

PLANNING REF : 260577
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Redacted
: Wokingham, Berkshire
: REDACTED
SUBMITTED BY : Dr Redacted Lee
DATE SUBMITTED : 18/04/2026

COMMENTS:

I write to register my strong objection to the above planning application, which seeks retrospective permission for the use of land off Range Road, Finchampstead, as two Gypsy and Traveller pitches. I have considered the application carefully and set out my grounds for objection below. I am of the firm view that this application should be refused.

1. Conflict with the Development Plan

The site is designated as countryside and falls outside the defined settlement boundary in both the 2010 Wokingham Local Plan and the 2024 draft Local Plan. It is not identified or allocated for development in either of those documents, nor does it appear in the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan - a document that reflects the conclusions of an extensive and genuinely consultative process carried out with the local community. The proposed development is therefore contrary to the adopted planning framework at every level. That framework has been drawn up deliberately to prevent precisely this type of unsustainable, out-of-settlement development in rural areas. There are existing Gypsy and Traveller sites within Wokingham Borough and, where additional provision is genuinely needed, those sites offer a far more appropriate starting point than the creation of new sites in unsustainable rural locations such as this.

2. Retrospective Nature of the Application

This is a retrospective application. Works have already been carried out on the site without planning permission, including the felling of trees and vegetation, attempts to widen the lane, and the stationing of caravans. The applicant should not be rewarded with retrospective consent for works that were undertaken in deliberate disregard of the planning process. To grant permission in these circumstances would send a damaging signal that unauthorised development in sensitive rural locations can be regularised after the fact, and would significantly undermine the integrity of the planning system.

3. Highway Safety and Access

The highway safety implications of this proposal are significant and the risks posed are serious and well-evidenced:

- Range Road is a narrow, single-track, unmade rural byway. It is structurally and physically unsuitable for large vehicles or caravans. The applicant's own attempts to bring a large static caravan onto the site provide direct evidence of this: the vehicle obstructed Range Road and spilled onto Nine Mile Ride for several hours, forcing other road users to mount the footpath. Despite causing damage to private property, the caravan could not be successfully manoeuvred onto the site due to the narrowness of the lane.

- The junction with Nine Mile Ride (B3430) is subject to severely restricted visibility, compounded by gradient and restricted sight lines. Traffic on Nine Mile Ride regularly exceeds the 30mph speed limit. A serious accident has already occurred at this location when a vehicle attempting to exit Range Road caused a speeding car to swerve, demolishing a lamppost and a neighbour's brick pillar. That incident could easily have resulted in pedestrian fatalities.

- The alternative access onto Sandhurst Road is equally problematic, leading directly onto a fast-moving main road without any appropriate junction arrangement or adequate visibility splay.

- The dangerous nature of the Range Road/Nine Mile Ride junction was a material ground of refusal for a previous planning application (F/2006/8196). The residential properties adjoining the junction mean that it cannot be improved. Traffic volumes on Nine Mile Ride have risen substantially in the intervening years, making the position worse, not better.

- Range Road itself is regularly used by walkers, joggers and dog owners who currently enjoy it precisely because it carries no through traffic. The lane has no pavements or passing places, and verges have already been damaged by the applicant's unauthorised works. Any increase in traffic - particularly from large vehicles - would create an unacceptable danger to these users.

4. Sustainability and Absence of Services

This location is entirely unsustainable. There is hardly any public transport serving Range Road. There are no shops, schools, medical facilities, churches or public houses within walking distance. There are no cycle routes and no safe pedestrian access. The site can only be reached by private vehicle, and the nature of the proposed use means that a significant proportion of those vehicles would be large. Approving development in a location where every need - shopping, schooling, healthcare, employment - requires a car journey is contrary to the sustainable development principles that underpin national and local planning policy.

5. Absence of Utilities and Drainage

The site has no connection to mains drainage, sewerage, water or power. The application provides no credible detail as to how foul sewage is to be disposed of, nor how the site will be connected to any drainage system - assuming such a system exists in this location, which is far from clear. The area is known to flood readily after heavy rainfall. The introduction of hardstanding will reduce natural drainage and is likely to exacerbate flooding on and around the site. These are not matters that can be addressed by condition; they are fundamental deficiencies that make the site physically unsuitable for residential use.

6. Impact on the Rural Character and the Green Gap

Range Road serves as an important green gap and wildlife corridor between Nine Mile Ride and Sandhurst Road, and between the historic forest rides of this part of Finchampstead. It is a designated bridleway of historic significance. The development of this site - particularly with two pitches, hardstanding, lighting, and the associated activity of permanent residential occupation - would irreversibly urbanise what is currently a rural, wooded and tranquil setting. The introduction of artificial lighting has already caused

visible harm: the light pollution from the unauthorised works on this site can currently be seen from a considerable distance, and the effect on the character of the area is self-evident. Granting permission would entrench and extend that harm.

7. Impact on Wildlife and Biodiversity

The applicant's assertion that this proposal will have no impact on biodiversity or protected species is, in my view, simply not credible. The site and surrounding woodland support a wide range of species, including bats, deer, badgers, owls, hedgehogs and numerous nesting birds. Development on this scale would result in:

- Direct habitat loss through the removal of trees, shrubs and hedgerows, some of which appear to have already been cleared by the applicant without permission.
- Habitat fragmentation affecting the wider woodland ecosystem and its role as a wildlife corridor.
- Serious and well-documented harm to nocturnal species from the introduction of artificial lighting into a currently dark area. The evidence of this harm is already visible from the unauthorised site activity.
- No indication has been given in the application as to how mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements will be met. The absence of any ecological assessment, baseline data, or BNG delivery plan means the application is materially deficient and cannot lawfully be approved on the information provided.

8. Tree Preservation Orders

Several trees on and immediately surrounding the site are protected by Tree Preservation Orders. These trees form an important part of both the local environment and the visual screening of the area. Works to the site already appear to have damaged or removed some of this protected vegetation. The installation of utilities - none of which currently serve the site - would require trenching that would inevitably damage or destroy the root systems of surviving protected trees. The application does not address this conflict in any satisfactory way.

9. Precedent

There are already a significant number of Gypsy and Traveller sites within the Wokingham, Finchampstead and Arborfield area. The approval of this application - particularly on a retrospective basis - would set a deeply unwelcome precedent and would be likely to encourage further applications along Range Road and in similarly inappropriate rural locations throughout the borough.

Conclusion

I recognise that national planning policy places an obligation on local planning authorities to make adequate provision for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. That obligation is not in dispute. What is in dispute is whether this particular site - in open countryside, without utilities, served by a dangerous and substandard access, and the subject of unauthorised prior works - represents a suitable location for that provision. It plainly does not.

The proposed development would cause serious harm to highway safety,

would destroy the rural character of an important green gap, would damage irreplaceable woodland and biodiversity, and would reward a pattern of unauthorised activity that should instead be the subject of enforcement. I urge the Local Planning Authority in the strongest possible terms to refuse this application.