

Questions raised at the Groby workshops - 19th February 2009

18.30 – 19.30 Session

Q. Will infrastructure be put in place before new housing is built?

The infrastructure plan in the Core Strategy identifies what additional facilities would be needed in Groby in order to support the increase in population from additional developments.

Infrastructure will be carefully considered at the time of a planning application being submitted on allocated sites. If it can't be proven that the required infrastructure improvements will be delivered, the development will not be approved.

Q. Where will new facilities go?

Strategic infrastructure requirements have been considered as part of the Core Strategy's Infrastructure Plan. This will be considered in greater detail when a planning application is submitted on any of the final allocations.

Q. How will the doctor's surgery be developed? Land availability is very constrained.

The Core Strategy's Infrastructure Plan acknowledges that significant investment in Groby's GP facilities is needed. This will be considered in greater detail in consultation with the Primary Care Trust when a planning application is submitted on any of the adopted allocations.

Q. Why was there so much confusion in December?

The leak to the Leicester Mercury related to work which was still very much in progress and not yet completed. Work was continuing on the document up until the Council meeting on the 20th January when members agreed the document for consultation.

Q. Who is going to pay for the gypsy and traveller sites?

For privately owned sites, the land will be bought and developed by gypsies and travellers. Some of the pitches to be provided may be socially rented which means that they would be developed by the Borough or County Council with funding that is available from central Government. The Transit site will be a managed site with appropriate facilities, funded by central government grant (if these are available at the time of development).

Q. I feel insulted by how Groby residents have been treated. Why was there a last minute amendment at the Council meeting on 20th January?

No one at the Borough Council intended to make anyone feel like they had been treated unfairly or unreasonably. All of the Council's guidelines on consultation have been followed and it was always the intention to consult with the public fully.

Although officers had made recommendations to members within the draft Site Allocations document, an alternative option was put forward by Borough Councillors to be discussed at the full Council meeting. Following the discussion it was considered by the elected members that this was preferable to the option put forward by officers for consultation. That is a legitimate decision for them to have taken at that point.

Q. Groby does not want any gypsy and traveller sites and no longer feel confident in the Borough Council.

Representations can be made on any of the sites that can be found in the Site Allocations document. If there are better locations for the provision of gypsy and traveller pitches, these can be suggested to the Borough Council. Sites do need to be provided somewhere, to do nothing is not an option.

This is a genuine consultation process and all comments received will be considered and used to shape the Site Allocations document, which will be considered by the Council later in the year and this will be published in advance of the Council meeting.

Q. The A5 site in Hinckley (off Hydes Lane) could be prone to flooding.

This site does not appear within a flood risk zone. It is therefore not considered a major barrier to the development of this site.

Q. Why is a site off Stoke Road not an option? It is in the County Council's ownership and is close to amenities?

The Stoke Road site in Hinckley is still in the Site Allocations document as an alternative option. At the time of the Council meeting on 20th January it was considered that there were potential land ownership issues with this site. During the public consultation period the Borough Council has been made aware that these issues may now not be the barrier to development first envisaged, but has had no formal representation to this effect.

This site will be reconsidered following the consultation period, taking into account all additional information received.

Q. Education in Groby is already over-subscribed. How is the Borough Council going to deal with this?

The Core Strategy's Infrastructure Plan acknowledges that significant investment in Groby's educational facilities is needed. This will be considered in greater detail in consultation with Leicestershire County Council (which is the education authority) when a planning application is submitted on any of the adopted allocations.

Q. Traffic issues in Groby need to be addressed. We are currently at capacity.

Initial comments received from Leicestershire County Council on the potential options in Groby have not raised serious highways concerns. Full comments relating to all of the potential options will be received by the Borough Council during this consultation period. Once allocations have been adopted, developer contributions relating to the highway network will be considered in greater detail in consultation with Leicestershire County Council (who act as the highways authority) when a planning application is submitted on any of the adopted allocations.

Q. Why are we over-allocating housing?

The Core Strategy has set out the number of new homes that are to be allocated. There has been an overprovision of 642 dwellings to ensure that the document is flexible enough to accommodate likely increases in housing numbers in the next review of the East Midlands Regional Plan, as well as ensure that the two Urban Extensions and necessary development to sustain rural settlements can be delivered effectively.

Q. Why have we moved away from the original figure of 6 to 9 pitches and commissioned a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment?

