

GYPSY AND TRAVELLER PROVISION CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Reading Borough Council

September 2017

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council is currently preparing a Local Plan for Reading, which will set out how Reading is to be developed up to 2036. A consultation on the first stage, Issues and Options, took place early in 2016, and a Draft Plan was subject to consultation in May and June 2017. One of the issues that both consultation documents highlighted was the possible need to find sites for gypsies and travellers.

The Identified Need

- 1.2 The Council recently carried out an assessment of whether there is a need to provide additional pitches for gypsies and travellers in Reading. This document, the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), looked at the needs of gypsies, travellers, travelling show people and those dwelling on houseboats, and reported in June 2017. Carrying out such assessments is both a legal requirement¹, and an expectation of national policy when preparing a Local Plan.
- 1.3 Reading's GTAA identified that, over the period to 2036, there is a need for 10-17 permanent pitches for gypsies and travellers, and for transit provision of 5 pitches (with each pitch able to accommodate two caravans) within Reading. It also shows a need for 2 additional plots for travelling show people. There is no need identified for additional residential moorings for houseboats.
- 1.4 There are no existing sites for gypsies and travellers in Reading, either for permanent or transit pitches. There is an authorised site for travelling show people at Scours Lane, which has six pitches. There is also very little recent history of interest in providing private sites in Reading.
- 1.5 A rise in the number of illegal encampments in Reading and the Thames Valley area over the past year, including a number of encampments in public parks, has brought the issue of traveller accommodation into sharper focus. While some incursions have not caused any issues for local residents, the Council or Police, others have. Local residents living near to encampments have frequently reported anti-social behaviour. Added to the substantial legal costs of the eviction process, the cost of clean ups or repairs is significant.
- 1.6 The Council and Thames Valley Police have different powers in respect of illegal encampments and work closely together to use the most appropriate powers of enforcement, in line with the relevant legislation. There are additional powers to direct both trespassers and travellers to leave land and remove any vehicle and property from the land where the senior police officer reasonably believes that

¹ Section 124 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016

two or more people are trespassing on land with the purpose of residing there, that the occupier has taken reasonable steps to ask them to leave and there is a suitable pitch available on a caravan site elsewhere in the local authority area. Regarding this last point, there are clear potential benefits to making transit provision available.

The Search for Sites

- 1.7 Reading is a very tightly constrained urban area, and as such there are very significant difficulties in finding sites for gypsies and travellers. A large proportion of sites in other parts of the country tend to be within the countryside, but the few parts of Reading that are not already within the urban area are at high risk of flooding and are not therefore suitable for caravans. Nevertheless, the Council must take a thorough approach to examining whether there are sites that could meet the need. There are two potential sources of sites - Council-owned land and non-Council owned land.

Non-Council-owned land

- 1.8 Unlike many other authorities, there are no existing sites to expand or previous significant planning applications or proposals to re-evaluate. In recent consultations on the Local Plan, the Council has specifically requested that potential gypsy and traveller sites be put forward. In the Issues and Options consultation (January-March 2016), question 9 asked "*Are there any sites that would be suitable for provision for gypsies and travellers?*" The Draft Local Plan consultation (May-June 2017) highlighted the matter in paragraph 4.4.87, and again asked for any sites to be put forward. No landowners came forward with sites at either stage.
- 1.9 In August 2017, the Council once again investigated this, by writing to all owners of potential development sites identified within the Draft Local Plan (apart from high-density proposals within the town centre), to ask whether there is potential availability of all or part of the site to be used for gypsies and travellers. Once again, no potential sites were identified.
- 1.10 In allocating a site for a specific use within the Local Plan, the Council must be confident that there is a likelihood of that use taking place. It is clear from the responses to consultation that there is very little prospect of a site coming forward for gypsy and traveller use on non-Council-owned land.

Council-owned land

- 1.11 With the above in mind, the Council undertook a thorough assessment of its own land. The process that was used is described in detail in the Gypsy and Traveller Provision Background Document, on the Council's website². In summary, all identifiable Council-owned land

² www.reading.gov.uk/readingldf

over 0.15 ha³ was identified that was not either (a) occupied by in-use buildings or (b) covered by designated public open space or statutory allotments. In total, this resulted in the identification of around 80 sites.


- 1.12 The sites were assessed for their suitability and availability for provision for gypsies and travellers. In terms of suitability, matters considered included effects on residential amenity, ecology or heritage designations, contamination, the presence of important trees, flood risk, visual amenity, topography and vehicle access. Availability considerations include whether the site is covered by existing leases or covenants which would prevent alternative uses, and whether there are already firm proposals that would require the use of the site.
- 1.13 A summary of the sites assessed and the reasons for their rejection are set out in Annex 1. Further detail is within the Background Document. After this process was undertaken, the only remaining site that was considered to be potentially suitable and available for this use was a site at the junction of Richfield Avenue and Cow Lane, identified below.

