

**NOTES OF A PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 29TH JANUARY 2013 AT 7.00PM AT ETONBURY ACADEMY,
STOTFOLD ROAD, ARLESEY**

The meeting was hosted by Stotfold Town Council, and Chaired by the Mayor, Councillor Brian Collier (BC).

In attendance:

166 members of the public

Stotfold Town Council – Councillors:

B Collier (Mayor)	A Cooper (Deputy Mayor)	Mrs S Bundock
Mrs A Clarey	Mrs D Clark	Mrs M Cooper
B Dack	S Dhaliwal	S Hayes
Mrs J Hyde	T Naisbitt	B Saunders
G Smith	L Stoter	J Talbot

Stotfold Town Council – staff/volunteers

Mrs K Elliott- Turner (Town Clerk)	Mrs M Howard (Assistant Clerk)
Mrs S Cowie (roving-mic)	Mr D Howard (roving-mic)

Councillor Collier welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained house-keeping matters such as fire exits, no smoking on site, mobile phones, etc.

Copies of plans showing the four sites in Stotfold and one adjacent in Arlesey were provided to those present, together with details on what types of objections could be raised. This meeting would discuss each site individually. It is not known at this present time how many pitches would be on each site and the exact siting of pitches within the site.

LAND WEST OF WRAYFIELDS NORTH OF MALTHOUSE LANE, STOTFOLD (SITE 70)

Mr Proctor – Melbourne Close

Asked if this site was agricultural land, and if so, would it be taken out of use.

BC – this land is agricultural land and is described as being a category 2 flood zone. The former Mid Beds District Council carried out a flood risk assessment which is valid until 2021. It shows zones flood zones 2 and 3 following the route of the River Ivel, and determined that such areas are not preferred development areas. Flood zone 3 is the highest category for floods and this affects the site.

Joan Barratt – Silverbirch Avenue

The access to this site is very dangerous from either side, Stotfold or the A1M.

Mr Maggionlini – Wrayfields

Pointed out that the roads are not gritted in this area, as has been highlighted with the recent heavy snowfalls. Asked if the sites have been assessed by Central Beds Council.

BC – Confirmed that Central Beds Councillors have visited each site, but the assessment information will not be made public until 14th February. Pointed out that the roads in this area are narrow, and if they are less than 3.7m wide, they fail the national policy on the siting of Gypsy and Traveller sites. There is also no footway to or from the site.

Mr Sutcliffe – Hazel Grove

Asked for a definition of a pitch. Is a pitch for a family or a number of families.

BC – the definition of a pitch is unclear. It could accommodate a caravan for a family, another caravan for family members, a shed, a day room, and parking for at least 2 vehicles including a small lorry or van.

Mrs Ray – Astwick Road

Pointed out that the proposed site borders a river. This is dangerous for children living on the site, and doesn't believe that the Gypsy and Traveller community would even want to live this close to the river.

Mr Clarke – Littlebury Close

Has established 28 valid planning reasons for objection for this site, 23 for Arlesey Road site, 20 for the Pig Development Unit site and 17 for the Hitchin Road site. Pointed out that members of the public will not be able to officially comment on the sites until May/June, which will be after the Central Beds full Council meeting in April where they will have approved sites. The SUSCOMS Committee (Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee) meets on 28th February to discuss which sites will go forward, and he advised people to object in writing before then. Referred to the apparent imbalance in site allocation numbers, weighted towards the north of the county.

Mrs Clarke – Littlebury Close

Asked if Councillor Brian Saunders, being a Central Beds Councillor, would give a comment on this matter.

BC – As a Member of the Central Beds Council SUSCOMS Committee dealing with the Gypsy and Traveller proposed sites, Councillor Saunders cannot express an opinion at this meeting as he would then not be permitted to vote at the SUSCOMS meeting.

Mr Ray – Astwick Road

Asked if Central Beds Councillor John Saunders, who was also present, would comment.

BC – an opportunity for Councillor John Saunders to comment will be given later in the meeting.

LAND NORTH OF ARLESEY ROAD WEST OF PROPOSED STOTFOLD LEISURE CENTRE, STOTFOLD (SITE 81)

Mr Barnes – Arlesey Road

Lives opposite the site, which is in an area of open countryside and prime agricultural land. This site has been mooted for the last 6 years, and was rejected on material planning grounds in 2009. Why has it been brought back into consideration.

