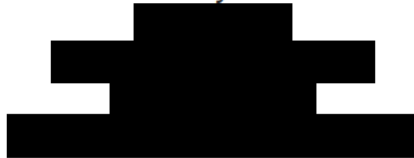


Turks Head Farm

Smithy Fen



To: Those who may find this of interest.

13th January 2026

Subject: The public consultation on the Greater Cambridgeshire Local Plan lasting from 01/12/2025 until 30/01/2026

Comments: are directed at, or toward, proposed policies H/GT, S/AMC/GT, the Accommodation Needs Assessment (ANA by arc4) and with attempt to make comments material to planning law(s)

Introduction:

The Local Plan, broadly, is a comprehensive document inclusive of relative analysis detailing the planning authority's intentions over the next (normally) 5 years for Jobs, Housing, Business, Environment etc and whereas, perhaps I missed it, I've seen no 'Impact Assessment' of the affects on business from such as the extortionate business rates and other Govt non-incentivising taxes, the authors of the Plan should be complemented.

However, I am of an age where seeking a job is no longer relevant and being fortunate enough to own my own home my interest(s) is in the impact the Plan may have on the quality of life that I, my neighbours, and the good folk of the nearby village of Cottenham, currently enjoy. With regard to such I submit my 'opinions' of intentions, conclusions and analysis (or lack of) contained in the Plan and associated documents.

Summary:

The ANA analysis concludes a need for a minimum of 130 additional Gypsy&Traveller pitches by 2040/41 – the Planning Authority (LPA), (given the tone of Cabinet meeting minutes et al), is minded to adhere to the findings of the ANA, Whereas the ANA is available to the public for scrutiny under Appendix A(i), Appendix A(ii) is withheld as confidential and sensitive containing the details of site locations: **this decision alone confirms a lack of transparency in the Plan as personal details can easily be redacted without affecting the basics of the document.**

The ANA advises the LPA on several ways to meet the needs, one of which is to expand existing sites and another to reverse its decisions on already rejected pitches or those currently 'unlawful.

The LPA will consider, I assume, such recommendations in the light of policy intentions H/GT and S/AMC/GT which shows a site map of intentions at Smithy Fen whereby the existing two sites are prevented from coalescence BUT where land currently covered (for good reason) by injunction is inferred as released for development..... **that extra land would allow the current approved pitch numbers of 24 (Setchell Drive, Park Lane and Pine Lane) and 26 (Water Lane , Orchard Drive) to increase by circa 40/45 on the one and a further 16/20 on the other, that is a doubling of current combined numbers and totally unacceptable given that the Fen has just 20 homes for the 'so called' settled community.**

The sites at Smithy Fen are ‘transient’, there are no ‘extended families’ to consider. SCDC has no control; the sites are without conventional leadership such as exists at Chesterton; ownership is vague if indeed factual; and the ‘here today gone tomorrow’ life of so many is a source of alarm to the more settled families and leaves the local community ill at ease, as neither knows ‘who’ or ‘what’ may come next.

The Smithy Fen sites should not be considered in the same light as, say, Moor Drove, Chesterton or even Primrose Meadow, Rampton where the extended family is cultural, and controlled site size increase justifiable.

As a consequence of the above:

I object to the apparent intentions to develop the sites at Smithy Fen in the manner indicated by the map (Figure 126 of S/AMC/GT) and I base my objections (detailed below) on both omissions in/from the ANA analysis regarding those sites and, too, on the “performance” of South Cambridgeshire District Council’s Planning and associated, excepting Liaison, Officers towards the running of these privately owned sites.

Rationale behind my Objections:

Based upon the reality that a good many Councillors may consider Gypsy, Traveller & Nomadic Accommodation issues, generally, something of a side issue **it is essential that time spent** considering each recommendation emanating from the ANA, or their officers, **is time spent with all facts, all data, all interested parties and known history properly represented**, so:

Part 1. – The A.N.A.

The ANA reflects data, opinion, probably algorithmic analysis from a variety of sources and its authenticity is not in question BUT in the compilation it did not:

- Seek the views of the Cottenham Parish Council
- Seek the opinions of the Travellers living on the Smithy Fen sites and has not:
- Sought to upgrade the statements on pitch ‘under-utilisation’ to meet the reality that existed before the date of commencement of this consultation.

In addition there is no evidence to suggest that the ANA took any notice of the history existing with regard to these sites. These points are material to the Planning issues because:

A) The Parish Council would doubtless have pointed out that H/GT policy requirements 1c, d and e cannot be met and that from its own historical experience that 1 b plus 2 a, b, c, f, g, h, i, k, can either not be met or not upheld*. In any event the sites at Smithy Fen are within the Parish boundary and as such CPC was entitled to be consulted!

