

WEEDON PARISH COUNCIL
CLERK TO THE COUNCIL MRS BARBARA MITCHELL

Mick Denman, Planning Officer
AVDC Development Control
The Gateway
Gatehouse Road
Aylesbury
Bucks HP19 8FF

25.10.2012

Dear Mr Denman

Parish Council Comments on Planning Application

12/02010/APP The Old Stables, Cooks Hill, High Street, Weedon HP22 4DR
Change of use to replace existing stables with a static caravan as a dwelling for one gypsy family

At its Parish Council Meeting held on Wednesday 3rd October, a motion from the attending public in the Open Forum session, which was carried by **79 votes to 1**, with no abstentions, urged the Parish Council to oppose this application and to take expert advice in the area of Gypsy and Traveller planning law.

Weedon Parish Council agreed in its closed council meeting to follow this motion and therefore we **OPPOSE** the application.

We have now obtained further information on some of the personal circumstances of the applicant and her family, reported to us by the applicant's brother and her agent Mr Joseph Jones at our parish council meeting of 13th October; however, we still do not know where the family is currently living. Where relevant, we have therefore based any comments relating to personal circumstances on the information we were given at this meeting:

- 1) The applicant and her family are currently living in the Aylesbury Vale area, probably in a mobile caravan on a designated gypsy/traveller site, but perhaps not authorised to live there.
- 2) The applicant has grown up and lived in the Aylesbury Vale area all her life.
- 3) The applicant has at no time lived or worked in Weedon parish.
- 4) We do not believe the applicant has lived officially in any of the neighbouring parishes of Hardwick, Aston Abbots, Quarrendon, Buckingham Park, Watermead or Bierton.
- 5) The applicant's 10-year-old son has a diagnosed behavioural disorder, and is currently attending a special school in Tring, which he would continue to attend regardless of where the family were to live in Aylesbury Vale. Home-to-school taxi transport is provided from the current address, and would continue.

We have no information on the school or nursery attended by the other child, or her exact age, but she is apparently a younger girl. We do not believe she is in education anywhere near Weedon.

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Reasons for Objection

We are of course aware that there is a separate area of planning policy relating to gypsy and traveller site applications, and we address the specific relevant elements of this policy area in detail below.

However, we would like to stress first that Weedon Parish Council objects in principle to ANY residential development in the countryside outside the existing settlement of Weedon, and we do not believe there is any national or local planning justification for conventional residential development on this site.

Weedon's Parish Plan (published in 2011 and produced with the active involvement of 66% of the residents), states in its section on Housing Development:

“Weedon has previously been classified by AVDC as a village where all new development is limited to qualifying infill and rounding off of existing settlement patterns. Villagers' views on new development concur with this policy, with 93% of respondents saying that Weedon should have no new development at all, or that development should be limited to small infill.”

1. Principle of residential development in the countryside outside an existing settlement

1.1 The proposal is in serious conflict with several policies of the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan, including:

- a) Policy RA1 which affords priority to the need to protect the countryside for its own sake
- b) Policy RA12 which indicates that planning permission will only be granted in exceptional circumstances for residential development in the countryside outside existing settlements
- c) Policy RA15, as the site is not necessary for agriculture or forestry, or for providing affordable housing to meet a local need.

1.2 The site is not, as is claimed in the applicant's supporting statement, “brownfield” land. Unless specifically designated in the local development plan (and this site is not), recently erected agricultural buildings such as stables are not considered brownfield sites appropriate for re-development.

The first-ever buildings on this site were two stables put up in 2006. The misleading “house” name of “The Old Stables” – implying that there had been stables there from historic times – was only given to the land earlier this year.

1.3 The site falls into an Area of Attractive Landscape, as designated in the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan 2004. The panorama is open countryside of large agricultural fields bounded by ancient hedgerows, dotted with an occasional stable, shed or field shelter.

The boundary of the Conservation Area of Weedon (High Street) extends to the high hedgerow immediately adjacent to the current stables, and the proposed site of the static caravan. This is also the route of the footpath WEE13 from Cooks Hill across to Hardwick Church. The footpath is part of the Aylesbury Ring.

