

Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan (GTLP) Preferred Options – Questions and Answers

Along with other local authorities, Wokingham Borough Council is required to assess and meet the need for Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation in the area. The Council is therefore producing an important planning policy document called the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan (GTLP).

Once it is adopted, the GTLP will allocate sites for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in the Borough. It will also include specific policies to guide decision-making on future planning applications for Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites. We are currently seeking views on how we have chosen to do this in the GTLP Preferred Options.

This Q & A explains more about what is happening. A Glossary of common terms is also available on the GTLP page of the Council's website.

Q How does the Council define who is a Gypsy and Traveller or a Travelling Showperson?

A The definition of Gypsies and Travellers is given in the following Government legislation:

- Gypsies and Irish Travellers are recognised ethnic groups for the purposes of the [Race Relations Act 1976](#) (amended 2000 & 2003).
- For the purposes of planning, the definition of Gypsy and Traveller is set out in [Planning Policy for Traveller Sites](#), Annex 1 (published 2012) – also see the Glossary.
- The [Housing Act \(2004\)](#) Section 225 sets out the requirements for local authorities to carry out an assessment of need for Gypsies and Travellers and Statutory Instrument 2006 no. 2190 goes on to define the meaning of Gypsies and Travellers (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2006/3190/regulation/2/made>)

Planning law defines Gypsies and Irish Travellers as people with a travelling way of life, which reflects their culture and traditions. Some groups are highly mobile, whilst others live permanently in one area or only travel for a few weeks or months of the year. Most Gypsy and Traveller families live within close-knit communities with strong family and social networks. The main reason for travelling is to work, to follow fairs and visit family. Whilst some Gypsies and Irish Travellers now live in houses rather than on caravan sites, their culture and heritage stays with them.

Travelling Showpeople are also defined in Annex 1 of [Planning for Traveller Sites](#) (2012) and make their living by attending funfairs. Showpeople require secure, permanent bases for the storage and repair of their equipment and to live when not on

the road (usually during the winter months). Many Showpeople are members of the [Showmen's Guild of Great Britain](#) and are required by the Guild to follow a strict code of practice regulating the use of their sites.

Q Why do we need to provide Gypsy and Traveller sites?

A The Government requires councils to provide housing for those who need it and this includes meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

As the definition in [Planning Policy for Traveller Sites](#) (2012) identifies, Gypsies and Travellers do not always travel. They may seek a place to stop for part of the year, such as during the winter months - travelling patterns are often linked to seasonal work – or on a more permanent basis due to factors such as ill health or on-going education for children. Families require safe and secure bases from which to do their travelling, where they can access key services such as doctors, dentists and schools – hence the need to provide permanent sites.

Unauthorised encampments (see Glossary) – for example, when Gypsies and Travellers stop at the side of the road – occur when there are not enough authorised sites to accommodate them. Local authorities and landowners have powers to move Gypsies and Travellers on in these situations as long as they follow the correct legal procedure, but provision of enough authorised sites would reduce this issue in the long term.

Section 225 of the [Housing Act 2004](#) requires local authorities (such as Wokingham Borough Council) to:

- (1) carry out an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers residing in or resorting to their district and
- (2) prepare a strategy in respect of meeting such accommodation needs.

In addition, [Planning Policy for Traveller Sites](#) (2012) requires local planning authorities to make an assessment of the Travelling community's need and to plan for sites to meet this need. These sites can be either private or owned by the council. Contrary to some views, all Gypsies and Travellers living on a local authority or privately owned site are liable to pay council tax, rent, gas, electricity and all other charges in the same way as other householders, and planning laws apply to them just as they do to the settled community.

Q How many new sites will there be?

A Like all communities, the Gypsy and Traveller population is expected to grow. The GTLP will ensure that sufficient sites have been identified in advance to meet that need as the population grows. The Council has taken steps to identify what the need is through the commission of a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) (see below).

Q What have the Council done so far?

A In March 2014 the Council commissioned a refresh to the GTAA in partnership with other Berkshire authorities in order to ensure that the Borough's Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need is up to date (in terms of the number of pitches that are required). An updated Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) for Wokingham has now been produced in March 2015 and this can be accessed online at <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/very-important-planning-policies/> (and clicking on 'Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan').

