

Cllr Ball
Basildon District Council
The Basildon Centre
St. Martin's Square
Basildon
Essex
SS14 1DL

27 July 2011

Re: Dale Farm, Basildon

Thank you for your letter of 15 July concerning the above.

I would like to confirm the offer of assistance that I gave Basildon Council officers on 13 April this year which was in addition to previous offers made to you directly at the variety of discussions we have held over the past year or so. The HCA has always been clear that it has an 'open book' approach to its land holdings in Basildon with regard to this issue and I continue to be pleased to discuss with Basildon Council any site that we hold in Basildon as an option for temporary or permanent site re-provision for travellers at Dale Farm.

I am sure you remember that there was an Alternative Sites Working Group set up to attempt to solve the issue that you have raised in your letter. This first met in November 2009 and then on numerous occasions until 3 August 2010. Its objective was to identify a group of six or so sites which could be made available for development of up to 12 – 15 pitches in a mix of locations both within and outside the Basildon Council area.

The membership of the core group consisted of representatives of Basildon District Council, Essex County Council, the Government Office for the East of England, together with the former leader of Reigate and Banstead Council and chairman of the Local Government Association Task Force on Gypsies and Travellers. The Homes and Community Agency was asked to join this group by DCLG directly.

The Group looked at a range of sources for sites that covered a wider area across the East of England including:

- Surplus Essex County Council owned sites in Basildon and across the Essex County Council area and adjoining areas;
- The Register of Surplus Public Sector Land;
- Sites owned by the Homes and Communities Agency within Basildon; and
- Land held by British Railways Board (Residuary)

Approaches were also made to Thurrock UDC and Defence Estates to ascertain whether land could be made available.

RESTRICTED - POLICY

At an official level, at a meeting on 2 February 2010, four HCA owned sites within Basildon were identified as being potentially suitable to accommodate pitches alongside a long list of six Essex County Council owned sites outside Basildon, which justified further consideration.

Although the Alternative Sites Working Group ceased in August 2010, much of the information gathered by the group on sites is still current. We are happy to provide this information as required.

As far as empty sites elsewhere in the country, I am not aware of any, but I am sure if your officers contact local authorities directly they may be able to share such information.

The role of the HCA does not extend to contacting other local authorities on your behalf to identify where Gypsy & Traveller sites may be brought forward. We respond to invitations by individual local authority requests to meet their perceived needs, thus embracing the localism agenda. Our role is to work with the local authority and its partners to investing monies to enable the pitches to be created.

We are keen to provide the Council with as much support as we can and it is therefore worth reiterating our offer to Basildon; the HCA controls a number of sites in the borough and has funding which it can make available to establish pitches that meet the needs of Gypsy & Traveller families. Indeed, if the Council has any land in its ownership, we would be pleased to consider funding the physical infrastructure on those sites also.

I too am concerned at the upheaval and disruption the eviction notice will cause the families involved and to that end I would be pleased to meet with you to further discuss our offer of making sites and funding for pitches in Basildon and any other assistance we can provide.

Best wishes

Terry Fuller
Executive Director – East South-East
terry.fuller@hca.gsx.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 374015
Fax: 01223 374024

RESTRICTED - POLICY