The 6 to 9 pitches mentioned in the Draft RSS8 review were interim figures and were superseded by findings from the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTAA).

All the Districts in the county, along with the City Council, Rutland and the County Council commissioned the needs assessment as a means of ensuring that there was a robust basis to any future proposals and that they were consistent across the county.

Q. Will the number of gypsy and traveller sites to be provided change in the future?

The current gypsy and traveller needs assessment highlights need up to 2016. The needs assessment will need to be reviewed in the future but there is no indication how many pitches we may need to provide.

Q. Who is going to monitor how many caravans are on the gypsy and traveller sites?

Planning conditions will be put on any new sites in order to control the number of pitches and caravans allowed on the site. If these conditions are breached, the owners of the site would be subject to usual planning enforcement procedures.

Q. Are the correct procedures being followed?

The correct procedures in terms of document creation and public involvement have been and are being followed.

Q. Transit sites should be run by the Council, located near urban areas so that they are near facilities. The allocations made seem to run in the face of this.

The site allocations document contains an alternative option for the provision of gypsy and traveller sites. This alternative option follows government guidance in Circular 01/06 and 'Designing gypsy and traveller sites: good practice guide' and would involve providing gypsy and traveller pitches as part of new housing allocations in order to ensure that they would be as sustainable as possible and conveniently located to facilities. This was not considered to be the preferred option of the Council at the meeting on 20th January 2009.

An alternative option for the location of a transit site at Stoke Road in Hinckley is in the document. If this is considered a preferable option, this can be submitted to the Council during the consultation period and must be considered.

Q. If a transit site is meant to ease the pressure off illegal sites, how will locating a transit site in Groby help Hinckley and Bosworth Borough? Illegal encampments from other areas would be moved there instead.

Although there is no guarantee as to where the visitors to the transit site will come from, the fact that we will be providing a transit site would provide us with the necessary infrastructure to deal with illegal encampments quickly and efficiently. We will consider other alternatives for a transit site which might more effectively meet our local needs.

Q. If Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council have no control over the provision of medical or educational facilities; there is nothing to say that the County Council or Primary Care Trust will do anything.

Although we can not speak or make guarantees for other organisations, the Borough Council will be working closely with these service providers to ensure that additional facilities are in place to support new developments. It is, and never has been, the intention of the Borough Council to build any form of new development in areas that will not be able to sustain them. To do this would lead to developments where people do not want to live, as well as putting unnecessary strain on existing communities.

Q. Groby only has medical facilities to cope for ½ of its residents and dental care for 1/3 of its residents. The schools are also at capacity. How could the area possibly cope with additional people?

The infrastructure plan in the Core Strategy identifies what additional facilities would be needed in Groby in order to support an increase in population that would arise from the new developments.

Infrastructure will be closely considered at the time of a planning application being submitted on the allocated sites. If it can't be proven that the infrastructure improvements will be delivered, the development will not be approved.

Q. When Councillors voted on the document on 20th January, residents had not been consulted. Councillors therefore did not know how the communities would react. Has the stable door been locked after the horse has bolted?

Certainly not. We are currently at an early stage in the site allocations process and this is a genuine public consultation period. There have been no definite decisions made on any of the options and things can change if legitimate reasons are put forward to the Borough Council. This is also not the final opportunity that communities will get to have their say on sites. A public consultation period will take place prior to submission to the Secretary of State and a public inquiry will follow this.

Q. What has been the political pressure on officers for the provision of gypsies and travellers?

There has not been any political pressure on officers for the provision for gypsies and travellers. Officers made a preferred recommendation to Council, however, elected members introduced a further option at the meeting on 20th January which emerged as the preferred option for consultation.

Q. Can the way the politicians voted on 20th January be made public?

A recorded vote was not requested, so only the overall numbers can be published with accuracy.

Q. There is currently inadequate policing in Groby, how is this going to be improved?

This issue would require consultation and negotiation with Leicestershire Constabulary, as part of their resource allocation decisions for the future, based on the annual strategic assessment for the whole of the Borough area.

Q. Earl Shilton had their potential site removed. What can be done to make Groby the same?

The proposal for Earl Shilton, whilst not now a preferred option, remains in the document as an alternative. It has not been removed completely. If it is considered that Groby should not be the preferred location for the provision of a gypsy and traveller site, representations can be made to the Council explaining this during the consultation period, as residents and their representatives are doing. We would still need to identify a (more) suitable location.

