

Gypsy and Traveller Presentation by Mr Keith Jones

(April 2014)

THANK YOU MR CHAIRMAN COMMITTEE MEMBERS

I did send to you a presentation that I was proposing to use when speaking to you, however events changed and this presentation is an updated version of my views; I do however stand by the conclusions and recommendations that I put in my previous circular to you.

I would like to let you have copies of this presentation because I have used a number of references to reports and their appendices as well as those of other documentations and you may find it helpful in using these references when you draw your conclusions at the end of this particular part of the process.

FIRSTLY

Gypsy's and travellers are classified in the same grouping for purposes of their ethnicity, by both the WAG and local authorities.

However, due to their differing lifestyles as well as their accommodation needs, including facilities, most gypsy families would prefer to be located at separate sites to the travellers. Discussions I have had with members of two families confirm this view.

I feel that, in a future search, officers should state whether sites are to be used by a particular category rather than as a **gypsy and traveller** site. This would benefit public discussions on the matter.

NOW TO DETAIL

In the report by the Head of Housing at this authority dated 25th October 2012; in **Section 6 Key Findings**, he states in paragraph 3:

“The independent reviewing officer agreed with the recommendation made for all 19 of the shortlisted sites which included the 5 sites on the final shortlist. This was following clarification of a number of issues by the planning officer and a further check undertaken with the head of planning for Neath/Port Talbot Council”

However Mr. Geoff White, who is head of planning at Neath/Port Talbot Council with over 30 years of experience, states in his report (undated):

“The detailed sieve of the 19 eliminates some sites because they **fail** on certain criteria such as **access** or **UDP designation.**”

Whose version is the correct one and if Mr. Whites is then why were some sites put in the final 19 if they failed criteria. These authorities' officers set themselves as listed in **Appendix A** of the report to the **EGM** on **25th October 2013.**

I quote these:

Item 4; headed site constraints – UDP designation.

Item 14; headed highway issues – Access

Mr. White in his report states that “I am familiar with this type of selection process having been involved in such a selection process in Neath/Port Talbot.”

This demonstrates that the selection process for the last 19 was not done thoroughly.

“The Head of Housing states that their review of 2 years’ work was carried out in just 3 days with an admittance that they had to rely on planning advice and other assurances from officers.” (Ref Head of Housing Report 29/10/12 Sections 1.2/1.3).

They did not have time to visit any of the sites which, I would have thought, was essential in order to put the report in context with practical applications on the ground.

MY RECOMMODATION

That any future reviews should be carried out by an outside company of **planning and development consultants** who are familiar with this type of process and that they are given the time and resources they need with access to all documentation as well as interview facilities with this involved in the process.

I do not believe that independent reviewers should be; quote “**relying on planning advice and other assurances from officers**”, whose decision making they are reviewing.

The Next Issue

In September 2012 the three main gypsy families were consulted about their preferences for site location and a chart was issued showing their preferences. All three were adamant that they would not even consider sites Gorseinon Cemetery or site 15 Penderry. When questioned by this committee, Mrs. Owen stated that despite this, these 2 sites were left in because the views of the families were only part of the process.

Had I been allowed to ask questions at the time; besides one asked by the committee which was:

“If gypsy’s won’t go to a selected site, how do you make them?”

I would like to have asked:

If 2 sites had been eliminated by March 2012, and I refer to a meeting of the Task and Finish Group on 8th of that month – agenda item 5A of which the minutes of the meeting include the following; state –

“It was emphasized that if members disagreed with the suitability of the remaining sites (the final 5) than any of the others discounted earlier could be reconsidered.

The pros and cons of the 5 sites were discussed and their suitability’s assessed. It was considered appropriate by members that 3 sites go forward as being considered suitable.

The Head of Services recommended that members visit all 5 sites for completeness before finalizing their thoughts.”

My questions would have been:

1. Why were these 2 sites not replaced by others from the list of 19 which were claimed to be potentially suitable?
2. What is the logic in pursuing a consultation process which includes 2 sites which have affectively been eliminated?

3. Why were the third gypsy families preferences not included in the 2012 Survey? Although they stated that they would not require accommodation for at least 5 years, by the time this process is over 5 years will have elapsed.

I would urge against any more gypsy family surveys, because if they keep changing their minds then the information that they give would have to be considered as unreliable.

Consultation – yes

Surveys – no

Next I feel that the process should now change to being linked to the LDP rather than the UDP as it is the LDP which will have to include provision for the gypsy and traveler sites.

The LDP update 2014 – online 6th March – notes that the Planning Policy Team has been finalizing the preferred strategy document, which will be presented to council members this spring/early summer. The final version of the preferred strategy will underpin the draft LDP which should be published in 2015.

