

THE RINGLAND MATTERS GROUP

HEARING STATEMENT

for

**NEWPORT CITY COUNCIL REVISED LOCAL
DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

**HEARING SESSION 5: GYPSY AND
TRAVELLER SITES**

at

HARTRIDGE FARM ROAD

and

RINGLAND ALLOTMENTS

Chairman: Mr F. Weston
Tel: 01633 413 176
Email: ringlandmatters@hotmail.com

Date: April 2014

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Ringland Matters Group (the Group) was formed in November 2012 in response to the Council's proposals for reviewing the Local Development Plan which, in the main, was instigated to review the provision proposals of the Gypsy and Traveller Sites in Newport.

1.2 The Group's aim was, whilst recognising the need for Gypsy and Traveller Sites, to raise objections to the proposed sites at Hartridge Farm Road and Ringland Allotments using valid reasoning and without prejudice to the Gypsy and Travelling Community or promoting or participating in any anti-racist activities.

1.3 The Group maintains its stance that its argument is with the Council and not the Gypsy and Traveller Communities.

1.4 The Group carried out two petitions (Hartridge Farm Road and Ringland Allotments) with a combined total in excess of 11,000 signatures from circa 5,750 individuals who, at the same time, pledged continuing support for the Group.

1.5 The statement herein is an overview of the information/concerns gathered by the Group and is supplementary to the Report, commissioned by the Group, and any supporting documents, submitted by the Musker and Sumner Partnership.

1.6 The purpose of this document is to summarise and highlight the Group's findings and concerns, including evidence.

1.7 Reference to sections of the Council Reports has been difficult due to the Council's omission in providing suitable page and/or paragraph numbering so quoted extracts have been used.

1.8 Examples quoted do not stand alone and are numerous. Further examples can be readily identified if required. Restricting the number has enabled a summarised document without distracting too far from its intended purpose.

1.9 In the main the following documents have been referred to:

- Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Scrutiny Consultation dated 29 October 2019
- Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Site Appraisal dated 24 April 2013
- Alternative Sites Register (Revised Stage) dated September 2013
- Communities and Local Government Planning Policy for Traveller Sites dated March 2012
- The Good Councillor's Guide 4th Addition 2013

2. Summary

The Ringland Matters Group's concerns referred to herein are summarised as follows:

- Timescale allowed for the revision
- The whole process is based on a selection procedure that is fundamentally flawed
- The likelihood that the Policy Review Group would not have a balanced opinion in their view
- The lack of understanding of Gypsy and Traveller Sites displayed by the Policy Review Group
- The lack of documentation to evidence the evaluation and assessment of the criterion used throughout
- The inconsistencies in applying criterion
- The methodology used in site selection not conforming to the terms of reference within the report
- The question asked of the Gypsy and Travellers to gain support for the proposal
- The lack of documentation as to the Gypsy and Travellers' needs and preferences and the inclusion within the criterion
- Failure to consult with residents most affected by the proposal
- Failure to consider the 'economic impact' on those residents
- The connotations of the reasons in voting in favour of the Revised LDP

3. Background

3.1 The original deposit version of the LDP was approved by the previous Council in March 2012 for public consultation. This report to full Council concluded that the 5 sites were deliverable and met the assessed housing needs of the families concerned and were deliverable and the draft plan was "sound". The new incoming administration declined to place the draft plan for that public consultation and decided to review the plan instead.

3.2 To date, there has been no explanation as to why the original five sites were discarded and why the process was restarted with no regard for the tight timescale of the review.

3.3 The time scale for the Review was far too short to ensure accuracies and diligences. The Review was agreed by Council in a meeting dated 27 June 2012 and the findings were completed 28 August 2012 for a 4 week public consultation that ended 4 October 2012.

3.4 The original list of some 240 'potential' sites were mapped using the Council's GIS data system, to '*determine their rankings against the criteria identified by the Group*'.

3.5 The Review Group met on the *13 August 2012* to consider these mapping results and the 40 sites were selected.

3.6 Three days later on the 16 and 20 August 2012 visits of the 40 selected sites took place.

3.7 Eight days later on 28 August 2012 the ‘preferred’ sites were selected.

3.8 The selection procedure only took 15 days to complete. These were now the only sites now being considered.

4. Site Visits

4.1 Site visits of the circa 40 sites were carried out on 16 and 18 August 2013 as follows:

Attendees	16/08/2013	20/08/2013
Councillor Hannon	yes	yes
Councillor Suller	yes	yes
Councillor Watkins	yes	no
Councillor Morris	no	yes
Councillor Delahaye	no	no
M Hand (Development Services Manager)	yes	yes
L Taylor(Planning Policy Liaison Manager)	yes	yes
M Aspey (Housing Strategy Officer)	yes	no
S Davies (Development Manager, Housing and Community Regeneration)	no	yes
J Eales (Scrutiny Support and Research Officer)	yes	yes

