

## **Motion on Gypsy and Traveller site provision in Bath and North East Somerset:**

**To be moved by Cllr Malcolm Hanney on behalf of the Conservative Group.**

### **Council notes:**

- That since Council last considered its approach to the provision of gypsy and traveller sites in Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) in November 2011, new Government guidelines 'Planning Policy for Traveller Sites' (PPTS) were published in March 2012.
- That many of the 'Preferred' sites selected by Cabinet and detailed in the Council's currently ongoing Preferred Options Consultation do not accord with the March 2012 PPTS Government guidelines.
- That the case being made by Cabinet for 'very special circumstances' for selecting Preferred sites within Greenbelt is not in accordance with the current Local Plan or Draft Core Strategy and is unsound for the purposes of the Local Development Framework for which Council has responsibility and as a matter of law given the lack of consideration that has been given to alternative Brownfield / development sites in B&NES and the apparent failure to give due consideration to a number of the currently 'Tolerated' sites in Bath & NE Somerset as part of the Site Assessment and related decision-making as to the Preferred Sites for consultation.
- That Council is concerned that the decision of the Cabinet (item 7) on 9 May 2012, on behalf of Council, to agree that only new sites will be considered for inclusion and not those already rejected through the initial site assessment, may have been premature without reference to Council given Council's responsibility for the Core Strategy and Local Development Framework.
- That Council has serious concerns relating to many of the sites currently identified as Preferred Sites, including but not limited to:
  1. Old Colliery Buildings Stanton Wick
    - the scale of the proposal which would dominate the nearest settled community contrary to PPTS Policy C (para 12)
    - the proposal is inappropriate development and harmful to the Greenbelt and thus contrary to PPTS Policy E (para 14)
    - the proposal has poor access to local facilities and is therefore contrary to PPTS Policy B (para 11)
    - the proposal has not had due regard to highways, site contamination and prior planning decisions on the site or neighbouring properties
    - the fact that the site was ranked 17<sup>th</sup> out of 23 in terms of suitability

but was one of only 6 sites selected as Preferred Sites for the purpose of consultation

## 2. Woollard Lane, Parcel 7100, Whitchurch

- the proposal is inappropriate development and harmful to the Greenbelt and thus contrary to PPTS Policy E (para 14)

## 3. Land near Ellsbridge House, Keynsham

- the proposal was put forward as a Preferred Site without due regard to the fact that the Site would be adjacent to and shares an access with a Nursery (Snapdragons) which is due to open in September 2012
- the Preferred Sites Consultation document approved by Cabinet on 9 May 2012 (and the subject of current ongoing consultation) makes no mention of the fact that the site would be adjacent to and shares an access with a Nursery. Furthermore the plan included within the Consultation document shows the adjacent property as being 'Ellsbridge House Management and Community Education Centre' when the Council through various departments is fully aware of the fact that the Ellsbridge House property is now to be a Nursery. This fact was specifically raised at the Planning, Transport and Environment Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel on 15 May 2012 and prior to publication of the Preferred Sites Consultation document on 23 May 2012.
- the lack of suitable highway access to the site
- the fact that the site is currently established / mature woodland
- the Cabinet has not considered or assessed possible alternative uses for this site (including an approach made by Snapdragons as regards possible purchase) prior to designating as a Preferred Site
- the fact that the proposal was ranked 15<sup>th</sup> out of 23 in terms of suitability but was one of only 6 sites selected as Preferred Sites for the purpose of consultation

## 4. Former Radstock Infant School Canteen

- the Cabinet did not consider alternative uses (including for affordable housing) or alternative values for this site before designating as a Preferred Site. It is noted that Cllr. Jackson indicated to the Scrutiny Panel on 15 May 2012 that £270,000 was potentially available through a Housing Association to build 12 new homes on the site for currently homeless families.
- the Cabinet did not (prior to designating as a Preferred Site) give due consideration to the impact on the Radstock Conversation Area or on other potential developments in the area including land owned by or occupied by the Council notwithstanding that Property Services had specifically advised Planning Services that it might be prudent to hold the site and dispose / develop with the wider school area.

- That Council is concerned that issues related to Boat Dwellers (otherwise known as Continuous Cruisers) as raised at the Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel in May 2012 and previously at Council in November 2011 may not be receiving appropriate attention / priority as part of the work programme for Traveller Communities

**Council resolves:**

1. To require\* Cabinet to report back to Full Council with its recommendations as to the appropriateness or otherwise of undertaking a new Needs Assessment of gypsy and traveller sites in Bath and North East Somerset following discussion with neighbouring authorities, noting paragraph 4 of PPTS March 2012, which includes:

*Government's aims in respect of traveller sites are:  
that local planning authorities should make their own assessment of need for the purposes of planning;  
to ensure that local planning authorities, working collaboratively, develop fair and effective strategies to meet need through the identification of land for sites;*

and Policy A (para 6), which states:

*In assembling the evidence base necessary to support their planning approach, local planning authorities should:  
b) co-operate with travellers, their representative bodies and local support groups, other local authorities and relevant interest groups to prepare and maintain an up-to-date understanding of the likely permanent and transit accommodation needs of their areas over the lifespan of their development plan working collaboratively with neighbouring local planning authorities;*

and Policy B (para. 9), which states:

*Local planning authorities should, in producing their Local Plan:  
c) consider production of joint development plans that set targets on a cross-authority basis, to provide more flexibility in identifying sites, particularly if a local planning authority has special or strict planning constraints across its area (local planning authorities have a duty to cooperate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries);*

and having regard to the fact that the last Needs Assessment was produced in 2007 on a West of England wide basis (Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation (and Other Needs) Assessment (GTAA)), that North Somerset Council has recently commissioned work to review the immediate need for pitches as an interim update to the GTAA for its area and South Gloucestershire Council halted progress on its Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document in March 2011.

2. To require\* Cabinet to produce a new Scoring Matrix for public consultation which better reflects the March 2012 Government guidelines, in particular taking account of the following:

Paragraph 4 of Government guidelines 'Planning Policy for Traveller Sites' March 2012, which states:

*Government's aims in respect of traveller sites are:  
that plan-making and decision-taking should protect Green Belt from inappropriate development;  
to enable provision of suitable accommodation from which travellers can access education, health, welfare and employment infrastructure;*

Policy C (para. 12), which states:

*When assessing the suitability of sites in rural or semi-rural settings, local planning authorities should ensure that the scale of such sites does not dominate the nearest settled community.*

Policy E (para. 14), which states:

*Inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved, except in very special circumstances. Traveller sites (temporary or permanent) in the Green Belt are inappropriate development.*

3. To require\* Cabinet, if it wishes to continue to include the Lower Bristol Road site (which ranked 18<sup>th</sup> out of the 23 sites assessed) as a possible or Preferred site, to consult formally on removing this site from Greenbelt.
4. To require\* Cabinet to re-assess the various sites currently identified as Preferred Sites having regard to the concerns being expressed by Council.
5. To require\* Cabinet to halt its current consultation pending Council's further consideration of matters set out in these resolutions.

\* Require shall mean 'require to the extent permissible by law' and shall otherwise mean 'Strongly request'