Q. Following the Hinckley and Bosworth Local Plan inquiry, the Council ignored the inspectors report with regards to housing. What is stopping them from doing it again?

Following the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), an inspector's report which follows a public inquiry is now binding on the Borough Council.

Q. Hinckley has far better facilities than other areas in the Borough. There should be additional developments here.

Hinckley has been allocated a considerable level of housing development through the Core Strategy and Site Allocations documents. However, additional sites put forward to the Council during the consultation period will be given consideration before the next round of public consultation.

Q. The Borough Council should go back to the drawing board with the Site Allocations document and do it properly.

The correct procedures in terms of document creation and public involvement have been followed by the Borough Council. That continues to be the case and the final recommendations will have a sound basis of full public consultation and information.

Q. Policy 18 of the Hinckley and Bosworth Core Strategy requires the Council to score potential gypsy and traveller sites against each other to find the most suitable sites. Why hasn't this been done?

There is no mention within policy 18 of the Core Strategy that sites need to be scored against each other. However, all options in the document have been in accordance with policy 18.

Q. Groby has a terrible broadband signal. An extra 110 houses will make it much worse.

Whilst this is not a formal planning issue, it is something which will be taken into account.

20.00 – 21.00 Session

Q. If travellers are allowed a certain number of pitches, could the site then evolve and get bigger?

This would not be allowed to take place without the owners of the site first gaining planning permission. Planning conditions would be put on any new sites in order to control the number of pitches and caravans allowed on the site. If these conditions are breached, the owners of the site would be subject to usual planning enforcement procedures.

Q. How many caravans are there per pitch?

There is no set definition for a Gypsy and Traveller residential pitch. In the same way as the settled community, gypsies and travellers require various accommodation sizes, depending on the number of family members.

'Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Good Practice Guide' (CLG, 2008) does however state that:

"As a general guide, it is possible to specify that an average family pitch must be capable of accommodating an amenity building, a large trailer and touring caravan, (or two trailers) drying space for clothes, a lockable shed (for bicycles, wheelchair storage etc), parking space for two vehicles and a small garden area.

Q. How can we ensure that illegal encampments are dealt with quickly by enforcement?

If the Borough Council has provided adequate provision for gypsies and travellers in the Borough then enforcement action can be taken quickly and efficiently. Historically the Borough Council has not provided sufficient sites for gypsies and travellers; this

led to unauthorised encampments which could not be moved on due to lack of provision.

If an appeal took place regarding one of these sites, a Government inspector would be likely to conclude that as the Borough Council had not been providing sufficient sites, the illegal encampment should be allowed to stay, whether it is in a suitable location or not. This has happened on more than one occasion in Hinckley and Bosworth Borough. The provision of adequate, permanent sites will give greater power to the Council and our partners for the relocation of illegal encampments.

Q. What guarantee have we got that there will not be any more illegal sites in the Borough?

There is no way that we can guarantee that there will be no more illegal sites in the Borough. If we do provide sufficient sites to satisfy the identified need it means that we can deal with illegal sites more quickly and efficiently.

Q. Is there an upper limit on the number of caravans per pitch?

No. However, planning conditions can be put on sites to restrict the size of pitches and number of caravans.

Q. How many caravans will there be on the transit site in the Borough?

The transit site will be able to accommodate up to ten caravans.

Q. If a site is provided off Anstey Lane, the residents of the site would use Anstey's services, not Groby's. What right do HBBC have to put it there?

The option located off Anstey Lane is still within the Hinckley and Bosworth administrative area. If the provision of a site at this location would be an unacceptable burden on Anstey's services, representations stating this should be submitted to the Council during the consultation period. It is an issue which is likely to arise in reverse from other areas which border Hinckley and Bosworth.

Q. Why are the proposed gypsy and traveller sites in accordance with ODPM Circular 01/06?

The site allocations document contains an alternative option for the provision of gypsy and traveller sites. This alternative option follows government guidance in Circular 01/06 and 'Designing gypsy and traveller sites: good practice guide' and would involve providing gypsy and traveller pitches as part of new housing allocations in order to ensure that they would be as sustainable as possible and conveniently located to facilities. This was not considered to be the preferred option of the Council at the meeting on 20th January 2009.

