

Statement on behalf of the residents of Appleby Magna Caravan Site.

NW Leicestershire District Council.

Community Scrutiny Committee Wednesday 6th May 2020.

The residents would like to thank the Committee Members and Officers for the opportunity to submit a statement regarding the report for recommendations of redevelopment / modernisation of the caravan site at Appleby Magna.

Background:

The general perception of a “caravan site” is one of holiday lets or more often when in fixed locations, a site occupied by transient residents or ethnic groups such as the Gypsy community. The latter often attract negative reactions and perceptions of a lifestyle associated with these communities.

This would be a gross misrepresentation of the Appleby Magna site, which should be more accurately described as static mobile home site, protected by the Mobile Homes Act 2013. More importantly, for the purposes of this Committee, is to understand the residents of the site form are a long-standing close-knit community many of whom happily resided on the site in excess of thirty years.

Following a fire to one mobile home in 2011, an FRA was undertaken which identified that action would need to be taken to make the site conform to the regulations. Since that time 9 years ago, the residents have experienced continued ambiguity and indecision about the Councils plans for the site. At the time of the fire two plots were vacant.

In 2014 the residents received a letter advising them the council were restricting their rights to sell or assign their homes and the licence to occupy the plots to another purchaser. This proposal was legally incorrect and caused considerable distress and anxiety to the all residents of the homes, but most acutely to the elderly residents of the site. Included in this letter was the offer to take up a council tenancy as an alternative to remaining on the site.

Despite the council retracting its restrictions on residents’ rights, there have been long delays in progressing any proposals for the site. This uncertainty impacted on residents, and by the time of the first public meeting, not held until 2017, following several formal complaints only 10 residents remained. It was at this meeting the council first proposed alternative options for the site. All the residents at the meeting stated their intention to remain on the site and wanted the council to commit to improving the site and bringing it up to standard.

Protracted discussions and meetings about the site have continued over the last 9 years with no certainty over its future.

During this time, the site has deteriorated considerably; repairs have been poor or non-existent, contractors engaged have left the site in unacceptable and unsafe conditions, and the maintenance of the site and amenities have been neglected, including the main showering and toilet block, which has remained unrepaired since damaged in 2018.

It is rather disingenuous to suggest therefore that a large cohort of the residents have voluntarily relinquished their home. It was inevitable in these circumstances, that many elderly residents in their 70's exhausted by the continuing uncertainty and seeing their environment deteriorate have succumbed to the stress and the uncertainty of the future of their homes. They felt they had little option but to take the offer of alternative accommodation made to them by the council.

Whilst home loss offers were made, this is not universally the case. Notwithstanding the clear issue that residents homes and the plot value has deteriorated as a result of site neglect, and the uncertainty over its future; home loss represents a questionable approach to compensating the value of a home that could have been sold publicly or purchased by the council at an agreed valuation rate.

Further deterioration of the site followed when the decision to not re-let the vacant plots was taken. Inevitably this would further impact on the viability of the site. There is no council record of this decision being taken as part of a formal decision-making process. 1.3 of the report states that management of a caravan site is not the councils core business, however this is a residential mobile homes site, owned and managed by the Council, and housing, of all tenures is the core business of the council. Reletting of some of the plots could have achieved further affordable housing on the site if this had been the strategic aim of the council and mitigated the nominal £5k loss to the general fund per annum. This could still be an option open to the council.

Consideration for the committee not explicit within the report are the following factors:

- The residents have statutory rights that must be upheld in any decision the council makes.
- They hold a "Protected Site" agreement in accordance with the Mobile Homes (Selling & Gifting) (England) regulations 2013.
- Without an occupier's consent, the occupier can only be required to move to another pitch on successful application to the appropriate judicial body *and if and only if* -
- The appropriate judicial body is satisfied the other pitch is broadly comparable to the occupier's original pitch and that it is reasonable for the mobile home to be stationed there.
- Payment for moving and re siting of the mobile home is the responsibility of the site owner (the Council)

Residents Views:

Despite this long and difficult history over the site, the residents recognise the need for their site to be improved, they want to become proud owners again of their homes.

The remaining residents are a strong community who have positively engaged with the council officers in order to agree progress; they have engaged in drafting plans

for the proposal, suggesting edits and offered compromise, of note is Option D was an alternative proposed by the residents that would facilitate the council being able to develop the existing site.

Residents strongly support Option E in the report, the outcome they have sought for 9 years. They have a vision for its future. If they can remain, they have stated not only will some commit to invest in the renewal and repair of their existing homes, but they will be able to maintain the increased plot sizes, working with the Council and bringing the site back up to acceptable standards.

Not only is Option E the most financially viable for the Council it is morally the correct one. These are your residents, they are part of the local community, have spent most of their lives in Appleby Magna and wish to remain on the existing site; it is their home.

Thank you.