

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

19 JULY 2016

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Anderson (Chairman)
Fisher
S Hearn
Hicks
Howard
Riddick
C Wyatt-Lowe (Vice-Chairman)

Officers:	John Chapman	Strategic Planning and Regeneration Officer
	Katie Mogan	Member Support Officer
	Nicola Turvey	Environmental and Sustainability Officer
	Laura Wood	Strategic Planning & Regeneration Team Leader

Also Attendance:

Councillor Janice Marshall

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

138 **MINUTES**

There were no minutes to sign.

139 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors G Adshead, Ashbourn, E Collins, Matthews, and Ransley.

140 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe declared a personal interest in agenda item 7. She said she was a Hertfordshire County Councillor who has a responsibility for gypsy and travellers. She reserved her right to speak on this item.

141 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

142 **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None.

143 **EMS UPDATE - WATER SAVINGS REPORT**

N Turvey gave a presentation to members about water leaks that have been rectified since the last presentation she gave to members in January 2016.

- In January and February, Heath Lane cemetery had a continuous flow and was leaking 2200 litres a day. The leak was found under a pipe and it is now using just 36 litres a day.
- The water flow is measured on data loggers bought two years ago.
- The water savings at Heath Lane and Tring Cemeteries have yielded a £2,304 annual saving, paying off the initial capital cost of the repair work in less than 9.5 months.
- Kingshill Cemetery is the next target site to save water at. They are using more water than Woodwells which is the main site with three permanent members of staff.
- There is also a huge leak at Chaulden Adventure Playground which is going to be looked at.
- Other projects for the future include replacing outdoor Adventure Playground lighting at Adeyfield, Bennetts End and Chaulden to LED bulbs before the end of September when the lights are on six evenings a week, to make the sites 100% LED lit, and reduce the electricity requirement for lighting by up to 75%.

Questions & Answers

Councillor Hicks asked if there was any ongoing maintenance for the water leaks.

N Turvey said that the 13 sites identified under the Environmental Management System all have data loggers installed and that data is recorded and interpreted every month. Previously, there was not a big enough budget to allow for repairs.

Councillor S Hearn asked advice on how to report leaks on highways. He said Tring Town Council has reported leaks to Herts Highways but they don't seem to ever be repaired.

N Turvey said that Herts Highways is a County Council department.

Councillor Anderson said that Tring Town Council might be better off reporting leaks to the local water provider.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said the investment in water leaks has yielded significant savings. She would welcome this to be rolled out across all sites. Similarly, the proposed LED lighting will help revenue costs and thanked the officer for all her hard work.

N Turvey said that she hoped the new LED lighting would show an immediate effect and would match with historical data to see an improvement.

Councillor Anderson said he was concerned that a lot of money was being spent on trying to save money on lighting, when relatively speaking lighting didn't cost that much, and there were far greater savings to be achieved from targeting water and heating usage.

N Turvey said that the external bulbs use much more energy than those inside so it is felt this will reduce costs significantly. The contract cost to change the LED bulbs is less. An LED bulb can last 17,500 hours which means less time and money spent changing the bulbs.

Outcome

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report.

144 PLANNING APPROACH TO PROVISION FOR GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS, INCLUDING LA5

L Wood introduced the report which had been requested by the committee. The report sets out the existing provision in Dacorum and the government's policy. The Council's approach to Gypsy and Traveller provision was established by the Core Strategy – work on which began in 2007/8, and has been informed by a Member task and finish group. At present, there isn't an opportunity to change the approach to gypsies and travellers as Full Council agreed the Site Allocations policy in January 2016. The policy is now in front of the government Inspector who could request changes to make the document sound. There is then a quick turnaround as the gypsy and traveller policy as the Core Strategy and Site Allocations document will be moved into one Local Plan. Technical work to inform this new Local Plan has already begun. The report on the viability of providing gypsy and traveller provision on sites LA1, LA3 and LA5 referred to in the report has now been received and is available on the website. It confirms that viability is not an issue on any of the three sites.

Questions & Answers

Councillor S Hearn said there were various matters than concerned Tring. The proposed site in Tring (on site LA5) is right on the entry to Tring which does not give a good first impression of the town. Tring Town Council were visited by Dacorum

Borough Council to give advice about the site and were told that whatever happens, the site is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the site would be in keeping and incorporated into the town. It took a lot of work to get the town to agree to a huge settlement of homes, and they now feel misled about the proposed gypsy and traveller site. Councillor S Hearn said he was fully aware of government rules for the provision of gypsy and traveller sites but questioned the need for a site in Tring and feels this is just simply conforming to the requirements of the Core Strategy. The positioning of this site is inappropriate and it is exposed, would travellers even want to live there? The infrastructure in Tring is currently on a knife edge even before 200 new homes are built. The doctor's surgery and clinic have closed and schools have no places available and this is a matter of great concern for the Town Council. Tring has been cooperative in discussion about the development but Dacorum Borough Council may find it difficult in the future as Tring feel let down. There are a number of gypsy and traveller sites across the border in Aylesbury Vale and surely this should be taken into account when allocating new pitches. Councillor S Hearn was concerned that despite the emphasis upon meeting need, there is no 'need' for gypsy and traveller pitches in Tring. They should be offered houses as an alternative. There are also concerns that occupiers will come and go on a regular basis, exacerbating issues.