4.2 It should also be noted here that the Summary of the Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Scrutiny Consultation Report states (extract):

‘We held our final meeting on 19 October 2012 to decide on our proposed recommendations to the Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Delahaye was out of Newport and sent her written comments for our consideration. We were concerned that Councillor Tom Suller did not attend the meeting and had not sent apologies. We tried to contact Councillor Suller by telephone but to no avail so took the view we had no option but to proceed’.

4.3 This appears to support a theory that the ‘revised’ sites were predetermined. Not all the Review Group was concerned to visit the sites or attend their final meeting. Only two of the five visited all of the sites, two attended only on one occasion and one did not visit any at all. Only three of the five Members of the Policy Review Group attended their final meeting. The Council, on the one hand, accepts (?) that the matter of Gypsy and Traveller Sites is a highly emotive subject for all and then appears to treat it with a blasé attitude.

4.4 At a Council Consultation meeting at the Llanwern Village Hall when asked about the site visits, Mr Hand could not answer a question referring to the attendees of the visits. He had no recall (knowledge?) of who was there or even the numbers. He could only offer in defence that he was ‘driving the mini-bus’. The audience queried whether actual site visits had taken place.

4.5 Site visits were carried out in the school holidays. If carried out at ‘school run’ time at Hartridge Farm Road a typical example of traffic conditions that would have met the visitors can be seen in Appendix 1.

5. Appointed Members of the Policy Review Group

5.1 Five Councillors were nominated to form this group. They actually volunteered for the role (Appendix 2), all but one having an ‘interest’ in doing so. They were as follows:

- Delahaye - Bettws: One of the original 5 sites was in Bettws but did not appear on the new list of sites. Lives in Celtic Horizon – close to Coedkernew (another of the original sites that did not appear on the new list).
- Hannan – Beechwood
- Morris – Lliswerry: Three of the original sites were in Lliswerry but none of them appeared on the new list of sites. He lives in Coedkernew (another of the original sites that did not reappear on the new list).
- Suller – Marshfield: One of the original 5 sites was in Coedkernew (within the ward of Marshfield) but did not appear on the new list of sites. This site is also within the same postcode district of his home.
- Watkins - Tredegar Park One of the original 5 sites was in Coedkernew (on the border of his ward) but did not appear on the new list of sites. This site is also within the same postcode district of his home.

This list of members demonstrates that the group was highly unlikely to have a balanced opinion in their review.

5.2 What qualities did these members have to make them competent to embark on such a highly emotive issue?

6. The Report dated 29 October 2012: Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Scrutiny Consultation

6.1 The Methodology Statement within this report states ‘*Analysis of this list against a clear list of criteria and using a scoring / weighting system, to establish an agreed shortlist of sites*’ and ‘*Before the short-listing process took place, the Group held a number of meetings to discuss appropriate criteria for sifting sites, and agreeing the best methodology for undertaking this piece of work*’.

6.2 The Ringland Matters Group requested a copy of the details of this scoring/weighting system and, in a response from the C.E.O. dated 28 February 2013 was told:

‘Sites are assessed using a traffic light system, with comments entered as necessary. This process was used as a sifting exercise to identify those sites which best meet the guidance criteria and general planning considerations to assist the Scrutiny review. As Officers will have discussed with you, there is no perfect site that meets every single

*criteria, and the purpose of the traffic light system was to flag up issues and highlight whether or not they are potentially insurmountable. Scrutiny Committee then considered this information to make an informed recommendation on which compromises (?compromises?) were considered to be most palatable. As discussed in your meeting with the leader and Officers, there is **no numerical scoring system to disclose because one was not used.***

6.3 There is no analysis of the criterion used or associated priority/weighting.

6.4 The Report boasts of an intricate, in depth methodology being used. This method type has the advantage of being readily scrutinised by others for consistency, robustness and transparency. However, no such method was used and a simplistic ‘traffic light’ system adopted in its place that is no more than an opinion (comments!) of the report author(s) with little or no supporting evidence to allow scrutiny/assessment by a third party. Thus the Report’s Methodology statement is inaccurate and grossly misleading as to its robustness and transparency.

6.5 The site selection stage is the most important, and critical, part of process. Only those properties deemed suitable will be further considered, other than possible new sites nominated at the alternative site stage.

