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## Proposed Travellers Site

### Swaffham Prior Meeting Notes

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Below are the notes from a recent meeting at Swaffham Prior Village Hall.

Swafftham Prior is calling for your assistance to oppose this proposal. In substance this means completing and returning the two questionnaires linked to the Consultation Document before the 16th August.

By 7.15pm there was standing room only and murmurs of 'this is the most people I have seen from the village'. Over 250 people attended the meeting, and some people had to listen to the meeting from outside the hall.



David Greenfield, a resident, was appointed as Chair, and he introduced the subject:-

A 107-page Consultation Document has been issued by East Cambridgeshire Council. It considers options for how East Cambridgeshire could grow and develop over the next 15 years. Two documents have been issued, one for Ely and one for every other area of the District. It equates to a Site Allocation Plan, and will form part of the Local Development Framework (LDF). A number of issues are covered: housing growth, transport, schools and sites for gypsies and travellers.

A Questionnaire is linked to the Consultation Document and it can be completed on line or by post.

The first LDF produced was called a Core Strategy and was adopted in 2009, so the procedure has commenced. The new national coalition government is going to replace LDFs, but as yet there is not definition of the replacement. Target numbers will be removed.

Only Section 11 of the Consultation Document is relevant to Swaffham Prior directly. A proposal for six pitches for travellers is proposed for Goodwin Farm. A pitch equates to 2 to 3 caravans, therefore one can anticipate that 6 pitches will equate to 18 caravans. The site is owned by Cambs County Council, and is considered sustainable e.g. there is a bus stop within 600m.

In attendance to take questions and give advice were David Brown (County Cllr), Allen Alderson (District Cllr) and John Colvill (Parish Cllr).

The debate was open to the floor:-

**Comment** - I am glad this meeting has been called. The quoted 1966 Act has been superceded by a later Act. This subject has been discussed at a Parish Meeting.

**Comment** - this proposal should be considered as a live proposal until it has been ruled out.

**Comment** - the proposed site can be located outside the village envelope.

**Comment** - Burwell has a large traveller's site and Bottisham has a small site. Recognition must be given for what has been done.

**Question** - are the people who will occupy the proposed site already resident in the district and on sites?

**Answer** - the site is designated for extended families. There is a very great shortage of sites for travellers with extended families. People who eventually live on the site will not already necessarily live in the area. East Cambs is looking for a site of six pitches for extended families to stop *ad hoc* camping. The Council is trying to solve an identified problem.

**Comment** - the designation is for extended families. The document does describe the pitches and the number of caravans. A pitch is the space required to accommodate one household and their caravans. Pitches on Council-run sites generally accommodate 2-3 caravans, a brick dayroom and parking/garden space.

**Comment** - I would like to make the case for cautiously welcoming the proposal (*unhappy murmurs within the room*). I am a former civil servant (*more murmurs and hissing*). My background is in planning and transport issues and in regional and national planning for travellers. Fact: legally over one third of gypsy families are homeless i.e. they have no lawful place to live. This is largely because casual stopping places have been closed (gated and bunded). Those following the travellers' life have nowhere to live. Since the 1980s it has been up to local authorities to provide sites. An irrational fear of travellers has developed.

**Comment** - our thoughts are not based on an irrational fear - we have experience of travellers. Some are good and some are not good. Some do not integrate (*loud applause within the room*)

**Comment** - I am a midwife. Midwives cannot visit sites on their own, they visit in pairs. The reason why we visit sites with caution is because of the negative attitude with which we are received

**Comment** - look at Cottenham and see the problems people experience

*People began talking over each other and someone said 'let's not degenerate into traveller mode'.*

**Comment** - fundamentally there is inadequate provision which drives travellers to camp *ad hoc*

**Comment** - when sites are provided *ad hoc* camping continues.

**Comment** - beware of being prejudiced even before people arrive. Hostility breeds hostility. Travellers are present at Swaffham Bulbeck. They are very pleasant, and get on well with the community.

**Comment** from District Councillor - I deal regularly with travellers. Very often unauthorised camping equates to shed thefts. The two seem to go together.

**Comment** - when travellers are asked why they do not go to authorised sites they reply that they do not want to move into houses and authorised sites. They want to camp *ad hoc*

**Comment** - the cost of setting up the camp will fall to the District Council. It will take two years to go through the various committees, planning etc.

