

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you. I'd like to give you a bit of my background and then follow on with my observations and the questions I would like answered about the process.

I have grown up and lived in the Llansamlet area for most of my life and know the area very well. I have lived in Peniel Green for the past twenty four years. I wish to emphasise that Peniel Green is a distinct area and it is not in Swansea Vale. Swansea Vale, used as the location name for the Peniel Green Road site, is a more recent term used to describe the area of the Lower Swansea Valley encompassing the Enterprise Zone, Tregof Village and the area of land on the eastern bank of the River Tawe. The current permanent Gypsy/Traveller site is on Pantyblawd Road, behind the Asda store by the River Tawe and near to the Morganite plant. In fact the site has always been known locally as the Morganite Caravan Site. Pantyblawd Road used to be a through road running from behind the church in Llansamlet around to the river. It split after about half a mile so you could either go towards Morriston, or towards Ynystawe by the side of the River Tawe. When I lived in Church Road Llansamlet with my parents I used to walk down Pantyblawd Road to go down to the River Tawe. My friends and I used to sunbathe and swim in the river by the weir. I do not remember any Gypsy/travellers in the area in the Sixties.

In the Seventies (1976) Morganite relocated from London and the first Enterprise Zone in the UK was set up in 1981 to regenerate the industrial wasteland that was the Lower Swansea Valley. With the regeneration of this former industrial area came the infrastructure for the retail and industrial businesses located there today. Although originally meant to be an Enterprise Zone for industry and small businesses, it was later allowed to have retail units. There were many areas of waste land but with redevelopment came roads and water and, more importantly, access to areas of waste and derelict land. You may well say who would blame the Gypsy/Traveller families for seeking an isolated spot to set up home. Also they didn't have much bother from officialdom. I am not sure of the protocol of mentioning Gypsy/Traveller family names, perhaps Mr Chairman could guide me? I certainly remember families in the Eighties; [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and other names come to mind. In the late Seventies/early Eighties illegal camping by Gypsy/Travellers became more of a problem and local residents were getting irate about the Councils', both Swansea City and West Glam, failure to deal with the problem.

West Glamorgan Council and Swansea Council did try to find a solution by drawing up the West Glam Agreement(WGA). Whether you believe there is any validity to it or not the result was the only official site in the Swansea/Gower area. There would have been no official site without the WGA. Unfortunately, the compromise of that piece of political acumen was not built on by succeeding Councils. The preferred option at that time was for there to be small sites in different areas of the city. It would have allowed the Gypsy/Traveller families to integrate into many communities and they would have been more readily accepted. Indeed in the **Neath Port Talbot Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment of December 2012** they state, "Thinking about future site provisions smaller sites are preferred over the creation of large sites. Smaller sites tend to be easier to manage and also more likely to be able to integrate with the settled community". The Council have allowed the Gypsy/Travellers to congregate mainly in one area of Swansea, namely, Llansamlet. Swansea Council seems to have underestimated the number of pitches needed for Gypsy/Travellers and I am interested if there has been consideration given for permission for private sites as the Welsh Government allows private sites under a "Rural Exception Site Policy". Indeed the Council lost an appeal last year against a private site being set up in Birchgrove. According to the **NPT Needs Assessment Dec 2012**"Local need does not have to be proven for private sites". **Has there been any discussion with Gypsy/Travellers about establishing a private site?**

The beginning of this drama for me and my family, was just over two years ago when my husband and I were on holiday in France. We received a phone call from our son, to say that the Evening Post had published an article, about a shortlist of five possible sites for an additional Gypsy traveller site. He explained that the field behind our house was on the shortlist. We frankly didn't really believe him. There is no getting away from the fact that there is a need for additional places for Gypsy/Travellers in Swansea. There has been an ongoing problem in the Enterprise Zone/Swansea Vale for years and it appears that the Council has been reluctant to move Travellers parked illegally

there. There seems to have been a *laissez-faire* (literally meaning-let it be, let them do as they will), or leave it alone) attitude of leaving the travellers in one place and that appears to be the policy whilst the search for another site continues. People in Llansamlet believe there has been a determination by officers to put an additional site(s) in the Llansamlet area. They believe that promises have been made to the Gypsy/Travelier families.

The two main areas I now wish to concentrate on are:

Firstly; the process started under the previous administration and how it came to a shortlist of five/two sites.

Secondly; how the Gypsy/Travellers have been dealt with in this process.

1006 to 2

Under the previous administration a Task and Finish Group was set up to evaluate suitable sites and make recommendations to officers. It has been stated that 1006 sites covering all 36 wards of the Council would be looked at. A decision was made to only look at Council owned sites which all sounds very wide ranging and fair. Every ward has Council owned property and the criteria would be applied to each site.

