



COUNCIL MEETING – 19 February 2009

Question under Council Procedure Rule 14

QUESTION 1

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access

1. “Would the Portfolio Holder confirm the agreed policy for residential sites for travellers/gypsies within the District and if there are any changes likely to take place as a result of the Local Development Framework consultation?”
2. Within existing and future policy, is there a clear definition as to what constitutes a temporary or a permanent residential site for travellers/gypsies and if so what is it?
3. In the event of the Council granting planning permission for one family to live on a designated site for travellers/gypsies, is there a limit to the numbers that can be allowed on site as ‘family’?”

Reply

1. The statutory local policy in the Winchester District Local Plan Review sets out criteria against which proposals for sites for gypsies and travelling showpeople will be judged (Policy CE.27). More recent advice from Government on sites for gypsies (Circular 1/06) and travelling showpeople (Circular 4/07) requires Local Development Frameworks to identify and allocate suitable sites, rather than relying on criteria-based policies.

The number of pitches that will be required in the District has yet to be finalised and this will be done through a partial review of the South East Plan. Therefore the LDF Core Strategy will give a commitment to providing the required number of pitches and set out general criteria for site selection. The Development Allocations document will need to allocate specific sites to meet the South East Plan requirement.

2. The South East Plan will contain separate requirements for 'transit' sites, permanent gypsy sites and permanent sites for travelling showpeople. The details of such requirements are still being worked on, but it seems that transit provision may be allocated to groups of Districts, rather than establishing individual District requirements.

Permanent sites are those used by gypsies or travelling showpeople as their main base. Transit sites are used for short stays of up to three months by gypsies or long-distance travellers who have an actively itinerant lifestyle.

Quite apart from this it is possible to restrict the occupation of the site for a limited period and this would be achieved by imposing a condition on a planning permission. However there would have to be a sound planning reason for imposing the condition as it could be challenged at appeal.

3. Granting planning permission which restricts the occupation of the site to one gypsy family does not restrict the number of people that can make up the 'family'."



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QUESTION 2

From: Councillor Mason

To: The Portfolio Holder for Environment

“At full Council held 5 November 2008, I asked a Question on leaf clearance. I was informed that road sweeping for both Town and District are on an 8 week schedule. A refuse vehicle with 3 operatives came to Colden Common a few days later followed by a road sweeper. I do appreciate the atrocious weather in December, January and February but 8 weeks has long gone, 14 weeks in fact.

Please can you inform me when a road sweeper is next due a visit to Colden Common?”

Reply

“The Colden Common area is scheduled to be swept on an 8 weekly cycle but like all other areas periods between sweeps may vary at times for operational reasons.

It was last swept during the first week of December and because of delays caused by the recent inclement weather conditions and the Christmas break will be swept again the week commencing 2 March.”



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QUESTION 3

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access

“Further to the question I asked in full Council on 5 November 2008, could the Portfolio Holder bring me up to date with the progress for W17346/02 - Land at Grange Road, and was he aware of the meeting that took place on 28 January 2009, with Opus and the County? Does the Portfolio Holder share my very considerable concerns that after 5 years it is not satisfactory that we still appear to be no nearer to sorting these issues out? Could I also be advised of what is the role and accompanying responsibilities that the City Council has in this matter?”

Reply

“The situation regarding role and responsibilities of the City Council remains as before, namely that the County Council is actively negotiating with the developer to achieve a package of highway works and contributions. Planning permission has been granted, and as these negotiations relate to securing highway works and contributions, the County Council as highway authority, rather than the City Council as local planning authority, is responsible for resolving the issue.

I understand from the County Council that negotiations are ongoing with the developer and their transport consultant, Opus, in respect of the variation to the Section 106/278 Agreement. The draft agreement has been prepared by the County and sent to the developers solicitors for agreement. The sum of £12,000 has been agreed in lieu of the bus stop works and the County Council's Passenger Transport Group are currently working with their engineers on a scheme to implement at the bus stop on receipt of the funds. The County's Section 278 Engineers have met with Opus to agree the construction details of the works to be undertaken at the Grange Road/St Cross Road junction along with the resurfacing works to Grange Road and Grange Close and are now awaiting submission of plans in respect of these works for inclusion in the legal agreement.

In conclusion, the matter remains an issue for the County Council to resolve, but we are in contact with them to help achieve an early resolution of this issue.”



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QUESTION 4

From: Councillor Verney

To: The Leader

“What are you doing to assist businesses in this credit crunch?”

Reply

“The Council has already taken a number of measures, notably with regards to tourism, the LEADER project and the City Council’s assistance to the Business Improvement District (BID) in Winchester. I am pleased to say an announcement will be made during the budget debate.”



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QUESTION 5

From: Councillor Spender

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access

“What encouragement did Cabinet and Officers give to the Silver Hill developer to plan along sustainability lines?”

Members and Officers will be aware of PPG11 which states that ‘Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) should encourage development plans....to promote more local energy-efficient development through such measures as CHP and community heating schemes. These need to be considered at the earliest stage of development because of the infrastructure required. CHP along with a community heating scheme can offer optimum energy efficiency and contribute towards urban regeneration and a sustainable environment.’

Bearing in mind the long time scale required for a development on the scale of Silver Hill and the fact that in 4 years time it will be mandatory for new housing to achieve a 44% improved fuel efficiency over that required under Part L of the Building Regulations, and that that standard will apply in 3 years in the case of social housing, are the residences planned for Silver Hill sufficiently future-proofed?”

Reply

“It is a requirement of the planning consent for Silver Hill that the developer submits a sustainability strategy which will be expected to explain how the development will utilise best practice in the use of materials, reduction of energy use and sustainable construction having regard for commercial practicality. This was considered a better approach than specifying details some years ahead which might become redundant with changes in design or technology.

