

FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE DECISION RECORD

8 August 2013

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Christopher Akers-Belcher (In the Chair)

Councillors: Peter Jackson, Marjorie James, Alison Lilley, Robbie Payne,
Carl Richardson and Chris Simmons.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2 (ii), Councillor Rob Cook was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Kevin Cranney, Councillor Cath Hill was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Paul Thompson, Councillor Geoff Lilley was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Keith Dawkins and Councillor George Morris was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Ray Wells.

Officers: Dave Stubbs, Chief Executive
Peter Devlin, Chief Solicitor
Denise Ogden, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Damien Wilson, Assistant Director, Regeneration
Chris Pipe, Planning Services Manager
Tom Britcliffe, Planning Team Leader
Andrew Carter, Senior Planning Officer
Alastair Rae, Public Relations Manager
Laura Stones, Scrutiny Support Officer
Angela Armstrong, Principal Democratic Services Officer

69. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kevin Cranney, Keith Dawkins, Paul Thompson and Ray Wells.

70. Declarations of Interest

None.

71. Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocation *(Assistant Director, Regeneration)*

Type of decision

Key Decision – Test (i) and (ii) applies.

Purpose of report

To provide information on the outcome of the consultation process undertaken for sites which were potentially suitable to accommodate Gypsy and Travellers and technical information prepared by Officers to enable the Committee to make a decision on the Council's preferred site.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided the background to the allocation of a Gypsy and Traveller site within the Council's Local Plan. A site selection process had been undertaken and details of this were included in the report. The results of the consultation process were préciséd by site in Appendix 3. Delivery risk assessments had been carried out for each site and the results were contained within Appendix 4. The report confirmed that from a legal viewpoint, the methodology and process used in the site selection of a Gypsy and Traveller allocation was thorough, robust and objective.

A discussion ensued during which Members raised a number of concerns in relation to several of the proposed sites. In response to a request for clarification from a Member, the Assistant Director, Regeneration confirmed that during the consultation process, it was highlighted that there may be potential to secure part or whole funding from other sources, including the private sector, to develop the preferred site. In addition to this, since the consultation had taken place, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) had indicated that there would be funding available to part of wholly fund the development of the preferred gypsy and traveller site with the condition that the site was complete before March 2015. It was noted that whilst the preferred site to develop as a gypsy and traveller site would be identified within the Local Plan, it was recommended that this site should only be developed once the demand presents itself. The Assistant Director, Regeneration clarified that any identified site would enable gypsies and travellers who were looking for a long term residential commitment with a minimum occupancy of 6 months, as opposed to the transient gypsy and travelling community.

Members were concerned that the cost of developing this site may rest with the Council whether part or in whole when there were other housing needs within the community, such as the need for more bungalows for elderly

people.

It was noted that since the consultation had commenced, a commitment to develop the following sites had been identified and it was therefore agreed to remove them from consideration:

Site 3 – Ref 370: Land at Burbank Street (Former Bridge Community Centre);

Site 4 – Ref 391: Land at Burbank Street (Former Lynn Street ATC);

Site 15 – Ref 403: Land at Clarence Road.

It was suggested that the preferred site should maximise capacity and as such, the following sites that had less than 8 pitches were removed from consideration:

Site 1 – Ref 348: Land at West View Road (West of no 306)

Site 2 – Ref 363: Land at Throston Grange Lane (North of no 220)

Site 7 – Ref 440: Land at Wiltshire Way (North of the Allotments)

Site 16 – Ref: 331 – Land at Reed Street/Huckelhoven Way.

Members proceeded to consider the remaining sites as follows.

Site 14 – Ref 437: Land at Briarfields

It was noted that the Chairman and President of Briarfields Allotment Association has submitted a letter of objection to be tabled for Members consideration.

It was proposed that this site be removed from consideration as it was included within the Park Conservation area and it was highlighted that the Council would realise a significant capital receipt from the sale of this land. In addition, at the stakeholder meeting, the gypsy and traveller representatives had indicated that they did not think the site was suitable for their accommodation. There was no dissent to this decision by members of the committee.

Site 5 – Ref 430: Land at West View Road (Rear of No 238 – 294)

A Member highlighted that there was the potential for the development of over 450 houses near this site and a significant amount of resources had already been committed to that site to remove decontamination. Members had concerns that this site would not be suitable due to the close proximity of the railway lines and the affect, particularly in terms of noise that would have on people living in an uninsulated caravan. Previous meetings had indicated the unsuitability of a site near industry for the very same reason of noise. It was therefore proposed that this site be removed from consideration.

