

## Sonning Common Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the PLANNING COMMITTEE held on Monday 3 October 2022 in the Village Hall.

Present: Mr Rawlins (Chair), Ms Boorman, Mrs Diwell, Mr Howe, Mrs Lewis, Mrs Pearman, Mr Robinson and Mr Collings the Parish Clerk. Also, Ms Casals of Henley Standard and 18 members of the public.

P23/049 Apologies for absence - none.

P23/050 Declarations of interest - none.

P23/051 Public question time – one question was asked about details of arrangements with MECE and development of SON15. No answers available yet. All other questions/comments were about item 052.01.

P23/052 New applications:

052.01/P22/S3244/FUL Application for two gypsy pitches with dayrooms associated parking, access and services on land at Bishopswood Camp Gallowstree Road Sonning Common. Mr Rawlins outlined the history of the site after which there were many questions and observations all of which are covered in the letter sent to SODC as attached hereto. Rejection was unanimous.

052.02/P22/S3321/HH First floor front gable extension at 32 Crowsley Way Sonning Common. After discussion it was agreed that the Committee held No Strong Views.

052.03/P22/S3292/HH Erection of proposed free-standing brickwork boundary wall at Highfield Cottage 6 Baskerville Road Sonning Common. After discussion it was agreed that the Committee held No Strong Views but with concerns about the viability of the hedging and the urban appearance of the wall itself.

P23/053 Completion of the SODC Settlement Assessment Questionnaire for Town and Parish Councils – Mr Rawlins will progress.

P23/054 Consider SODC response re seeking £7.5 million from Inspired Villages – Mr Rawlins will convene a special meeting to take this forward.

P23/055 Matters for future agendas.

Date of next meeting: Monday 14 November 2022 at 19.15.

Chairman: .....

Dated: .....

Letter to SODC regarding Gypsy pitches.

To: Paul Lucas  
Senior Planning Officer  
South Oxfordshire District Council

5 October 2022

Dear Mr Lucas

**P22-s3244 2 Gypsy pitches at Bishopswood “campsite” Gallowstree Rd  
Sonning Common RG4 9BT**

Our Planning Committee has resolved unanimously and emphatically that this application should be rejected. Many valid objections have been posted on your website to which we wish this one to be added.

As you know this site of 0.68 hectares was a WW2 refugee camp. The wooden huts have long gone leaving one brick air-raid shelter and some vestiges of brick chimneys. It became disused after the war and after failed planning applications it was auctioned off in 1959. The original emergency use having long ceased the site is now in the countryside and is **not** brownfield. It is open countryside in the AONB with Ancient Woodland around it.

Post-war, this site was separated from land for a special school approved in 1975, which has recently become a nursery/pre-school, and playing fields used for sports since 1978. The site forms part of a key gap between settlements.

A planning application for 2 dwellings under P16-s1110/O was refused in 2016 by SODC and went to appeal in 2017 - where the appeal was dismissed. Subsequently it was sold to the applicants - who cleared the site of most internal vegetation and fenced it into two plots around a diagonal Public Right of Way.

This proposal, made without pre-application advice, is for two traveller or gypsy pitches – each one with one fixed trailer and one mobile caravan with small ancillary buildings for a kitchen/utility facility and one for shower/toilet. A new access onto Gallowstree Road is required for one of the plots. The road has a 60mph speed limit. The fenced footpath is proposed to remain. It is stated that there is currently a deficit of traveller pitches in SODC, although the Local Plan 2035 does make provision on strategic allocation sites to meet needs.

It is not disputed that the site is in the AONB and outside the built limits of the Sonning Common settlement. (Likewise of Gallowstree Common.) Normally development should not be approved on such a site that is not allocated in the Local Development Plan (LP2035 plus SC NP). It is thus contrary to policy. The applicants suggest though that exceptional circumstances of need override this and that this site is a good solution to meet that need.

Normally a traveller site should be planned in conjunction with the traveller community. There appears no evidence of that having happened and immediate local need is not evidenced.