**Question** - they are known as travellers so why do they need permanent sites?

**Comment** - the County Council will not be objecting to the site as they are happy and it would be difficult to object. It is part of their remit. They won't sell the site.

**Question** - what about affordable housing instead?

**Answer** - no.

**Comment** - East Cambs DC were approached last summer and stated that 'they were not promoting the site'. The opposite view now seems to be the case.

**Comment** - Cambridgeshire now already has more travellers' sites than most counties. Sites act like a honey pot, and cause a self perpetuating problem

**Comment** by a person from the Carter Jonas partnership - unless the community opposes this scheme it will happen. Object within the timescale and on planning grounds. That is the only way to stop this scheme.

**Question** - what are the planning grounds?

**Comment** - there was a south Norfolk case. It was long and costly. The community was well mobilised and set up a fund. The planning consultant tailored the work he undertook according to the funds available. A possible representative was introduced to the meeting. He had previously been employed by East Cambs DC and Taylor Vintner.

**Comment** - a fund has already been established

A show of hands was taken in the room. Four people did not oppose the scheme the rest of the people in the room (approx. 250) were against the proposal.

Names were gathered on a clipboard passed around the room and on a table outside

**Comment** - I have some experience regarding live proposals for gypsy sites and would like to make some points:

- 1 A number of authorities are dropping the LDF proposals. The national coalition government is dropping their guidelines re. numbers. It's difficult to understand why the District Council is soldiering on. There is no need at the present time.
- 2 The timescale is inappropriate.
- 3 The big question is about need.
- 4 Travellers do not respect county boundaries. There is an over dependence on sites in north Cambs. South Cambs is actually better because of the road networks

**Comment** - the traditional reasons for travellers visiting has gone (e.g. crop picking). There is no work here for them here.

**Comment** - identify who is going to pay. Without that definition it is illogical.

**Comment** - the site is green field land in agricultural use. The latter will be a loss

**Comment** - Cottenham is an authorised site but tensions continue.

**Comment** - act now. Express your will. Ensure that the community view is known

**Comment** - don't be a NIMBY. We need well thought out reasons why the site is inappropriate.

**Comment** - the consultation process will be heard at the Nov 9 meeting.

**Comment** - consider what are the reasons for selecting the site?

**Comment** - consider what are the reasons for opposing the site?

**Comment** - the Consultation Document does not justify the selection of the site.

**Comment** - has even the significant need for travellers' sites been identified or calculated?

**Comment** - the Document describes the proximity of the site to a settlement with local services, these equate to: 2 churches, 1 school, 1 pub and 1 hall.

**Comment** - we do not have local services. The school does not have the capacity, and the school building is in poor condition

**Comment** - we need advice prior to completing the Questionnaire

**Chair** - this meeting was called to gauge feelings and we can now make an Action Plan:

- a) Make available information for completing the questionnaire.  
The system is built against people. If you say nothing you get nothing.
- b) Employ a consultant to put in a representation against the proposal
- c) Maximise numbers. Talk to your neighbours and get them to join in. Get paper copies of the Questionnaire and help those who do not have IT access.

**Question** - do we know the occupancy of existing sites?

**Answer** - nobody has undertaken a survey

**Question** - what about traffic movement, speed humps, ecology? Identify issues and increase costs.

**Planning Consultant** - there are four good grounds for opposing the scheme:

- a) No demonstrable need
- b) No qualitative need. There is no current use of Swaffham Prior by travellers.
- c) The impact on the countryside.
- d) The impact on local services (practical problems, financial problems, the ebb and flow of children).

**Comment** - there are some travellers in the parish.

**Comment** - at Cottenham travellers got a foot hold and the numbers got bigger and bigger.

**Comment** from Fireman - I have attended numerous fires e.g. at Fenland and the Blackhorse site (A14), and have met hostility. We have needed a police escort. We have had to disinfect all our equipment and clothing because of human excrement. Sites have an environmental and health impact. Not all travellers may be bad, but a significant number are.

The date for returning the Questionnaire is 16 August 2010

**Comment** - the site will segment the village.

**Question** - I recognise your opposition to the travellers. I have no experience of gypsies. Doesn't the school offer them an opportunity for education?