As part of the initial work on the GTLP, a public consultation was held from 18th July to 23rd August 2013. This asked for people's views on a draft supporting document called the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Scoping Report (*see below and also the Glossary for an explanation of the purpose of the SA*). The Council also held a 'Call for Sites' exercise to allow people to submit possible sites for Gypsy and Traveller development.

The next stage was the preparation of the GTLP Draft Options, which was subject to public consultation from 7th August to 2nd October 2014, as well as a second 'Call for Sites'. The Draft Options document identified various approaches for addressing the main issues that will be covered by the GTLP, and the consultation responses that we received have been used to help select the options now included in the Preferred Options.

Q How will allocated Gypsy and Traveller sites benefit the settled community?

A As already noted, the identification of sites through the planning process will help to prevent unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller encampments in unsuitable and sometimes dangerous locations (such as by the side of roads) and will also give Gypsy and Traveller families more opportunity to access key services and to integrate with the local community. It will be better for all members of the community if sites can be allocated by agreement in suitable locations. By taking a positive approach we will have greater control over the quantity and quality of Gypsy and Traveller and also Travelling Showpeople sites.

Q How will the Council identify sites?

A Potential sites have been submitted by the public via a 'Call for Sites', first held in 2013 and again in 2014. The sites submitted are currently being assessed to see if they are suitable to include in the GTLP. Please note that **no sites are being allocated at the Preferred Options stage of the process**, although an initial Sustainability Appraisal of the sites put forward has been included in the current consultation (see below).

Q How will the Council assess any sites put forward?

A Submitted sites will be considered on relevant factors such as size and location and weighed against planning policies (specifically policy TB10 of the [Managing Development Delivery \(MDD\) Local Plan](#)). Site visits will be conducted by Council officers and the views of residents on the specific sites will be sought through consultation on Proposed Submission GTLP, which will be the next step of the process (to take place later in 2015). As part of this the Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities will also be consulted on their preferences about where they wish to live.

Q When will the sites be built?

A Like any other development, sites allocated in the GTLP will need to apply for and gain planning permission before they can be built. This will mean that the applicant has to make satisfactory arrangements for access, site layout and landscaping and to protect neighbours from issues such as noise or loss of privacy. Planning applications for a Gypsy and Traveller site will be considered against the policies contained within the GTLP and the relevant policies from the other Development Plan documents.

Q What documents are being consulted on?

A As well as the GTLP Preferred Options, we are also seeking views on two Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SA/SEA). When making Local Plans, local authorities are required to identify the likely social, environmental and economic effects that may result from a plan, and to set out ways in which any potential damage could be prevented or reduced in an SA/SEA document. This has been done for the Preferred Options and also for the suggested sites, and these SA/SEAs are also available as part of the current consultation.

Q How long is the consultation period?

A The consultation will last from 4th June until **4pm on Thursday 30th July.**

Q Where can I find the GTLP Preferred Options and the SA/SEAs?

A All of these documents can be found at:
<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/very-important-planning-policies/> (click on 'Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan')

Q What happens next?

A The process of producing a Local Plan can be seen in the Local Development Scheme, which can be accessed at:
<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/very-important-planning-policies/> (click on 'Local Development Scheme')

After the current consultation on the GTLP Preferred Options, a Proposed Submission GTLP – which will include potential sites for allocation – will be produced and consulted on. This should take place in autumn/winter 2015. Following this the Proposed Submission GTLP will be subject to an independent examination carried out by a Planning Inspector in 2016.

Q Who should I contact if I have a query regarding the GTLP?

A You can email the Land Use and Transport Team on GTLP@wokingham.gov.uk or telephone **0118 974 6478**. Our website also features the latest information relating to the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan.

Advice on writing a response to the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan Preferred Options consultation:

When writing a response to the Gypsy and Traveller Local Plan we would ask respondents to consider the legislation in [Public Order Act 1986, Part III](#) which sets out the offense of an incitement to racial hatred. Under this legislation the Council is prevented from publishing responses that it considers could stir up racial hatred. Wokingham Borough Council will not publish or take in to consideration any responses to the consultation which are considered to be an incitement to racial hatred or that are defamatory. This is in line with the standards set out in the [Local Authority Publicity Code](#) which requires all Council communications to be lawful, appropriate and have regard to equality and diversity.