³ Based on the Council's interpretation of best practice on designing sites for gypsies and travellers, it was considered that 0.15 ha was the minimum size of site needed to accommodate five transit pitches. A site for at least five permanent pitches would need to be larger, with an estimated minimum size of 0.34 ha.

2. POTENTIAL SITE

- 2.1 This document asks for your views on the potential site that has been identified at the junction of Richfield Avenue and Cow Lane. Details of the site are set out below. The proposal is that this site would be used for transit rather than permanent pitches. The site is more than large enough to accommodate the full transit need of 5 pitches.

Land at Junction of Cow Lane and Richfield Avenue	
Ward:	Abbey
Site Size:	0.73 ha
<i>Issues</i>	
Highway access:	Vehicle access from Cow Lane
Access to facilities:	Close to town centre
Effect on character:	Site adjoins industrial, leisure and agricultural uses, and should not detrimentally affect character. No nearby heritage assets. Possible to screen from main road.
Effect on amenity:	No nearby residents.
Trees/biodiversity:	Some trees and vegetation on site, but much of site is gravel/hardstanding.
Other:	Site is within Flood Zone 2, requiring sequential and exception test in line with NPPF.
Availability	Site used in part for Festival, which would need to be addressed.



- 2.2 The site forms part of a wider site between Cow Lane and Richfield Avenue, but the remainder of the area to the south is at high risk of flooding (Flood Zone 3) and, in line with national policy, would not therefore be appropriate for development involving caravans.
- 2.3 If, after consultation, the site is considered suitable for transit provision, it is intended that it would potentially be included as an allocated site within the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan. Further work would need to be undertaken to assess how and when the site could be delivered.

3. REMAINING ACCOMMODATION NEED

- 3.1 If allocated in the Local Plan, the Richfield Avenue and Cow Lane site could meet the need for transit provision. However, no available or suitable sites have been identified that could meet the permanent needs for 10-17 pitches.

- 3.2 In line with national policy, where there are unmet development needs within an area, the Council must work with other local authorities to consider whether the needs can be met in other areas. The Council will therefore need to engage with its neighbours to address this issue within the Local Plan.

4. CONSULTATION DETAILS

- 4.1 We would like to hear your views on the matters set out in this document. In particular, we would like you to consider the following questions:

1. *What are your views on the Cow Lane/Richfield Avenue site identified in this document?*
2. *Do you agree that there are no other potentially suitable and available sites within Reading Borough?*

- 4.2 Your comments will be taken into account in drawing up the next version of the Local Plan, the Pre-Submission Draft, which is due to be subject to consultation starting at the end of November 2017. Please could you therefore provide any comments by 5:00 pm on Tuesday 24th October 2017, using the following contact details.

Email: planningpolicy@reading.gov.uk

Address: Planning Policy Team
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

ANNEX 1: SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT OF OTHER COUNCIL-OWNED SITES

A1.1 The following Council-owned sites were considered during the site assessment process, and rejected for the summary reasons set out below. More detail, including maps of the sites, is available in the Gypsy and Traveller Provision Background Document on the Council's website.

Ward	Address	Size (ha)	Reason for rejection
Abbey	Rivermead overflow parking areas	1.18	Required for continued use as car park.
Abbey	Land at Orts Road	0.18	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Abbey	County Lock	0.25	Visual amenity No vehicular access
Abbey	Reading Family Centre, North Street	0.22	Required for alternative use
Battle	Field at Littlejohn's Farm	2.94	Flood risk Biodiversity significance Landscape significance
Battle	Thames Side Promenade	2.11	Flood risk Biodiversity significance Landscape significance
Caversham	Land at Elliotts Way	0.22	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Caversham	Former Caversham Nursery	0.16	Flood risk
Caversham	Hills Meadow Car Park	1.25	Required for continued use as car park Visual amenity
Caversham	Land west of Deans Farm	0.31	Flood risk
Caversham	Nire Road	0.5	Flood risk Biodiversity significance
Caversham	Land at Charles Evans Way	0.9	Flood risk Biodiversity significance
Church	Land at Windermere Road	0.38	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Church	Land rear of The Lawns	0.14	No vehicular access
Church	Land rear of Monksbarn	0.41	Biodiversity significance Landscape significance Topography
Church	Foxhays Road	1.12	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Church	Wentworth Avenue	0.29	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Katesgrove	Canterbury Road	0.24	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Kentwood	Scours Lane	1.01	Flood risk
Kentwood	Land north of Scours Lane allotments	3.42	Flood risk
Kentwood	Land west of Riverside Park	0.4	Flood risk Biodiversity significance
Kentwood	Garages at Rodway Road	0.28	Required for alternative use
Kentwood	Land at Wealden Way	0.47	Biodiversity significance Landscape significance Topography
Kentwood	Land between Denby Way and Chelsea Close	0.2	Residential amenity Visual amenity

