



PUBLIC QUESTIONS

12 March 04

Question 1. From Cllr Judith Norman, Conservative Group Secretary, on behalf of the Runnymede Borough Council Conservative Group:

Question regarding:

We assume that the Surrey County Council Members and Officers are aware of the Inspector's recent decision on Walnut Tree Farm, Almers Road, Lyne (APP/Q3630/C/02/1103640 and APP/Q3630/C/03/1118321), which has allowed the siting of 40 gypsy caravans and associated lorries under 3.5 tonnes on Metropolitan Green Belt land. This will have serious consequences for Runnymede as nearly 70% of the area is designated Green Belt land, which if purchased by gypsies in small parcels will become more vulnerable to further illegal encampments.

May we draw your attention to paragraphs 54 to 58 and paragraph 61 of the Inspector's report. The main thrust of these paragraphs is that there is a Surrey-wide shortage of pitches for gypsies. During designation, Runnymede fulfilled its obligation and provided 30 pitches within the Borough (Elm Farm and The Paddocks), and subsequent to designation a number of further sites have been allowed on appeal.

This cannot be a Runnymede problem alone. We would ask that the Local Area Committee ensure that Surrey County Council devise a more equitable way of providing the number of gypsy sites that are obviously required throughout Surrey.

Response by Mr Steve Evans, Principle Surveyor, Property , Surrey County Council

It can be confirmed that Surrey County Council officers who are responsible for Green Belt and traveller issues, are aware of the Inspector's recent decision at Walnut Tree Farm, Almers Road, Lyne. As a result of similar decisions within the County, the County Council has initiated a Strategic Review into Traveller Issues, an element of which is currently being taken forward based on a need survey for traveller accommodation. Discussions with partner organisations have already taken place as part of this strategic review and this includes Runnymede Borough Council (Head of Planning).

This needs assessment will be completed by the end of April, the consequences of which will be discussed with partner organisation to arrive at a common strategy.

It should be noted that Central Government have commissioned and now received, the Report relating to the twice yearly counts of gypsy caravans throughout the Country. The key findings of the Report relate to concerns over the accuracy of the counts, the context and purpose of the counts and the lack of involvement of traveller representatives. The conclusions of the Report and the work carried out by the County through the needs assessment, will inform current and future Local Plans when dealing with policies on traveller issue.