

Gypsies and Travellers Development Plan factsheet

There are many misconceptions about Gypsies and Travellers and why we need to provide sites for Wiltshire's travelling communities. This document will help people in settled communities to gain a greater understanding of people in the travelling communities.

“We don't need more Gypsy or Traveller sites in the area.”

There are many reasons why we need to provide additional Gypsy and Traveller sites. First of all, the council has a legal responsibility to plan for the accommodation needs of the Gypsy and Traveller communities, as we do for the settled community.

If we failed in this duty, a Planning Inspectorate would need to approve sites on appeal and the local community would lose all control over the process. A deficiency of authorised sites has been used by the Courts and the Planning Inspectorate throughout the country to justify retention of some unauthorised developments, with considerable costs to landowners and opposition by the settled community.

Allocating sites will improve access to health and education for Gypsy and Traveller families currently living on unauthorised sites, addressing some of the symptoms of deprivation currently faced by these communities.

The allocation of sites may also save taxpayers money, as cost of enforcement action can far exceed that of providing authorised sites. So it would mean us pursuing less enforcement action against unauthorised encampments.

“Allocating sites will mean more Gypsies and Travellers come to the area and it will lead to more unauthorised encampments.”

The sites in the draft Gypsies and Travellers Development Plan are intended to accommodate Gypsies and Travellers who are already part of the local community and residing in Wiltshire.

They are necessary to accommodate natural population growth in these groups, in the same way that additional housing is needed to accommodate growth in the settled community. There is no evidence that provision of sites lead to greater demand for accommodation in this area from Gypsies and Travellers. Also, allocating authorised sites sufficient for the local Gypsy and Traveller communities will help the council to take more effective enforcement action against unauthorised sites. Local authorities nationwide are going through a similar process of assessing need and allocating sites.

“Gypsies and Travellers get land for free.”

Gypsies and Travellers either buy or rent authorised sites, and there are costs when setting up an authorised site. These costs can be minimised by reconfiguring existing sites rather than setting up new ones, which is why many allocated pitches are on existing sites.

Where new sites are needed, a number of funding options are available, including funding by Gypsies and Travellers themselves and the use of Government grants. Once set up, new sites may be rented from the council or from a Housing Association.

“Gypsies and Travellers don’t pay their way.”

Gypsies and Travellers who live on council or privately-owned sites pay council tax, rent, gas, electricity and other associated charges. These vary from site to site, but are often higher than comparable charges for conventional housing.

Like everyone else, Gypsies and Travellers pay vehicle tax, VAT on goods and services, and income tax when working or self-employed. Those living on unauthorised encampments do not pay council tax, but equally they do not receive standard services. This is another good reason for allocating more authorised sites.

Gypsy and Travelling communities have been shown to have significant issues with access to health, education and social services, often as a result of having to move location frequently due to evictions. Research has found that life expectancy for men and women is 10 years lower than the national average, and Gypsy and Irish Traveller mothers are 20 times more likely than mothers in the rest of the population to have experienced the death of a child. Traveller children have the lowest educational attainment of any ethnic minority group. Allocating sites will help to address these symptoms of deprivation by allowing Gypsy and Traveller communities adequate access to services and opportunities for integration.

“Gypsies and Travellers are getting special treatment – they get planning permission where others wouldn’t.”

Most Gypsy and Traveller site applications fail to get planning permission first time around, and many are also unsuccessful on appeal.

Gypsies and Travellers are engaged in many paid and voluntary activities supporting local communities and national life. Today, despite barriers to health and education services, increasing numbers of children are enrolled in school. Gypsies and Travellers want to engage with the wider community and promote mutual understanding.

“If Gypsies and Travellers want to live in the area they can live in houses like the rest of us.”

The courts have confirmed that, for many Gypsies and Irish Travellers, living in a caravan is not a lifestyle choice, but a result of their social and cultural heritage and an essential part of their ethnic identity. This is true whether they are nomadic or settle for long periods in one place.

Most Gypsies and Irish Travellers in England are believed to live in houses. While some choose to live in conventional housing, others may feel they have no alternative, because of bad health or educational needs.

“Gypsies and Travellers are responsible for antisocial behaviour like littering, fly-tipping and crime.”

Littering and fly-tipping are mainly a problem on unauthorised sites, where there are often no rubbish collection facilities. This process will identify potential locations for authorised sites.

Authorised sites are more likely to have planned rubbish collections, and may engender a greater sense of ownership and pride amongst the communities who live on them. Well managed Gypsy and Traveller sites do not generally cause trouble to the local settled community.