

My name is Clarke Osborne and I am Chairman of the Stanton Wick Action Group

My representation to you this evening concerns the progress of your Gypsy and Traveller DPD and the devastation it has left in its wake.

Stress, confusion, fear, anger and real cost have resulted from an ill conceived and executed process which has driven travelling and settled communities apart, the very opposite of what was intended.

This process has seen the extraordinary in the calling of a special Council Meeting and your eventual change of course in the face of legal action. It has seen this Council attempt to manipulate the process of site comparison and justify the unjustifiable in planning proposals.

We had all hoped that the turmoil within our communities was behind us when on the 12th September you set out a new plan and pledged to reset the process and invest time and effort in resolving the conflict started by the doomed DPD of March 2012.

Unfortunately that resolve has not materialised in real progress and some 9 months later we are again faced with seeking explanation for a series of unfortunate events that have left our community exposed to the whims of the same unscrupulous landowner and his Gypsy and Traveller allies.

We have to ask how a planning application, that by any reasonable measure should not be accepted, is registered and allowed to proceed without the requirement for public consultation. How, when withdrawn at the 11th hour, an application with a fundamental alteration of size but with all the 30 plus errors can be permitted a free application, but, and here is the rub, without the ability for the hundreds of detailed objections lodged by local residents to simply carry-over. We can all hide behind procedure but surely a planning application of this size and impact warrants the special attention of your officers and their active support to the local community? Your allocated planning officer has taken two weeks pre-planned holiday in the middle of the consultation period!

Perhaps we are the victims of a series of unconnected events borne out of your desire and officers' lack of engagement? It is hard to rationalise in this way in the face of undisclosed connections between members of the Gypsy and Traveller community and this Council.

We have always considered that your rather overzealous embrace of the Gypsy and Traveller needs in preference to the settled communities has been detrimental to the promotion of integration but, the most damage has been done by not seeking out and studying the requirements of individuals within the travelling community rather than listening to and it appears being influenced by a Gypsy land agent.

You are the temporary custodians of a world heritage city and a rural network of towns and villages dominated by the Green Belt. A truly unique district with unique requirements. Handle with care and promote good relations between all communities. They are all special and have special needs. Be fair, reasonable and open in your dealings and you will earn the respect of many.

Resolve to redouble your efforts with this DPD and ensure your Core Strategy, which is closely linked with this DPD remains on-track