

Proof of Evidence: Councillor Simon Pike

Land at Lawrences Lane, Thatcham, West Berkshire

Change of use to 7 no. Gypsy/Traveller pitches comprising 7 no. static caravans, 7 no. day rooms, 7 no. touring caravans and associated works

Appeal Reference: APP/W0340/W/22/3292211

(West Berkshire Council Planning Application No: 21/02112/FUL)

1 Introduction

1. I am Councillor Simon Pike, a Thatcham Town Councillor for the Thatcham West Ward. I was elected in May 2019 and became a member of its Planning and Highways Committee. I have been the Chairman of the Committee since May 2021. I am a Chartered Engineer and member of the Institution of Engineering and Technology.
2. This proof of evidence summarises the views of Thatcham Town Council, as expressed in its Statement of Case dated 25th October 2022 and its representations on the Wheatcroft Consultation.

Drainage and related aspects of site layout will be addressed in a separate proof of evidence.

2 Amenity impact on local residents

3. At the time of occupation of the site a tall fence was installed at the top of the embankment beside Lawrences Lane, which was at the time of construction therefore very prominent and isolated the site from the local community (it has since been partly obscured by seasonal growth of vegetation).
4. This physical isolation from the local community has been compounded by the manner in which the existing works on the site were undertaken, in flagrant breach of planning regulation - with the resulting concerns of local residents and consequential lack of social interaction.
5. The amended site layout maintains a physical isolation from the local community, with mobile homes in a prominent location facing away from Lawrences Lane.

The amenity impact on local residents will be supplemented by separate proofs of evidence by Councillors.

3 The setting of the site

6. Both the site and Lawrences Lane are within the setting of the AONB, and are part of the green infrastructure of West Berkshire. Paragraph 176 of the NPPF and West Berkshire planning policy CS18 are therefore material considerations to this Inquiry.
7. The site is outside the settlement boundary of Thatcham, and also outside the boundary proposed as part of the local plan review.

8. Lawrences Lane provides a pleasant route from Thatcham to the many public footpaths, bridleways and byways in the AONB, in the parishes of Bucklebury, Cold Ash and Hermitage. It is the only route for cyclists that is not a busy road. The lane is bordered by hedgerows and trees, and has a similar character to many lanes in the AONB.
9. The implementation by West Berkshire Council of a Traffic Regulation Order for Lawrences Lane increases the importance of maintaining it as a rural corridor for walkers and cyclists to reach the AONB from Thatcham
10. This development has adversely impacted the rural character of this popular leisure route, especially if the appeal is granted and a passing place and/or a footway are required.

4 Highways and access

11. The Highways Technical Note does not consider the need for a caravan being towed by a van to pull completely off the carriageway of Lawrences Lane, to allow another vehicle to pass, and its construction could harm the green infrastructure of the lane
12. The layout of the site does not comply with relevant design guidance, such as the Good Practice guide on Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites. It is impossible to manoeuvre large vehicles, touring caravans and mobile homes on and off the site.