



## **View from Wiltshire Council**

### **Cllr Rich Rogers**

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In recent months, a spotlight has been shone on several local authorities struggling with financial difficulties. The likes of Birmingham City Council, Slough, Croydon and Woking find themselves on the brink of bankruptcy, putting essential services at risk. External pressures such as high inflation are key factors, which is why sound financial management and responsibility is so important for local authorities to weather such turbulence. This week, I attended Wiltshire Council cabinet where the latest financial forecast was presented. These highlighted a modest overspend projection for the year of £0.3million; a manageable hurdle against a total council budget of approx. £450million. This is a result of our strategy of long-term planning, being accountable, and safeguarding vital services while minimising tax increases to protect our community's well-being.

Financial responsibility provides the enabler to invest in services and infrastructure such as roads. Wiltshire Council is responsible for the maintenance of 2700 miles of road, which requires significant funding. This week, the Wiltshire Council cabinet approved an additional £10 million to be invested in the repair and maintenance of our extensive road network. This significant decision reflects a more strategic and forward-thinking approach to highway maintenance, which will focus more on prevention rather than waiting for the problems to occur and to build resilience into the road network. Last winter, we witnessed an unprecedented increase in potholes and road defects due to fluctuating weather conditions which we are keen to avoid in the future. This extra funding, will almost double the road repair capacity from 69 to 130 miles. Local area boards will play a crucial role in identifying priority areas and concerns within their communities, aligning with the council's commitment to strategic road maintenance. As chairman of the Southern Wiltshire Area Board, I will be putting forward a case for many road schemes in our area which are in need of repair. The additional works will commence in April next year and run alongside the existing maintenance programme.

And finally, the Wiltshire Local Plan consultation is just around the corner, starting on September 27th. This consultation is on the draft local plan which has identified potential housing sites and requirements across the county until 2038 based upon suitability and local need. There are no strategic sites identified in the immediate vicinity of Winterslow and Firsdown, although a site has been identified in Laverstock. Winterslow, as a designated large village will have a specific allocation to meet, and ideally the location of these should be set out in a locally produced neighbourhood plan. There is no specific requirements for smaller villages, so the focus will therefore be on limited infill development or meeting local affordable housing needs through rural exception sites. But it is extremely important to get involved with the consultation, to ensure your voice is heard. The council is organising both in-person and online events for your convenience. You can drop in at libraries and leisure centres for face-to-face discussions, or join our live online event on October 10th via Microsoft Teams. The consultation will run until the 22nd November. For detailed information and registration for the online event, please visit [www.wiltshire.gov.uk/localplan](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/localplan).

If you have any questions on the above, or other matters, please do not hesitate to get in touch.