Ward	Address	Size (ha)	Reason for rejection
			Public footpath crosses site
Mapledurham	South of Ridge Hall Close	0.44	Biodiversity significance Landscape significance Topography
Minster	East of A33	3.26	Flood risk Biodiversity significance Landscape significance
Minster	West of A33	6.45	Flood risk Biodiversity significance Landscape significance
Minster	Land adjacent to water treatment works	4.59	Flood risk Biodiversity significance Landscape significance
Minster	Rear of 284-290 Wensley Road	0.19	Residential amenity Topography
Minster	South of Coley Park Allotments	0.99	Flood risk No vehicle access
Minster	Land rear of Arbour Close	0.18	Flood risk No vehicle access Residential amenity
Minster	Land at Coley Place	0.18	Topography
Minster	Land west of Swallows Croft	0.49	Biodiversity significance
Norcot	Land at Tarlon Court	0.22	Residential amenity Visual amenity Heritage considerations
Norcot	Land at The Meadway	0.19	Visual amenity
Park	Former Tennis Courts, Bulmershe Road	0.51	Site required for alternative use
Park	Land at Green Road	0.49	Site required for alternative use
Park	Mockbeggar Allotments	0.37	Site required for alternative use
Peppard	Land west of Harveys Nurseries and north of Cemetery	0.38	Site required for alternative use Landscape significance
Peppard	Grove Road Green	0.23	Visual amenity Public footpath crosses site
Peppard	Land between Lowfield Road and Milestone Way	0.28	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Peppard	Car park at the Milestone Centre	0.21	Required for continued use as car park
Peppard	Land at Lowfield Road	0.73	Site required for housing use, currently underway
Redlands	Land at Hexham Road	0.2	Biodiversity significance Residential amenity
Southcote	Granville Road verges	2.61	Visual amenity
Southcote	Devil's Dip, Circuit Lane	0.51	Biodiversity significance Visual amenity
Southcote	Land at Fawley Road	0.18	Residential amenity Visual amenity Public footpath crosses site
Southcote	Alice Burrows Home, Dwyer Road	0.48	Site required for alternative use
Southcote	Land at Holybrook Crescent	0.26	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Southcote	Playing Field, Hastings Close	1.46	Site required for continued playing field use
Southcote	Land east of Brunel Road allotments	2.31	Flood risk
Southcote	Land south of Hatford Road	2.42	Flood risk Biodiversity significance
Southcote	Land west of Florian Gardens	0.22	No vehicular access

Ward	Address	Size (ha)	Reason for rejection
			Residential amenity
Southcote	Land east of Florian Gardens	0.16	No vehicular access Residential amenity
Southcote	Coronation Square	0.58	Visual amenity
Southcote	Land at Barn Close	0.34	Residential amenity
Thames	Land at The Warren	1.16	Biodiversity significance Landscape significance Topography
Thames	Land south of Ammanford	0.34	Protected trees Residential amenity Visual amenity
Thames	Land at Gravel Hill	0.17	Landscape significance Residential amenity
Thames	Furzeplat	1.46	Biodiversity significance Protected trees Topography
Tilehurst	Junction of Walnut Way and St Michaels Road	0.21	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Tilehurst	Downing Road Playing Field	1.17	Site required for alternative use
Tilehurst	Land at Lansdowne Road	0.19	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Tilehurst	Land at Portland Gardens	0.39	Residential amenity Visual amenity Biodiversity significance
Whitley	Wincanton Road	0.6	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Whitley	Swallowfield Drive	0.35	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Whitley	Land at Whitley Wood Lane	0.24	Residential amenity
Whitley	Land at Vernon Crescent	0.5	Residential amenity Visual amenity
Whitley	Land at junction of Acre Road and Basingstoke Road	0.16	Visual amenity
Whitley	Basingstoke Road verge between Acre and Bennet Road	0.46	Visual amenity
Whitley	Basingstoke Road verge between Bennet Road and Manor Farm Road	0.99	Visual amenity
Whitley	Southside (former Greyhound/Speedway stadium)	9.7	Site required for alternative use
Whitley	Land east of Smallmead and south of Island Road	0.25	Flood risk
Whitley	Land north of Island Road	3.18	Site required for alternative use - recent planning permission for industrial
Whitley	Land south of Manor Farm Cottages	1.16	Flood risk
Whitley	South of Kennet and Avon Canal	4.3	Flood risk Landscape significance
Whitley	South of Fobney Pumping Station	0.6	Flood risk Landscape significance
Whitley	South of Smallmead	3.79	No vehicular access Likely contaminated land
Whitley	South of Sewage Treatment Works	1.61	Site required for alternative use

NB: The reasons for rejection set out above are not necessarily the only reason why a particular site is considered unsuitable. Once a site had been excluded for robust reasons, there was not considered to be any need to identify further issues