

Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan

Council's Statement - Stage 8 Hearing session

Northern Settlements

Settlement: Oaklands and Mardley Heath

Policy Number: SADM28

Site References: HS32 (GTLAA04)

Matter number: N/A

Issues: Site capacity, air/noise

Question Numbers: Q48-53



Policy SADM 28, Site HS 32 (GTLAA04), Four Oaks, Great North Road

- 48) **What was the outcome of the planning application for 20 pitches referred to in representations?**

Welwyn Hatfield Response

- a) The site currently has permission for 5 pitches, with 5 static and 5 touring caravans, equating to 10 caravans in total.
- b) Representors at Regulation 19 stage, (Danesbury Residents' Association - dlpps1982, and Welwyn Parish Council - dlpps644) noted that a planning application had been received for this site¹. The planning application, N6/2016/0270/VAR seeks the variation of conditions 1 (occupants) and 2 (number of caravans) of Planning Permission N6/2010/0211/S73B to increase the number of caravans, not pitches, from 10 to 20 of which no more than 5 shall be static caravans or mobile homes.
- c) This application is yet to be determined. At the time this application was received, the decision was made to await the adoption of the Local Plan and the potential release of this site from the Green Belt. However, due to the passage of time, progress is now being made to determine this application. Additional information has been requested from the applicant to determine whether Very Special Circumstances exist and the planning authority will proceed to determine the application in light of the information received and any other material considerations.

- 49) **Has the site's capacity for pitch extension been objectively assessed?**

Welwyn Hatfield Response

- a) Yes, the capacity of this site has been objectively assessed and is considered to be an appropriate intensification of the current use of the site.
- b) As part of the plan-making process, in 2013 a '*Call for Sites*' was held to identify land available in the borough for the provision of Gypsy and Traveller pitches. The Council engaged with the local Gypsy and Traveller community and other key stakeholders throughout this process. A Gypsy and Traveller Land Availability assessment was published in 2014 (HOU/13). Subsequent to this, a number of sites were reviewed in the HELAA 2016 (HOU/19).
- c) The 2014 GTLAA and HELAA 2016 noted that 7 further pitches were promoted for site GTLAA04, which would bring the total number of pitches on site to 12 (with an estimated 24 caravans assuming an average household size with one static and one touring caravan per pitch, i.e. a total of 24 caravans) in addition to a utility block, day room and small paddock area for horses. Plans submitted at this stage suggested

¹ Note, the application reference noted in those representation was incorrect.

that an estimated area of 2,100sqms could be allocated for 7 pitches, equating to 300sqms per pitch. Both assessments concluded that this would result in a cramped layout and size of pitch, with no room for landscaping or noise attenuation measures that may be required. Therefore, a reduction in the number of new pitches from 7 to 6 would represent a more appropriate density assuming the paddock area is not retained.

- d) When assessing site capacity for Gypsy and Traveller pitches the GTLAA 2014 (section 4.9 – 4.12) noted that The Department of Communities and Local Government Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites - Good Practice Guide (2008)², advised that there are no one-size-fits all measurements of a 'standard' pitch or site. Account should be taken of the accommodation needs of different sized households but as a general guide, an average family sized pitch should be capable of accommodating a hard standing for 1 large mobile home, a hard standing for 1 touring caravan (trailer), parking spaces for 2 vehicles with suitable surface, 1 small amenity block, a lockable storage shed, a drying area and a small garden area. The CLG Good Practice Guide also advised that for reasons of health and safety, such as fire prevention measures, certain minimum distances should be planned for.
- e) At that time, the council commissioned the preparation of an illustrative scheme for a 15 pitch site (with a mix of pitch sizes) designed with reference to the CLG best practice guidance. This work indicated that the average (gross) pitch area would require 678sqm of land, taking into account the need to provide access and circulation within a site, a play area and a small site office/community building). Smaller sites may not require a site office or play area and individual pitch sizes (net areas) varied from 240sqm for single pitches to 662sqm for large family pitches. Based on this work, the average sized family pitches ranged from 350sqm to 560sqm (net).
- f) The council also reviewed the average size of pitches on existing sites in the borough. These varied from 298sqm to 940sqm per pitch. For the purposes of this assessment, an average pitch size of 500sqm was applied in order to assess site capacity. This is equivalent to 20 pitches per hectare. This approach was agreed with the Head of the Hertfordshire County Council Gypsy and Traveller section.
- g) It should be noted however, that at a detailed planning applications stage, a higher or lower number of pitches may be more appropriate for each site depending on pitch and site layout and the level of facilities to be provided. It should also be noted that transit pitches are generally smaller than residential pitches.
- h) The GTLAA 2014 and HELAA 2016 concluded that an estimated capacity for 6 additional pitches (equating to 12 caravans) on top of the existing 5 pitches/10 caravans previously permitted, totalling 11 pitches (22 caravans) for the site.
- i) This estimate is based on an 'average' pitch size, however, as noted above and in the GTLAA 2014 (HOU/13) it is recognised that pitch sizes do vary and at a planning application stage this would need to be considered dependant on what scheme is submitted for consideration.

² Note: This national guidance was subsequently withdrawn in September 2015

- 50) **Have the ramifications of air and noise pollution from the adjacent motorway on the potential living conditions at this site been fully considered?**
- 51) **What mitigation is to be put in place?**

Welwyn Hatfield Response

- a) A combined response is provided to questions 50 and 51.
- b) Yes, the Council's Environmental Health team provided advice as part of the plan making process and this was used to inform the assessment of site suitability. In the HELAA 2016 (HOU/19) it has been noted the site is likely to be affected by significant levels of noise and air pollution, given the proximity of the A1(M).
- c) However, Environmental Health did not object to the allocation of this (existing) site but has advised that at the planning application stage, a noise and air quality survey and report would need to demonstrate that appropriate mitigation measures can deliver a residential development with a healthy internal and external environment.
- d) Planning permission has previously been granted for the erection of a 3.5m block acoustic wall (N6/2001/0011/FP) to mitigate against noise from the adjoining A1(M) and provide an adequate standard of residential amenity on the site.
- 52) **Is six additional pitches the optimum outcome for the proposed extension to this site?**
- 53) **Is the proposal positively prepared and justified?**

Welwyn Hatfield Response

- a) A combined response is provided to questions 52 and 53.
- b) Yes, as discussed in the response to question 49 above the 6 additional pitches is an objectively assessed estimated of (additional) pitch capacity for this site. The estimate is considered robust and justified by the evidence.
- c) As previously noted, pitch sizes may vary depending on the size of household and the mix of permanent/transit pitches proposed. This level of detail is appropriately considered at a planning application stage in light of all material considerations at that time.
- d) The current application, as mentioned in the Councils response to question 48, (reference: N6/2010/0211/S73B) seeks to increase the caravan capacity of this site to 20 caravans and provides evidence of a scheme promoted by the landowner which is close to the estimate made in the GTLAA 2014 and HELAA 2016 of 22

caravans.