6.6 Site rejection is inconsistent; the result is that the site selection process is not sound thus other sites that are suitable have been improperly rejected and have not been given proper consideration within the extended process. This, with other issues herein, brings into question the competency of the Policy Review Group.

7. Inconsistencies.

7.1. The inconsistencies throughout the report and ‘spreadsheets’ listing the sites at various stages are numerous (see appendix 2). The criterion boasted as applied to each site is not done so equally and on many occasions the criteria that should apply to some sites has been ignored so as to make it appear that some sites are more suitable than others.

7.2 The issue of C1 flood plains is consistent throughout. However, the Welsh Government guidelines states:

‘Areas at high risk of flooding should be avoided’.

7.3 The C1 flood areas cannot be deemed as ‘*high risk*’ as they have had no flooding since 1607. Even then it is considered that this flooding event was due to a tsunami.

7.4 The recent, unprecedented, storms, high tides and swells resulted in no floods occurring in, near or around Newport, therefore, supports ‘C1’ flood plains not being considered as ‘*high risk*’.

7.5 Further, the Council perceived no problems in 2007 in providing a Gypsy and Traveller site off Stephenson Street, adjacent the Transporter Bridge, which is within a designated flood plain (C2?) and an industrial area (it should be noted here that it remains a preferred site for those travellers occupying this site).

7.6 No criterion used (Welsh Government Guidelines or otherwise) are weighted or scored.

7.7 The Council have considered the ‘economic impact’ on areas adjacent new residential developments. They have considered the impact on Industrial Estates. Yet no such considerations have been applied to existing residential areas, when such impact (especially for those who live close to the proposed sites – see section 9) is catastrophic.

7.8 The Former Chicken Processing Plant was rejected in part as ‘*too large for its intended need*’. (Gypsy and Travellers Sites: Scrutiny Consultation 29 October 2012 Para 14.X). (See Appendix 4).

The size of this site is 8330m².

The Hartridge Farm Road site is 102,600m² (10 Hectares!!)

The Ringland Allotments site is 12,930m²

No reference to the ‘*large*’ size of these sites is made.

7.9 Hartridge Farm Road Site, as confirmed in the 240ish spreadsheets, is a play area/environmental space and has unsuitable topography. This has now been ignored/disregarded. If the reasons are due to the results of site visits then *all* sites needed to be visited so that all listed suitability statuses are checked for accuracies?

7.10 Bettws Playing Field was rejected in part because of ‘*potential for anti-social behaviour*’. No other site has been categorised with this yet two of the proposed sites in Ringland have been so identified, re The Site Appraisal, Appendix 4, by the Gwent Police Authority: (extract)

Crime data for a radius of 500 metres from the proposed site (i.e. Hartridge Farm Road)

<i>Offences</i>	<i>August 2012</i>	<i>September 2012</i>	<i>October 2012</i>	<i>November 2012</i>	<i>December 2012</i>	<i>January 2013</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>ASB</i>	42	30	34	36	31	26	199
<i>Burglary</i>	0	2	0	0	4	2	8
<i>Criminal Damage & Arson</i>	7	6	6	14	10	8	61
<i>Drugs</i>	0	5	2	0	1	1	9
<i>Vehicle Crime</i>	3	4	0	1	1	1	11
<i>Violent Crime</i>	6	0	0	1	1	3	20
<i>Other Crime</i>	1	4	9	2	1	3	20
<i>Total</i>	59	51	51	54	49	44	308

The Former Ringland Allotments present similar figures.

This indicates that of all of the 11 sites short listed the two proposed Ringland sites have, by far, the most potential for anti-social behaviour (and other crimes) an issue acknowledged by travellers. This was not identified as part of the overview of the 240

site stage, as was Bettws Playing Field, and totally ignored at the Site Appraisal Stage. Given the above circumstances what consideration has been given on the impact of their decisions on crime and disorder in this area? This is *not* a slight on the Gypsy and Travelling Community but a balance of the existing anti-social behavioural problems in the area with the emotiveness of the subject, and the location and size of the proposals. In circa 2005 the Hartridge Farm Road Site was subject of an illegal occupation of Travellers. This resulted in a very aggressive behaviour from pupils from the then Hartridge High School including stone throwing (see appendix 4).

7.11 This further puts into question the viability of any possible community cohesion in the area and supports the residents' fears below.

7.12 The Council has approached business and travellers on the many issues of site provision but has made no direct attempt to contact those residents most affected by the proposals. Only after pressure from residents did the Council hold a Public meeting in Ringland. However, this did not give the like for like attention to the residents most affected by the proposal as was given to the Gypsy and Traveller communities.

