
**POTENTIAL SITES FOR GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS AND TRAVELLING
SHOWPEOPLE CONSULTATION**

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Chris McEwan,
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Richard Alty, Director of Place

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This is a report on the responses to and an analysis of the recent consultation on potential Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites. It includes a recommendation to Cabinet as to the sites to be proposed as land allocations in a draft local development plan document, so as to fulfil the requirement to meet the identified accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers over the plan period.

Summary

2. As part of preparing the Making Places and Accommodating Growth Development Plan Document (DPD), consultations were carried out on Potential Sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople from 13th March to 24th April 2012. The consultation was on the outcome of an assessment of potential sites, which resulted in six potential sites being suggested.
3. Over 400 written responses to the consultation were received, including petitions. Responses were received from members of the public, adjacent local authorities, government bodies, landowner / developer interests and local interest groups. A schedule of the feedback received, officers comments on them, and subsequent recommendations, is included at **Appendix 1**.
4. Consultation responses were received relating to each of the sites included in the consultation document. In another six cases, landowners have taken the opportunity to put forward their own site for consideration.
5. Given the wide level of interest and uncertainty that this consultation has generated, it is important to identify as soon as possible, any potential sites that, as a result of the consultation and/or further information becoming available, will not now be actively pursued as potential Gypsy and Traveller site allocations in Local Plan (previously known as Local Development Framework) preparation. All or parts of these sites can then be

considered alongside others for potential other uses, such as housing and employment, or for safeguarding from development, e.g. for open space.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that, on the basis of information currently available:-
 - (a) The list of sites set out in paragraph 44 be agreed for inclusion in the Council's preferred option for meeting the identified needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople within the emerging Local Plan;
 - (b) The list of sites in paragraph 43 be discounted as potential Gypsy and Traveller sites.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
 - (a) The Council is required to meet the identified accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers;
 - (b) To continue to progress towards fulfilling statutory requirements to have an up to date local plan in place.
 - (c) The list of preferred sites set out in paragraph 44 represents best fit in relation to the search criteria for sites as set out in paragraph 38.

Richard Alty, Director of Place

Background Papers

- (i) Potential Sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, DBC, March 2012
- (ii) Tees Valley Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment, 2009
- (iii) National Planning Policy Framework, CLG March 2012
- (iv) Planning Policy for Traveller sites, CLG March 2012.
- (v) Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy DPD, May 2011

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S17 Crime and Disorder	The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.
Health and Well Being	The Local Plan is the spatial expression of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed. It is considered that the allocation of sites to meet needs will assist in the delivery of the Healthy Darlington theme of the strategy in access to health, education and welfare infrastructure and promoting peaceful co-existence between traveller sites and local communities.
Carbon Emissions	The Making Places and Accommodating Growth Development Plan Document referred to in this report will be subject to sustainability appraisal during its preparation, integral to which is reducing carbon emissions. All policies are tested and amended to ensure the most sustainable outcomes, including keeping carbon emission to a minimum, and promoting the use of renewable energy in new developments.
Diversity	Equalities Impact Assessment (EqA) and Disability EqA are integrated into the preparation of local development documents. All policies will have been tested and amended to ensure the most equitable outcomes, and to ensure that the needs of specific groups are met.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	The preparation of the Making Places and Accommodating Growth Development Plan Document will take place using existing resources. The documents will complete the statutory land-use planning framework for the Council's area.
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	Yes
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The LDF Core Strategy is the spatial expression of 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed'. This work will contribute to showing more exactly what this means in terms of new development, where and when.
Efficiency	This strand of planning policy work is proving to be very resource intensive, and has impacted on the ability of the Planning Policy team to progress other work to agreed timetables. It will continue to require a relatively high level of resources compared to other planning policy areas in the medium term, but could save the Council money over the longer term by reducing the likelihood of costs being awarded against the Council, where planning applications have been refused, and the applicant has successfully appealed the decision.

