

Letter 1 - Greengate Lane

Please reply to:
The Office of Liz Kendall MP
42 Narborough Road
Leicester
LE3 0BQ

Planning and Development Control Committee
Leicester City Council
Town Hall
Town Hall Square
Leicester
LE1 9BG

30th October 2013

Dear Members of the Planning and Development Control Committee,

I'm very sorry that I am unable to attend today's hearing. Unfortunately, I have commitments and duties that I must attend to in Westminster.

I am very grateful to the Chair for allowing this letter to be read out during the course of your meeting today.

As the local Member of Parliament, my job is first and foremost to champion the views of my constituents and to ensure that these views are listened to and acted upon.

You'll be aware that the planning applications before you today have been very strongly and almost unanimously opposed by local residents – I have received hundreds of letters and hosted a number of very well attended public meetings on this issue.

I understand that the public consultation and site identification exercise that preceded these applications should not be considered material in your determination and that these applications should be judged on their own merit. However, one can only understand the strength of local feeling by looking at these applications in their wider context.

First and foremost, resolving the problem of unauthorised encampments and the lack of authorised provision is a city-wide responsibility and I have therefore strongly argued that it requires a city-wide solution.

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However, all potential sites that have been put forward so far are concentrated in close proximity to each other and are all in the same part of the city. This has led to a strong local sense of unfairness.

For any proposal involving authorised sites to succeed, it needs to get the “buy in” from the settled community including by demonstrating that it will impact on unauthorised encampments and from the traveller community by demonstrating that it meets their needs. I fear that these applications fall short on both counts.

We need a comprehensive, long term, strategy that deals with all of the problems we face. However the proposals we’ve seen so far, of which today’s applications are a part, are piecemeal and in particular do not address the fundamental problem of unauthorised encampments. Indeed, there is a very real risk that these proposals could exacerbate, rather than alleviate the problem of unauthorised encampments.

Alongside a fair spread of small, authorised sites with adequate facilities such as a place to store horses, we need to look in detail at deterrents such as bunding, particularly for areas that are likely to continue to experience an excessively high occurrence of unauthorised encampments. Our neighboring local authorities, who have been so vocal in their opposition to these proposals, also need to step up to the challenge of comprehensively dealing with this issue.

Whilst the vast majority of traveller caravans nationally (80%) are on authorised sites that have planning permission, I understand that there are still around 3000 caravans on unauthorised sites, which are either sites developed without planning permission or encampments on land not owned by travellers. Locally, I understand that there are 80 families on the waiting list for Meynells Gorse.

It is clear that demand for sites far outstrips supply both at a local and national level. Given this imbalance and the lack of action taken by many other local authorities across the country, many of my constituents are concerned that the two sites before your consideration today will simply increase the number of travellers who come to Leicester.

As neither of these proposals are for a transit site, they will do nothing to increase the capacity of the authorities to deal with unauthorised encampments. This is a major concern for many of my constituents.

Anything short of a comprehensive, city-wide solution is likely to aggravate community relations and undermine the potential of addressing this issue in future.

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Turning to the specific application for a site on Greengate Lane, I would like to highlight some of the main concerns expressed by my constituents.

1 Health and Safety Concerns

There are concerns that Greengate Lane is not a suitable highway for vehicles, horses and pedestrians to use as a way of accessing this site. In particular, my constituents have raised concerns about the potential of a collision involving children living on the proposed site. I am firmly of the view that a full and independent review of this risk should be carried out before planning permission is considered.

2 This has become an authorised site “by the backdoor”

The site on Greengate Lane has long been seen by my constituents as an “authorised site by stealth”. Initially, residents were informed that a family would be able to stay on the site as a temporary measure until their situation stabilised as one of the family members was suffering from severe ill health. From this point, there has been a widespread perception that the Council were “bringing in a site by the back door” and that local residents were not being listened too. This application simply confirms and reinforces residents’ worst fears and undermines their trust in the process. It also adds to fears that whilst this planning application is for six pitches, it will be extended in future.

