

# **GYPSY AND TRAVELLER TEMPORARY SITE PROVISION IN THE DISTRICT**

## **UPDATE REPORT OF THE GYPSY AND TRAVELLER SITE PROVISION WORKING GROUP**

**COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE – 23 MARCH 2023**

### **Foreword by Councillor Susan Hobson, Chair of the Working Group**

This update report is submitted to provide Members, affected stakeholders and the wider public with the current position on the Council's search for appropriate temporary sites for those specific homeless Traveller families with an accepted local connection to the Derbyshire Dales. It is being presented to the Community and Environment Committee as the last opportunity to be considered on at a meeting of the authority before the pre-election period commences on 24 March 2023.

The Council extended the remit of this Working Group after our previous report was considered on 24 November 2022 in order for further work to be undertaken to identify potential temporary sites and recommend those back to the Council in an open and transparent way.

As previously, I would like to thank those Members who have committed a lot of time to attending meetings, undertaking research and providing their advice and direction to inform the ongoing activity of the Working Group.

This update report reflects the concerns of one of the specific Traveller families to whom we owe a homelessness duty, as well as airing the feedback received from the parish council and businesses in Matlock Bath. The Working Group has spent a considerable amount of time trying to identify alternative solutions not only to the question of suitable sites but also in seeking to resolve the complications for local businesses and residents in Matlock Bath arising from the ongoing use of the Matlock Bath Station Yard Car Park by a specific Traveller family.

Some progress has been made in negotiating a potential agreement for the temporary use of a site, but this process has not concluded. Any decisions on this will be a matter for the new Council after the local elections scheduled to take place on 4 May 2023. The new Council will need to ensure that any decision making process is wholly open and transparent, with all relevant parties being able to provide their views which Members can have regard to before making any decisions.

This has not been an easy task, but I am grateful to all involved for their ongoing commitment to working through the various options available to the Council in seeking to resolve this longstanding issue. This update report is submitted in order to demonstrate what has been done and what is left to do by the new Council.

**Councillor Susan Hobson  
Chair of the Gypsy and Traveller Site Provision Working Group  
March 2023**

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This update report has been prepared by a cross party, Member-led working group to make recommendations to the Council proposing the designation of locations in the District as being suitable for temporary occupation by Gypsy and Traveller families to whom the District Council has a statutory homelessness duty. The report should be read in conjunction with the Working Group's [initial report and recommendations](#) from November 2022.
- 1.2 The working group was established by the Council at its meeting on 29 September 2022 with the following remit:
- (a) Considering the viability of options against the criteria established in Policy HC6 of the Derbyshire Dales Local Plan
  - (b) Undertaking site visits to any location under consideration to gain an appreciation of the issues associated
  - (c) Recommending proposals for the development of temporary sites to the Council for approval.
- 1.3 The Council also mandated the working group to report its conclusions and recommendations back to an extraordinary meeting of the Council before 24 November 2022. [This report](#) was submitted on 24 November 2022 and the Council [agreed a number of recommendations](#) in respect of temporary site provision. At the same time, in recognition of the temporary designation of Matlock Bath Station Yard Car Park until 31 January 2023, the Council extended the remit of the Working Group to identify further temporary site options for consideration by the Council.
- 1.4 The cross party working group has continued to be chaired by Councillor Susan Hobson and has the following membership representing four of the five political groups on the Council:

Councillor Jason Atkin  
Councillor Sue Burfoot  
Councillor Tom Donnelly  
Councillor Steve Flitter  
Councillor Stuart Lees  
Councillor Tony Morley  
Councillor Mike Ratcliffe  
Councillor Alasdair Sutton  
Councillor Colin Swindell

The Green and Independent Group has not formally participated with the Working Group since November 2022.

## **1. Engagement with the Specific Traveller Family and Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group**

1.1 It was noted in the initial report of the Working Group that it had not possible to meet with representatives of Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group and a member of the specific Traveller family currently camped on the Matlock Bath Station Yard Car Park. Members were therefore keen to make arrangements to do so and a meeting took place on 30 January 2023 attended by Councillors Sue Burfoot, Tom Donnelly and Sue Hobson.

