

Application 212037 application for a Gypsy and Traveller site, Island Road- full consultation responses received by the Local Planning Authority.

### **RBC Transport Development Control**

The proposed development is located on the south side of Island Road, between the RE3 Recycling Centre and a Thames Water sewage treatment works (STW). Island Road is accessed from a 4-arm signalised junction off the A33. Island Road is a two-way industrial estate type access road with a 30mph speed limit and a continuous footway on the north side. Across the site frontage on the south side, there is a footway with dropped kerbs to enable uncontrolled crossing between the two footways, to provide a continuous route. All traffic on Island Road is for access only (there is no through route).

There are no parking restrictions on Island Road in the vicinity of the site frontage, except for a short length of double-yellow lines associated with the entrance to the RE3 facility.

The transit site will comprise 7 pitches, bin store, outdoor seating area, play area, and a new access onto Island Road. Each plot comprises a kitchen/toilet block and space for two caravans and two to four light vehicles and/or an OGV1 [**Other Goods Vehicle 1** (OGV1) Classification Includes all rigid vehicles over 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight with two or three axles] plus trailer and provision of an EV charging point.

The proposed development will be accessed off Island Road via a priority junction. The new junction is to have tactile crossing points, and a 1.8m wide footway leading into the pedestrian entrance. The distance between the proposed new access and the nearest existing access on Island Road is 22m (based on midpoints). Access will be controlled by a lifting barrier arm linked to CCTV / access control. The barrier arm is set back 11.9m from the edge of the carriageway which will ensure that a car and twin axle caravan can wait at the barrier and not protrude out into the carriageway. In addition, a sliding gate is provided, set back 10.1m from the edge of the carriageway which will be open during the day and only shut over-night or under exceptional circumstances.

Tracking diagrams have been included in appendix 1 of the TS to demonstrate a car and twin axle caravan entering the site but not accessing the individual pitches. However, the applicant has stated that once the caravan is towed into position adjacent to a pitch, the resident will then use a combination of vehicles and jockey wheels to position the caravan within the pitch, as per standard practice. Given that the access road width is in excess of 10m wide, this is considered acceptable.

It is stated that each pitch is booked as an entity. The main vehicular entrance will be controlled via an automatic rising barrier with overhead height restriction. The applicant has clarified that the site will be a transit site and residents will be able to live on that pitch for a maximum of 3 months. Pitches will have to be pre-booked based on the Council's allocations policy. The Council will keep forms to book a pitch at the local housing offices and with the GTLO (Gypsy Travelling Liaison Officer) to ensure that visitors do not travel to the site unless there is availability.

A dedicated waste and recycle bin storage area is provided with direct internal site access, as well as external access adjacent to Island Road for ease of waste collection. There is insufficient space to turn a refuse vehicle on-site, so it is proposed that refuse vehicles will pull into the site access to enable waste collection to occur off the carriageway. Given that Island Road is a non classified road and the anticipated traffic generation from the development will be low, I do not object to this arrangement. However, I would suggest that the Council's Waste department are consulted on this application to determine whether the arrangements are acceptable.

The Trip Rate Information Computer System (TRICS) database has been used to calculate the proposed trip rate and subsequent trip generation for the proposed development. However, there is no data available for a gypsy and traveller transit site within TRICS, and trip rates have been established using privately owned residential houses. It is anticipated that the development is likely to generate four trips in AM peak (08:00-09:00) and three trips in PM peak (17:00-18:00). I query whether the use of TRICS data for privately owned residential houses provides the most accurate assessment for a gypsy and traveller site, however, given the small scale of the development, the estimated total vehicle trip generation is likely to reflect a worst case scenario and is acceptable.

The Council's Local Plan was adopted in November 2019 and this includes a requirement at Policy TR5 for each new house to be provided with an electric charging point. The applicant has confirmed that each pitch includes the provision of an EV charging point.

Pitches will have to be pre-booked to ensure that visitors do not travel to the site unless there is availability to ensure that there is no waiting on the public highway. Therefore, there is no transport objection to this application subject to the conditions below.

#### Suggested conditions

- DC1 VEHICLE PARKING (AS SPECIFIED)**
- DC3 VEHICULAR ACCESS (AS SPECIFIED)**
- DC8 REFUSE AND RECYCLING (AS SPECIFIED)**

#### **DC11 SET BACK OF GATES**

Any gates provided shall open away from the highway and be set back a distance of at least 10 metres from the nearside of the carriageway of the adjoining highway.

**REASON:** To ensure that vehicles can be driven off the highway before the gates are opened, in the interests of road safety in accordance with Policy TR1 and TR3 of the Reading Local Plan 2019.

#### **DC24 EV CHARGING POINTS**

No plot shall be first occupied until the electric vehicle (EV) charging Scheme for the development has been fully provided in accordance with the approved details. The spaces shall be maintained for vehicle charging in accordance with the approved Scheme at all times thereafter.

**REASON:** In the interests of environmentally sustainable transport in accordance with Policy TR3 and TR5 of the Reading Local Plan 2019.

## IF3 Highways

### RBC Waste Services Manager

Under The Controlled Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2012, the waste from this site would be classed as household waste. This means that they would need to adhere to our capacity etc. for the amount of pitches. If additional waste capacity is required in excess of this, then there would be a collection charge.

The capacity (with no charge) would be;

- 3x1100 general waste
- 3x1100 recycling

These would be collected on a fortnightly collection.

All of the bins would need to be within 10 metres of the vehicle. I think we would be able to stop on the road to collect, rather than having to enter the site, but all would need to be within this walking distance. Does the highways officer OK with this?

There is also further generic advice - [Waste management guidelines - Reading Borough Council](#)

### RBC Environmental Protection

Initial comments received 17<sup>th</sup> January 2022:

#### Noise impact on development

The noise assessment indicates that there will be an impact on the site from external noise, in particular from the waste transfer station and the A33.

It is not completely clear in the assessment what the resultant noise levels will be in terms of BS4142 and BS8233 assessment, with the retaining wall in place. This needs to be clarified.

Whilst some lee-way can be allowed in terms of the noise levels due to the residents not living there permanently, it will be important that they are not exposed to noise from the waste transfer station that are at nuisance levels particularly at night when this could cause sleep disturbance and also place the facility at risk in terms of restrictions should a nuisance be found to exist.

Are there any mitigation measures that can be put into place in terms of improvements to the retaining wall or operational adjustments to the waste transfer facility (e.g. change of the reverse alarms from tonal ones to white noise) in order to reduce the risk of adverse noise impacts?

### Air Quality - Increased exposure

The air quality assessment concludes that there may be an impact on the occupants from odour from the sewage treatment works and the waste transfer facility, due to the proximity.

We do occasionally receive complaints about odour from the sewage treatment works but this is usually only when an element of the process has gone wrong, as the process is a closed system that is intended to be low odour. However there is an increased risk of complaint as the proposed site is so close to the facility.

If possible, further assessment should be undertaken regarding the potential impact of odour from the waste transfer station and the STW as the on site assessment was carried out in cold weather so was not worst case. Whilst the residents may be more tolerant of odour given they are not resident permanently on site, it will be important to establish the severity of any potential odour and how often it may occur, if possible.

### **Contaminated Land**

The contaminated land assessment concludes that some remediation will be required (placement of hard standing, use of cover soils for soft landscaping, some gas protection measures for permanent buildings) therefore a remediation strategy is required.

### **Recommended conditions**

#### ➤ CO4 REMEDIATION SCHEME (TO BE SUBMITTED)

No development shall commence on site including demolition and any preparatory works until a detailed remediation scheme to bring the site to a condition suitable for the intended use by removing unacceptable risks to human health, buildings and other property and the natural and historical environment has been submitted to and been approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme must include all works to be undertaken, proposed remediation objectives and remediation criteria, an appraisal of remedial options, and proposal of the preferred option(s), and a timetable of works and site management procedures. The scheme must ensure that the site will not qualify as contaminated land under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to the intended use of the land after remediation.

**REASON:** These details are required due to insufficient information being contained within this submission and to ensure the development is suitable for its end use and the wider environment and does not create undue risks to occupiers of the site or surrounding areas in accordance with Policy EN16 of the Reading local Plan 2019.

#### ➤ CO5 REMEDIATION SCHEME (IMPLEMENT AND VERIFICATION)

The approved remediation scheme under Condition INSERT shall be implemented in accordance with the approved timetable of works. A validation report (that demonstrates the effectiveness of the remediation carried out) shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority before construction above foundation level.