In the report for the EGM, 21st October 2013, section 7.2 responds to the comment that (relating to site 2) **“There are future long term aspirations for the development of the area which is currently being considered as part of the LDP preparation.”**

By saying

“Until the plan is adapted in 2016, these potential proposals have no official status. Nevertheless, it does highlight the requirement to balance future aspirations against current designations/demand prior to the identification of site(s) for the planning application stage.”

The gypsy site issue needs to be considered in relation to the LDP and potential sites need to avoid being considered in strategic areas of this plan because doing so would cause severe disruption in such sensitive areas.

In the Q&A session on April 30th, Mrs. Owen stated in reply to a question from a committee member about the effect that a gypsy site might have on business in an area;

“Information from other authorities shows that things tend to settle down once a site becomes established.” Standard quote in consultation replies.

I would like to have asked the following:

1. Which authorities said this?
2. When and how was it communicated to you?
3. What were the distances between any such sites and businesses?
4. Was this confirmed by the businesses concerned?

In Swansea, some businesses are already holding back on development plans until the outcome is decided.

FOR EXAMPLE

REFERENCE CONSULTATION SUBMISSIONS APPENDX B1 – PAGE 393 ONLINE

Harris Brothers – who are owned by the Micheldever Tyre Group who are the UK’s largest independent tyre dealer with 1/6 of the total market – have had a £300,000 development put on hold – planning permission having been granted previously.

APPENDIX B1 – ONLINE PAGES 1140 – 1144

Bakeart, a leader in cake decoration manufacture who supply major supermarkets as well as small outlets, who were intending to relocate their factory from North East England to Fforestfach to be near to their Swansea HQ in the Kingsway Fforestfach; have delayed the move and have said it will not go ahead if a site is located nearby.

Appendix G gives many businesses views on their attitude to the location of a site near to them and their thoughts on the effect it would have on their business and their staff numbers.

My question would be:

“Are the council prepared to risk losing businesses and jobs in Swansea? There are plenty of towns who would welcome them if they decided to relocate.”

I now refer to the number of pitches proposed and the associated traffic movement.

In its replies to consultation comments, officers talk about the relatively small of the site. The **WAG** and **gypsy forums** recommend 10 as the optimum number.

However in her comments to the committee, Mrs. Owen recognized a number of 20 in due course.

This would equate to a approximately 200 extra traffic movements per day. This would severely impact on highway issues, especially in an area such as Fforestfach which already has severe traffic limitations.

The estimated traffic movement is taken from figures given by S. Gloucestershire Council in the case of an application for a site at Hall end, north of Bristol near Wickwar.

Such a site would dominate the nearest settled community which is against WAG and HC9 Policy.

Finally, an item which gives me great concern.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Consultation – act or process of consulting

Consult – seek information or advice – take into account

Responders – over 3200

No. of website pages - 3808

Fictional Person – John Smith

You want to see the response to your concern. First go to Appendix B1-B6 – whichever appropriate – then trawl through up to 1679 pages to locate a submission with your initials.

Initials not in any obvious sequence, e.g. SL – CW.

If you find them – B16 IF – are they relating to you? Why couldn't a computer put them in alphabetical sequence?

If you have not given up and you find your comments, you will almost certainly find that you have been wasting your time because the chances are that it will have one of a number of standard responses given to it which have been used to cover a variety of comments on any given subject, e.g. Highways, security etc.

If the officers could not disagree with your comments the following would usually be a standard answer:
“Comment Noted” or “This is unlikely to succeed as a planning objection”

Not a single agreement with a comment.

e.g. “This seems a sensible point, we will consider further”

All of the references made in order to support officers replies are vague and cannot be confirmed

ODPM 2006 – Office of Deputy Prime Minister

Nner Et Al 2005 – Pat Niner

Joseph Rowntree Foundation in Scotland

The Planning Exchange – Charity in Scotland – 5 Trustees / 1 Secretary

The release of the consultation results should have taken 3 months but eventually took over 6 due to the tremendous response from both the public and businesses. This obviously upset the planned timetable which was to get the matter out of the way before the end of the year and possibly the imminent retirement of two senior officers with involvement in it.

It s worth noting that the responses to comments sometimes contradict established facts, for example:
Site 2 Site Plan Public Transport 823 meters away (just over ½ mile which exceeds WAG guidelines)

Answer to comment:

“It is considered there is reasonable transport provision within the vicinity of the site, Gypsy and Traveller families more often than not have private means of transport”.

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that the council have failed to find a suitable location for a gypsy or traveller site which could be considered suitable for the families or acceptable to residents or businesses.

The comments in my written report stand that consultation responses should be dealt with by outside experts rather than by officers, who are defending their own work and who so not have open mind on the subject, still stands.