

Keswick and Intwood Special Parish Council Meeting 24th June 2008
Minutes of the meeting held at The Reading Rooms, Keswick at 19.30.

The meeting discussed South Norfolk Council Planning Application 2008/1137 by Broadland Housing Association relating to the proposal for the construction of a permanent gypsy site, containing 8 pitches, a communal compound, play area, access road and reed bed drainage system, together with landscaping and screen planting.

Present: Alan Gelder (Chairman) (AG); John Payne (JP); Joe Loades (JL); Diana Bulman (DB); John Morrison (JM); Phillip Brooks (Clerk).

Also present: Tony Cooke, Housing Renewal Manager, South Norfolk Council (SNC) (TC); Andrew Savage, Development Director, Broadland Housing (AS); Judith Virgo (Norfolk County Councillor) (JV); Garry Wheatley (Councillor Cringleford Ward) (GW); Christopher Kemp (Councillor Cringleford Ward) (CK); and 13 parishioners.

1. To consider apologies for absence: Resolved to accept apologies from Lars Tibell (LT) (away from Norwich on other business); Linda Thursby (LTh) (attending a previously arranged school appointment).

2. Planning Application 2008/1137: TC began by out-lining his role as Housing Renewal Manager at SNC. He explained the need for more authorised permanent gypsy sites to bridge the growing gap between the needs (for gypsy sites) and the provision made so far. There was a need for 32 pitches in the South Norfolk area and research showed this was likely to be best met by small sites of six to eight pitches. The site being discussed was unauthorised but had been used for some 18 months and it was now considered that it should be investigated as an authorised site. Furthermore, the recently secured government funding enabled the planning application to go forward. As additional background information, TC said that a feature of the site would be an "Allocation Register" of formal applicants (for the pitches); and there were ongoing discussions with Broadland Housing about management of the site.

AS described Broadland Housing's role as a housing management company. He said that SNC and Broadland Housing would cooperate and Broadland Housing would manage the site – the organisation has housing support teams familiar with dealing with this type of arrangement. The allocation of pitches (to the gypsies) would be on a local residence policy – that is to say a county heritage must be shown by the applicants and would be more stringent than normal for housing. So far as managing the site was concerned, AS said there would be a policy of "zero tolerance"; and that Broadland Housing could demonstrate a track record of achieving this elsewhere. The layout of the site would be based on government guidelines worked up with Salford University to be sure that everything would be built in the right way. He explained that the buildings themselves could be described as "one bedroom flats without the bedroom provided" (bedroom accommodation being provided in the gypsies' caravans). Finally, AS said the site

“ticked all of the requirements boxes” and there was a willing landowner too. Regarding the adjacent landowners, AS said discussions were ongoing and further meetings were planned for the coming week. It was noted that other sites had been offered but these had been turned down for a range of different reasons.

3. Public Participation. It was resolved to adjourn the meeting for public participation including questions from the parishioners attending. (A summary of the questions and answers follows:)

Q1. *What would be the length of a tenancy agreement on the site?*

A1. A probationary period would lead on to a permanent tenancy (i.e. there would be security of tenure); but there were currently discussions in the House of Lords to establish the future relationship between caravan dwellers and land owners (AS said he would confirm the position in this regard when he could. **(Action AS)**). He added that the rent for a pitch would be £75 per week and the rating would be Band A for council tax purposes. There would be powers of eviction from the site for non-conformance with the tenancy agreement.

Q2. *Would Broadland Housing have any extra powers to manage this site (in addition to those usually administered elsewhere)?*

A2. There would be no extra powers. In response to concerns about other gypsies coming onto the site without proper agreements, AS said Broadland Housing would not be putting 40 years reputation and commercial management expertise on the line without being confident that they could manage any likely eventualities connected with this venture.

Q3. *Gypsies and travellers tend to make their own rules. How is Broadland Housing going to manage this?*

A3 It was not anticipated that this would be a problem with a properly authorised and managed site with legally binding tenancies that are enforceable.

Q4. *Had any payments been made for this or any alternative site to the land owners by SNC?*

A4 Yes, some had been made to compensate for set aside payments.

Q5. *Why should the prospective users of the site start paying rent and council tax? Might they not simply move to another site?*

A5. There are gypsies who do want to pay for somewhere to bring up their children.

Q6. *What is there to stop the site expanding?*

A6. Broadland Housing will not be seeking an extension of the planning permission. Eight pitches are enough and that is what the families want too. Discussions are taking place with the adjoining land owner to ensure there is no “spread”.

Q7. *What are the plans to accommodate livestock i.e. horses?*

A7. The plans do not include provision for horses but there are kennels for dogs. The possession of animals will form part of the allocation process.

Q8. *Can security be guaranteed?*

A8. It is very difficult to guarantee absolute security in any circumstance. The location of the site is placed in such a way to give the best chance of achieving this.

Q9. *What is being done to deal with crime as the police seem powerless at present?*

A9. The current difficulty is that the site is unauthorised and that makes it impossible to manage and police. With the new site there will be a more effective policy on policing.

Q10. *What is the size of the site likely to be (in terms of the number of caravans parked there)?*

A10. Up to three with a maximum of four vans per pitch. (It was pointed out that this meant a possibility of 32 caravans whereas the *Design and Access Statement* (para. 6.2 Parking) published with the site plans suggested no more than 16. TC said the *Design and Access Statement* would need to be adjusted in this regard.) **(Action TC).**

Q11. *What are the arrangements to provide schools for the children?*

A11. The children already go to local schools and that arrangement will continue.

