Dear Charmian Burkey,

Planning Application ref 14/12118/OUT

I refer to my recent letter of 22nd August 2016 listing a number of points of objection to the application. Since then you and your colleagues at the council have given me further information and advice on where to find more. You have also said that the proposals will be presented to committee on the 21st September, at a time yet to be confirmed. However there are still letters from consultees being uploaded daily and many consultations with Wiltshire Council officers that clearly have not yet been satisfactorily concluded.

There are fundamental questions and objections raised by consultees in early 2015 that have not been answered by the applicant in the revised documents. **Without these answers I believe your assessment of the application will not be complete and therefore will result in an unsafe decision that will be challenged.**

I have a list of objections and although some of these could be considered individually for resolving as reserved matters set out in a conditional consent, there are other objections that cannot justify this approach. More importantly, the cumulative effect of all the objections is such that I believe you must refuse consent until there is a further review of the key issues of heritage, highways and ecology. There is a need to reduce the impact on the Conservation Area and wider environment by way of specific alterations to the proposals.

**In summary, my response is an objection to the application.** Below are the details of my observations and grounds for objection in so far as time has allowed.

**Objection 1 – Notification**

**Recommendation 1** – that the planning consultation process is extended by at least 3 weeks to allow more time for neighbours’ consideration of the proposals.

1.1. The residents of Rowden Manor hamlet feel aggrieved by the lack of notification and consultation on the large amount of technical information recently
1.2. Since the early consultation and PR exercise in 2014, there has been no advice to the Rowden Manor residents nor notices from Wilts Council for this development that surrounds our boundary - the first we knew of the revised development proposals was a notice (Regulation 22) pinned to a fence post at the edge of the private section of lane on 13th August 2016. This advised that any representations had to be sent in by 18th August. Although you have since noted that comments can be accepted up until the eve of the planning committee meeting there is a lot of technical information to be gone through, some of which requires discussion with the various council officers and other consultees in order to gain a fair understanding of what the applicant is now proposing - not least the increase in housing units from 1000 at the time of first consultation to upwards of 1400 units.

The consultation period also coincided with the unavailability of some council officers due to summer leave.

1.3. There have been many reports and hundreds of pages of detail uploaded as supposedly revised documents for this application. Much of this detail is repetitive and has not been revised - in most cases new information is not clearly marked as such. There are also out-of-date references and erroneous advice from consultees based upon the previous proposal for a smaller number of house units. The status of the applicant’s Environmental Statements and addendums are not clear on the website as there are few revision dates shown.

1.4. I was informed that this summer’s main revisions are to do with the rifle range, additional houses, density, protection of a Southern link and affordable housing. However, there are several other fundamental issues also revised – including heritage, ecology, environment, highways, rights of way, construction management and landscape.

Quite simply, we need more time.

**Objection 2 - Heritage issues**

**Recommendation 2** – that the application is withdrawn to allow time for specialist conservation advice and appropriate amendments to be made before resubmission. If not withdrawn, the application should be refused consent for non-compliance with National and Local Government Planning Policy.

2.1. The residents of Rowden Manor hamlet have a long history of fighting to conserve the essential nature of the Conservation Area and this important green lung into Chippenham town centre. The residents would like to feel that further alterations could be made to lessen the adverse effects of this development that
in current form does not address the original concerns and indeed the applicant’s stated objectives. This area is not only unique to the residents of Chippenham for its rural character and visual setting but is glimpsed and viewed from many vantage points that the applicant has not fully taken in account. In addition there has been little consideration for the seasonal variations that transform visual aspects and prospects.

2.2. I have seen last week’s letter of 26th August from Historic England that repeats their advice of 9th March 2016 and 29th January 2015 urging you to address their outstanding concerns and to press the applicant for review of the proposals that they have noted as largely unchanged. Historic England state their disappointment and in disagreeing with the applicant’s consideration of the Conservation Area point out that the proposals relating to the CA have not moved on since their first comments on the 1000 unit scheme: the applicant has clearly failed to respond to the HE concerns. There seems more archaeological detail and a paucity of cultural heritage detail within the revised Environmental Statement.