**REASON:** To ensure the development is suitable for its end use and the wider environment and does not create undue risks to occupiers of the site or surrounding areas in accordance with Policy EN16 of the Reading local Plan 2019.

➤ **CO6 UNIDENTIFIED CONTAMINATION**

In the event that contamination is found at any time when carrying out the approved development not previously identified, development shall be halted on that part of the site the contamination reported in writing to the Local Planning Authority.

An assessment of the nature and extent of contamination shall be undertaken and where remediation is necessary a remediation scheme, together with a timetable for its implementation, shall be submitted in writing to the Local Planning Authority for its written approval.

The measures in the approved remediation scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved timetable. Halted works shall not be re-commenced until the measures identified in the approved remediation scheme have been completed and a validation report has been submitted to and been approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

**REASON:** To ensure the development is suitable for its end use and the wider environment and does not create undue risks to occupiers of the site or surrounding areas in accordance with Policy EN16 of the Reading local Plan 2019.

**Further to revised and additional information, further comments received 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022:**

The assessment with the proposed 4 m wall is showing noise levels reduced by around 7 dB which means the actual noise levels are (just) acceptable. There does still remain the risk of complaints about noise from Re3 because, as stated in the assessment, the noise from the activities there will remain above background noise levels. It appears from the assessment that the main noticeable noise source is the tonal reverse alarms therefore I would strongly recommend that the development team consult with Re3 to understand if there is any option to phase these out and replace with white noise reverse alarms. White noise alarms are considered good practice in any case. If this is not something that can be negotiated then Re3 need to be made aware that if the development goes ahead and complaints are received then we are likely to require that to be carried out.

**Further to revised and additional information, further comments received 26<sup>th</sup> July 2022:**

There are currently 18 complaints from Kennet Island and Green Park Village residents about odour from the Sewage Treatment Works. As it stands it is assumed that the proposed development would also be impacted by this unpleasant odour.

The Sewage Treatment Works should be able to operate without odour escaping to the surrounding area when their odour abatement unit is working. Unfortunately, they appear to have let this run into disrepair and it's now going to take a while to completely fix. If this is repaired and then maintained properly the proposed development should be fine.

11/7/22 email from EP to planning case officer

Thanks, the assessment with the proposed 4 m wall is showing noise levels reduced by around 7 dB which means the actual noise levels are (just) acceptable. There does still remain the risk of complaints about noise from Re3 because, as stated in the assessment, the noise from the activities there will remain above background noise levels. It appears from the assessment that the main noticeable noise source

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For information: extract of an EP Team email text to Councillor Rachel Eden providing an update to local residents on measures to address odour issues at the Sewage Treatment Works:

The Council has received a number of complaints from residents with regards to the unacceptable odour issues being experienced around the Thames Water treatment plant. In response the Council has been in contact with Thames Water on behalf of local residents. Thames Water have assured the Council it is doing everything it can to resolve the issue. Following Council officers investigations, these actions have been taken by Thames Water to date to try to resolve the issue:

- Broken roller shutter door on the inlet building is now closed, meaning that the building is closed for the odour control to extract as required.
- Work on the inlet Odour Control Unit commenced on 29<sup>th</sup> August. Once completed this unit will be in full working order.
- Order placed to replace a fallen odour stack outside the inlet building. Unfortunately Thames Water has said this has a 40 week lead time so will not be completed until next year.
- Funding granted for repairs to sludge building OCU. A procurement process has been started to get contractors on board. The Council does has not yet been given a timescale for the completion of this work by Thames Water

The inlet building odour control units are likely to have the biggest impact on the reduction of odours at the site, so we are hopeful that things should have already improved considerably. This seems to be holding true at the moment as residents' complaints have reduced but we will of course continue to monitor it.

### **RBC Planning Natural Environment Tree Officer)**

#### **Initial comments received 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022:**

The site is close to a Major Landscape Feature (to the north-west), directly adjacent to an Area of Identified Biodiversity Interest (watercourse to the west) and is within a low canopy cover Ward (as defined in the Tree Strategy). Proposals therefore demand due regard to the trees, vegetation and adjacent watercourse and require mitigation for loss of vegetation.

With reference to **Proposed Block Site Plan P1 00**, I note that the refuse areas and the pitches (largely) are on the east side, away from the watercourse to the west, which is positive.

With reference to the **Planning Statement, ref RP20211216, from Shrimpin**, this confirms in 3.2 that the site *'is overgrown scrubland. It is enclosed by mature, dense tree belts which will be retained'* and in 6.10 *'that the scheme will not result in a loss of biodiversity or important trees and will provide ecological mitigation'*.

With reference to the **DAS from HCC**, this reiterates in 2.02 that the *'mature, dense tree belts to the east and west which will be retained'*. 5.03 advised that *'The site is to be fully protected with a new 2m high brick boundary wall..'*, with 5.06 stating that *'Ground levels are to be raised generally across the site to form a level accessible and safe access into and across the site'*. Details of the increase in ground level is given in the **Flood Risk Assessment**, with the executive Statement saying:

*'Modifications to the current site topography are required to create safe platforms for development above the flood level. The remodelling of the site will also require construction of a storage area underneath the development area to offset the volume of floodplain lost. It is proposed to increase the site level of 39.44 mAOD..'* and 6.1 of the FLA states *'The site raising will be achieved through installation of a piled concrete structure with a concrete slab forming the site surface'*

I am unclear on the works involved in this and would welcome clarification.

Section 5.24 of the DAS details proposed works to retained Willows.

The Soft Landscape section of the DAS suggests that 10 trees will be planted around the swale to the south of the site, with potentially new planting in the soft play area and playground.

With reference to the **Arboricultural Impact Assessment from SJ Stephens Associates dated 30 November 2021:**

This confirms that 10 trees are to be removed (as detailed in 6.1) and three early mature crack willow (T1, T2 and T3) will be topped at 1.8m and allowed to re-shoot and T7 and T9a will be cut to ground level and allowed to re-shoot. 6.3 states that *'Trees alongside the river will be removed to allow installation of the new retaining wall'*. I will take the details in 6.1 and the tree survey table to be the proposed removals and tree works and assume this supersedes the statements about tree retention within the aforementioned documents.

5.4.1 details the 'no-dig' constructions areas, the details of which are expanded on in 5.5, and the hand excavations on the west side for the retaining wall, the details of which are expanded on in 5.6. Tree protection measures (fencing and ground protection) are given in Section 5.4 - these are all shown on the TPP.

In relation to the trees overhanging from the east, I note that no works are proposed to these. Given the low canopy height of the majority of these, as stated in the Tree Survey table, this should be checked, particularly in light of the proposed increase in ground level.

#### Existing trees

The proposals result in unavoidable tree loss. I note the intention to effectively coppice the Willows on the west side rather than remove altogether, which is positive.

The need to works to trees overhanging from the east needs to be clarified.

The AIA does not sit well with the proposed ground level work recommended in the FLA and should be reconsidered with this in mind, e.g. comparison of the piled concrete slab with the no-dig cellular confinement system. The TPP shows tree protective fencing, albeit it is difficult to see due all the other coloured lines on the plan, but I question whether this is necessary as a separate element or whether there would be site hoarding in the same location for the majority of the build which would act as tree protection? It will need to be established at what point in the construction the wall (around the perimeter) is being built and factored into the need for separate protection for vegetation.

A revised AIA is required.

#### Landscaping

Principles are included and could be secured via condition L2 (landscaping etc). I assume the landscaping will be maintained by RBC?

In conclusion, and subject to Ecology comments, the principle of the development is supported but clarity is required within a revised AIA as detailed above prior to a decision long with clarity on the proposed ground raising.

#### **Further to revised and additional information, further comments received 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022:**

With reference to **Proposed Block Site Plan P2 00**, I note this now has a larger area within the red line of the site - wider towards the east and extending further south. Other than that, the proposals remain the same. I note this does not have structures numbered on the plan to go with the legend, as should be provided.

Other plans have been provided to assist with understanding the proposed levels across the site: **Structural Sections drawing P01, Level 00 Structure drawing P01 (Water Level Structure) and Foundation Level Structure drawing P01**. I find it hard to interpret these (see further comments in relation to the AIA below).

