

Herefordshire Local plan - Travellers Sites Document - Fact Sheet

Why is the Council preparing a Travellers Sites Document?

Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy Policy on Traveller Sites (H4), gives a commitment to the preparation of a Travellers' Sites Document Plan Document (DPD). This document will include site specific allocations for Traveller Sites for the plan period. It will also include policies which will help decide planning applications for other new pitches and travelling show people plots. The Council's Core Strategy Policy H4 can be viewed at: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/core-strategy/adopted-core-strategy>

When the Travellers Sites DPD is adopted it be part of the Herefordshire Local Plan.

Herefordshire Council's Equality Policy 2017 – 2019 identifies three priority areas including the production of a Gypsy, Roma & Traveller (GRT) strategy. This includes the objective of agreeing on a location, and development of a transit site/temporary stopping place in Herefordshire. A further objective is to focus on key areas such as education, employment, accommodation and health in relation to the travelling community. The adoption and implementation of the DPD will make a positive contribution to achieving these wider objectives

Romany gypsies and Irish travellers are recognised as being distinct ethnic groups and are protected from discrimination by the Equality Act 2010. There is a statutory duty on public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in the course of developing policies and delivering services. This ethnic identity is not lost when members of the communities settle.

Who will the Travellers Sites Document identify sites for?

The Travellers Sites Documents will address the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

Gypsies and Travellers live in different ways, including permanently 'on the road', in caravans or mobile homes, or in settled accommodation (for part or all of the year). For the purposes of planning the 'Planning Policy for Traveller sites' (DCLG, 2015), defines Gypsies and Travellers as "Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependants' educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily, but excluding members of an organised group of Travelling Showpeople or circus people travelling together as such".

Travelling Showpeople hold fairs, circuses or shows around the country and most of them are members of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. This is an established organisation which protects its members through its Code of Rules and legal processes. The Code of Rules, cover such matters as the orderly running of fairs and the conduct of members of the guild both on and off fairgrounds.

For the purposes of planning the 'Planning Policy for Traveller sites' (DCLG, 2015), defines Travelling Showpeople as "Members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circuses or shows whether or not travelling together as such. This includes such persons who on the grounds of their own or their family's or dependants' more localised pattern of trading, educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily, but excludes Gypsies and Travellers"

How many sites are in the County?

In Herefordshire, sites vary in size with small sites of 1-5 pitches typically being occupied by a single, extended family. The majority of sites are privately owned, either by their occupants or by a landlord who rents the pitches to individuals. Six sites are managed and run by the Council. In all there are about 140 pitches in the county. There are also 10 Travelling Show people plots in the county.

What are Traveller Sites like?

Gypsy and Traveller Sites are made up of pitches which usually have a hard standing for a vehicle and a caravan, plus a permanent building to house the family cooking and washing facilities. Travelling Showpeople sites have similar facilities but also include areas for storing and maintaining equipment associated with their businesses.

How do you decide how many new pitches and plots are required?

Local authorities are required to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers either living in, or resorting to their area. Local planning authorities are also required to identify a supply of available and deliverable sites to provide for needs identified in that assessment. There is also a requirement to plan for a supply of sites up to 2031. The Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Show People population will grow and an assessment of the accommodation needs up to 2031 has been carried out.

This Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) identified the requirement for pitches based on two approaches – firstly by applying a cultural definition of travellers and secondly applying the definition that is included in the 2015 Planning Policy for Traveller Sites guidance.

The GTAA Update 2017 has found evidence of Gypsy and Traveller pitch need over the next five years (2017/18 to 2021/22) equating to 48 pitches under a cultural definition, and as a subset of this number, 17 pitches under the PPTS 2015 definition of Gypsy/Traveller (those who still travel and/or intend to travel).

For the full Local Plan Period (2011/12 to 2030/31) the GTAA has identified a cultural need for 91 pitches and, as a subset of this number a PPTS need for 33 pitches.

The GTAA takes into account an anticipated annual turnover of 6 pitches on local authority sites during the remainder of the plan period (2017/18 to 2030/31), this equates to 84 pitches becoming available. Therefore, it concludes that both the cultural and PPTS shortfalls are likely to be addressed.

However the GTAA recognises that not all traveller families will want to live on local authority sites and therefore it recommends that the Council should continue to consider applications for appropriate small sites to address the needs of local Gypsy and Traveller families should they be forthcoming over the plan period.

The GTAA can be viewed here:

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/11829/herefordshire_gypsy_travellers_and_travelling_showperson_accommodation_assessment_update_final_report_july_2017

What consultation has already taken place?

Issues and Options Consultation

Broad public consultation was undertaken between 21 August and 2 October 2014 giving an opportunity for early community involvement.

The purpose of this stage was to:

- Discuss the issues around providing new sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople;
- Finalise a method for assessing what makes a viable location for new sites;
- Invite land to be put forward to be considered as possible new sites as a Gypsy, Traveller or Travelling Showpeople site: a 'Call for Sites'

Preferred Options Consultation

This took place between July and September 2016. The purpose of this stage was to:

- Detail the findings of the accommodation assessment;
- Set out the potential sites proposed to meet the required number of pitches;
- Invite comment on the proposed sites as well as suggestions of other potential sites to be considered.
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How have you consulted with people?

