



Report Title: Notes from Focus Group with
Residents of Travelling Persons Site

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Present: Kirsty McDonald (Falkirk Council), Ruth Glendenning (Falkirk Council) and 5 female residents from the site.

1. What do you think about the site conditions at present?

- The children's swing park should be removed as the children do not play there. It is always in a mess and an eye sore for the residents that live down that end of the site.
- The children in the site are older and therefore are not interested in the play park. Either remove or replace it with a swing on a rope and put down bark rather than stone chips as the kids throw the stone chips at the caravans and this has caused some denting to the caravans.
- Consider replacing the park with a place for the kids to play football with high netting to prevent the ball from hitting the caravans.
- No one takes responsibility for tidying the site, a few residents try and clean up but it should be a joint effort from all residents.
- Fire hose needs fixed – is this a health and safety issue? A few years ago a caravan went on fire and although there are fire extinguishers they would not have helped to put the fire out. If the hose is working then in future if this was to happen again they would be able to try and prevent the whole caravan from being destroyed.
- Re-introduce the road sweeper. Since Jessie Wallace has left there has been no road sweeper up to the site. The residents felt they are not being treated the same as other residential areas. This would assist in keeping the communal areas clean and encourage resident to all keep their areas tidier.
- Residents feel that the site is dangerous as there was a traffic accident recently in which a car leaving the site hit another car coming into the site. The residents stated that due to hedges at the entrance it is difficult to see oncoming traffic hence the accident occurred. They would like to see the hedges either cut or moved back to enable a clearer view when turning onto the main street.
- The residents would like the barrier back in operation as they are occasionally disturbed by people on motorbikes coming into the site and driving off again. They would like to use the barrier to prevent this sort of thing happening in the future. At the moment they can't stop unwanted people coming into the site. The use of an electric barrier was discussed with Jessie Wallace before she left.
- The chalets are in poor condition and the residents are aware that other sites in other Local Authorities are replacing/updating the chalets (Perth sites have wee houses/chalets, Kincardine and Larkhall sites have splash backs in kitchen). A lot of other Councils are upgrading the sites in particular the chalets or providing proper static homes on site and rent them out to residents.
- All residents would like a bath installed rather than have a shower in the chalets. It is difficult to wash the children especially the young babies using a shower. A bath would make it much easier.
- When Capital Works (re-roughcasting) were being carried out to the chalets the residents still remained on site. Nobody thought to move us. There was scaffolding up and a child climbed up the scaffolding, fell and split her head open. Also when the pitches were being cemented the residents had to walk from their caravan over planks of wood. Again there was no offer to be moved while the work was being carried out and the site resembled a building site and this was dangerous especially with children around. Work was being carried out around the caravans and chalets. The residents were also not told when this work was taking place workmen just turned up and began the work.
- The Falkirk site is known within the Travelling community the worst/dirtiest site out of the majority of Local Authorities who have Travelling Person Sites.

- No phone or internet services. Difficult to get a signal on the site and the residents feel it is due to the new housing developments built either side of the site.
- The layout of the chalets have not changed since the site first opened in 1984/85. One resident has been residing on the site since it first opened.
- The children are not allowed to go off site therefore nothing for them to do. The older children particularly, the boys get bored easily and they end up fighting with each other. This is particularly worse during the school holidays. If there were provided with a pitch or the park is replaced with a football pitch this might relieve the boredom. There is nothing for the children to do as they get older.
- The residents would like to have a speed sign on site to remind residents the speed limit is 10mph. Some residents and visitors ignore this limit and drive too fast within the site.
- More kitchen units required
- Repairs are slow to get carried out.

2. What do you think about the current amenities on site?

- Skirting boards in the chalets are rotten and full of woodworm. This is due to the water from the shower running under them. What is required is tiling further up the wall to prevent this.
- Rats are an issue on site.
- The toilets in the chalets are in a bad condition – very unhygienic to have the kitchen and bathroom beside together. The layout of these chalets has not changed since the site opened in 1984/85.
- The toilet should be kept completely separate from the kitchen. The outside storage hut could be converted into a toilet and the kitchen could be made bigger.
- Installing baths are important to all residents. The showers are not very good to shower young children.
- The showers flood the whole area when in use as the floor is flat and difficult for the water to drain away. Thus the water runs under the skirting boards and causes damp and rot and infestations of slater's. Slater's are associated to rot and damp wood.
- When it has been windy rubbish is blown onto the site and is caught in the trees. This makes the site untidy. Public parks get litter pickers, why can't the play park at the site get litter pickers too.

3. What do you think about the size of the site and the number of pitches available to rent?

- The site is too small for larger caravans in particular the pitches. One resident had to remove the fence in order to get the caravan into position. The steel pillar for the gate was removed still has a piece left sticking out the ground and could be considered quite dangerous if a child was to fall on it. Can this not be fixed by the Council? See photo attached
- Not a flat site.
- The bays are not big enough for larger caravans, unable to shut the gates properly. Would like larger pitches.

