

## TRAVELLERS CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Minutes of the inaugural meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2003  
starting at 2.00pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Dr DR Bard                      Councillor Mrs EM Heazell  
              Councillor CC Barker                     Councillor LCA Manning  
              Councillor RE Barrett                  Councillor Mrs DP Roberts  
              Councillor Mrs MP Course              Councillor JH Stewart

Councillors RF Collinson (local Member for Cottenham) and RT Summerfield (local Member for Milton) attended the meeting by invitation.

The following Officers attended the meeting: Mark Barron (Travellers Officer), Jem Belcham (Area 2 Planning Officer), Ryan Carter (Assistant Enforcement Officer), Gareth Jones (Deputy Planning Director), Geoff Keerie (Principal Environmental Health Officer), Tony Marks (Enforcement Officer), Chris Taylor (Head of Legal Services) and Jane Thompson (Community Partnerships Manager).

Councillors Mrs JM Healey, Dr JA Heap (local Member for Harston), JA Nicholas and J Shepperson (local Member for Swavesey), and David Hussell (Planning Director) sent their apologies for absence.

### 1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Mrs DP Roberts proposed that Councillor RE Barrett be elected Chairman of the Group for the coming year, This was seconded by Councillor Dr DR Bard and, there being no further nominations, it was

**RESOLVED** that Councillor RE Barrett be elected Chairman of the Group for the coming year,

### 2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Head of Legal Services introduced an "Issues Paper" on the Council's record on providing private pitches through the planning process, definitions in the light of *Wrexham v Nat. Assembly of Wales and Berry* recently decided, the respective roles of Government, local government and the Courts in addressing Traveller-related matters, and the question of policy formulation.

Members engaged in a wide-ranging discussion in the light of concerns as to the name, constitution, and reporting responsibilities of the Group. The following specific points were discussed:

- the method by which the Group's deliberations should be reported to the Cabinet
- the different roles of the Group – fact-finding, policy consideration, and liaison with Travellers (possibly via a sub-Group)
- the need to ensure sensitivity and safety before undertaking any further surveys of the Travellers community
- the relative rights and duties of the Council and Travellers
- impact of the law and the role of the Police

- the desire that the Council set itself a vision in how best to use design and approach to address the Travellers issue in a positive and co-ordinated manner
- the importance of recognising and respecting the lifestyle of Travellers while dealing with criminality and anti-social behaviour in the usual way (that is, not in a way unique to Travellers)

Members endorsed the view that the Chairman should attend meetings of the Development and Conservation Control Committee, Portfolio Holders and Cabinet in order to present to them in person any recommendations made by the Group.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet that the Group should adopt the following Terms of Reference:

- (1) To consider all issues in relation to Travellers, including any unmet demand, site provision, site enabling, site development, site control and other arrangements.
- (2) To advise the Cabinet on policy issues relating to Travellers.
- (3) To advise the Development and Conservation Control Committee on development control issues relating to Travellers.
- (4) To report annually to the Cabinet and Development and Conservation Control Committee on the number of caravans and Travellers families on authorised and unauthorised sites, and upon relevant trends, on planning control issues arising during the previous twelve months, and on liaison arrangements with the travelling and ex-travelling communities.
- (5) To consider all new case law and guidance, and new and proposed legislation.

### 3. **NAME OF THE GROUP**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Group be known as the Travellers Consultative Group.

### 4. **PUBLIC EXCLUSION FROM FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Group discussed whether or not future meetings should be held in open session.

Members considered the following options:

- that meetings be open to the Press and public, subject to the usual exempt categories contained in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (As Amended)
- that all meetings be held in private, due to the sensitive nature of matters likely to be discussed
- that confidential items be considered at the beginning of the meeting, thus overcoming concern at having to exclude members of the public, including Travellers, from a previously open meeting

- that all meetings be closed unless otherwise stated

Members also considered the following:

- the need for the Council to be transparent in its dealings
- the desirability of publicising the Council's good record in terms of Travellers issues
- four additional categories of exempt information, issued recently in the context of business likely to be conducted by the Standards Committee
- the danger of giving the impression of holding meetings "in secret"
- the need to acquire the trust and confidence of the Travellers Liaison Group

Councillor CC Barker expressed misgivings about considering confidential items at the beginning of the meeting, followed by open items.

