

COMMENTS ON THE EMERGING STRATEGY - SDC LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

Questions 1.0a/1.0b

The 5 key issues reflect correctly reflect priorities across the district but other local issues must not be forgotten. Wotton has problems with car parking, traffic congestion and the lack of coach parking for tourists. Tourism is likely to be key to maintaining the viability of the High Street. Also, Issue 2 must include protection of the AONB and landscape value.

Question 2.1a

Supporting the local economy is important but unfortunately Wotton has now lost all but two of its employment sites (to housing) and no reasonable local alternatives exist.

Question 2.1b

The improvement of access to the rail network is vital to the economic vitality in the South of the District. SDC and GCC need to work with South Gloucestershire Council to facilitate the re-opening of Charfield railway station, with the West of England councils to realise Metrowest 2 as far as Gloucester, and with the Train Operating Companies to ensure a reasonable service for local stations. Connecting shuttle-bus links from Wotton and Kingswood to Charfield station would also be required. Tourism is highlighted as being an important to economic growth, especially so for Wotton with limited local employment opportunities. The emerging Strategy needs to address this.

Question 2.2a

Identification of the need for additional parking is welcomed and its provision would contribute to the health of the town centre by making it more accessible to local shoppers in an expanding hinterland. However, concerns remain about the (somewhat distant) location of current proposals and their environmental impact.

Question 2.2b

As mentioned previously action is needed to reduce traffic congestion, provide more off-street car parking within the town and coach parking. Recognition of the priorities identified in the Town's Community plan update is welcomed and support from SDC for the various community projects, such as improving public toilets, would be very welcome. It is not clear why the Greenway cycle and walking route has been given such a high priority, given the likely cost, although it would be a very attractive facility if Charfield railway station was to be re-opened. Due to the rapid expansion of Charfield, pressure should be put on South Gloucestershire Council to ensure local service provision in Charfield and not rely on Wotton for these.

Question 2.3a

The emphasis within the District on affordable homes, homes for older people, housing specifically for local people and maximising the use of brownfield sites is supported.

Questions 2.4a/2.4b

The proposals for Wotton are generally supported. Support for the protection of Holywell Farm and the wider landscape is welcomed, especially those previously identified as having high landscape value. There is a recognised need for more green space within the town (but there are no available sites) although the need for off-street in-town parking is considered to be a higher priority. Also needed, particularly if Wotton is to become an attractive tourist destination, is coach parking and improved public toilet facilities. Wotton already has a well provisioned

youth centre/service provided mainly by the Town Council at local taxpayers' expense. Additional support from SDC – to expand the service – would be welcome. Due to expected large scale housing developments in nearby South Gloucestershire (at Charfield), schools, health and other community services in Wotton will also need expansion. In this respect the emerging plan seems deficient. Identification of the need for a safe walking and cycling path between Wotton and Kingswood (and KLB school) is welcome. Lighting of the existing safe path from Wotton to KLB school during Winter evenings is being considered by the Town Council and support for this, as part of the improvements, would be welcome. As mentioned previously, the Wotton, Kingswood, Charfield Greenway is not seen as a high priority unless Charfield rail station is re-opened. The desire to restore derelict canals is noted but this has limited benefit to tourism in the wider community and should not be undertaken at the expense of important local projects. The promotion of the Cotswold canals as an “alternative mode of transport” seems over optimistic.

Questions 3.1a/3.1b

Vision 2040 is supported but there has to be an economic strand as well. A good economy is vital to the health and regeneration of the community. Reducing CO₂ emissions will require a much better, integrated public transport system with good rail connectivity. Given the Gloucestershire 2050 vision, for consistency, should the SDC planning be extended to the same date?

Question 3.2a

The strategic objectives are supported but the facilities needed to meet SO1/SO3 will need to take account of nearby large housing developments in South Gloucestershire and SO4 will require a much better, integrated public transport system with good rail connectivity. It is recognised that some of these are not within the power of Stroud DC to achieve alone.