(*Principal support for this comes from the Report to the First Secretary of State (and Deputy Prime Minister) John Prescott by David Baldock MA DipTP DS MRTPI (Assisted by Robin Muers BA Solicitor LARTPI) 10.01.2005 in which the Inspector having regard for a plethora of considerations refused all appeals, on all grounds, and in planning per se to the then SCDC policy HG/23 which doubtless bore some resemblance to the now H/GT (but in truth I cannot recall its details), The First Secretary of State upheld the Inspector’s findings without any reservations.)

B) The opinions of Travellers (only post covid did Gypsy families start to arrive again on Water Lane/Orchard Drive) should have been sought, as some are concerned by the transient nature

of the sites. **Fear is a material consideration in planning law** (see West Midlands Probation Committee v Sec of State for the Environment + Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council; Court of Appeal. 1997 lead Law Lord Pill), and whereas current concerns cannot translate to ‘fear’, any adverse changes to behaviour caused by expansion can result in such, I refer you again to Mr Baldock above.

In addition, had opinion been sought one person would have said (and I paraphrase for brevity) that they had viewed many sites in Cambridgeshire and in their view:

“Chesterton is already too large, it is well run by the main families there and they tolerate no nonsense but save for what seem to be a number of Showmen renting there’s nothing unusual, except the size”. Viz Moor Drove: “Very sad circumstances, they burned an Orchard, and shouldn’t have, and as a consequence a number of pitches have been turned down and extended family members forced to move on. Given that there are no farms or house anywhere near that orchard and you can’t really see it from the road in my opiniion another half dozen or ten pitches wouldn’t go amiss”.

Viz Smithy Fen: “There’s no leadership as such, just several factions with differing views and attitudes, and often on the move. A small extension to Orchard Drive or Water Lane, say 6 pitches, might be ok but anything bigger might cause problems.

Material, relevant? It’s an ANA for G&T’s et al, suggesting “yes” to both.

- C) The ANA correctly points out that a lot of lawful pitches are being rented out to non-nomadic persons, it also states that a number of pitches are vacant/under-utilised and Smithy Fen is included in these conclusions. The renting out of pitches to non Travellers has been going on at Smithy Fen, particularly Park Lane, Pine Lane and Setchell Drove, for at least 10 years (and SCDC was made aware through the offices of then portfolioholder Linda Harford). Pitch under-utilisation was the case back in 2021 and it didn’t change at all through covid **but in 2023/24 circumstances changed and by the end of last summer (2025) many of the under-utilised pitches (the lawful ones on Water Lane and Orchard Drive) were renovated, and have since been occupied (or about to be as the pitches are brought up to spec.)** The pitches on Smithy Fen now reflect, albeit with many rentals, full occupancy of all official pitches – Setchel Drove and Park Lane (18 pitches) have in some cases multiple occupancy. Water Lane pitches 1 – 6 and 19 – 24 are/about to be occupied; this, too is the case on Orchard Drive where 16 (technically sub divided to take two families) and others 1, 2, 3, 12 – 15 are occupied and where unlawful pitches 10 & 11 have tolerated use (currently causing no harm). Piches 7, 11 and 12 Water Lane are now occupied, and pitches 8 – 10 appear to be occupied by one man with his “trade goods”.

These are privately owned G&T pitches, and whereas full time occupancy may exist on other sites in Cambridgeshire, this has not been the case on Smithy Fen since the English Gypsies were intimidated out by the Irish in 2003. The ‘travellers’ on Smithy Fen do just that, they travel, move from place to place, the gent owning 11 Water Lane is currently in Cheshire; the ANA should reflect this reality, and it should also be capable of up-dating itself as circumstances change. It’s conclusions then on ‘vacancy’/‘under-utilisation are no longer accurate even though the rental situation still needs sorting out.

Part 2. – The Performance of South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC)

As I stated above, I object to the plans for Smithy Fen sites because of shortcomings in the ANA but, too, because the **withholding of information (Appendix A(ii)) by the LPA shows a lack of transparency that suggests ‘consultation or no consultation’ the outcome has already been decided.**

That in itself is bad enough, **but there is another reasons to object to Figure 126 of S/AMC/GT** and that concerns the District Council and the manner in which its Officers fulfill, or fail to fulfill, their duties, and that takes my observations back to history.

In 2003 a turf war between English & Irish Travellers began on the Fen – the English were, effectcively, forced to sell at ‘offered’ prices. By their own reckoning 100 Irish families began the unlawful creation of circa that number of extra pitches. Suffice to say that the sequence of events that followed resulted in a series of appeals from 2003 to circa 2014. At the first, in 2003, the Parish Council was unrepresented and the residents naïve: it was the only success the Irish appellants had in that 11 year period, for at appeal after appeal the Inspectors, where necessary supported by the Secretary of State, rejected the appeals, albeit for three families, permitting temporary permissions on health grounds.

Despite being represented by experts, and barristers including highly renowned Marc Willers KC, the Inspectorate, time and again, pointed out: that the sites were large enough and that local communities must not be overwhelmed; that coalescence of the sites was to be avoided (as attested by injunctions); that behaviour and attitude was justification enough to be fearful of those from the sites; that the local amenities were unable to cope with any further increases in numbers (and Cottenham’s amenities have not changed); that the planning policy (then) HG/23 was to be fully respected; that social considerations such as education and ‘need for somewhere to live’ DID NOT outweigh inappropriate expansion at Smithy Fen.

