

THE RT. HON. SIR CONOR BURNS MP

Bournemouth West



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

By email to: bcplocalplan@bcpcouncil.gov.uk

BCP Local Plan, Planning Policy,
BCP Council, Civic Centre,
Bourne Avenue,
Bournemouth,
BH2 6DY

2 May 2024
BWC/CB78563/JM

Dear Sirs

**Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole Council Draft Local Plan Policy H10
Strategic Policy P29, Talbot & Branksome Woods
Site: TBW.3, “Branksome Triangle”,
Paragraph 4c, Provision of housing for Gypsy & Traveller population**

I wish to register comments on the proposal included in the BCP Council Draft Local Plan relating to Policy H10 and Strategic Policy P29, Site TBW.3, Branksome Triangle, for at least 15 pitches for the settled Gypsy and Traveller population. The site is in my constituency. I write on behalf of constituents of Bournemouth West who have contacted me to let me know what they think.

I have urged my constituents to respond directly to the consultation so that their individual views are formally registered. This letter is a synopsis of those views and a statement of the principles which concern me regarding the proposal included in the BCP Council Draft Local Plan.

In preparing its Local Plan, I understand that as planning authority BCP Council is required to identify a supply of deliverable sites as well as a supply of developable sites for Gypsy and Traveller provision. My comments take as their starting point the Government’s Policy Paper, Planning Policy for traveller sites, updated 19 December 2023, and Point 1(g) “*The Government’s aims in respect of traveller sites are ... for local planning authorities to ensure that their Local Plan includes fair, realistic and inclusive policies*”. This Policy Paper informs Policy H10 in the Draft Local Plan.

I attach a summary of constituents’ replies to my invitation to let me know their views, having drawn their attention to the proposal, predominantly from the three Wards closest to the site. I have also received replies of a multi-issue nature which have not been included in the simple breakdown that is attached. Of the total, 94% were opposed to Strategic Policy P29, and 6% supported it.



This in my view indicates overwhelming opposition among local residents to the proposal included in the Draft Local Plan as Strategic Policy P29.

Prior Consultation

In replies to my survey, 98% of respondents say they were not consulted by BCP Council or aware of the proposed development before the Draft Local Plan was issued. I was not consulted or informed. The local community and local stakeholders were therefore not given an opportunity by BCP Council to contribute to the plan-making and site selection process, and there is no information in the Draft Plan as to the reasons why site TBW.3 was the only site across the whole conurbation believed by the Council to be suitable for inclusion. The Draft Local Plan includes no information on other sites that may have been considered and the reasons for their rejection.

In a written statement to me dated 12 January 2024, BCP Council says “*if this site is not suitable a different site within the BCP area must be identified*”. There is no indication of the efforts that were made by BCP Council to seek alternatives in order to meet its obligations in the Draft Local Plan to identify deliverable and developable sites and why only this one site is considered viable.

I am concerned that the reply to any request for relevant information is answered by BCP Council as “*If you wish to register your concerns you will need to respond to the Council consultation [on the Draft Local Plan] during [the mid March to the end of April] time period*”. There is therefore no opportunity to seek background information on any details before replying to the consultation.

My constituents are left believing that this is a *fait accompli* based on an undemocratic, rushed and incomplete site identification process. That belief would prevail irrespective of the housing purpose for which the site had been identified. In the light of the specific wording of Strategic Policy P29, Paragraph 4c which proposes “*at least 15 specialist homes that could include permanent gypsy and traveller pitches*” without defining other possible numbers or uses for the specialist homes, this point is fundamental to opposition to proposed development of the land.

Constituents have asked whether the views of the Gypsy & Traveller community locally have been sought as to the suitability of the site for their purposes, in the light of constraints set out below, as also required in the Government Policy Paper referenced in this letter.



Site suitability for family housing

For sites to be accepted as deliverable, the Government Planning Policy for Traveller sites requires them “*to be available now, offer a suitable location for development, and be achievable within a realistic prospect that development will be delivered on site within 5 years*”.

Based on concerns about site suitability and in the absence of any evidence that barriers to development can be overcome swiftly and cost-effectively, it would appear highly unlikely that development at Branksome Triangle can be delivered on site within 5 years. The inclusion of this site in the Draft Local Plan is therefore contrary to Government Policy.

This conclusion is based on the following factors:

- Contamination

Part of Branksome Triangle is a former coal yard and landfill site. Government guidance (Planning Policy for traveller sites, 19 December 2023) indicates that sites should not be identified for Gypsy & Traveller use if they are on contaminated ground until such time as it has been properly decontaminated. The inclusion in the Draft Local Plan is therefore directly contrary to Government Policy.

- Proximity to railway lines and associated high voltage electrical supplies

Branksome Triangle is so named because it is bordered on two sides by active Network Railway lines on which rolling stock generates a high level of noise. There is a disused railway line and viaduct “The East Viaduct” on the third side. The site is alongside access to the Branksome train maintenance depot, in constant use.

“Risk of Death” signs posted on the site warn against trespass on to railway property. Concern has been expressed to me that the high-voltage electricity switchgear exposes the area to high levels of electromagnetic field radiation which is a hazard to health.

There is no evidence that the Council has carried out full risk assessments or consulted Network Rail/South Western Railway as to the feasibility and cost of necessary safety measures to protect families living on the site. This would include not only “risk of death” but also barriers against the intrusive daily noise of passing trains for some 18 hours a day, out-of-hours track maintenance work, and EMF radiation.



