Do you support or object to the development of the sites identified?

Please explain why you support or object to the development of each.

Most of the identified 'potential sites' are several kilometres away from the boundary of the Cotswolds National Landscape and / or from elevated viewpoints within the National Landscape. The only exception is 7d (Beeches Green Health Centre) which is only 200m from the National Landscape boundary. However, this is just a small site surrounded by urban development and is not of concern.

For these reasons the Board does not object to these potential sites. All things being equal, allocating housing at these sites would probably be preferable to allocating housing in the Cotswolds National Landscape or its setting.

QUESTION 8

Are there any other sites that you would like to be considered for future housing development?

No.

QUESTION 9

Do you support or object to the development of the potential growth points identified, or any sites therein?

9a PGP1 Land at Grove End Farm, Whitminster. Including SALA sites WHI007 and WHI014.

9b PGP2 Broad location at Moreton Valence / Hardwicke. Including SALA sites HAR015, HAR016, HAR006, HAR007, HAR008 and HAR009.

Please explain why you support or object to the development of these broad locations. If your comments relate to a specific site within the broad growth point area, please reference the SALA site number(s).

In principle, the Cotswolds Conservation Board supports the development of the potential growth points identified, or any sites therein.

However, the following points should also be taken into consideration.

Whitminster (Ref: WHI014; 2,250 dwellings; 13ha employment land):

This site is located approximately 2km from the Cotswolds National Landscape boundary and approximately 4km from elevated viewpoints in the National Landscape (such as the Cotswold Way National Trail on Haresfield Hill).

Given the distance from these elevated viewpoints, the impact of this allocation on views from the Cotswolds National Landscape are likely to be limited. However, the quantum of development being proposed may mean that the magnitude of change in these views is more than negligible.

In addition, the District Council's Landscape Sensitivity Assessment raises a number of concerns about the suitability of this site, including in relation to views from public rights of way to the east.

For these reasons, the Board recommends that an assessment should be undertaken of the potential impact of the proposed allocation on views from (and to) the Cotswolds National Landscape.

Moreton Valence, Hardwicke (HAR006-HAR009 and HAR015-HAR016, 1500 dwellings):

This site is located approximately 1.6km from the Cotswolds National Landscape boundary and approximately 3km from elevated viewpoints in the National Landscape (such as the Cotswold Way Trail on Haresfield Beacon).

As with the Whitminster allocation, the impact on views from the Cotswolds National Landscape are likely to be limited, although the quantum of development may mean that the magnitude of change in these views is more than negligible.

This site has not been assessed as part of the District Council's landscape sensitivity assessment.

For these reasons, the Board recommends that an assessment should be undertaken of the potential impact of the proposed allocation on views from (and to) the Cotswolds National Landscape.

QUESTION 10

Are there any other sites that you would like to be considered as a future growth point?

No.

QUESTION 11

Do you have any comments to make about the Sustainability Appraisal that accompanies this consultation document?

No additional comments other than the references made to the Sustainability Appraisal in response to the previous questions.