MAIN REPORT

Purpose of the Report

8. This is a report on the responses to and an analysis of the recent consultation on potential Gypsy and Traveller sites. It includes a recommendation to Cabinet as to which sites should be proposed as land allocations in a draft local development plan document, so as to fulfil the requirement to meet the identified accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers.
9. The work being undertaken seeks to achieve land use allocations to meet quantitative needs and a range and choice of sites to meet needs over the plan period.
10. Since the publication by the Government of the National Planning Policy Framework, and the Planning Policy for Traveller sites, all Local Planning Authorities must have a policy, setting out criteria against which to determine planning applications for Gypsy and Traveller development that may come forward, irrespective of any identified need. The implication of this is that whilst sites may be allocated to meet identified needs, this does not preclude small windfall sites still coming forward through ad hoc planning applications, provided that the criteria set out in a local policy, together with national criteria, are satisfied.

Outcome of Consultation

11. During March and April, the Council carried out public and other consultations on potential Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites. The consultation involved sending letters to people most likely to be affected by potential sites, advertising the consultation on the Council's website, and using posters and leaflets in public places such as the Crown Street, Cockerton and Mobile libraries to publicise a series of 'drop-in consultation events. The consultation also included the use of social media, such as the discussion forum on the Council's website, Facebook, and Twitter, engaging people who may not have otherwise been involved.
12. Specific consultation also took place with Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. This involved a visit to the nearest Travelling Showpersons site in North Ormesby, and visits to the existing Gypsy and Traveller sites in the borough, to raise awareness of the consultation, and also to invite communities to the drop-in sessions.
13. This consultation generated significant public interest, particularly among those living in the vicinity of the potential sites identified, local Gypsies and Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople outside of the Borough. A total of 403 written responses, including 24 petitions were received, and the ten drop-in public consultation sessions, at venues in the town centre, were well attended.
14. Site specific and more general issues were raised, primarily from the settled communities. The feedback is summarised in the following section of this report, and attached in full at **Appendix 1**, grouped in order of site, and specific issue raised. **Appendix 1** also includes officer responses to the feedback received and subsequent recommendations.

15. There was wide support from the Gypsy and Traveller community, for expansion / improvement of Neasham Road (GT014) and a more limited response for Honeypt Lane (GT002/GT015). A small number of respondents were concerned about these sites becoming too large to manage. There were some letters of support and objection to the expansion of a small existing site at Roundhill Road (GT016). The remainder of the sites (Blackett Road Open Space (GT023); North West Urban Fringe (GT022); Salters Lane West (GT041)) received a significant level of objection from residents and local community groups. Representations were also received from other Tees Valley local authorities in respect of the number of pitches being planned for. All responses and additional information submitted has been analysed, and is considered in more detail in the following section of this report.
16. Some matters raised by respondents were not matters that the planning system can consider, for example, the effect of a potential land allocation on property prices and land values. Also, disappointingly, some responses were considered to contain inappropriate content (not included in the schedules at **Appendix 1**); where possible, such respondents were contacted and invited to resubmit their comments more appropriately.

Discussion and Next Steps

17. Given the level of interest and uncertainty that this consultation generated, it is important to identify as soon as possible, any potential sites that, as a result of the consultation and/or further information becoming available, will not now actively be pursued as potential Gypsy and Traveller site allocations in Local Plan (previously known as Local Development Framework) preparation. All or parts of these sites can then be considered, alongside others, for other potential uses, such as housing and employment, or for safeguarding from development, e.g. for open space.
18. The starting point for discounting any of the potential sites from further consideration as Gypsy and Traveller site allocations is to be clear about how many new pitches are needed to meet identified needs. Work undertaken so far has been on the basis that about 35 new residential pitches are needed in the Borough; the justification for that figure is set out in the 'Potential Sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Study', published by the Council as part of the consultation in March 2012, and available to view on the Council's website at www.darlington.gov.uk.
19. Following the publication of the Planning Policy for Traveller sites by the Government, together with the National Planning Policy Framework, work is being undertaken primarily with the other Tees Valley Planning Authorities to validate the evidence base for continuing needs and to reconcile site allocations across the Tees Valley.
20. The Council has to follow national planning policy in identifying land for Gypsies and Traveller pitches, and Travelling Showpeople plots. This was done in preparing LDF Core Strategy Policy CS13 (Accommodating Travelling Groups), which sets out the criteria for identifying new sites and the preference that will be given to sites in different kinds of locations. Policy CS13 is clear that the first priority will be provision at existing sites at Neasham Road, Honeypt Lane, and the other small private sites within the Borough.

