

Sunderland

Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showperson

Accommodation Assessment 2017

Addendum

Sunderland City Council

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- 1.1 In June 2017, arc⁴ published a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment for Sunderland City Council. The GTAA presented an evidence base to inform the development of planning policies relating to Gypsy, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.
- 1.2 The assessment identified a need for 33 Travelling Showpeople plots over the Plan Period, in order to accommodate the needs of the city's Travelling Showpeople community. With regards Gypsies and Travellers the 2017 GTAA found no evidence of need for permanent pitches in Sunderland City over the Plan Period (to 2033). However, it did indicate a need for some form of stop-over provision to meet the needs of unauthorised encampment activity and recommended that a stop-over site of 5 pitches (to accommodate 10 caravans) be developed.
- 1.3 Since the GTAA was published, the Council have actively sought to identify appropriate sites for stop-over pitches. As part of the Draft Core Strategy and Development Plan 2017 consultation process three sites were considered appropriate for 'stop over' provision and were consulted upon. There was an extensive amount of opposition to all three of the identified sites from the general public and businesses and additional information brought to light on how the sites are currently used and the surrounding land uses operate.
 - 1.11 As part of the council's duty to cooperate meetings with its neighbouring authorities, the Council have had discussions with neighbouring County Durham regarding how they meet stop-over needs. Following this it was considered that due to the small number of encampments the city encounters and the nature of the encampments, only having a small number of caravans on them, then a tolerated unauthorised encampment procedure might prove more effective in enabling transit, rather than a dedicated stop-over site. This is the procedure Durham has in place and they encounter an average of 224 unauthorised encampments a year. Officers from Durham also explained that from their experience it is unlikely that a site so small in size in Sunderland would be used.
 - 1.12 Other Councils¹ around the Country are also considering alternatives to transit/stop-over provision which provide appropriate and temporary locations to facilitate travelling.
 - 1.13 Following the consultation the Council have also had further discussions with the Police, the Council's security team and Street Scene service who deal with unauthorised encampments when they visit the city. They have indicated that allocating a site will not, from their experience, help address the need and if an unauthorised encampment was to take place within the city and notice was given for them to leave and move to the authorised site, they would most likely leave the city rather than travel to the authorised site.

¹ This includes South Lakeland who are seeking to ensure appropriate stopover (or tolerated stopover) provision as opposed to a transit site. See https://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/media/5037/dm-dpd-gypsies-and-travellers-topic-paper_february-2018.pdf

- 1.14 As such, it is considered that the most appropriate approach to meeting the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers within the city is to have an 'acceptance policy' in place for unauthorised encampments. This acceptance approach to encampments would allow Gypsies and Travellers to reside within the city for an agreed number of days providing the location is suitable and a code of conduct is followed (There will be instances where the location of unauthorised encampments will not normally be accepted by the council. In these instances the travellers will be asked to leave the site and an alternative safe location offered). Due to the small number of encampments the city experiences, it is considered that this approach is proportionate to the needs.
- 1.15 The City Council adopted an 'Unauthorised Encampment Policy', following Cabinet approval in July 2008. As part of this policy guidance is set out for dealing with unauthorised encampments, which are considered on a case by case basis and 'acceptance' was the approach taken when unauthorised encampments were in suitable locations. However, to date this approach has not been implemented to its full extent.
- 1.16 As such, it is suggested that the Unauthorised Encampment Policy is revised/updated, to ensure that procedures are set out with regards managing conflict between the gypsies and travellers and the settled community. The policy should also ensure management and cross-section meetings are in place to allow effective communication.
- 1.17 It is also recommended that the number of unauthorised encampments be monitored and kept under review, along with how well the acceptance policy is working. This aspect of the Local Plan should be reviewed if evidence indicates the acceptance policy is not effective or that a stop-over site may be more appropriate.