

Note on transit provision APP/W0340/W/22/3292211 - Land at Lawrences Lane, Thatcham

In response to the question of the need or otherwise for transit provision in West Berkshire, the following extracts from the previous 3 GTAA's are instructive:

2015 - GTAA

From page 25 –

4.9 As previously mentioned there is one transit site within West Berkshire, New Stocks Farm, which is located at Paices Hill in Aldermaston. The site has 15 transit pitches and is privately run. It was reported during the interviews that this transit site is used by those travelling from Derbyshire, South Wales and the West Country. It is believed that they are travelling from Birmingham to perhaps Winchester or Guildford.

From page 31 –

Transit Site Paices Hill – New Stocks Farm, Aldermaston 5.11 Staff from ORS visited the Paices Hill site in June 2014. The site has planning permission for 15 transit pitches. At the time of fieldwork there were 9 Gypsy and Traveller households living on the site comprising 15 adults, 17 children and 5 teenagers. Three of the 9 pitches are occupied by three households from one family who appear to be living on the site on a permanent basis. The remaining 6 pitches were occupied on a legitimate transit basis. In addition to the 9 Gypsy and Traveller households identified on the site, there were also 3 trailers on 3 pitches occupied by non-Travellers who are renting privately. As such there were 3 vacancies on the transit site at the time of the fieldwork.

From page 43 -

Transit/Emergency Stopping Site Provision

6.46 Transit sites serve a specific function of meeting the needs of Gypsy and Traveller households who are visiting an area or who are passing through. A transit site typically has a restriction on the length of stay of around 13 weeks and has a range of facilities such as water supply, electricity and amenity blocks. An alternative to a transit site is an emergency stopping place. This type of site also has restrictions on the length of time for which a Traveller can stay on it, but has much more limited facilities with typically only a source of water and chemical toilets provided. Some authorities also operate an accepted encampment policy where households are provided with access to lighting, drinking water, refuse collection and hiring of portable toilets at a cost to the Travellers.

6.47 The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 is particularly important with regard to the issue of Gypsy and Traveller transit site provision. Section 62A of the Act allows the Police to direct trespassers to remove themselves, their vehicles and their property from any

land where a suitable pitch on a relevant caravan site is available within the same Local Authority area (or within the county in two-tier Local Authority areas). A suitable pitch on a relevant caravan site is one which is situated in the same Local Authority area as the land on which the trespass has occurred, and which is managed by a Local Authority, a Registered Provider or other person or body as specified by order by the Secretary of State. Case law has confirmed that a suitable pitch must be somewhere where the household can occupy their caravan. Bricks and mortar housing is not a suitable alternative to a pitch.

6.48 Therefore, a transit site both provides a place for households in transit to an area and also a mechanism for greater enforcement action against inappropriate unauthorised encampments.

6.49 Evidence provided by stakeholders and data from the Council indicates that there are only a small number of roadside encampments in West Berkshire each year and that these are almost all families passing through en route to another destination, visits to friends or family, or attending a specific event. West Berkshire currently has one transit site which was not full at the time of the study, with 3 vacant pitches and 3 pitches occupied by non-Travellers. As such ORS would not recommend any further transit provision at this time.

6.50 However the landowner of the Paices Hill transit site (New Stocks Farm) indicated during the site visit that he is considering applying for a proportion of the current transit pitches to be made permanent for himself and members of his family (some of whom are already living on the site unauthorised on a permanent basis). If this were to happen and be successful the Council may need to revisit transit provision in the future following a period of monitoring the capacity of the remaining transit pitches. [my emphasis]

2019 GTAA

From page 48 -

Transit site requirements 7.43

7.39 The household survey found that 60% of Gypsies and Travellers felt there was a need for transit provision. A transit pitch normally has a hard standing, electric hook up and amenity shed. The number of transit pitches stated by respondents ranged between 1 and 15, with 4 the most frequently mentioned number. Most stated that the Council should manage any transit provision.

7.40 A good indicator of transit need is unauthorised encampment activity and over the period 2014/15 to 2017/18 there have been a total of 39 recorded incidents on Councilowned land. The statistics exclude encampments on parish council and private land. The number of reported encampments has been generally increasing, with the following numbers reported annually:

2014 7

2015 2

2016 11

2017 8

2018 11

Total = 39

7.41 During the site observation period, two unauthorised encampments were visited. The first was at Chieveley which comprised three caravans and three household units. All were travelling through from visiting events in the south of England back to their homebases in Lincolnshire and Lancashire. The second encampment at Greenham comprised three caravans and three household units. The families were travelling together but had homebases in the south east. Households would consider using transit site but were cautious about sharing with families they were not travelling with.

7.42 Given the incidences of unauthorised encampment activity, the views of residents and those on unauthorised encampments, **it is recommended that the Council considers the development of a transit site to facilitate travelling through the district.** Data were not available on the number of caravans on unauthorised encampments, but observations of unauthorised encampments and views of the Gypsy and Traveller community would suggest that a 4-pitch site (which could accommodate up to 8 caravans) would be appropriate. Additionally, a tolerated stopping policy could be considered, where Travellers can be directed to appropriate locations to temporarily stop over with support if it is required. [my emphasis]

2021 – update GTAA

From page 37 –

Transit site/stop over need

7.6 There are currently 16 transit pitches at 1A Paices Hill. The owner would like to transfer some of these pitches to permanent residential pitches, leaving around 8 transit pitches.

7.7 To address unauthorised encampment activity, the council should also consider stopover places and negotiated stopping arrangements. The need to identify land for negotiated stopping is a priority given the likely passing of the Criminal Trespass Bill.

Conclusion

Successive GTAAs have highlighted the importance of provision for Gypsies and Travellers passing through West Berkshire. I am not aware of any proposals for replacement transit

sites or other means of provision. As such, the loss of transit provision is without replacement.

Dr Simon Ruston MRTPI 10th March 2023