Provision of Gypsy and Traveller Sites in Cranbrook – Responding to Community Concerns

7 March 2016 – Notes

In Attendance

Ed Freeman, Service Lead – Planning, East Devon District Council
Claire Rodway, Senior Planning Officer, East Devon District Council
Cllr Kim Bloxham, Cranbrook Town Council
Cllr Shaun West, Cranbrook Town Council
Cllr Phil Norgate, Cranbrook Town Council
Janine Gardner, Town Clerk, Cranbrook Town Council

Cranbrook Town Councillors had previously circulated a number of questions to the Service Lead – Planning and the Senior Planning Officer who responded at the meeting as follows:

1. Why were all the points raised by those who commented about the potential economic and social impacts of such a policy ignored?

East Devon District Council had carried out consultation on behalf of the Planning Inspectorate who could consider and respond to any representations at their discretion. The views of those who had submitted representations were not ignored but informed the Planning Inspector’s view of the Local Plan.

The call for possible gypsy and traveller sites had closed but if any additional site(s) came forward, the District Council would still consider those. The District Council was still considering all the options, and it was not clear at this stage whether there would be a need to utilise all 30 pitches in Cranbrook. The needs assessment identified a need for 22 new pitches up to 2019, and a further 15 pitches up to 2034. Two pitches have received permission since the needs assessment, leaving 35 new pitches to be found. The Local Plan runs up to 2031 (rather than 2034, like the needs assessment) so East Devon District Council deemed it sensible to run the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document to the same end date as the Local Plan. Since five pitches are needed from 2029-2034, a reduction in timescale of three years would also reduce the pitches needed by three.

With regard to the concerns which had been expressed in relation to the social impact as well as healthcare and education provision, ample provision would be planned and delivered as Cranbrook grew further and as part of the Cranbrook Masterplan. Appropriate service provision would have to be ensured in order to make the proposal deliverable.
There was no evidence to suggest that potential buyers were deterred by the provision of gypsy and traveller pitches. For example, Teignbridge District Council had an overall need for 70 pitches and are delivering these at Haldon Hill (Housing Association traveller site of 15 pitches), as urban extensions to Exeter and Newton Abbott (a total of 48 pitches – 25 of which are understood to be provided as part of a 2,500 home scheme) and through other, smaller permissions. There were also examples in South Somerset where gypsy and traveller sites were running smoothly (Merryfield and Tintinhull, both provided by the District Council). The co-location of gypsy and traveller pitches and settled homes needed to be well-integrated and made attractive. Often the fear and stereotypes of gypsies and travellers did not match reality and the management and maintenance of sites is key to their success. Gypsy and traveller sites could be managed by the local authority, a housing association or a developer and the managing body maintained control over who resided on those sites.

2. Why is East Devon District Council (EDDC) going against all recommendations contained in the Devon Partnership gypsy and traveller accommodation assessment and looking to provide up to 30 pitches in one East Devon Town?

Government guidance suggested a maximum of 15 pitches on any one site and East Devon District Council’s preference was a provision of several sites. The Cranbrook Masterplan would incorporate consultation questions on gypsies and travellers. This would inform future proposals which would also depend on negotiations and needs. There were currently no proposals relating to specific locations within the parish boundaries of Cranbrook.

The needs of gypsies and travellers were changing all the time and unauthorised encampments were being monitored more closely. It was thought that future ample provision of authorised sites would reduce the risk of unauthorised sites.

3. Why are EDDC not looking at land they currently own e.g. land in Gittisham?

East Devon District Council were considering all publically-owned land across the district. The land at Gittisham was allocated in the Local Land as employment land and a covenant prescribed the use as green and playing fields at the moment. This would be evaluated as part of the call for sites.

4. What is the breakdown between gypsy and traveller groups?

It was currently not possible to state how many of the maximum of 30 sites in Cranbrook might be occupied by gypsies or travellers in the future and there is no standard formula which would enable such a calculation because the Government encompass everyone with a nomadic lifestyle under the term ‘Traveller’. The District Council refers to Gypsies and Travellers because the groups are culturally different and the public perceives them as different groups. The basic requirements for pitches are the same (space for living/sleeping and touring vehicles, a ‘dayroom’ containing cooking and washing facilities and garden/recreation space) but the layout of pitches and associated landscaping may differ as New Travellers, particularly, prefer informality.
The total of 37 pitches (up to 30 of which are to be located at Cranbrook) is based on an identification of needs by consultants after they had consulted with gypsies and travellers locally but they did not differentiate between the groups. An approximate split of 75% gypsies and 25% travellers could be assumed.

5. Why are EDDC continuing to look at provision for gypsy and traveller groups together when the gypsy and traveller assessment makes it clear that separation is essential? Even the Portfolio Holder (Cllr Moulding) makes this point in his comments dated 8 August 2015.

See above.

6. One of the major justifications for the additional pitches was the fact that existing gypsy families are growing and that they require additional pitches. Why has only one family suggested an expanded family site? If the demand is there an expectation would have been for more to come forward.

Gypsy and traveller families had diverse reasons for not engaging with the planning system, e.g. the landowner not being prepared to expand provision, the cost of planning applications and related documents, e.g. various assessments, as well as a clash with their beliefs relating to how land should be managed.

7. Why do EDDC continue to ignore the views of the community and the consortium?

The feelings of the community in Cranbrook would need to be addressed and managed moving forward. It was unfortunate that the amendment to the Local Plan which proposed the provision of up to 30 pitches had been introduced late in the process. Cranbrook had been nominated to include the majority of gypsy and traveller sites in East Devon because it featured the majority of settled housing development and the new facilities and services to support it.

A report to East Devon councillors was expected in May or June 2016 which would set out the alternative site options for Members to consider. This would then be consulted upon with a view to agree options by the end of the year. The report to East Devon councillors would also set out how affected communities would be consulted with.

8. Why is EDDC not insisting that other East Devon towns take a small number of pitches in the same way that they are insisting that Cranbrook takes up to 30 pitches?

Many of the other towns across the district featured gypsy and traveller sites. The challenge in East Devon was the identification of suitable sites which did not fall into an Area of Outstanding Beauty, Jurassic Coast or National Trust land and which met needs in the most appropriate locations.