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30<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Ian Bellinger  
Head of Planning Policy  
Wokingham Borough Council  
By e-mail

Your contact is: Mark Worringham, Planning Section

Dear Mr Bellinger,

**Re. Wokingham Local Plan Update: Request for assistance to meet identified need for gypsy and traveller pitches under the duty to co-operate**

I write in response to your letter of 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023 requesting assistance in meeting Wokingham's anticipated unmet needs for permanent gypsy and traveller pitches.

As you are aware and as has been discussed through the duty to co-operate between WBC and RBC on a number of occasions over recent years, Reading has its own unmet needs for permanent sites for gypsies and travellers. A Gypsy and Traveller, Travelling Showpeople and Houseboat Dweller Accommodation Assessment was undertaken in 2017 which identified a need for 10-17 permanent pitches for gypsies and travellers, with 10 pitches being the need in accordance with Planning Policy for Traveller Sites and 17 being the 'cultural' need. Your points in your letter regarding the impacts of the recent court case in terms of planning for the higher 'cultural' need are noted in this regard.

The scope to accommodate Reading's own permanent needs was explored extensively as part of the process of preparing the Reading Borough Local Plan. This included the following measures:

- Several call for sites exercises, during which no sites for gypsy and traveller pitches were put forward;
- An exploration of the Council's own land, identifying 80 Council-sites that were not part of a park or contained existing buildings; and
- Writing to the landowners of all sites that had been put forward for other development (other than high density town centre sites) enquiring about the possibility of gypsy and traveller provision, to which there were no positive responses.

This process did not therefore result in any suitable or available sites being identified to meet Reading's needs.

As part of this process, on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2018 RBC also wrote to a number of its neighbouring authorities including WBC under the duty to co-operate, similarly requesting in meeting unmet needs for permanent gypsy and traveller pitches. WBC replied on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2018 identifying an anticipated challenge in meeting its own needs and stating that it was not able to accommodate any unmet need from Reading. WBC's response further stated that it was open to RBC to explore the possibilities of

purchasing land within its area for this purpose. We would therefore recommend that this is something that WBC also explore.

The situation within Reading has not changed since the process of preparing the Local Plan, in that no additional sites have arisen that would be potentially available or suitable for gypsy and traveller pitches.

As more general background, Reading is a highly urban authority and the vast majority of undeveloped land that exists is either public open space or is at risk of flooding and therefore unsuitable for permanent residential caravans. There are no existing gypsy and traveller sites and there is also very little history of planning applications being brought forward for such a use. This is why RBC has found it so difficult to meet its own needs.

As a result, there is no scope for Reading to accommodate any unmet gypsy and traveller need from Wokingham. As identified previously, we remain open to continue discussions on gypsy and traveller need and the possibility of a cross-boundary solution, but we do not anticipate the situation in Reading changing in the foreseeable future.

Please feel free to contact me if there are any queries.

Yours sincerely

Mark Worringham  
Planning Policy Manager