

## **LDDAG: Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocations DPD**

### **Key site requirements and site assessment criteria Results of Parish Council and Member briefings**

#### **Background**

1. The Council are producing a Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocations DPD. The DPD will undertake a process of assessing sites within Maidstone borough, to identify if they are suitable sites to meet the needs of Gypsy and Travellers.
2. Four briefings have been undertaken, in the plan making process to date, to inform the development of site criteria to identify Gypsy and Travellers sites. These include a:
  - Parish Council briefing at Lenham Village Hall (18 August 2009);
  - Parish Council briefing at Maidstone House (24 August 2009);
  - Parish Council briefing at Staplehurst Village Hall (18 August 2009);
  - and
  - Members briefing at Maidstone Town Hall (15 September 2009).
3. At each briefing, attendees were asked to outline their experiences of Gypsy and Travellers and then assess Gypsy and Traveller sites in relation to the following issues:
  - General approach to location;
  - Access to services;
  - Relationship to surrounding land uses;
  - Site conditions; and
  - Essential services.

#### **Responses**

4. A summary of the responses received from the Parish Council and Members briefings is provided below. Listed are the planning considerations raised that relate to site requirements and site assessment criteria.

#### **General approach to location**

5. General comments were provided in relation to the spatial strategy of sites across the borough:
  - Distribute sites across Borough;
  - Locate more sites in the north of the borough to even out imbalance;
  - Low concentration of sites in any one location; and
  - Along A249 and at major villages.
6. The following locations were considered as being appropriate for Gypsy and Traveller sites:
  - Sites on the outskirts of built up areas; and
  - Sites within rural or semi-rural settings.
7. Other comments relating to the location of sites included:

- Countryside location for keeping horses;
- Only allocate sites within designations, if appropriate; and
- Brownfield sites first.

**Access to services**

8. The majority of Parish Councillors and Members considered that sites should be near settlements with access to local services:
  - Primary school;
  - Secondary school;
  - GP surgery;
  - Local shop; and
  - Local employment.
9. In particular, easy access should be to a primary school and doctors surgery. It was noted that Gypsy and Traveller sites had a growing elderly population, who may need to live close to health facilities.
10. Where sites were not located close to these facilities, it was suggested that sites should be located on a public transport route.
11. A few comments, however, suggested that sites did not need to be located close to facilities, due to the use of the car to access these services. While other commented that sites should be located in sustainable locations, the same as market housing.
12. School spaces can be a problem if sites are in rural locations, where there is a large concentration of sites and gypsy family with children. There is no guarantee the local school will have spaces.
13. Where Gypsy and Traveller children attended local schools, it was deemed that these families integrated well with existing communities.
14. There was mixed opinion to whether there should be a set planning criteria relating to distances between a site and specific facilities.
15. One respondent suggested that play equipment should be provided on site.

**Relationship to surrounding land uses**

16. Many respondents were concerned about the impacts of Gypsy and Traveller sites on surrounding land uses. Suggestions relating to surrounding land uses included:
  - Protect existing communities from the impact of noise, visual, light, waste disposal;
  - Encourage good integration with existing communities by locating sites close to existing communities;
  - Provide small sites (2 to 3 pitches?), that are in scale and proportion to the existing settlement, to ensure sites do not dominate existing communities;
  - Protect the environment/local character, such as SSSI, AONB, prime agricultural land, local landscape, character of country lanes, woodland, hedges and trees; and

- Well landscaped and screen sites received a mixed response. It reduces the visual impact of sites, but may also result in the separation of the occupants from the rest of the community .
17. Comments were received on the disturbance of the caravan occupants from adjoining uses. Sites should not be built adjacent disused employment areas or next to railway lines or major roads/motorway, given the noise transference of living in a caravan.
18. A few respondents suggested that Gypsies and Travellers should have a local connection.
19. It was also noted that permission should only be given to caravans, and the change of use from caravans to bricks and mortar should not be.

**Site conditions**

20. Many commented that the design of sites for Gypsies and Travellers, in terms of living conditions, should be the same as for ordinary residential dwellings.
21. Consequently the following are not considered acceptable locations:
- Sites in areas at high risk of flooding;
  - Sites located on disused employment sites (polluted/contaminated land); and
  - Sites in noisy locations, such as on busy main roads/adjacent the motorway or next to the railway.
22. In addition, sites should:
- Provide good access and sightlines;
  - Be located on wide roads;
  - Provide adequate grazing land for horses;
  - Contain strong site boundaries;
  - Provide hard-standing (but for only where required and not for the whole site); and
  - Be large enough for caravans, vehicles and horses.

**Essential services**

23. The respondents stated that sites must have access to:
- Water;
  - Electricity;
  - Drainage and sanitation;
  - Sewerage (mains is preferable);
  - Waste collection; and
  - Highways/main road access.