

Mike Slater
Head of Planning
City of York Council

21 March 2018

Dear Mr Slater,

City of York Local Plan, Gypsies and Travellers – Need for further work to ensure the Plan can be found sound

I write following our helpful meeting with Rebecca Harrison on 16 March. We have appreciated our constructive dialogues with York Planners over the development phase of the Local Plan.

Gypsies and Travellers are York's longest established and probably most disadvantaged ethnic minority community. The serious shortage of accommodation is one of the key aspects of that disadvantage. It will be difficult to address such issues as low educational achievement and poor health without solving the accommodation crisis. There has been a lack of progress in addressing the crisis for many years, and we see the Local Plan as a once in a generation opportunity for York to re-think its relationship with its Gypsy & Traveller citizens, and to move forward and provide additional, and more adequate accommodation.

We welcome the fact the Plan recognises that accommodation is required both for Gypsies and Travellers who meet the revised definition for planning purposes and those who fall outside it. This is a significant step forward.

However, we have significant reservations about whether the Draft Plan is compliant with Equality legislation and whether the Gypsy and Traveller policies are sound. Our concerns are explained in greater detail in the representations we have submitted on the Draft Plan. They fall into three main categories.

Firstly, in common with Gypsy and Traveller groups across the country, we have major concerns about the soundness of ORS' work. We believe that the overall level of need is higher than the ORS assessment suggests. Our own assessment suggests a need for accommodation for at least 61 households, compared with the 47 in Table 5.3 of the Plan – much closer to the figure put forward by ORS in 2011. We have profound doubts about ORS's ability to distinguish between Gypsies and Travellers who meet the definition and those who fall outside it. We believe that the numbers who meet the definition will be significantly higher. We believe the plan should reflect an understanding that it is difficult to be definitive about who meets the definition and who does not through the needs assessment.

Secondly, we object to the definition of the inner Green Belt boundary on the basis that the area excluded from the Green Belt does not allow for the land that will be required in future years for Gypsies and Travellers. This is discriminatory. It will set up a situation where it will be extremely difficult to meet Traveller needs, and where there is likely to be a high degree of conflict over any proposals that do come forward.

Thirdly, and our most profound concern, is that the Council's proposed approach to delivering the required accommodation has not been thought through and as it stands is not workable. There is no indication where the sites will be located. The Green Belt boundary has been defined without allowing for Gypsy & Traveller needs. Developers are more likely to offer land for Gypsy & Traveller sites outside their main sites, which may be in the Council's proposed Green Belt. It will be easier to negotiate contributions if there are identified sites where the funds can be directed. There is no consideration of where Travellers want to live and the types of site they want. There is no indication of how the negotiation process will work. There is no indication of who will be responsible for delivery.

We note that a number of the developers have said similar things in their representations.

As currently drafted, the policy is likely to fail the four soundness tests.

The Council needs to ensure the plan can be made sound. Further work is needed, and we are writing to ask the Council to initiate and lead it. We would be happy to contribute our knowledge and skills. We see the work as essentially falling into two strands. We question how the Plan can be found sound without carrying it out.

Firstly, identifying the supply of sites. Among the elements of this work would be:

- Identifying land owned by the Council or other public agencies, which could be developed for Travellers' needs;
- Liaising with major developers / land owners etc with a view to identifying parcels in their land-holding perhaps a little away from their main development which could be developed for Gypsy and Traveller needs;
- A call for sites focussed on the Gypsy & Traveller community. Gypsy families sometimes own grazing land, which they may be willing to make available for pitches;
- Revisiting site options considered earlier in the process;
- We specifically propose that vacant Council owned land adjoining the Clifton site is allocated for a 6-8 pitch extension.

Secondly, a study of what is required and how it will be achieved. This would include:

- Consideration of the type of sites needed. Our work suggests there should be two main types of sites. Firstly, small sites (of perhaps 2-5 pitches) in urban fringe or village fringe locations, which would be developed by Travellers themselves. These are likely to be achieved either by developers making the land available, or by using land already in the ownership of Traveller families. This type of site would begin to address

the shortage of private sites in York. Secondly, and the majority of provision, would be for rented sites located within or near to the existing built-up area;

- Identification of a delivery partner who could hold land and then transfer it to families acquiring sites and to the managing agents of any rented sites;
- Identification of the delivery process.

We have raised these ideas with the Planners over several years. We are pleased that some of our suggestions have been taken forward. We are disappointed, however, that the constructive arguments that we have put forward as to how the future accommodation needs of York's Gypsies & Travellers might be addressed and implemented have not been incorporated into the Local Plan. We will now be raising our concerns with the Equality & Human Rights Commission which has expressed an interest in developments in York.

We would welcome the opportunity for an early meeting to discuss the scope of the work outlined above, and how we might move forward on these issues.

Violet Cannon
Director, York Traveller Trust