4. What is it like to reside on the site?

- The site is good but the residents are embarrassed when they have visitors they have to use the facilities. This is not because they are unclean but because they are so run down they look shabby, poor condition and look dirty even though they are not.

5. On a scale of 1-5 how safe and secure do you feel residing on the site> (1=don't feel safe 5= feel safe).

- The residents felt safe and secure on the site and gave a score of 4 ½ out of 5.
- Speed bumps are needed to be increased to stop people going over the 10mph speed limit in the site and the residents feel this is a health and safety issue too.
- The hedges at the entrance to the site required to be cut back.

6. What would you like to see changed or added to the site? E.g. more pitches, better heating, improved washing facilities?

- More pitches
- Better heating
- Improved washing facilities as mentioned above.
- Dampness in sheds and chalets.
- Dry rot
- Slates missing on the chalet roofs – see photos attached
- Wet damp wood in the chalet.
- Shower room floor can get very water logged – not sufficient drainage.
- Plumbing in the chalets is poor and one pipe to drain water from shower, washing machine and sink resulting in regular blockages. The residents advised that they have all experienced problems with draining water.
- Street sweeper and jet wash the site regularly.

7. What support services are currently accessible on the site and what other services would you like to be made available.

- Grass cutting the communal areas.
- Make better use of the office at the site and have regular classes either weekly or monthly that the residents can look forward to.
- Examples of activities/courses provided include cooking classes, IT classes, literacy classes, health courses.
- Nothing for the children to do so provide activity days to get the children involved in arts and crafts. Give them something to do and pass the time as the children are not allowed to leave the site. Would consider opportunities for the children to mix with other children.
- Computer and computer games provided for the children.

8. How do you feel about the rental charge for a pitch and why?

- Extortionate rent – c. £73.00 per week which is more rent than a council house per week.
- They pay for council tax and rent for the pitch some residents thought they were charged additional costs for management of the site.
- The residents feel the rent is too high for the services they get. For example repairs take too long. One resident has been waiting for a new boiler to be installed. 4 workmen have been up to the site to assess what is required but still no new boiler.
- The residents feel that they are often forgotten about and do not get the same service as a mainstream tenant.

9. Would you remain residing on the site and why?

- The residents agreed they would remain residing on the site as many have resided there for many years and they have family staying on the site too.
- It's not a bad place to live but the cleanliness of the site is a concern and how visitors perceive the cleanliness of their chalets as they are run down.

10. What consultation have you been involved with in regards to any changes/improvements to the site?

- The residents stated they have not been involved in any consultation in relation to changes or upgrading the site.
- The residents suggested that the pitches and chalets have an agreed letting standard similar to the one for letting mainstream houses. This would keep the pitches and chalets consistent as some have been upgraded (residents unsure when) while others have not.

11. How would you prefer to be consulted?

- The residents advised they would like to be consulted more regularly by having someone from Housing Services to come up either once a month or quarterly in order for the residents to raise issues and be given updates on any future work, for example timescales.

12. What 'other' housing options are available to you? E.g. purchasing land for privately owned sites or contacts for housing options advice.

- This question was not discussed as the residents left the office.

After the focus groups Ruth and I were taken round the site and shown some of the issues highlighted in the focus group. Pictures attached show what the residents feel are hazards around the site. The pictures include the hole left where the fence post was removed in order to manoeuvre the caravan onto a pitch. A picture of the tree that is hanging unsafely over one of the caravans. The owner is worried the tree might come down onto the caravan in windy weather. Pictures of the play park and the rubbish accrued around the park. Finally pictures of inside and outside some of the chalets, capturing the run down look of the chalets, detailing the kitchen and bathroom together and slates missing from the roofs.

Key findings from the focus group.

- Overall residents are generally happy residing in the site.
- Remove the play park or turn it into a football pitch with high netting to give somewhere for the children to play.
- Fix the fire hose for health and safety purposes – if this is correct?
- Re-introduce the road sweeper – post focus group note – *Lesley Gibson advised the site has been added to the list and the road sweeper will follow on behind the bin lorry when the bins are lifted.*
- Upgrade and reconfigure the chalets to provide separate bathroom and kitchen. Increase the size of the kitchen and add more storage units by converting the storage hut into a bathroom.
- Make better use of the site office to encourage better integration between families on site and provide monthly courses on cooking, health, IT and literacy.
- Regular consultation with the residents so they can air view and keep updated on any progress with works – *post focus group note – a new Travelling Site Officer has been appointed and will start the post in the coming weeks. They will be based permanently up at the site on a full time basis.*