21. Last month, Cabinet agreed to release money to enable feasibility work to be carried out at the existing sites of Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road. This feasibility work will establish the best way to provide new pitches in these locations and to establish how many new pitches can be delivered with the £1.5 million of HCA funding that has been earmarked to the Council for new Gypsy and Traveller residential pitch provision. Notwithstanding that this feasibility work has not yet been undertaken, it is estimated that 20 net additional pitches could be provided with this funding.
22. The recently published Government Planning policy for traveller sites, acknowledges that there will always be those travellers who cannot provide their own sites; Council-owned sites at Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road would continue to provide for those needs. However, the Government's aims are also to promote more private traveller site provision. There is evidence of a local need for some small private sites through the work undertaken on the GTAA, local information, and sites suggested through this consultation, together with recent windfalls. The feasibility work on the extension of Neasham Road and Honeypot Lane will need to be considered alongside information about effective management of sites of these sizes. Consultation feedback indicates a demand for pitches on both of these sites and they continue to make an important contribution to the meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers residing in Darlington.
23. Taking into account the 20 net additional pitches that could be provided on the existing Council owned sites, and seven 'windfall' sites that have been recently approved, the residual amount of new pitches that need to be identified is eight.
24. This capacity could be accommodated on any one or a number of the sites previously consulted on. But further work, which will form part of the evidence base for the identification of sites, including the feedback from the consultation from members of the public, statutory consultees, and internal consultees, leads to the following conclusions regarding the consultation sites, and discounts some of them.

Consultation Sites

Site GT002 and GT015 Honeypot Lane

25. There has been some support for the extension/rationalisation of this existing Council-owned but privately run site, for example, by converting some transit pitches into residential pitches (for which there is evidence of a reduced need for these transit pitches). It is proposed that further work with the Gypsy and Traveller community should be undertaken to establish the most effective and efficient means of providing additional pitches. The option of converting transit pitches has the capacity to provide additional residential pitches with an anticipated range of between 8 and 12 additional pitches, in addition to a recently approved planning application for the conversion of the existing Surestart building to warden's accommodation, which would free up space for one additional pitch. The site performed particularly well in the detailed site assessments that were undertaken in terms of accessibility and sustainability issues. Further feasibility work is also being undertaken by the Projects and Implementation team relating to the Homes and Communities Agency funding allocation. The site is considered in planning terms, to be an acceptable location for additional residential pitches, and it is recommended that this site is included within the Council's Preferred Options, with the additional pitch numbers that could be provided reflecting the findings of the feasibility work. The suggested increase in pitches could take

place within the existing Local Plan allocation, and this could therefore potentially provide for shorter-term needs.

Site GT014 Neasham Road

26. There has been much support from the Gypsy and Traveller community for the extension of this site, which could also provide some improvements for existing residents. The site performed particularly well in the detailed site assessments that were undertaken in terms of accessibility and sustainability. Further feasibility work is also being undertaken relating to the Homes and Communities Agency funding allocation. Nevertheless, the site is considered in planning terms, to be an acceptable location for additional residential pitches and it is recommended that this extended site is included within the Council's Preferred Options.
27. Taken together, it is estimated an estimated 20 additional pitches could be accommodated at Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road.

Site GT022 North West Urban Fringe

28. This urban fringe site is close to local communities and is part of a wider area that has been identified in the Core Strategy as a strategic housing location. Local developer Bussey & Armstrong and a number of local residents have major concerns about the impact of providing a Gypsy and Traveller site on the viability of a new housing development, and have suggested this as a reason for discounting the site. Local residents were also concerned about the loss of open land, flooding, and loss of nature conservation and open space. These issues would require further investigation before part of this site could be allocated for this use, but the land is currently in agricultural use with no formal public access and the Council has no records of flood risk there. It is recommended that the site be discounted because of the potential impact that it could have on the ability to deliver the wider planning objectives in this area, which is identified as a key location for strategic development from 2016.