L Wood said that Dacorum have been involved in several Town Council meetings and are fully aware of the concerns of members and residents. The decision on which sites would provide gypsy and traveller sites was discussed by the task and finish group and the final location was the preferred location. It is a matter for the government Inspector to look at as part of the Site Allocations examination process and she could suggest a different location. The role of the Core Strategy is to set out a general approach to gypsy and traveller provision, whereas the Site Allocations document sets out the detailed location and position of the sites. In relation to the comments about a 'need', this is worked out on a borough wide basis through a gypsy and traveller needs assessment. This follows the same process as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment that looks at needs for other types of housing. The existing site at Long Marston is operating over capacity and other locations in Tring were considered over the course of plan preparation. The Scott Wilson report highlighted independent locations across the borough where pitches could be provided, but it was the decision of Cabinet not to pursue these locations, or the option of extending existing sites. Instead, their preference was for the current approach of including sites as part of larger housing developments. It was discussed with travellers about where they would want to live and sites at LA1, LA3 and LA5 are supported by the gypsy and traveller liaison officer at Herts County Council. A meeting with an existing resident at the Long Marston site was positive about the location of the site in Tring. To clarify, the site is not a transit site but a settled residential one. There is a transit site at South Mimms in Hertsmere. The new Local Plan will be discussed by a new task and finish group with representation from across the borough and members of this committee. With regards to Aylesbury Vale,

they have 120 pitches compared to Dacorum's 36. This number will also increase as they need to provide 57 extra pitches so this is on a different scale.

Councillor Anderson questioned the deliverability and asked if the land was in one ownership using LA5 as an example.

J Chapman said there are 3 or 4 different land owners with Cala Homes being the main owner and having options on the remainder of the site.

Councillor Anderson said it is important to challenge and identify the need.

Councillor Hicks questioned the process and selection of the site. He said when the exhibitions were held in Tring regarding the new development for the Core Strategy, there was no mention of the gypsy and traveller site. Tring residents feel they have been 'hoodwinked' by Dacorum Borough Council. In a consultation meeting with Cala Homes, it was suggested that extra houses would be better than a traveller site.

L Wood said the Core Strategy and the Site Allocations policy will be pulled together into one single plan which will make it easier to make decisions alongside each other. The Council has learnt from the process and with one plan, it will be easier to be clearer to residents but there was no intention to mislead anyone.

Councillor Anderson said no one was questioning how the Tring residents feel. At the Core Strategy stage, it was a general policy with no detail which became clearer in LA designations. The unfortunate process divided the Core Strategy and the Site Allocations and the detail was not as well publicised as it would be under a single policy. The Council has not done anything it should not have done.

Councillor S Hearn referred back to his point about the need for a site. He said it is difficult to understand why something has been done when there is no apparent need shown. He said the report in the agenda just seems to justify what the Council has done so far.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe spoke as a borough councillor for Woodhall Farm and County Councillor for Grove Hill ward. She said she does not disagree with the policy of attaching gypsy and traveller sites to housing developments but says she has concerns relating to Woodhall Farm. Three Cherry Tree Lane has 30 pitches which is the largest site in Hertfordshire. In St Albans, 300 yards from the Dacorum boundary are another three traveller sites. It is unfair that north east Hemel Hempstead seems to have a string of gypsy and traveller sites within a two mile radius, especially with the addition of five pitches at Marchmont Farm. It is a concern that these sites could encourage behaviours that residents do not want. For example, the developments at Leverstock Green have not got a gypsy and traveller site. Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said she strongly objected to the additional pitches at Marchmont Farm and was arguing for a more fair dispersal of sites and feels it is incorrect to look at Dacorum and ignore the neighbouring boroughs.

L Wood said that there are three large and three small Local Allocations identified in the Site Allocations document, the smaller sites are not big enough to accommodate gypsy and traveller sites; hence the choice of the three larger sites.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe questioned why there aren't a smaller number of allocated sites across the borough and this might help to assimilate gypsy and travellers into communities.

L Wood said the Cabinet did consider the option of extending existing gypsy and traveller sites or having stand alone sites (as per the Scott Wilson report) but the decision was made in favour of the approach we have now.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe urged that this aspect be reconsidered in the future. The Core Strategy was written a long time ago and gypsy and traveller needs have changed. The site at Three Cherry Trees Lane has a lot of internal controls and pressures that affect the residents, smaller sites are becoming more appropriate.

L Wood said there will be a new gypsy and traveller needs assessment commissioned in 2017 and said she would be happy to present those findings to the committee at a later date.

Councillor S Hearn asked if homes had been offered to gypsies and travellers.

L Wood said Hertfordshire County Council carried out a targeted consultation with face to face interviews with gypsies and travellers. There was mixed feedback about this proposal but they have been taken into account. It is important not to over provide pitches and in comparison to other local authorities, we are providing a small number. Central Bedfordshire are looking to provide 150 more pitches.

Councillor Hicks asked how many gypsy and travellers had been rehomed.

L Wood said that data is not collected but knows some gypsy and travellers that move into a house are keen to get back into a caravan on a pitch and vice versa, due to responses to previous consultations.

Councillor Riddick referred back to Councillor S Hearn's point about the perceived need for these pitches. He said he was not made aware of any gypsy and travellers approaching Dacorum Borough Council for somewhere to stay.

L Wood said that the gypsy and traveller sites are owned and managed by Hertfordshire County Council who does have a waiting list.

Councillor Hicks asked how the housing density of gypsy and traveller pitches compared with ordinary houses.

J Chapman said that the proposed gypsy and traveller site on LA5 was for five pitches on a site of around 0.5 hectares. This density is lower than urban edge housing developments which tend to be about 25-30 dwellings per hectare.

L Wood said even if the pitches in Tring were not provided, they would still be obliged to provide the pitches elsewhere in Dacorum. It is the Council's obligation to provide homes for different communities.

Outcome

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report.

145 WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

L Wood asked for clarification on the Water Policy item scheduled for 21st September.

Councillor Anderson asked if the report could explain the provision of water in the planning process.

L Wood said there was a county wide study taking place which would fit nicely into that report.

The work programme was agreed by the members present.

The Meeting ended at 9.08 pm