

My name is Karen Abolkheir and I am a member of the Stanton Wick Action Group

I am here again in respect of your Gypsy Traveller DPD to remind you and inform your Tax payers how we got here and highlight the lamentable progress made since your resolutions made on 12th September 2012.

You will recall that on 9th May 2012 in the face of detailed and informed objection you voted to take forward six sites for consultation. Concerns of your communities were swept aside as you relentlessly pursued these completely inappropriate sites.

During that Cabinet meeting Cllr Ball stated that he would not be deflected. You were indeed determined and it took the threat of legal action to eventually stop you. Then out of the fires of defeat came a new rallying cry with the promise that you would get it right this time and would work at a pace to get the job done in a timely manner and in line with your Core Strategy programme. You said you would submit to the inspector in April and now sometime in the summer of 2014. 14 months later than your target and 2 years from the date you told us you were on the case. How could you let this happen?

You suggest issues arising from consultation and lack of resource as mitigating the dismal performance.

Can I remind you that the reason that issues arose from the consultation was your relentless pursuit of a highly inappropriate site contravening much of Government National policy. A site grossly incorrectly scored in a matrix, which itself was not properly updated for the NPPF and which was contrary to your own officers' advice solicited during your internal consultation.

Despite your own highways, contamination and ecology department's advising against the sites suitability you ploughed on and conveniently lost some of their comments on the way. Your officers were not able to answer questions and contradicted each other. No proper notes were taken during your road shows, all contrary to good practice and proper consultation. We consider you were badly let down by your officers then and continue to be.

Lack of resource surely cannot be justified. You employed an external consultant, dedicated to the DPD for 3 days per week from July 2011 to relatively recently.

When you removed the Old Colliery from the DPD list of sites on 12th September last year you failed to set out the substantial planning grounds and chose instead to remove on the grounds of viability in a hastily compiled report. This has left the site exposed to spurious planning applications and your settled community with yet more stress, uncertainty and cost – doing the job that you should have.

Your failure to progress your promise to bring forward the site at Lower Bristol Road has placed many of your rural communities under threat of spurious planning applications. 9 months with no sign of a planning application when you are the Planning Authority is by any standard slow.

Despite detailed, structured and professional advice provided by this Group you have continued to stumble or meander through this process, wasting over a year pursuing inappropriate sites, fiddling with your criteria and comparison process and in the meantime leaving communities vulnerable to unscrupulous landowners and their Gypsy and Traveller agents.

This is an unsatisfactory report, a deeply flawed and damaging process which calls for your decisive and progressive action now. For the sake of the communities which you serve, don't accept less than good, don't encourage this laissez faire attitude and make things happen. You will not be forgiven for failure.

It could all have been so different.