

Planning application for Pendell Transit Camp, Merstham

27th October 2021

Proposed planning application

Surrey County Council (SCC) together with Surrey Police, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPPC) and Surrey's district and borough councils have been working on a proposal for providing 10 new transit Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pitches on land just south of the existing permanent Pendell Camp site in Merstham. You may well already be aware of the proposal, and you might have provided comments through the Surrey Says web page and social media.

This letter is to let you know that a planning application will be made shortly, and you will be able to comment on the proposals through the planning process which is being run by SCC. This letter contains some high-level information about the project, and how we are addressing some of the public's concerns.

Meeting a Recognised Need

Between 2018 and 2020, Surrey Police recorded 483 unauthorised encampments across the County on private, Local Authority and SCC-owned land; so far in 2021, there have been 72. Unauthorised encampments often cause significant disruption and cost to communities and landowners, whilst also putting a strain on Police resources.

Transit sites help address these problems, and provide temporary refuge for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, some of whom travel around the UK sourcing seasonal work with their own caravan accommodation. Pre-booking will be made available at the proposed site, and its residents can stay for **up to 4 weeks**. There is currently no transit provision for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers anywhere in Surrey, and this development would be the County's first, marking a significant step forward in addressing their community's housing needs.

Site Selection – Why Pendell?

This site has specifically been chosen after an extensive search process undertaken by SCC, with a requirement for a transit site identified in the east of the County. The search focused on SCC land holdings, as acquiring third party land was not an option given the high land values in Surrey, which would make the project unviable.

Addressing Community Concerns

Experience in neighbouring counties shows that the provision of transit sites significantly reduces the number of unauthorised encampments, by providing dedicated sites where members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community can locate temporarily. Transit sites elsewhere have also reduced disruption to local communities and provided the police with greater powers to manage and move on unauthorised encampments. The same County-wide positive outcomes are expected when the Pendell transit site is delivered.

More locally, SCC officers will be responsible for liaising with the adjacent Pendell Camp residents. The proposed design will ensure privacy for the residents of both sites, with landscaping and security fencing around the boundary. The proposed site will share access off Merstham Road with the adjacent permanent camp, but only for a short length. Each site can operate independently.

Site Security and Management

SCC have produced a management plan for Pendell Transit Camp and have been engaging with stakeholders, including local and wider communities, on the emerging development proposal.

The site will be managed by SCC with dedicated staff. Out of hours, a security company will manage the site when it is operational. A management office is proposed and will be sited in a prominent position near the site entrance. The building will house CCTV and ANPR (automatic number plate recognition) cameras which will be linked directly to SCC and Surrey Police.

When operational and if an unauthorised encampment is directed to the transit site, an SCC Officer will ensure there is sufficient space to accommodate new residents and open the site. The journeys of residents at the unauthorised encampment travelling to the site will be staggered, to minimise vehicle congestion on the local highway network.

Local Highways Safety

Specialist transport consultants have produced a Transport Statement which will accompany the planning application. A review of road accident data has revealed there have been only 4 reported minor road accidents on Merstham Road within close proximity to the site, including the junction at Warwick Wold Road over the past 5 years. This is a low number of accidents and therefore it is not considered there is an existing safety problem in the vicinity of the site.

A review of the likely additional vehicle movements to occur as a result of the proposed development indicates a maximum of 5 additional two-way vehicle movements within the AM Peak (08:00-09:00) and 6 additional two-way vehicle movements within the PM Peak (17:00-18:00). This equates to less than 1 vehicle movement approximately every 10 minutes in either peak hour.

Landscape, Environment and Design

Good quality landscaping, environmental design and buildings are at the heart of the proposed development. The planning application will be accompanied by a number of reports and assessments demonstrating how the site's biodiversity will be enhanced by wide ranging sustainability measures.