Where construction of residential or commercial property is covered by other standards which may be mandatory at the time, such as the Code for Sustainable Homes, then those standards must be met and the development has already taken this into account.”



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QUESTION 6

From: Councillor Worrall

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access

“The Planning Department has run an annual visit to sites of planning interest in recent years which has given Members an insight into individual site developments and architectural best practice. Members will soon be asked to vote on the Local Development Framework (LDF).

Given the potential impact of Members’ decisions, will the Portfolio Holder organise a comparable Members’ visit to the sites short-listed for future development in the Winchester Town area so that Members can be as well-informed as possible when called upon to decide?

Please ensure that the visit includes a housing development of comparable density to that proposed for the current (so-called) ‘preferred option’ at Barton Farm and that visits are organised both during the week and on a Saturday in order that all Councillors have an opportunity to attend.

Reply

“Site visits are normally made to enable Planning Development Control to view the site, if there is a specific element that is unclear. The LDF processes are different in that they are looking at a wide range of strategic issues, many of which cannot be ‘viewed’ at a site inspection.

All sites need to be considered in the context of the many factors that need to be taken into account particularly those from the scoring matrix presented to the last LDF Committee. These involve decisions on factors such as infrastructure needs, potential for economic development, health/well-being impacts, effect on water resources, effect on heritage, etc which will not necessarily be apparent from a tour of possible sites.

All Members were given maps and locations of the sites in 2007 (the Core Strategy 'Issues and Options' document) so a tour of all the sites included in the LDF could for many, be unproductive and unnecessarily time consuming. Most Councillors will already be aware of them and have taken the opportunity to visit the sites under consideration during the past year or so. However, if there are Members who feel that it would help them to see a specific site, it can be arranged to meet them there and show them the area concerned.”



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QUESTION 7

From: Councillor Cook

To: The Portfolio Holder for Performance and Organisational Development

1. “Would the Portfolio Holder state what is the current dedicated officer support allocated to the Scrutiny Function of the Council?”
2. Would he state the difference in that officer support at this date in comparison to what dedicated officer support was available to the Scrutiny Function twelve months ago, specifically the Principal Scrutiny role?”

Reply

“The review of organisational effectiveness and efficiency that took place after the resignation of the Head of Performance and Scrutiny in late 2008 brought about an expanded overview of the performance management systems generally.

The former Head of Service post was the principal officer taking responsibility for scrutiny management. When that postholder left the Council the opportunity was taken to merge the role with that of the Head of Communications and Partnership. This was done to allow, amongst other things, the scrutiny and performance management of partnerships to be considered and not just internal service performance that was the remit of the former postholder.

Following the agreement of Personnel Committee and Cabinet in November and December, the procedures for recruitment to the new posts have commenced. The differences in the planned officer support compared with twelve months ago are mainly that it will be led by the newly created post of Improvement, Partnerships and Scrutiny (ISP) Manager, which will not be a Head of Division post but will report to the new Head of the Division. This ISP manager’s team has within it the business manager team providing input to performance management and scrutiny work. This has also enabled a reconfiguration of one of the business managers’ posts to provide a Performance & Scrutiny Officer post to support partnership as well as internal service performance.

The Council’s HR provisions for the handling of recruitment to posts in the wake of a reorganisation of this sort, including a six week consultation period, are being followed and it is hoped that this process will be completed within the next month.”



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QUESTION 8

From: Councillor Verney

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access

“Please can you consider urgently in conjunction with Hampshire County Council, allowing say 10 spaces in the Upper High street (still leaving 2 spaces for delivery vehicles)? This would generate about 9000 short stay parkers on weekdays and assist business in this area. People park there on Sundays without causing any problems for traffic.”

Reply

“The Upper High Street is an important part of the one-way system and allowing parking on this section may cause hold ups and delays to vehicles and in particular buses through vehicles manoeuvring/reversing into spaces. The area already accommodates some disabled parking and loading but formally allowing general parking here may well cause problems to traffic flow and generate road safety issues.

The Upper High Street is defined as a County Interest Road under the terms of the Traffic Management Agency which we run for the County Council. As such we are required to consult the County Council on any proposals which affect such roads. I have already asked officers to seek the views of the County Council on this suggestion.”



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QUESTION 9

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Access

“Could the Portfolio Holder advise me of the number of pre-application advice applications the Authority has received since the introduction of charges on 1 October 2008 and how much income has this generated?”

Reply

“Thirty pre-application advice applications have been received since charges were introduced.

Income of £11,442.20 (net of VAT) has been generated from these.”



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QUESTION 10

From: Councillor Tait

To: The Leader

“Does the Leader share my concern and disappointment that a member of the House of Lords chose to single out Winchester above over 120 other authorities who had investments with Icelandic Banks, for very critical and un-balanced attention through an article he wrote for The Independent on Sunday (12 October 2008) and an interview he had on the BBC Today programme (13 October 2008) regarding an investment the Authority made with the Scottish, Heritable Bank, when as the Lord admitted in a letter he wrote to me, he had only been told about Winchester’s investment a week before and he was un-aware of the background. Does the Leader agree with the sentiments expressed by our Member of Parliament who issued a press statement supporting the Council and Naomi House and mentioning that ‘I do not feel comfortable at all with the idea of pointing the finger of blame when it is going to achieve absolutely nothing. Now is not the time to score political points’ and continued ‘If others want to point the finger of blame I will play no part in it’.”

Reply

“I share the Member’s concern; Winchester has a £1m investment at risk, made on 16 September 2008 whilst the bank still had a Fitch short term rating of F1, out of a total of £920m of Local Authority investments at risk with Icelandic banks, some of which invested after this date.”