

Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Site Allocations - Frequently Asked Questions

The following list of frequently asked questions has been devised to help explain issues relating to the provision of accommodation for Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople within the Site Allocations: Publication Draft consultation.

1. Who are Gypsy and Travellers?

This is the term used to refer to all Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers under the Race Relations Act (1976) now incorporated into the Equality Act (2010). There are several main Gypsy and Traveller communities, each with different histories and traditions.

Gypsies are Romany ethnic groups who have lived in Britain for at least 500 years. Their ancestors originate from northern India. Irish Travellers are a nomadic group with a distinctive way of life who have been part of Irish and British society since ancient times. (New) Travellers are people of settled backgrounds who adopted a travelling lifestyle in the more recent past, although some are now in their third or fourth generation of travelling.

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'.

2. Who are Travelling Showpeople?

Travelling Showpeople are members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circuses or shows. Most Travelling Showpeople are members of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain which aims to protect the interests of its members through its code of rules and the legal and constitutional processes of the land.

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'.

3. What is a pitch /plot?

The term 'pitch' refers to the space required on a site to accommodate a Gypsy and Traveller household. There is no set size for an individual pitch. They can vary like house sizes depending on the number of family members. However, pitches should usually be large enough to provide space to accommodate a static caravan, a touring caravan which is used to travel around the country for part of the year, an amenity block with washing/cooking facilities, parking spaces and room to hang washing.

The term 'plot' refers to the space required on a site to accommodate a household of Travelling Showpeople. These are also sometimes also referred to as 'yards'. In addition to the basic on site facilities plots for Travelling Showpeople also include an area to store and maintain their show equipment. This storage space can sometimes be a communal area, however there is a usually preference for them to form part of individual plots for security reasons. There is no standard size for a plot, however the Showmen's Guild has published some model standards for sites, which are considered to form good practice guidance.

4. Why is Leeds City Council allocating sites for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople?

Local Authorities are required by law to assess the accommodation needs of all people living in the area they are responsible for, this includes Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. A detailed Gypsy and Traveller needs assessment was undertaken to support the Core Strategy. Like all communities, the Gypsy and Traveller population is expected to grow. The study identified a need for 62 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches and 15 new plots for Travelling Showpeople for the period up to 2028. The Site Allocations plan is the mechanism to choose the most suitable new sites for allocation to meet this defined need.

Leeds, like most other parts of the country, has a shortage of authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites. Historically, the lack of sites has created unauthorised developments and encampments. Living on an unauthorised encampment, often by the roadside is far from ideal and carries a heavy weight of suffering and disadvantage. Gypsy and Travellers themselves contend daily with the risk of criminalisation and eviction, as well as limited access to basic services such as running water or sanitation. Gypsies and Travellers face serious disadvantages compared to other ethnic minority groups with a much shorter life expectancy, high child mortality rates and low educational attainment. The lack of legal sites makes accessing key services and facilities much harder.

If suitable sites can be identified through the planning process, it will also help to prevent the need for illegal encampments, which often cause conflict with the settled community and can cost the Council money if legal action has to be taken and clean-up costs are incurred. It is better for all members of the community if sites can be identified in suitable locations, by agreement, following consultation. By taking a positive approach we can have greater control over the identification of sites. It also means that if illegal encampments occur in the district, the Council will be far more likely to be successful if it has to take action against those sites.

5. Why are permanent sites required?

Not all Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople travel with the same frequency. Some groups are highly mobile, moving on to find work elsewhere and others live permanently in one area and only travel for a few weeks or months of the year. The main reason for travelling is to work, follow fairs and visit family and so a 'base' site is required from which to live when not travelling. As Gypsies and Travellers grow older and become less able to travel on a regular basis, some require a safe and secure stopping place where they can maintain the cultural traditions of being a Gypsy or Traveller. Gypsies and Travellers also sometimes stop travelling temporarily to care for sick or elderly relatives or to continue a child's education.