2.3. HE repeatedly recommends that you determine the application in accordance with national and local policy guidance using specialist conservation advice. Your single page of specialist conservation advice earlier this year was based upon the outdated 1000 unit scheme but raised concerns of non-compliance with current planning guidance and noted harm to the CA setting. There is little specialist advice provided here for questions raised by HE such as the marked impact on the CA character, the tranquillity, the spatial distance, the layouts, densities, landscaping and loss of agricultural land.

2.4. As I write this now I see no updated or expanded advice forthcoming from your offices in response to HE’s criticism and would respectfully suggest that without this your assessment of the application will not be complete and therefore cannot result in a sound judgement. There are many heritage issues that appear to have been given scant or erroneous commentary in the revised application documents and it is essential to thoroughly evaluate these. Matters such as LVIA's, CA setting, rural qualities versus 'Country Park' and loss of agricultural land setting need further examination.

2.5. There are recent precedents elsewhere in Wiltshire where robust conservation evidence has been produced in consideration of heritage settings. This site demands a greater degree of specialist appraisal.

Objection 3 - Highways issues
Recommendation 3 – that the application should be withdrawn to allow more time for Wilts Council to assess the traffic generation and for the proposals to be appropriately amended; that the consultation process is extended to allow consideration of the Government Inspector’s findings for the CSAP (Chippenham Site Allocations Plan) - currently suspended; that future highway alterations do not reduce the currently direct access to the A4 from Rowden Lane; that a
Construction Management Plan is provided for discussion in the public domain – particularly concerning site access points; that no construction site access is permitted from the Coppice Close junction with the main road; that street lighting is controlled strictly by specification and particularly in reduced height in order to reduce unacceptable pollution; that Rights of Way are upheld and no proliferation of pathways allowed; that no illumination of any type is to be placed within the open spaces of the Conservation Area.

3.1. The traffic assessment has been changed in recent documents and shows a considerable increase in traffic in some areas, leading to concerns that the development proposals cannot be achieved without enforced congestion at highway junctions. I have yet to see Wilts Highways’ appraisal for the new traffic data that takes account of the increase in housing units. Also, the sustainable transport officer noted that he had made observations on the 1000 dwelling proposal in 13th May 2015 – these observations cannot be found on your website.

3.2. Highways England report that no more than 140 houses should be built until the M4 junction 17 improvements are complete. I am concerned that there is an absence of comment on the potential Eastern Link Road which would considerably reduce traffic congestion resulting from the Rowden Park development.

3.3. The information in the July 2016 traffic impact assessment proposes an increased traffic flow of 25% (AM) and 46% (PM) in the L1 area - that being the section of road between the A4 Bath Road and Coppice Close. There is also a 23% (AM) and 37% (PM) projected increase in the L2 section of road between Coppice Close and the Site Access 1. These projections are significantly different to those produced for the 1000 unit planning application and the Rowden Manor residents’ fears for future junction problems are justified.

3.4. There is an Atkins report for the CSAP examination that refers to a recommended highway strategy for the Rowden Park application of 1400 house units. This would include installing traffic lights at the junction of the A4 and Patterdown (removal of the mini-roundabout), banning left turns from Patterdown to A4 West and banning right turns from A4 Eastbound into Patterdown. This arrangement is strongly objected to as it would thereby deny local residents free access to the A4 from Coppice Close. With the new housing proposed to use the Coppice Close junction there will be greater congestion for the local residents and users of the A4. The proposed East Link Road seems to be an essential key to relieving congestion in and around Chippenham. Wilts Highways should thoroughly investigate the new traffic data and comment on what is currently an unsustainable highway strategy for Rowden Park.

3.5. The Atkins report to the CSAP also notes that there will be a decrease in air quality, increase in noise pollution and increase in light pollution at night due to this application – none of which appears to have been considered by the applicant or by a Wilts Environmental assessment.

3.6. I have been advised that although a Construction Management Plan will be required prior to any site works, it is not usual to debate this in the public domain.
I would request that any CMP is displayed for all to comment as the applicant is currently completing a related development in Rowden Lane where their track record and public relations is far from satisfactory. The applicant should also be refused consent for construction traffic to use any part of Coppice Close and its junction with the main road – this is to prevent further congestion and blockage in this narrow road that is currently difficult to negotiate due to parked vehicles.

3.7. Rights of Way and foot/cycle paths - although the application is for outline consent, pathways are very important to the Conservation Area. Additional or misplaced routes may adversely affect the setting and there is at least one plan that shows a path that has no entrance or exit point, leading nowhere.

