



Ms Lorna Coldicott
Senior Planning Officer
Planning Policy Team
Development Services
Warwick District Council
Riverside House
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20/5/2013

Dear Ms Coldicott,

Landowners Forum – Identifying Sites for Gypsy and Traveller Use in Warwick District Council

Thank you for the invitation to attend the Landowners Forum on 14th May 2013 held at Leamington Spa Town Hall. Attendees at this meeting on behalf of The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association were Carol Warner (Head of Canine Services), David Hurst (National Breeding Centre Site Manager), and planning consultant Dan Drayton (Senior Planner with DNS Planning and Design). We found the meeting very worthwhile and informative and we hope that the information we were able to impart to officers regarding Guide Dogs' National Breeding Centre at Bishop's Tachbrook was equally useful. It was mentioned that Warwick District Council are about to prepare a document listing potential sites for Gypsy and Traveller Pitches and that consultation on this document would take place in June and July this year. To assist Officers in advance of the publication of this document we would like to take this opportunity to explain the nature of Guide Dogs activities at the National Breeding Centre and to clarify our concerns regarding the potential siting of Gypsy and Traveller pitches in the vicinity of the site.

The National Breeding Centre (NBC) at Banbury Road, Bishop's Tachbrook was constructed in 2009 and supplies dogs to all of Guide Dogs regional training centres throughout the UK. It produces 1350 puppies per annum and is the largest single breeding centre of working dogs in the UK and possibly the world. There can be up to 180 animals on site at any one time comprising 100 adult dogs and 70-80 puppies. The scale of this operation has necessitated a state-of-the-art centre which was a huge investment for Guide Dogs to undertake, in the region of £20 million. Of great significance at the planning stage was the identification of a suitable site. This had to be separate from existing built up areas and especially other dog populations. This is because the breeding of dogs has to be strictly controlled to avoid the risk of infection of pregnant bitches and new born puppies whose immunity and resistance to disease is at its lowest. Even within the NBC site, where all dogs are vaccinated according to nationally agreed guidelines and subject to regular veterinary examination, different dog populations are kept in segregated areas to avoid cross infection. An early decision was taken not to co-locate the Breeding Centre at, or adjacent to, the Guide Dogs Leamington Training Centre. Co-location of breeding and training at Leamington would have saved Guide Dogs substantial cost but has

been avoided for many years because of disease control (even though the animals in training have a high health status and are all fully vaccinated).

The introduction of a Gypsy and Traveller site with the potential for a new population of dogs adjacent or in the vicinity of the NBC would give Guide Dogs considerable concern. This is because of the possibility that these dogs would be of unknown vaccination and health status and at risk of carrying diseases that are not seen in the guide dog population. There would be no guarantee of the health management of those dogs, nor of movement of dogs onto that site that are not normally resident on the site. Cross infection into the NBC greatly increases the risk of losing puppies to disease, and loss of pregnancies within the breeding dogs. This would be very costly to the breeding programme and detrimental to Guide Dogs UK distribution network. In addition, the NBC accommodates bitches that are in heat; these females produce pheromones specifically to attract male dogs. A local and potentially free roaming population of male dogs would likely be constantly trying to enter the Breeding Centre to seek out the females; the nuisance aspect could be quite considerable and this also increases the disease risk because such male dogs will have a positive desire to enter the Centre rather than simply living nearby. Although the NBC has a perimeter fence, we do not consider that it would be acceptable for a proposed Gypsy and Travellers site to be located adjacent, or in the vicinity.

This letter reflects advice provided by Professor Gary England on this matter who is the Foundation Dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science at the University of Nottingham and is Professor of Comparative Veterinary Reproduction.

We trust that the Council will take these comments into consideration. Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

DNS Planning and Design

cc

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Roz Gratton, GDBA Head of Property Services
Robert Wheeler, GDBA Estates Manager
Carol Warner, GDBA Head of Canine Services
David Hurst, GDBA National Breeding Centre Manager
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