

Traveller Site Consultation – Matlock 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 by Councillor Jason Knighton, on behalf of Matlock Town Council:

Matlock Town Council welcomes the process driven approach to the identification of temporary tolerated traveller sites and permanent sites adopted by Derbyshire Dales District Council and this opportunity to respond to the public consultation.

Matlock Town Council is hugely disappointed that the Arc site has been proposed. The Council recommends that Derbyshire Dales District Council does not use the site as a temporary tolerated site for the following reasons:

- 1. The site does not satisfy the criterion distancing the traveller site from housing, and the site would therefore create an intolerable noise nuisance for residents. The houses and gardens for some of the 56 houses on Morledge and Uplands Drive are within 100 metres of the site including some as close as 40 metres. The woodland area does not screen the site from view all year round and does not screen noise at any time.*
- 2. The site would reduce parking for the Arc. There would be four direct consequences for the Arc and the District Council:*
 - First, at peak times the car park is fully utilised by Leisure centre users. It is, in fact, not big enough to house all users during busy periods. Fewer parking spaces would have an adverse effect on the Arc's income from loss of session fees and subscription fees. This may result in a legal claim against the District Council or a requirement for the Council to make up lost income in a business in which has already invested heavily.*
 - Secondly, there would be loss of amenity for the users of the Arc through difficulty of access in busy periods.*
 - Thirdly, it would be more problematic to use the Arc for galas and other events that attract many people from across the County and beyond. This would have an adverse effect, not only on the Arc, but also the wider Matlock Community and businesses, and would damage the image of Matlock as a place to live, work and play.*
 - Finally, the loss of on-site parking would result in more parking in residential roads nearby. These roads are narrow and have not been designed for parking except for residents and domestic visitors. Additional parking would therefore create safety hazards on Morledge, the A6 and connecting roadways.*
- 3. The proposed site would create a hazard to children walking to and from school. There are footpaths from Megdale to Uplands Drive and Morledge that pass close to the proposed site or would be blocked by the site. These footpaths are used by many children including those primary school age and could be a safeguarding issue for unaccompanied children. The alternative route is much further to Uplands Drive and*

would include a section on Bakewell Road as well as along Morledge, newly congested by overflow parking from the Arc.

4. There are documented reports of fires, human waste, rubbish and noise on the existing sites at both Derwent Way, Matlock and at the Matlock Bath traveller site. Should these issues transfer to the site being considered this would have a detrimental effect on users of the car park, residents of Morledge and the adjacent path and playing fields currently used by local children, their parents, dog walkers, runners and cyclists.
5. The Arc is built on a former domestic refuse tip and prior to that a lead mine. No information exists as to the mineralogy of the ground there. However, there are good reasons to think that a mine and a landfill would contain contaminants and therefore the habitat does not lend itself as suitable for living on. Many houses in the adjacent areas were fitted with methane detectors due to the hazard it causes to health.

Regarding the existing Derwent Way Station Carpark site, Matlock Town Council does not believe that any car park is a suitable site for the settlement of any persons and would ideally want this to be closed in favour of a permanent site. However, the Council recognises the immediate Problem. The Council therefore recommends remedial work to separate the temporary Traveller site from the carpark as proposed by the District Council under the strict understanding that this remains as a temporary site and not a permanent one.

Councillor Sue Burfoot, District Council Ward Member for Matlock West presented the following representations:

You have heard the reasons given by Matlock Town Council which reject the proposal to take forward the Arc car park as a suitable temporary tolerated site. I am the District Council Ward Member for Matlock West, this area includes Morledge, I am also a Matlock Town Councillor. I fully endorse the views of Matlock Town Council. The Arc car parks should not have been included on the list of proposed sites. A permanent site is the only long-term solution.

The aim of this administration is to find at least two permanent sites for the two groups of travellers to whom we have a statutory duty of care. The Arc site is too close to residential properties, it's adjacent to the Arc leisure centre and close to the Premier Inn. More than 50 houses are within 100 metres of the site, with the nearest property as close as 38 metres. The tree screening is irrelevant as they will lose their leaves during winter.

The pool is a competition pool and very important to the leisure facilities in the Derbyshire Dales. It is always busy, especially when competition galas are held. The loss of parking will result in more pressure on the nearby narrow residential roads. The site is close to an outdoor play area and there are footpath routes used by children using the pool for lessons.

It is not possible to prevent unauthorised encampments at the Arc site. There are other issues relating to habitat, wildlife, contamination etc. I repeat my view that this site should never have been considered as an option. I would like to ask those on the working group to tell us how you voted when these six sites were chosen.

