

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 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 by the Council's Planning Department 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 and that the proposals were shortly due to be announced to the public. We were contacted by several neighbours who also had no knowledge of this.

We were also concerned to discover that far from being in the early stages of the process, Ellsbridge had already been short-listed from an initial 23 sites and was now one of the preferred 7 sites, since reduced to 6.

Our main concerns are:

1. the council has failed to give proper consideration to the fact that the proposed travellers' site will be adjacent to and share an access with Snapdragons Nursery and Out of School Club
2. the current Consultation Document makes no reference to the fact that the site is adjacent to a children's nursery and the map enclosed within the consultation document shows the adjacent property as 'Ellsbridge House Management and Community Education Centre' when it is now 'Snapdragons Nursery and Out of School Club'. The Council was fully aware of the fact that Ellsbridge House is now a nursery and indeed the matter was extensively discussed at the Scrutiny Panel on 15th May. I believe the Council has been both negligent and misleading in not ensuring the Consultation Document is accurate and provides appropriate information to all parties being consulted on the Preferred Sites
3. before the Council designated the site as a Preferred Site, it should have considered the serious matter of shared access and related highways issues and discussed with us
4. there is currently no existing boundary whatsoever between Ellsbridge House and the land in question and substantial fencing would be required to secure the site and protect the children
5. 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. Thus the site is smaller than the proposals.
6. as a children's day nursery, we are highly regulated by Ofsted and have a duty to protect and safeguard the children. All staff must have a CRB check and all visitors to the nursery have to be signed onto the premises and escorted. I have to be able to ensure that children cannot be videoed or photographed but most of all that they are safe. Any threats to that will have serious implications under the terms of my registration and insurance
7. the land in question is not covered by dense vegetation but is densely wooded with long, established, mainly deciduous trees and provides an wonderful, natural environment. Destroying the woodland would have a massive impact on the listed property. We had approached Property Services with an expression of interest to rent or buy but had not received a response

8. the issue of the Listed Status of Ellsbridge House and the nature of the mature woodland which is part of its setting should have been given much greater consideration prior to the site being designated as a Preferred Site. We needed consent in order to carry out alterations and have completed these sympathetically in order to maintain the integrity of the building. The plans for the new police centre also had to take account of the impact on the house and appropriate landscaping formed part of the planning regulations. The proposed site will have a huge impact, predominantly because the woodland used to form part of the gardens and follows the natural line of the driveway and in addition is unbordered and highly visible from the front elevations of the house
9. we had over 60 registrations when we first advertised the nursery and this interest has amounted to less than 10 since the sites were made public. When I mentioned concerns from parents to the Planning Consultant, she suggested that I pass them onto her and she would answer their queries.

I am sure that 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 and should this nursery fail, it could put at jeopardy the rest of our business which is supporting this venture. We currently care for over 1000 local children and employ about 150 local staff, particularly in the 18-30 age group. What started out as an exciting project for Keynsham, offering childcare and local jobs, using local services and suppliers could have a devastating impact on a local business that started trading in Wiltshire and Bath in 1998. Keynsham would be our third nursery in B&NES, the other 2 being in Bath and, as a responsible employer, I have a real duty to support the livelihoods of the staff currently employed by me. In the same way as I support and value my staff, I would like the Council to support its local businesses.

I did not ask to have my business put under threat and the time and resources I have spent trying to fight my corner is taking valuable time away from my real passion and that is providing excellent childcare for local children in a safe and secure environment.

Rosemary Collard  
Director  
Snapdragons Nurseries Ltd