Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Planning policy for traveller sites

December 2024
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

OGL

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Introduction

1. This document sets out the Government's planning policy for traveller[1]sites. It should be read in conjunction with the National Planning Policy Framework.

2. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This policy must be taken into account in the preparation of development plans, and is a material consideration in planning decisions[2]. Local planning authorities preparing plans for, and taking decisions on, traveller sites should also have regard to the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework so far as relevant.

3. The Government's overarching aim is to ensure fair and equal treatment for travellers, in a way that facilitates the traditional and nomadic way of life of travellers while respecting the interests of the settled community.

4. To help achieve this, the Government's aims in respect of traveller sites are:

   a) that local planning authorities should make their own assessment of need for the purposes of planning;
   b) to ensure that local planning authorities, working collaboratively, develop fair and effective strategies to meet need through the identification of land for sites;
   c) to encourage local planning authorities to plan for sites over a reasonable timescale;
   d) that plan-making and decision-taking should protect Green Belt from inappropriate development;
   e) to promote more private traveller site provision while recognising that there will always be those travellers who cannot provide their own sites;
   f) that plan-making and decision-taking should aim to reduce the number of unauthorised developments and encampments and make enforcement more effective;
   g) for local planning authorities to ensure that their Local Plan includes fair, realistic and inclusive policies;
   h) to increase the number of traveller sites in appropriate locations with planning permission, to address under provision and maintain an appropriate level of supply;
   i) to reduce tensions between settled and traveller communities in plan-making and planning decisions;
   j) to enable provision of suitable accommodation from which travellers can access education, health, welfare and employment infrastructure; and
   k) for local planning authorities to have due regard to the protection of local amenity and local environment.

[1] See Annex 1 for the definition of traveller for the purposes of this statement.

[2] Sections 19(2)(a) and 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In relation to neighbourhood plans, under section 38B and C and paragraph 8(2) of new Schedule 4B to the 2004 Act (inserted by the Localism Act 2011 section 116 and Schedules 9 and 10) the independent examiner will consider whether having regard to national policy is appropriate to make the plan.

5. To benefit those engaged in planning for traveller sites, specific planning policies for traveller sites are clearly set out in this separate document. The Government intends to review this policy when fair and representative practical results of its implementation are clear.

6. The Government still intends to review in the future whether Planning Policy for Traveller Sites should be incorporated within the wider National Planning Policy Framework. This will be considered as part of any wider review of the Framework.

Using evidence

Policy A: Using evidence to plan positively and manage development

7. In assembling the evidence base necessary to support their planning approach, local planning authorities should:

   a) pay particular attention to early and effective community engagement with both settled and traveller communities (including discussing travellers' accommodation needs with travellers themselves, their representative bodies and local support groups);
   b) cooperate with travellers, their representative bodies and local support groups; other local authorities and relevant interest groups to prepare and maintain an up- to-date understanding of the likely permanent and transit accommodation needs of their areas over the lifespan of their development plan, working collaboratively with neighbouring local planning authorities; and
   c) use a robust evidence base to establish accommodation needs to inform the preparation of local plans and make planning decisions.

Plan-making

Policy B: Planning for traveller sites

8. Local Plans must be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. To this end, they should be consistent with the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework, including the presumption in favour of sustainable development and the application of specific policies in the Framework, and this planning policy for traveller sites.

9. Local planning authorities should set pitch targets for gypsies and travellers as defined in Annex 1 and plot targets for travelling showpeople as defined in Annex 1 which address the likely permanent and transit site accommodation needs of travellers in their area, working collaboratively with neighbouring local planning authorities[3].

[3] See Annex 1 for definitions of 'pitch' and 'plot'.

10. Local planning authorities should, in producing their Local Plan:

    a) identify and update annually, a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide 5 years' worth of sites against their locally set targets[4];
    b) identify a supply of specific, developable sites, or broad locations for growth, for years 6 to 10 and, where possible, for years 11-15[5];
    c) consider production of joint development plans that set targets on a cross-authority basis, to provide more flexibility in identifying sites, particularly if a local planning authority has special or strict planning constraints across its area (local planning authorities have a duty to cooperate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries);
    d) relate the number of pitches or plots to the circumstances of the specific size and location of the site and the surrounding population's size and density; and
    e) protect local amenity and environment.