Site GT041 Salters Lane West

29. This urban fringe site is again close to local communities and considered to be in a suitable location for additional residential provision. There have been major concerns from the local communities who live in the vicinity of the site, that any development of this site would mean the loss of an important area of open land. Other concerns raised were related to flooding, biodiversity, noise, presence of high voltage power lines and other amenity considerations, and all would need to be investigated before identifying an allocation within this site. A strong concern has also been expressed by the developer of the adjacent housing site, Fabrick, who have provided evidence of a significant loss of sales enquires on their starter homes and affordable housing scheme, and have reported the loss of a number of sales since the consultation began.
30. Whilst these points have been noted, it is considered that subject to Cabinet agreeing to the package of Preferred Options, there is no longer a reason to consider the allocation of this site if needs are being satisfied in other preferred locations.

Site GT023 Blakett Road Open Space

31. This site is close to local communities and amenities and is considered to be in an appropriate location. Local residents have raised concerns regarding the suitability of the site, its existing high value as an open space, access to and from any proposed site and contamination issues identified in the detailed site assessments. An earlier planning consultation (The Accommodating Growth Issues and Options Report, November 2010) indicated the site could be for a mix of uses, including residential and open space.
32. It is recommended that the site be discounted to allow the other development and land use options to be considered, taking account of the value of development that would be required to address the required remediation on the site.
33. Based on the above, it is recommended that sites GT023 Blakett Road Open Space, GT022 North West Urban Fringe, and GT041 Salters Lane West, be discounted.

Site GT016 Oakwood Farm, Roundhill Road

34. The principle of this location has already been deemed acceptable in planning terms as an existing site that has planning permission. The landowner wants to provide a modest extension to the site (3-5 pitches), for the family growth aspect of the local need identified. It has generally been received well by consultees. There have been some objections to the extension to the site regarding highway safety; however the Council's Highways officer considers that the allocation of this site for a limited number of additional pitches would be acceptable. There have also been some comments regarding flooding issues; however the response from the Environment Agency indicates that these are not insurmountable and can be dealt with by appropriately locating pitches within the site. A few non-planning issues were also raised.
35. Subject to further liaison with the Highways Officer regarding the objections/ issues raised, it is recommended that this modest extension to an existing site is included within the Council's Preferred Options.

Further sites suggested

36. During the consultation, six other sites were put forward for consideration. These sites, identified on the plan at **Appendix 2**, are as follows:-
 - (a) Site GT045 – Land south east of Swan House Roundabout, Heighington (submitted capacity 2 residential pitches);
 - (b) Site GT046 – Skipbridge Brickworks (potential capacity 5-15 residential pitches);
 - (c) Site GT047 – South Side of Dene Beck, Walworth Road (potential capacity 1-15 residential pitches);
 - (d) Site GT048 – Black Banks, Snipe Lane (potential capacity 1-15 residential pitches);
 - (e) Site GT049 – Little Beck, Burma Road (submitted capacity 2 residential pitches);
 - (f) Site GT050 – Oak Meadows, Middleton St George (potential capacity 1-6 residential pitches).
37. The sites suggested are less sequentially preferable than the sites already discussed in this report, and whilst some may have the potential to accommodate additional pitches, these

could come forward as windfall sites through the development management process, over time. Windfalls can be unallocated sites, which are granted planning permission, or sites that may be considered too small to be allocated in the Local Plan, e.g. one or two pitches on a private Gypsy or Traveller site. Over the past five years, eight new pitches have come forward in this way, an average of 1.6 a year. As explained earlier in this report, planning applications meeting the national policy and the Core Strategy criteria will still be acceptable, meaning that about 24 pitches may come forward in this way over the 15 year plan period to 2026 if this rate continues. However, given that there will be alternative site options at the allocated sites, this would suggest the rate of windfalls is likely to fall.

