

Rosemary Collard, Snapdragons Nursery

Statement regarding land near Ellsbridge House, Keynsham, one of the Council's preferred Gypsy and Traveller Sites.

We exchanged contracts on Ellsbridge House, better known locally as Norton Radstock Veterinary College, in December 2011 and completed the sale in January 2012. We were completely unaware of the proposed use of the site and nothing was revealed in the solicitor's search even though the purchase took place during the public consultation period.

Towards the end of April, we heard from a local journalist, that the adjacent woodland was being considered as a possible travellers' site. The proposals were shortly due to be announced to the public. This was the first intimation we had of the Council's plans for this site. On the same day, a neighbour of Ellsbridge House was alerted to the proposal by a BBC journalist who knocked at his door wanting to know how he felt about it. This neighbour subsequently contacted us.

We immediately contacted the B&NES Planning Department and were told that there was a Cabinet meeting on 9th May where seven possible sites would be discussed and that following this meeting there would be an eight-week public consultation period beginning towards the end of May. During this conversation we were not informed that we could have any input at the cabinet meeting. In fact, we were given the impression that this was a purely internal affair for cabinet members. We were told that the list of seven sites being considered on 9th May had been released into the public domain at the very early stages of the process of choosing sites so that the public was involved and that the process was transparent. Subsequently, we have discovered that Ellsbridge House had, by that time, already been short-listed from an initial 23 sites and that the process had been begun in November 2011.

On Monday 14th May we heard from another source about the DPD Meeting at the Guildhall the next day. We realised that the public could attend this meeting, but were unaware that we would be able to speak. Once we reached the meeting it became apparent that we would be able to represent ourselves, but the opportunity to be prepared in expressing our concerns at this stage would have been welcomed.

We really believe that Snapdragons Nursery will be a valuable asset to the area and, indeed to B&NES Council itself. We will be providing many additional childcare and out of school places, supporting working parents. In addition, the government has announced its intention to provide additional free places for disadvantaged two-year olds and the opening of this setting will help the local authority and the Early Years team to fulfil this objective. We will also be creating 40-50 new local jobs at all skills levels, including apprenticeships. The proximity of Wellsway School will mean that we are able to offer workplace experience for young adults. Our plans for forest school and other on-site training offer opportunities for the wider community. All our

nurseries aim to use local suppliers for all their food needs and other service, for example gardening and maintenance.

We have a recruitment evening later this month for this nursery and over 30 people have applied for positions. This is exciting for us and should be viewed very positively in light of Keynsham's forthcoming regeneration project.

However, this excitement is being overshadowed by some of our concerns relating to the possible Gypsy and Traveller site.

Our main concerns are:

The shared access onto this site. If we have shared access the point at which the land next to Ellsbridge House is accessed, would be very difficult, if not impossible to secure, leaving the site vulnerable to trespassers and loose animals. At present we use a barrier that the college used to use and that does give us some protection. Being able to secure the property is of paramount concern to us because we have a duty to safeguard the children in our care and because the site is unoccupied at weekends and overnight. If a new access from the highway were to be created, the bus stop which serves the pupils of Wellsway School would need to be relocated. There is currently no existing boundary at all between Ellsbridge House and the land in question as it sits on the main driveway to the house and so substantial fencing would be required to secure the sites. According to land registry documentation, the site boundary for the plot of land next to Ellsbridge House used by the council's planning consultants in the site assessment report is wrong and part of the land belonging to Ellsbridge House has been included. As this area constitutes a considerable proportion of the proposed site, the number of plots considered viable would need to be reassessed.

The site is referred to on the documents as Ellsbridge House Management and Community Education Centre. This is no longer the case. It is now Snapdragons Nursery and Out of School Club. As a children's day nursery, we are highly regulated by Ofsted and part of our protecting and safeguarding children responsibility means that all staff need to have a CRB and that all visitors to the site need to be signed in or escorted. I also have to be sure that no children can be photographed or videoed. This is further reason why the boundary issue is so sensitive to us. The land in question is densely wooded with mature trees and so does not appear to be suitable without extensive tree surgery and excavation work to prepare it for any form of dwelling. However, it would provide a wonderful natural environment for learning outdoors and we had approached Property Services to express our interest in buying or renting this woodland. Unfortunately, we received no response. Ellsbridge House is a Grade II listed building and therefore we had to get consent to carry out alterations. Everything has had to be done to maintain the integrity of the building and this includes part of the gardens surrounding the building. Indeed plans for the new police centre being built to the rear of Ellsbridge

House, had to take account of its impact on the house and appropriate landscaping formed part of the planning regulations. When we first advertised the nursery we had in excess of 60 registrations/enquiries. Since the announcement of the proposed site in April, we have had less than 10. We also received some concerned enquiries. I did mention this to a Planning Consultant who suggested I could pass any concerned parents onto her and she would answer their queries.

I am sure you can appreciate that starting up a new business with the uncertainty of the plans for the adjacent land hanging over us is very worrying. We have invested a substantial amount of money in the purchase of the property and associated fees and are now in the middle of refurbishment which is a very costly exercise because of the regulations we have to adhere to when caring for children and being an employer and the additional regulations in respect of listed buildings. What started out as being an exciting project and one which we hoped would be seen as offering additional services and employment for Keynsham has now turned into fighting for the survival of this business which could ultimately impact on the success of the rest of our business. We have been trading in Wiltshire and Bath since 1998. We care for over 1000 local children and employ about 150 local staff. I must say that at the moment I feel very let down by the people who should be supporting local businesses during these uncertain times.

If anyone has not visited this site, I would be very happy to meet you personally at Ellsbridge House.

Many thanks for taking the time to read through this and I look forward to hearing your responses.