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Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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To whom it may concern:

I am a resident of Berkeley and, whilst understanding the Council's dilemma, feel that what is proposed for green belt, agricultural land between Berkeley and Sharpness is inappropriate. I realise that this is only one site of several around the area, and I appreciate that much of the land within the Stroud district is not suitable for development – being either very hilly or within the AONB. However, just because the land between Berkeley and Sharpness is relatively flat, does not make it suitable or desirable for a development of this nature. I walked up on Stinchcombe Hill at the weekend and looked west over towards Sharpness, the Severn and the hills beyond. To imagine this beautiful rural area covered by houses, a whole new town, is unthinkable. Gloucestershire, and the Severn Vale and Vale of Berkeley, provide us with some of the most outstanding landscapes in the country. It is an historic area where growth has been gentle, peppered by small towns and villages with the only conurbations, to date, around Gloucester, Cheltenham, Stroud and Bristol to the south. To deposit a new town (hardly a Garden Village) on this green and pleasant landscape would be destruction on a monumental scale.

My initial response is to question the Government's model for growth over the next 25-30 years. They have been wrong before – think of closure of school places because the pupil population was decreasing – now schools are over-subscribed and bursting at the seams. Similarly hospitals – a few years ago the model said that demand for patient in-beds would decline with more treatment at home and day cases – now A&E departments are at full stretch and demand for hospital beds exceeds supply, with a huge knock on effect to waiting lists. There is no reason to believe that they have got it right with population growth and demand for housing now. Why is it always GROWTH that is the god, whether in output or housing? I appreciate that family life is different now, with couples separating therefore requiring two houses where previously one was enough; and an aging population so that housing stock is not freed up so frequently. But surely the first consideration when deciding where to build new houses is to put them where the jobs are. And where are the jobs for the Sharpness Garden Village?? A few small industrial units within the plan, but the majority of the residents of this Utopia will be driving north to Gloucester, Cheltenham; east to Swindon; south to Bristol. The talk of a new rail line is almost a red herring, and without a link south to Bristol is hardly worth doing anyway.

The infrastructure is just not there – the local roads are over busy at the moment – put 10,000 more cars and lorries on them and we will achieve gridlock. The local primary schools will not be able to meet the demand for new places, and although new schools are on the plan for Sharpness Village, when will they be built? Which will come first, the chicken or the egg? And as for secondary schools, who will fund a new one, and how soon will that arrive? Without these, more children will be travelling long distances eastwards to already oversubscribed schools.

Berkeley is a small, rural town; of course we must accept some development, but if the 200 or so houses being built by Persimmon currently to the north of Berkeley are to be taken as a yardstick, then this is not the place to put them. The developers apparently cannot sell the houses they've already built, some of them 'starter homes' (at a price well over £200K it's said) and phase 2 of the building is on hold. How are 5000 homes going to fare? And this brings me to my principal concern, putting the development in the hands of private developers. Once passed, this plan means that local residents and the council will have no say in what the developers actually do. Their main aim is profit, not community concerns. If they cannot sell houses, they will stop building and the promised schools, community centres etc which were a trade off of the planning consent, will not be built. We will be left with churned up fields of half built houses while the big companies walk away. And to build a new farm where one

previously stood is madness. There is no evidence or guarantee that public transport, a new railway station, road improvements, health facilities, schools etc can or will be delivered.

Our objections might be seen as NIMBY – but it's more than that; yes, we don't want our pleasant rural landscape and local villages/hamlets subsumed under concrete, but common sense tells us all that to build 5000 houses on a greenfield site where there are not jobs is senseless.

Let's go back to the government and query their growth model; the jobs are largely in the south east of England, and that's where the majority of houses are needed. Not in rural west of England, virtually on a flood plain, where the infrastructure is insufficient.

There is land along the A40 between Cheltenham and Gloucester; there is still land to the south of Gloucester; there are probably more brownfield sites around Stroud; and Cam and Dursley are much closer to established road and rail links.

As for the District Council 'roadshow' which I attended at Berkeley Town Hall a week ago, there was just too much information. Your representatives were courteous and informative, and very patient in the face of much local hostility. But the 'story boards' were just too wordy – so covered in information that it was impossible to take it all in. Maybe this was the intention – to blind with science! What the council is concerned with at this stage is outline planning, general ideas, and no detail was available; but what the locals want is to start from the detail; if we start from, and approve this kind of development in principle we have no idea at this stage of what it will actually look like. The council and the local residents start from, and demand, a very different standpoint.

I can understand the council favouring one large development within the area – lots of much smaller ones scattered around the district will not attract new schools, roads, community and health centres etc. But this rural area historically has got where it is by this sort of development – slow and steady, small and absorbable. And I can understand that the council has to be seen, by central government, to be carrying out and finding space for their housing allocation. But I do question the existing model of allocating housing requirement nation wide irrespective of jobs, local character and history, and existing infrastructure.

I believe we should think again and I object to the vast scale of this proposed development.