Re; Sustainability Appraisal/SEA Appendix 2 para J.1.2 (extract)

'The Gypsy and Traveller groups have been consulted at regular intervals regarding their requirements.'

Yet, even when it was the Council's intention to release the final sites, no attempt was made to consult those immediately affected by that decision to enquire about their 'requirements'.

7.13 At the Full Council Meeting dated 4 May 2013 the Council claimed that further consultation had taken place with the Gypsy and Traveller Families (page 3 of the minutes) extract:

Further consultation with Gypsy and Traveller families – Council was informed that of 24 adults within the families 21 had voted, all of whom identified their preferred option as the Hartridge Farm Road Site.

This was in a response to a claim by the Group, supported by an article in the South Wales Argus, that the Gypsy and Traveller families were opposed to the proposed sites.

What has been omitted from the minutes is the actual question (as requested by a Council Member during that meeting) asked of the families; the question was:

'Do you want to occupy the Hartridge Farm Road site or would you prefer each of your families being split up on smaller sites?'

This is a grossly, improper, question that only gives a choice of two (undesirable) scenarios. The question can only be deemed as a threat i.e. 'either accept this site or be split up'.

8. The Former Speedway Site

8.1 A highly controversial rejection.

8.2 This site had *'positive feedback from Gypsy and Traveller families and other members of the public who favoured it as a residential site'*. It was not so considered as its selection was based on it being a *transit site*. The Council refused to respond to the considerable feedback and consider it as a residential site, a strong contender, if only in part, to resolve this emotive matter.

8.3 The Council concluded it was less suitable, even though:

a) The Council's Scrutiny Consultation Report dated 29 October 2012 (Appendix 5) state (extract):

Former Speedway Site, Plover Close, Llanwern

- *Strongly favoured by two families.*
- *Would allow children to remain in their current schools.*
- *Close to where one family is already living, and where they are known in the local community.*
- *Walking distance to shops and services.*
- *Will eventually benefit from the services being developed at Glan Llyn.*

b) Police Authority appraisal (Scrutiny and Travellers Sites: Site Appraisal: Appendix 5) state (extracts):

'To the north approximately 100 metres from the proposed site is the new housing development on land originally owned by Llanwern Steelworks. The location of the proposed Gypsy and Traveller site is well screened from this housing development by thick foliage. To the east of the site is a Greenfield area between this and the site is foliage and a reën'.

The site can only be accessed along Longditch Road and Plover Close which is a no through road, this enhances the security of the site and creates a sense of ownership.

There are pedestrian footpaths along these roads which should allow safe movement on foot to local amenities.

There should be minimal movement past the site except from the small factory at the end of Plover Close.

It should be noted here that the Council have continually resisted such sites because:

- They are in, or close to, 'industrial' areas.
- They are on a protected flood plain.
- It was originally only considered as a transit site.

8.4 It should be further noted that Cardiff's Shirenewton Gypsy and Traveller site is used as an example by the Council as proof that larger sites can be managed. This may be the case but those Officers have failed to disclose to Council Members that both Cardiff's sites are:

- well away from residential areas
- adjacent to/in industrial areas
- are on C1 flood plains

8.5 Being away from residential areas being the major (if not the only) element of the success. Whilst this may not comply with guidelines it must be accepted that this is what both travelling and settled communities want and to ignore it will only fuel further negative emotions.

Why not follow such an example?

8.6 Torfaen County Council has allowed a residential development at Avondale Road that borders, and is adjacent, an existing industrial area, why does Newport City Council appear to be adamant that residential development in such areas is not permitted/desired (Glan Lyn??)?

9. Residents Closest to Hartridge Farm Road and Ringland Allotment Sites Concerns

9.1 Size of the Site

9.2 Its dominance over the immediate small Hartridge Farm Road hamlet of 11 houses:

When assessing the suitability of sites in rural or semi-rural settings, local planning authorities should ensure that the scale of such sites does not dominate the nearest settled community.

(Extract from Communities and Local Government Planning Policy for Traveller Sites March 2013)

Five of these properties are less than 6m away from the proposed site (see Appendix 6)

9.3 The value of their properties:

Because of the national perception of Gypsy and Traveller Communities (rightly or wrongly) the property value becomes worthless and will result in the residents becoming a 'prisoner' of their own property and being forced into negative equity. Their freedom of choice to move will be taken away.

