

Traveller Site Consultation – Wirksworth 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 Mayor of Wirksworth Town Council made the following representations:

The Town Council's stance on the suitability of the site adjacent to Stoney Wood remains unchanged from 2019 – this site does not represent an appropriate location to house Travellers.

The geography of the space is not safe for the Traveller Family (from comments in previous DDDC reports), alongside obvious traffic concerns around access and egress to and from the site. At present, there are no utilities on site and in our experience the land often has flowing surface water during wet weather.

The site is adjacent to the entry to Stoney Wood, and by many residents it is seen as an extension of the woodland owned by the Town Council which provides an important community green space. The site is maintained by the very active community group, Stoney Wood Group. This group maintain the site but also host and facilitate many activities throughout the year, such as hosting concerts, arts festival events and seasonal celebrations, as well as weekly gatherings and events. Use of the District Council land will jeopardise all these community uses and may not be compatible with a family living in close proximity to the site.

The area owned by the District Council has remained unused (and left to nature) since 2020 and the biodiversity on the site would be impacted by its use as a traveller site (there is a legal obligation to establish Biodiversity Net Gain).

Finally, should the site be used, the Town Council seeks assurances from the District Council that we will not be affected by this decision.

In practical terms this includes:

- *Remediation of any impact on the Town Council estate, which occurs within duration of the site use a temporary traveller's site.*
- *DDDC to remove any other travellers both on the site and/or on WTC property.*
- *DDDC to assist the Town Council to take measures to protect its estate from unauthorised use.*
- *The remediation and assistance to be provided in a timely manner.*

(This means for example, clearance of debris or repair of damage when it occurs and not simply when the site is vacated).

The following representations were presented on behalf of Stoney Wood Community Woodland Group:

We are writing to express our concern about the land to the east of Hopton Works as a potential site for traveller families.

This land is right by the entrance to Stoneywood Community Woodland. We are Denise Bristow, Chair of the Stoneywood management committee and Rosemary Blenkinsop, Vice Chair.

- 1. There are rare wildflowers returning to the wood on that piece of land; including brand leafed helleborine and pyramid orchids. These would be crushed under the weight of traffic There are a range of trees there, willow, hazel and poplar that would have to be cut down to make way for the caravans, this would be disastrous.*
- 2. Wirksworth residents have told us they would not feel comfortable visiting Stoneywood if travellers were camped there. So the woodland as a public amenity for the residents of Wirksworth would be impaired.*
- 3. Stoneywood is very important for biodiversity- unimproved limestone grassland is increasingly rare in Derbyshire. The butterflies and birds are regularly surveyed, and variety of species is improving. We have no guarantee the travellers if they were living there would respect the land and its gradually increasing biodiversity.*

We are both unable to attend the public meeting this Friday 20th but wanted you to know our views.

Councillor Peter Slack, District Councillor for the Wirksworth Ward, made the following representations:

- This is not a good site, it is next to a community park and will spoil it. The lower entrance to Stoneywood is not suitable as the solid rock base cannot be made flat.
- Caravans won't be able to manoeuvre on the site due to the rock face and busy road adjacent.
- A footpath runs through the centre of the site.
- Travellers have not been sited here before and it would be an incorrect use of this site.

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

Local Resident: I agree with the Town Council's views, if this site is used we want to see minimal trees removed and the space used needs to be towards the back of the site not near the entrance.

Local Resident: We are concerned that crime and vandalism will increase in the area.

Local Resident: We have been undertaking butterfly surveys in that area. I agree with Cllr Slack, the site is unsuitable, it is shady with limited sunlight, has value for biodiversity in the area, and the access is very narrow. Trees would need to be removed to make a safe access.

Local Resident: We live on the same road, they would be very vulnerable on that site. The road has a speed limit of 60mph and a dangerous bend. People regularly park on the site, this is not suitable even as a temporary site.

Local Resident: I am appalled by the comments that have been made, there is no evidence that this group of Travellers have been involved in crime. The proposed site is not suitable though, could remediation be done to address the overlooking rocks? It would be cheaper and better to find a permanent site.

Local Resident: Why have these sites been chosen? How long will they be temporary? How much will each temporary site cost? These people have not tried to integrate, there have been issues with violence.

Local Resident: There are children walking down that road regularly, it is not safe.

Cllr Susan Hobson: There are only four Members on the Gypsy and Traveller Working Group, this is not enough. The site assessment that has been used is flawed. This won't help the Travellers. Matlock Bath residents have complained about how they have been treated by the Travellers.

Local Resident: Coaches are still visiting Matlock Bath, they just drop passengers off on the roadside and park elsewhere. The site in Wirksworth is unsuitable due to its proximity to Blue Lagoon.

Local Resident: We have concerns about an increase in anti-social behaviour.

Local Resident: As a scout leader, we will not be able to use the Stoneywood facility if the proposed site is used.

MEETING CLOSED AT 7:15PM