

Matter 8 – Gypsy and Travellers

Council Introduction

The council recognise the challenge of meeting the large need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches within South Staffordshire. As set out within the Submission Plan and Gypsy and Traveller Topic Paper (EB33), the council has exhausted all avenues towards meeting this need.

The latest GTAA update (2024) identified a need for 142 pitches up to 2042 for those families that meet the planning definition of Gypsies and Travellers. When assuming that 84% of 'undetermined' households in the district will also require a pitch then this need increases to 162 pitches to 2042. A need of 18 pitches for those not meeting the planning definition was identified to 2042. The study identifies a 5-year need of 92 pitches.

The Submission Plan proposes to allocate pitches on suitable site options to meet the 5-year needs of existing families within the district (who meet the planning definition), as informed by the GTAA update. These allocations are set out in Policy SA4 of the submission Plan. A total of 37 pitches are proposed to be allocated.

As a result of the shortfall of pitch provision against the 5-year need, further options to identify sites have been explored. Given that the needs are generated from specific family members already living in the district, the focus has been to identify options for a new public site, so it would be possible to ensure pitches were reserved for those family members in need of a pitch. This could not be guaranteed if privately owned sites were allocated where there would not be the same level of control on who the pitches went to. In the process of exploring options for a public site, an assessment of district and county council owned land was undertaken, but this process demonstrated that no council owned sites were suitable. In addition, site promoters for allocated housing sites were contacted to enquire whether a proportion of their site could be made available for a publicly run traveller site, however a willing landowner for this use could not be identified.

In addition, the council have made several requests to neighbouring authorities and authorities within its housing market area for assistance in meeting the unmet need. However, no offers have been received.

The council believes that the approach to retaining Gypsy Traveller and Travelling Showperson sites in the Green Belt to be sound, as expanded on in section 2 of the Exceptional Circumstances for release of Gypsy & Traveller sites from the Green Belt Topic Paper 2024 [EB32]. However as explained in the topic paper, the council is aware of other council's removing traveller sites from the Green Belt, and should the inspectors consider this to be appropriate, then the Council believes there are exceptional circumstances for established sites with permanent pitches to be removed from the Green Belt, as detailed in the topic paper.

Policy HC9 is included within the submission plan as a criteria-based policy to assess windfall sites. This policy is required to ensure that the new sites/pitches are located in the right areas, are well designed, function effectively, and meet the needs of our Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities', whilst also protecting the amenity of neighbouring residential areas.

The council consider that this policy takes a positive and pro-active approach towards assessing windfall sites which will come forward to help towards meeting the identified need for pitches.