



Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 3 September 2025

Site visit made on 3 September 2025

by A Owen MA BA(Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 15th September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/P0240/W/25/3366763

Land at 3 New Road, Beeston, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1PB

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Larry Connors against the decision of Central Bedfordshire Council.
 - The application Ref is CB/23/02331/FULL.
 - The development proposed is change of use of land to use as a residential caravan site for four gypsy families each with one static caravan/mobile home, together with erection of four utility buildings and laying of hard standing.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. It was clarified at the hearing that the proposal does not include the provision of touring caravans. Indeed the plans do not show them and the description of development does not include them. Although it is recognised that touring caravans are commonly found at gypsy and traveller sites, I have considered the appeal on the basis of the development applied for.
3. In the Council's Statement of Case, they confirmed that their concerns in respect of air pollution had been addressed. In addition, they advise that although noise in the outdoor amenity areas would be higher than desirable, satisfactory noise levels inside the caravans could be ensured subject to the submission of further details secured by a condition. On this basis they no longer had objections to the development on the issues stated in the third reason for refusal. I have no reason to consider otherwise.

Main Issues

4. In light of the above, the remaining main issues are:
 - i) the effect of the development on highway safety;
 - ii) the effect on biodiversity; and
 - iii) whether the proposal would be suitably located in respect of its effect on the character and appearance of the area and its accessibility to services and facilities.

Reasons

Highway safety

5. The site is accessed from New Road, just east of its junction with the A1 dual carriageway. The access comprises a fairly wide bell mouth flanked by brick walls which lead to metal gates around 7m back from the highway edge. The speed limit for New Road at this point is 50mph, but it is clear that traffic passing the site would not be travelling this fast. This is because vehicles travelling westbound would be slowing before reaching the junction with the A1, and vehicles travelling eastbound would have just pulled off the A1 and would not yet have had a chance to speed up.
6. At the hearing, details of a traffic survey were provided showing that the average speed of traffic at a point marginally east of the access was just over 30mph. On this basis, the appellant suggests visibility splays would need to be around 50m in each direction. However, in my view, this would assume that traffic speeds are consistent along New Road, whereas in this case, traffic is either speeding up or slowing down as it passes the site. Traffic approaching the site from the east would most likely be going faster than 30mph at a point around 50m from the site. I therefore agree with the Council that it would be necessary to measure speeds further east along the road rather than, or as well as, by the site access. I have no information on traffic speeds further east of the site, but taking account of the speed limit of the road and the fact that cars will most likely already be starting to slow down with the A1 ahead, the Council estimate westbound speeds of 40mph, which would necessitate a splay of 120m. I agree with this approach.
7. A splay of this length would not be possible without encroaching across the front of No 1 New Road. Although the appellant says they own this property I have no substantive evidence to support this and therefore cannot be assured that the splay could be achieved. Indeed, it may be that visibility within the required splay is impeded by a detached storage building at the front of No 1. As such, I would not be confident that sufficient visibility exists to the east. This may compromise the safety of vehicles, generated by the day to day movements from four families, emerging from the access.
8. To the west, there is only a distance of about 40m to the end of the southbound slip road off the A1. However, traffic approaching the site from the west would most likely be going slower than 30mph at that point, as it turns from the slip road into New Road, and so a splay of less than 50m would be sufficient. Likewise vehicles coming from the northbound carriageway would either have slowed to turn onto New Road or have stopped completely before crossing the southbound carriageway. On that basis the visibility to the west would be satisfactory.
9. At the time of the site visit there were two HGVs unloading at the pallet storage business further east along New Road. Indeed there was also one there when I passed the site the previous afternoon. Though this may have the effect of slowing down westbound traffic at some times, it acts as a further impediment to visibility as the closest vehicle was around 50m from the appeal site access. In any case, visibility splays should be calculated for when traffic is free flowing.
10. As set out above, the proposal does not include touring caravans. I understand gypsy families sometimes store tourers elsewhere or hire them as and when needed, and hence such vehicles may only be brought to site a few times a year

before and after families tour. It may be possible to impose a condition to prevent the permanent stationing of touring caravans. Though it would not be a regular occurrence, it would still be necessary for tourers to be physically able to enter and leave the site. Although I have no tracking drawings before me, I am confident that this would be possible, even if there may need to be some minor widening of the access or an enlarged radii, as there would appear to be a substantial amount of scope along the site frontage. Indeed, I note the existing dropped kerb extends further west than the access. Additional plans could be provided to show how this would be achieved.