Mrs Rave – Astwick Road

Access to the site would cross the cycle path, which is a route to Etonbury Academy.

BC – as does the health centre access, so this argument could be countered.

Mrs Barrett – Silverbirch Avenue

Concerned about the proximity of the site to school children, heavy traffic travelling to the school, and the football pitches that are soon to be constructed adjacent to (leisure centre site) the proposed site.

Mr Bumstead – tenant farmer of site at Arlesey Road

Is the tenant farmer (of Central Beds Council) of both the proposed Gypsy and Traveller site and the football pitch (leisure centre) site. Planning permission has been granted for the football pitch site and he has surrendered the land, however permission has not been granted for access to the site, and he believes that the same access would be used for the proposed Gypsy and Traveller site. Advised that a Gypsy and Traveller resident at the Hatch site indicated that they would not prefer this site, and they don't want to go where they would be despised or hated. Not all Gypsies and Travellers are bad. It is a very good productive arable site, but it does flood in the winter months. He has a Countryside Stewardship Plan on the site, which has a lot of wildlife including brown hare, corn bunting, skylarks, linnets, and house sparrow.

Paul Redwood – Alexander Road

Asked how can a site that has been rejected previously be considered now. SUSCOMS are not able to answer why this is now back in consideration.

Mr Davies – Silverbirch Avenue

Felt that this should be considered as misconduct.

BC – CBC Councillors do not have to respond to such questions in their SUSCOMS meetings.

LAND EAST OF FAIRFIELD SOUTH OF THE FORMER PIG DEVELOPMENT UNIT (SITE 75)

BC – pointed out that this site is in a flood zone 3, and as such should not be considered as a site.

Peter Nash – Bronte Avenue

Asked if the flood zone category eliminates the whole site from consideration, or just part of it?

BC – unknown, but it does represent a close danger to occupants of the site.

Mr Cardona – Hitchin Road

Believes that there should be a field around each site, but this one abuts their property. The tenant farmer of the site was not aware of the proposal.

BC – it is recommended that there should be a field around each site, but is not required. The adjacent Pig Development Unit site, marked MA7 on the plans accompanying the proposals for sites, has planning permission for B1, B2 and B8 business use, and 5 dwellings. The Government's own papers advise that Gypsies and Travellers should not be sited close to such industrial/business areas.

Mr Lloyd – Fairfield Park

The traffic flow in the area of the site is already heavy. Asked if Gypsies and Travellers had an opinion on this, or any of the sites.

BC – advice from Government says that it is best for Gypsies and Travellers to be sited where they already have links – there are no recent links in the Stotfold area with any Gypsy and Traveller communities. There are Gypsies and Travellers now settled and living in Stotfold, and their descendants. There is no history of sites in Stotfold and therefore no linked need to have sites in the Stotfold area.

Mrs Tuffin – Hitchin Road

Lives immediately next door to the proposed site. Pointed out that the flood zone is a category 3 as it is more than half flooded, and the plans accompanying the proposal do not correctly show the flood area. There are pylons in the field for the proposed site and serves their property. Properties south of the field have intermittent electrical problems. Doesn't think that the Gypsy and Traveller community would want their children playing near electricity pylons. Pointed out that the outflow from the sewerage works is also in this area.

Mrs Clarke – Littlebury Close

Asked residents at the meeting to take photographs of any flooding in the areas of the proposed sites, and to forward to her or her husband.

BC – advised that it is preferable for residents to send their photographs to Central Beds Council with their objection letters.

Mr Clarke – Littlebury Close

Will forward the planning reasons he has found to any resident who wants a copy.

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Asked if it would be sensible to submit a petition from residents.

BC – urged caution as a petition document is counted as one submission, and it would be better to submit individual letters of objection.

Mrs Macdonald – Hitchin Road

Pointed out that the sewerage goes under their house and Hitchin Road. Getting out of the site onto the roundabout is very dangerous as it is a blind corner from the direction of the A507.

Mr Tuffin – Hitchin Road

Asked what mains services the Gypsies and Travellers would be provided with. His property is not on the mains sewer, if Gypsies and Travellers are given mains sewers then all the residents in that area should have it.

BC – electricity, water, sewerage – although noted that the sewerage pipes in this area probably wouldn't be big enough.

Mr Turner – High Street

We need real objections based on planning law.