Preferred Options

38. In considering the preferred options, the following issues have been taken into account in selecting the portfolio of sites:-
- (a) Core strategy policy CS13, which identifies Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road as key sites, and site criteria for new sites.
 - (b) The deliverability of particular sites and the need to bring sites forward quickly;
 - (c) The sequential preference of sites;
 - (d) The outcome of the consultation exercise;
 - (e) The need to have range and choice of sites;
39. In applying the above, both Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road remain strategic sites in terms of policy delivery. The delivery of new pitches on these sites is also likely to bring about improvements to existing pitches. **Table one (below)** provides an outline of how the needs identified could be met through the plan period. The number of pitches that could be delivered is indicated as a range rather than a specific figure as this could vary depending on how each potential allocation is delivered.

Table 1 Preferred Option: Planned Provision for Gypsy and Traveller Sites

Preferred Option	No. of new pitches	When
Neasham Road*	8-15	Years 1-5
Honeypot Lane*	8-12	Years 1-5
Oakwood Farm	3-5	Years 6-10
Wardens accommodation at Honeypot Lane	1	Years 1-5
Windfalls – pp granted	7	Years 1-5
Total Planned Provision	27 - 40	
Other potential windfalls	8-24	Years 1-15
Total	35 - 64	

Equalities Impact Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal

40. An Equalities Impact Assessment of the proposals outlined in this report has been carried out and the view of both Gypsies and Travellers and the rest of the population have been taken into account, where they are matters that can be addressed in plan-making.

* It is expected that only part of the Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road sites will come forward in the first five years, the rest dependent on the results of the feasibility study findings. This will help towards maintaining the required 5 year supply required by government policy.

41. Gypsies and Travellers are a minority population group in the borough, and planning for the provision of new residential pitches to meet their identified needs will have positive impacts on that group as the plan is delivered. Issues raised by some of the settled community regarding the potential impact on their residential amenity arising from the provision of new pitches for Gypsies and Travellers are things that can be mitigated against at planning application stage, and then through effective site management and local policing.
42. A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the preferred portfolio of sites compared to other alternatives will be carried out and published prior to consultations on the Preferred Options. Should the findings of the SA indicate other sites to be more sustainable than any in the preferred option, this will need to be considered alongside any responses to the consultation on the preferred option, in finalising the policy for publication and submission to the Secretary of State for examination.

Conclusion

43. Taking all the above into consideration, and assuming that planning for 35 additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches withstands the scrutiny of other Tees Valley local authorities, then the minimum of 20 pitches at one or other or both of the existing Council owned sites, together with the extension of the existing site at Oakwood Farm (GT016) and the windfalls that have come forward will be sufficient to meet the Borough's identified planned needs for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. It is not considered necessary to identify sites for less than 3 pitches within the land use allocation document as these can be managed through the planning application process using criteria based policy CS13. On this basis, and for the reasons outlined above, the following sites identified in the Potential Sites study and consulted on in March/April, no longer need to be actively considered as strategic land allocations within the plan period.

- | | | |
|-----|-------|---|
| (a) | GT022 | North West Urban Fringe |
| (b) | GT023 | Blackett Road Open Space |
| (c) | GT041 | Salters Lane West |
| (d) | GT045 | Land south east of Swan House Roundabout, Heighington |
| (e) | GT046 | Skipbridge Brickworks |
| (f) | GT047 | South Side of Dene Beck, Walworth Road |
| (g) | GT048 | Black Banks, Snipe Lane |
| (h) | GT049 | Little Beck, Burma Road |
| (i) | GT050 | Oak Meadows, Middleton St George |

44. Based on the information available currently, and subject to further work being undertaken with the Gypsy and Traveller communities on these sites, the sites that the Council will be taking forward as its Preferred Option for accommodating the needs of Gypsies and Travellers will be as follows:-

- | | | |
|-----|---------------|------------------------------|
| (a) | GT014 | Honeypot Lane |
| (b) | GT002 / GT015 | Neasham Road |
| (c) | GT016 | Oakwood Farm, Roundhill Road |

45. The next consultation on the Council's preferred option for accommodating Gypsies and Travellers would be as part of consultations on a wider range of draft planning policies and land allocations, e.g. new housing sites, limits to development, etc. This may not be until

early 2013. Further information on the next stages of Local Plan preparation will be set out in the Darlington Local Development Scheme report, to be considered by Cabinet in September.