11. Moreover, although there are gates on site at present, the appellant confirmed that having gates in this position is not necessary, though some may be needed further into the site for security. This would ensure that even large vehicles could pull clear of the highway and not obstruct traffic on it.
12. I note the concerns that the right turn filter lane on the northbound A1 may not be large enough to accommodate large vehicles. However, this would be for the Highways Agency to resolve as the filter lane could be used by any HGVs and any additional large sized traffic generated by the development would be very minimal.
13. With respect to static caravans, once on site they would not be likely to be moved for many years. The appellant also advised that the police are required to be notified when static caravans are being transported. Any resulting effects on traffic flow would therefore be very rare.
14. Overall, although I consider that the access would most likely be able to spatially accommodate vehicles likely to visit the site, the inadequate visibility to the east means that I could not conclude that the access would be safe to use. The development would therefore have a harmful effect on highway safety and so would be contrary to policy T2 of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan (2021) which says that development must not have a detrimental effect on highway safety.

Biodiversity

15. Local Plan policies EE2 and EE8 both require all development to provide a net gain in biodiversity.
16. Most of the appeal site is covered ruderal vegetation. Some of this would be used for the stationing of caravans and parking and manoeuvring, with the rest used as amenity areas. It is likely that maintained amenity areas, even if grassed, may not be as ecologically rich as areas that are untouched. A substantial length of hedgerow is proposed for the site boundaries which would most likely provide some useful habitat, and a landscaping scheme could be developed with additional planting to provide additional habitat. Nonetheless, based on the large parts of the site that could not accommodate any planting, I could not be confident that the hedgerow and proposed landscaping would result in a net gain in biodiversity.
17. I recognise that policies EE2 and EE8 do not state that schemes that do not provide biodiversity net gain should be refused. Nonetheless, the absence of evidence before me to demonstrate that a net gain could be achieved, leads me to conclude that the proposal would not accord with these policies.
18. As such I cannot conclude that the development could provide a net gain in biodiversity and so it would fail to accord with policies EE2 and EE8.

19. The site is also within a Red Impact Risk zone for great crested newts, and I am advised that the site is within 500m of a pond. It is agreed that the red zone does not appear to account for the presence of the A1. On this basis it seems more reasonable that the site, in practice, would be within an orange zone, but this still signifies that great crested newts are likely to be present. There is no evidence that the nearest pond contains great crested newts, that the site has suitable habitat for great crested newts or that the pathway from one to the other is suitable. Nonetheless, taking a precautionary approach, I cannot be confident that this protected species would not be harmed.
20. Although I note that in the Great Billington appeal a biodiversity enhancement strategy was secured by condition, that site appears to have already been in use and contained hardstanding. The operative part of the site before me is wholly undeveloped and so would have a greater likelihood of having a high biodiversity value which may not be able to be enhanced, and may accommodate habitat for great crested newts.

Character and appearance

21. The site is positioned between the A1 to the west and a few dwellings and a pallet storage business to the east. The appeal site is deeper than the adjacent development to the east. The caravans, utility rooms, amenity space and parking would be on the rear, undeveloped part and hence would project further into the open land which surrounds this cluster of buildings. Despite the presence of the A1 and the development close to the site, the overriding character of the area is rural and the undeveloped nature of the substantive part of the appeal site makes a contribution to this.
22. The development would most likely only be appreciable from positions on the A1 and New Road. There is no footway alongside the A1 and so views of the development would be from drivers. Although traffic on the A1 passes the site at high speed, views are possible from a considerable distance to the north due to the openness of the land opposite the site. Nonetheless, due to the limited height of the utility room and caravans, slightly lower level of the site compared to the A1, and proposed boundary hedgerow and acoustic fencing, it is likely only a limited view of the proposal from here would be possible.
23. From New Road, views would be limited to that which would be possible through the site access. From here the development would be set back inside the site, and partially obscured by boundary fencing and hedgerow planting. Also, from here, its projection southwards compared to the neighbouring development would not be fully apparent. It would therefore be mainly seen alongside the other developments on New Road.
24. In that context, the development would not be incongruous such that the character and appearance of the area would be unacceptably harmed. It would therefore accord with Local Plan policies EE5 and HQ1 insofar as they seek to ensure that development has regard to the characteristics of its setting and responds positively to its context.

Accessibility

25. Policy H7 of the Local Plan relates directly to gypsy and traveller sites and sets out a number of criteria. One of which is that adequate schools, shops, healthcare and

other facilities are within reasonable travelling distance. The Council consider such facilities are within reasonable travelling distance, and hence the proposal would not conflict with this part of the policy. Paragraph 13 of the national Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) also refers to the need for sites to allow for access to health services, schools, and to provide a settled base that may reduce the need for long distance travelling. The proposal would not be contrary to this advice either.

