

Ask for: Shaun Scruton
Direct Dial: 01702 318100
Email: shaun.scruton@rochford.gov.uk

Mrs K Cumberland
Rayleigh Town Council
The Pavilion, King George V Playing Field
Bull Lane, Rayleigh
Essex SS6 8JD

My Ref: SS/KT/RTC

Date: 21 September 2018

Dear Kerry

Traveller site allocations

I refer to your letter dated 14 August 2018 seeking information about the Council's planning policies re Gypsy and Travellers.

The Council adopted a Core Strategy in December 2011, and this included a policy (H7), which sets out a commitment "to allocate 15 pitches by 2018" for travellers. Subsequently, the Council adopted an Allocation Plan in February 2014. The Allocations Plan identified a site at Michelins Farm, Rayleigh (Policy GT1) to meet the commitment to allocate land to provide 15 pitches.

In August 2015, the Government published a revised planning policy for traveller sites. The policy must be considered in the preparation of development plans and is a material consideration in planning decisions.

In 2017, the Council published an updated Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) as part of the evidence base for a new Local Plan. A Local Plan Issues and Options paper (December 2017) included a section on Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs and explained the findings of the GTAA, updating the assessment referenced in the Core Strategy from 2011.

The latest GTAA, is a more accurate reflection of the need for traveller pitches in the district and suggests a requirement for 19 pitches between 2017 and 2033. The Issues and Options paper discussed this evidence in detail and we'll be publishing the results of that consultation in the autumn.

In summary, the adopted Core Strategy gave a commitment to allocate land to provide 15 pitches; a site allocation was made and tested in public examination. It is true that it has not yet proved possible to bring the allocated site forward for development, but the Council is continuing to consider options for delivery within the plan period to 2025 as well as appropriate policies and allocations for the emerging new Local Plan.

Before commenting further, I'd just point out that you have not accurately reflected my point about the delivery of the allocated site. I specifically said that it has not, as yet, proved possible to bring the site forward for development. I have not stated, as you allege, the allocated site is not viable.

You argue that the planning policy situation in the district means that it is possible for travellers to purchase 'low cost green belt land' to develop. I don't know what you mean by 'low cost' as, presumably, anyone offering land for sale will need to satisfy of getting best value from the market. Land can be offered for sale whether it is in the green belt or not, and a traveller is as entitled to purchase a piece of land as any member of the settled community, and to then seek planning consent for development. All proposals for development are considered against the relevant material planning considerations. The Council will always ensure that local and national planning policies are applied fairly for all members of our community; indeed, it is absolutely essential that we do so.

On the issue of temporary sites becoming permanent, I can't agree with your notion that the Council accepts temporary sites will in due course become permanent. When a temporary consent expires a further planning consent will be required and this will need to assess the material planning considerations prevailing at the time. I don't see how the Council can know the matters that will need to be considered five years ahead.

You make great play of a point about property values, but, as I am sure you are aware, property values cannot be taken into account when considering planning applications.

I am fully cognisant of the concerns that exist about the provision of sites for travellers. The Council must consider the needs of travellers for suitable sites for pitches alongside the needs of the settled community. There is no doubt that while traveller site allocations may be an emotive issue, the numbers we are dealing with in terms of land area are modest in comparison to the very significant challenges we are facing to find land to meet the needs of the settled community. You may take issue with my comment, but it is clear the land requirements for delivering many thousands of homes over the next 20 years is of much greater significance, not least given the associated need for employment land and essential infrastructure.

Finally, whatever decisions are taken by the Council on planning applications, your comment about officer recommendations is simply unacceptable and is a direct slur on their professional competence. Planning Officers provide advice to the Council based on their carefully considered professional assessment of the material planning considerations. They cannot and should not provide advice or a recommendation based on the views or objections of residents, and I am extremely disappointed the town council has seen fit to make such a statement.

Yours sincerely



Director