Parish Council Report – August/September 2026

Wiltshire Local Plan Review and Community Engagement

You will be aware that Wiltshire Council withdrew the draft Local Plan earlier this year. In my view, this was a significant mistake. The Local Plan provides the framework that determines where development should and should not take place, ensuring that new homes are accompanied by the necessary infrastructure, services and environmental protections. Without an up-to-date plan, there is an increased risk of speculative development proposals coming forward in locations that have not been strategically assessed. Recent large-scale proposals in locations such as Hilperton, Semington and Melksham demonstrate the pressures Wiltshire is already facing.

The withdrawal took place against a backdrop of substantially increased housing requirements from central government. Wiltshire is now expected to accommodate approximately 81% more housing than under previous targets. In my opinion, this makes it even more important that Wiltshire has an adopted Local Plan to guide future development rather than leaving decisions to be driven by speculative applications and planning appeals.

Wiltshire Council has now started work on a new Local Plan. The first stage is a Scoping Consultation, running from 2 September to 30 September 2026, which seeks views on the challenges and opportunities the plan should address over the coming decades. The consultation will form part of a new 30-month plan-making process.

Parish Councils are invited to attend specific engagement events – and I have suggested that Devizes Rural West Parish Councils may wish to join me at the event at County Hall on Monday 21 September, 6.00pm to 8.00pm. This will be an opportunity to find out more about the process and ensure that local priorities, infrastructure needs, environmental concerns and community aspirations are properly reflected in the new Local Plan from the outset.

More engagement events are planned throughout September including at Devizes Market (Thursday 10 September 9am-3pm) and Online Webinar (Thursday 17 September 6pm)
Wiltshire Local Plan scoping consultation to begin next month - Wiltshire Council

Planning Committee Changes

Significant changes are being introduced nationally to the planning system. Currently, Wiltshire councillors can "call in" controversial planning applications for determination by a planning committee, allowing applications to be considered in public with residents and parish councils able to address councillors directly.

Under new planning arrangements, developments of nine homes or fewer, together with smaller commercial applications, are expected to be determined by planning officers without a public committee meeting. For larger applications, requests for committee

determination will be subject to a new approval process involving senior planning officers and a designated Councillor.

I am concerned that these changes could reduce local democratic oversight of planning decisions and limit opportunities for residents and parish councils to present their views in a public forum. A briefing for Wiltshire Councillors is scheduled for Tuesday 8 September and I hope to have more detail about the future arrangements then.

Roadworks and Traffic Management

I know that roadworks and traffic management continue to be a source of frustration for many residents, particularly given the number of schemes currently underway across Wiltshire. These include essential highway maintenance, emergency utility repairs and major infrastructure projects such as Wessex Water's water mains replacement programme in Seend.

To help residents stay informed, Wiltshire Council, utility companies and other organisations publish details of roadworks, road closures and traffic management measures through One.Network, which provides up-to-date information on both current and planned works. Residents can search by location and date range to see what works are taking place over the coming days, weeks and months.

Key schemes likely to affect the local area include:

- Western Way (Melksham A350): 1 to 22 September.
- Lower Road, Erlestoke: 7 to 11 September.
- Norney Bridge, Marston: 14 September to 2 October.
- Seend Hill / Seend Fork / Spout Lane / Inmarsh Lane (Wessex Water Phase 2): 5 October to 27 November.

Further information is available at https://one.network.

Wiltshire Freight Strategy

Wiltshire Council is launching a consultation on its new Freight Action Plan, which will help determine how heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) are routed across the county. The consultation runs from 26 August to 23 September.

The plan aims to support the movement of goods while reducing the impact of freight traffic on communities, improving road safety and protecting the environment. Proposals include updating Wiltshire's advisory freight route network, encouraging HGVs to use the most appropriate roads, supporting lower-emission vehicles and increasing the use of rail freight where possible. I hope that the strategy will provide a platform for reducing the impact of HGVs on our villages. The plan and consultation will be available from 26 August at https://wiltshirefreight.commonplace.is/

Household Recycling Centre Booking System

A reminder that Wiltshire Council will introduce a booking system at six Household Recycling Centres from 14 September, including Devizes and Melksham. Residents will be required to book a time slot in advance, either online or by telephone. The Council says the trial is intended to improve site operations, reduce queues, improve safety and enhance the customer experience before deciding whether the scheme should be adopted more widely.

I continue to challenge the Administration on the rationale for introducing this scheme. In my experience, and from the feedback I have received from residents, there is little evidence of significant queuing or delays at many of these sites that would justify the introduction of a booking system. I will continue to press for clear evidence that the benefits outweigh the additional bureaucracy and inconvenience imposed on local residents. Please email me your feedback tamara.reay@wiltshire.gov.uk

Car Parking Charges Increases from 1 September

I am concerned about the changes to parking charges being introduced across Wiltshire from 1 September 2026, which include an average 20% increase in pay-and-display charges and extended charging hours in many short-stay car parks. These increases come at a time when many residents and local businesses are already facing significant financial pressures. There is a real risk that higher parking costs could discourage people from visiting town centres and impact local high streets.

Moreover, the final proposals do not appear to deliver a consistent approach across the county. Following consultation, a number of changes were made, including the decision not to introduce Sunday on-street charging in Salisbury, Marlborough High Street and Cross Hayes in Malmesbury, while other towns will continue to face increased charges and extended charging periods. Residents and businesses rightly expect parking policies to be fair and equitable, and I believe questions remain about whether all Wiltshire communities are being treated equally under the revised arrangements.

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