

# MINUTES OF CABINET

Tuesday, 23 May 2023  
(7:01 - 7:57 pm)

**Present:** Cllr Darren Rodwell (Chair), Cllr Dominic Twomey (Deputy Chair), Cllr Sade Bright, Cllr Cameron Geddes, Cllr Syed Ghani, Cllr Kashif Haroon, Cllr Jane Jones, Cllr Elizabeth Kangethe and Cllr Maureen Worby

**Also Present:** Cllr John Dulwich and Cllr Mukhtar Yusuf

**Apologies:** Cllr Saima Ashraf

## 1. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

## 2. Minutes (18 April 2023)

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 April 2023 were confirmed as correct.

## 3. LBBD Draft Local Plan: Provision of Gypsy and Traveller Sites in Barking and Dagenham

Further to Minute 25 (22 September 2020), the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Development presented a report on proposals regarding the provision of gypsy and traveller sites within the Borough as part of the development and progression of the Barking and Dagenham Local Plan 2037.

At the meeting in September 2020, it was noted that three sites at Choats Road, Collier Row Road and the extension of the existing traveller site at Eastbrookend Country Park were proposed to provide the additional capacity of 25 new pitches required to meet identified need for the period up to 2037, in line with national planning policy requirements and the Mayor's London Plan. Since that time, the sites at Choats Road and Collier Row Road, which were not in the Council's ownership, had been withdrawn as potential options by the landowners, leaving the extension of the site at Eastbrookend Country Park as the only remaining option. During the Preliminary Hearings stage of the draft Local Plan consultation programme, the Planning Inspectors had raised that issue as a major risk for the Council to address before the draft Local Plan could proceed to the main Examination stage, due to commence later in the year.

In light of the Planning Inspectors' comments, Be First identified a further 60 potential alternative sites in the Borough owned either by the Council or third-parties and conducted a formal "Call for Sites" process, inviting landowners to propose additional sites. Whilst the "Call for Sites" process did not receive any responses, Be First carried out detailed assessments of 19 of the 60 sites, which were detailed in Appendix A to the report, to assess whether they met the key criteria of (1) reasonable access to health and education services, (2) good environmental quality in terms of noise and air pollution levels, (3) not prone to flooding, (4) able to accommodate a minimum of five pitches, and (5) owned by the

Council or have a realistic prospect of being available. The Cabinet Member advised that only one of those potential sites, at 47 Thames Road, Barking, passed the key criteria test. However, it was recognised that financial and social issues relating to the site, as well as its future inclusion in the Thames Road Transformation Zone, meant that the 47 Thames Road site was also not considered a practical site to put forward to the Examination stage of the Local Plan.

The Cabinet Member explained that meeting the needs of the gypsy and traveller community was an integral part of the Council's Inclusive Growth strategy, not only because of the Council's obligations to that protected group under the Equality Act 2010 but also its commitment to provide all residents of the Borough, including the gypsy and traveller community, with the best possible housing and living conditions. He would, therefore, continue to work with officers to identify potential alternative sites and it was noted that discussions were ongoing with the Greater London Authority (GLA), Barking Riverside Limited and Transport for London (TfL) regarding their land-holdings in the Borough.

The Cabinet Member had met with the local Eastbrook and Rush Green ward councillors who had conveyed their opposition to a future potential expansion of the Eastbrookend Country Park site and the Cabinet were presented with a letter and supporting documents from Jon Cruddas, MP for Dagenham and Rainham constituency (tabled at the meeting in the form of a supplementary report which the Chair agreed could be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency under the provisions of Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972) expressing his views against the expansion and the desire for the Council to identify alternative provision.

The Cabinet Member explained that as it was not possible to identify specific alternative sites despite the extensive work that had been undertaken, the expansion of the existing site at Eastbrookend Country Park would have to remain in the draft Local Plan as the sole identifiable option for meeting potential future need over the first five-year period of the Local Plan.