Firstly let's look at the myth of 1006 possible sites. When you look at the detail of the 1006 sites you can see straightaway that the majority of sites are unfeasible. Out of 36 ward areas 29 have no suitable land leaving only 7 wards in Swansea with the possibility of a new site. That means that there would be 29 wards whose Councillors could be certain that they would not have to justify a Gypsy/Traveller site being set up in their area. It does make you wonder if someone was trying to find the most acceptable decision for the most number of Councillors. On the one hand, it is obvious that there is still a lot of unused land in Swansea Vale/Enterprise Park, Felindre and some of the other areas. That is partly why there were 7 sites in Llansamlet out of the 19 sites shortlisted in the first sieve of sites. On the other hand, you could say that ONLY taking Council land into consideration would always give a lot of sites in Llansamlet. Some people have said that is the result that was wanted. There is a theory that a site was chosen and then the process was made to fit. Some of the criteria used to reject some sites applies equally to the Peniel Green Road site, but are not then used to reject the Peniel Green Road site !

The 7 areas with 19 possible sites are: Bonynmaen, Cockett, Cwmbwria, Gorseinon, Llangyfelach, Llansamlet and Penderry.

When you look at examples of the Council owned land listed you can see that most of them are completely unsuitable as schools, parks, libraries, community centres and Council housing are included in the list.

Examples from the 1006 sites:

Penlfergaer-Penlfergaer Primary School unable to be included because of buildings and playing fields !!; Council Housing Estates off Llewellyn Road, Heol Y Gelli and Heol Dewi Sant-unable to build because of buildings i.e. peoples' homes !!!

Pontardulais-Coedbach Park unable to be included because of Highways issues and it's a park; Council Housing off Pantiego Road unable to be considered because there are buildings i.e. peoples' homes!!

St Thomas- Danygraig Cemetery unable to be included because of Highways issues and it's a cemetery; Council Housing off David Williams Terrace unable to be used because of buildings peoples' homes !!!

Sketty-Council estates at Aneurin Close, Briar Dene, Laurel Place etc-unable to site because of buildings i.e. peoples' homes !!

Llansamlet- Heol Las Park; Primrose Park; Llansamlet Library, Talycopa Primary School;

I notice that some of the land in the list of 1006 sites is unsuitable because it has been leased out.

The shortlisted site at Peniel Green Road has been leased out for years and has always been used for agricultural purposes. In the last 23 years it has been used for growing silage and for grazing for cows and horses. I do not know the state of the current leasing arrangement but I understand the previous lease ended rather conveniently last year, towards the end of March. There has been no break in the field being used and there are still horses in the field.

Who was involved in the decision to only look at Council owned land?

Who made that decision?

Why was the Felindre site not seriously considered?

Has there been any discussion with Gypsy/Travellers about the possibility of a privately owned site?

WHAT WAS SAID?

My second point is to ask you to find out the truth about any conversations that have occurred between any Council Officers and the Gypsy/Travellers. There is no argument that there should be more places provided for Gypsy/Travellers. There is a big question mark over the number of places required. The illegal permitted site already looks overcrowded. It is better for Gypsy/Travellers to have a permanent base with facilities and to enable their children to go to school. When we have heard the much quoted comment "they would prefer to stay where they are", in what context has that comment been made? Has anyone explained that the Council proposal is to move the Gypsy/Travellers from "where they are" and that the Peniel Green site is nearly two miles away? I believe the other Gypsy/Traveller sites in the former West Glam area are in secluded, discreet positions away from local residents just as the Pantyblawd Road site is. The Gypsy/Traveller family on the permanent site are happy with the position of their site.

What Council officers have been involved in discussions, are they available to answer questions or can they make themselves available? If not, will they give written answers to questions submitted to them?

Has anyone other than paid Officers of the Council been involved in any discussions? Save the Children? Police Liason officers? Etc.

Are the Gypsy/Travellers aware how overlooked the proposed site in Peniel Green would be?

What notes have been kept of discussions?

What promises have been made to the Travellers?

Has an up to date Accommodation Needs Assessment been made as there seems to have been an increase in the numbers of Gypsy/Travellers on the illegal but permitted site?

Final question is how much weight has been given to the Travellers wishes?

Some or perhaps all of these questions may have been asked before. There are officers of the Council who have been involved who have left the employ of the Council. If this process has been open, honest, procedurally correct and robust then there would be notes and minutes of all meetings that have taken place so far. These would presumably be made available to Scrutiny? If there are no records then what has been going on? I understand it is part of the Scrutiny Committee's job to ask questions about the robustness of the process. That is a valuable part of the process but unless questions can be answered then it will be very difficult for the Council to move forward to find a solution. If these questions cannot be answered then what is the point of a scrutiny process?

Thank you for your time and for allowing me to speak to you.