This is evidenced generally in the media (see Appendix 7)

Further evidence is the property adjacent the Shirenewton site in Cardiff

Further, more direct evidence is Hartridge Farm Road itself:

- Two properties on are the market and, initially, attracted a lot of interest. However upon becoming aware of the proposal all interest is withdrawn. One property has had the asking price significantly reduced but remains unsold.
- A further two properties have considered selling because the elderly owners of one of them are finding the property too big to manage. The Estate Agents have

all advised that it is best to wait till the matter of the Traveller site is sorted as any interest will be withdrawn with the awareness of the site.

The Council has failed to:

Extract from Communities and Local Government Planning Policy for Traveller Sites March 2013:

- *Relate the number of pitches or plots to the circumstances of the specific size and location of the site and the surrounding population's size and density*

9.4 The likely antisocial behaviour 'overspill' from the nearby estate(s).

9.5 The appalling lack of direct consultation and care shown by the Council to the affects such decisions would have on these residents.

9.6 So often quoted are the human rights of the Gypsy and Travelling communities, yet these residents appear to not have any!!

10. Public Meeting dated 5 February 2013

10.1 This meeting was organised by the Ringland Matters Group.

10.2 Invitations (amongst others) to attend sent 25 January 2013 to:

Councillor David Atwell (Langstone Ward and Chair of Scrutiny): other commitments and did not attend or send a representative from Scrutiny.

Will Godfrey CEO – no response

Mark Hand Development Services Officer – Declined due to concerns for his well being (see Appendix 8).

10.3 It seems that, in the main, the Council was intent on keeping the Newport East residents who had strong feelings regarding the proposal at a distance.

10.4 The Council also further, initially, refused to meet the Ringland residents on 'home' ground (as so done in other wards) and offered only a meeting in the Civic Centre. It was only pressure from Ward Councillors, residents and Ringland Matters Group that eventually 'forced' a meeting within the Ringland Ward. This seems to confirm that the Council are aware of the anti-social problems that unfortunately exist within Ringland but have not considered these implications in their selection of the proposed sites process as they have with other sites.

10.5 The meeting consisted in the main of Ringland residents generally but did include a representation from gypsy travellers.

10.6 As expected there were resounding objections to the Hartridge Farm Road and Ringland Allotment sites.

The meeting was taken by surprise that these objections were also supported by the travellers (see appendix 9).

11. Full Council Meetings

11.1 Meeting Dated 4 June 2013

At this meeting Councillor Morris, a member of the Gypsy and Traveller Sites Review Group, displayed a complete lack of understanding of such sites. He did not know what the basic commodity of what a traveller site consisted of, i.e. what a pitch was.

Councillor Morris queried the scale of the site, explaining he was unaware of the possible number of caravans likely to be sited at this location. The Development Services Manager clarified that a pitch typically contained two or three caravans and was comparable to a two or three bedroom house. The Hartridge Farm Road site would contain 43 pitches by 2026 which could be up to 129 caravans.

(Extract from page 4 of the Minutes above meeting)

He obviously assumed during his role within the Policy Review Group that a pitch housed a single caravan and not up to 4 (even possibly 5) per pitch. He was visually perplexed when the officer confirmed that it could be up to 3 (which itself is not strictly correct!!) resulting in 129 caravans (possibly 172+ in actual terms!!). Yet the Council accepted the report and agreed for the LDP to go forward to Public Consultation.

11.2 Reasons for Councillors accepting the Report could be seen as a flagrant dereliction of their duty of care for the best for Newport as a whole. Their ‘fear’ of a Gypsy Site in their Ward or close to their home was a major point (if not the only one). The correctness of the procedure or the interest of Newport was secondary (if at all).

(Re: The Good Councillor’s Guide 4th Addition 2013)

11.3 The following should be noted:

- E mail from Councillor David Williams dated 23/06/2014 (see Appendix 10)
- E mail to all Councillors dated 20/12/2013):- only 5 of the 50 Councillors responded. 4 of which voted against the LDP and 1 (see Appendix 11) voted for the LDP
- Flyer to Langstone Residents from Councillor David Atwell and Councillor Ray Mogford. (see Appendix 12)

Councillor Atwell (Chair of Scrutiny) canvassed personally from door to door to encourage Langstone residents to support the LDP offering no reasoned argument why the proposed sites were suitable other than to ensure the sites did not go to their ward.

(Re: The Good Councillor’s Guide 4th Addition 2013)

12. Conclusion

12.1 The sites selected and all consequential supporting documentation is base on the initial site selection procedure that is seriously fundamentally flawed in many areas as highlighted and evidenced, with examples, within this statement.

12.2 Further, the supporting documentation, although not contained within this statement due to the enormity of those documents, contains ambiguous statements that, if required, can also be evidenced.

12.3 As procedure is not fair, robust or transparent and contains no rationale its soundness is seriously questionable.

End of Statement