

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 Anne Satchell of Chippenham, Wiltshire

Is there a possibility that both sites A and B in Stanley Lane are likely to be used together for the provision of sites needed, i.e. there could be two separate sites in Stanley Lane?

Yes. But the site assessment contained within the consultation document assesses all potential sites based on set criteria. This will form the basis for the most suitable site(s) as well as highlighting areas where more information is required. The site assessment also enables the council to undertake a comparative assessment of possible suitable sites.

If a suitable site is identified, further survey work will be undertaken and this will include:

- An assessment of ground conditions, water supply, gas supply, waste disposal and drainage.
- Suitability of providing a utility block.
- Land Registry search including legal covenant.
- Assessment of site size, density and capacity.
- Consideration of management issues.

This work will form part of the preparation of future planning policy which will be subject to further consultation at an appropriate time.

What are the local residents to think of the need for 24 hour security at Stanley Park when travellers sited themselves there temporarily on the weekend of 9 May 2008? Will this be an ongoing need if the sites in Stanley Lane go ahead and will the local council taxpayers be footing the bill for this?

The consideration of management issues will be examined at a later stage if a site is deemed to be suitable. (See response to Question 1). All Gypsy and travellers who reside on a public or privately owned site are subject to Council tax, rent, utilities etc, which are measured in the same way as other houses.

(2) Submitted by Mr D A & Mrs J M Blackledge of Chippenham, Wiltshire

From information publicly available it is notable that the density of traveller sites within the county as a whole appears to be disproportionately focused in the county of Wiltshire. Please can the councillors advise what specific action they have taken, in conjunction as necessary with the County Council, to act on behalf of residents of the county of Wiltshire in arguing that we already provide a disproportionate level of sites and that the request for further sites is unsustainable

This is not a position that NWDC Members have taken. However, NWDC has supported the County Council in its representations to the Panel at the recent Examination in Public into the South West Regional Spatial Strategy, published on 10 January 2008. This Report and supporting documents can be located at www.southwest-ra.gov.uk

NWDC welcomes the views of local residents and has an adopted Statement of Community Involvement which outlines how the District Council will consult on such matters. NWDC has undertaken a comprehensive consultation and will consider all the representations received to ensure that the most suitable site(s) are found.

From the information publicly available it is notable that the density of traveller sites within the county of Wiltshire is very heavily weighted in the districts of NWDC and Salisbury, but that other districts have a significantly lower number of sites, and in the case of Kennett none. Please can the NWDC advise what specific action they have taken to act on behalf of the residents of NWDC in arguing with Central government, or other appropriate bodies, that the current density of traveller sites within NWDC is already disproportionate to the size of the district and suggest that they seek, should it be necessary for further sites, to promote sites in those part of the country or county where there is an apparent under representation.

This is not a position that NWDC Members have taken. However, NWDC has supported the County Council in its representations to the Panel at the recent Examination in Public into the South West Regional Spatial Strategy, published on 10 January 2008. This Report and supporting documents can be located at www.southwest-ra.gov.uk

The formal consultation process provides the opportunity to allow local residents to share their views and concerns. These representations are then considered as part of the formal consultation and planning process.

Whilst not accepting the principle of further sites in the NWDC area, and specifically not in the potential sites indicated at Stanley Lane, please can NWDC state what specific consideration has been given to the impact of traffic on what is a narrow minor country lane, including what was the nature, extent and frequency of the physical inspection/s of the road and traffic usage by Humberts or officers of NWDC prior to the sites being placed on the proposed site list.

The Humberts Report was a desk based study; the analysis contained in the Consultation Document included subsequent visits by officers from NWDC Planning Department.

The site assessment details contained within the consultation paper assess the road infrastructure in terms of road classification, and access, specifically in terms of safety of cars and pedestrians, on top of this NWDC has consulted with the transport department of Wiltshire County Council, whose comments will be fed in to the consultation process.

Was the council aware of previous planning applications for use of sites adjoining one of the Stanley Lane sites, being rejected on the basis that the increase in traffic (from a business site) would be inappropriate following an official review of the highway conditions etc. If so why are they now considering sites, albeit a mix residential / business site, which would attract a significant increase in the volume of vehicles, both private and commercial?

