

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

17 January 2012

Public Participation

Statement and Questions from Mr Nick Murry

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

Statement

David Cameron recently stated in an interview with the BBC that the Government's vision for planning was intended "to give communities much more say and much more control" and to make it easier for local people to say no to unwanted development. He said that the intention of new planning legislation was to prevent unwanted development being imposed on the countryside and to allow local communities to protect green spaces in a way they hadn't been able to do previously.

The recent Communities and Local Government Committee Parliamentary report into the Government's proposed national planning policy framework (NPPF) has urged significant changes be made to the NPPF proposals, including removal of the exhortation to adopt a 'default yes' to development and removal of the presumption that planning applications should be approved unless the adverse effects 'significantly and demonstrably' outweigh the benefits.

Planning Minister Greg Clark has since welcomed the select committee's recommendations and said the Government was determined that the National Planning Policy Framework will put power into the hands of local people, through a system, which safeguards our natural and historic environment.

A number of surveys have been conducted in Chippenham by various groups, including one carried out by Wiltshire Council's Vision Group, all of which have demonstrated that the large scale of development being proposed is not wanted by the communities affected by the Core Strategy proposals or by the majority of wider population of Chippenham.

There is no obligation from a higher tier of Government for Chippenham to artificially expand the town on this scale and the people of Chippenham were not consulted as to whether they wished the town to receive any special growth status, which seems to have been imposed by the Council.

Question

Why has Wiltshire Council paid no heed to the Government's localism agenda and forthcoming changes to the planning system by persisting with proposals

for the same disproportionately large scale of development it previously proposed, thereby wasting an opportunity to scale down its proposals in line with the wishes of the local population?

Response

While David Cameron may have emphasised the importance of the local countryside in the Countryfile interview, he has also through other interviews championed 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 Council is bound by the legislation and Government policy that is currently in place, which includes the need to make provision for growth. An appropriate balance needs to be taken between safeguarding the natural and historic environment, accommodating Wiltshire's development needs and the views of our local communities.

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.

Statement

Secondly, specifically in relation to the proposed inclusion of what was previously Option 2, which would allow development to take place to the East of the town, along the River Avon corridor; it is difficult to conceive of any large scale site in Chippenham that would be less suitable for development from an environmental perspective (e.g. in terms of additional carbon emissions as a result of the inevitable long distance out commuting, biodiversity loss, destruction of natural habitat, pollution of the River Avon and environmental degradation of an area of outstanding natural beauty), on top of the other adverse impacts that would result if development were to go ahead on this site (e.g. increased flood risk, permanent loss of high grade agricultural land, increased road congestion (particularly in relation to Monkton Park), increased rail congestion, loss of existing public amenity and loss of an irreplaceable historical landscape). Opening this site for development also carries a real risk of opening up the area across the river to speculative land purchase and other activity that will put pressure on the Council to designate this land for development in future, raising the prospect of further substantial environmental damage and loss of the town's surrounding countryside.

Question

Given the Government is increasingly emphasising that environmental limits must be respected (which is the essence of *sustainable* development) and that the environmental costs will significantly outweigh the 'projected' economic benefits of developing on this site, why has the Council persisted in bringing this site forward and why hasn't it used the opportunity of redrafting the Core

Strategy, to identify more suitable sites that would not incur such significant adverse environmental damage (of which there are several, some of which have been highlighted at Council led workshops and through other discussions with planning officers)?

Response

A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Draft Wiltshire Core Strategy has been undertaken and has not identified any specific environmental constraints that would indicate that the environmental limits of the town have been reached or that any of the strategic sites would lead to significantly adverse environmental damage. Although the SA does highlight some sustainability issues locally, these can be resolved through the masterplanning of sites and the planning application process. Appendix 3 of Topic Paper 12 sets out the evidence for the strategic sites proposed at Chippenham. All reasonable alternatives have been appraised in determining an appropriate Strategy for the Town.

Question

In this regard, would the Council please provide a clear statement of its calculation of the environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of allowing development to the East of Chippenham, along with any other information that is material to its proposed inclusion in the draft Core Strategy?

Response

The evidence base underpinning the strategic site options at Chippenham is set out within Topic Paper 12.