Travelling Showpeople require a permanent base where they can store, maintain and repair their equipment and where they can station their caravans when they are not travelling for the purpose of their business. This has traditionally been known as the winter quarters site, as historically it has

only been through the winter months when a permanent base has been required. Today, however, more Showpeople are wishing to occupy these sites during periods of the summer; older family members require less seasonal occupation and a more permanent base assists in the education of children.

6. What is the difference between a publically managed and a private Gypsy and Traveller site?

Private sites are sites developed on private land by individuals and are self-managed. In Leeds the existing private sites tend to be small in scale accommodating between 1 and 3 pitches, however they can be much larger. Not every Gypsy and Traveller has the means to develop their own land. Publically managed sites are sites which are developed and operated by the Council. These sites are usually located on land owned by the Local Authority. Leeds Council currently has two publically managed sites. A permanent site at Cottingley Springs, nr Gildersome and a site at Kidacre Street, City Centre, which benefits from temporary planning permission.

7. What is a negotiated stopping site?

Negotiated stopping sites are provided so as to ensure that Leeds has a managed approach to Gypsies and Travellers who have a Leeds connection but who only require pitch provision for short periods of time each year and are travelling the remainder of the year. The Council will work to identify a pool of sites which can be made available at short notice e.g. currently vacant sites pending another future use, which are preferable to the roadside or more sensitive areas where temporary stopping has occurred in the past such as on parks and playing fields. This pool of sites will be continually updated and managed by the Council over the plan period.

8. What will a site look like once it is developed?

Properly established and managed sites are nothing like unauthorised encampments. Unauthorised encampments by their nature are uncontrolled and unregulated and can cause considerable problems for both the on-site occupants and the surrounding community. Properly set up and maintained sites have services and facilities on-site to establish safe, secure and healthy communities. Both new Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites will be subject to a detailed planning application before they are developed.

A typical Gypsy and Traveller site includes a series of pitches, each of which include an area of hardstanding for a caravan or chalet style mobile home plus landscaping, an amenity block and vehicle parking which usually includes space for a touring caravan. Some sites may also include areas of shared space. The sites are connected to services such as water, sewerage, electricity, gas and broadband. Travelling Showpeople sites have similar facilities but tend to be mixed use in nature and larger per household due to the need to store and maintain substantial equipment. The access and internal roads associated with sites for Travelling Showpeople also tend to be wider in order to safely accommodate HGV's. Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople on authorised sites pay council tax, rent, gas, electricity and other amenity charges. These vary from site to site, but are often higher than comparable charges for conventional housing.

9. Why are some Green Belt sites being proposed?

Protecting the Green Belt remains a key priority for the Council and policy H7 of the Core Strategy seeks to direct Gypsy and Traveller sites to non Green Belt land by setting out that the order of preference for sites is brownfield, greenfield and then Green Belt land. National planning policy does allow Local Authorities to make limited alterations to the Green Belt boundary in exceptional circumstances through the plan-making process. Within the Site Allocations process every effort has been made to place all of the Gypsy and Traveller sites within good accessible locations and on non Green Belt land. In most cases this has been achieved. However, the challenge in Leeds is that as well as finding suitable sites for new Gypsy and Traveller sites the Site Allocations plan is also seeking to provide 70,000 new homes, 1,000,000 sq metres of new office space, 493 hectares of new industrial land, space for new retail development and safeguard important green spaces. Leeds is significantly constrained given that nearly all of the non-urban area is Green Belt. Consequently, some Green Belt will be required for Leeds to meet its defined overall development needs.

In terms of the provision of new Council managed Gypsy and Traveller accommodation, the Council has undertaken an extensive search and assessment of Council owned land across the whole of Leeds. However, these landholdings on non Green Belt land need to be balanced against the development needs for housing, employment, green space and retail. Many of the most suitable sites are identified as preferred allocations or already have planning permission for another use. They are therefore not always available for Gypsy and Traveller use. It is a similar story for the new private Gypsy and Traveller provision. All of the new suggestions from private landowners for new private sites are situated on Green Belt land. Furthermore, the majority of existing private sites in Leeds are located on Green Belt land. This is partly due to land values in the urban area tending to prohibit Gypsy and Traveller sites being viable and deliverable options. The new sites proposed by the Site Allocations Plan are considered to be available and deliverable options, as such the identification of sites in the Green Belt is therefore the most appropriate strategy, in principle, when considered against the lack of reasonable alternatives.