1.2 Key points that were expressed by the family representative were:

- The family confirmed that the facilities currently on site at Matlock Bath met their basic needs, from their point of view
- The family expressed the view that whilst they would prefer a location further south in the district, in order to be closer to family support, they were comfortable enough at Matlock Bath and were not currently planning to move from the site
- The issue of moving to the other side of the coach park was discussed. The family's view was that this would not be favoured, because of an increased likelihood of complaint and increased risk to a vulnerable family member
- The family confirmed that they would use an adjoining car park leased by the Council if the coach park was no longer an option, but that they would prefer not to move if both sites were available
- The family confirmed that they would not collocate with the other homeless Traveller family, who are currently located at Matlock Station car park
- The family confirmed that they did not consider that the Woodyard site was suitable for their particular needs. Whilst they were of the view that it might provide a suitable site for another Traveller family, the vulnerabilities of one of their own family meant that they did not consider this to be suitable for them

1.3 These points were shared with the wider Working Group at a meeting in February 2023 and there was collective agreement that it would not be appropriate to require the specific Traveller family to relocate from the coach park at Matlock Bath Station Yard Car Park until a suitable alternative site had been identified.

## **2. Engagement with Matlock Bath Parish Council and Businesses**

2.1 The Working Group are especially conscious of the impact of the use of the Matlock Bath Station Yard Car Park as a temporary site for a specific Traveller family, especially in the context of their ongoing use of the site beyond 31 January 2023. Their presence has generated complaints to the

Council for a number of reasons and the Working Group are assured that officers have worked to address the issues and respond to those complaints.

2.2 A key consideration for the Working Group has been ensuring that there is improved communication and engagement with all stakeholders. In recognition that the specific Traveller family would not relocate from the site by 31 January 2023, officers of the Council made arrangements to meet with representatives of Matlock Bath Parish Council to provide an update and respond to concerns or issues.

2.3 The feedback from Matlock Bath Parish Council was:

- Residents will not be happy about the family staying beyond the 31 January. The village has had its fair share of encampments.
- The Parish Council is extremely concerned about the mess and human excrement which is left along walking routes residents and visitors use and in the car park itself. It is not a good advertisement for Matlock Bath.
- The Parish Council is concerned about the exposure by one member of the family which we have seen on previous occasions in front of village children together with the excessive shouting.
- The Parish Council would prefer that if the family stay beyond the 31 January, that they are moved to an adjoining car park leased by the District Council rather than stay on the coach park.
- The Parish Council is extremely concerned about the effect the Travellers on the car park will have on visitor numbers. They know from previous correspondence that some visitors will not park when they see the Travellers and have evidence that coach drivers will not stay either. The businesses in the village and the village itself cannot sustain a loss of visitors/income at the moment. Businesses are already struggling with the increase in the cost of living.
- Over the winter the Heights of Abraham have done a lot of work in trying to encourage coach companies to come. This work would benefit the village and not just the Heights.
- The Parish Council would wish to see the travellers moved no later than February half term

2.4 At the time of drafting this update report in early March, the specific Traveller family has not moved from Matlock Bath. It is recognised that the valid concerns of the Parish Council need to be addressed and the Working Group continues to work to identify potential suitable temporary sites for use by the specific Traveller family.

2.5 Prior to the publication of this update report, further correspondence was received from Matlock Bath Parish Council (dated 14 March 2023) which referenced the proximity to the Easter holidays – a time when the village will be busy – and highlighting the need for alternative arrangements for the specific Traveller family to be made in order to free up the car park for coaches to return and for visitors to park. The Parish Council also stated that *“we feel this will be a testing time for coach companies so fear that if we lose out with business at the Easter holidays, we will not see them return*

*during the summer .... our position is that the lack, or reduction in visitors, will have an enormous effect on businesses who are still struggling from the Covid pandemic.”*

