

My name is Clarke Osborne; I am a resident of Stanton Wick and represent the Stanton Wick Action Group

I would like to bring the Cabinets attention to the report commissioned by the Council to update the needs assessment for the provision of pitches for Gypsy and Travellers and yards for Travelling Showpeople.

The report was produced by Opinion Research Services and was published on the Council web site on 2nd March despite being dated December 2012. I have provided copies for the Cabinet together with a printed copy of this presentation.

Our attention was drawn to this report as contrary to reporting on the assessment of need, it has gone further to report on opinions of apparently selected individuals from the Gypsy community as to their preference to specific sites. It is unlikely to be coincidental that the expression of site preference is almost exclusively focused on Stanton Wick, a site personally promoted by Maggie Smith-Bendell, the Council's Gypsy consultant and now promoter of a planning application for the same site.

The report raised suspicion of both the process of procurement and the brief to the consultants.

We have yesterday received response to our questions of the Council (issued under FOI Act) together with a copy of the brief. These documents are also copied for you.

The answers have confirmed our concerns in that both the commissioning of the report and the report itself require thorough investigation.

Specifically in respect of the commissioning of the report I draw your attention to the period between the advertisement for tender first advertised on Saturday 10th August and awarded on 21st August, only 7 working days later. We are advised that ORS were the only organisation to respond – quite understandable given the time allowed. We believe you should question the undue haste and the reason an appointment was made without an alternative quotation. The report cost over £13,000

In respect of the brief we consider you should question who specifically drafted the brief and in particular the justification for adding the requirement as noted in brief paragraph 3.7 which seeks report on the preferences of the travelling community as to where in the district they would want to live and their preferred ownership and management arrangements. Such request is outside of the brief of a Needs Assessment which focuses on the number of units of accommodation that are needed within the district and in some aspect those requirements which cross over district boundaries. The brief has been interpreted by ORS an experienced organisation as asking and noting responses from targeted individuals as to their specific site preference, and guess who is quoted, yes, Maggie Smith Bendell and guess where she quotes, yes, Stanton Wick.

The Council has good experience in the commissioning of reports and of the requirements of a needs assessment and we question, as before, if undue and conflicted influence has

been provided by the Gypsy and Travelling community, which of course would be reprehensible and very damaging to community relations.

We find the resulting report to be confused and weak and ask you the Cabinet to question how this report was accepted by the Council and the consultants paid their fee. You will note that the report is not evidenced based and reports third party conversations, telephone interviews without proper identification of those interviewed and on some occasions supposition of what someone would have said if they were at home.

We therefore ask the Cabinet to investigate the commissioning and acceptance of this report by their officers and to report their findings in due course. We think the Cabinet have been badly served in this instance. We feel that the evidence base is not robust or accurate to satisfy the inspector who will review the DPD as part of the Core Strategy.

We ask that the Council reassure us that no weight can or will be placed in respect of the reported preferences for the Stanton Wick site and to confirm that the Council has firmly rejected the Stanton Wick site as a possible site within the DPD and will not under any circumstances review that decision.