The Cabinet Member concurred, however, that the option to expand the existing site faced some challenges and was not the preferred long-term option and, to that end, he spoke on a longer-term alternative that had been identified. National planning policy allowed local planning authorities to identify broad locations which could come forward later in the Local Plan period and the matter had also been suggested by the Planning Inspectors during the Local Plan Hearing sessions held last summer. The Castle Green area in the south of the Borough was currently allocated as Strategic Industrial Land with industrial units operating on a 24/7 basis. For that reason, a number of potential sites which had been identified within Castle Green were not considered suitable for the allocation of a traveller site within the first five-year period of the Local Plan. However, the area was identified as a 'transformation area' with potential to deliver up to 12,000 new homes, subject to a decision being made on the tunnelling of the A13 and the building of a new rail station. Subject to that development coming forward, there would be a number of opportunities to deliver a state-of-the-art traveller site in the location towards the end of the Plan period. With that in mind, officers had been tasked with securing an appropriate location within the Castle Green masterplan area. In terms of the potential benefits of that proposal, the Cabinet Member explained that

the inclusion of a state-of-the-art gypsy and traveller site in the Castle Green masterplan could not only deal with the future additional sites needed to meet current projections but could also serve to accommodate all of the Borough's gypsy and traveller community in the new facility, which would enable the existing or extended site at Eastbrookend Country Park to be closed and the site re-incorporated into the Country Park.

Following discussions on the proposals, the Cabinet Member clarified a number of points, which included:

- It was not within the Council's remit to withdraw the potential expansion of the Eastbrookend Country Park site from the draft Local Plan at the current point in time. It would, however, be within the remit of the Planning Inspectors to reject the proposal should they determine that extension into the Green Belt was undesirable;
- The proposals before the Cabinet this evening would enable the Council to proceed through the remaining stages of the draft Local Plan consultation process and should not be construed as the Council approving the expansion of the Eastbrookend Country Park gypsy and traveller site;
- Any future decisions regarding gypsy and traveller site provision would be the subject of extensive public consultation as part of the statutory planning process, overseen by the Council's Planning Committee;
- It was noted that, in the future, there may be a need to review the evidence-base that informed the original Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTAA), particularly as current need levels appear to have diverged from those original projections;
- There was an urgent need to address the Council's site management arrangements at the existing Eastbrookend Country Park site to improve the facilities and living conditions for the families currently in residence;
- It was the Council's long-term aim to provide its gypsy and traveller community with a purpose-built, state-of-the-art site away from the Eastbrookend Country Park.

Cabinet colleagues fully recognised the importance of the Council's Local Plan 2037 and the considerable risks of it being delayed or deemed unsound, noting that any prolonged absence of an approved Local Plan could hinder the Council's overarching aims of:

- Delivering ambitious regeneration in the Borough, including over 44,000 new homes and 20,000 jobs;
- Providing new, high-quality affordable homes that reflected local needs;
- Providing certainty for future investment plans and Government grants in the Borough;
- Delivering transformation areas;
- Provision of new supporting infrastructure such as school and healthcare facilities.

Cabinet **resolved** to:

- (i) Note that of the three sites previously approved for allocation as Gypsy and Traveller Provision in the draft Local Plan, two had been withdrawn by the landowners and, therefore, the extension of the existing site at

Eastbrookend Country Park represented the only site available to contribute to the identified need within the first five years of the Local Plan period;

- (ii) Confirm, after consideration of the assessment of all potential sites identified based on their suitability for traveller pitches set out in section 2 and Appendix A of the report, that 47 Thames Road would not be available due to the identified financial and social implications and its future inclusion in the Thames Road Transformation Zone;
- (iii) Note that in view of 47 Thames Road being deemed unavailable and in the absence of any further sites being deemed suitable, a shortfall of 13 pitches remained within the Local Plan period which presented a risk to the soundness of the Council's Local Plan; and
- (iv) Commit to the provision of a state-of-the-art, modern Gypsy and Traveller site within the strategic proposals for the Castle Green Transformation Area with the aim being to meet the Borough's future requirements for its Gypsy and Traveller community.