

Monday, 12 September 2022

Dear Ms Blomfield

Response from Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) to consultation under Article 15 of the Town and Country (Planning General Development Procedure) Order 2015

Application No: DM/22.2015

Location: Land North of Staplefield Road, Slaugham. Haywards Heath. West Sussex

I write this statement in support of the proposed application requesting that planning permission for a 6-pitch transit site, (with 6 utility pitches and the creation of a children's play area), is granted at the location identified above.

I, Barry Winchester, Oak Project Coordinator, for Friends, Families and Travellers (Registered Charity: 111 2326) of Community Base, 113 Queens Road, Brighton. BN1 3XG, make this statement and confirm that the contents are true to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I understand that it may be produced as evidence. Families and Travellers is a national voluntary organisation working with Romany Gypsies, Travellers, and Roma throughout the UK.

To contextualise how important the provision of this transit site is, please note the following.

Firstly, it is important to state that living nomadically is part of Gypsy and Traveller cultural heritages and identities, and whilst many have settled, they continue to maintain this tradition for at least part of the year. Living nomadically is enshrined within law, in that Local Planning Authorities owe a positive duty under Article 8, of the European Convention on Human Rights to facilitate the Gypsy way of life. Underlining this is the existing Equality Act 2010 and the associated Public Sector Equality Duty.

There are approximately 3,000 caravans lived in by families with no place to stop in Englandⁱ. For these people there are currently only 42 available transit pitches in total in the whole of Englandⁱⁱ. This crisis in stopping sites will be intensified by the newly introduced Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, June 2022 in criminalising unauthorised stopping when there are very few stopping places in existence as it is.

This chronic national shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites, temporary and permanent, is widely recognisedⁱⁱⁱ. For example, the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC), has stated for some years that *the key issue to address on a national level in respect of Gypsy and Traveller communities is the lack of appropriate accommodation for them*. The NPCC adds: *The shortage of suitable sites for families to live on and access as they move around the country often creates the biggest single source of conflict between the Travelling and settled communities*.^{iv}

This crisis is also reflected locally in Mid Sussex. According to the Gypsies and Travellers Team Manager, West Sussex County Council^v, there have been twenty-eight unauthorised encampments on public land in West Sussex in the last twelve months. There are currently forty-seven applicants on the wider West Sussex County Council's waiting list. On the Mid Sussex District level, there are twenty-five, twenty-three, and twenty-one applicants for the three sites located in Mid Sussex, respectively^{vi}. Clearly, there is high demand for the limited sites in the area, reinforcing how important new site development is in the District Council boundaries.

Regarding temporary, transit site provision. It is vital to enable Gypsy and Traveller communities to continue to pursue a nomadic way of life whilst simultaneously allowing temporary respite to enable people to access essential health, welfare and maternity services, for example. To reinforce how important transit spaces are to health outcomes: Gypsy and Traveller women are twenty times more likely to lose a child than a settled woman (Baker, 2005). Furthermore, research shows that life expectancy is estimated to be up to twenty-five years lower than the national average (Parry et al). Therefore, more transit (and permanent) sites will facilitate better access to healthcare and subsequent follow-on services such as ante and post-natal care and specialist treatments for illnesses.

If Mid Sussex District Council, fail to grant planning permission for the development of these six family pitches it could result in health and wellbeing access issues for the transient communities as well as continued stress related to community discord and harassment because of having to camp on unauthorised spots within District Council boundaries and beyond.

Signed:
Barry Winchester
Oak Project Coordinator

Date: 12.09.2022

ⁱ (Cromarty et al, 2019)

ⁱⁱ Last on the list: An overview of unmet need for pitches on Traveller sites in England. FFT January 2021

ⁱⁱⁱ Briefing: Accommodation issues facing Gypsies and Travellers in England, March 2022 , FFT

^{iv} NPCC. Operational Advice – Trespassing On Land Without Consent / Unauthorised Encampments Police
Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022: Changes to Legislation June 2022

^v Mr Scott Judge, Gypsies and Travellers Team Manager, Community Safety and Wellbeing, West Sussex County
Council, September 2022

^{vi} WSCC statistics, September 2022