# Residents oppose traveller pitch plans near World War II orphanage site



Furious residents in Sonning Common, Oxfordshire, have expressed strong opposition to plans for a traveller pitch on land historically associated with a World War II orphanage. John and Cindy Ayres have submitted a proposal to establish a mobile home on the site, which previously housed over 300 orphans evacuated from London during the Blitz, despite an earlier application being rejected last year.

The proposed site is located near Bishopswood recreation ground, an area of outstanding natural beauty and in close proximity to a local nursery and playing fields. Villagers have characterised the application as ‘unsuitable’ and ‘inappropriate’, voicing their concerns on the local planning portal. More than 20 objections have been logged, with residents emphasising the potential negative effects on local children and recreational spaces.

David Phillips, a local resident, stated, "The application has been rejected twice previously and also on appeal. Nothing has changed. The proposal is out of settlement and inappropriate given adjacency to nursery school and playing fields." Phillips raised issues regarding the public right of way that runs through the site, fearing that it might impede free access.

Another local, Jonathon Edney, underscored the potential damage to the children's nursery and the impact on the recreational areas for youth, asserting that "the physical and mental health benefits of exercise are well documented.” He warned that the application posed too great a risk to local children's wellbeing, particularly amid a backdrop of diminishing open spaces for recreational use.

Little Beeches Nursery, situated adjacent to the application site, also lodged objections. The nursery's owners articulated concerns about the proposed development's effect on the character of the landscape, biodiversity, and existing trees in the vicinity.

In response to the objections, Mr and Ms Ayres have assured that their plan will not negatively impact the site, highlighting that it would be designed sensitively, with plans to enclose the pitch using native hedgerows and reinforce boundary shrubs.

The Ayres' application follows new guidelines introduced by Angela Rayner, which compel local councils to allocate green belt land for traveller use if there is an 'unmet need' for pitches. Currently, there are only ten traveller sites in South Oxfordshire, which reportedly falls short by 34 pitches, as reported by the Henley Standard.

Despite their commitment to addressing the shortage of traveller sites, the Ayres' previous plans met resistance, having been rejected on appeal in January 2022. Residents remain wary, recalling a similar case where an individual was allowed to keep a mobile home in the nearby Goring-on-Thames area despite local council objections, citing a lack of available traveller pitches.

The site of the proposed pitches, off Gallowstree Road, continues to be a focal point of contention, with conflicting sentiments surrounding the need for traveller accommodation and preserving local heritage and community spaces. The matter now lies with the South Oxfordshire District Council, who will consider the applications amidst local opposition and evolving planning policies.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.henleystandard.co.uk/news/home/175021/residents-oppose-plans-for-pair-of-gypsy-pitches.html> - This article supports the claim that residents in Sonning Common oppose the plans for gypsy pitches due to concerns about the site's location, impact on local services, and road safety issues. It also mentions the site's proximity to Bishopswood recreation ground and its designation as an area of outstanding natural beauty.
* <https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/app/uploads/2024/12/TOP03.2-Housing-Requirement-Affordable-Housing-and-Gypsies-Travellers-and-Travelling-Showpeople-Topic-Paper-Submission-Version.pdf> - This document explains the policy framework for addressing the need for traveller sites, including the requirement for local councils to assess and meet the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers. It supports the claim about the shortage of traveller pitches in South Oxfordshire.
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/planning-policy-for-traveller-sites> - This page provides guidance on planning policy for traveller sites, which includes the need to identify and address under-provision in appropriate locations, supporting the context of the Ayres' application in accordance with national policies.
* <https://www.chilternsaonb.org/> - This website provides information about the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), supporting the claim that the proposed site is located within an area of significant environmental importance.
* <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/planning-and-development/planning-applications/> - This page explains how South Oxfordshire District Council handles planning applications, including public consultations, which supports the process described in the article regarding the Ayres' proposal.