Site 6 – Ref 439: Land at Catcote/Macaulay Road

It was noted that this proposed site would be completely overlooked on all sides by residents. In addition it was highlighted that there were a lot of elderly residents living in that area in bungalows, in a settled community who were fearful of an increase in the fear of crime. Catcote Road was also a very busy road where there had been a number of accidents and this development would cause problems with traffic flow onto that main artery route. In response to a query from a Member, the Chief Solicitor confirmed that the proposed site area was not a designated village green. It was therefore proposed that this site be removed from consideration. There was no dissent to this decision by members of the committee

Site 8 – Ref 446: Land at Old Cemetery Road

A Member commented that there had been significant investment in clearing the surrounding site for potential housing development. In addition, there was also a bird sanctuary and coastal walkway in this area. There were concerns raised regarding the potential economic impact of developing this site for gypsy and travellers in terms of the significant housing development adjacent this site and also businesses on Oakesway and potential loss of investment. It was highlighted that the Headland Parish Council strongly opposed the development of this site as a gypsy and traveller site as they did not consider it suitable in view of the development of the Headland Neighbourhood Plan which included the continuing development of the north linear park as well as the potential housing development for that area. It was therefore proposed that this site be removed from consideration. There was no dissent to this decision by members of the committee

Site 9 – Ref 448: Land at Lennox Walk/Owton Manor Lane

There were a number of issues with the development of a gypsy and traveller site on this area as Members considered it would have a huge impact on the economic development and regeneration of the south west extension to the town. Members were reminded that in the past, a proposal to create a play builder site was rejected as residents did not want to see that open space developed as it was an area utilised by families in the area as open green space. It was therefore proposed that this site be removed from consideration. There was no dissent to this decision by members of the committee

Site 10 – Ref 454: Land at Masefield Road/Gulliver Road

It was noted that this area was a popular recreational site used by families as open green space and was a well walked footpath and bridle way with access to Summerhill. Members were informed that there were bats and great crested newts in the locality which were protected species. Whilst it was noted that Sport England had indicated that the football pitches on the site could be disposed of, it was suspected that this would not be supported

by residents as the pitches and green open space were utilised by families especially during school holidays. The site offered wider community value. It was therefore proposed that this site be removed from consideration. There was no dissent to this decision by members of the committee

Site 11 – Ref 462: Hart Small Holdings East

As this site met all the appropriate criteria for a gypsy and traveller site and there were no major objections from Members, it was suggested that this site remain on the list of proposed sites at this stage. There was no dissent to this decision by members of the committee

Site 12 – Ref 464: Summerhill, Off Catcote Road

Members did not think it was appropriate to include this site due to the high volume of community usage and the fact that it was open meadow land. In addition, it was suggested that the location of a gypsy and traveller site would impact on the potential capital receipt for the nearby Briarfields site due to its close proximity. In addition, Members also did not feel it was close enough to other facilities such as health, retail and employment opportunities. It was therefore proposed that this site be removed from consideration. There was no dissent to this decision by members of the committee

Site 13 – Ref 465: Hart Smallholdings West

This site had similarities to the Hart Smallholdings East and as such was included within the considerations. There was no dissent to this decision by members of the committee

In summary, it was noted that Site 11 – Ref 462: Hart Smallholdings East and Site 13 – Ref 465: Hart Smallholdings West were the two sites to remain on the list for further consideration as a proposed gypsy and traveller site.

One Member did comment that the soil in this area was extra rich soil and was very unhappy to see this site included, however no alternative sites were proposed for consideration at this point.

A discussion ensued on the two sites at Hart Smallholdings and it was noted that the access to the West site would have least impact on local traffic.

Members wished to thank all Officers involved in the robust and objective process undertaken to develop the Local Plan and the consultation undertaken to identify a gypsy and traveller site.

Members discussed the potential for demand for a gypsy and traveller site and there was divided opinion on when and if this demand would present itself. In addition to this, Members were mindful that, should they choose to

develop the site in accordance with the Homes and Communities Agency grant, by 2015, and the demand did not present itself there would be additional costs to the Council for maintenance and security. However, it was noted that if the demand occurred within the timeframe set out by the Homes and Communities Agency, there may still be the potential for part or whole funding for the development of the site from the HCA.

Decision

- (i) That Site no 13, Ref 465 be identified as the preferred site to meet the need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in the Borough.
- (ii) That if the above site was not agreed by the Planning Inspectorate, Site no 11, Ref 462 be identified as an alternative site to meet the need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in the Borough.
- (iii) It was agreed not to develop a site in the timescale set out by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) relating to current funding availability, but instead wait until the demand presents itself. In doing so however, Members were aware that beyond March 2015 there was uncertainty regarding what level of funding may be available from the HCA (if any) to develop a gypsy and traveller site and the liability would then fall upon the Council.

72. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The meeting concluded at 3.26 pm

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

PUBLICATION DATE: 14 August 2013