

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Planning Sub-Committee held on
Thursday, 22 March 2007

PRESENT: Councillor Dr DR Bard – Chairman
Councillor NIC Wright – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: SGM Kindersley Mrs HM Smith
Mrs DSK Spink MBE

Officers: Holly Adams Democratic Services Officer
Catriona Dunnett Principal Solicitor
Gareth Jones Corporate Manager (Planning & Sustainable
Communities)
Philip Readman Assistant Enforcement Officer
Charles Swain Assistant Planning Enforcement Officer
Tim Wetherfield Head of Policy and Communication

Councillors BR Burling, SM Edwards, RMA Manning and MJ Mason were in attendance, by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor NJ Scarr and from Steve Hampson, Executive Director, and Simon McIntosh, Corporate Manager (Policy, Performance and Partnerships).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor SGM Kindersley declared a personal interest as a Cambridgeshire County Councillor.

Councillor MJ Mason declared a personal interest as a member of Histon Parish Council.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the 27 February 2007 meeting were agreed as a correct record.

3. TRAVELLER SITES IN WILLINGHAM

The Council was putting significant resources to accommodate the needs of Gypsies and Travellers, whilst recognising the impact authorised and unauthorised sites had on local resources such as education, healthcare and the countryside. The government was aiming to address through the Regional Spatial Strategy and Development Plan Documents the significant shortfall of authorised sites, and the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document (DPD) process was underway, with input from both the Travelling and settled communities.

The Corporate Manager (Planning and Sustainable Communities) explained that existing legislation made it difficult for local authorities to control effectively and quickly unauthorised breaches; an injunction on land at Willingham was being sought to allow the Council to control the situation until completion of the DPD process. The proposed injunction would not affect the existing sites and would not displace existing occupants, including those whose plots were the subject of current planning applications: it was intended to minimise the “honeypot effect”. The Corporate Manager emphasised that

this injunction was being done in addition to, and not as a replacement for, existing policy for planning enforcement of Traveller sites. The Assistant Planning Enforcement Officer confirmed that, since 2003, there had been six parcels of land in Willingham parish occupied by travellers, for which retrospective planning application had been made and permission for temporary consent granted; three more retrospective planning applications currently were waiting to be determined. In addition the Council recently had obtained three injunctions on land within the Willingham area as a direct result of land being made ready for occupation or being used as a temporary unauthorised site. There were now eleven full or temporary approved sites in the Willingham area with a total of fifty caravans as of the official caravan count in January 2007.

It was important for the Council to retain the confidence of both the Travelling and settled communities, and it was acknowledged that the settled community had expressed legitimate concern that granting permission for authorised sites before completion of the DPD would impact local resources such as education, healthcare and the countryside. The Council sought to demonstrate to the settled community that there was a risk of further unauthorised development if the Council did not seek to take action now; at the same time, the Council wanted to break the cycle whereby members of the Travelling community would spend significant amounts of money investing in unauthorised, undeveloped sites which ultimately would not obtain planning permission, thereby creating potential financial difficulties when they sought to relocate to authorised sites identified through the DPD.

The Principal Solicitor explained that the court would need to be confident that an injunction was necessary and expedient, and the Council would need to provide evidence of apprehension of breach of planning consent. Members were reminded that Counsel's earlier advice was that a district-wide injunction was unlikely to be successful, but that an injunction for a smaller area, such as that identified at Willingham, would be more likely to succeed if the necessary evidence could be demonstrated to the court. If the application for an injunction did prove unsuccessful, the Council's next actions would depend both on the reasons given by the judge for refusal and on any possible resource implications.

The Corporate Manager clarified that members previously had instructed officers to investigate district hotspots, as a result of which Willingham had been identified as the priority area. The current pressures on Cottenham were not as strong as those at Willingham, but Cottenham would remain under investigation as resources allowed.

The Corporate Manager undertook to discuss with members of the public present specific details of their planning application after the meeting.

The Planning Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDED** that the Council seek an injunction preventing the unauthorised siting of residential caravans and associated development and use of the land at Willingham, as identified in the appendix to the report, for residential purposes.

4. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Democratic Services Officer would circulate potential meeting dates. The Sub-Committee was minded to schedule one meeting per month, the meeting to be cancelled if there were a lack of business.

Members were invited to remain for an informal update on Moor Drove, Histon.

The Meeting ended at 9.50 a.m.
