

COUNCIL MEETING – 18 APRIL 2013

Recommendation to Council from the Executive meeting held on 18 March 2013

E/12/143 Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan

Prior to consideration of the report, and in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Public Participation, the Chairman invited 16 speakers to address the Executive. Members of the public raised comments and concerns, which in summary included the following:-

- concerns about aspects of the process by which the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee had come to conclude that seven sites should be put forward for final consideration;
- the interpretation of the Government's Planning Policy for Traveller Sites and in particular Policy E: Traveller Sites in Green Belt;
- site 76 – concerns about the health risks this site would have for both children and adults. Concerns about the risk of flooding, exposure to farm machinery, air and noise pollution. There was also concern that local infrastructure including access to the site was not adequate and that Fairfield Park Lower School would not be able to accommodate additional children;
- site 78 - concern that the community had not been formally advised of the intention to select this site which was in area of great landscape value, about access to it, the onsite waste or recycling facilities and the noise levels from the M1;
- site 16 – there were concerns that this site was very close to site 116 at Pulloxhill with the residents and businesses of Faldo Road situated between the two. It was suggested that both gypsy and travellers sites would dominate the area. Concerns were expressed about access to the site especially as this was used by farm machinery and lorries. The land was clay and held moisture which could lead to health issues for the gypsy and travellers. The site would not have ready access to services and facilities. The speakers also indicated that businesses in Barton felt that the site would impact adversely on the nearby Industrial Estate;
- site 55 – this area was high grade agricultural land and was near Stratton Manor Moat. There was concern that there was no public footpath along this stretch of busy and dangerous road and that there was poor access to public transport, health services, community facilities and local schools. There was also concern about the lack of utilities available at the proposed site and the impact on wildlife;
- site 82 – concern that this site was next door to a mobile home park; and
- site 58 – this site was high grade agricultural land. The farmer of this land had produced valuable vegetables, cereal and root crops for many years and losing this site would have an impact on his livelihood. Concerns were raised about the access to an A class road, public transport, health services, schools, community facilities, utilities and waste and recycling facilities.

The Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Strategic Planning and Economic Development thanked the speakers and addressed each site individually where concerns had been raised.

Whilst addressing the issues he read out paragraphs 14 and 15 from the Government's Planning Policy for Traveller Sites and explained that the Council could make an alteration to the defined Green Belt boundary to meet a specific, identified need for a traveller site, and that it should do so only through the plan-making process and not in response to a planning application. If land was removed from the Green Belt in this way, it would be specifically allocated in the development plan as a traveller site only. Alternatively land could be allocated in the Green Belt if there were very special circumstances.

The Executive received a report from the Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Strategic Planning and Economic Development that set out the findings of the Gypsy, Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2013 and introduced the draft Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan including site specific policies. Appendix D to the report containing additional key issues raised in representations submitted after 25 February, was tabled at the meeting.

In response to questions from Members, the Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Strategic Planning and Economic Development explained that:

- the Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showperson Accommodation Assessment update 2013 conducted by Opinion Research Services had found a need for 157 additional permanent pitches in Central Bedfordshire between 2013 and 2031 for Gypsy Travellers and 22 additional plots for Travelling Showpeople. The proposed sites would provide an additional 66 pitches with further sites being submitted through planning applications. These new applications would be determined by the Development Management Committee as and when received. It was anticipated that based on applications received over the last ten years, this would be adequate provision for the next ten, accepting that the decisions of the Development Management Committee could not be pre-empted;
- the Council had until March 2014 to develop its Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. If the Plan was not in place, the Council would lose control of this issue and sites could be allocated by the Planning Inspectorate;
- Members had been given the opportunity to visit the proposed sites and the Executive Member advised that he had met with Gypsy and Travellers at various sites across Central Bedfordshire;
- the recommendations from the Executive would be forwarded to Council for approval on 18 April 2013, after which the proposed Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan would be published to allow for formal consultation between May – June 2013 during which interested parties would have the opportunity to submit representations. All representations would then be considered before submitting the document, along with all representations received, to the Secretary of State in October 2013. The Secretary of State would then appoint an independent Planning Inspector who would hold an examination in public to determine whether the document was 'sound' and legally compliant;

- members of the public who had made previous representations would need to re-present their representations during the consultation period to have them included in the submission to the Secretary of State, but a summary of those comments would be supplied to the Secretary of State;
- the proposed sites were a mixture of Council and privately owned land;
- there was no definition relating to the number of families (occupants) that would be considered to “dominate” the nearest settled community; and
- the Plan would be subject to a review in five years.

Reason for decision: To enable progress on the draft Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan prior to its formal submission to the Secretary of State in October 2013.

RESOLVED

- 1. that the total number of pitches and plots required to 2031 recommended by Opinion Research Services in the Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showperson Accommodation Assessment Update 2013, attached at Appendix A to the Executive report be approved.**

RECOMMENDED to Council

- 1. that the draft Pre-Submission Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan, attached at Appendix B to the Executive report, be approved for the purposes of Publication and Submission to the Secretary of State; and***
- 2. to authorise the Director of Sustainable Communities, in consultation with the Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Strategic Planning and Economic Development, to make any minor amendments to the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan:***
 - (i) prior to Publication;***
 - (ii) after Publication but before Submission; and***
 - (iii) during the Examination process.***