

MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF STOTFOLD TOWN COUNCIL IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, SIMPSON CENTRE, STOTFOLD ON MONDAY 5TH JANUARY 2009 AT 7.30PM

Councillors present:

B Collier (Chairman)

Mrs S Bundock	Mrs A Clarey
A Cooper	Mrs M Cooper
Mrs D Haslett-Saunders	S Hayes
Mrs J Hyde	D Savill
L Stoter	Mrs C Turner
Mrs L Wilding	

Also present:

8 members of the public, District/County Councillors Street and Saunders, Alistair Burt M.P. and the Clerk

8063. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Smith, Saunders and Mrs Lewin.

8064. DISCLOSURES OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of Members interests.

8065. ORAL QUESTIONS FROM ELECTORS

Mr Haskell, Ivel Way

Made reference to the District Council's response regarding supposed racist comments in the last gypsy and traveller site consultation, together with references to comments regarding reducing crime in the 2004 Queen's speech and the former Prime Minister's stance on being tough on crime. He asked Alistair Burt to support the objections of the town to the suggested site, and asked for his colleagues to do the same.

8066. TO CONSIDER THE COMMENTS FROM RESIDENTS AT THE PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 19TH DECEMBER 2008 REGARDING THE GYPSY AND TRAVELLER SITE CONSULTATION, AND TO AMEND AND APPROVE THE TOWN COUNCIL'S RESPONSE ACCORDINGLY

Members were previously provided with a copy of the Council's draft response, together with a copy of the notes of the public meeting. Due consideration was given to the comments made at the public meeting and a lengthy discussion took place.

Alistair Burt advised that he has spoken to the Chief Executive at the District Council, Jaki Salisbury, and has requested up to date gypsy and traveller figures. He disagrees with the policy the District Council has been forced to follow, as it takes away the decision making ability from the local level. He referred to the apparent 3,100 racist comments made and that the District Council advised only 5% of comments were rejected. He will find out precisely how many were rejected.

Alistair Burt advised that he has found that where gypsies and travellers can expand their existing sites, they would rather do so, as they know the people already living there, and it is an easier process than finding a completely new site.

A brief discussion ensued regarding the rates paid by the gypsy and travelling community and it was:

Resolved that the District Council is asked if they collect business rates (NDR) as well as Council Tax from those running or carrying out business activities from gypsy and traveller sites within the District.

With regard to query raised at the public meeting as to whether the police have been asked to comment on the consultation document, those present were advised that they have been asked but have declined to respond as they wish to remain neutral on the matter.

The Chairman permitted Members of the public to make final comment or ask questions on matters discussed at the meeting, before final approval of the Council's response was made.

Mr Anderson, Francis Close

Felt unsure that emergency services would be able to access the site via Baldock Road, and was advised that the Baldock Road bridge has a weight limit on it.

Mrs Haskell, Ivel Way

Pointed out that a national caravan and camping club states the exact sizes of their pitches, and queried why the District Council have not stated the exact size of the pitches concerned in this consultation.

District/County Councillor Street

Advised that he had requested and attended an urgent meeting at the District Council regarding the gypsy and traveller site matter, at which the Chief Executive and Chief Planning Officer also attended. The valid objections in the 3,100 responses to the last consultation were carried through, with only 5% having comments scrubbed through, being deemed as racist. He advised that the District Councillors will be supporting our objections all the way through the process.

After the deadline of the 7th January, Vision 21 will provide feedback to District Council Officers on the comments received. The Officers will then make recommendations to the Local Development Framework Committee meeting on 10th March. The recommendations from that meeting will then go to the Executive on 18th March and full Council on 26th March. Members of the public can speak at both Executive and Council meetings, once they have submitted a request to do so. The District Council's recommendation will then go to another consultation – Draft Submission Consultation, which will take place during six weeks in May/June 2009. The outcome of this consultation will then be presented to the Planning Inspectorate in September, followed by an examination in public in early 2010.

Alistair Burt M.P. finished by advising that he will be putting forward the objections raised by his constituents, and will be asking the District Council to look for alternative sites. He advised that the process being taken to find gypsy and traveller sites is to prevent unauthorised sites.

After consideration of all the documentation available to them, and with agreed amendments being made to the draft response, it was:

Resolved that the amendments and additions to the Council's response to the gypsy and traveller site consultation as agreed at this meeting be made accordingly, and the final response is to be submitted to Vision 21/Talk to Mid Beds before the deadline of 7th January 2009, together with the notes from the public meeting, in their entirety, as circulated to Members.

8067. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY

Thanks were given to the Chairman, Clerk and those Councillors who have produced the documentation to assist Members in making a response to the consultation, and also for their work in putting together the public meeting. Thanks were also given to those members of the public who attended the public meeting who helped to make it a well-ordered meeting.

There being no further relevant business the meeting was declared closed at 8.53pm

CHAIRMAN

DATED