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Development on the application site would therefore be directly adjacent to a large open historically significant field within the Conservation Area, and would adversely impact the setting of the Conservation Area and the Area of Attractive Landscape.

- 1.4 There is no justification for a residential facility to be provided simply to take care of horses. The previous owner of the stables did not appear to need to live on site for the 5 years he kept his horses there, and neither do other owners who have horses and stables on adjacent land.

2. Planning policies for gypsies and travellers

- 2.1 The March 2012 national "Planning Policy for Traveller Sites" (PPFTS), produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government, states at paragraph 20 that "applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise".

As outlined above, this application is in serious conflict with several policies of the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan, and we do not believe there are material considerations justifying approval.

- 2.2 Paragraph 23 of the national PPFTS states that "Local planning authorities should strictly limit new traveller site development in open countryside that is away from existing settlements or outside areas allocated in the development plan."
- 2.3 The AVDC "Planning Policy Position Statement providing for Gypsies & Travellers & Travelling Showpeople", published in August 2011, and updated in July 2012 (update not yet officially published), indicates that there is an up-to-date 5-year supply of deliverable sites in the district. This is a significant and material consideration which would justify refusal of permission to this application.

3. AVDC's criteria-based approach to assess planning applications for gypsy and traveller sites

We have studied Appendices 2 and 3 of the July 2012 Update of AVDC Position Statement, and our comments on this application with regard to the Appendix 2 Criteria, and the Appendix 3 Development Management Framework are as follows.

3.1 Status/Local Need

A. Local Need – Aylesbury Vale district

In the July 2012 Update of AVDC's Position Statement, it is concluded (paragraph 16) that through to 2016/17 (ie. a 5-year supply), "**currently there is an adequate and up-to-date supply of deliverable sites in the district**".

This is a material consideration to be taken into account, as it satisfies national policy requirements.

The figures in the July 12 Update do not even allow in the deliverable supply the 8 authorised pitches at Wing in public ownership. We consider it entirely justifiable to take additional account of these in any assessment of traveller site provision in the district, as they are listed in the 2006 "Tribal" Survey and Report, and the August 2011 published Position Statement, and should be treated as being available in 2012. Adding back the Wing pitches would of course further augment the supply of available sites.

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B. Local Need – Weedon and neighbouring parishes

As outlined above in Personal Circumstances 1-5, the applicant does not have “an existing significant and long-standing family, educational or employment connection to the area” (criterion (b) of Appendix 2), nor do they have “particular health needs which need to be met in the locality” (issue (2) of Appendix 3).

Neither child has any link with a school in the parish (there is no school in Weedon anyway), nor the neighbouring parishes, nor with Whitchurch School, the catchment primary school for Weedon village.

There are no special health needs (eg. for the applicant’s son) which can only be met in Weedon parish. There is no doctor’s surgery in the village, nor in neighbouring parishes within walking distance, and Stoke Mandeville Hospital is not easily accessible. For easy access to healthcare facilities, there is scarcely a more difficult location in the Aylesbury environs than Weedon.

In fact, as far as we can establish, the applicant has NO personal connections at all to Weedon or the adjoining parishes, aside from the simple fact that a member of the family purchased land and stables here earlier in 2012.

3.2 Impact on environmental assets: Landscape, Historic environment

As outlined in 1.3 above, the development would have an adverse impact on the setting of a Conservation Area and an adverse impact on an Area of Attractive Landscape.

3.3 Location: Proximity, Services, Utilities, Scale

While the application site is within 1 mile walking distance of Weedon (and Hardwick), the availability of services within these villages is extremely limited. Please see Sustainability below.

