

Agenda Item IMD28

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION REFERENCE IMD: 2017/28

TITLE	Wokingham Borough Council response to the Reading Borough Council Gypsy and Traveller provision consultation (27 th September – 24 th October)
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Highways, Cllr David Lee
DATE AND TIME	09:00am Thursday 9th November
WARD	None specific
DIRECTOR	Interim Director of Environment, Josie Wragg; Director for Corporate Services, Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To ensure that Reading Borough Council's strategy for providing Gypsy and Traveller accommodation has minimal negative impacts upon Wokingham Borough and that any positive benefits are maximised.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Highways agrees that Wokingham Borough Council:

- 1) Raises a holding objection until such time as:
 - a) clarification is provided as to whether the identified transit site can also accommodate permanent pitches on a mixed use site;
 - b) additional work is undertaken by RBC to understand whether current uses on sites assessed as unavailable may be relocated elsewhere to free up those sites for Gypsy and Traveller or Travelling Showperson use; and
 - c) clarification is provided as to whether RBC has considered the purchase of new land to help meet the identified needs;

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Reading Borough Council (RBC) published its Gypsy and Traveller, Travelling Showperson and Houseboat Dweller Accommodation Assessment 2017 in September 2017. The study identifies a need for permanent pitches for Gypsies and Travellers; plots for Travelling Showpeople; and a transit site to be provided in the period up to 2036/37.

RBC has considered its capacity to provide sites to accommodate the identified needs and has consulted on this proposed strategy between 27th September and 24th October 2017. RBC has set out that it considers a transit site can be provided to accommodate this identified need, but does not consider there to be capacity to accommodate its permanent Gypsy and Traveller pitch and Travelling Showperson plot needs.

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) has considered the consultation documents and is not satisfied that there is sufficient evidence that RBC is not able to find suitable and available sites within Reading Borough to meet its own need.

Background:

Reading Borough Council (RBC) are in the process of preparing a Local Plan and have previously consulted on an Issues and Options stage (early 2016) and a Draft Plan stage (May/June 2017). These consultations highlighted a potential need for sites to accommodate Gypsies and Travellers but at that time the need was not quantified in the absence of a published Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA). At those stages of consultation, the documents simply reflected there being a likelihood that sites for Gypsy and Traveller use would be required.

At the Draft Plan stage, RBC had not identified any potential sites for this use. WBC therefore raised concern, in its response to the consultation, that no work had been undertaken to identify sites given it was RBC's understanding at the time that a need was likely to emerge from the forthcoming GTAA.

RBC has now published its Gypsy and Traveller, Travelling Showperson and Houseboat Dweller Accommodation Assessment 2017 (GTAA 2017). The study has identified a total need within Reading Borough of 17 pitches, of which 10 are for those that meet the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) definition, in the period up to 2036/37. However, 11 of those pitches (10 PPTS) are required in the first five years to 2021/22. The GTAA also identifies a need for the provision of a transit site for 5 pitches (each to contain 2 caravans) as well as a need for 2 Travelling Showpeople plots.

RBC has undertaken further work to assess its capacity for meeting the identified needs within its administrative boundary, and has now consulted on its proposed approach towards this.

Analysis of Issues

Proposed transit site

RBC propose to allocate a site at Cow Lane/Richfield Avenue, RG1 8EQ to accommodate the full identified transit need of five pitches. RBC is inviting comments on the following question, to which Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) response is provided below:

- 1. What are your views on the Cow Lane/Richfield Avenue site identified in this document?**

WBC notes that the suggested site for transit provision has outstanding issues relating to availability during Reading Festival and considers that these should be resolved. It also appears that the access lane to the site, Cows Lane, lies within flood

zone 3. Therefore, the site may possibly be inaccessible at certain times of the year. WBC however agrees that the site is suitable for transit provision subject to these issues being resolved.

The Gypsy and Traveller Provision Background document sets out minimum size thresholds for five pitch transit sites and five pitch permanent sites. The identified sizes are 0.15ha and 0.34ha respectively. It is noted that the Cow Lane/Richfield Avenue site has an area of 0.73 ha and therefore could, in purely capacity terms, accommodate five transit pitches and five permanent pitches with additional space leftover. WBC expects RBC to consider whether the site is appropriate for a mix of transit and permanent provision which could help towards meeting RBC's identified need for permanent pitches within Reading borough itself.