With reference to the revised **Arboricultural Impact Assessment from SJ Stephens Associates dated 22 March 2022:**

1.5 - I note this refers to the previous Proposed Site Plan P01 so needs updating.

5.2.3 states: *In addition, three early mature crack willow (T1, T2 and T3) will be topped at 1.8m and allowed to re-shoot.* This is contrary to the tree works stated on the Proposed Landscape Plan P1-00. Submitted documents should be consistent. Para 6.4 also refers to 1.8m.

The Tree Protection Plan is not based on the revised Site Plan and therefore needs updating.

A Proposed Detail Site Plan P1-00 is provided on the last page, which is not the revised layout (red line).

None of the Appendices are labelled, which would be helpful.

The AIA offers no commentary to aid the understanding of the ground level changes across the site, as shown in the aforementioned plans that have now been provided.



It is necessary to have that commentary to demonstrate that the works are arboriculturally acceptable. The AIA confines comment to the retaining wall alongside the river as a result of the required lifting of ground level.

In relation to the trees overhanging from the east, I note that pruning works are now proposed to these to: *Prune back any overhanging branches to clear new wall and buildings.*

I previously stated: *The TPP shows tree protective fencing, albeit it is difficult to see due all the other coloured lines on the plan, but I question whether this is necessary as a separate element or whether there would be site hoarding in the same location for the majority of the build which would act as tree protection? It will need to be established at what point in the construction the wall (around the perimeter) is being built and factored into the need for separate protection for vegetation.* It does not appear that this has been addressed.

A revised AIA is required.

#### Landscaping

Proposed Landscape Plan P1-00 includes principles for 4 different zones on the site. I note all Willow (wherever they are) are to be coppiced at 0.5m above ground level. The text explaining the principles for the north 'road' boundary does not state 'tree planting', as would be expected or which appears to be indicated on the plan. In relation to the south 'riverside meadow', new tree planting should avoid Cherry, as Prunus is an over-represented genus on Council land. I am unclear why or how it is feasible to plant so much Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) in this area and would welcome clarification on this.

In conclusion, and subject to Ecology comments, the principle of the development is supported but clarity is required within a revised AIA as detailed above prior to a decision.

## AWE Off-Site Planning Group

### AWE Planning Consultation Considerations re 212037

Consideration	Details																									
Planning Application No	212037																									
Site Location:	Land adjacent to Reading Sewage and Treatment Works Island Road Reading																									
Description of development:	The application proposal is for a gypsy and traveller transit site. A transit site is "A site intended for short-term use while in transit. It will comprise 7 pitches, bin store, outdoor seating area, play area, and a new access onto Island Road. Each pitch comprises a kitchen/toilet block and space for two caravans and two cars																									
Is the proposed development within the relevant site DEPZ or area of Extendibility?	DEPZ																									
If yes, within which sites DEPZ or area of extendibility does the application fall within (Aldermaston/Burghfield):	AWE Burghfield																									
If yes which Sector is the proposal within?	B																									
Current Demographic Information within Sector the sector and 2 adjacent sectors. (In any incident at least, the sector affected and the 2 on either side are alerted in order to allow for drift etc)	<table><tr><th>Sector</th><th>Residential</th><th>Residents</th><th>Commercial</th><th>Employees</th></tr><tr><td>A</td><td>31</td><td>74</td><td>25</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>B</td><td>1264</td><td>3033</td><td>85</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>C</td><td>9</td><td>21</td><td>121</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Totals</td><td>1304</td><td>3128</td><td>231</td><td></td></tr></table>	Sector	Residential	Residents	Commercial	Employees	A	31	74	25		B	1264	3033	85		C	9	21	121		Totals	1304	3128	231	
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A	31	74	25																							
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C	9	21	121																							
Totals	1304	3128	231																							
Is the proposal for:																										
Residential	Yes																									
What is the increase in Population Density within the Sector (Based on the average household size to be 2.4 persons per household and details in application relating to employees for business developments)	N/A																									
Commercial	No																									
Are there details of any Site Emergency Plan in place	No																									
Are there any vulnerable developments proposed?	No																									
What applications are approved in the sector but not completed (still valid)	Unknown at time of drafting this response																									

	Consideration	Impact on AWE Off-site Emergency Plan
1	Within DEPZ area or OPZ	DEPZ
2	Proximity to Site Boundary	3km
3	Impact on short term Sheltering – 24 – 48hrs	Caravans are not a suitable means of providing shelter from an incident at AWE. This Gypsy and Traveller site proposes to have brick-built utility blocks, but these are unlikely to be suitable for up to 48 hours of sheltering from a welfare perspective (adequate amounts of food, space for sleeping arrangements). Furthermore, the reliance upon a utility building may require those on the site to leave their accommodation to access the utility block for welfare purposes and this has the potential to increase exposure to airborne radioactive material.
4	Impact if requirement for Medium/Long term Sheltering 48hrs+	Caravans are not a suitable means of providing shelter from an incident at AWE for any period of shelter arrangements.
5	Requirement for Immediate Evacuation & Impact –including reception and rest centre	Due to the lack of suitable protective structures the residents are at a higher risk of immediate evacuation being required. In the event of evacuation being required, or post-sheltering permanent or temporary relocation, priority would need to be given to those in less suitable structures. This increases the resources required to respond to the emergency and has the potential to decrease the effectiveness of the arrangements due to delaying the evacuation/relocation of other, pre-existing, communities. This would also have an impact on the number of reception centres and rest centres required.
6	Impact if requirement for subsequent Evacuation—including reception and rest centre	Due to the application type, shelter would not be viable and therefore additional residents would need to be moved off site for radiation monitoring & possible decontamination. It is unlikely that vehicles would be able to be removed from site as they could be contaminated. Onward transportation would need to be sourced, placing a burden upon the Local Authority who would be asked to assist in these circumstances. This would also have an impact on the number of reception centres and rest centres required.
7	Impact on Warning & Informing processes	Normal warning and informing processes for the AWE system relies upon a live landline phone connection, the transient nature of the residents expected to occupy this proposed development will add to the challenges in communicating the required safety information/warning and informing advice, when there are no landline phones and community are unlikely to have seen the REPPIR public information booklet. The difficulty communicating with an even larger population in an incident are significant, especially around the differences to the possibility of lifting shelter for DEPZ but not the UPA.
8	Day time or night time impact	No difference to the impact
9	Vulnerable People considerations	Due to the transient nature of the proposal it would be unrealistic for the Local Authority to maintain accurate data on vulnerable residents.

AWE Offsite incident were in support of this recommendation. Granting permission for this site would set a precedence that sheltering in this type of accommodation is acceptable for any future application at this site or any other DEPZ in the UK. As a result, due to the impact on responding agencies and the potential impact on the occupants of the proposed development **the AWE Offsite Planning Group recommended that the Planning Authority refuse the application.**

## RBC Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Team

First response is same as for the Offsite Planning Group (above)

### **Response to case officer by email 22/8/22:**

Due to your deadline of the 7<sup>th</sup> September it has not been possible to convene a meeting of the AWE Off-Site Planning Group. Instead below is a summary of recommendations received by email from its members in response to the applicants comments contained in the briefing note received on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

- The OPSG Demographic figures initially included in the planning considerations did not factor in the Reading Stadium in the adjacent sector (C) which has the potential to add 20,000+ people to the response requirements and associated pressure on emergency responders.
- 2.2.1 Site manager – this provision is welcomed but the wording suggest that there will be periods that a site manager will not be available ‘Residents will be told who they should contact in the absence of the Officer and in case of emergencies’ This does not meet the 24/7 requirements to alert residents of an incident. A more robust method of warning and informing the site occupants would be required in order for them to shelter in time to avoid exposure to any airborne contaminant.
- 2.3 - Site Emergency Plan
- *‘In the past, travellers have parked on Island Road. A specific site assigned for their use with a detailed emergency plan is therefore offered as an improvement to the current situation.’* – there has been significant development in the area and with it additional use of the area. The briefing note confirms there has only been one encampment in the past few years.
- *A detailed plan will be drawn up in due course on the following basis:*
  - *In case of an emissions emergency, the site will follow a stay-put policy to be implemented by the GTLO* - The same concerns remain that caravans are not a suitable means of shelter, the stay put policy implementation would only be possible during periods that the post holder is on site. If time from the initial alert allowed any localised road blocks mentioned will require some form of deployment adding pressures to emergency responders and could require additional personnel being deployed to the area of risk.
  - *It is proposed that the static brick units provided on site would be used for the stipulated 48 hours.* – The proposed brick buildings make no provision for cooking or the required floor space to sleep for the required period of shelter, which would increase the chance of residents feeling the need to return to unsuitable shelter or attempt to leave the area. The shelter provided would need to suitably accommodate the maximum number of occupants of the site with suitable facilities for sleeping / cooking and hygiene.
  - *We propose the addition of a site office by the gates along with a telephone landline for AWE warning messages to be conveyed. Calls to the landline will be directed to the GTLO’s mobile when he is off-site.* – Whilst this is a welcomed addition, the alerting provision would be required on site 24/7 in order to ensure residents are able to shelter in a timely manner. Whilst it is not yet live, the soon to be launched UK push-notification emergency alerting system would go some way overcome the issue of not having landlines in place to cascade alerts, it is not yet known if the activation of the AWE offsite plan will be initially included in the governments emergency alert triggers.

