

PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Written Questions

The following written questions were received and the Chairman responded to these at the meeting:

(1) **Submitted by Stephen Walls, Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire**

I understand that the County Council still wishes to use the Marlborough Road depot which is one of the sites under consideration. Also, can the actual area under consideration be clarified as it varies from map to map?

NWDC has consulted Wiltshire County Council on all potential sites and these comments will be considered as part of the consultation process.

The map provided within the consultation document clearly shows the area of the potential gypsy and traveller site.

There is no pedestrian access to the Marlborough site. There is no pavement to local services and it is along a busy road with bends.

There is no question to answer here, the comments will be recorded in the normal way and considered as part of the consultation process.

The Marlborough Road site is next to a sewage farm. How possible is it to place people next to a sewage farm?

The presence of the sewage farm is a factor that will be considered as part of assessment process.

What is the timescale for obtaining a site and arranging for it to be occupied bearing in mind the pressure to close the unauthorised site at Minety? Is there pressure resolve this before or after the unitary elections next year?

20 th June	End of public sites consultation.
3 rd July	NWDC Executive meeting. If a site is chosen and planning application could be submitted through the Summer of 2008.
Summer 2008	Assessment of other (private) sites. - Second round of consultation if required.
Winter 2008	Proposals for site allocations in a planning policy document.
April 2009	New Wiltshire Authority will takeover the decision-making.

Can the Stoneover Lane site be excluded at this early stage because of its unsuitability?

All of the sites that have been considered within the consultation process will be assessed by NWDC officers who will present their conclusions to the Executive on the 3rd July. It is at this stage that sites that are not suitable will be removed.

I understand that the siting of travellers at Thingley has ensured the neighbouring primary school remains open. This would not be the case in Wootton Bassett but could be the case in rural areas. Has this been taken into account?

No, this is not part of the assessment criteria.

(2) **Submitted by Martyn Spettigue**

Can the council confirm that a full environmental and bio-diversity study will be carried out for the Stoneover Lane site?

If it is concluded that the site is deemed suitable then NWDC will commission an appropriate bio-diversity study.

Can the council also confirm that a noise assessment will be carried out for the Stoneover Lane site as has been done for some of the other sites?

This would be considered at the later stages if the site is submitted for planning application purposes.

Why are the sites getting an "Red" against the size criteria selection when they are big enough and it would be possible to divide the site to the size required for the proposed development.

The site could be smaller to comply with the criteria.

Additionally are the council saying that using it for this purpose makes the rest of the plot unsuitable for other uses?

No.

Why when it was deemed that the Stoneover lane site was unsuitable for residential building is it now being considered for what is in effect commercial development, when previously the council did not permit householders to buy the land on the grounds that the land was going to be kept as a nature reserve?

The comments in this question have been noted and will be taken into account as part of the consultation process.

Additionally, the council should be aware that other plans for a commercial development at Woolford Grange were shelved and residential property built instead?

The comments in this question have been noted and will be taken into account as part of the consultation process.

Why has the size of the site that the council is seeking, i.e the number of pitches, been reduced when government policy is that sites should be sustainable, and therefore expandable?

This has not been done; the search for sites of 18 pitches is intended to represent the most practicable size for a site.

Additionally the council has publicised that the number of pitches that will need to be found has almost doubled, why are small sites being considered more favourable than large sites?

This is not the case.

Why is the Stoneover site rated "yellow" for access when the Humberts report states that access will not be granted from the A3102 and access through the residential area is unacceptable? There is no realistic option for access and no mitigation for either of these.

NWDC has requested a highways assessment from Wiltshire County Council – NWDC does agree that access will be difficult.

Additionally the site has immediate proximity to neighbors and is on a narrow site. Access towards the Town Centre involves a muddy path through trees and there is a pond as well.

This has been noted and will be considered as part of the consultation process.

Can the council provide a "landscape character" assessment for the Stoneover Lane Site?

There is a general Landscape Character Assessment for the District, but a more detailed assessment for this site would be required for any planning application that could be submitted.

(3) Submitted by Paul Heaphy

As this site (Marlborough Road) is outside of the building limits of Wootton Bassett, how can this development on green field sites be good for the countryside?

Sites on the outskirts of built up areas may be appropriate as sites for Gypsy and travellers should be considered on the same basis as "exception needs" housing.

For further information on this please see Policy H7 of the North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011. www.northwilts.gov.uk

Have you consulted the travellers themselves, would they like to live on this site?

NWDC district council has undertaken a comprehensive consultation exercise, this includes Gypsy and Travellers and organisations that represent them. Any comments received by the Gypsy and Traveller community will be considered as part of the normal consultation process.

