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Objections to Planning Application 260577: Caravan Site, Land South of Valois Finchampstead RG40 3NR

I strongly object to this planning application and would ask that WBC refuse this application.

Inaccuracies in Planning Application 260577

The site has never, in the last 44 years I have lived here, been a garden. A Donkey grazed on the field for many years.

There has never been any access to the site from Range Road.

There has never been any previous development on the site.

The applicant states that there is no delivery development by WBC for gypsies and travellers – this is incorrect.

The applicant said nobody objected when the land was purchased. Obviously, nobody objected because nobody knew the applicant's intention then was to live on the site.

The proposed development is not compliant with the Local Plan.

The applicant says the development would have no adverse effect on the area's landscape – again false. Caravans are not dwelling houses and are totally out of character with long established dwellings on Range Road.

The applicant states that access from Range Road onto Nine Mile Ride is fine. This is FALSE, it is potentially hazardous. A previous planning application (061483) in 2006 along RR was refused due to highway safety.

Harm to the Countryside and Ecology

Range Road is part of the "Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands" area and has Valued Landscape status under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Having M1 primary area classification, Range Road is subject to strict planning constraints. The proposed site lies within designated Countryside, outside the settlement boundary in the 2010 Wokingham Local Plan, the 2024 draft Local Plan and the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan. The site is not listed for development in any of the aforementioned plans.

Range Road is a key Green Gap between the historic Rides in the forests such as Nine Mile Ride and Sandhurst Road. Development of this site would erode this Green Gap (as defined in the FNDP) and would completely change the rural, wooded character of the area.

The rural, undeveloped isolation of Range Road allows it to remain a diverse, ecologically important area, used mainly by walkers for leisure. Stepping into Range Road from either the busy Sandhurst Road or NMR is akin to stepping into a different world., serene and verdant, with an abundance of wildlife and birds who thrive in their undisturbed habitat.

The proposal (caravans, mobile homes, hard standings, parking) would have an urbanising effect on the countryside, encouraging urban creep and more traveller sites. It would be totally incongruous, a stark intrusion into the rural landscape of Range Road which, hitherto, has only had five long-established dwellings which blend harmoniously into the countryside, and which are compatible with the surrounding area.

Highway Safety Concerns

Planning Application 260577 directly contravenes policy CP6 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy. This states that any development must enhance road safety and avoid causing highway or traffic related environmental concerns.

Additional traffic including heavy wide caravans would have an adverse impact on Road Safety causing risk to life.

Section 66(1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 defines a byway open to all traffic (BOAT) as a highway over which the public have a right of way for vehicular traffic, but which is used by the public mainly for the purpose for which footpaths and bridleways are so used. Additional traffic and use of caravans is contrary to the accepted use of this Byway (BOAT).

Range Road is used mainly by walkers (of which I am one) who enjoy the unspoilt, rural character. I am concerned about any increase in traffic because there are no passing places, no separation of pedestrians and vehicular access when pedestrians must clamber onto verges for safety to allow vehicles to pass (verges which have been destroyed by the recent, illegal scraping of Range Road to facilitate wide caravan access).

Access in and out of Sandhurst Road and Nine Mile Ride is hazardous and substandard with severe visibility issues.

The incline and sightlines for exiting Range Road onto NMR makes it very difficult to see what is coming from the right.

Equally, turning from NMR into Range Road from NMR, it is difficult to see a vehicle coming up Range Road, necessitating reversing onto busy NMR, as it would be impossible for the vehicle on RR to reverse as there are no passing places. An increase in traffic will mean a higher chance of vehicles coming from opposite directions and meeting, with adverse consequences for drivers and pedestrians.

Evidence of the substandard access from RR onto NMR is further substantiated by the rejection of Planning Application 061483 on Range Road opposite the site of Planning Application 260577.

That Application was rejected on the grounds of how dangerous it would be for vehicles to pull out onto NMR. Considering the increase in volume of traffic in the last 20 years since that rejection, there is all the more reason to reject planning application 260577 now.

Lack of Utilities

There is no drainage, sewerage or mains utilities to the site.

The long-established dwellings in Range Road have water pipes and electricity cables serving them with permission for the installation thereof granted at the time of the initial development of Range Road. The owner of Range Road is now unknown, and it is therefore not possible for utility companies to give lawful consent to install further utilities.

The addition of hard standing will cause great harm by changing the drainage properties of the area. Vehicle movements and electric lights will change the rural, wooded character.

Sustainability – Access to Services and Facilities

The proposed site is unsustainable. It is accessed via a Byway with no paved surface. There are no local services (shops, schools, healthcare, etc) within walking distance or accessible by public transport. Future occupants would therefore rely heavily on private cars, adding traffic to busy highways. This conflicts with planning policies aiming for sustainable development.

Scale and Dominance in a Rural Setting

It is usual for Gypsy plots to be given permission to expand once initial planning permission is granted (A typical example of Gypsy pitch expansion, once planning permission is obtained, involves intensifying an existing site by subdividing plots or developing unused adjacent land to increase the number of pitches and utility buildings. Examples include expanding a two-pitch site to five or increasing an existing four-pitch site by adding four more, often requiring site reconfiguration).

This site could accommodate many more caravans and cars than in the proposal.

The addition of more caravans would fall within permitted use if the Application were granted and no further planning consent would be necessary. The number of caravans would soon outnumber the existing houses on Range Road, further changing the character of current local inhabitants and increasing the intensity of unsuitable traffic along Range Road.

National Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) states that such development should not dominate the nearest settled community.

17% of Gypsy/Traveller population in the Wokingham Borough are in Finchampstead, while Finchampstead only accounts for 10.5% of the land mass of the Borough. Any further Gypsy/Traveller pitches in Finchampstead would be disproportionate to the scale of existing settlements in Finchampstead.

There are other sites in the Borough which are far more suitable for Gypsy/Traveller developments. The emerging Local Plan update contains provisions for additional Gypsy/Traveller pitches, notably at High Barn Farm, Barkham,

Conclusion

Range Road is a key Green Gap which must be retained as it currently is to maintain the rural character of Finchampstead.

Proposal 260577 conflicts with local planning policies in the Wokingham borough plans that: -

- Restrict development in the countryside
- Protect rural character
- Control where Gypsy/Travellers sites should go

The proposal would harm the landscape and appearance of the area, neither maintaining nor enhancing the quality of the environment.

The proposal would not be in a suitable location for the development, in respect of the spatial Strategy for the area.

The proposal would cause serious concerns for highway safety, both to vehicles and pedestrians.

The proposal is in a poor location for sustainability, conflicting with planning policies aiming for sustainable development.

I would draw your attention to a recent appeal decision regarding an application for a Gypsy/Traveller site at Warren Lane, Finchampstead (APP/X0360/W/25/3364902). The inspector, whilst not disputing the need for such sites, nonetheless rejected the application.

I believe there are even stronger grounds to reject the Range Road application 260577, which I respectfully ask you to do.

Yours faithfully,

Alexis Fraatz

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