Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Project

Site Search Exercise – Planning/Availability Assessment

1. Introduction

A site search exercise has been undertaken with the aim of identifying a 'preferred site' considered to be suitable and available for the development of a permanent (as in residential) Gypsy and Traveller site.

2. Search exercise

All sites were considered against three sets of criteria:

1. Site Availability
- Only council owned land was considered. This was to ensure realistic project delivery.
- Sites were also assessed in availability terms to determine the likelihood of development being able to commence within the next two years (by May 2010). Any potential sites must therefore be free from leasehold/tenancy constraints, legal constraints and also free from a clear commitment to alternative forms of development.

2. Site Size

A minimum site size was set of 0.35ha to capture as many sites as possible within the search. This was considered the minimum site size required to accommodate a reasonable number of residential pitches plus basic site facilities. In reality, a larger site area is likely to be required to accommodate appropriate landscaping and screening measures as part of any development.

Government guidance on the size of sites[1] states that 'there is no one ideal size of site or number of pitches although experience of site managers and residents alike suggest that a maximum of 15 pitches is conducive to providing a comfortable environment which is easy to manage'. However, the guidance also accepts that where a larger site is unavoidable then steps should be taken to create small 'closes' within the site for extended families.

3. Planning Considerations

A: Overall Approach:

A robust and comprehensive site search was conducted across the City area including both 'urban sites' (those falling within the defined built-up area of the City) and those on the edge of the City referred to as 'urban fringe sites'.

In terms of planning considerations/constraints tested, the site search adopts a 'sequential approach'.

In general terms, sites which fall within the city's defined 'built-up area boundary' have an 'in principle' acceptance for development (although any development proposal will still have to meet specific policy 'tests' across a range of land use issues and criteria). Sites falling outside of the built-up area boundary will generally be much more sensitive in terms

[1] CLG: Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Good Practice Guide, CLG, May 2008

of environmental/landscape constraints and much more difficult to justify for certain forms of development. This is especially the case for Brighton and Hove which is tightly constrained by the current Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation and the proposed boundaries for the future South Downs National Park. In addition to these nationally important designations there are local areas designated ‘urban fringe’ and/or ‘countryside’ on the edges of the city where development is generally resisted other than that designed to reflect its countryside location and where environmental improvements can be secured.

Following from this, the first ‘preference’ for suitable sites would ideally be any potential sites which fall within the urban area itself followed by any suitable sites on the urban fringe and lastly (where there were no other suitable options) a consideration of sites falling within designated AONB/National Park areas.

B: Specific Criteria/Considerations:

Site search criteria were drawn from the adopted local plan policy HO17 ‘Sites for Gypsies and Travellers’ and the emerging Core Strategy (Revised Preferred Options) policy CP14 ‘Provision for Gypsies and Travellers’; the latter of which reflects the most recent government guidance as set out in Circular 1/2006 ‘Planning for Gypsies and Traveller Caravan Sites’.

3. Results

a. Search within the Urban Area

No suitable sites were identified within the existing built-up area. Many were considered ‘not available’ either in terms of leasehold/tenancy/legal constraints or ‘not available’ because there is a clear corporate commitment to achieving alternative forms of development. Several sites were considered ‘not suitable’ (not suitable for residential development generally or the site was too small or of too difficult a configuration). These results are not surprising given that the city is tightly constrained, already very densely developed and generally lacks development opportunities. Many of the urban sites identified by the search represent significant regeneration opportunities for the city where proposals are already well advanced either in terms of local plan designations and/or involving active negotiations with development interests.

b. Search within Urban Fringe

All urban fringe sites considered in the search have been treated initially in terms of a ‘hierarchy’ of landscape/environmental designations. Those designated AONB[2] or Proposed National Park would not be favoured if there were alternative potentially suitable sites with local designations such as NC5/NC6 Urban Fringe/Countryside.

From this site search one urban fringe site was identified as suitable for proposal as a “preferred site” for the development of a permanent Gypsy/Traveller site:

- **Former BMX Track, Wilson Avenue**

The site falls within the urban fringe and is designated NC5/NC6 (Urban fringe/Countryside) in the local plan. The site is suitable for the development of a

[2] Unless formally allocated for development in the adopted local plan.

permanent Gypsy/Traveller site with good road access and accessibility to local services. Early investigative work is required to assess any risks of contamination.
Would require a ‘departure’ application approach if selected as contrary to NC5/6 policies in the adopted local plan. Any such application would be subject to call-in by Secretary of State. This would require a robust case to be made based on ‘need’ (immediate unmet need for permanent gypsy/traveller accommodation and the specific nature of need in terms of site requirements) and a ‘lack of alternative sites’.

c. Conclusion

The ‘preferred site’ for the development of a permanent gypsy/traveller site is the former BMX Track site, Wilson Avenue.

Preferred Site	U or UF	Summary of site assessment
Former BMX Track, Wilson Avenue.	Urban Fringe	• Existing good road links • Good accessibility to local services. • Site access from Wilson Avenue. • Used previously as tolerated gypsy/traveller site. • Requires further investigation for potential contamination issues. • Sufficient scope to redevelop existing emergency site and BMX site to provide large site and required facilities. • Further screening required. • Landscape assessment required. • Any redevelopment would need to be sensitive to adjacent SNCI, proximity of Proposed National Park land and downland character. • Contrary to NC5/NC6 – would require ‘departure’ application approach.

May 2008.