**Answer** - my experience is that gypsy children were disruptive in school, and the local children's education was lessened. Extra money was not given. Gypsy children often have special needs and money from within the school is diverted. Local children suffer at the expense of gypsies.

**Comment** - gypsies are non taxpayers and non contributors.

**Comment** - the site is a small part of a larger piece of land. The number of pitches may be increased in the future. The Council may say, 'We have not had much trouble perhaps we should increase the numbers'

**Comment** - gypsies equal nothing but trouble.

**Comment** - they are a detriment to the countryside and property.

**Comment** - traffic is an issue.

**Comment** - I have met with the head teacher of the school and they have eight spare places in September. 12 - 18 Children may be anticipated and they could not all fit in.

**Comment** - highways demanded that a proposed landscaping business construct two new lay byes.

**Comment** - I am a teacher and would like to clarify the funding issue. There is one day in the year when the number of children in the school is counted. Travellers' children may not be present on that one day and may be excluded. It cannot be relied upon that travellers' children will boost funds

**Comment** - travellers' children often have special needs and need to be stated. The latter takes time and money. The children may have gone before the stating has been completed - it can take two years.

**Comment** - councils are under no legal obligation to provide sites for travellers.

**Comment** - the Council does fund things that they are not obliged to.

**Question** - if we are successful is the site going to be forever vulnerable to similar proposals.

**Answer** - it will be excluded to at least 2025.

**Comment** - some gypsies are OK. I spoke to a gypsy I know about the proposal and he said, 'crikey you don't want them near you - you'll have horses on the road, loose dogs and children throwing stones'.

**Comment** - remarks detrimental to people will be discounted. We need pointers. The consultant will set out pointers within one week.

**Comment** - from the Consultation process, the scheme will enter the Strategic Plan and then pass through the traditional planning process.

**Comment** - if it goes into the LDF it WILL happen.

**Chair** - filter out emotions and work on the points appropriate to the planning system.

**Comment** - just to discount the financial side. The site could be sold to a private gypsy for their extended family. Over half of gypsy sites are privately owned.

**Question** - if we all object on the same grounds, are we lumped together as one objection? Will it carry any weight?

**Answer** - quantity has a quality of its own.

**Comment** - quality conveys the feeling of the community and this is important. Use the template, but articulate your thoughts in your own way. Quality does carry weight, but add your own individual views. Use village web site for communicating data. Communicate also through the Parish Council. The latter [Swaffham Prior] has sent a preliminary letter listing its objections and will follow through with more detail. It is important to object on the correct grounds. Target objections.

**Comment** - within the Consultation Documentation there is a List of Rejected Sites with reasons given:

- 1 detrimental impact on neighbouring dwellings
- 2 detrimental impact on appearance of area

**Comment** - gypsies desire separation from communities to retain their own privacy and identity.

Request to be kept informed by E Cambs.

The village is uncommon in having two windmills and one SSI.

We could generate a petition.

**Comment** - the County Council web site gives reasons why an objection will fail (Section 1.2.2).

**Comment** - the Swaffham Prior proposed travellers' site meets the criteria for why a site would fail therefore the Officer who proposed Swaffham Prior should be fired

**Comment** - three farms existed. One was sold and two were put down to sheep. The land could be purchased for allotments for the community.

**Question** - is there a Saxon burial in the field?

**Answer** - in the top field by the pylons cropmarks are visible and may represent a Bronze/Iron Age settlement. I am a retired archaeologist.

**Comment** from tenant Farmer - Galley Hill close to here has Saxon burials and Roman remains. The latter were excavated in 1992. I have made considerable environmental improvements to the farm. My tenancy ends in 2013.

**Comment** - we should inform the neighbouring villages.

**Comment** - urgency is required because 16 August, the deadline for objections, is close.

**Comment** - let's establish a Committee to follow up the ideas expressed at the meeting.

**Answer** - a Committee has already been established, and should continue.

**Comment** - the village magazine, The Crier, will be out shortly and will spread the word.

**Comment** - if it goes ahead 2013 will be the earliest date for construction

**Comment** from Goodwin Farm - Cambs CC did say that they would not sell the farm because they had planning ideas for the future.

The meeting closed at c.10pm.

**Claire Halpin-McDonald**