

Reading Borough Council

Submission Local Plan March 2018

Policy WR 4

**1 Introduction**

1.1 My name is Henry Colin Hatcher. I retired in 2005 as a Chartered Surveyor with 48 years' experience in the Public and Private sectors. I am Footpath Officer for the Pang Valley Group of the Ramblers' Association.

1.2 I submitted an objection to Policy WR4 in the Pre-submission Draft. I had previously made representations to the November 2017 Reading Borough Council Consultation on the proposal to establish a Gypsy and Traveller at Cow Lane via access from a gravelled track doubling as Public Footpath Reading 17.

1.3 I pointed out that Public Footpath Reading 17 is a designated public footpath and as such access is limited by Section 34 of the Roads Traffic Act 1968 to pedestrian use only. The use of a public footpath by motor vehicles is therefore unlawful.

1.4 Despite considerable opposition from nearby businesses and the Reading Festival promoters (Festival Republic), no significant changes were made to Policy WR4 in the Local Plan submitted to the Secretary of State on 29<sup>th</sup> March.

**2 Basis of objection**

2.1 Following the submission of the Local Plan to the Secretary of State, Reading Borough Council decided that the most suitable site for a new secondary school would be the site in Cow Lane/Richfield Avenue that formed the subject of Policy WR4 but with access from Richfield Avenue. That would be acceptable to Pang Valley Ramblers since it would not affect the status of Public Footpath Reading 17.

2.2 The proposal for the new school was the subject of Agenda Item 10 of the Council's Policy Committee of 11 June 2018. The Conclusion to that report was:

4.16 Due to the significant adverse effects on Reading Festival, as well as the proposals for use of a site including this land for a secondary school, it is recommended that the proposal for a traveller transit site at Cow Lane not be proceeded with.

4.17 The work undertaken in assessing sites for potential gypsy and traveller use in Reading shows that there are no likely alternative sites that are suitable and available. A criteria-based policy in the Local Plan will enable any proposals that do come forward to be considered on their merits, but it is not considered likely that sites will be proposed in the foreseeable future. This would mean that Reading does not provide a transit site. The Council will continue to work with its neighbours to identify whether its needs for gypsy and traveller provision can be met in adjoining authorities, and this will include transit needs. However, it should be recognised that, whilst a transit site close to Reading in an adjoining authority could help to prevent some unauthorised encampments arising in the first place,

an out-of Borough site would not allow use of the enhanced enforcement powers referred to in paragraph 8.4.

4.18 Should Committee resolve to not proceed with the site, the Council will need to prepare an update for the Local Plan Inspector, which recommends the deletion of policy WR4 of the Local Plan. It will be for the Inspector to decide whether the policy should be removed in order to make the Plan sound.

### **3 Conclusion**

3.1 Given the strength of opposition to the consultation on the proposal to site a Gypsy and Travellers site at Cow Lane and to Policy WR4 of the Pre-Consultation Plan and the recommendations of Agenda Item 10 of the Council's Policy Committee meeting of 11 June, it seems unsound to continue with Policy WR4.

3.2 Accordingly I respectfully suggest that Policy WR4 should be deleted or at least be reworded to omit reference to Cow Lane in the heading of the Policy, to Richfield Avenue in the Policy, and to Cow Lane in the justification paragraphs. The Policy should be removed from the West Reading section of the Plan and should be in the Plan as a general policy. Without such alteration, I submit that the Policy and therefore the Plan is unsound.

3.3 The wording of the Policy should be amended to (**wording in red should be deleted**):

Policy **WR4**: Potential Traveller Transit Site **at Cow Lane**

**This site has been identified as having potential for transit accommodation for travellers.** This will continue to be explored by the Council. Any proposed development for transit accommodation should:

- At a minimum, provide five transit pitches, with each pitch capable of accommodating two caravans;
- Ensure that pitches are available to rent on a temporary basis only;
- Include access to the highway network that does not detrimentally affect the use of existing vehicular routes or public rights of way;
- Not have significant adverse effects on existing operations, in particular the Reading Festival;
- Not cause adverse effects on the local area in terms of public amenity and safety;
- Take account of the potential for flooding, including avoiding any location of caravans within the small areas of the site in Flood Zone 3; and
- Be provided with a strong landscaped buffer to open spaces, commercial sites **and the Richfield Avenue frontage.**

7.3.19 The need for transit accommodation for gypsies and travellers in Reading is highlighted in relation to policy H13 of this plan. A rise in the number of illegal encampments in Reading and the Thames Valley area over recent years has brought the issue of traveller accommodation into sharper focus. The provision of a transit site within Reading would

enable the police to make Site use of powers under Section 62a to e of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

7.3.20 The Cow Lane site emerged from a thorough assessment of the potential for provision for gypsies and travellers in the Borough. The site is in Council ownership, and is considered to be the only location in Reading where transit needs could potentially be met. More detailed consideration of the potential of the site, including the likely costs, will be needed before any detailed proposal can be made.

7.3.21 It should be noted that there are existing commercial operations that could be affected. In particular, the site is currently used as part of the Reading Festival site, which takes place annually in August. The Festival is a major asset to the town, and any proposal will need to ensure that the ability of the Festival to operate will not be threatened.

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