Generally, if a site is not good for housing it is not good as a traveller site – unless exceptional need exists for which the site is a good solution. Even then great weight must be given to the AONB designation. Light pollution and other visual and biodiversity harms would arise.

Whilst property law permits some enclosure of land, the form of urban fencing erected by the applicants without planning permission (implemented since the 2016 application was refused) is of urban design, harms character and is of dubious standing.

The applicants have cleared a lot of vegetation – reducing biodiversity – since they have owned the site. Google Earth images over time prove this. There is a great lack of evidence for the increase in biodiversity claimed in the application.

How appropriate is the site for Travellers?

- Only two pitches - where guidance suggests a range of 4-15 (DLUHC guidance on Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites – Good Practice Guide (2008))
- At least four for a sense of community and security. These two pitches are individually isolated and fenced in/divided by the diagonal PRoW (public right of way). The PRoW must continue where it is to make the necessary connections.
- The specification of what will go onto the site is vague, without explicit dimensions or indication of sleeping provision or number of occupants.
- DLUHC policy guidance “Planning policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS (2015)) makes it clear that landscape designations – including AONB – are relevant. (Contrary to the suggestions in the applicants’ planning statement. Sections 25-27 of PPTS 2015 would appear particularly relevant.
- SODC’s Local Plan 2035 (policy H14) makes provision for necessary Travellers’ sites within large, allocated sites specifically designed to address needs appropriately. This approach was tested and explicitly endorsed by the Local Plan inspector.
- Contrary to all the guidance, there is zero evidence that the design of this site has been done in conjunction with the traveller community and there is no evidence that it would fit with and meet the needs of particular families.
- Design to avoid crime and fear of crime is absent.
- The site is not a strong sustainable site and would promote a car-based lifestyle.
- Some half of each pitch is allocated to grazing pasture of about 0.4 and 0.6 of an acre respectively. A horse requires at least 1.5 acres and a sheep 0.2 of an acre. If there are grazing livestock the area seems inadequate. If not, the area risks being used by extra mobile caravans i.e. an intensification.
- No arrangements are described for the management and control of the site for the welfare of potential occupants. For example, how would the number of trailers and caravans be controlled?
- Whilst licensing would be required the relevant requirements are not addressed – nor are the related requirements of the Mobile Homes act (2013) and Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act (1960) addressed.
- It is not clear how woodland, trees and screening would be protected and maintained. Ancient woodland must be protected. No arrangements are proposed.
- The ecological survey was done in February – the wrong time of year.
- There is no landscape visual appraisal.

- It is not clear how sewage and emptying arrangements for chemical mobile caravan toilets would be dealt with on site.
- There is a lack of detail on highways arrangements and access. A 60 mph road needs very wide vision splays that would detract from screening and AONB standards. Caravans turn out slowly and there would be a risk to the safety of travellers' children living on-site.
- There is no public transport or bus service.
- It does not suit walking and cycling to access facilities.
- Waste collection for this site is likely to be difficult.
- Travellers often have dogs – in part for security. How well might this work with the footpath and adjacent uses?
- How well would this development sit with the nursery and leisure facilities?
- It does not appear that adequate thought has gone into community cohesion and promoting conditions for tolerant and peaceful compatibility.
- In summary this site does NOT provide a high-quality solution as a traveller site.

If approved development on this site would encourage development on more sites harming the AONB and the separation of settlements.

### **Conclusion**

As previously established residential development of this site does not accord with the Local Development Plan. Not with LP2035 and not with the made Sonning Common NP (2016) nor with the currently emerging (examined) Sonning Common NP revision. It would be in stark conflict with policy on AONB, protection of Ancient Woodland and wider conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and ecology.

The claim that this site is especially good to meet the needs of travellers does not stand up. The suggestion that its prospect represents an appropriate exceptional circumstance to justify a breach of the Local Development Plan and national policy and guidance is unproven.

We enclose with this emailed letter two official Government publications that support our views.

Yours sincerely



Philip Collings  
Parish Clerk & RFO