3 Economic Impact

There are very real and widespread concerns about the potential economic impact of this site at a time when local residents’ incomes are already being squeezed. Many of my constituents are genuinely fearful that these proposals would reduce their property values and increase the insurance premiums for their homes and their cars.

4 Fly-tipping and antisocial behavior

Many of my constituents have told me of the difficulties they have directly experienced with unauthorised encampments. These include fly tipping, bonfires and hazardous driving. My constituents are concerned that this proposal could increase the likelihood of these incidents occurring.

5 Impact on local public services

There are widespread concerns about the impact that this site could have on the provision of local services.

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For example, whilst distance from the nearest school was considered in the Council's site selection process, there has been no assessment of the availability of school places. I have previously been contacted by the Chair of Governors at Glebelands Primary School, who has expressed concern that the school may not be able to offer sufficient places in some year groups for the additional children that the sites could bring to the area.

6 Impact on the local environment

This development would erode the green wedge and city's green network, which clearly conflicts with Policy CS13 in the Core Strategy and policy GE06 in the Local Plan. My constituents are concerned that this development would significantly impact on the amenity they enjoy of this open green space.

Furthermore, my constituents have told me that they are concerned that this development could interfere with the local wildlife habitat and cause harm to species such as badgers.

7 Planning issues

The committee will be aware of the arguments put forward around planning policy CS09 in the Core Strategy, which states that sites will be allocated in the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD, which is yet to be produced. They will also be aware that Ashton Green has an outline plan for the development of 3000 houses as well as the development of industrial infrastructure.

Some of my constituents have asked whether this planning application would undermine both Ashton Green development and the Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD.

In this letter, I have tried to highlight some of the many objections I have received in relation to planning application 20131493. As the Member of Parliament for Leicester West, I urge the committee to put the concerns of my constituent first and to refuse this application.

In making this recommendation to the committee, I would also like to acknowledge that doing nothing is not an option. We desperately need to meet the accommodation needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community but this has to be done in a comprehensive way that also deals with unauthorised encampments.



Liz Kendall MP
Member of Parliament for Leicester West

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Letter 2 – Red Hill Way

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Dear Members of the Planning and Development Control Committee,

I would once again like to apologise for not being able to appear at this evening's meeting in person, owing to commitments and duties that I must attend to in Westminster.

Many of the arguments I set out in relation to the previous application are equally relevant to this one.

Above all, I'd like to reiterate the need for a comprehensive citywide solution that adequately provides for the gypsy and traveller community whilst tackling the problem of unauthorised encampments. Again, I believe the application before you falls far short of this. Indeed, it may well have the potential to exacerbate the problem of unauthorised encampments.

In my letter relating to Greengate Lane, I highlighted about the proposal including

- The economic impact
- The impact on public services
- The environmental impact
- The perceived potential for an increase in fly-tipping and antisocial behavior

I will not repeat in detail these concerns beyond stressing that they are equally relevant to the proposal for a site on Red Hill Way.

One additional concern I would like to particularly highlight in relation to this application is the serious risk that has been expressed to me by the likes of my constituent, Mr Hill, who is

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a retired teacher. Mr Victor Hill and others are extremely concerned about this site's close proximity to Red Hill Way and the high pedestrian footbridge that crosses it.

Members of the Committee will know that this is an extremely busy ring road. It is therefore difficult to see how this could be deemed a safe surrounding area for a traveller site, particularly for the children that would live on such a site. Mr Hill and others are deeply concerned that this development would significantly increase the likelihood of a collision and that the consequences could be fatal.

I am firmly of the view that a full and independent review of this risk should be carried out before planning permission is considered.

Many of the technical planning issues that have been raised about the Greengate Lane application also apply to this site but I think it is particularly pertinent to note that previous applications for development on this site were refused on the basis that they would have impacted on local amenity and eroded the green wedge.

As the Member of Parliament for Leicester West, I would once again urge the committee to put the concerns of my constituent first and to refuse this application.

Many thanks and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liz Kendall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Liz Kendall MP

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