For the reasons stated above and that of the original feedback by the AWE Off-Site Planning Group, it remains the view of the AWE Offsite Planning Group that this application is recommended for refusal.

## **Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR)**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I apologise for the delay to our reply.

I have consulted with the emergency planners within Reading Borough Council, which is responsible for the preparation of the off-site emergency plan required by the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information Regulations) (REPPiR) 2019. They have not been able to provide me with adequate assurance that the proposed development can be accommodated within their off-site emergency planning arrangements.

Therefore, ONR advises against this development, in accordance with our Land Use Planning Policy ( <http://www.onr.org.uk/land-use-planning.htm> ).

I would be grateful if you would notify ONR of the outcome of the determination of this application via email to [ONR-Land.Use-Planning@onr.gov.uk](mailto:ONR-Land.Use-Planning@onr.gov.uk).

## **RBC Planning Policy Manager**

The Council's Planning Policy Manager supports application 212037, subject to a planning condition that requires submission and approval of a warning and evacuation plan to cover both flooding and an emergency event at AWE Burghfield, prior to first occupation.

### **Introduction**

It is worth firstly being aware for clarity that RBC Planning Policy led some of the early site identification and appraisal work that is cited in this planning application, and it was in a document prepared by RBC Planning Policy that this site was first identified as a potential location for gypsy and traveller use.

It should also be noted that the Planning Policy team is not resourced to be able to review every aspect of an application's compliance with adopted policy, particularly in relation to development management policies. My response therefore identifies selected matters which are considered to be of greatest importance in relation to an application. Where this response does not address an issue, it does not necessarily imply compliance with the respective policy.

### **Relevant planning policies**

The main planning policy that is of relevance to this planning application is policy H13 (Provision for Gypsies and Travellers). Other development management policies that are of relevance include EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network), EN17 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems) and OU2 (Hazardous Installations).

### **Need for development**

The Planning Statement submitted with the application contains a relatively full summary of the need for the development. It stems from a Gypsy and Traveller, Travelling Showpeople and Houseboat Dweller Accommodation Assessment completed in 2017 by Arc4. This was undertaken to inform the then emerging Local Plan. It identified a need

for 10-17 permanent pitches and a transit site for five pitches (with each pitch accommodating two caravans, meaning ten caravans in total). These needs were referred to in the Local Plan at paragraph 4.4.103 of the Local Plan. There are no existing permanent or transit pitches within Reading, and since the publication of the Assessment, there have been no new proposals for gypsy and traveller pitches and no other changes in circumstances to suggest that the needs have changed.

The need for transit pitches in the assessment stems from the large number of unauthorised encampments that have been experienced in Reading in recent years. Further information on these encampments has been assembled since the publication of the Assessment. These have increased over the last few years. For instance, there were 87 unauthorised encampments within Reading between April 2016 and March 2017, the majority of which were on Council land. There is a consistent and ongoing issue with unauthorised encampments which causes issues for local residents, the Council as landowner, the police and the travellers themselves who lack transit provision in the local area.

It is worth bearing in mind that, whilst there may be possible options for providing permanent pitches for travellers in adjoining authorities, this differs in the case of transit pitches. The police have discretionary powers under Section 62A-E of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to direct both trespassers and travellers to leave land and remove any vehicle and property from the land, but one of the conditions is that a suitable caravan pitch must be available within the authority. To make use of these powers therefore, transit pitches must be available within Reading Borough.

Therefore, there is a strong and evidenced need for transit pitches in Reading, and this proposal could accommodate 14 caravans which would meet the identified transit needs in full.

### **Identification of site**

Options for finding a site for transit provision in Reading are extremely limited. The Council undertook significant steps to try to identify land to meet both permanent and transit needs as part of the Local Plan process, but was ultimately unable to identify a site.

In terms of private land, the Council specifically asked on a number of occasions for sites to be nominated for gypsy and traveller use, but none were put forward. The Council also wrote specifically to each landowner that had nominated land for other uses (other than sites for high density development in the town centre) to explore the possible inclusion of gypsy and traveller provision, but did not receive any positive response.

The focus for a site search so far has therefore been on the Council's own land. In 2017, planning policy officers undertook a search of all Council land of over 0.15 ha that did not include existing in-use buildings and was not covered by a protected open space designation or did not house statutory allotments. This led to the identification of 80 sites for further assessment, of which only one site, at Cow Lane, was considered to be potentially suitable. This work was published alongside a consultation on Cow Lane in September 2017.

Subsequently, the Cow Lane proposal was abandoned as the land was required for the Reading Festival and was also proposed to be part of a forthcoming secondary school site. The sites identified were reassessed, in particular with a fresh approach to flood risk relating to transit use, after it was noted that the vulnerability classification in Planning Practice Guidance (now in the NPPF itself) differentiates between permanent residential caravans and caravans for short-term let. Potential private sites for purchase were also considered. This led to feasibility work on the small number of sites which were

considered to have some potential, which came to the conclusion that only one site, the site of this application, was potentially feasible.

This means that a great deal of work has been undertaken by planning policy officers and colleagues to come to the conclusion that this is the only potential feasible and suitable site in Reading to meet the important transit need.

## **Principle of development**

The principle of use of this site for a traveller transit use needs to be considered against the criteria in policy H13, which are as follows:

- “i) Have safe and convenient access onto the highway network;*
- ii) Have good access to a range of facilities including education and healthcare by a choice of means of travel, including walking;*
- iii) Not have an unacceptable impact on the physical and visual character and quality of the area;*
- iv) Not result in an adverse impact on the significance of a heritage asset;*
- v) Be located in line with national and local policy on flood risk, and not involve location of caravans in Flood Zone 3;*
- vi) Not have an unacceptable impact on the amenity of existing residents in surrounding areas, or on future residents of the proposal; and*
- vii) Not result in the loss of biodiversity or important trees, and provide a net biodiversity gain where possible.”*

Criteria i) and vii) are the subject of technical reports which are best addressed by other consultees.

In terms of criterion ii), there are few services and facilities in the immediate vicinity. However, the site is approximately 600m from some basic facilities in the centre of Kennet Island, and just over 1 km from existing primary schools in Whitley and Green Park. It is also around 1.2 km from the Whitley district centre. The A33 carries fast bus links into central Reading. Given that gypsy and traveller sites are frequently located in quite isolated locations, it is considered that this represents comparatively good accessibility by a choice of means of travel.

There is not expected to be an unacceptable impact on the character and quality of the area (criterion iii)), which is primarily industrial in nature, and there are proposals to screen the development and retain mature trees around its boundaries.

In terms of criterion iv), there are no identified heritage assets in close proximity to the site.

In terms of flood risk, in relation to criterion v), the site does propose to locate caravans in flood zone 3, and it therefore fails this element of the policy. However, this requires a balanced approach taking into account the significant benefits that the proposal could bring. The other element of the criterion is around compliance with national policy, and this is addressed in more depth below, albeit that some of the technical elements of the Flood Risk Assessment are for others to respond to.

There would not be any significant negative impact on the amenity of residents in surrounding areas (criterion vi)) given that the site does not adjoin any residential properties. Whilst there are residential areas within walking distance, this will always be the case within an authority such as Reading, and direct impacts on the amenity of those

residents would not be expected. In overall terms, the amenity of residents across Reading should be improved by provision of a transit site allowing unauthorised encampments, which frequently occupy parks and open spaces and may cause anti-social behaviour, to be enforced against more effectively.