Have all brown fields sites been investigated as these sites are often inside existing towns so have greater access to facilities and less impact on our environment.

NWDC is assessing the most suitable sites that are in public ownership. As part of the consultation the council is also providing opportunity for private sites to be promoted. Any site that is promoted will be assessed and consulted upon in the same way as for public sites.

Open Forum

The following questions and comments were made during the open forum session:

First session (7pm). (“LR” refers to Lachlan Roberston, Head of Policy and Performance).

<u>No.</u>	<u>Question</u>	<u>Answer</u>
1	(S. Walls) Were any MoD sites considered, and why are no sites considered in Kennet?	LR – The MoD have been contacted but experience indicates that an early response is unlikely. Initial work had indicated there was no demand for sites in the Kennet area, but the inspectors now seemed to suggest five sites would be required.
2	(WB resident). Queried a recent press article, in which WB was described as “heartless” and asking if land was to be sold in Church Street.	LR – part of the consultation will involve the consideration of any future sites if they come forward
3	(Woodshaw resident). The selection criteria made no reference to biodiversity. The Stoneover Lane site would have high levels of noise, and the previous sale of the site had been refused as “it was likely to become a nature reserve”.	LR – welcomed the suggestion of including biodiversity in the criteria. The purpose of the consultation exercise was to pick up as many views as possible.

4	(On behalf of the gypsies at Minety). The gypsies had been at Minety for 5 years, with no signs of any trouble. Since 1998, it had become more difficult to move on the road, and they therefore wished to remain where they were. Funding was questioned.	LR – 24 pitches were suggested for North Wiltshire, notwithstanding the numbers at Minety. The government had suggested publicly funding the NW sites, and LR said it was likely to be a mixture of private and public funding. As the Minety site had had some investment, it was unlikely that the gypsies at Minty would be re-locating to Wootton Bassett.
5	(WB resident) – Why don't NWDC just give planning permission to the gypsies at Minety.	LR – the Minety situation was the subject of a planning appeal due to start in early July.
6	(WB resident). Para 3.1 of para 11 of the consultation document recognised some sites already.	LR – the decision on the appeal at Minety was outside the control of NWDC.
7	(WB resident). If the government were to put forward funds, would the rest need to be raised locally? Secondly, is it possible that gypsies could avoid having to pay council tax by moving around?	LR - £150,000 had been put forward by the government, and NWDC had allocated another £100,000. Ultimately this was all taxpayers money. The District Council had a duty to collect all council tax due.
8	(WB resident). Having heard the officer's presentation, what is the view of elected members?	The Chairman explained the committee would be discussing this after the Q&A session, and their views would be evident there. (At this point the questioner asked for a show of hands on the proposal that there is no confidence in the present administration).
9	(WB resident). Was the increase from 24 pitches to 48 known by NWDC in March 2008? Secondly, Compulsory Purchase is not applicable as the majority of the access is privately owned.	The SW Regional Assembly had debated a number of matters leading to the Regional Spatial Strategy. The number of proposed pitches only became known at the end of May 2008. CPO was a long and tortuous process, and would not be completed within the lifetime of NWDC, if attempted.
10	(Marlborough Road resident) had previously sold his house, but the potential buyers had withdrawn, resulting in loss of fees of at least £2,500.	LR – the point was understood, but financial circumstances can not be taken into account in planning matters.
11	(Woodshaw resident). Was the council changing its mind – the "nature reserve" is unsuitable	LR – the council has had to start with all sites in public ownership, but all options identified could be looked at
12	(WB resident). Could the position at Marlborough Road be clarified?	There was enough land in public ownership to warrant consideration of a site at Marlborough Road. However the County Council had written to say they no longer wanted their part of the site to go forward.

13	(WB resident). The selection criteria seem to favour the smaller sites.	LR said he would be happy to revisit the criteria, however site catering for in excess of 18 pitches tended to be too large, so the council was not looking for just one large site. The Humberts report was just one of many sources of information to be taken into account.
14	(Woodshaw resident). If an entrepreneur came forward to buy the site for dwellings for young people, would this be permitted?	The NW Local Plan allowed for "exception" sites, i.e. sites outside the framework, where there was a clear demand for affordable housing.
15	(WB resident). Could the Council consider the use of a CPO? How is council tax assessed on caravans?	LR – transactions tend to be more effective when both sides negotiate rather than have a solution imposed I do not have knowledge of how council tax is assessed on caravans.
16	(WB resident). Comments regarding the distance travelled to local facilities, and there was a balance between access to facilities within a reasonable distance, and needing to be on the verge of urban areas. A number of alternative sites were suggested (Hay Lane, Hullavington, Chiseldon, Blakehill, Wroughton).	LR – any new sites would require further consultation before being put forward, but as part of the "call for sites" initiative, these suggestions would be noted.
17	(WB resident). Requested clarification of "constraints" applying to the Stoneover Lane site.	LR – there are a number of constraints, e.g. size of site and highway matters.