For too long the travellers on Matlock Station and Matlock Bath Station have had no alternative but to reside there with minimal facilities. We need to find a suitable

permanent site. Residents in Matlock have been very tolerant of the Matlock Station site. However, there have been numerous occasions when unauthorised Travellers have entered the site illegally, this has resulted in numerous evictions, which has cost the Council a lot of money. I support the recommended work to demarcate this site to separate the temporary traveller site from the main car park. If this site in Matlock Station goes ahead as a temporary tolerated site, it must not be a permanent site. The Arc car park should be neither.

Councillor Martin Burfoot, District Council Ward Member for Matlock West presented the following representations:

Matlock West Ward now has two sites shortlisted for consultation and has suffered from the negative effects of the gypsy and traveller community for too long. The previous administration failed to find any suitable sites, permanent or temporary, for many years. That is why the two groups of travellers that we have duty of care towards have been encamped on Matlock Station car park for six years and Matlock Bath car park for the last three years. As a new administration, we have looked again at all District Council owned land. Whilst I applaud the efforts of Cllr Marilyn Franks in particular, I also think that the working group should comprise of more than four members, if only to produce a more politically balanced conclusion.

Matlock Station car park is already established as a temporary site, which I fear will need to continue for some time. The Council has already resolved to seek consent for a divided entrance, in order to allow access to the temporary traveller site from one side and the height barrier at the other side can be lowered to exclude unauthorised traveller families.

In regard to the Arc car park, the plastic block reinforced stone surfaced car park is already subsiding. The site is impossible to demarcate to prevent unauthorised encampments. There would be a detrimental impact for residents and the community walking to and from school or the adjoining play areas, as well as dog walkers and runners etc.

We need two permanent sites which are available to the Council at a reasonable cost for lease or for purchase. Finally, I have been a Matlock Councillor for a long time, and I believe that decisions made should be fair and logical. The Arc leisure car park is neither and should never have been shortlisted for consultation.

Councillor Steve Wain, District Council Ward Member for Matlock West presented the following representations:

I'm supportive of what others have said. At the meeting of Matlock Town Council, good arguments were put forward as to why Arc is not suitable. This issue has been raised repeatedly during my time as a Councillor, I support the working group looking into this. I have looked around Morledge and I am astounding how such an oversight could have been made. There are a significant number of houses that are very close to that site, and it won't be screened from November through till April.

The Arc leisure centre is a valued asset. It is used by a lot of people including for national swimming galas, we should not relinquish 40% of our car parking space for this purpose. Finally, why does Matlock have to have two proposed sites within a thousand meters of each other, when other areas don't have any?

Councillor Sue Hobson, District Council Ward Member for Chatsworth presented the following representations:

I am the County Councillor for this area which covers Morledge which adjoins the Arc. The Arc site is totally unsuitable for a temporary traveller site. I cannot understand legally how this site can be considered again after the decision to exclude all the sites was made in November 2022 by full Council. I have consistently voted against the Arc and all the sites being included in this consultation both at the Gypsy and Traveller Working Group and at the Community and Environment Committee.

The problems in Matlock Bath relate to litter, antisocial behaviour, and noise. It not the communities' issue to share and solve, it's for this council.

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

Local Resident: The site assessment showed the Arc car park to be totally unsuitable. The residents of the surrounding areas have provided detailed in-depth information questioning every section of the site assessment. We are concerned that the Council would even consider this site as it does not meet any of the required criteria and has previously been discounted. The wider question should also be asked as to why Matlock should shoulder the burden.

Local Resident: I live forty metres from the proposed site. I am concerned about safeguarding of my children. This will have a detrimental effect on their wellbeing, there's going to be noise and mess and there is no screening.

Local Resident: The proposal for people to live on the Arc car park potentially for a number of years is cause for deep concern. Some Travellers may comply with the code of conduct, but we can expect incursions from those who are not signed up to this.

It is disturbing to think that the problem's experienced at the old station road car park, Rowsley and the Matlock Bath Station Car Park described would be transferred to such the Arc leisure centre car park. The impacts of a Traveller site here would be more intensely felt than any of the other sites under consideration.

My second point is impact on residents. The impact on residents living within a hundred metres of the site should be correctly coded red in the site assessment document. It is a very public thoroughfare offering no real privacy. Many use the footpath that runs alongside this car park, if this route becomes unsuitable then there is no safe alternative. Several houses are elevated above the site and have a good view into the car park. The trees shed their leaves in the winter, providing no screen at all.

My third point is the impact on wildlife. Before construction began on the leisure centre, I enquired with the council about what was being done to protect wildlife. I was informed that a team of ecologists had carried out extensive surveys and mitigations were being put in place. All this to protect many species such as owls, bats, foxes, badgers, birds, dragonflies, moths and more. I highlight that most of the creatures mentioned are nocturnal. The car park is currently unoccupied at night and many of these species are surviving here. If travellers occupied the site, their presence would put wildlife under pressure with increased disturbance leading to their displacement.