10. Why isn't the existing Council run site at Cottingley Springs being extended through the Site Allocations process?

The Council has previously sought to extend the existing Gypsy and Traveller site at Cottingley Springs, Gelderd Road, nr Gildersome via a planning application in 2013. However, the application was refused following call-in by the Secretary of State due to its impact on the Green Belt and other harm. In particular, the Inspector noted that the extension would have exacerbated an already high concentration and domination of Gypsy and Traveller pitches within a relatively small area, continuing the physical and social separation and isolation from the settled community. The potential to extend the site was re-assessed as part of the Site Allocations process. However; when the site was considered against policy criteria it was considered a less favourable site than the sites currently proposed for allocation. This was mainly due to the potential total numbers of resultant pitches vastly exceeding the recommended maximum of 15 pitches per site.

11. Why are the majority of sites situated within South Leeds?

The Council conducted a city-wide search of Council owned land during the site selection process for new Council run Gypsy and Traveller sites. Following this assessment, it was considered that the sites proposed within this plan formed the best available, suitable and deliverable options, when assessed against policy objectives. There were considered to be no suitable and available sites within the northern part of the city. In terms of the proposed private provision, all of the submitted new

private sites are situated to the south area of the city. Furthermore, the majority of all the existing private sites and recent unauthorised encampments from Leeds based Gypsy and Travellers are located within the inner and southern parts of the city. These areas of the city tend to be favoured by Leeds based Gypsy and Travellers for numerous reasons including proximity to existing family networks, work connections and land availability. Details of the site search can be found in the [Housing Background Paper](#).

12. How can I make comments on a proposed site?

The best way to tell us your views is to complete the online response form which is available via the link below or via the [interactive map](#) which is available on the main [Site Allocations](#) webpage:

<https://siteallocations.leeds.gov.uk/>

You will need to ensure that you enter the site reference for the specific site(s) you wish to comment on in Question 2.2 (e.g. "HG7-3")

If you are unsure about the tests of soundness please refer to the guidance note at:

<http://www.leeds.gov.uk/SiteAllocationMaps/SAP%20and%20AVL%20Documents/zHow%20to%20complete%20online%20form%20guide.pdf>

Please ensure that representations are received no later than **5:00pm on Monday 16th November 2015**.

Please note that during previous consultations the Council received several representations on Gypsy and Traveller issues which were motivated by generic and negative perceptions of race, ethnicity or culture and were either offensive, racist, discriminatory or threatening. These are not material planning considerations and should not be included. In general terms, a discriminatory representation is one which includes words, phrases or comments which are likely:

- to be offensive to a particular racial or ethnic group;
- to be racially abusive, insulting or threatening;
- to apply pressure to discriminate on racial grounds;
- to stir up racial hatred or contempt.

Any objections and comments that are racist or personally abusive are destroyed and disregarded.

13. Can I suggest new or alternative sites for Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople provision?

Yes, if you have land that you would like us to consider for suitability as a site, or if you know of any suitable, available and deliverable sites, please let us know by filling in a representation form and attaching a plan of the site. Physical copies of representations and plans can be sent to:

LDF Publication Draft Consultation
Forward Planning and Implementation
Leonardo Building
2 Rossington Street,
Leeds,
LS2 8HD

Or via email to sap@leeds.gov.uk

Additional Information

Please note that all information regarding the proposed Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Site Allocations can be found on the main Site Allocations: Publication webpage <http://www.leeds.gov.uk/council/Pages/Site-allocations-plan-publication.aspx>

Documents of particular interest will include the individual area documents (e.g West Leeds HMCA), which detail the site boundaries and individual site requirements for each site. In addition, the housing background paper discusses the Council's approach to the allocation of sites and includes reasons why sites have been discounted.