There are no proposals to divert or close Rights Of Way in the application but there are variations shown on different plans – this should be clarified. I understand that the Wilts RoW and footpath officer was unaware of the revised application and has yet to comment on the updated proposals.

I had requested further pathway information from the Highways Sustainable Transport officer as there is a confusion of detail in the application documentation. Wilts Highways have now sent me a plan of the proposed Rowden Mile cycle path that shows it following the Western and Northern perimeter of the CA. However, there are other paths that do not follow the existing Rights of Way and these need clarifying as to purpose – a proliferation of formal paths will detract from the heritage setting and the overall CA. There are clear desire lines that currently run across the fields and they should suffice for future access without the need for additional and artificially designed paths. The applicant should produce a definitive plan for assessment in order to remove this confusion.

I object to lighting of field pathways for the reason of protecting the CA setting. Other urban cycle links to Chippenham and the National Cycle Route on the East side of the Avon are unlit as they pass through open countryside.

I also object to the seemingly random proposal to increase the width of paths that run across open land, as this will adversely affect the setting of the CA. I refer to the matter of open farm land versus Country Park later in this letter.

3.8. Street and path way lighting in general - I have also referred to this under Environmental issues as Wilts Highways told me they do not give advice or comment on light pollution. The applicant’s ES does not convey an understanding of or respect for the setting of the CA and there is little detail that I can see save for reference to 6 metre high lighting masts – another point of objection on the grounds of light pollution. Lower lighting masts should be proposed for conservation areas.

3.8. Speed of traffic in Patterdown – this application will encourage greater car use as shown by the projected data. The urbanising of the countryside – for that is what this development will cause – should be reflected in a lowering of speed.
to 30mph along the length of Patterdown from the A4 to beyond the first major site entrance along the frontage.

**Objection 4 - Environmental issues**

**Recommendation 4** - that the application should be withdrawn for further assessment and subsequent alterations to mitigate flood risk; that increased flood risk is not acceptable to the Rowden Manor listed buildings and setting; that outflows to rivers need calculation and agreement with the EA; that no building or surface water ‘holding’ should be in Flood Risk 3 areas; that playing fields should not be all-weather surfaces; that an acceptable energy strategy for the development is presented before planning consent is granted; that existing light levels are established and potential development pollution is eliminated from the CA by design; that wildlife habitat is protected by reducing the built area; that air quality is measured and assessed before any planning committee decision; that background noise measurements are taken and assessed before any planning committee decision; that cumulative environmental impacts are assessed by specialists for a conclusive report on impact.

4.1. I have not yet been able to speak with your environmental advisors about various concerns arising from the applicant’s ES. From reading the consultee reports on your website, there are outstanding matters that remain to be explained and further information is required from the applicant. It will be useful to speak with your advisors in order that the concerns can be put into perspective.

4.2 Flood plain mitigation has been referenced in the applicant’s ES but there appears to be a clearer presentation of the problems to be found within the Atkins report to the CASP examinations. Pudding Brook is a major land-draining river that flows into the Avon and together they sustain the current ecological balance for the open and hedgerow land. It is stated that there will be an increased risk of flooding in the area as a result of the development and the consequential reduction of permeable land due to building and all-weather surfaces. An increase in flooding due to unsustainable development should not be permitted and this risk is totally unacceptable to the residents of Rowden Manor hamlet.

Some of Rowden Manor hamlet surface water flows into land adjacent Pudding Brook and there is concern that potential surcharge from the development proposals would present a higher than normal risk to the hamlet and the wider ecological balance of the CA. I can find no calculation of the order of magnitude of this high risk within the application or any note of Wilts Environmental or Drainage officer’s evaluation. The Environment Agency notes that Wilts Council has a responsibility for obtaining and carrying out an assessment of the calculations from the applicant. Full consideration of the flood risk to neighbours should be carried out before planning consent is granted. This must also consider the potential consequential loss and the legality of increased risk by allowing such development.
The proposals indicate some housing is located in Flood Zone 3 - this should be removed as I believe there is insufficient permeability on the site to sustain this, even with water-retaining methods. The Environment Agency have asked for estimates of drainage catchments and outflows to rivers and this will need to be provided for Wilts Council to assess and report to the EA. The EA does not permit water retention on site in high flood risk locations and I understand that some of the managed ‘ponds’ and wet areas will be within the high risk locations. Wilts Council do not appear to have considered the overall effect on the CA and possible increased risk on wider area flooding, leaving the applicant’s Peter Brett report incomplete and unchallenged. I understand that the full extent of surface water catchments and outflow figures have yet to be calculated or published in order to assess the effectiveness of the proposed mitigation.

