

# **Methodology for Site Assessment**

## **Identification and Appraisal of Potential Sites for Gypsies and Travellers**

for

**Wealden District Council**



## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Government has published a Planning Circular (01/06) demonstrating its commitment to ensuring that the Gypsy and Traveller community is adequately provided with sites for permanent residential occupation and stopping throughout the country. Local Authorities are therefore charged with assessing the accommodation needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community and making provision for the necessary sites, in exactly the same way that the accommodation needs of the settled community is assessed and provided for.
- 1.2 In Wealden District a need for up to 20 permanent residential pitches is currently identified and will cater for Gypsies and Travellers for the period to 2016. A method for assessing suitable sites to meet that identified need for permanent accommodation has been devised. This document sets out the methodology and criteria, alongside a justification and suggested weighting.
- 1.3 This method has been the subject of consultation. The consultation process is set out in the Consultation Plan, which has been agreed with officers of the District Council and the Gypsy and Traveller Working Group.

## **2. The potential Long List of Sites**

- 2.1 A Long List of sites will be drawn from vacant and underused sites in public ownership, either in the ownership of Wealden District Council or East Sussex County Council. Other public bodies may also have surplus land that may be included in this assessment.

## **3. Criteria**

- 3.1 The suggested criteria are drawn from a wide selection of published guidance:
- Government guidance (Circular 01/06)
  - County Council guidance/policy (East Sussex Traveller Strategy and work for SEERA on identifying need and capacity)
  - Other published guidance (Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites Good Practice Guide 2008 – DCLG, RTPi Good Practice Notes, The Road Ahead: Final Report of the Independent Task Group on Site Provision and Enforcement for Gypsies and Travellers 2007 - DCLG)
  - What other Local Authorities have done.
- 3.2 The criteria are listed in the following sections, with an explanation and source. The criteria have been the subject of consultation. The consultation process has informed the criteria against which potential sites will be tested.
- 3.3 The weight to be applied to each criterion will differ according to local circumstances. The significance of each criterion was also the subject of consultation.

## **4. Form of the Site Assessment**

- 5.1 Most other authorities that have attempted this exercise have presented the data in the form of a matrix. This enables each site to be tested against a common set of standards and an objective decision reached.
- 4.2 The project brief from Wealden District Council is to maintain this format. The format is not the subject of consultation.

## **5. Initial Exclusions**

- 4.1 Some sites will not be suitable from the outset and although may appear on the potential long list, may be subject to practical constraints that render them unsuitable. Such sites will include sites liable to flood risk (zones 2, 3a and 3b) or land contamination. Government Guidance makes it clear that due to the particular vulnerability of caravan parks and mobile homes, land subject to some forms of land contamination and flood risk should not be considered for such uses. (Circular 01/06 and PPS25)
- 5.2 The work carried out by East Sussex County Council in responding to SEERA (South East England Regional Assembly) consultation for the assessment of need and capacity for gypsy and traveller sites, concluded that sites the subject of SSSI designation should not be included. Such sites have a national recognised nature conservation or scientific value, which could be harmed by use as a gypsy and traveller site.
- 5.3 Some sites in the long list may not have any achievable access. If this is the case, these sites will be excluded from consideration. Where an access can be achieved but some realignment or speed assessment is required, the site will form part of the assessment.
- 5.4 It is therefore suggested that this assessment should also discount sites that fall within these four categories.

## **6. Consultation**

- 6.1 The results of the consultation exercise on the method for assessing sites have been collated and published.

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 The consultation on the list of criteria to be applied has been vital to support the eventual choice of site(s) for accommodating the needs of gypsies and travellers. The involvement of both the settled and the travelling communities will help engender a sense of ownership and participation that may help to foster tolerance and understanding on both sides.

## Site Selection criteria

Criterion	Reason	Weight	Score
1. Landscape Designations	Nationally designated landscape include the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the future South Downs National Park. Some areas of undesignated landscape are particularly remote or attractive, and this scores lower than general undesignated landscape. This will involve a value judgement.	Significant	<p>If the site lies in undesignated landscape, score 3.</p> <p>If the site lies in an undesignated, but in particularly attractive or remote landscape area - score 1.</p> <p>If the site lies in nationally designated landscape - score 0.</p>
2. Nature Conservation Designations	Ancient Woodlands are an important part of the Wealden countryside and are to be recognised as such. Locally designated areas include Sites of Nature Conservation Interest and Local Nature Reserves. Nationally recognised sites of nature conservation value (SSSI's) have already been excluded.	Significant	<p>If the site lies in undesignated area, score 3.</p> <p>If the site lies in a locally designated area, score 1.</p> <p>If the site lies in Ancient Woodland - score 0.</p>
3. Historical Designations	All designated areas include Conservation Areas, Historic Battlefield sites, Historic Parks, Archaeological sites etc.	Significant	<p>If site lies on undesignated land - score 3.</p> <p>If site lies on designated land - score 0.</p>
4. How visible and open in character is the site?	The local topography and form of the landscape will affect the visibility of a Gypsy and Traveller site and will affect its ability to integrate into its surroundings. Some sites will be highly visible, and others more visually contained. The zone of visual influence is being tested.	Significant	<p>If the site is visually contained with a narrow zone of visual influence – score 3.</p> <p>If the site is moderately visible in the landscape – score 2</p> <p>If the site is highly visible and open in character with a wide zone of visual influence – score 0.</p>