- Physical site safety

The site is on a high plateau. The legacy of its previous use for landfill leaves it unstable, with a risk of landslip caused by rainfall and/or surface water flooding, of which there is a moderate risk. The land is often unstable underfoot. The site also gives access to railway viaducts, including the disused East Viaduct, some 50ft above ground level.

There is no evidence that BCP Council has carried out risk assessments of these physical features so as to be confident that it could meet health and safety guidelines.

The contamination, proximity to railway lines and high voltage equipment, and the inherent risks of the site itself also suggest that it does not comply with Government Planning Policy for Traveller sites, which requires them to “*provide for proper consideration of the effect of local environmental quality (such as noise and air quality) on the health and wellbeing of any travellers that may locate there*”.

- Restricted Access

Access to the site is currently through two height-restricted arches or tunnels through which larger vehicles, including some emergency service vehicles could not pass. The topography of the site is such that creating new access would be complex and potentially very expensive.

The restricted access also creates isolation of the site itself and could therefore be contrary to Government Planning Policy for Traveller sites, which requires Council proposals to “*promote peaceful and integrated co-existence between the site and the local community*”, as well as failing to comply with a requirement to offer easy access to local services such as schools and health facilities.

Planning Considerations

It has been put to me that the Title Register Reference DT104276 for the land south of Gordon Road owned by BCP Council shows that the boundary to the land extends across the disused East Viaduct to a point within 400 metres of the internationally protected Dorset Heathlands Exclusion Zone of Talbot Heath.

Whilst it is accepted that there is no proposal to extend the housing for the traveller community across the Viaduct, nor would the site be accessed by way of the Viaduct, I request consideration by the Inspector as to planning guidance on how the extent of the 400 metre Exclusion Zone is measured; whether to the nearest point of the parcel of land registered as above, or to the point of access to the housing.



Environmental Considerations

Part of the land at Branksome Triangle is designated by BCP Council as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) in recognition of the substantive local nature and wildlife that it supports, including some protected species such as sand lizards. This places a legal requirement on the Council to minimise negative impacts, albeit that it is my understanding that the Council can issue proper authorisation to itself to intentionally damage or destroy the SNCI.

Whilst accepting that the proposal to develop “at least” 15 residential pitches for the settled Gypsy and Traveller population is low-density development by comparison with an existing traveller site at Yarrow Close, Poole, so offering the opportunity to create distance between the proposed pitches and the area of SNCI, the limitations of the site listed above make it difficult to understand how the Council will achieve Policy NE2 of the Draft Local Plan to seek opportunities to enhance or achieve net gain in biodiversity on the site.

Financial Considerations

The development costs of the site appear to be prohibitive, though the lack of supporting evidence as to it being capable of being delivered or developed make it impossible to evaluate in terms of value for money. Issues set out above including industrial contamination, the presence of landfill, the inherent safety issues of an elevated site, railways lines and infrastructure, the need for enhanced access to the site as well as the need for investment in infrastructure essential for settled family accommodation would appear to rule out its development on financial terms.

My concern in regard to the development cost is for all my constituents, on whom some of the burden of these costs is bound to fall, as Council-Taxpayers. Without any information on the rejected sites, one cannot assess how Branksome Triangle compares financially with them and how this site despite its many development issues remains the sole survivor of the assessment process.

Other issues raised by Constituents

The principal concern of local residents who wrote to me, as set out in the attached analysis, was increased traffic on roads that are already extremely congested. Impact on the existing local infrastructure was also raised.



I take these concerns very seriously in that, as a local resident myself, I know how adversely they affect my constituents' ability to go about their daily lives because of

- gridlock on roads locally and across the conurbation;
- the difficulty of negotiating the one-way system in the immediate vicinity resulting from the need to cross over or under railway lines;
- the traffic created by the Tesco superstore on Poole Road and the Redlands retail park at the end of Alder Road;
- availability of parking, be it for residents, shoppers, commuters or visitors;
- difficulty in securing NHS appointments;
- limitations on bus services and cuts in bus routes;
- availability of capacity in some of our local schools.

These concerns are therefore important, and appear to be recognised in the Government Planning Policy for traveller sites Point 13 (f) "*policies should ... avoid placing undue pressure on local infrastructure and services*". I believe they should therefore be taken into account.

I am unclear as to the extent to which members of the settled Gypsy and Traveller population would seek to exercise their right to travel, and I therefore can only record but not comment on concern put to me that the movement of large mobile vehicles resulting from eventual development of the land for the settled Traveller population could exacerbate existing traffic problems on Surrey Road.

Future Plans

Constituents are alarmed that the Draft Plan proposes "at least" 15 pitches. There is concern about a much larger development in the future, following the example of the density of an existing pitch site at Mannings Heath. I share that concern.

In Favour

The replies that support the proposal can be summarised as expressing the view that, as the Council has identified a need for new specialist Gypsy and Traveller housing, the Branksome Triangle is an appropriate site for that purpose, principally because it is not at present used for any purpose.

My concern on this view is that the proposal to designate it as a site for specialist housing that could include gypsy and traveller pitches might be regarded as offering the



traveller population an inferior, potentially hazardous and inaccessible site not suitable for other housing purposes. That appears not to meet the Government's overarching aim "*to ensure fair and equal treatment for travellers*" and therefore to be contrary to Policy H10 and to Government Planning policy for traveller sites, December 2023.

I request BCP Council to note the contents of this letter and to ensure that it is passed to the Examiner of the Draft Local Plan so that my concerns of those of the constituents I represent can be given full consideration.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Graham Farrant', with a horizontal line underneath.

Copy to: Graham Farrant, Chief Executive, BCP Council