The development proposal shows both informal playing fields and SUDS in the same location - more information is required to assess whether they are mutually compatible given the land topography. There is objection to any proposal for all-weather playing fields as this would adversely affect the setting of the CA.

4.3. Energy Strategy – there has been a strategy proposed for the development and the response from your Energy Policy Officer on the Wilts website states that the application should be refused as it fails to comply with Wiltshire’s requirements for energy sustainability. The matter is outstanding and requires a full response from the applicant.

4.4. Light Pollution - There has been evidence produced elsewhere for the CSAP that shows the development will produce adverse effects from vehicle and other lighting. This will affect a number of receptors along the development frontages. As well as the effect on the CA, the local fauna will be affected but there seems to be no commentary on this from Wilts Council and no sustainable evidence of mitigation from the applicant. There is reference to wildlife corridors but the plans do not indicate corridors of substance that will be sustainable for the birds, bats, snakes, amphibians, deer and other species that inhabit or are transitory visitors to the area.

4.5. Air Pollution – I find no mention in the documents for measurement of air quality. The separate reporting to CSAP stated that the development will result in an adverse effect on the quality of air and as such the prevailing winds will drive this pollution over the CA and into central Chippenham. There should be sampling carried out prior to grant of planning consent in order that assessment can be made.

4.6. Noise Pollution – There is much reference to noise that may adversely affect the completed development but there seems to be no consideration for noise from the development affecting surrounding areas and the CA. There has been reporting to CSAP stating that there will be adverse traffic noise pollution. There will also be background noise emanating from new homes, school and other mixed uses. There should be independent background noise studies carried out within the CA prior to grant of consent in order that baseline parameters can be established for future controls.
The current status of environmental audit and assessment for this application appears to be very incomplete. The cumulative impact of all the measurable environmental issues should be independently assessed so as to determine if the size and site of this development is appropriate for this area of Chippenham.

Objection 5 - Ecology issues

Recommendation 5 – that there should be an assessment of protected species; that there should not be a loss of high quality farm land; that there should be a continuous land use of pasture in the CA area; that there should not be a managed park in the style of Tadpole Garden Village; that flora and fauna is protected by building on less of the site and if necessary increasing the housing density elsewhere in specific areas where topography permits.

5.1. The existing flora and fauna will be adversely affected by the development and I believe there are insufficient mitigation measures within the current proposals. Notwithstanding the proposed change from farmed land to managed park, there is concern that details that have yet to be presented will not support a satisfactory ecological balance. The majority of the land is high quality BMV agricultural farmland and I object to the loss of such an important resource.

5.2. It is regrettable that Natural England has not carried out an assessment on protected species for this site and unacceptable that there appears to be no report on this matter from Wilts Council. There is a particular concern that bat populations are likely to be most adversely affected. Natural England has provided their Standing Advice to you in order for your assessment of the impact and possible mitigation for specific issues. This should be carried out prior to any grant of planning consent.

5.3. Natural England recommends a continued use of pasture land in order to maintain the countryside setting and diversity - and avoid “an anywhere suburban park”. It is quite feasible to have farm land together with positive public access without the result appearing manicured and themed.

5.4. The applicant has previously given examples of their experience of managed parks and I have looked with great concern at some of their attempts to create a natural appearance for their open spaces. The resulting parks such as “Tadpole Garden Village” near Swindon do not bear resemblance to the typical rural landscape around Chippenham.

Furthermore, the Wilts Conservation Officer’s latest published comment is that there is no clear understanding of what the intended land use will be.

5.5. The applicant’s proposals for wildlife corridors and enhanced habitats appear to be empty words without independent validation. The extent and nature of green-field land that will be lost cannot be replaced by artificial means. The developer’s idea of a country park is based upon nostalgic references to Ebenezer
Howard’s Garden City ideals. The Rowden Park Conservation Area is neither garden nor edge of city.

