

**Wiltshire Council**

**Cabinet**

**17 January 2012**

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**Public Participation**

**Question from Marilyn Mackay**

**Pre-Submission Draft Wiltshire Core Strategy Development Plan Document  
(Item 6)**

**Question**

David Cameron was interviewed on BBC Countryfile, 8th January, 2012, in which he said he “cares deeply about the countryside”. He was speaking in his West Oxfordshire constituency, where he has a home. He added “when you list what we’ve got, our countryside comes right at the top”.

He went even further, in saying he “would no more put that at risk than my family”. Adding that “communities have much more say”.

The question is, that if this is the view of the Prime Minister, why have Wiltshire Council spatial planners disregarded almost entirely the local community opposition to destroying large tracts of countryside around the Chippenham town area, which many local people also value “like they do their families”? Is West Oxfordshire an exception, or should Wiltshire residents also be heard when they express a deep care to protect their valued countryside?

Chippenham was made a ‘strategic town’ quite wrongly and “housing allocations have been made beyond that which can be accommodated in terms of ‘environmental limits’. This position was expressed in The *Sustainability Appraisal of Proposed Changes* to draft RSS.

If David Cameron considers our countryside ‘right at the top’ of what we have, yet the core strategy for the Chippenham area will clearly be destroying large areas of greenfield land ‘in the interests of economic growth’. “Growth” is what we are told by the Chippenham Vision Board and local council is their key value. Local community groups want to protect countryside, while also encouraging growth.

Various proposals which would be less harmful have been suggested by local community groups, including a ‘brownfield site first policy’. Local community views have been disregarded – why?

In addition, losing valuable agricultural land, is not wise when global competition for food resources is beginning to be felt.

Surveys have been done by Chippenham Vision and Chippenham Community Voice and both indicate a shared view with David Cameron, that local countryside is most

highly valued around the town. This is in scale with its Market Town character. A market town, which is what Chippenham is. Why ignore this evidence?

Traffic modelling and other access issues demonstrate the additional housing will be excessive for town residents, not to mention fail to meet low carbon policies. Will the Cabinet listen to local residents who want to protect their town and environment, in the same way that David Cameron would not put his own 'at risk'? And if the Cabinet listen, will they follow community demands?

## **Response**

It is recognised that concerns have been raised by the local community regarding the scale of growth at Chippenham. As a result of this, extensive consultation has been undertaken with the local community and the level of growth revised with a reduction from the 5,500 new homes proposed in the Wiltshire 2026 (October 2009) consultation document, as reflected in the draft RSS, to 4,000 new homes now proposed. Chippenham is one of the few communities where growth has been reduced. Core Strategies must be based on robust and credible evidence and there is no justification to lower the scale of growth further at the town.

A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Core Strategy has been undertaken that has not identified any specific environmental constraints that would indicate that the environmental limits of the town have been reached. The reduction in housing numbers at the town is considered to address the concerns with regard to environmental impacts highlighted in the Sustainability Appraisal to both the draft RSS and the Core Strategy. Although the SA does highlight some sustainability issues locally, these can be resolved through the masterplanning of sites and the planning application process.

While David Cameron may have emphasised the importance of the local countryside in the Countryfile interview, he has also acknowledged the need for the country to grow. In order to do this in the most sustainable way land on the edge of towns will need to be used for development. The Draft Wiltshire Core Strategy prioritises the reuse of brownfield land and also recognises that in order to accommodate the growth that is needed that greenfield sites will be required also. The Strategy seeks to achieve a balance between the need for growth and protection of the wider countryside.