This is the initial consultation stage of the planning process. As part of that process the County Council has been asked for a full Highways assessment of the sites.

At a meeting held by those potentially affected by the proposed sites, senior NWDC councillors made a specific commitment that they would seek to find alternative sites. Please can NWDC advise what specific action they have taken to find such sites, and what additional sites may have now been included

The six week consultation process provides the opportunity for residents to submit details of suitable alternative sites through a "call for sites" response form. Such sites will be examined once the consultation process concludes on Friday 20th June 2008. The Humberts Report referred to a number of possible private sites; such sites are being examined by officers of the Councils to ascertain their suitability. It would not be appropriate to disclose these sites until all the landowners have been contacted. Any other suitable "other sites" will be assessed, and landowners, where relevant and appropriate, contacted for their agreement to a second round of consultations which will be held later.

Assuming that NWDC have identified further sites, currently in private ownership, please can they confirm when these sites were added to the list, as at a meeting of those potentially affected by the proposed sites on Stanley Lane, a commitment was given by senior NWDC councillors that there would be a minimum period of six weeks consultation for each site, prior to any decision being made.

Additional sites will be examined and assessed in the same way as publicly owned sites have been during this consultation. All private sites that landowners wish to be included in the planning process will be the subject of further consultation as undertaken for the public sites.

Notwithstanding the non acceptance of the appropriateness of an additional traveller site in NWDC, it is understood that in addition to the “criteria” there is an obligation for consideration to be given to “other factors”. Please can NWDC set out the specific other factors that it will consider and the weighting that will be given to each factor and the relationship of such weighting with the “criteria”

The meaning of the question is unclear. Should a site be promoted for the use, it will be subject to the normal considerations that apply to any planning application.

(Note: It was agreed that a further written response would be given to this question)

Is NWDC aware of the use made of Stanley Lane, outside normal working hours, by local community groups, including local cycling clubs, local running clubs, horse riders etc? If so why given that this is a minor, and narrow country road are they prepared to see a significant increase in traffic from the potential traveller site, which would affect the whole of, not only Stanley lane, but also roads to Studley?

It is not possible at this early stage, to rule on whether or not the development of any one site will result in a significant increase in traffic. Part of the evidence that is gathered during the present consultation on this point will be considered carefully. This is what the consultation process is for.

(3) Submitted by Mr Steve Cripps of Chippenham, Wiltshire

Can the Council please tell me how much it will cost to run each site per annum, i.e. cleanup, refurbishment and replacement of utilities? As we know these jobs regularly need doing on traveller sites.

All Gypsy and Travellers living on local authority or privately owned sites are liable for council tax, rent, and utilities which are measured in the same way as other houses. There are no specific figures for the running costs of a Gypsy and Traveller site.

Maintenance of services and facilities on any permanent publicly owned site will be undertaken by the District Council just as the Council would do so on any other service for facility.

If it has been ordered by Central Government to provide traveller sites are they going to foot the bill for the upkeep? If not, can they tell the Government that we cannot or rather won't pay for it?

NWDC is committed to ensuring that members of the Gypsy and Traveller community have the same access to decent and appropriate accommodation as every other citizen. In order to meet this need NWDC has been awarded a Government grant of

£150,000 and committed a further £100,000 towards the provision of permanent Gypsy and Traveller sites.

(4) **Submitted by Mr George Powell, Chippenham**

Can the police say that they support the use of Stanley Lane site for gypsies and travellers some of whom will only stay a few weeks before moving on?

The Wiltshire Policy Authority has been consulted and any representations made will be considered as part of the formal consultation process.

(5) **Submitted by Mrs D Edwards, Chippenham**

The proposed travellers (gypsy) sites in Chippenham – Some of the reasons I have for the sites: - Why do they always leave such a mess? I pay over £100 a month (I am a widowed senior) Council Tax. Would tax go up if travellers' facilities and mess fail to be provided and sorted? The closeness of Abbeyfields School, the housing estates, the sports field and the cemetery are some of my concerns.