Methods of community engagement included:

- Briefing Parish Liaison Group
- Posters to advertise the consultation and particularly the drop in events
- Press and media coverage
- Dedicated webpages on the Council's website
- Direct mail / email to all statutory consultees, individuals and companies already on the Council's Local Development Framework database prior to and at the start of consultation.
- Drop-in events
- Questionnaires to record comments on the document

The full Consultation Report is available at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/travellers-sites-document

What makes a suitable site?

There are a number of factors which will need to be considered when selecting suitable sites including:

- Being reasonably accessible to facilities and services including health and schools
- Where they enable mixed business and residential accommodation (providing for the live-work lifestyle of travellers)
- Where they avoid undue pressure on local infrastructure and services
- Where in rural areas, the size of the site does not dominate nearby settled communities
- Where they are capable of accommodating on-site facilities that meet best practice for modern traveller site requirements, including play areas, storage, provision for recycling and waste management.
- Travelling showpeoples' sites may require more space for storage of equipment.

Well-designed and well located with a good standard of facilities can also help to address inequalities that Travellers families can face in relation to general life outcomes and in particular health and education issues.

How has the impact on the surrounding area been assessed?

The Council has sought to identify sites which have minimal impact on the environment. A sustainability assessment of the site options and the policies in the DPD has been carried out. This covers social and economic impact and environmental impacts as well. The latest Sustainability Assessment can be found at

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/download/75/travellers_sites_document

What happens now sites are identified in the plan?

The Traveller Site Development Plan Document sets out the sites proposed for the additional pitches. The document has been published for public consultation and will be 'submitted' to the Government for examination. An independent Inspector will be appointed to hear objections to the final document. The Inspector will be sent all the representations received by the council at that consultation stage as part of that consultation process. The Inspector will chair roundtable discussions known as 'hearings' and will decide who to invite to take part in these sessions. The Inspector will then make recommendations for the Council to consider. The Council must accept these recommendations unless there are very good reasons.

Allocated sites will still have to go through the planning application process to determine the detailed aspects of development such as design, highways access and landscaping before development can commence. This will mean further information in the form of ecology and highways assessments may still be required on individual sites to gain planning permission and further local consultation will take place for any planning application.

Who will pay for the development of sites?

The financing of the proposals is not a matter for consideration for the Travellers' Sites DPD and the successful delivery of the pitches will be subject to available finances. However funding from different sources will be considered including the Council's capital programme process. Funding is also potentially available from Homes and Community Agency. The Council will receive rental income from tenants on the site.

Site development may also be brought forward by private individuals. In such cases development costs would fall to the individual developer, and would include paying for site infrastructure, such as connection to utilities and mains sewerage, as well as any additional works that may be required to make a site acceptable.

How will local doctor's surgeries and schools cope with additional patients and children?

Most Herefordshire Gypsies and Travellers have a permanent base in the county, and have been for generations. Many of these families still travel for cultural events or for employment. In addition, some families, who are not based in Herefordshire, travel through the county for similar reasons. In each of these cases, local authority temporary stopping place provision would be a valuable resource that enables local authorities to minimise potential community tensions and to offer safe temporary accommodation for travelling families. Herefordshire is in need of this type of facility. The vast majority of Herefordshire Gypsies and Traveller are already registered with a GP.

Herefordshire Traveller children generally attend school from a permanent address in Herefordshire in the same way as non traveller children. With regard to temporary encampments, schools are allowed to go over numbers for a temporary period in order to accommodate those Gypsy and Traveller children who are not permanently resident in the area. In these circumstances, the local authority will deploy staff and resources to ensure that these children's needs are met and to minimise the impact on the resources available for the existing school children. Of course schools are accustomed to children from both settled and travelling communities joining and leaving classes part-way through school years. School staff are well-equipped to assess and meet the needs of children who join in year and are accustomed to seeking advice from the local authority.

Do the residents of the sites pay tax and rent?

As with all other residential properties, each pitch will be assessed by the council and given a council tax rating. Residents will then pay the appropriate level of council tax for their property. Charges for water, electricity and other amenities are also paid on Traveller sites.

Gypsies and Travellers are subject to the same law enforcement rules as the settled community for non-payment of taxes. Rent will be charged at the temporary stopping places as well.

What is the definition of Affordable Traveller Sites?

Social rented, affordable rented and intermediate pitches for those eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.

What happens next?

After this consultation period, all responses will be reviewed and provided no further work is required first, the final draft, as well as representations will be 'submitted' to the Government for examination. An independent Inspector will be appointed by the Secretary of State to hear objections to the final document.

The Inspector will then make recommendations for the Council to consider. The Council must accept these recommendations unless there are very good reasons, before it can be formally adopted.

If you require any further information please contact a member of the planning policy team who will be happy to help you either by email to ldf@herefordshire.gov.uk or by telephoning 01432 383637/ 01432 260137