<p>5. Can the visual impact of the site be adequately and appropriately mitigated against?</p>	<p>The visual impact of a Gypsy and Traveller site could be mitigated by appropriate and native screening or landscaping. On sites open in character, this may not be possible or appropriate. This would include the impact of external lighting.</p>	<p>Significant</p>	<p>If appropriate and effective screening is achievable - score 3.</p> <p>If screening is neither appropriate nor possible - score 0.</p>
<p>6. Does the location of the site have an adverse impact on the amenity of nearby residential properties?</p>	<p>In order to promote understanding and tolerance between local residents/landowners and Gypsies and Travellers, it is important that any impact on the living conditions for local people are acceptable.</p> <p>In considering any planning application, a value judgement has to be made on the potential impact on existing residential properties, by virtue of character, scale, layout, levels, lighting, fencing, noise, traffic etc. this criterion is to make that same assessment.</p>	<p>Significant</p>	<p>If the site has no potential adverse impact on nearby residential properties by virtue of character, scale, layout, density, levels, lighting, fencing, noise, traffic generation etc - score 3.</p> <p>If the potential impact of the site on any nearby residential properties can be adequately and appropriately mitigated against - score 2.</p> <p>If the site has a potentially adverse impact on nearby residential properties - score 0.</p>
<p>7. Previously Developed Land (Brownfield sites)</p>	<p>The Government, in its advice in Circular 01/06, prefers the use of brownfield sites where available.</p> <p>There is also recognition that there is a lack of brownfield sites in the District and they will not necessarily be available for Gypsy and Traveller sites. Therefore although important, realistically there may be limited alternatives to Greenfield land.</p>	<p>Significant</p>	<p>If the site lies on previously developed land - score 3.</p> <p>If the site lies on a greenfield site - score 0.</p>

<p>8. Relationship to settlement (with good range of services)</p>	<p>The availability of shops and services to sites is high in the Governments priority, to allow for easy access to education/shops/GP's and work opportunities. In a rural district such as Wealden, the full range of services is unlikely to be met in each settlement. For this reason the proximity to public transport is taken into account alongside relationship to settlement.</p> <p>(800m is acceptable walking distance in 'Manual for Streets')</p>	<p>Significant</p>	<p>If the site lies within 2 km of a town or village, and is within 800m of a bus stop/train station, score 3</p> <p>If the site lies more than 2 km from a town or village but is within 800m of a bus stop/train station, score 2.</p> <p>If the site is more than 2km from a town or village and not within 800m of a bus stop/train station, score 0.</p>
<p>9. Suitable access for level of use (with any necessary realignments)</p>	<p>A suitable access will be a primary consideration for highway safety and hence the grant of planning permission. The access may be realigned in some instances. Access must be suitable relative to the proposed number of pitches. It must also cater for large vehicles (although a potentially intermittent use) and suitable for emergency vehicles and waste management. Access roads also need to be suitable for the vehicles using the site.</p> <p>If a site has no prospect of gaining any access, it will be excluded from the long list.</p>	<p>Significant</p>	<p>If a site cannot achieve any access it will be excluded from consideration.</p> <p>If a site has an existing suitable access relative to the proposed number of pitches - score 3.</p> <p>If a site has an access requiring realignment, relative to the proposed number of pitches - score 1.</p> <p>If a site has an access that cannot be realigned within the same land ownership - score 0.</p>
<p>10. Level site</p>	<p>Sites must be level to accommodate hardstandings for mobile homes and caravans. In some instances sites may be made level, but the natural topography will be a factor.</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>If site is mostly or totally level - score 1</p> <p>If site is not level and level pitches cannot realistically be achieved - score 0.</p>

<p>11. Availability of services and deliverability of site</p>	<p>Water and electricity are vital elements for life and will need to be installed in any successfully managed site.</p> <p>Services such as water, electricity and suitable foul drainage may already be on site or can be readily installed. Such sites are most suitable. Sites where services cannot be installed, or only with difficulty, should be considered less suitable. In reality the limiting factor will be funding. On sites owned by Gypsies and Travellers, the site owner would bear this cost.</p>	<p>Significant</p>	<p>If site has all services deemed necessary and no constraints to delivery - score 3.</p> <p>If site has limited or no services but reasonable prospect of delivery – score 2.</p> <p>If site has no services and these could not realistically be provided for or there are other constraints to delivery - score 0.</p>
<p>12. Suitable for residential use by Gypsies and Travellers? (Amenity/Noise/ Pollution/potentially incompatible uses)</p>	<p>Sites should meet the normal requirements for housing, as they will be occupied by people and families. Mobile Homes and Caravans cannot meet standards for ventilation, noise insulation etc. that can be met by modern housing. Therefore sites that are incompatible with housing development due to noise/amenity /pollution or potentially incompatible land uses (such as sewerage or pylons for example) should score poorly.</p> <p>Such sites might provide sites for emergency stopping places.</p>	<p>Significant</p>	<p>If a site is suitable for residential use by Gypsies and Travellers - score 3.</p> <p>If site can be realistically modified to make it suitable for residential use - score 2.</p> <p>If site is not suitable for residential use by Gypsies and Travellers - score 0.</p>
<p>13. Size of Site</p>	<p>It is generally accepted that smaller sites are better, both for the relationship with the local environment, and for the future occupants. However sites should allow room for expansion and provide open space for children.</p> <p>Sites that accommodate <i>up to</i> 10 pitches are the maximum size for Gypsy and Traveller communities, so these will score the highest.</p>	<p>Moderate</p>	<p>If the site could accommodate up to 10 pitches, including open space and vehicular turning and manoeuvring space - score 2.</p> <p>If the site could accommodate more than 10 pitches and is unsuitable for subdivision, score 0.</p>