

From: Steve Webb MP <steve@stevewebb.org.uk>  
Subject: Update on meeting with minister  
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Cc: howard.gawler@southglos.gov.uk  
Date: Friday, 16 October, 2009, 12:30 PM

Dear Chris,

We have now been able to have the meeting with the DCLG minister that I initiated in my Parliamentary debate back in July and I thought I should update you on the progress that was made.

In attendance from the South Gloucestershire side apart from me were Pete Jackson (director of planning), Patrick Conroy (from the Spatial planning team), Cllr Sheila Cook (deputy leader of the Council) and Cllr Ruth Davis (Lib Dem group leader). On the Government side was the minister, Shahid Malik, together with officials from his department and from the Government Office for the South West.

The meeting was surprisingly constructive, and the Department appeared to recognise that South Gloucestershire Council were acting in good faith to try to meet the legitimate needs of local gypsy and traveller families and to make appropriate 'transit' provision, but were registering important concerns about the process and the potentially counterproductive way in which the issue was developing. Peter Jackson stressed that the Council's primary strategy was to intensify the use of existing gypsy and traveller sites - after all, if part of the reason for the higher population estimates is the extended family and growing generations of local gypsy and traveller families, then where better to identify additional provision than on or near existing sites. The Council was confident that it could deliver a significant part of the central government target via this route. However, the Council argued that the overall figures needed looking at again (especially regarding transit site numbers which were much too high) and that particular problems were coming up with 'speculative' sites such as at Hall End which did not fit the overall local strategy but which were effectively being forced through because of the high target figures.

It was agreed that the Government would look again at the transit site issue, with particular reference to the fact that the Bristol/Kingsweston site was itself barely used and was only a short distance from the South Glos. boundary. It was also agreed that South Glos. and the Government Office would have talks about whether South Glos. could come forward with a DPD with lower overall numbers of residential pitches provided that it provided evidence that this was still adequate to meet a realistic projection of future need, and then have this approach tested by an independent Inspector and not simply ruled out up front. Perhaps most significantly, it was suggested that a meeting might take place between the Council and representatives of the Planning Inspectorate so that there was a better understanding of the Council's approach to gypsy and traveller issues. The significance of this is that if in future the Council were to reject an inappropriate application partly on the basis that adequate gypsy and traveller provision was already

going to be made, the Inspectorate might be less likely to overturn the Council's decision in future.

I hope that this update is helpful and will ultimately lead to an improvement in the way that these issues are handled in the future.

Best wishes,

Steve Webb MP