Mrs Valance – Hitchin Road

Pointed out that Pix Brook could be contaminated. Then asked if residents could purchase the site.

BC – you would need a willing purchaser and seller – being Central Beds Council.

Mr Nash – Bronte Avenue

We should quote an overload of infrastructure in our objections, which goes against Planning Policies for Travellers. A transport planning specialist advises that the access to the site would need extensive alterations to make it safe. Sewerage would have to be pumped from the site, this would be very expensive.

BC – infrastructure arguments could include education – the lower schools are already pretty much full, and would therefore require considerable investment if they were to take additional children of the Gypsy and Traveller community.

LAND SOUTH OF FAIRFIELD AND WEST OF STOTFOLD ROAD, STOTFOLD (SITE 76)

BC – The drainage lake opposite the site is accessed by the River Ivel Drainage Board. It is a flood reservoir taking storm water from Letchworth and now Fairfield Park. It is subject to fairly rapid rise and fall, and the outflow goes into Pix Brook. The lake has enormous capacity and could be considered dangerous, being so close to the proposed site.

Mr Sweeny – Cavell Walk

Pointed out that the resident adjacent to the site wasn't informed of the proposal, nor was the farmer of the land. The field opposite the flood reservoir slopes towards the road and has a 30ft height difference, being lower at the road. Drainage pipes under Hitchin Road are clogged and water often settles in this area. If the proposal site is hard surfaced, this will increase flooding on Hitchin Road. The entrance to the site is very poor, and it is a very busy road. The noise levels on Hitchin Road (Class C road) are becoming unacceptable and to put Gypsies and Travellers in caravans this close to the road would be unacceptable and inhuman.

BC – this also applies to the site at Wrayfields, with its proximity to the A1M. Hitchin Road is technically too narrow for buses to go in both directions. Again, if it's width is less than 3.7m then this is another reason to object to the site. The roads on the site should be 5.5m wide as per Government advice.

Mr Sutcliffe – Hazel Grove

The drain in the dip outside Lower Wilbury Farm recently collapsed and an enormous pothole appeared making it dangerous for users of the road.

Mrs Tuffin – Hitchin Road

Hitchin Road is very noisy. Agricultural vehicles cannot travel along on the correct side of the road, this would happen if the site housed travelling show people.

BC – it is unlikely that any of the sites would be for travelling show people, as they would be more likely to be sited near the existing travelling show people sites in Biggleswade.

Mrs Coffey – Baldock Road

Asked if the Dr's surgery could cope with additional demand.

BC – advised that they would be able to cope as they have recently received planning permission to extend the premises for more consulting rooms.

Mr Pike – Fairfield Hall

Asked if the surgery would be a planning matter in this case.

BC – confirmed that is a planning matter in terms of infrastructure, and sites should be within a certain distance of a doctor's surgery.

LAND NORTH OF WEST DRIVE EAST OF ARLESEY (SITE 79)

BC – Pointed out that West Drive should have been suitable for buses, but is not suitable for any vehicle at the moment.

Mr Clarke – Littlebury Close

Arlesey Town Council did a deal with Mid Beds District Council. This deal agreed 4 pitches for Hitchin Road, Arlesey, and he felt that that this will grow to 10. Another retrospective site in Arlesey has grown from 1 to 5 pitches. There is a danger in saying no to one site and offering another site instead.

Mrs Palmer – Astwick

Currently has major problems with the Gypsy and Traveller community as she is a farmer. Felt that we need to fight this together. Most of the sites are in the countryside and farmers will be targets. We need to target MPs and the Government and to say NO. We need to get parishes together to fight together. Pitches are only going to grow in size. These sites ruin our countryside.

Mr Page – Mowbray Crescent

The last time we were consulted on Gypsy and Traveller sites, we had letters saying that we were racist. It costs £4m to move people off the illegal site at Hatch, most have gone back on site.

BC – they have only returned to the approved part of the site. Mid Beds District Council spent £1/2 million on this matter.

Mr File – High Street

The sites on Hitchin Road are very close to the border with Hertfordshire. Are Hertfordshire Council or Letchworth residents aware of the sites. We could get more support from these residents.

BC – North Herts Councils have not been advised by Central Beds Council, nor have the residents of Letchworth.

Mrs Tuffin – Hitchin Road

She has previously rented fields in Stevenage and had problems with illegal Gypsy and Traveller encampments – asked if she could use this experience to respond. This site is outside the settlement envelope, asked if any other sites are outside the planning envelope.

