15.9.08

RE: Dovecliffe Road Wombwell

Mr Smith currently resides on the privately owned family caravan site on Ings Lane Barnsley.

Mr Smith is of Romany birth and has recognised Gypsy Traveller status. He has lived in the Barnsley area with his immediate and extended family all of his Life, his children attended local schools in Wombwell. He and his family have a clear need for culturally appropriate accommodation and are regarded as part of the locally identified need.

The 13 pitch site is in Wombwell on the south side of Barnsley and has been in existence for over 30 years and occupied by the Smith family. The site is overcrowded and there is insufficient space for the younger members and emerging families.

It was severely flooded following the heavy rainfall in the summer of 2007 and the occupants had to be temporarily re located to a car park in Wombwell town centre where they stayed for several months. Many of the families, including Mr Smith lost their homes. The site was evacuated again in January 2008 following heavy rainfall and is considered to be at high risk of future flooding by the Environmental Agency.

There was a substantial cost incurred by the Local Authority to support and maintain the families whilst residing on the car park, during the rehabilitation and the essential work carried out by the Local Authority to ensure the Ings site was fit for human habitation.

The displacement incurred as a result of the flood had a major impact on the health and mental wellbeing of the families, who are in constant fear of a repeat of the site flooding. During this period Mr Smith suffered ill health and was admitted to hospital for a major operation which caused further stress.

Following the floods and disruption, many of the families living on the site at Ings have expressed a desire to re locate if the opportunity of an appropriate alternative were available. The families would like to reside together has they have done so for many years ensuring a traditional way of life. There is a constant feeling of fear amongst the families that they will experience another flood and loss of their homes.

Barnsley Black and Ethnic Minority Initiative Limited Tel: 01226 284477 Fax: 01226 284499 Email: info@bbemi.org Web: www.bbemi.org

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4 Burleigh Court
Burleigh Street
Barnsley
South Yorkshire
S70 1XY

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Current provision

There is currently one Local Authority site in Barnsley which is managed by Berneslai Homes. The site was refurbished and extended in 1995/96 to improve the facilities and extend the number of formal pitches from 8 to 28 to cope with the level of demand. Since that time the average annual occupancy has always been either full or very close to capacity and has always been open.

The Ings Lane site is privately owned and has 13 plots. The site has been in existence for over 30 years. The site is fully occupied and there are no opportunities for expansion to accommodate emerging families.

There are 3 individual family plots across the borough with 5 year temporary planning permission and most recently 1 family plot with permanent approval.

A Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment was undertaken for Barnsley and 4 nearby authorities in 2006/7. This identified a need for 207 additional permanent residential pitches across South Yorkshire by 2011, with 48 in Barnsley alone and an immediate demand for 38 pitches in the Borough. These figures have been accepted by the Council who acknowledge the lack of alternative sites currently available.

There are several homeless Gypsy and Traveller families who have been living on unauthorised encampments in the Barnsley area for some years who have requested to reside in the area permanently, as well as families who stay temporarily in Barnsley visiting family members or who are in transit.

Sharon Smith

Gypsy Traveller Community Development Worker

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Location
The site location is semi rural on the edge of Wombwell, often preferred by the Gypsy and Traveller communities and consistent with traditional lifestyles. The location offers access to schools, health services and other local amenities. It provides visual and acoustic privacy with characteristics which are sympathetic to the local environment.

Design and Access

Access
The proposed primary site access point will be located on Dovecliffe Road. Following consultation with the highways engineers, the location gives the best visibility to the site and allows the utilisation of the existing drainage and service runs as far as possible. At present there is access to the site on Summer Lane via a gate, this can be utilised as an alternative access point, but this offers limited visibility to oncoming traffic. Therefore it is considered to be more appropriate if emergency access is needed.

The internal access roadway will be made of tarmac not less than 3.7 metres wide. Consideration will be given to traffic management, manoeuvrability and pedestrian safety within the site, with installation of traffic calming measures. The proposal provides for access for emergency vehicles. There will be a gated and walled entrance to the site set back from the main road.

Boundaries
The site takes advantage of the existing trees to provide clear demarcation of the perimeter of the site. Further bushes will be planted to the east of the site to define the adjoining land. To ensure the site is well screened and integrated into the local surroundings, further planting of hedges and natural features can be undertaken to achieve a sympathetic boundary.
It is recognised that there is a need for a 3 metre clear gap from the inside of the boundaries as a fire prevention measure.

Orientation of plots
The site layout and design will ensure a degree of privacy for the individual 6 plots incorporating walls and gates for safety, with the necessary 6 metre buffer zone between dwellings. Plots will be designed to enable the easy manoeuvrability of trailers up to 20 metres, parking for vehicles on plots to a minimum of 2.4x4.8 metres. Soft landscaping and additional visitor car parking will be incorporated opposite the plots within the site boundaries.

Facilities
A mains water and electricity supply will be provided to each plot with domestic meters.
Underground cabling which is adequately earthed and complies with installation regulations will be used.

Drainage and Sewerage
There is an existing sealed septic tank on site which will be utilised for the discharge of sewerage. Sanitation provision will be in accordance to current legislation with disposal for each individual plot.
There is an existing drainage system in place to accommodate surface water.

Lighting
Low level lighting will be incorporated to enable safe access and movement of pedestrians and vehicles, which will be less intrusive than street lights.

Consultation
Mr Smith approached the Barnsley planning office prior to submitting his application to discuss his proposals. Following this, he met with a planning officer and representative of Strategic Housing. It was suggested Mr Smith approach Barnsley Land Acquisitions department to inquire about further land which may be available to purchase and which may be more suitable. But unfortunately he was informed that was no suitable land available to meet his needs.

Mr Smith continues to be in contact with the planning department to discuss his application.

The occupants of the house overlooking Mr Smith's land, (the only neighbours) have been informed of his plans for development. At this time they have made no comment to support or oppose his plans.

Following the initial concerns from the planning office with regard to the land being close to Wombwell Woods, Mr Smith met with Joy Bretton, (Chair of Friends of Wombwell Woods) to inform her of his plans. After consulting with the friends group and the Forestry Commission, the responses from both parties were in favour of Mr Smith's proposal.

Mr Smith is receiving support from Barnsley Black and Ethnic Minority Initiative, (BBEMI). BBEMI is a voluntary BME organisation who represent 18 ethnic minority groups in Barnsley, the Gypsy and Traveller community being one of those groups.