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Your ref

Dear Sirs

Consultation on the Preferred Options Sites for Gypsy and Travellers

On behalf of our client Merlin Attractions Operations Ltd (Warwick Castle), please find enclosed our response to the Gypsy and Travellers Preferred Options consultation document.

We submitted representations to the Gypsy and Traveller Site Options consultation in 2013. Our previous comments concluded that GT11, GT17 and GT18 were unsuitable for use as gypsy and traveller sites. We also concluded that GT19 was not realistically available. We are pleased that the Council has reached the same view and since discounted sites GT11, GT17 and GT18.

We continue to have reservations regarding the availability of GT19. Our comments submitted previously regarding this site remain relevant.

A number of alternative sites have been put forward as part of the previous stage of consultation. One of these sites (GTalt01) has been included in the Council's Preferred Options. We set out our response below.

GTalt01

GTalt01 is located approximately 1.5km from the Grade I listed Warwick Castle. The Castle Grounds, however, extend further east towards the proposed gypsy site. 10 pitches are proposed at this site.

Sustainability

Warwick Castle objects to the siting of a gypsy and traveller site at this location. Warwick District Council (WDC) has specific criteria that the gypsy and traveller site must meet. Point 1 states that the site must have convenient access to a GP surgery, school and public transport. These facilities are crucial aspects of sustainable development.

The closest GP surgery is located at Priory Medical Centre which is 1.5 miles away from the site. The closest primary schools are Kingsway Community Primary School (2.7 miles), Whitnash Primary School (3.4 miles) and Shrubland Street Community Primary School (3.4 miles). The



closest secondary school is Myton School (1.4 miles) although this is a specialist science college. This is in contrast to the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) which suggests that proximity to local facilities is a 'minor positive', suggesting that the assessment is incorrect.

The nearest public transport is located at Warwick Technology Park which is 0.6 miles away from the site (approximately 13 minutes' walk).

The site is isolated from Royal Leamington Spa. A footway only exists alongside the A425 for a short section. The A425 is a busy 50mph road without any lighting columns and it will be dangerous for residents to walk along this road to access local services. It is therefore unreasonable to assume that residents will walk to nearest schools, shops, medical facilities and public transport facilities.

We consider that the site is therefore isolated from key services and therefore unsustainable. The SA for GTalt01 confirms that the public transport provision is poor.

The unsustainability of the site is contrary to advice set out in the Communities and Local Government's 'Planning policy for traveller sites' which should be read in conjunction with the NPPF. Paragraph 11 of the guidance states:

"Local planning authorities should ensure that traveller sites are sustainable economically, socially and environmentally."

It is also contrary to the general underlying theme of the NPPF which is to promote sustainable development. Para 14 states:

"At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking."

We are aware of an outline planning application that has been recently submitted to WDC for 900 dwellings, a primary school, local centre and a Park and Ride at Europa Way (LPA Ref: W/14/0300). We note that the site is not identified in the emerging development plan as an allocation, indeed, it had been identified in an earlier document but removed as part of the July 2013 consultation.

Notwithstanding this, it is prudent to consider the proposal at this stage. The proposed development would go a significant way to addressing the sustainability concerns set out above. However, the application documents are explicit in stating that the Park and Ride and dwellings will form part of the first phase for which construction work is anticipated to start in 2015. Neither of these will assist in meeting the local facilities required. The phasing detail set out in the Environmental Statement advises that there is no agreed timescale for the delivery of the local centre or primary school. The application documents are also clear that the development will be delivered over 15 years, beyond the time frame for the emerging Local Plan. These are of significant concern as the WDC consultation document states that there is a need to deliver 31 pitches, 25 of these are to address an existing shortfall in provision. A suitable sustainable site must be identified now and cannot rely on the possible provision of a future local centre and school.



Whilst the consultation document notes the identification of new schools in the emerging Plan, these are not within walking distance of the site and there is no understanding of when these will be delivered.

Health of future residents

The SA states that the former use as a landfill site is a major negative factor as it might be contaminated. Whilst the consultation document notes that there are conditions attached to the planning permission for a touring caravan park on the site, the contamination and remediation details do not appear to have been discharged, according to the Council's online planning register. We note that a separate condition required the permission to be implemented within 3 years of the approval date, 2/11/09. It is not clear whether the permission has been implemented and therefore raises the question whether the permission remains extant as is set out in the consultation and background documents.

The SA also states that the close proximity to the A road has the potential to create high levels of noise, poor air quality and possible light pollution. This has the potential to have a negative impact on future residents' health.

Flooding

Tach Brook runs alongside the northern perimeter of the site. The EA flood map shows that parts of the site have a high risk of flooding from Tach Brook. The Technical Guidance to the NPPF (Table 2) states that caravans, mobile homes and park homes intended for permanent residential use are considered highly vulnerable. The SA states that flooding could:

“pose a significant risk to caravans which are considered to be particularly sensitive development to flooding.”

Whilst a touring caravan site might have been acceptable, a permanent caravan site is assessed differently and the consultation documents have not adequately addressed this point.

Conclusion

GTalt01 is not suitable for a gypsy and traveller site and we conclude that it should be removed from the site finding exercise. Whilst the site assessment notes that the principle of caravan development has been accepted on the site through the planning permission for touring caravans, this does not justify permanent pitches for the gypsy and traveller community to live in a sustainable location that has access to local facilities and services. The site is unsuitable for a number of reasons including poor sustainability credentials, uncertainty about the quality of the site, health impact as well as flood risk from Tach Brook.

The Site Assessment document states that the owner of GTalt01 has been recently informed about the potential gypsy and traveller site. It is therefore unknown if the owner is willing for a gypsy site to be located here. The deliverability of the site is therefore questionable.

For these reasons GTalt01 should not be allocated as a gypsy and traveller site. The negative impacts arising from this proposal clearly outweigh the benefits of providing the site for the gypsy and traveller communities in this location. Warwick Castle recognises the Council's statutory duty to provide pitches but strongly believes that these must be made in a sustainable location.



Nathaniel Lichfield
& Partners

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Should you have any queries regarding this representation please do not hesitate to contact me, or in the first instance Arwel Evans or Helen Ashby-Ridgway.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'A.O. Evans'.

P.P

Nick Thompson

Director

Copy

Geoff Spooner – General Manager (Warwick Castle)