In terms of the amenity of the residents on the site itself, the site is located between the water treatment works and the recycling centre. This is not a location that would have been likely to offer a good standard of residential amenity for permanent residential accommodation due to the industrial nature of the surroundings. However, as residents would only be present in the short term, and there are considerable landscape buffers both within and around the site, it is considered that this is acceptable.

## **Flood risk**

The Planning Policy team is not in a position to comment on the technical aspects of the Flood Risk Assessment. However, I am in a position to give a view on the policy requirements regarding the sequential and exception test.

### ***Vulnerability classification***

The first element is to identify the vulnerability classification of the development, with specific reference to Annex 3 of the NPPF. In terms of use for caravans, the vulnerability classification considers sites for caravans, mobile homes and park homes intended for permanent residential use to be 'highly vulnerable', and therefore inappropriate for location within Flood Zone 3a under Table 3 of the Planning Practice Guidance on flood risk<sup>1</sup>. The classification identifies sites used for holiday or short-let caravans and camping to be 'more vulnerable', subject to a specific warning and evacuation plan. 'More vulnerable' uses may be located in Flood Zone 3a subject to passing the sequential and exception test.

The work undertaken by the planning policy team in identifying potential sites after the Cow Lane site was rejected has considered that transit use is likely to be 'more vulnerable'. Transit sites are not for permanent residential use, and typically have a maximum stay of around three months, although it is within the local authority's gift as both manager and local planning authority to set alternative occupancy periods if necessary. In my view, a short-term transit site would qualify as 'more vulnerable'. This opinion has been referred to in paragraph 5.1 of the Flood Risk Assessment, and remains my view.

A requirement of a caravan use being classified as 'more vulnerable' is a specific warning and evacuation plan. This does not appear to have been submitted, but should be required to be submitted and approved by planning condition before first occupation. As a transit site would be managed by the Council, and caravans would be able to move out very quickly if necessary, in my view it is more likely that an effective plan can be put in place than would be the case, for instance, with private housing.

I am aware of the comments provided by the Environment Agency set out as Appendix B of the Flood Risk Assessment, in particular the response of 25<sup>th</sup> August 2021. I do not agree with the conclusions of that response, which in my view seems to not fully appreciate how traveller transit sites work and that they are an established form of provision rather than a bespoke solution for this site. I respond to some of the detailed points raised by the EA below.

In terms of whether the caravan represents the permanent home of the traveller, this is not necessarily the case. Many travellers have a permanent residence elsewhere, either

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<sup>1</sup> [Table 3 - Flood risk vulnerability and flood zone compatibility .pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/612211/Planning_Practice_Guidance_on_flood_risk.pdf)



on a permanent site or in bricks and mortar. This is not the case for all travellers, and for some of the occupants the caravan is likely to be their only home, but it is not the case for all.

In terms of seasonality, gypsies and travellers tend to travel around mainly in the summer. I am not able to provide details of the seasonality of unauthorised encampments in Reading, but transit sites may well be used by those travelling from further afield.

The “other risks” noted by the EA do not appear to appreciate that a transit site will need to be formally managed by the Council, as is the case with sites elsewhere (the EA even states that “sites are not managed”). Access will need to be provided by the Council and relevant contact details taken. Occupants will have an understanding of the temporary nature of their stay from the outset. This will make evacuation of the site easier rather than harder.

The EA response also refers to sites being “periodically cleared” and “periodically evicted”. This demonstrates a lack of understanding about how transit sites function. There are transit sites elsewhere, and their temporary nature is understood from the outset.

In terms of the references made to [Planning Policy for Traveller Sites](#), it is appreciated that paragraph 13 (g) states that planning authorities should ensure that they “do not locate sites in areas at high risk of flooding, including functional floodplains, given the particular vulnerability of caravans”, although it is worth noting that these criteria are in relation to what policies should say rather than to decision making. It is also worth noting that this is stated to be because of the vulnerability of caravans, but the NPPF does draw the distinction between caravans based on occupancy as has already been stated.

Reference is made to the demographic profile of potential occupants, and it is stated that exceptions to the policy are generally made only where occupants would be young, fit and healthy. I have no further information on the demographics of the unauthorised encampments that Reading experiences. However, it is worth noting that the occupants of these encampments are used to having to mobilise and vacate a site at a moment’s notice, and do so with great regularity, far more than most of the settled community. It could be expected that they could do so in the event of a flood.

Impacts on mental health as a result of flooding are noted, and are no doubt significant. However, the impacts on mental health as a result of regular eviction from other sites are also likely to be significant, and this will continue without the Council making efforts to find alternative provision.

Finally, the EA also suggest a search area expanding to outside Reading’s boundaries. The Council has sought to work with its neighbours to identify sites outside its boundaries for permanent accommodation, and continues to do so. However, for the reasons already outlined, a transit site needs to be within the authority boundaries to make use of the enhanced powers under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

I therefore consider that this development should be treated as ‘more vulnerable’, and may therefore be located in Flood Zone 3a subject to the sequential and exception test.

### ***Sequential and Exception Test***

It does not appear that the information submitted provides evidence of complying with the sequential or exception test. However, given the very specific set of circumstances around this proposal, it is nevertheless possible to come to a view on this matter.

In terms of the sequential test, the Council undertook a sequential test for sites in the Local Plan, and this included assessing sequentially preferable sites when an alternative



transit site at Cow Lane was being proposed. This clearly demonstrated that there were no sequentially preferable sites available or suitable for this use. This is referred to in paragraph 5.2 of the Flood Risk Assessment. The sequential test undertaken did not however assess the application site, as it was not a proposed Local Plan allocation. However, as it has already been demonstrated that there are no other potentially available and suitable sites for this use (summarised under the 'Identification of site' heading), and the Cow Lane site itself was not progressed because it is not available, the sequential test would clearly have been passed.

If the transit use is considered 'more vulnerable' (as I consider it should), the exception test applies. Paragraph 5.2 of the Flood Risk Assessment states that a Sequential and Exception Test was carried out in relation to the Local Plan, but that only dealt with the exception test in relation to a number of specific sites not including the application site, so it does not fulfil the requirement of the NPPF in relation to this proposal. Further consideration is therefore required.

As set out in paragraph 164 of the NPPF, the exception test is that:

*“(a) the development would provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh the flood risk; and*

*(b) the development will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall.”*

Criterion (b) is a matter for the Flood Risk Assessment, and I do not offer any comments here. However, criterion (a) is a matter of balancing the sustainability benefits. There are clear sustainability benefits to the community of providing a transit site, in relation to providing an alternative to, or enforcing more effectively against, unauthorised encampments. These cause considerable disruption to and impacts on the local communities where they occur, frequently including anti-social behaviour, and often leave behind a significant amount of waste when they depart, which can cause harm to local residents and requires clean-up. Continued enforcement against unauthorised encampments also impacts on the health and wellbeing of the travelling community. The provision of a transit site represents a unique opportunity to provide a partial solution to this important sustainability issue. In my view, the wider sustainability benefits outweigh the specific flood risk on this site.

For this reason, I consider that, subject to criterion (b) being satisfied by the Flood Risk Assessment, the development would pass the exception test.

## **AWE Burghfield**

It is not for the Planning Policy team to respond to the emergency planning implications of the proposal, but it is worth noting in this context that, should a warning and evacuation plan be required by planning condition as referenced in relation to flood risk, this could also cover warning and evacuation in the event of an incident related to AWE. In this context, it is worth noting that a managed transit site offers advantages in terms of evacuation over unauthorised encampments which may well also be within the DEPZ.

## **Conclusion**

In my view, the proposal is generally in accordance with relevant planning policies, and provides a unique opportunity to help to address an issue that currently impacts negatively on both the settled and travelling community. I support the proposal, subject to a planning condition that requires submission and approval of a warning and evacuation plan

to cover both flooding and an emergency event at AWE Burghfield, prior to first occupation.

### **North Reading Safer Neighbourhoods Forum**

The North Reading Safer Neighbourhood Forum (NRSNF) agreed that it should write a supportive comment regarding the proposed Gypsy & Traveller Transit Park Planning Application 212037 having previously responded to a request for comments following the publication of the Gypsy and Traveller Provision Background Document in September 2017 with a supportive comment.

This comment is based upon RBC's current assessment that a Gypsy & Traveller Transit Park is required.

It ignores the question of cost of the site.