11. Criteria should be set to guide land supply allocations where there is identified need. Where there is no identified need, criteria-based policies should be included to provide a basis for decisions in case applications nevertheless come forward. Criteria based policies should be fair and should facilitate the traditional and nomadic life of travellers while respecting the interests of the settled community.

12. In exceptional cases, where a local planning authority is burdened by a large-scale unauthorised site that has significantly increased their need, and their area is subject to strict and special planning constraints, then there is no assumption that the local planning authority is required to plan to meet their traveller site needs in full.

13. Local planning authorities should ensure that traveller sites are sustainable economically, socially and environmentally. Local planning authorities should, therefore, ensure that their policies:

    a) promote peaceful and integrated co-existence between the site and the local community;
    b) promote, in collaboration with commissioners of health services, access to appropriate health services;
    c) ensure that children can attend school on a regular basis;
    d) provide a settled base that reduces both the need for long-distance travelling and possible environmental damage caused by unauthorised encampment;
    e) provide for proper consideration of the effect of local environmental quality (such as noise and air quality) on the health and well-being of any travellers

[4] To be considered deliverable, sites should be available now, offer a suitable location for development, and be achievable with a realistic prospect that development will be delivered on the site within five years. Sites with planning permission should be considered deliverable until permission expires, unless there is clear evidence that schemes will not be implemented within 5 years, for example they will not be viable, there is no longer a demand for the type of units or sites have long term phasing plans.

[5] To be considered developable, sites should be in a suitable location for traveller site development and there should be a reasonable prospect that the site is available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged.

that may locate there or on others as a result of new development;

f) avoid placing undue pressure on local infrastructure and services;
g) do not locate sites in areas at high risk of flooding, including functional floodplains, given the particular vulnerability of caravans; and
h) reflect the extent to which traditional lifestyles (whereby some travellers live and work from the same location thereby omitting many travel to work journeys) can contribute to sustainability.

Policy C: Sites in rural areas and the countryside

14. When assessing the suitability of sites in rural or semi-rural settings, local planning authorities should ensure that the scale of such sites does not dominate the nearest settled community.

Policy D: Rural exception sites

15. If there is a lack of affordable land to meet local traveller needs, local planning authorities in rural areas, where viable and practical, should consider allocating and releasing sites solely for affordable traveller sites. This may include using a rural exception site policy for traveller sites that should also be used to manage applications. A rural exception site policy enables small sites to be used, specifically for affordable traveller sites, in small rural communities, that would not normally be used for traveller sites[6]. Rural exception sites should only be used for affordable traveller sites in perpetuity. A rural exception site policy should seek to address the needs of the local community by accommodating households who are either current residents or have an existing family or employment connection, whilst also ensuring that rural areas continue to develop as sustainable, mixed, inclusive communities.

Policy E: Traveller sites in Green Belt

16. Inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved, except in very special circumstances. Traveller sites (temporary or permanent) in the Green Belt are inappropriate development unless the exceptions set out in Chapter 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework apply.

17. Green Belt boundaries should be altered only in exceptional circumstances. If a local planning authority wishes to make an exceptional, limited alteration to the defined Green Belt boundary (which might be to accommodate a site inset within the Green Belt) to meet a specific, identified need for a traveller site, it should do so only through the plan-making process and not in response to a planning application. If land is removed from the Green Belt in this way, it should be specifically allocated in the development plan as a traveller site only.

[6] Small rural settlements have been designated for enfranchisement and right to acquire purposes (under Section 17 of the *Housing Act 1996*) by SI 1997/620-25 inclusive and 1999/1307

18. The Golden Rules, set out in chapter 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework, do not apply to traveller sites.

Policy F: Mixed planning use traveller sites

19. Local planning authorities should consider, wherever possible, including traveller sites suitable for mixed residential and business uses, having regard to the safety and amenity of the occupants and neighbouring residents. Local planning authorities should consider the scope for identifying separate sites for residential and for business purposes in close proximity to one another if mixed sites are not practical.