- 2.6 The Working Group has been made aware of specific representations directed to the District Council from the Heights of Abraham business located in Matlock Bath in February 2023. Given the public interest in this specific issue, it is worth noting that the correspondence received set out disappointment that the District Council had not been able to reinstate the coach park at Matlock Bath Station Yard Car Park at the end of January 2023. Furthermore, the correspondence set out the economic and reputational implications for this specific business. Whilst the Working Group acknowledges the impact, it has sought solutions from officers in respect of the provision of coach parking facilities as this will reduce the economic impact on all tourist related businesses in Matlock Bath.
- 2.7 Officers have prepared a number of options for consideration in respect of the issue of coach parking in Matlock Bath. Discussions are ongoing with landowners in respect of the potential use of alternative sites for coach parking during the peak tourism season. The Working Group has also asked officers to make changes to the Matlock Bath Station Yard Car Park that will ensure that there is some provision of coach parking at that location. This will involve the relocation of four coach parking spaces to a different part of the car park. It is also recognised that the Tinti's Yard area of the car park, which is used as overspill parking, is in need of surface improvement works. Furthermore, officers have identified that improvements to the entrance to the Artists Corner car park would enable two coach spaces to be allocated, although this would mean the loss of 45 car parking spaces.
- 2.8 The Working Group is focused on providing alternative options which ensure that the Council's obligations to all affected by the current Traveller encampment at the Matlock Bath Station Yard Car Park are met in a fair and equitable manner.

### **3. Alternative Temporary Sites**

- 3.1 The previous report to the Council meeting on 24 November 2022 indicated that the Working Group had identified two sites in private ownership that Members wanted to explore further for potential designation as temporary sites for Travellers to whom the Council has a homelessness duty. These sites were not named due to the commercially sensitive negotiations that would be required.
- 3.2 After the Council meeting on 24 November 2022, the Working Group instructed officers to appoint a land agent and surveyor to conduct negotiations with the owners of the two plots of land which were of interest. In January 2023 it was reported that the owner of one of the sites was not prepared to enter any discussion with the Council in respect of the use of their land for the purpose of accommodating Traveller families. This was

disappointing, but the Working Group acknowledged that it could not force the landowner to come to the negotiating table.

- 3.3 The other site under consideration has seen negotiations progress well with the landowner who is open to the possibility of agreeing a temporary leasing arrangement with the Council for a period of three years. Negotiations have progressed to a point where the Council will need to make a decision whether to progress with entering into an agreement. However, as this report is submitted for information on the eve of the pre-election period, it is not appropriate to recommend that any further action be taken until a new Council is elected on 4 May 2023. However, the Working Group will be in a position to make a recommendation to Council that a site has been identified with the potential for occupation.
- 3.4 In identifying this potential site, Members will need to be mindful of the specific circumstances of those Traveller families and have regard to policy and planning considerations, as well as other matters such as safeguarding, before making any determination in respect of this site and how it may be used in future.
- 3.5 Officers have separately provided a briefing to the Working Group on the potential use of compulsory purchase powers. It is clear that this approach is not straightforward and would take considerable time for any site (should any suitable site be identified). However, Members may wish to examine this route further in respect of any potential delivery of permanent sites in the future.

#### **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

- 4.1 The Working Group has continued to undertake the task it was allocated by the Council to find temporary solutions to enable the authority to meet its statutory obligations to the two Traveller families with a local connection to the Derbyshire Dales.
- 4.2 Following the publication of this report on 15 March 2023, the Working Group held a further meeting on 21 March 2023 to discuss the updates from the independent valuer and in respect of coach parking options. Members were encouraged the progress made in both areas but recognised that further information is required before a firm recommendation can be made to the Council in respect of a potential temporary site.
- 4.3 At the present time, the Working Group is minded to make the following recommendations to the Council after the election:
  - (a) That further work be undertaken to provide a full appraisal of a privately owned site to assess its viability for the potential delivery of a temporary Traveller site in order for the Council to make an informed decision, having regard to all relevant information.

(b) That officers be recommended to make an agreement with Total Parking Solutions in respect of the provision of coach parking at Cromford Meadows as an alternative location for coaches to park during the use of the Matlock Station Bath Car Park.

4.4 This update report provides Members and the public with an interest in this matter with the latest position before the municipal elections on 4 May 2023. It will be the for the new membership of the Council after those elections to take forward the discussions and decision making process for the allocation of any sites for use by those specific Traveller families to whom the Council has a homelessness duty.