

Position Statement on Gypsy & Traveller provision

Matter 9, Issue 4

1. Until April 2019, the most recent published GTAA was the East Kent Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (2014).
2. However, due to the fact that the study was becoming dated, the Council commissioned work to update the 2014 GTAA. This work was carried out by Arc4, who are also carrying GTAA updates for a number of other Kent authorities. This final version of the Study was submitted to the Council on 22nd March, and has now been published on the Council's web-site as Core Document ref [CD9.10](#).
3. For many years, the Council's own information, and successive GTAAs, have confirmed that there was no need to make provision for Gypsy and traveller accommodation in the district.
4. However, over the last two years, there has been an unprecedented and significant increase in unauthorised encampments and traveller activity in the district, and particularly in the last year. From January 2018 to September 2018, there was a total of 40 incursions in 15 different locations (information collated by the Council's Community Safety Unit). This activity is wholly associated with the activity of two related groups in the area.
5. This change has coincided with the update of the GTAA work for the district, and additional work undertaken in relation to this has helped to inform the GTAA update.
6. In summary, **the GTAA Report indicates a (cultural) need of 7 permanent pitches and 5 transit pitches over the Plan period**. This need is driven entirely by the current and anticipated future needs of the groups that have been the subject of enforcement.
7. The Council's Community Safety Unit and Planning Teams are working with other statutory bodies (in particular, KCC and Kent Police), and the families currently in the district, to establish what their precise needs are and how they can best be met in a way that will be effective and practical.
8. The Council is committed to working with the groups involved, to ensure that their accommodation needs are met. The Council has recently established a Traveller Task and Finish Group (including the Housing & Planning Service and the Community Safety Unit), which meets once a month, to address the issues arising over the last two years and to determine the most effective way of bringing forward suitable sites at the earliest opportunity.
9. Because of the advanced stage of the draft Local Plan, and the intervention of the Secretary of State in the Local Plan process, the Council does not consider it practicable to identify sites for Gypsy and traveller accommodation in this draft Plan. This would lead to a substantial delay to the Plan process.

10. However, the Council is keen to resolve this matter without unnecessary delay, and believes the following approach represents the most appropriate and practical approach to meeting the needs of the families involved, and the Council fulfilling its statutory duties in this matter.

11. The Council is intending to address this issue as follows:

Stage 1 (in progress) - to work with the families to identify a short-term site, suitable for their needs, which would not be subject to enforcement action. The Council is exploring possible site options through the One Public Estate database, to see if there is an immediately-available suitable site for this purpose;

Stage 2 (over next 6 months) - to work with the families to identify suitable sites for the longer term, and to support planning applications in suitable locations, in line with draft Policy HO22; and

Stage 3 (as part of review/update of Local Plan, mid-2020) - to identify any additional sites required to meet the total provision in the planned early review of the Local Plan.

12. There is a current Appeal (Ref: APP/Z2260/W/18/3209424) for Gypsy and traveller accommodation (TDC planning application ref: F/TH/18/0323) on a site at the edge of Ramsgate, within the identified Green Wedge. If that Appeal is allowed, this would provide for “the siting of caravans for residential purposes for 1no. residential family gypsy pitches, comprising 1no. mobile home [and] 1no. touring caravan...”. The Appeal was submitted in August 2018. At the time of writing, no start date had been set, and an Inspector has not been appointed.

13. In the light of the publication of the GTAA report, and the changed circumstances in the District, the Council proposes that the draft Local Plan text should be modified to reflect these new factors; to specify the identified need in the text; and to set out the Council's strategy for the identification of suitable sites to meet the accommodation needs.

14. In the meantime, and under the current circumstances where a specific need has been identified, the Council is of the view that draft Policy HO22 would benefit from amendments to provide greater clarity.

15. Current draft Policy:

The use of land to provide accommodation for Gypsy and Travelling communities will be permitted provided the proposed use will not impact unreasonably on surrounding uses or local environmental quality, and the site has reasonable access to local facilities and services, particularly schools, employment and healthcare and lies outside areas at risk of flooding.

16. Proposed amendments:

The use of land to provide accommodation for Gypsy and Travelling communities will be permitted to meet the identified need, provided:

- (1) the proposed use will not have a detrimental impact on local environmental quality, such as the Green Wedges or sensitive landscape areas;**
- (2) the site is not located in Flood Risk Areas or in, or adjacent to, sites of national or international wildlife or habitat importance;**
- (3) the site has reasonable access to local facilities and services, particularly schools, employment and healthcare; and**
- (4) any business use associated with the proposals will not impact unreasonably on adjacent residential amenities.**

Pending the next review and update of the Plan, the Council will take proactive steps to accommodate all emerging needs of Gypsy and Travelling communities within the District on temporary sites and, wherever possible, permanent sites which meet the above criteria.

17. The draft Policy needs to be read with other relevant policies in the Plan (SP25 - international wildlife designations; SP22 - Green Wedges; CC01 - Flood Risk Zones).