

## **Q&A Brief for the Coastal West Sussex Authorities and South Downs National Park Authority Gypsy, Traveller and Traveller Showpeople Sites Study**

**Question:** When was the Sites Study carried out?

**Answer:** The Sites Study was commissioned in September 2012. The purpose of the Study is to produce a shortlist of potential sites to meet the need for the Coastal West Sussex Planning Authorities which is identified in the Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (Phase 1) April 2013. From September 2012 to September 2013, the timetable for the Sites Study included information gathering, identification of site criteria and a desktop analysis of sites with information fed into the assessment of suitability.

**Question:** How were the sites identified?

**Answer:** **Stages 1 to 2** of the study involved an inception meeting and gathering relevant information regarding policy and site constraints. At **Stage 3** Peter Brett Associates (PBA) consulted with Opinion Research Services (ORS), who carried out Phase 1 needs assessment for the Authorities, to identify key site requirements and needs in order to establish at **Stage 4** site assessment criteria.

**Stages 5 to 6** involved identifying sites, site survey and assessment, resulting in a shortlist of sites. Stage 7 involved developing a model policy and delivery options for the Authorities.

**Stage 8** involved a report of findings and recommendations.

**Question:** How many sites were looked at as part of the Sites Study?

**Answer:** 87 sites were assessed. Sites included existing authorised sites where there may be potential for further extension or intensification, current unauthorised sites, or sites subject to temporary permissions which could be made permanent. To identify new sites a 'Call for Sites' exercise was undertaken to existing landowners, land agents, Gypsy and Traveller agents, planning agents and other key contacts. The contact list was provided by the Authorities and reflects those organisations who potentially knew about land that may be available for Gypsy and Traveller use.

**Question:** Where are the sites which have been assessed?

**Answer:** Appendix 1: Sites Location Map in the Sites Study identifies the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites considered in the Study.

**Question:** What are the findings of the Sites Study?

**Answer:** All available sources of sites have been fully investigated and the authorities are not aware of any further available and suitable sites. It is important to note that most of the current provision within the Sites Study area is met on private sites. The sites identified with potential to achieve additional pitches/plots are listed in Appendix 4 of the Sites Study.

**Question:** What is the assessment criterion?

**Answer:** In terms of **suitability** PBA assessed each site against the agreed criteria, which were broadly grouped into policy requirements, physical constraints and potential

impacts. For sites outside existing settlements, an assessment was made on the likely landscape impacts and whether mitigation measures can resolve any likely adverse impacts.

In terms of likely **availability**, landowners were consulted to gain an understanding of availability and potential constraints to release. These could include legal or ownership problems.

By **achievability**, economic viability was explored with regard to delivering the site, taking into account cost factors (site preparation, infrastructure costs, etc.) and whether the value of potential alternative uses of the site makes its delivery unlikely.

**Question:** What types of sites are identified in the Sites Study?

**Answer:** A total of 23 sites are identified as potentially suitable to contribute additional pitches and plots towards meeting future identified needs for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. With the exception of four existing public owned sites the remaining are privately owned. The future availability of existing sites to accommodate any additional need is, therefore, dependent on existing site owners being prepared to accommodate future needs on these sites.

**Question:** What happens after the assessment?

**Answer:** The data collected through the Sites Study process should enable the authorities to identify potential suitable sites to meet the need identified through the Phase 1 Needs Assessment, April 2013.

**Question:** Is the need for transit site provision identified?

**Answer:** The Phase 1 Needs Assessment highlights a clear gap in provision for, at least, one transit site of 10 pitches in the Coastal West Sussex area to help manage unauthorised encampments. An independent report was commissioned last year by the Chief Executives of West Sussex County, District and Borough councils, to assess whether a transit site would assist in managing unauthorised encampments and to inform partners of the pros and cons of a transit site.

Subsequent to this report, West Sussex councils have been awarded a £630,000 grant from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to help develop a transit site in Chichester.

**Question:** What does it mean for a site to be identified in the Sites Study? Does it mean planning permission will be given?

**Answer:** The Study must be considered as part of the wider evidence base for the emerging development plans, but does not commit any Authority to allocate any particular parcel of land for a particular use, nor approve any application for development. Further site assessment work is likely to take place at a District/Borough level.

**Question:** Who will come forward with planning applications for these sites?

**Answer:** This might happen through Gypsies and Travellers applying for planning permission on pieces of land that they own or looking to gain permanent permission on sites with temporary permission, or through the council applying for planning permission on pieces of land within their ownership.

**Question:** Do the councils have to provide/operate the sites identified in the Sites Study?

**Answer:** Councils are required to make provision, but it doesn't mean that all the pitches have to be owned or 'managed' by the council – we simply have to make sure there are another 88 additional pitches over the next 15 years that have planning permission for use by Gypsy and Travellers in Coastal West Sussex. For Travelling Showpeople the estimated additional site provision to address the needs of identified households is 26 plots.

**Question:** Why have Gypsy and Traveller sites been identified and not sites for the settled community?

**Answer:** A Strategic Housing Market Assessment focuses upon the number of dwellings required in an area, and how many of these should be provided by the public and private sector. The public and private provision of mainstream housing is also largely mirrored when considering Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. One common form of Gypsy and Traveller sites is the publicly provided residential site, which is provided by West Sussex County Council. Places on public sites can be obtained through a waiting list, and the costs of running the sites are met from the rent paid by the licensees (similar to social housing). There are currently four public sites in the Study area.

The Government's overarching aim, via the National Planning Policy for Travellers, is to ensure fair and equal treatment for Travellers, respecting both the traditional nomadic way of life of Travellers as well as the needs of the settled community.

**Question:** Why do travellers need sites if they move around?

**Answer:** Councils need to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers who don't travel throughout the year and need a base from which to travel. There is also a clear business case for planning for and providing sites. A 2006 Commission for Racial Equality report found that local authorities spent around £18m a year of council tax payers' money evicting gypsies and travellers from unauthorised sites and that these costs could be significantly reduced if councils invested in providing an authorised alternative. The result is a cycle of deprivation that is never broken. Access to Health services is denied, access to Education is minimal and access to employment almost non-existent. Across Coastal West Sussex we are determined to break that cycle both for the Travelling community who have no legal place to stop and for the interests of the settled community.

**Question:** Why can't travellers live in houses?

**Answer:** It is a Government requirement for councils to make provision for all people requiring housing. This includes meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. Government advice says that councils have to ensure that through their plan-making process, sites are identified for Gypsies and Travellers to meet any requirements which have been identified in an accommodation needs assessment.