It was **RESOLVED**

- (1) that, usually, meetings be open to the Press and members of the public;
- (2) that items involving exempt information, and any matters which, even though not exempt or confidential, the Chairman decides (whether in considering the agenda for the meeting or at any later stage) should be dealt with privately, be considered at the beginning of the meeting;
- (3) that, upon the conclusion of those items referred to in (2) above, members of the Press and public be invited to attend (but not speak) for the remainder of the meeting; and
- (4) that Members, whose wards or constituents are affected, or likely to be affected, more than any other ward or constituents on any matter on the agenda, be entitled to attend and speak notwithstanding the nature of the business.

## 5. **UNAUTHORISED TRAVELLERS' SITES**

Members received and **NOTED** a report from the Planning Enforcement Officer, consisting of an extract from the Enforcement Action Progress Report presented to the Development and Conservation Control Committee on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2003, and plans showing the location of unauthorised sites within the District.

The Planning Enforcement Officer highlighted the dilemma he faced in carrying out his responsibilities on behalf of the Council while, at the same time, being identified by certain Travellers as somebody with whom they could discuss community, health and education issues among other things.

Members recognised the difficult situation in which this placed the Enforcement Officer, and Councillor Mrs DP Roberts highlighted the need to encourage the Primary Care Trust, Local Education Authority and other relevant agencies to engage in greater partnership working with the Council.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer summarised the involvement of the Environmental Health section, highlighting the communication skills that had been developed in addressing public health issues in the context of Travellers.

## 6. SMITHY FEN, COTTENHAM

The Consultative Group considered a report from the Deputy Planning Director, in respect of seven individual planning applications relating to privately-owned Traveller sites at Smithy Fen, Cottenham.

The Deputy Planning Director outlined the complex issues involved, and expressed the hope that the Travellers Consultative Group could provide the necessary impetus to ensure that the various aspects were given appropriate weight, and that the eventual decision by the Development and Conservation Control Committee would be seen as having increased credibility.

Councillor RF Collinson summarised the history of the site, referring to views expressed by Cottenham Parish Council, and to the narrow nature of the vehicular access to it. He also expressed doubts as to the accuracy of the information relating to the local connection of some of the individuals concerned, and asked that it be verified.

Subject to officers being satisfied as to the accuracy of the information relating to the personal circumstances of some of the applicants, it was **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Development and Conservation Control Committee that planning permission be refused for the proposals submitted by J O'Connor, Miss B Grant, J Culligan and J Flynn, and that weight be given to personal factors in relation to the applications submitted by Mrs J Price, S Price and H Price, when considering these applications in the context of Policy HG29.

## 7. UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS

The Consultative Group received and **NOTED** a report, prepared by the Travellers Officer, on current liaison between South Cambridgeshire District Council and the Travellers' community.

## 8. CAMBRIDGESHIRE TRAVELLERS INITIATIVE

The Consultative Group received and **NOTED** a report, prepared by the Community Partnerships Manager, on the Cambridgeshire Travellers Initiative.

It was **AGREED** that the Project Manager should be invited to address a future meeting of the Travellers Consultative Group.

## 9. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

It was **AGREED** that items for future agendas should include:

- the Council's response to recent Government reports on Transit Sites
- unauthorised encampments
- report from Travellers Liaison Officer (Standing Item)
- an invitation for officers from the Local Health Authority, Primary Care Trust and Cambridgeshire County Council to address Members
- a Project Plan for conducting a Travellers survey to assess the future need for travellers' sites and help determine whether or not

provision should be made for Travellers within new major housing allocations

- delegated powers

**10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was **AGREED** that the Travellers Consultative Group should meet on a quarterly basis, and that the Committee Administrator should endeavour to arrange the next meeting in October, subject to the availability of Members and Officers.

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The meeting closed at 4.35pm

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