

Staploe Parish Council object to this application 25/01596/FUL.

History:

The site was purchased and then occupied by the Rooney family in 2007 without planning permission. All planning applications were refused by the Borough Council.

The owners appealed under Appeal Ref: APP/K0235/A/11/2149691. On 31/08/11 the Planning Inspector stated that the appeal was “dismissed insofar as it relates to the 2 transit pitches and the day room. The appeal is allowed insofar as I grant temporary, personal, planning permission for the use of land for the stationing of caravans for the residential purposes for 2 gypsy pitches together with formation of hard standing and I grant permanent planning permission for the formation of new vehicular access and the erection of stables.... in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 10/02302/FUL, dated 10/09/10” This was subject to conditions which included limiting the permission to three years. When that expired in 2014 the Rooneys applied for permanent permission 14/03009/S73 but this was refused and a stop notice came into force. The Rooneys did not comply with the stop notice so in 2015 the Borough Council cleared the site. The entrance has remained in place as it was granted permission in connection with the stable (which was never built). On 6/12/16, the Borough Council took out another injunction against Mrs Rooney as she was proposing to move onto the field again. The Council received a planning application 16/03661/FUL on 19/12/16 to bring mobile homes onto the site and live in them again. The Borough Council returned the planning application and advised the agent on 12/01/17 that it would not be considered because it would constitute a breach of the pre-existing enforcement notice.

On 3/4/2017 Bedford County Court issued an indefinite Injunction in relation to the St Joseph’s site. It forbids the Rooney family and persons unknown from taking up residential occupation of the site and also forbids them from causing or allowing any caravans, mobile homes or other forms of residential accommodation to be stationed on the land.

Of relevance is the recent planning inspectors dismissal of the appeals at Keysoe for a similar application. The decision was made in April 2025. Appeal A Ref: APP/K0235/C/22/3303840 Appeal B Ref: APP/K0235/C/22/3303839 Land South West of The Manor, Keysoe.

The appeal was dismissed largely on the grounds of potential harm to biodiversity, landscape, amenity, urbanising effects and lack of access to facilities and services. Of particular note is the argument that Paragraph 26 of the PPTS states that local planning authorities should very strictly limit new traveller site development in open countryside that is away from existing settlements or outside areas allocated in the development plan. Bedford’s Settlement Hierarchy Addendum, April 2022 assesses the sustainability

of all the settlements in the Borough. Keysoe and Brook End scored only 4 points in that assessment, with the highest scoring settlement scoring 92. Keysoe and Brook End is rated as a Group 4 Settlement and is ranked joint 59th, with only two other settlements achieving lower scores. It should be noted that Upper Staploe has an even lower rank than Keysoe and Brook End and scores zero points in that assessment.

Grounds for our objection to this application:

1. This is an isolated site in open countryside. Upper Staploe consists of 7 isolated dwellings each surrounded by agricultural fields. It scored zero points in Bedford's Settlement Hierarchy 2022 and ranks bottom of the list for accessibility and availability of facilities. There are no facilities and it is only accessible by private car. There is no public transport, no pavement and the only route to a shop, school, or doctor is 2.4km along Bushmead Road which is a fast, busy road at 60mph with no pavements and narrow, uneven verges with overhanging vegetation often forcing you to walk in the road which is frequently used by large HGVs. It is extremely rare to see any pedestrians on the road and it is not a safe route for cycling.

2. We object to the statement that this is previously developed land. No permission was granted for the hard standing and septic tank that were installed in the past. The hard standing was not properly laid and was never signed off by building control. The stable block was never built and the permission granted has now lapsed. The site was left in a very poor condition in 2011 and the Borough Council had to use public funds were used to return the land to its previous state.

3. We also object to the statement that the previous use of 2 gypsy and traveller pitches was acceptable to the planning inspector in 2011 in terms of character. This was a temporary use to enable the occupants to find alternative accommodation. The planning inspector stated "I agree with the conclusions of the previous Inspector who considered that the development appears unduly stark and that it unacceptably harms the character and appearance of the countryside."

4. On p4 of the preliminary ecological assessment it repeatedly describes the site as an urban location with surrounding physical barriers. The location is not urban. It is an isolated field in the open countryside. The "surrounding physical barriers" are widely spaced barbed wire fences around most of the site and a wooden post and rail fence near the road. They are not significant physical barriers for most animals but they would prevent a horse from escaping.

5. The development could potentially cause harm to biodiversity on the site. Since the Borough Council took direct action to return the land to an agricultural field the field has been used periodically for grazing horses. Residents walking the footpath have seen badgers, roe deer, muntjac, many birds, bats and other wildlife on the site in the extensive scrub. There is a pond to the west of the site and many ponds in our parish

show evidence of great crested newts. The owners of the pond are not aware of anyone requesting to survey the pond – contrary to the claims made in the Preliminary Ecological Assessment. Otters have been seen just north of the site and there are badger sets in the vicinity. The description of the site as “bramble scrub” does not accurately reflect the biodiversity and we believe a more detailed survey is required.

6. The proposed development will urbanise the site which was an agricultural field with a diverse rural hedgerow before the site was occupied in 2007. The proposed development will reduce the amenity for those walking Footpath 21. It is incorrect to say that the site can't be seen from the footpath as stated in the planning statement – it definitely can. It will also be seen by those driving along the Bushmead Road.

7. The planning inspector foresaw potential planning creep and in the 6/12/2011 decision allowed stables but point 53 says “I have restricted the use of the stables to prevent any domestic use of the building.” Therefore, permission to build stables did not imply permission for domestic use.

8. We are aware that the planning inspector granted permission for an access to the highway on Bushmead Road for the stables that were granted permission. However, highways access for a stable is likely to be used relatively infrequently compared to residential use. Bushmead Road has become much busier since 2011 and there have been many accidents in recent months. Due to the A428 construction roadworks affecting the Black Cat roundabout there are times when a lot of the A1 traffic uses the Bushmead Road and this is likely to continue for several years with East West Rail construction. We do not believe that the access is safe for regular residential use.