

Topic Paper

Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

October 2017

Background

The size of the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople's communities in our district is small in comparison with the housed community, and our travelling community is small, settled and stable. As with the housed community, we have a statutory responsibility to assess and plan for travellers' needs. By maintaining a supply of new authorised pitches and plots¹ to meet the identified needs arising from our travelling communities, we are in a stronger position to resist unauthorised sites and encampments.

Need

In order to assess the need for pitches and plots, a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) was jointly prepared with Oxford City Council and Vale of White Horse District Council (2014). This identified a need for 19 additional permanent Gypsy and Traveller pitches to be delivered to 2031. For the Travelling Show People community, the assessment identified that 5 plots were needed within the district during the same period.

The GTAA was recently updated in 2017 to reflect changes to national guidance, set out in Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) 2015. This had implications on calculating the need for additional pitches and plots as the guidance made changes to the definition of a 'Gypsy' or 'Traveller'. Gypsies and Travellers who have stopped travelling permanently due to ill health or old age have now been removed from the definition. The changes also make it much more difficult for Gypsies and Travellers to get planning permission for pitches located in the Green Belt or open countryside.

The updated GTAA (2017) was prepared jointly with Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council and Vale of White Horse District Council. This study identified a lower overall need for the travelling community than the previous 2014 assessment. For South Oxfordshire it identified a need for 10 additional permanent Gypsy and Traveller pitches to be delivered to 2033. For the Travelling Showpeople community, the assessment identified no need for any additional plots. This is because the council is only required to identify pitches and plots for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople that meet the new planning definition set out in PPTS (2015). The 10 pitch requirement includes provision for traveller families where it was unknown whether they met the planning definition set out in PPTS. The accommodation needs of families where it was known that they no longer meet the definition are taken into account with other 'caravan dwellers'. These needs are addressed by Policy H1 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan.

The table below summarises the differences between the needs identified in the 2014 GTAA and in the 2017 update.

Need Identified	GTAA 2014	GTAA 2017
Pitches	19	10
Plots	5	0
Total	24	10

¹ Area of land on a site/development generally home to one household. Can be varying sizes and have varying caravan numbers. Pitches refer to Gypsy and Traveller sites and Plots to Travelling Showpeople yards. Plots tend to be larger as they need to accommodate fairground equipment.

Consultation responses

We sought views on how and where we should plan for gypsy and traveller sites throughout the local plan process, starting with Issues and Scope in June 2014 through to the second Preferred Options consultation in March 2017. Most respondents felt that it would be preferable to intensify or extend existing sites, rather than find new sites. However consultation responses indicated that if new sites are needed, brownfield sites are preferred. Some people commented that existing sites were focussed to the north of the district and should spread more evenly around the district. Some of the sites suggested were Chalgrove Airfield and Didcot power station. There was general support for not allocating sites in the Green Belt.

Site Selection

We jointly commissioned a Delivery of Pitches [report](#) (2015) with Vale of White Horse and Oxford City to help identify appropriate Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites. This report recommended safeguarding all existing permanent traveller sites within the district and intensifying and/or extending these, where appropriate. The study also identified six new sites that were assessed as either having potential for development now, or in the future. This included the greenfield neighbourhood development at Didcot, now known as Didcot North East. Delivering pitches on this site was also identified as a priority in the Core Strategy (Policy CSH5).

The other five sites recommended by the study could not be taken forward for a variety of reasons, including the sites being needed for strategic infrastructure improvements, the sites being identified for a different use in a Neighbourhood Development Plan, the sites being located in the Green Belt, or the sites identified by Oxfordshire County Council as potential waste management sites.

The Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment also assesses the potential for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.

The council's approach is to safeguard all existing authorised and permanent sites, and to meet the need for 10 additional pitches at the following strategic allocations:

- Chalgrove Airfield (3 pitches)
- Culham (3 pitches)
- Didcot North-East (4 pitches)

Providing a site for gypsies and travellers at Didcot NE was identified in the adopted Core Strategy in Policy CSH5 (referred to as a greenfield neighbourhood) and is being carried forward in to the new Local Plan, as a suitable site for 4 pitches.

The remaining 6 pitches that are required to meet the identified need are proposed to be split between the strategic sites at Culham and Chalgrove. All three of the preferred sites have the capacity to accommodate more pitches, but as the need for pitches/plots has reduced from 24 to 10, the council now only need a small number at each of the preferred locations.

Our preferred option is to split our requirement between three small sites, suitable for family groups that are easier to manage and have less impact on infrastructure. Allocating pitches on the identified strategic sites also means that they can be considered as part of the masterplanning process, and ensures that needs are taken into account at the outset of the design process and properly integrated into the design of the development.

Further detail on the sites considered for additional pitches can be found in the Sustainability Appraisal.