Second session (8.20pm). (“LR” refers to Lachlan Roberston, Head of Policy and Performance).

No.	Question	Answer
18	(WB resident). Requests clarification of the land in the report of 24/4.	LR confirmed that although there had been a reprographics error, the land in question was still the same land as at 24/4.
19	(WB resident). The land in Kennet seems larger, but there are fewer sites	There are very few sites in Kennet, which is perhaps understandable as they tend to be found on the edges of larger urban areas. Kennet do receive a larger share of seasonal/transient travellers.
20	(WB resident). A higher than average proportion of the extra need has been passed to Wiltshire to resolve.	LR agreed, and explained he did have concerns about the manner of the increase.
21	(WB resident). Asking for comments on closing the Minety site and relocating the gypsies.	LR explained the planning enquiry would start shortly, and the Executive would be discussing the provision of gypsy sites on 3 July.
22	(WB resident). If the developer does not buy the rugby and football ground sites, then the community would miss out on community facilities. Had MoD sites been considered?	LR said the council was constantly looking for sites, and the MoD had been contacted.
23	(WB resident). Referred to the rubbish and mess near the canal as the result of being inhabited for just a few weeks.	Cllr Bucknell added that the permanent gypsy sites tended to be a lot better maintained than those used by itinerant travellers. The reason the council was in a weak position with regard to evicting gypsies from unauthorised camps was that there was currently no designated alternative site.
24	(WB resident). “Permanent” and “travellers site” seem to be a contradiction in terms.	LR reminded the meeting of the definition contained in the legislation, to the effect that it is “a person of nomadic habit who has ceased to travel”
25	(WB resident). What local taxes do gypsies have to pay, bearing in mind a possible increase in numbers as migration from East European states continues.	LR confirmed that travellers were subject to the normal rules for NH, council tax etc. Nationality issues were not relevant to the process.
26	(WB resident). Would planning consent be granted for any ancillary activities.	LR explained this would be handled in the usual way. It was not uncommon for commercial use of dwelling type activities to develop to the point where consent for change of use might be required, and the same would apply if this happened on gypsy sites.

27	(WB resident). If the Stoneover Lane site were to be selected, what controls could be applied, e.g. no access from the A3102, and how could the use be restricted to just the site.	LR – if NWDC do permit the use of the site, then a normal planning application and full technical assessment would be needed. The permission would be specific to the land in the application and overspill on to adjoining land would therefore be contrary to any permission.
28	(WB resident). Are gypsies able to choose which site they wish to go to. How can you differentiate between itinerant and permanent travellers?	LR – it is always better if both sides can agree, rather than one side be forced into action. However, there is little point in prioritising unreasonable sites, so an element of compromise is usually necessary. The definition of travellers is given above.
29	(WB resident). Do travellers pay Business rates? Why not consider sites on groundfill land?	LR – As mentioned above, gypsies are liable to the normal taxation rules. The idea of landfill sites had not been ruled out, and under the “call for sites” request, all such suggestions would be considered.
30	(WB resident). If the sites are to be funded by the travellers, how likely is it that they could be funded, at a time when young people are finding it increasingly hard to get a foot on the property ladder?	LR appreciated the social housing issues, but pointed out that the financial means available to travellers probably varied considerably.
31	(WB resident). The Minety settlement is about 3 miles outside the village, and planning was partly refused on footpath grounds (the A3102 is considerably more significant). What does “close to amenities” mean?	This is a “knotty” problem. On the one hand the council would wish to encourage sustainability, reduce transport etc, but on the other hand some sites are best sited away from the immediate built up area.
32	(WB resident). The location of sites could have an effect on the local economy.	LR – no specific assessment of this is made.
33	(WB resident). As a resident of the area for 30 years, the resident expressed concern at racist / discriminatory comments being made when discussing travellers.	The comments did not require a response
34	(WB resident). Had any contaminated land / landscape character assessments been undertaken?	LR – if and when any site is proposed, then further work will be undertaken on a full technical assessment. Initial inspection of records had been undertaken.
35	(WB resident). It seems odd that one of the overriding criteria is to avoid car journeys.	LR – the selection of sites was a matter of balance. It was most unlikely that a single site would be found which fully met all criteria, but equally it would be irresponsible

	Would a reasonable distance from existing settlements be better?	to simply find any site just anywhere. A balance of all the material factors would hopefully identify the best site meeting most of the most relevant criteria.
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