



From field to fight: Bramley camp faces enforcement questions

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An unauthorised traveller camp has been built on land earmarked for inclusion in the Surrey Hills National Landscape - and now plans to make the site permanent have been submitted. Witnesses reported several caravans moving on to Unstead Lane in Bramley last week, sparking frustrations among residents over the lack of enforcement action. Since then a petition has been created calling on immediate action to be taken - with more than 600 people already signing.

It says: "Residents and taxpayers expect and deserve equal protection under planning law. The Surrey Hills National Landscape and Green Belt exist to safeguard our countryside for the benefit of all, not to be eroded by unlawful development. Allowing this encampment to remain would set a dangerous precedent that planning law can be ignored without consequence."

Guildford Borough Council has said it was aware of the work carried out and understood people's concerns. Officers visited the encampment and completed background work to gain a full understanding of the situation.

Councillor Jane Austin, leader of the Conservative opposition group in neighbouring Waverley Borough Council, represents the Bramley and Wonersh ward near the site. She said: "People went to bed on Friday looking out to a field and now they have this. Saturday the road was blocked and they were clearly doing something without planning permission, but nobody could get hold of anyone. That field was due to be national landscape land, deemed to be of that high quality. The land is on floodplain and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, they won't ever be legally built. People around here are reasonable and agree the GTL (Gypsy Traveller League) community need somewhere to live. Everybody should follow the law of the land without exception, planning is there to build sustainable communities and must be followed."



Councils must provide adequate land for housing - whether fixed homes or traveller pitches. If they cannot demonstrate enough provision, sustainable planning applications are difficult to reject as they are often won on appeal - with the council liable for costs. In 2024 Guildford Borough Council was only able to identify 2.59 years supply for traveller pitches, below the minimum five years. Elsewhere in Surrey, Runnymede Borough Council's decades-long failure to provide the legal minimum number of Gypsy and Traveller pitches has forced families to take matters into their own hands and build their own. Runnymede's planning committee recently felt obligated to approve 12 new pitches in Hardwick Lane, Chertsey, despite concerns the site would be overcrowded and the roads unsafe.

Guildford Borough Council said it could not be expected to predict or prevent this type of incident occurring, but would react and manage it as quickly as possible. A spokesperson said: "If a breach of planning control is confirmed on any site in the borough, we have several enforcement options including negotiation and formal action. However, the enforcement powers available to local authorities do not achieve an instant solution."

A planning application for the site was submitted on Saturday September 13. If it contains the correct paperwork, the council must validate it - with nearby residents contacted and given the opportunity to submit their views before any decision is made.

Surrey County Councillor Matt Furniss said he has been speaking with Guildford's planning team and that Surrey Highways Enforcement has also visited the site to assess the new unauthorised access onto the highway for safety and to determine next steps. He added: "It is always disappointing when some individuals choose to work outside the planning process and I will be pressing both councils for a quick resolution."

MP Jeremy Hunt said: "Residents all express the same sentiment - why is there so little action to address unauthorised encampments like this, which are appearing with increasing frequency. It is absolutely infuriating to see the law being ignored this way - and the people who do it getting away scot-free. This latest case is another rural field, recognised as being of such quality that it is earmarked for inclusion in the Surrey Hills National Landscape. Yet local people now face the prospect of potentially years of planning enforcement action - with no guarantee of success. The point is that such drawn-out processes risk consuming vast amounts of council time and money, while the local community continues to suffer the consequences. Early intervention and decisive action such as prompt issuance of a Stop Notice would help prevent situations like this from worsening."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Image of site in Unstead Lane, Bramley