As an aside, the applicant’s ES makes no reference to the number of deer that roam the Rowden CA.

Objection 6 - Landscape and Urban Design issues

Recommendation 6 – that a land management plan must be presented and assessed before planning consent; that the majority of open land within the CA should continue to be actively farmed with pasture and cropped meadows to protect the setting of the CA; that suburban park activity be restricted to within the confines of the residential areas; that Rights of Way are retained; that the townscape and massing for the housing areas should be reviewed and adjusted in dialogue with Wilts design officers to achieve the objectives of Historic England; that the housing designs and layouts must be bespoke for this development and respect the rural setting without resorting to pastiche.

6.1 The Wilts Landscape advisor disagrees with the applicant’s understated assessment of the development impact and finds “significant adverse effect” - especially resulting from the permanent change of rural farmland pasture with permanent new urban mixed use development.

Wilts Landscape debates the merits of the Rowden site with other proposals elsewhere in Chippenham and finds that development of green-field land is unavoidable if Chippenham is to achieve large blocks of new housing. I find this conclusion negative and unsustainable in 2016 when there are smaller alternative brownfield sites that could provide a similar number of house units with a more integrated urban development – and importantly not significantly reduce the irreplaceable Wiltshire countryside.

6.2. There is a pressing need to agree what sort of land management is appropriate for this site and it must not be left until after planning consent for a condition that will prove difficult to apply. This is one of the most important elements of the proposals that will secure the setting of the CA and long-term quality of surrounding land use.

Wilts Landscape team proposes that “The Management Plan shall set out a clear vision for how the Riverside Park land holding will be used by people and community groups, and how the land (individual fields / land parcels) will be managed in perpetuity by the designated management body. The Management Plan shall clearly define and prescribe how management objectives and maintenance operations will protect and enhance the existing heritage, ecology and landscape value and character of the site, within the context of wider green infrastructure links and functions of this land.”

Surely the protection and enhancement of the existing values can only be sustained by continuing the current farmland uses over most of the CA. The existing field
arrangements are secured so that occasional livestock can readily be moved around without over-restricting public access, as is the case with present Rights of Way.

6.3. The concerns for landscape are similar to those of Ecology noted in Objection 5 above. There can be small areas suitable for observation & interpretation installations with the inevitable picnic tables but I would strongly object to the widespread application of a suburban park. Any themed or domesticated areas must be restricted to within the residential site perimeter in order to protect the setting of the CA. There is already a plan for a new school - that should be the hub and focus for field education and interpretative studies.

6.4. Urban Design – the Wilts urban design critique makes little reference to the lack of townscape, site aspect and prospect analysis in the applicant’s documentation. The overall design concept does not appear to much respect the topography of the site and gives little to the main road frontage other than the appearance of another typical suburban development forced upon a rural setting. There is not time to go into detail of the building designs, composition and materials but I am concerned that the stereotyped box-building style of cramped plots at Rowden Lane may be repeated here by default. This format has no resemblance to a garden village and should not be a precedent for the application site.

There should be a dialogue between Wilts Urban Designer and the development designers to achieve better townscape and more appropriate massing in good relationship with the topography. The visual aspects and prospects should respect and can also exploit the best of more extensive LVIA studies – the applicant’s current LVIA findings I consider too weak for adequate assessment. Historic England has also referred to the need for a review of the house massing and densities.

Objection 7 - Chippenham DPD

Recommendation 7 – that the planning officer’s report and committee meeting is postponed until there is a recognised Chippenham Site Allocations Plan and DPD.

7.1. I understand that the DPD is currently suspended until an inspector’s review later this month. As such there is no baseline for assessing the overall sustainability of the application in relation to site allocations and combinations. It would be prudent to postpone determining this application until there is a DPD that is formally adopted.
There is a great deal of complexity within the application documents and bearing in mind the short timescale before the committee meeting I would welcome an early opportunity to discuss your comments on my objections. I acknowledge that I have not seen all of the documents nor read every page available and given more time there may be other issues arising.

Finally, on the basis that you are now putting together the planning officer’s report for committee, I would like to know when this will be available to view in advance of the meeting.

Yours faithfully,

Maurice Evans

Copy to: Residents of Rowden Manor hamlet