It notes that the site is liable to flooding and there are other experts who are better qualified to comment on this topic.

In the 2017 consultation residents were asked about what were their views of the site and if they thought there were any other potential sites available. In this case the proposed site is in Whitley and is, therefore, outside of the NRSNF area. We would suggest that the local residents, businesses, councillors and the Gypsy & Traveller community are better placed to give views regarding the appropriateness of the site's location. The Forum does recognise the difficulty that the council has had in finding sites for a proposed Gypsy & Traveller Transit Park. We note the comments regarding the size of the facility in relation to full capacity but also note the difficulty in finding a larger site.

The Forum notes that encampments have slowly increased in rank of issues that concern the residents in North Reading, and that this is now the third most important concern according to the recent RBC neighbourhood survey.

In the 2017 consultation document the following comment was made regarding the impact of encampments on residents *'A rise in the number of illegal encampments in Reading in the Thames Valley area over the past year, including a number of encampments in public parks, has brought the issue of traveller accommodation into sharper focus. While some incursions have not caused any issues for local residents, the Council or Police, others have. Local residents have frequently reported anti-social behaviour. Added to the substantial legal costs of the eviction process, the cost of clean ups or repairs is significant.'* The Forum also notes comments made by the council that there had not been one day over the past year without an illegal encampment in the town (Nov 2021).

Reading has a limited amount of space. An encampment in a local facility can significantly impact the community's ability to use that facility. For example a reduction in parking available as a consequence of an encampment at Hills Meadow Car Park, or an encampment can place pressure on the viability of local community

events. The Forum is concerned that the situation is likely to become more concentrated in the near future as certain sites that have been regularly used for encampments are redeveloped. For example there will be a new school built at Cow Lane. Given the potential to concentrate the issue on fewer sites, the Forum is concerned that the issue of a reduction in facilities etc will become more of an issue, more of the time for the same group of residents. The Forum, thus, thinks it would be in all groups interest to have a Gypsy & Traveller Transit Park and thus would be supportive of the Planning Application 212037.

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### **RBC Ecologist**

#### **Initial comments received 7<sup>th</sup> February 2022:**

The site is located next to a watercourse which leads directly into the River Kennet/Kennet and Avon Canal Local Wildlife Site (LWS). It is also located on a designated green link as per policy EN12 effectively connecting the River Kennet/Kennet and Avon Canal Local Wildlife Site with land and lakes within Green Park. The proposals will break and fragment this link. It is therefore advised that it does not comply with policy EN12 as the green network will not be maintained.

EN12 reads:

*"The identified Green Network, the key elements of which are shown on the Proposals Map, shall be maintained, protected, consolidated, extended and enhanced. Permission will not be granted for development that negatively affects the sites with identified interest or fragments the overall network."*

*The Green Network comprises:*

- *Sites with identified biodiversity interest - Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, protected and priority species and their habitats, Priority and Biodiversity Action Plan habitats, and the River Thames and all its tributaries (including the River Kennet and the Kennet & Avon Canal); and*
- *Areas with potential for biodiversity value and which stitch the Green Network together - designated Local Green Space and open green spaces, and existing and potential Green Links.*

Furthermore, the plans show that the development will take place within 10m of a watercourse that leads directly into River Kennet/Kennet and Avon Canal Local Wildlife Site. The proposals would not comply with Policy EN11 which states that new developments should be set back at least 10m from a watercourse and are very unlikely to be acceptable from an ecology perspective.

EN11 reads

*"Where development in the vicinity of watercourses is acceptable, it will:-*

- 1 Provide appropriate, attractive uses and buildings that enhance the relationship of buildings, spaces and routes to the watercourse, including through creating or enhancing views of the watercourse, and create a high quality public realm;*
- 2 Make positive contributions to the distinct character, appearance, historic significance, landscape and amenity of the watercourses;*
- 3 Provide a strengthened role for watercourses as important landscape features, wildlife corridors, historic features and recreation opportunities;*
- 4 Wherever practical and consistent with its biodiversity role, provide good, level*

*access to and along the waterside for all those who want to use it;*  
*5 Be set at least ten metres back from the watercourse wherever practicable and appropriate to protect its biodiversity significance;*  
*6 Improve the quality of watercourse environment through protecting and enhancing habitats and ensuring that habitat creation is balanced with access and urban uses; and*  
*7 Pursue opportunities for deculverting of watercourses.*

**Further to revised and additional information, further comments received 20<sup>th</sup> July 2022:**

There will still be development within 10 metres of the watercourse and as such the scheme does not comply with EN11. The proposals are likely to have a number of impacts on the water course including water pollution, littering, light pollution, noise etc. These issues have not been properly assessed in the ecology report and further details on all potential impacts and how they would be mitigated would need to be provided before we would have enough information to assess this application.

It has also not been demonstrated that the proposals will result in a net gain in biodiversity units as stipulated in the NPPF and policy EN12. The applicant would need to submit a Biodiversity Impact Assessment Calculation. This is likely to show that there will be a net loss in Habitat Units and as per policy EN12 the applicant would need to demonstrate that there are “*exceptional circumstances where the need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site*” and “*provide off-site compensation to ensure that there is “no net loss” of biodiversity*”.

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**Berkshire Archaeology**

I was contacted by a representative of the agents prior to the submission of the planning application, and following a detailed and helpful discussion, I reached the conclusion that the works would have no archaeological implication, and therefore that no archaeological works would be recommended. On the evidence of the ground investigation report, and the "worst case" ground impacts, it was unlikely that buried archaeology, if present, would be affected by the proposals given the relatively thick layer of made ground overlying the natural subsoil. The note to this effect in paragraph 2.6 of the planning statement is a fair and accurate summary of those discussions.

As such, I would not recommend that any archaeological works are required.

**Crime Prevention Design Advisor (CPA) at Thames Valley Police (TVP)**

**Initial comments received 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022:**

We note that the location is currently a disused plot of land off Island Road in between Reading Waste Management and Reading Sewage Treatment works. We understand that there is a need for transit sites in the Reading area and that this site has been identified for that purpose to meet the area needs.

Due to the nature of the site being a transit site we need to consider the impact of Crime and Anti-social Behaviour on both the users of the site and the surrounding area. We need to ensure that users are protected from crime and ASB from neighbouring sites, but also that the neighbouring sites are not highly impacted by the consistent change of occupants. As this is an industrial area it needs to be assessed whether the industrial site will impact on the peaceful co-existence of a residential site in order to reduce Anti-Social Behaviour, for example noise. Considering the needs of the occupants of the site regarding supplies and local amenities we would like to confirm from the applicant if a time limit is being placed on the occupants for duration of their stay for example 72 hours. We request information regarding how the applicant will enforce this to ensure that it remains a transit site and does not become a permanent site.

We note that a secure boundary has been provisioned with the installation of a 2m high brick boundary wall, vehicle and pedestrian gates. We have concerns relating to the rear access gate leading to the Swale. This appears on plans as a double gate, no information has been provided regarding how this gate will be secured and if users of the site will have free access to this area. We have concerns that this area will not be covered by CCTV and presents opportunity for Crime and ASB. We request further detail on this gate, its purpose and access to the area.

Bin Stores can be used as an alternative point of entry when they have not been secured correctly. We recommend that the external bin doors onto the public realm are secured robustly so that users of the site are unable to open these doors or leave them open as this will provide an access point for unauthorised access and opportunity for crime and ASB. These doors should only be accessible to waste management.

**Further to revised and additional information, further comments received 9<sup>th</sup> August 2022:**

Having reviewed the comments below I am happy that this has addressed our previous concerns.

**Environment Agency**

**Initial comments received 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022:**

Thank you for consulting us with this application. The application site lies within Flood Zone 3 according to our Flood Map for Planning. This is defined as areas having a high probability of flooding in accordance with Table 1 'Flood Risk' of the Planning Practice Guidance. The site is also located partially within the 5% annual exceedance probability (AEP) flood extent according to our detailed flood modelling. This is defined by Reading Borough Council Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), June 2017 as a starting point - Land which would naturally flood with an annual probability of 1 in 20 (5%) or greater. It goes onto subdivide flood zone 3b into 2 categories - flood zone 3b 'developed' and flood zone 3b 'functional floodplain'. As this site is located within the 5% AEP and has not currently been developed, it is classed as being located within the functional floodplain.