Q. The Hinckley (Stoke Road) site needs to be looked at again as it is a far better option.

The Stoke Road site in Hinckley is still in the Site Allocations document as an alternative option. At the time of the Council meeting on 20th January it was considered that there were potential land ownership issues with this site. During the public consultation period the Borough Council has been made aware that these issues may now have been resolved but has not yet received any formal response on this.

This site will be reconsidered following the consultation period, taking into account all additional information received.

Q. The Borough Council needs to look for more neutral sites. They shouldn't be located near settled communities.

Traditionally, gypsy and traveller sites have not been located close to the settled community and tend to be found away from settlements. In order to now make these sites more sustainable, guidance issued by Central Government encourages local authorities to locate gypsy and traveller sites in or near to existing settlements so that they can be near to essential facilities and services. Our understanding, however, is that this arrangement in fact is favoured neither by the travelling nor by the settled communities.[Subsequently, we have been advised informally that Travellers would prefer to live adjacent to settled communities. We expect that point to be confirmed formally as part of the consultation responses]

Q. What's to say that the sites will not expand in the future when the next needs assessment is done?

There is no way of knowing what the results of any future reviews of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment would be.

Q. Why are planners putting forward options that they know are not the best options?

Officers made a preferred recommendation to Council. This recommendation included what officers believed were the best locations for gypsy and traveller sites. However, at the end of the day, the final decision is a political one made by elected members.

Following this consultation period, officers will review all comments that have been received and will put forward updated options to reflect these comments to elected members before the pre-submission consultation.

Q. Mr Prowse and his department should've found the best sites before the consultation period.

The identification of sites is a long process and we are at an early stage with it. Although officers can make informed recommendations, the reason for the public consultation is so that local knowledge and ideas can guide our options to ensure that the best possible options go forward as the final allocations.

Q. (to Steve Atkinson) Do you personally prefer the Stoke Road site?

It is not appropriate for me to make a personal comment on the site allocations.

Q. ODPM Circular 01/06 says that sites should be sustainable and shouldn't cause disturbance. There is no evidence that the Borough Council has taken these points into account.

The site allocations document contains an alternative option for the provision of gypsy and traveller sites. This alternative option follows government guidance in Circular 01/06 and 'Designing gypsy and traveller sites: good practice guide' and would involve providing gypsy and traveller pitches as part of new housing allocations in order to ensure that they would be as sustainable as possible and conveniently located to facilities. This was not considered to be the preferred option of the Council at the meeting on 20th January 2009.

Q. Are you going to compulsorily purchase land to build these sites?

Borough Councillors have categorically said that Compulsory Purchase powers will not be used to deliver sites for gypsies and travellers.

Q. Why couldn't the leaders of the Council come here to meet the public?

The site allocations consultation should not be a political issue and officers are expected to listen to the public and make recommendations based on best practice and government guidance, having taken an independent and objective view of the public response.

Q. Why can't gypsy and traveller sites be located on smaller, Brownfield sites instead of Greenfield sites where they will have the chance to expand?

There is no reason why gypsy and traveller sites could not be located on suitable Brownfield sites. If anyone knows of locations that are more suitable than those currently suggested then these can be submitted to the Borough Council during the public consultation period.

Q. There is a boarded off RAF base that would make a suitable site. Why hasn't this been considered?

We are not currently aware of this site. If it is believed that this would be a more suitable location than those currently suggested then this can be submitted to the Borough Council during the public consultation period.

Q. A site at Desford Tubes would be suitable. Why hasn't this been considered?

The preferred option for this site is currently to allocate it for continued employment use. As it has been suggested through the consultation period, its suitability to provide a number of pitches for gypsies and travellers will be seriously considered.

Q. Why has Groby been chosen to have more than 10% of the gypsy and traveller need?

The Borough Council has developed a set of options according to the information that was made available to them. This will not be the final recommendation, if there is strong evidence (such as a need for "fairness") to the contrary.

Q. The Borough Council need to look at Brownfield sites for gypsies and travellers before Greenfield.

If there are any suitable Brownfield sites for gypsies and travellers, these can be submitted to the Borough Council during the consultation period.

Q. There is concern regarding the 82 dwellings proposed to the west of Sacheverell Way. Services are too stretched already and access would be dangerous.

The infrastructure plan in the Core Strategy identifies what additional facilities would be needed in Groby in order to support the increase in population from the additional developments. This would include improvements to the road network in order to ensure that safe access can be provided.