Q12. *What will happen to any vans moving into the surrounding area?*

A12. They will be quickly moved on.

Q13. *What powers are the police going to have in relation to the site?*

A13. TC said he would report back on the powers the police will have. **(Action TC).**

Q14. *Why not just build houses with the government funding being made available?*

A14. The site is not entirely government funded and there are problems in dealing with a community that does not want to live in houses.

Q15. *How many people will be allowed on each pitch?*

A15. A pitch is for a husband, wife and their children. It is not for extended families. Those limits will be set in the tenancy agreement and Broadland Housing will be on site four days each week to monitor compliance.

Q16. *Some sites have allegedly had the plumbing and sanitary ware removed to accommodate animals. What will stop that this time?*

A16. This will be a managed site and SNC has spent a lot of time examining what works on such site and why it works. Best practice will be brought onto this site and there will be a policy of "zero tolerance" in the day today management of what happens there. AS said he would provide written confirmation of "zero tolerance" that parishioners could relate to. (Copies of this written confirmation would be circulated to everyone at Keswick New Hall.) **(Action AS).**

Q17. *The wildlife survey took place in the winter. Wasn't that misleading as no bats or tawny owls would have been observed anyway?*

A17. The ecological impact will need looking at again to be sure this is right. (**Action TC**).

Q18. *Is there an exit strategy for Broadland Housing if everything goes wrong?*

A18. Broadland Housing is not in the game of giving up and (if approved) the site would need to be made to work. In extreme circumstances, sites have been cleared in the past but that was not envisaged here.

Q19. *What compensation will residents of Keswick New Hall receive if the site does go ahead?*

A19. If planning permission is given there will not be another site within a 20 mile radius. [Additional information provided at this point was that a meeting would be taking place with Keswick New Hall residents to improve the visual impact and make the view for them as pleasing as possible. Consideration would also be given to the impact and effect of any smoke arising from the site being blown in the direction of the Hall.]

Q20. *The access road is too long – why can't there be a shorter route from the A47?*

A20. Access to and from the site via the A47 was not a practical alternative.

Q21. *What happens to the residents while the site is being built?*

A21. Many of the families it is anticipated would occupy the site have dispersed but contact is being maintained with them and they will be brought back when the work is complete.

Q22. *Many of the answers given imply that this is already a "done deal". Is that the case?*

A22 Absolutely not. The decision will be taken at a planning meeting on 23rd July commencing at 13.30 at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton. There is an opportunity for anyone to object at that meeting but it should be noted the objections must be compelling, well presented and be based on planning considerations. Personal feelings would have no influence on the decision whatsoever.

AG asked the parishioners attending whether they were content with the time that had been devoted to their questions and whether the information provided had been adequate. There was unanimous agreement that this was the case although there was concern that information (by SNC) about the planning application prior to the meeting had been poor. It was pointed out that all of the information was available on the SNC website. The response was that not everyone has access to the Internet and there was a duty of care by SNC to cater for everyone. At this point the public participation section of the meeting ended.

DB asked for further clarification of "zero tolerance" and what happens when any resident wished to move on? TC said that once travellers have a tenancy they cease to travel but they simply don't like residing within bricks and mortar. AS confirmed that he

would get 200 copies of the powers they have to enforce zero tolerance delivered to AG for distribution around Keswick New Hall (Q 16). **(Action AS and AG).**

JM enquired how many other of the 32 pitches mentioned in the introduction by TC had been identified? TC said this was the first one (not just in the local area but in the whole of the UK) and the remainder were being sought. This project was therefore definitely breaking new ground. JM then asked where the existing residents would go if the planning application was refused. TC said it would then be for the land owner to take action to get them moved on. AG added that if this happened the adjoining land owner was ready to take action too.

JL asked what the impact would be for the local council tax? TC said the capital cost would be met by central government and other costs would be covered by the rent paid so there would be zero impact on the rates. AS said that Broadland Housing would be the landlord via a long term ground lease and that (as landlord) they had the right insurance and maintenance contract in place to meet all eventualities. JL then enquired about the qualifications for occupancy. These requirements were explained as prospective tenants having to demonstrate that they had lived in South Norfolk for the previous six months; or in the last three years to have spent 9 months residing in South Norfolk.

JP said he felt let down by having been asked at an earlier meeting not to draw attention to the project; and then SNC suddenly “going public” on their website, especially as three alternative sites had been suggested (by JP). TC said he would look back at the suggestions but could not guarantee withdrawing the application although AS suggested the grant might be moved if a suitable site was found. AG added that he also wondered about the suitability of other sites. **(Action TC).**

AG summed up the proceedings and noted that it would be better for parishioners to have some influence on the course of action decided (in relation to the proposed site) rather than have something else imposed on them. Nevertheless, he thought the crucial element in the plan was how effective Broadland Housing would be in managing the site. That was absolutely paramount and would determine not only the success of this site but the development of similar projects nationwide.

A further meeting was fixed for 19.00 hours on Monday 30th June to agree the Parish Council’s response to the planning application based on the information provided and discussion that had taken place during the evening. AG thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting closed at 22.10.

Phillip Brooks
Parish Clerk
27th June 2008