

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF TASK AND FINISH PANEL ON TRAVELLER ISSUES
HELD ON THURSDAY, 8 JUNE 2006
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET EPPING
AT 7.30 - 9.25 PM**

Members Present:	P McMillan (Chairman), Mrs D Borton, Mrs A Cooper, Ms S Stavrou and J M Whitehouse
Other members present:	Mrs D Collins
Apologies for Absence:	(none)
Officers Present	J Preston (Head of Planning and Economic Development) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)

1. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

None reported.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Mrs D Collins, Ms S Stavrou and Mrs A Cooper declared personal, non prejudicial interests in matters relating to Paynes Lane, Nazeing.

3. PROGRESS ON CURRENT WORK

(a) Paynes Lane, Nazeing

The Head of Planning and Economic Development reported on discussions held with the glasshouse operators adjacent to the site. It had become clear that the company plans involving securing, clearance work and building a glasshouse on part of the site breached planning policy. He asked the Panel to feed back comments on the approach the Council should take to remediation work. The Head of Environmental Services would report this to the Consultant.

The Panel noted their discussions with residents of Paynes Lane and the assurance given that action would be undertaken to deal with the site.

Recommended that the work agreed by the Cabinet be pursued as a matter of priority.

(b) Birchfield and Hamlett Hill

Noted that steps had been taken to clear up the site at Birchfield involving the removal of the top layer of the land. Reference was made to the outstanding planning appeal which had now been determined against the applicants and access issues. In relation to Hamlett Hill noted that there were still outstanding clear up issues.

4. PLANNING FOR GYPSY AND TRAVELLER CARAVAN SITES - ODPM CIRCULAR (FEBRUARY 2006)

The Head of Planning and Environmental Development presented the circular. He referred to changes to the definition of a gypsy/traveller and possible implications of this for the District. The changes might impact on the number of application submitted by travellers and contained advise on identifying sites. The Circular explored the feasibility of sites in urban areas and associated infrastructure issues. Envisaged that the Local Development Framework would comprise provisions reflecting the changes.

Noted the circular suggested that the number of 'mixed sites' used for both residential and business purposes should be increased. Concern was expressed about this.

Reported that the first draft of the new Local Plan contained no real changes to traveller policy. The Policy recognised that the Council was a Green Belt Authority and that special circumstances must be demonstrated before a development could be granted. This could restrict the Councils ability to provide more traveller sites. The Circular considered the option of removing land from the Green Belt for the provision of sites to address needs. The Panel noted how this might work.

Noted that it was expected that the new Local Development would explore Traveller Housing needs. The Council had already responded to the Circular.

Recommended that the information circulated at the meeting on applications authorised be updated on a regular basis and available to Members for consideration.

The Panel concluded that the issues in the Circular could not be determined over a short timescale and therefore more suited to Standing Panel review.

Considered the impact on officer time and resources of providing/ maintaining Transit Sites.

5. 'LOOKING BACK MOVING FORWARD' - STUDY COMMISSIONED BY THE ESSEX PLANNING OFFICERS ASSOCIATION ON TRAVELLER NEEDS IN ESSEX

The Head of Planning and Economic Development presented the study.

In response considered issues around ownership of authorised private sites and how these might be funded by the occupants. A Members suggested the possibility of involving Housing Associations in the management of sites.

The Panel considered page 69 comprising a recent count of traveller caravans across Essex showing the position for Epping Forest. This indicated that the District accommodated 157 caravans, exceeding the totals attributed to most other areas in the County. This was possible because of the Districts proximity to London which facilitated traveller business activity.

Suggested that a two fold approach be taken involving:

- (a) Action to deal with unauthorised sites;

- (b) The provision of new sites to address the needs assessments

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE/WORK PROGRAMME

Recommended:

That the Task and Finish Panel be disbanded and;

That the Environmental and Planning Services Standing Panel be asked to monitor issues in item 1

That the items yet to be determined – (namely items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) be referred to the Standing Panel for consideration and action due to the likely timescales involved.

ACTION:

Head of Planning and Economic Development and Chairman to draft final report covering work undertaken by Panel and the above recommendations for the OSC on 6 July 2006.

7. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Final Report of the Panel.