

Traveller Site Consultation – Matlock Bath Public Meeting

Councillor Steve Flitter, Leader of the Council, opened the meeting with introductions and an explanation of how the meeting would be conducted. Councillor Marilyn Franks, Chair of the Gypsy and Traveller Working Group, then presented some background to the process being followed by the Council.

The following representations were presented on behalf of Peter Baranek, Chair of Matlock Bath Parish Council:

In the last 2 years the parish council estimates a loss of £9,020 of coach parking fees based on DDDC coach parking figures for 2019 and a loss of £43,100 of car parking fees (22 spaces in the coach parking are) plus loss of toilet income of £15,109 (based on 33% of visitors using the toilet in Memorial Gardens) This is a grand total of £67,229.

Based on the coach and car parking loss and estimating that each visitor would spend at least £10 the parish council estimates a loss of income to the village from the loss of 61,600 coach passengers and 51,720 car passengers (3 per car)- that is 113,320 visitors – to be £1,133,200. If shared equally amongst the 33 businesses in the village that is over £34,000 per business.

There has been a loss of tax to the government as there is a loss of VAT if only 90% of the £10 each spent by the lost visitors was subject to 20% VAT £203,976.

There has been a loss of employment, with many businesses taking on less staff due to a drop in income.

More people are coming in cars as there are no coach trips due to the lack of parking. This means extra fuel is used for driving around looking for parking, more congestion is caused on the main A6 holding up non visitor traffic leading to an increase of traffic pollution.

Use of the selection criteria that do not consider either the economic or environmental effects on the village.

Inaccurate application of the criteria that were used when identifying Matlock Bath Station Car Park as a possible temporary traveller site.

There have been continuous issues with the current occupants, all of which have been logged with DDDC.

Councillor Nick Whitehead, District Council Ward Member for Cromford and Matlock Bath presented the following representations:

It is hard to describe the impacts that we have felt over the last few years, not just the economic impacts but the impacts on us as a community. We are an honest, decent, compassionate, and tolerant community. We have always had travellers come and stay with us at certain parts of the years. Sometimes this has caused trouble and unrest but most of the time it has been tolerated.

We feel that when the travellers were last placed with us, over 3 years ago, we feel like they have been abandoned in our community and so I feel for them as a family. I can only imagine what that must feel like, to be placed in Derbyshire Dales District Councils busiest car park, to be abused by visitors as they come to park their cars there. But then I

think about how we feel as a community, It is intolerable that we have to put up with shouting from dawn to dusk. In the Summer months this is from 5:30am to 10:30pm. Due to the geographical location of Matlock Bath the noise from the family travellers to the top of the community.

It is unbelievable that this has been allowed to happen for so long. We now have a no-go area for our community, which used to be a regular walk for most. We want solutions, we have been really patient, but we are all at the end of our tether. I appreciate the consultation but what we want is a solution. We can't wait for a long-term solution. We need a break. None the other temporary sites that are out for consultation are suitable, however, other communities are going to have to step up in the short term.

The Chair of the meeting then opened the floor to representations from residents and others present.

Local Resident: We don't use Lovers Walk because there is human faeces and toilet paper everywhere. I don't know if this is the travellers, but there is a lot of rubbish which has been dumped in the river by the top car park, this is really bad for our environment.

Local Resident: We need a permanent site, for the sake of both the Travellers and local residents. The current situation is intolerable for everyone. There is noise from shouting and generators from dawn to dusk and there is human excrement. We do not understand why there is one rule for them and another for us. It feels like nothing is being done to resolve the situation.

Local Resident: For 10 years we have had illegal encampments in Matlock Bath and there is no end in sight. The responsibility needs to be shared with other communities. The code of conduct is based upon existing legislation which is currently not being enforced. There are no Council staff on call 24hrs a day for us to call when there is a problem. The police do not respond to our concerns.

Local Resident: There have been reports of the Travellers charging visitors to park in their compound.

Local Resident: In the car park consultation which is running at the same time as this one, it said very clearly that there is a shortage of parking in Matlock Bath and listed two under used car parks, neither of which have been proposed.

Local Resident: Matlock Bath has less than 1% of the population of the District. Businesses here are tolerant, open minded and enjoy the reputation and style of the village. I cannot understand why the car park here has been tolerated for 10 years as a traveller site. The village feeds and parks 1.2 million visitors, which takes the burden away from towns in the district. We enable the district to function economically. We need support from the Council, the responsibility needs to be shared by all wards.

Local Resident: Most of us recognize that the Travellers have their needs and that these need to be recognised and met, which they are currently not. Why are two of the sites in this consultation already being used and the others are close by. My understanding is that the travellers link to the district is near Ashbourne, however no proposed sites are in the Ashbourne area.

Councillor Nick Whitehead: You could have moved the Travellers to Fishpond Meadow in Ashbourne and used part of Shawcroft or an alternative car park to house the Ashbourne Reborn contractor compound.

Local Resident: We have a situation which is illegal, we have people breaking the law. Parking and other regulations are being broken daily and we are having our own rights infringed daily. We need action now, we need another site. We and the Travellers are being treated like second class citizens.

Local Resident: The sub-letting of the car park is something officers have known about. It is affecting house prices in the area. It's not just businesses that are suffering, it's the local community.

Local Resident: Has the Council given any thought to improving the security of all its car parks to stop unauthorised encampments.

Local Resident: We've had additional travellers visiting for the last 2 weeks, I have asked why they are leaving the metal fences which are barricading the coach park off. Why are the council leaving fencing over the last two weeks of our summer holidays so that the coaches have got no access and people can't park their cars.

Local Resident: The Heights of Abraham Winter light trail and the illuminations, these are some of Derbyshire's highlights, the first thing people will see are a traveller site. We feel unprotected and vulnerable.

Councillor Steve Flitter gave some closing remarks, thanking those in attendance for their contributions and closing the meeting.