Question 4.2a

The emerging growth strategy is supported. As stated, Wotton has significant environmental constraints due to its sensitive location in the landscape and, because of these, it cannot be considered for any significant development. The potential for some limited development at small and medium sized sites immediately adjoining settlement development limit must not contravene environmental constraints and should only be pursued if there is community (rather than developer) support. Improvements to M5 Junction 14, public transport improvements and the re-opening of Charfield railway station (which has not been included in the list of potential stations on page 35) will be important to improve access to out of area employment, tourism and accommodate housing developments in South Gloucestershire. The “other planned improvements to services” (end of page 35) are not specified.

Question 4.2b

The plan's own alternative development sites beyond Wotton's development boundary are not supported (page 90).

Questions 4.2c/4.2d

The proposals are supported but other settlements should have the opportunity to expand where there is local community support.

Question 4.3a

The (continued) identification of Wotton as a Tier 2 settlement is supported. Further development at Kingswood will put increased pressure on Wotton's facilities including primary schools, with the related transport issues, as Kingswood school cannot expand any further.

Question 4.3b

Settlement limits should be retained but with flexibility to allow adjacent developments, if supported by the community.

Question 4.3c

The cumulative impacts of growth on individual settlements should be recognised and addressed.

Questions 4.4a

The continuation of defined settlement limits (updated as needed, but where there will not be damage to the AONB and other areas of high landscape value) is supported.

Question 4.4c

Some limited adjacent development should be permitted if supported by the community (for example through a Neighbourhood plan and where there will not be damage to the AONB and other areas of high landscape value).

Questions 4.4e/4.4f

The proposed changes to settlement limits should only proceed if supported by the local community, unless needed for specific growth sites. The settlement limits should be expanded to include any adjacent development but must not set a precedent for further expansion beyond the limit.

Question 5.0a

Some adjustment to the wording for the Wotton Cluster min-vision is needed. (See below).

Question 5.0b

The following wording is proposed (for Wotton):

Page 47:

Add "and preserving heritage assets and protecting the AONB".

Question 5.0c

Some adjustment to the wording for the Wotton (page 90) is needed.

Question 5.0d

Page 87:

The range of services in the town should be re-written as "...services in the town including a local cinema, heritage centre, swimming pool, arts centre and nearby sports and leisure facilities". (note: at present there is no agricultural market.)

The key issues and top priorities should include:

- Provision of additional off-street car parking and coach parking
- Support for measures to reduce congestion and improve traffic flow through the town

Note: These are those identified by local community representatives. It is too late to prevent the loss of employment sites.

The need to improve public transport is a higher priority than improving safe walking and cycle routes. This should include action to re-open Charfield railway station. If this happens then a safe walking/cycle route to Charfield would be a major advantage. Without increased subsidies from GCC bus services will not improve.

It would be appropriate to include mention of the leisure facilities provided by the Wotton Community Sports Foundation.

It is not clear how Wotton would benefit from the “revitalisation of Dursley and its town centre”. This could take trade away from the town. Action is needed to make Wotton an attractive location for local shopping and services.

Page 90:

Planning Constraints. Add to first statement “and its sensitive location within the landscape”

Landscape Sensitivity. Statement not understood. There are no parcels of land identified in the North West and WUE 001 (Holywell Farm), in the North East has already been identified as being an area requiring special protection (Page 20). All SALA (blue) sites would impact the need to preserve Wotton’s “sensitive location within the landscape”!

Settlement Role. Is Wotton really a “very large settlement”? What is the definition? Elsewhere (page 39) it is referred to as a Tier 2 settlement and “relatively large” although it is probably the largest in Tier 2.

In the list of facilities, “places of worship”, “pubs”, and “banks” should be plural – the town has several places of worship, four pubs and two banks. Also GPs’ surgeries and primary schools should be plural. Given the traffic and parking problems can it really be argued that access to facilities “here and elsewhere is very good”? What does access to facilities “elsewhere” mean? It is very difficult to get to work outside Wotton e.g. Bristol and put in a full day’s work using public transport. Likewise, with the loss of industrial areas, it is difficult to justify the town as having a significant employment role (although Renishaw’s headquarters are nearby in Kingwood parish, where staff come from a very wide area). Wotton needs to be on the map as a tourist destination and have appropriate facilities to make it attractive as such.