All Gypsy and Travellers living on local authority or privately owned sites are liable for council tax, rent, and utilities which are measured in the same way as other houses. Having permanent authorised sites for the gypsy and traveller community will help reduce the number of unauthorised sites, which in turn can reduce the costs in terms of time and resources used to deal with such unauthorised encampments.

In respect of the proximity to Abbeyfield's School, the housing estate, sports field and cemetery, these concerns have been noted and will be considered as part of the formal consultation process which runs until Friday 20th June 2008.

Open Forum

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

(1) ***The whole consultation process was originally looking to find 18 pitches and it now transpires that 48 pitches are required. Will more sites now be required?***

It is possible that more than one site may be required but further assessment will need to take place.

(2) ***The Council is requested to reconsider its position regarding gypsy sites. The Long Close site is unsuitable because it is in a flood plain.***

The Council will listen to all responses to the consultation.

- (3) ***If open space is to be used to provide gypsy sites why not consider Monkton Park or John Coles Park which are Council owned? The Hardens Mead area is used as a children's play area.***

The above mentioned parks are designated for open space use.

- (4) ***The Hardens Mead site is used as open space and is very close to a residential housing estate. It is not suitable due to lack of access and potential to flood.***
- (5) ***The Long Close land is used as a park/play area. The Council's Local Plan states that it should protect existing amenities and enhance the quality of life for its residents. This proposal is going against Council policies.***
- (6) ***The Stanley Lane site is used at weekends for all types of recreational activities including cyclists, runners and walkers. It is not at all suitable for this type of use.***
- (7) ***None of the sites in Chippenham appear to be ideal. The public should be able to see details of the private sites that have been proposed.***

The private sites are not yet available to the public because the landowners have not yet been approached. If any of these sites are considered to be suitable for a site then a separate consultation process will take place towards the end of the summer.

- (8) ***Are different criteria being used for the public sites and the private sites? The Humberts report should be ignored and the exercise should start again with new criteria.***

The Planning Department had to undertake a formal consultation. It was important to apply certain criteria to avoid totally unsuitable sites being put forward. If it is found, following the consultation process, that no sites are suitable then the Council will say this. Once the consultation period has finished a report will be submitted to the Executive meeting on 3 July 2008 when a decision can be made.

- (9) ***The proposals have brought the whole area into confusion and affected young people greatly as they are the ones who currently use these sites.***
- (10) ***Why have certain sites been proposed? Why are there no gypsy and traveller sites in the Kennet District?***

The GTAA work has been undertaken to find suitable sites. A recent Report for the South West Regional Spatial Strategy suggests that five pitches were required in the Kennet District.

- (11) ***How can the consultation document be of value if the number of sites is not correct?***

North Wiltshire District Council defends its original finding that only 24 pitches are required. However, the Report considers that this is flawed.

- (12) ***Who made the original decision on the proposed sites?***

North Wiltshire District Council instructed Humberts to look at these sites.

- (13) *It has been reported that nine private sites should be considered. What has the Council done regarding these nine sites and any other private sites that have been identified?***

These private sites will be looked at over the summer. If any of the additional sites offered are considered to be suitable then there would be a consultation process over the summer with the agreement of the landowners concerned.

- (14) *Has a decision been made on the Minety gypsy and travellers' site? They are happy to stay on the site why can't they stay there? Local residents understand the need for these sites but do not want them in close proximity to their homes.***

The appeal regarding the Minety site will be heard in July.

- (15) *Why have there already been two meetings with the gypsy and traveller community and yet this is the first meeting with members of the public?***

These were two different types of consultation.

- (16) *How was the £250,000 towards this project made up? Some of the information has been misleading.***

£150,000 is from central government and £100,000 from North Wiltshire District Council.

- (17) *If 48 sites are now required where will the shortfall come from?***

This is unclear at the moment.

- (18) *Why is there a law to protect landowners but not those in residential properties who will be greatly affected by this decision?***

The Council is unable to predict Government legislation.

- (19) *Can the Council assure the public that the money paid to the open spaces fund by developers will not be spent on a gypsy and traveller site?***

The money for open spaces is allocated for a specific purpose. It will not be used for gypsy and traveller site provision.

(Note: Three members of the public stated that they had submitted written questions which had not been received by the officers. The Chairman assured them that they would receive written responses to their questions).