The utilities on the site are either not in place or are of questionable standard – a particular concern if young and vulnerable children are to live there:

- No mains electricity supply (the previous owner had a generator on site)
- No mains water connection
- The septic tank may be sub-standard, and may not be registered with the Environment Agency (as required from January 2012). The lower part of the field floods often, possibly as far up as the location of the septic tank, presenting a possible health hazard. Septic tanks are generally unsuitable for clay soil such as this, particularly where there is a risk of flooding.
- No telephone landline access, and mobile telephone connectivity is very poor in the village generally
- No street lighting nearby

3.4 Sustainability: Environment, Social cohesion, Transport

The environmental sustainability is questionable, due to the high risk of flooding in the lower part of the grazing field which runs down from the stables to the Hardwick Brook.

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There are extremely limited local services in Weedon:

- No shop
- No school
- No post office
- No GP surgery
- Most regular village hall activities are for special interest groups eg. Upholstery, Art, French conversation, Yoga, Pilates, Camera Club. Inclusive community functions are on a monthly basis only eg. film club is once a month, café is once a month
- There is a pub and a Methodist chapel

Of the adjoining parishes, only Hardwick is within reasonable walking distance of the site, but it also has no shop, no school, no post office, no GP surgery and no pub.

The other neighbouring parishes are not easily accessible:

- Aston Abbotts – 4 miles. No school, no shop, no GP, no PO. Bus link (153/154) to Weedon twice a week.
- Watermead – centre 4 miles. No school, no GP, but shops & services. A413 bus link.
- Buckingham Park – centre 4 miles. No shops yet, but school & GP. A413 bus link.
- Bierton – No direct road or bus link to Weedon.
- Quarrendon – No direct road or bus link to Weedon.

There is very limited public transport to access neighbouring villages or Aylesbury, where services are located.

There is only ONE bus on a Wednesday and ONE bus on a Friday in each direction from Weedon centre on the 153/154 route between Aylesbury and Newton Longville/Great Horwood. There is a regular bus service between Aylesbury and Buckingham on the A413, but the nearest bus stop to the site is half a mile away.

Looking at the above, we would argue that the site is NOT SUSTAINABLE as a gypsy/traveller site.

3.5 Site Layout and Design – including Parking, Storage, Play and Residential amenity

- i. We cannot judge the design or size of the static caravan as no detailed plans are given.
- ii. The question arises – if two stables are to be removed to provide space for the static caravan, are these to be replaced to accommodate the four or five horses on the land?
- iii. Permission is also sought for “one parking space”, but no information is given on its location or proposed use. There is plenty of hard-standing at the site currently to park a car or van. We would like clarification of whether the additional “parking space” is intended to be a new area of hard-standing; if so, where is it to be sited, of what dimensions will it be, and what type of vehicle is to park there?

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- iv. The immediate proximity of the static caravan to the remaining two stables could lead to a significant risk of infestation by flies and/or vermin. We understand that “serious infestation” was the reason for the Haddenham site becoming unfit for habitation, and being currently closed.
- v. Although it is close to the rural lane Cooks Hill, the site feels very isolated, and in no way part of Weedon. The nearest house is half a mile distant down the national-speed-limit unlit lane which has no footway.

Being set very close into the edge of rising land in a corner of two high hedges (as required by the original planning permission of 2006), the stables themselves, particularly the ones which are proposed to be replaced by the static caravan, receive very little sunlight. The location has a cold, dank, dark aspect even in daytime and late summer. What it would be like on winter nights is only to be imagined, and can surely not be a suitable place for young children, particularly one with special health needs.

- vi. This location is far from other authorised gypsy/traveller sites in the district. The applicant and her children would be isolated and cut off from their wider family and the gypsy community.

The residential amenity of the site for a gypsy family with young and vulnerable children is therefore to be seriously questioned.

In summary, we re-iterate that on the basis of AVDC’s own Position Statement of July 2012, there is a 5-year supply of authorised gypsy/traveller sites available in the district, and therefore no district-level “unmet need”. With no evidence of any personal connections of the applicant to the village or environs of Weedon, we believe that the site is unsustainable and of questionable residential amenity for a gypsy/traveller site.

We would therefore urge AVDC to refuse this application for a residential caravan for a gypsy/traveller family in this unspoiled rural location, in the same way that we are sure you would refuse permission for any other development.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Mitchell
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cc Cllr Ashley Bond

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