The FRA submitted with this application states that the site should be considered 'more vulnerable' in terms of flood risk as it is not intended for permanent

residential use, however we class the site as 'highly vulnerable' in terms of flood risk as it includes caravans/ park homes which could be permanently used. The applicant proposes to raise the site into Flood Zone 1 by installing a piled concrete structure with the volume lost offset by the undercroft area but insufficient detail has been provided to demonstrate it is a viable method of compensation.

The site is also adjacent to the Green Park Flood Relief Channel, a statutory main river. We have concerns about the watercourse in this location as the applicant has failed to provide a suitable buffer zone to the watercourse.

#### **Environment Agency position**

We have **three objections** to the proposed development as submitted. They are:

- 1. Proposed development incompatible with Flood Zone**
- 2. Inadequate Flood Risk Assessment**
- 3. Inadequate buffer zone to watercourse**

**Objection 1 - Proposed development incompatible with Flood Zone** We object to the proposed development as it falls within a flood risk vulnerability category that is inappropriate to the Flood Zone in which the application site is located. The application is therefore contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework and its associated planning practice guidance. We recommend that planning permission is refused on this basis.

**Reasons** The PPG classifies development types according to their vulnerability to flood risk and provides guidance on which developments are appropriate within each Flood Zone. This site lies within Flood Zone 3b functional floodplain, which is land defined by your SFRA as having a high probability of flooding.

The development is classed as highly vulnerable in accordance with table 2 of the Flood Zones and flood risk tables of the PPG. Tables 1 and 3 make it clear that this type of development is not compatible with this Flood Zone and therefore should not be permitted.

#### **Overcoming our Objection**

The applicant can overcome our objection by not increasing the number of people or properties at risk of flooding or by clearly demonstrating that the proposed development site is located outside of Flood Zone 3b. This may include undertaking further studies such as a site specific topographical survey and/or detailed flood modelling.

Only upon successfully demonstrating that the site is located outside of Flood Zone 3b would additional gypsy/ traveller developments potentially be appropriate at this site. This is also provided that vital issues including; the flood risk sequential test; the exception test; and flood risk issues including safe access and egress can be satisfactorily addressed to ensure there are no adverse environmental impacts or risks to future occupants.

Despite our objection to this planning application on policy grounds we have reviewed the technical aspects of the proposal. We have reviewed the documents listed below and have the following further objection relating to the proposals:

- Flood Risk Assessment (1620009874-RAM-ZZ-XX-RP-WA-00001, Version 1, November 2021, Ramboll)
- Proposed Site Sections

- Proposed Block Site Plan
- Proposed Ground Flood, Roof Plans & Elevation

**Objection 2 - Inadequate FRA** In the absence of an acceptable flood risk assessment (FRA) we **object** to this application and recommend that planning permission is refused.

**Reason** The submitted FRA does not comply with the requirements for site-specific flood risk assessments, as set out in paragraphs 30 to 32 of the Flood Risk and Coastal Change section of the planning practice guidance. The FRA does not therefore adequately assess the flood risks posed by the development. In particular, the FRA fails to:

- Provide sufficient detail to demonstrate the piled concrete structure with a concrete slab will meet the Environment Agency design guidelines for the undercroft area and it will deliver appropriate level for level compensation.

We have reviewed the application for a Gypsy and Traveler transit site and we are not satisfied sufficient detail has been provided to demonstrate the proposed development is appropriate and feasible. The FRA states the creation of an undercroft area below the site level will allow level for level flood storage but it has not been demonstrated this is possible. More information is needed about the floodplain compensation scheme to show an equal of volume of flood plain will be created to that taken up by the proposed development. The drawings provided do not clearly demonstrate the location, spacing and height of the piled columns.

**Overcoming our objection 2** To overcome our objection, the applicant should submit a revised FRA which addresses the points highlighted above.

If this cannot be achieved, we are likely to maintain our objection. Please re-consult us on any revised FRA submitted and we'll respond within 21 days of receiving it.

It will need to be shown that any increase in built footprint within the 1% annual probability (1 in 100) flood extent with an appropriate allowance for climate change can be directly compensated for. This is necessary to prevent the new development reducing flood plain storage and displacing flood waters, thereby increasing flood risk elsewhere.

Level for level compensation is the matching of volumes lost to the flood plain, through increases in built footprint, with new flood plain volume by reducing ground levels. Please note for this to be achievable it requires land on the edge of the floodplain and above the 1% annual probability (1 in 100) flood level with an appropriate allowance for climate change to be available. A comparison of ground levels (topographical survey) with modelled flood plain levels will show land above the 1% annual probability (1 in 100) flood level with an appropriate allowance for climate change to be used as compensation.

Level for level flood plain compensation is the preferred method of mitigation because voids, stilts or undercroft parking tend to become blocked over time by debris or domestic effects leading to a gradual loss of the proposed mitigation.

If it is not possible to provide level for level flood plain compensation then other forms of mitigation may be considered if agreed with the Local Planning Authority (LPA). The FRA must demonstrate that level for level compensation has been

considered, explain why it was not possible to provide it and detail how any associated risks from the chosen form of mitigation can be minimised.

If voids are proposed as an alternative form of mitigation these will need to be floodable, with the underside of the void above the 1% annual probability (1 in 100) flood level with an appropriate allowance for climate change. The LPA must also be satisfied that they can enforce a condition to maintain the voids as designed and that an adequate maintenance plan is in place to ensure the voids remain open for the life time of the development.

If the LPA are not satisfied that alternative mitigation measures are appropriate then the applicant should revise their development proposals to ensure that there will be no increase in built footprint on this site.

The applicant should demonstrate that a void can be provided with openings at least 1 metre wide, extending from the existing ground level to above the 1% annual probability (1 in 100) flood level with an appropriate allowance for climate change. There should be 1 metre opening in every 5 metre length of wall on all sides of the building. The void should be open and maintained as such in perpetuity. If the void openings are a security risk, then vertical steel bars placed at 100mm centres can be installed.

**Objection 3 - inadequate buffer zone to watercourse** The submitted planning application and associated documents indicate that bank reprofiling and a significant loss of riparian semi-natural habitat within the riparian zone of the Green Park Flood Relief Channel will be required as part of the proposed development. These activities will require a flood risk activity permit under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 which is unlikely to be granted for the current proposal.

We therefore **object** to the proposed development, due to its impacts on nature conservation, ecology and physical habitats. We recommend that planning permission is refused.

**Reason(s)** In determining the flood risk activity permit for this development, we will assess its compliance with the Thames River Basin Management Plan (RBMP). We'll also consider how the development will affect water biodiversity and the wetland environment. The RBMP states that the water environment should be protected and enhanced to prevent deterioration and promote the recovery of water bodies.

Under the current proposals, the development severely infringes on the riparian corridor of the river. This directly goes against Policy EN11 in Reading Borough Council's Local Plan which states that development 'be set at least ten metres back from the watercourse wherever practicable and appropriate to protect its biodiversity significance'. Current proposals show only a one metre corridor between the river and the development.

Buffer zones to watercourses are required for a number of reasons, including to provide a "wildlife corridor" bringing more general benefits by linking a number of habitats and affording species a wider and therefore more robust and sustainable range of linked habitats. Development that encroaches on watercourses has a potentially severe impact on their ecological value. Land alongside watercourses is particularly valuable for wildlife and it is essential this is protected.



We do recognise that ecological enhancements to the banks of the river, and in channel, have been suggested both on and off site. However, very little information has been provided regarding these enhancements and no net gain assessment has been undertaken to quantitatively show that the development can compensate for the high net loss this development will cause, as well as provide an additional 10% net gain. Irrespective of this, the development is unacceptable so close to the river. This objection is supported by paragraphs 174 and 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which recognise that the planning system should conserve and enhance the environment by minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity.

**Overcoming our objection** To overcome our objection the development should be re-designed to provide a 10 metre ecological buffer zone, in line with Reading Borough Council's Local Plan policy. The buffer zone scheme shall be free from built development including lighting, domestic gardens and formal landscaping and should be managed for biodiversity in the long term so it can act as a wildlife corridor. In addition, a biodiversity net gain assessment should be undertaken to show that the development can achieve a 10% net gain.