My final point is the impact on Arc leisure centre and surrounding area. The leisure centre and associated car park would be regularly placed under pressure as there is no alternative parking. The surrounding roads lack capacity to take overspill parking. The

dimple playing fields adjacent are well used, particularly the new outdoor play equipment. These public spaces must be protected and cared for.

I strongly object to taxpayers' money being spent on a futile attempt to accommodate a family on a totally unsuitable site.

Local Resident: The Arc car park is on contaminated land. It's known to be an old refuge site. It is unsafe for the Travellers to be on there. It's a risk to their health.

There is no definition of temporary. This adds uncertainty for residents and also the Travellers. This would displace a lot of vehicles and is impractical.

Previous consultations have discounted the Arc car park. Many vulnerable people use the Leisure facility. Removing access to parking will have a greater impact on them.

There are a number of footpaths that go past the car park, use of these will be restricted. The paths are used for children to get to the bus stop on the way to school, this could put children in harm's way.

I feel this Council is not serving the public or the Travellers by looking at temporary sites. Efforts would be better directed to finding a permanent site.

Local Resident: We've had six years of this on Matlock Station Car park. Barking dogs, noise, mess, its completely unsuitable. You are suggesting that car park in Matlock is suitable and that it's going to be kept as a temporary site which concerns me greatly.

Local Resident: I want to reinforce what everyone else has said about the unsuitability of the Arc car park. There were seventy cars in the car park during the swimming gala this weekend. There was also several vehicles parked on the road. We are going to have double yellow lines from Bakewell Road right the way up Morledge. The condition of the car park is not good, and it won't take the load.

Local Resident: Insufficient consideration has been given to the impact of this on visitors and Members of the leisure centre. Safety concerns have been expressed regarding the customers and staff, especially those attending early and late sessions. Staff recruitment could be a problem in the future.

The proposal could financially impact the Arc due to cancelled memberships and lack of casual attendance. The public perception of having a Traveller site situated in such close proximity to the leisure centre could cause the public to look elsewhere. In the long term, this could lead to its closure.

Local Resident: You did state that we are sharing the responsibility round the District, however the six proposed sites are within a small area.

When we moved here, we were assured that there were mitigations in the houses in relation to the landfill site. This is a car park with no mitigations and the proposal is to put Travellers on it.

I found a spreadsheet on the environment agency website about historic landfills. I found the dimple farm landfill, it says the site was filled with domestic waste, commercial waste and industrial waste.

Local Resident: I live on Snitterton Road, just about as close as you can get to the family that are living on Matlock Station car park. We moved here six years ago, one month before the Travellers were moved onto the station car park. We use the Arc

regularly as I have young children and I commute from the railway station several times a week. The impact on our lives has been zero. There aren't anti-social behaviours. We walk past them several times a week and we haven't encountered any inappropriate behaviour. There have been issues with litter and waste which have improved since the Council improved the waste collection.

I urge people to visit and say hello, it is well maintained. There is screening and fencing. We're talking about fifteen people across two sites. There's been a lot of dramatic language used this evening, but the impact on the community at the station has not been dramatic.

Local Resident: If the Arc site had domestic and commercial waste in it, it will be producing methane gas. This is incredibly hazardous and should never be lived upon as it takes decades to break down.

I've been coming to Matlock for many years now and I've seen a massive drop in the use of the railway station and the car park due to the travellers being there.

Local Resident: I'm the Chair of Matlock Swimming Club. There are at least 15 to 20 galas held at the Arc every year and is considered the second-best pool in the County. There are no other pools that have the facilities available. If they take that away because there is no parking, we will lose other clubs which bring in revenue, not only for the Arc but for Premier Inn and the town. It's used by major water polo competitions. School children use it for their swimming lessons. I have concerns from a safeguarding point of view. The Arc were recently granted an award for inclusion of disabled people, and I am concerned that inclusivity will go. Important health aspects for all ages will be lost.

Local Resident: The travellers deserve suitable sites and a right to their family life, as do we. The site is too close to houses. The site access is not safe as parking will take place around junctions. How can you make the site secure but still allow access for emergency vehicles. The updated transport and travel plan provided the optimum spaces of parking for the site. This suggests that if we lose those spaces, it is going to be a problem.

Local Resident: The Environment Agency will not allow you to put a traveller site on the car park as it's designed. There is no drainage under that car park. It's designed to percolate into the ground. A suitable urban drainage system will be required and a connection to the sewers.

Local Resident: I've got a young family, so my issue is around safeguarding.

Local Resident: I am a grandmother and I take the children regularly over that bridge to the Arc and I would not feel safe. I have walked past station car park at early morning whilst walking my dog and I have not felt safe. There had been heckles and dogs barking, and I think it's totally unsuitable.