20. Local planning authorities should have regard to the need that travelling showpeople have for mixed-use yards to allow residential accommodation and space for storage of equipment.

21. Local planning authorities should not permit mixed use on rural exception sites.

Policy G: Major development projects

22. Local planning authorities should work with the planning applicant and the affected traveller community to identify a site or sites suitable for relocation of the community if a major development proposal requires the permanent or temporary relocation of a traveller site. Local planning authorities are entitled to expect the applicant to identify and provide an alternative site, providing the development on the original site is authorised.

Decision-taking

Policy H: Determining planning applications for traveller sites

23. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan[7], unless material considerations indicate otherwise[8].

24. Applications should be assessed and determined in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development and the application of specific policies in the National Planning Policy Framework and this planning policy for traveller sites.

[7] Section 38(1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004: this includes adopted or approved development plan documents i.e. the Local Plan and neighbourhood plans which have been made in relation to the area (and the London Plan).
[8] Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

25. Local planning authorities should consider the following issues amongst other relevant matters when considering planning applications for traveller sites:

    a) the existing level of local provision and need for sites;
    b) the availability (or lack) of alternative accommodation for the applicants;
    c) other personal circumstances of the applicant
    d) that the locally specific criteria used to guide the allocation of sites in plans or which form the policy where there is no identified need for pitches/plots should be used to assess applications that may come forward on unallocated sites;
    e) that they should determine applications for sites from any travellers and not just those with local connections.

26. Local planning authorities should very strictly limit new traveller site development in open countryside that is away from existing settlements or outside areas allocated in the development plan[9]. Local planning authorities should ensure that sites in rural areas respect the scale of, and do not dominate, the nearest settled community, and avoid placing an undue pressure on the local infrastructure.

27. When considering applications, local planning authorities should attach weight to the following matters:

    a) effective use of previously developed (brownfield), untidy or derelict land;
    b) sites being well planned or soft landscaped in such a way as to positively enhance the environment and increase its openness;
    c) promoting opportunities for healthy lifestyles, such as ensuring adequate landscaping and play areas for children; and
    d) not enclosing a site with so much hard landscaping, high walls or fences, that the impression may be given that the site and its occupants are deliberately isolated from the rest of the community.

28. If a local planning authority cannot demonstrate an up-to-date 5 year supply of deliverable sites, the provisions in paragraph 11(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework apply. Local planning authorities should consider how they could overcome planning objections to particular proposals using planning conditions or planning obligations including:

    a) limiting which parts of a site may be used for any business operations, in order to minimise the visual impact and limit the effect of noise;
    b) specifying the number of days the site can be occupied by more than the allowed number of caravans (which permits visitors and allows attendance at family or community events);
    c) limiting the maximum number of days for which caravans might be permitted to stay on a transit site.

[9] Unless any relevant exceptions from inappropriate development in the Green Belt apply as set out in paragraph 154 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Policy I: Implementation

29. The policies in this revised Planning Policy for Traveller Sites apply from the day of publication. This replaces the version published in December 2023.

30. The implementation policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework will apply also to plan-making and decision-taking for traveller sites. In applying those implementation provisions to traveller sites, references in those provisions to policies in the National Planning Policy Framework should, where relevant, be read to include policies in this planning policy for traveller sites.

Annex 1: Glossary

1. For the purposes of this planning policy “gypsies and travellers” means:

Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family’s or dependants’ educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a caravan, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling showpeople or circus people travelling together as such.

2. For the purposes of this planning policy, “travelling showpeople” means:

Members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circuses or shows (whether or not travelling together as such). This includes such persons who on the grounds of their own or their family’s or dependants’ more localised pattern of trading, educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excludes Gypsies and Travellers as defined above.

3. For the purposes of this planning policy, “travellers” means “gypsies and travellers” and “travelling showpeople” as defined above.
4. For the purposes of this planning policy, “pitch” means a pitch on a “gypsy and traveller” site and “plot” means a pitch on a “travelling showpeople” site (often called a “yard”). This terminology differentiates between residential pitches for “gypsies and travellers” and mixed-use plots for “travelling showpeople”, which may / will need to incorporate space or to be split to allow for the storage of equipment.