Infrastructure will be closely considered at the time of a planning application being submitted on the allocated sites. If it can't be proven that the infrastructure improvements will be delivered, the development will not be approved.

Q. How can the people of Ratby and Groby be assured that their views will be taken on board by the administration?

It would be wrong to promise that the views expressed through the consultation period will be taken on board by elected members. What can be promised is that officers will take on board all legitimate comments and make fair, informed recommendations to Councillors prior to the next round of public consultation.

Q. Could existing gypsy and traveller sites be extended?

The preferred option currently being consulted on would involve extensions to some existing sites.

Q. What is the difference between green belt and green wedge?

Green belt is a nationally recognised designation which intends to prevent urban sprawl around cities. There is no green belt in Leicestershire.

Green wedges are local designations that intend to prevent the coalescence of settlements. They were originally designated by Leicestershire County Council and have now continued into Local Development Framework policies.

Although the reasoning behind the two designations is similar, green wedges do not carry the same weight in terms of planning policy as green belt.

Q. Why was Sacheverell Way a preferred option at any time?

Information received from Leicestershire County Council has shown that a high proportion of unauthorised gypsy and traveller encampments recorded from 1996-2007 have been located within the north-east of the Borough. It is considered that transit sites are best placed in locations with a history of unauthorised encampments.

Other reasons for the selection of the Sacheverell way site is that the Borough Council was led to believe that this site was currently in the ownership of a gypsy / traveller. This, and the site's location in relation to the strategic road network, were the reasons for its inclusion within the document.

Q. This area already has enough pitches and doesn't have a need for any more.

If it is considered that current provision in the area is adequate (or beyond the limits of fairness), representations stating this can be made to the Borough Council during the consultation period.

Q. Will the Borough Council be letting us know about things this time or will we need to read about it in the Leicester Mercury?

It was always the intention of the Borough Council to fully consult and involve the public. It was unfortunate that information was leaked to the Leicester Mercury as it was incomplete at the time.

Q. Information should be made clearer on the website. Especially the minutes of the Council meeting held on 20th January.

This is noted. We will aim to make information clearer on the website.

Q. When were the documents sent out to Councillors?

Councillors received the draft Site Allocations and Generic Development Control Policies document when the 20th January Council meeting agenda was sent out on 12th January 2009.

Q. Are you going to use CPO powers to provide gypsy and traveller sites?

Borough Councillors have categorically said that Compulsory Purchase powers will not be used to deliver sites for gypsies and travellers.

Q. Why didn't we just tell the government that we don't want to provide any sites?

This would not be sufficient. Hinckley and Bosworth Borough has been identified as having this need and we must try to fulfil it. If, after continued attempts to locate suitable sites, we can still not find enough locations, we could report back to the

Government and let them know that Hinckley and Bosworth Borough can not accommodate this additional level of provision in full. This would however be a last resort. To do nothing is not an option.

Q. What happens if Labour isn't in power after the next election?

There is no way of knowing what will happen at the next general election, or how any change would affect the planning process.

Q. Do the Council get financial rewards for finding these sites?

No

Q. The Council need to plan for improving recreation opportunities, not for taking it away.

The Site Allocations document includes options to allocate additional (and protect existing) allotments, open space and play provision. However, due to the additional levels of development that we are required to find, it simply would not be possible to accommodate all of this onto Brownfield sites.

Q. The Borough Council need to make it clear what additional facilities residents will get.

A strategic view of the additional facilities needed is included within the Infrastructure Plan in the Hinckley and Bosworth Core Strategy.

Q. Why put a transit site somewhere where there aren't any facilities?

The reason for the selection of the Sacheverell way site is that the Borough Council was led to believe that this site was currently in the ownership of a gypsy / traveller. This, and the site's location in relation to the strategic road network, were the reasons for its inclusion within the document.

If it is considered that a site at this location would cause unacceptable levels of strain on Groby's resources, this can be highlighted to the Borough Council during the consultation period.

Q. Can we remove Sacheverell Way from the document altogether?

No. All sites that have been considered at any time must be detailed in the document. It is important that people have the opportunity to comment not just on the preferred options, but also the alternative options considered. If we did not do this, it would be picked up by a Government inspector and the document would be found unsound.

Q. By building these sites, aren't we simply attracting more gypsies and travellers to the area?

By allocating these sites we are trying to provide for the gypsies and travellers that are already within the County with nowhere to go.