26. It is noted that access to the nearest shop, which is a supermarket in Sandy around 600m from the site, by sustainable modes of transport is poor. There is no pavement along New Road to Sandy, no streetlighting and much of the road has a 50mph speed limit. As such, despite not being an inordinate distance to walk or cycle, it would not be an appealing proposition. Nonetheless, the policies referred to do not require access to be by sustainable mode of transport.
27. It is agreed between the parties that the site lies outside any identified settlement and hence is in the open countryside for planning policy purposes. Policy SP7 of the Local Plan refers to all development and states that outside settlement envelopes only particular types of development will be permitted. Gypsy and traveller development is not one of these particular types of development. It is clear then that as the site is outside Sandy, which is the nearest settlement with a defined envelope, the proposal would conflict with this policy.
28. Paragraph 26 of the (PPTS) says sites in the open countryside away from existing settlements must be strictly limited. The settlement of Beeston is just across the A1 from the site. Though Beeston does not have a settlement envelope and there are no services or facilities for day to day living within it, the proposal could not be said to be away from a settlement in spatial terms.
29. In summary, the site would be suitably located in terms of its accessibility to services and facilities and as a result, the proposal would accord with policy H7. Also, although it is spatially outside a settlement envelope, it would not be away from a settlement. Therefore, though there would be a conflict with policy SP7, I give this limited weight given the location of the site and the guidance in the PPTS.

Other Matters

30. It is not disputed by the parties that the Council cannot currently demonstrate a five year supply of gypsy and traveller pitches, though the Council suggest that until the definition of gypsies and travellers in the PPTS was amended in December 2024, they did have a sufficient supply. I have no reason to consider otherwise. Nonetheless, they now suggest there is a need for around 170 pitches to 2035, based on data in their 2016 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment. Permissions have only been granted for 109 pitches since that time and hence there is still a shortfall of about 60 pitches.
31. Moreover, I was referred to a site at Little Billington where lawful provision is likely to be decreasing from that which was anticipated. This indicates there is a current unmet need too. The Council accept there are no alternative sites near the appeal site, though point to a site of 6 pitches which has just become available at Houghton Conquest. However generally I agree that with such a significant shortfall, alternative sites are limited.

32. Due to the lack of a five years supply, paragraph 11 d)ii) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') is engaged. This requires planning permission to be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole. It adds that particular regard should be had to policies relating to design, affordable housing, the effective use of land and development in sustainable locations. Matters of detailed design and affordable housing are of little relevance to the proposal.
33. With regard to sustainable locations, as set out above, the site provides reasonable access to services and facilities and would not be away from a settlement. It would hence be supported by paragraph 110 of the Framework.
34. In terms of an effective use of land, paragraph 129 refers to development taking account of the need for different types of housing and the availability of land for accommodating it, but also the need to take into account the importance of well designed places. Whilst the need for gypsy and traveller sites and the lack of supply is recognised, the unsafe access to the site means the development would not be well designed and so the proposed use of the land would not be wholly supported by this paragraph.
35. Also, paragraph 115 advises that safe and suitable access to sites should be achieved, and paragraph 192 seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity. The proposal would conflict with both these paragraphs of the Framework for the reasons given above.
36. I give substantial weight to the benefit of four pitches at a time where there is a shortfall of supply, to the current unmet need with no alternative sites currently available, and to the fact the pitches would allow reasonable access to services and facilities. Nonetheless I give considerable weight to the harmful impact on biodiversity and very substantial weight to the failure of the development to provide a safe access. As such I consider the harms would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when considered against the policies in the Framework as a whole.
37. I have considered whether granting a temporary permission would be justified, but in view of the inappropriate vehicle access and immediate harm to biodiversity, a temporary consent would not be advantageous.

Conclusion

38. The proposal would fail to accord with policies EE2, EE8 and T2 of the Local Plan which are consistent with the Framework. Even though I find no conflict with policies HQ1, EE5, H7 and limited conflict with SP7, the proposal would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole. There are no other considerations, including the provision of the Framework, that lends me to a decision other than in accordance with the development plan.
39. As such, for the reasons given above, the appeal is dismissed.

A Owen

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANT:

Larry Connors	Appellant
Phillip Brown	Agent

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY:

Eilis Edmonds	Principal Planning Officer
David Hale	Gypsy & Traveller Officer
Jethro Punter	Highways Officer

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Cllr Susan Bell	Ward Councillor
Cllr Robert Pashby	Ward Councillor
Stephen Scott-Dunwoody	Local resident
Sara Scott-Dunwoody	Local resident
Mary Donahoe	Local resident
Lorna Howie	Local resident

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED AT THE HEARING

Appeal decisions Ref APP/P0240/C/22/3312021 & APP/P0240/C/22/3312049

Summary of traffic speed survey and visibility splay drawing