

The site at Pensford Colliery is unsuitable under both the national guidelines and the matrix. A generous score of 10 out of 47, equivalent to 2 out of 10, suggests that there is little to be gained from referring this site to consultation but there is another more subtle reason for turning it down.

National guidelines describe permanent traveller sites as harmful and inappropriate development in the green belt. They are only to be allowed under "very special circumstances." The use of the word very and the removal of the word normally from the latest issue of this guidance tells us that it is to be interpreted narrowly and will only be found to apply in extremely restricted circumstances.

The council asserts that the lack of traveller sites in BANES, the need for them to be provided and the relative scarcity of non green belt land (the council area is roughly 2/3rds green belt) constitutes very special circumstances. But think for a moment what that position if upheld would mean for the area. Firstly we need to realise that there is very little development that is forbidden in the green belt. Wind farms, waste incinerators, large scale housing development are all theoretically possible but only in very special circumstances or words to that effect. If the council are found to have very special circumstances purely as a result of the makeup of the council area, which will not change, and subjective assessment that a project is required the effect would be extraordinary. It will be the end of effective green belt protection from council initiatives in Bath and North East Somerset. If you think I am exaggerating consider this. Who cannot conceive of social housing, wind farms or sewage treatment plants being put forward as meeting a pressing need? Indeed all forms of development serve a purpose and address a need. The council are not even legally obliged to provide traveller pitches and yet you still perceive there to be a need that qualifies as very special circumstances.

This exemption won't exist for us. It will take two years for them to pass the extension in rubble stone to mirror the local vernacular but for the council the door will be open on all green belt land throughout the county.

Nor could it be claimed that the site is so good that it contributes to very special circumstances. We have just heard how it contravenes practically every guideline on the provision of traveller sites. It is too large, too remote, the infrastructure could not cope and it is probably contaminated.

It is hard to imagine a judge accepting an interpretation that lifted the effects of national legislation from the council based on nothing more than the arbitrary location of its boundary. That such an exemption could even be sought would I suspect leave many voters angry and annoyed.

The open countryside of BANES is as much a part of the beauty and character of this area as the city it protects. We look to our representatives in council to respect this when making their choices, to take their time and only fill your quota for traveller sites as and when sites that are actually suitable become available.