#### **Environmental permit - advice to applicant**

The Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 require a permit or exemption to be obtained for any activities which will take place:

- on or within 8 metres of a main river (16 metres if tidal)
- on or within 8 metres of a flood defence structure or culverted main river (16 metres if tidal)
- on or within 16 metres of a sea defence
- involving quarrying or excavation within 16 metres of any main river, flood defence (including a remote defence) or culvert
- in a floodplain more than 8 metres from the river bank, culvert or flood defence structure (16 metres if it's a tidal main river) and you don't already have planning permission

For further guidance please visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/flood-risk-activities-environmental-permits> or contact our National Customer Contact Centre on 03708 506 506 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm) or by emailing [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk).

The applicant should not assume that a permit will automatically be forthcoming once planning permission has been granted, and we advise them to consult with us at the earliest opportunity.

#### **Sequential test - advice to LPA**

In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 162), development in flood risk areas should not be permitted if there are reasonably available alternative sites, appropriate for the proposed development, in areas with a lower risk of flooding. The sequential test establishes if this is the case. Development is in a flood risk area if it is in Flood Zone 2 or 3, or it is within Flood Zone 1 and your strategic flood risk assessment shows it to be at future flood risk or at risk from other sources of flooding such as surface water or groundwater. The only developments exempt from the sequential test in flood risk areas are:

- Householder developments such as residential extensions, conservatories or loft conversions
- Small non-residential extensions with a footprint of less than 250sqm

- Changes of use (except changes of use to a caravan, camping or chalet site, or to a mobile home or park home site)
- Applications for development on sites allocated in the development plan through the sequential test, which are consistent with the use for which the site was allocated.

Avoiding flood risk through the sequential test is the most effective way of addressing flood risk because it places the least reliance on measures such as flood defences, flood warnings and property level resilience.

**Further to re-consultation, no further comments received.**

### **Thames Water**

Initial comments received 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022:

Thames Water has concerns that the use of this land for residential purposes will have unacceptable amenity impact on future residents for the following reasons. The proximity of the Reading STW to the development is extremely close (the proposed residential site borders the STW). There are various issues that are likely to negatively affect residential amenity arising from the site's operations which is within its permitted planning use.

- Noise & Light - the STW site generates a level of noise and light as it is a constantly operating site (as sewage arrives at the site 24/7 so treatment is continually taking place). Residential development adjacent to this is likely to be more sensitive to this noise/lighting than the other surrounding uses (warehouse and waste processing).
- Air quality/odour - The adopted Reading Local Plan, 2019, Policy SR1 sets out that development must: "... iv. Take account of potentially contaminated land and potential odour issues arising from the sewage treatment works" There is no mention of odour impact within the application Planning Statement, but an Air Quality Assessment by Ramboll has been submitted which covers odour. By the Ramboll report's admission, the surveys were taken in the winter, which is not the optimum time for assessing impacts. The report concludes that: 'The results from the predictive assessment suggest that odour from the WWTP and recycling centre are likely to have a moderate adverse effect on the proposed Application Site.' IAQM guidance (<http://www.iaqm.co.uk/text/guidance/odour-guidance-2014.pdf>) sets out that for high sensitivity receptors, such as residential, the creation of a moderate adverse effect can be generated by Medium relative odour exposure (Table 11). The guidance states that: 'Where the overall effect is greater than "slight adverse", the effect is likely to be considered significant'. A significant effect should mean that planning permission is not granted.

Therefore, we do not consider that locating residential development in this location is appropriate due to the potential risks for future residential amenity. This is in line with the 'agent of change' principle established at Paragraph 187 of the NPPF, which requires that existing businesses be protected from unreasonable restrictions placed on them by new development.

We have also provided comments on the application with respect to the infrastructure requirements of the proposed development, for information as set out below:

#### **Waste Comments**

This site is affected by wayleaves and easements within the boundary of or close to the application site. Thames Water will seek assurances that these will not be affected by the proposed development. The applicant should undertake appropriate searches to confirm this. To discuss the proposed development in more detail, the applicant should contact Developer Services - <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/developers>

The application indicates that SURFACE WATER will NOT be discharged to the public network and as such Thames Water has no objection, however approval should be sought from the Lead Local Flood Authority. Should the applicant subsequently seek a connection to discharge surface water into the public network in the future then we would consider this to be a material change to the proposal, which would require an amendment to the application at which point we would need to review our position.

With the information provided, Thames Water has been unable to determine the Foul water infrastructure needs of this application. Thames Water has contacted the developer in an attempt to obtain this information and agree a position for FOUL WATER drainage but have been unable to do so in the time available and as such, Thames Water request that the following condition be added to any planning permission. "No development shall be occupied until confirmation has been provided that either: - 1. Foul water Capacity exists off site to serve the development, or 2. A development and infrastructure phasing plan has been agreed with the Local Authority in consultation with Thames Water. Where a development and infrastructure phasing plan is agreed, no occupation shall take place other than in accordance with the agreed development and infrastructure phasing plan, or 3. All Foul water network upgrades required to accommodate the additional flows from the development have been completed. Reason - Network reinforcement works may be required to accommodate the proposed development. Any reinforcement works identified will be necessary in order to avoid sewage flooding and/or potential pollution incidents. The developer can request information to support the discharge of this condition by visiting the Thames Water website at [thameswater.co.uk/preplanning](https://www.thameswater.co.uk/preplanning). Should the Local Planning Authority consider the above recommendation inappropriate or are unable to include it in the decision notice, it is important that the Local Planning Authority liaises with Thames Water Development Planning Department (telephone 0203 577 9998) prior to the planning application approval.

Further information is required on the proposed connection point to the foul network to further assess the impact of the development.

We would expect the developer to demonstrate what measures will be undertaken to minimise groundwater discharges into the public sewer. Groundwater discharges typically result from construction site dewatering, deep excavations, basement infiltration, borehole installation, testing and site remediation. Any discharge made without a permit is deemed illegal and may result in prosecution under the provisions of the Water Industry Act 1991. Should the Local Planning Authority be minded to approve the planning application, Thames Water would like the following informative attached to the planning permission: "A Groundwater Risk

Management Permit from Thames Water will be required for discharging groundwater into a public sewer. Any discharge made without a permit is deemed illegal and may result in prosecution under the provisions of the Water Industry Act 1991. We would expect the developer to demonstrate what measures he will undertake to minimise groundwater discharges into the public sewer. Permit enquiries should be directed to Thames Water's Risk Management Team by telephoning 020 3577 9483 or by emailing [trade.effluent@thameswater.co.uk](mailto:trade.effluent@thameswater.co.uk) . Application forms should be completed on line via [www.thameswater.co.uk](http://www.thameswater.co.uk). Please refer to the Wholesale; Business customers; Groundwater discharges section.

### **Water Comments**

On the basis of information provided, Thames Water would advise that with regard to water network infrastructure capacity, concerns about water infrastructure capacity to serve the proposed development.

Thames Water recommend the following informative be attached to this planning permission. Thames Water will aim to provide customers with a minimum pressure of 10m head (approx 1 bar) and a flow rate of 9 litres/minute at the point where it leaves Thames Waters pipes. The developer should take account of this minimum pressure in the design of the proposed development.

### **Summary**

Thames Water do not consider that locating residential development in this location is appropriate due to the potential risks for future residential amenity. This is in line with the 'agent of change' principle established at Paragraph 187 of the NPPF, which requires that existing businesses be protected from unreasonable restrictions placed on them by new development.

### **Further to revised and additional information, further comments received 2nd August 2022:**

Apologies if there has been some confusion regarding our position on the development and odour matters, I have sought to clarify matters below:

- The design of Reading STW had an operating level of 5 isopleths (odour units) at the boundary
- The institute of air quality management ([Guidance on the assessment of odour for planning 2018 v1.1](#)) and planning appeals recognise 3 isopleths as the point of statutory nuisance
- The proximity of the site makes it highly unlikely that an isopleth of 3 or less could be achieved for the development land in question, meaning development couldn't proceed (agent of change principle)
- To understand the exact contours at the development site it would require a detailed odour survey to be undertaken at the developers expense. Where base information already exists then this can be used, but where it doesn't then on site samples may have to be gathered or indicative values used
- We are happy to get a free quote to undertake this work from our supplier but it will be at the developer expense to fund the actual study. **Please confirm if you would like a quote for this.**
- This study will show the base position and is / isn't the site affected by adverse odours

- We can then look at what mitigation options might be available to reduce odours further. However as Reading STW was built as an exemplar site with odour as a key consideration in its design, further mitigation options are going to be extremely limited.
- Any mitigation options identified would again be for the developer to fund (Agent of change principle)