BC – urged caution. Under this proposal process, Central Beds Council will be able to have some transit sites, once these are in place, anyone parked at the side of the road or in a field illegally can be immediately ejected and moved to the transit sites. Government documents advise that sites should not dominate the existing community, so this could be used as an argument. All proposed sites in Stotfold are outside the settlement envelope. There are different policies on how to look at applications in or out of the envelope – outside the envelope have more strict policies.

Mr ??? – Vaughan Road

Pointed out that Mr Clarke has been asking for a list of the highest ranking sites, to get an indication of whether we are likely to get a site, and has been advised by Central Beds Council that this won't be available until 14th February.

Mr Nash – Bronte Avenue

Showing domination of sites is a very strong argument. The Equalities Act of 2010 gives Gypsies and Travellers protected status as an ethnic minority. If we say something racist in our responses, Central Beds Council have the right to reject the objections in its entirety.

Mr Clarke

You cannot prove that people on sites will cause problems. There are plenty of planning reasons to use. Pointed out that it is Central Government who require the Gypsy and Traveller sites, not Central Beds Council.

Mr Rickwood – Wrayfields

Arrived late, and pointed out that the area of Mill Lane, Malthouse Lane and Wrayfields is much valued and an important area of recreation for residents. The Town Plan clearly states that we don't want development of any kind in these areas.

Mr Roberts – Hazel Grove

Wants to buy expert lawyer to fight these sites, using Stotfold Town Council reserves.

Mrs Coffey – Baldock Road

Asked if Church Farm (proposal site land) was good agricultural land, and if they would put the site next to the listed building.

BC – the property is grade 2 listed. This is another planning objection.

GENERAL OPINIONS

Mr Pearson – Heron Way

Asked if there was any value in asking people of Stotfold to donate £10 each to fight this. The Council could administer the funds and we could have a war chest to prevent depreciation in property values.

BC – We cannot use property value as a planning reason although planning blight is a recognised planning objection.

Central Beds Councillor John Saunders

Felt that we need to fight each individual site. Pointed out that he had an interest as he lives directly next door to the proposed Wrayfields site. All of the land for the proposed sites is owned by Central Beds Council and not privately owned. The River Ivel Valley is part of our country park – running from Stotfold to Broom. With regard to the Arlesey Road site, he has family living opposite the site. He felt that once it is established that a site is not to be built on, then why should the rules be changed. There are good argument points already raised against the Pig Development Unit site, particularly regarding the access. Felt that the dip in Hitchin Road by the Wilbury Farm site would be very dangerous. The West Drive site is on good agricultural land, and feels that we should support Arlesey Town Council in rejecting this site.

Ms Manfield – Astwick Road

Asked if Stotfold Town Council could approach lawyers of local builders to fight our case, as it would be in the interest of the builders.

Mrs Valance – Hitchin Road

Asked if objections are upheld on the 28th February, what happens next, will other sites be found and we start the process again.

BC – they may have sufficient sites or may come back with further sites.

Mrs Barratt – Silverbirch Avenue

Asked where Central Beds Council are getting the money from to widen roads, provide drainage, etc.

BC – There is funding available from Central Government, and also from Central Beds funds – so inevitably, the tax payer.

Mr Maggionlini – Wrayfields

Felt that we need to fight this as a community, and to respond to every single site, and not just the one next to your own house.

Mrs Clarke – Littlebury Close

Central Government has a funding pot of £12.1m, and it is allocated on a first come first serve basis. Asked when the next Stotfold Town Council meeting will be held, where this matter will be discussed.

BC – the Town Council will be holding a Special Town Council meeting for Members to consider the sites, following comments made at this meeting, on Wednesday 20th February.

Mr Clarke – Littlebury Close

Urged people to get their letters of objection sent off sooner rather than later as they need to be distributed to the 12 members of the SUSCOMS Committee. Jonathan Partridge at Central Beds Council will arrange for the letters to be passed on.

Mr Redwood – Alexander Road

3 – 4 years ago the Green Infrastructure Plan for Stotfold was put together, and this included reference to the River Ivel Country Park. Queried how much clout our Plan actually has.

Councillor Collier thanked residents for attending, and urged them to send their objections and comments to Central Beds Council and Alistair Burt MP as soon as possible.

The meeting was closed at 9.00pm

DRAFT