Relevance: SCDC spent £tens of thousands employing counsel to fight at the appeals; on officer time researching and preparing those cases; creating a bund to prevent a reoccurrence of what was Pine View; applying for injunctions; and enforcing the decisions of the Inspectorate.

YET NOW, with or without Members knowledge, those injunctions are being breached: pitch 15 Water Lane sits on injunctive land and may, in fact, have been enlarged; high fencing (itself a breach of injunction) now obscures the land that was Pine View and hosts at least three chalets; 10 and 11 Orchard Drive are likewise covered by injunction but ‘some occupancy’ is tolerated; pitches to the rear of Setchell Drove have been exended into injunctive land.

WHY? There is no excuse for Officers to be so neglectful of their enforcement duties, no excuse for Members not to be insisting that Officers respect those injunctions and uphold the status quo at Smithy Fen, and thus Cottenham.

Could it be that Officers are withholding action knowing that the Plan for Smithy Fen is a large expansion (despite the history), and that deptsite the consultation Cabinet has decided (as inferred above) that the consultation is just a legal formality? IF such is the case, such decision taken.....and certainly the “instructions” on “how you must deliver your comments” can hardly be considered an invitation to “let your voice be heard!”.... then the culpable members of SCDC should be brought to book.

Furthermore, and whether the Officers or Members are at fault here is moot, the fact is that SCDC has no control over the two Smithy Fen sites at current levels and thus the thought of uncontrolled activities on expanded sites are the mother of all nightmares. This lack of control is evidenced not just by the breaches of injunction but also by the following.

As I understand it: once a pitch has planning permission, invariably subject to conditions, it also requires a licence for those living there. Accepting that ‘conditions’ of planning do not have to be rigorously enforced one would expect the basics of such (adequate sewage arrangements, water and

power provisions legally acquired, the number of units on site) to be essential to all parties. Not so at Smithy Fen.

A number of the recently re-occupied pitches on Water Lane have had to chase, more than once, for licences. Until 6 months or so ago a good many of the Setchell Drove and Park Lane pitches had no licenses (and weren't seeking them). **Relevance: if 50 pitches cannot be administered what chance more?**

Anglian Water has taken over control of all/part of sewage disposal for both sites (it seems) because of health hazards from inadequate systems. **Relevance: the potential for further sewage related health hazards from inadequate installations on enlarged, uncontrolled, sites.**

The number of units per pitch, as a norm, would be a chalet, perhaps 2, a day-room and perhaps 2, touring caravan, say 4/5 units: the pitches being rented have in some cases more than that. **Relevance: the risk of fire from inadequate spacing, witness The Laurels at Chesterton Fen.**

Planning permission, for new sites/pitches to accommodate travelling people, is granted for the express purpose of "making provision for, such as, Gypsies & Travellers" – the consents are invariably explicit but, as the ANA confirms, a good number are under rental to non-travellers, and this has been tolerated at Smithy Fen for the last 10 years or so. Whereas, **unofficially**, the SCDC position seems to be that until all existing pitches are occupied by Gypsies & Travellers then any extra provision required (130 + pitches minus those rented pitches) cannot be exact.

A perfectly reasonable approach to the ANA, but make the 'unofficial' position 'official' and written into the relevant section(s) of the Plan, and, of course, logically SCDC's first priority should be the accommodation of all persons renting on G&T sites because that will show the actual number of pitches properly in use and accurately reveal the number still required.

Final Comments.

I fully accept that Gypsies, Travellers, Showmen et al accommodation needs **must** be given full consideration. I accept, too, that existing sites offer an easy option for Councils to consider given the level of bigotry that unfortunately can, and does, exist regarding these communities.

I accept the opinion of the person who told me that a small expansion at Smithy Fen would: "do no harm", though even that would further adversely impact the Cottenham amenities, especially the surgeries, that are woefully overstretched as a consequence of allowing several hundreds of houses to be built 'without amenity provision'.

BUT unlike the "housing without additional amenities" even a small development at Smithy Fen combined with the reintroduction of G&T's on pitches freed from rentals requires a caveat in the best interests of all parties:

the Council must accept that any/all pitches in almost parlous repair must be up-graded; that on all pitches it will ensure water, power and sewage is properly controlled and legitimised by the suppliers;

that new pitches will only be approved if developed to the highest standards;

that the injunctive land (hopefully most of what exists now) will be cleared of all fly-tip and laid to green open spaces as a condition for any new pitches;

that SCDC will ensure correct and full licensing at all times, and regulate unit numbers, and spacing of such, on all pitches and at all times in order to meet the exacting standards of fire prevention.

AND, that there be full liaison with the Police/appropriate authorities before decisions are finalised because if any enlargement results in the same “kicking off” as in 2003/4 they are going to be extremely busy!

— [REDACTED] —