Permanent sites position

RBC has undertaken work to assess the suitability of sites for Gypsy and Traveller use. No sites have been promoted for Gypsy and Traveller use within Reading. However, RBC has written to all owners of those sites which have been assessed as being potentially suitable for alternative uses, whether there is any scope for the provision of pitches on those sites as part of a mixed use scheme. No suggestions were received.

RBC has also assessed all of its own land over 0.15 ha that was not occupied by in use buildings or covered by designated open space or allotments. Of these 80 sites 1 has been identified as being suitable to accommodate a 5 pitch transit site as discussed above. No further sites have been identified as suitable for accommodating permanent pitches or plots. Therefore, RBC consider that they cannot meet their need within their own area.

RBC is inviting comments on the following question, to which WBC's response is provided below:

2. Do you agree that there are no other potentially suitable and available sites within Reading Borough?

WBC notes RBC's position that it does not consider that the identified need for 10-17 permanent pitches for Gypsies and Travellers can be met within its administrative boundaries, nor the need for 2 Travelling Showpeople plots.

WBC acknowledges that a concerted effort has been made to invite submissions of privately owned land for Gypsy and Traveller use through the various stages of consultation on the Local Plan to date and the preceding call for sites exercises. It is noted that there has been no interest or any site submissions as a result of this effort. This is not unusual for planning consultations to be unsuccessful in engaging with the Gypsy and Traveller community. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) are clear that availability is a fundamental part of the consideration as to whether sites are considered developable (sites to come forward in the first 5 years) and deliverable (those likely

to come forward in 6-10 or 11-15 years). WBC accepts that to allocate private land for Gypsy and Traveller use without clear landowner support for that use would be contrary to national policy and guidance. Allocating sites without a clear position on their deliverability would not lead to a sound plan. WBC therefore accepts that it is unlikely there are suitable and available private sites within Reading Borough.

With regard to council owned land, RBC have identified 80 potential sites. It is noted that site 44 – Land at Lowfield Road is identified as being an existing mobile home site and would be suitable for Gypsy and Travellers pitches in principle. However there are availability concerns given the site benefits from planning permission for 28 temporary housing units for homeless families; a permission which runs until 20th July 2021. WBC would welcome clarification as to whether consideration has been given to allocating the site to come forward later in the plan period when the temporary permission has expired and the site restored – presuming there is no longer a need for the temporary accommodation once the permission lapses. Given the site's suitability notwithstanding the availability issues, WBC would encourage consideration being given to allocating this site to help meet the identified need for permanent pitches.

Additionally, site 49 – Alice Burrows Home, Dwyer Road is also a site that has been identified as being potentially suitable other than issues relating to availability. It is noted that this is previously developed land (PDL) that once accommodated a care home. WBC would welcome a greater understanding of why the site is identified as being 'required for residential / residential care' and considers that a residential Gypsy and Traveller site could be acceptable in this location given its contained nature and its PDL status.

Though WBC has not undertaken a detailed evaluation of all of the identified council sites, in addition to the two sites mentioned above, it is generally noted that there are other sites within the list which RBC have considered to be potentially suitable for Gypsy and Traveller use but that this is currently inhibited by the sites being required for alternative uses. WBC expects RBC to undertake a fuller assessment of whether these alternative uses could be relocated to allow the sites to be used for permanent pitches to meet the borough's own need in full.

WBC would additionally welcome understanding of whether RBC has positively reviewed options for the purchase of new land to provide pitches. Whilst accepting existing landownership has been reviewed, the option remains open for the council to purchase additional land on which to make delivery and WBC would expect this option to be explored.

Conclusion

In conclusion, WBC does not agree that current evidence shows there are no suitable and available sites within Reading Borough.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and

subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None anticipated

Cross-Council Implications

Decisions in Reading Borough on the location of sites for residential and other types of development could affect how the authority needs to resolve impacts on services such as transport, education, etc. within the borough.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Director of Corporate Services	No comment received
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Monitoring Officer	No comment received
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Leader of the Council	No comment received
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List of Background Papers

Information published by Reading Borough Council relating to the consultation – see www.reading.gov.uk/gypsy-traveller-provision-consultation .

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