Gypsy and Travellers' Accommodation

Background

There has been a travelling community in Herefordshire for the last 500 years. Travellers live in different ways, including permanently 'on the road', in caravans or mobile homes, or in settled accommodation, for part or all of the year. The term Travellers is used to include Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

Nationally, Travellers can face inequalities in terms of access to a range of services, and this can affect their life outcomes. Statistics about the Herefordshire Traveller population demonstrate that in general terms this is no exception in Herefordshire. Ensuring the provision of good quality and a sufficient supply of accommodation for Gypsy and Travellers is key to helping to address these inequalities.

The following sets out how gypsy and traveller accommodation issues are addressed through the County Plan and the Local Plan's new vision and objectives.

Herefordshire County Plan

A key social aim of Herefordshire's adopted County Plan (2020-2024) identifies the need to address the inequalities which result in some children and young people being at a disadvantage by delivering good learning facilities, great job opportunities and homes that young people can afford to buy or rent.

Local Plan Draft Vision

The Local Plan 2021-2041 has a socially themed draft vision which states:

'By 2041, Herefordshire will be a place where planning has helped to create an environment where all of its residents have an exceptional quality of life and are able to live and travel in a more sustainable way.'

Planning policies that provide for the needs of the travelling community will be key contribution to realising this vision.

Local Plan Draft Objectives

Providing accommodation in appropriate locations for needs of Gypsies and Travellers come under two of the social objectives of the Local Plan draft objectives:

- To ensure that all residents have easy access to an appropriate range of nearby services, with community hubs thriving in market town and rural settings, thereby reducing the need to travel and enhancing quality of life;
- To provide a range of housing and tenure types to meet local needs, including affordability and specialist requirements. To provide diverse opportunities for home ownership for all.

National Guidance

Government guidance requires Local Planning Authorities to increase the number of Traveller sites in appropriate locations with planning permission, and to enable provision of suitable accommodation from which travellers can access education, health, and welfare and employment infrastructure.

The Government's planning policies and requirements for Gypsy and Traveller sites are set out in the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS), which must be taken into consideration in preparing Local Plans and taking planning decisions. Local Authorities are required to have an evidence base for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs, to set local targets for the number of pitches and plots to be developed.

The Equality Act 2010 recognises Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers as being distinct ethnic groups, and protects them from discrimination. There is a statutory duty on public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in the course of developing policies and delivering services.

Local Considerations

In Herefordshire, there are a number of small privately owned traveller sites and larger sites that are managed by Herefordshire Council. Travelling Showpeople occupy plots on yards. As well as space for living quarters, due to work, Travelling Showpeople often require additional space in order to store and maintain large equipment.

It is important to ensure that there is an adequate supply of pitches and plots for Travellers on authorised sites in the county. Without a permanent site, it is difficult for Traveller families to access basic health care, support and education services, leading to poor life outcomes.

The Local Plan update will identify the following to meet the requirement over the plan period:

- Residential pitches and sites for Travellers.
- Residential plots and yards for Travelling Showpeople
- Temporary stopping places where travellers who are either passing through the County or without a permanent base can reside for a specified temporary period. These are sometimes referred to as Negotiated Stopping Places

A 'call' for all of these types of sites will be carried out as part of this consultation exercise. However, it is recognised that there is a lack of availability of sites and in the past, call for sites processes have returned a small number of sites for assessment. This means identifying a supply of suitable sites to meet the requirement can be challenging. Therefore, the council needs to consider other options for finding sites, and this could include identifying some pitches or plots within a strategic urban extension or large development.

There is an existing shortage of yards and plots for Travelling Showpeople. The Local Plan update needs to address how a more flexible approach to identifying sites for Travelling Showpeople can be reached. This could include considering land that is suitable for employment to be used for this purpose, given the residential and work mix that is characteristic of such sites.

Unauthorised encampments, for example on roadsides or in car parks, can lead to tension between Travellers and settled communities and are often unsuitable places for Traveller families to stay without access to basic facilities. Currently there is no temporary stopping place or transit site in the county where Travellers can go in these situations, although one was identified in the Travellers Sites Development Plan Document 2019. An additional approach to this is to identify pieces of unused land on an ongoing basis where Travellers on authorised encampments can be directed to for stay for an agreed length of time with the agreement of the landowner. Temporary sanitation and rubbish disposal faculties are provided on the site.

Any updated policy should continue to recognise the shortage of available sites for Travellers. It should continue to limit such development outside settlements, whilst being flexible enough to respond to any shortage of supply. However, sites should still be located in reasonable distance of services and facilities.

Evidence Base

- Local planning authorities are required to make their own assessment of accommodation need for the purposes of planning. A new Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) has been commissioned, and should be available imminently. This assessment will provide the council with information about the current and future accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople.

Existing policy

Policy H4 of the adopted Core Strategy sets the requirement to prepare a Travellers Sites Development Plan Document (DPD) and sets out criteria for considering sites for Travellers in the interim and also for non-allocated sites. The Travellers' Sites DPD was adopted in 2019 and therefore policy H4 has broadly become out of date. Policy RA3 sets out what types of development may be permissible in rural locations outside settlements. This includes where the proposal includes a site providing the needs of Gypsies or other Travellers in accordance with policy H4.

The Travellers Sites Development Plan Document (DPD) addresses the provision of the three different types of Traveller accommodation as mentioned above. It allocates sites to meet a five year requirement for residential pitches and a temporary stopping place. However, no sites for Travelling Showpeople were identified. The DPD also includes policies setting out criteria in relation to the consideration of Traveller pitches and Travelling Showpeople plots.

Neighbourhood Planning

The provision of Traveller accommodation requirements and site provision is considered as a county wide issue. Therefore, there is no requirement for Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) to address this issue individually.

Gypsy and Travellers Policy Options

It is likely that the emerging GTAA will identify a requirement for additional pitches and plots, and therefore all of the options below reflect this. Whilst we could consider updating the DPD separately instead of addressing the accommodation requirements in the Local Plan, this is not being suggested as an option, as this would cause too much of a delay in addressing the accommodation requirements.

Some of the sites identified in the Travellers Sites DPD have either been developed, or are currently being developed. The Local Plan update will need to review the status of the remaining sites to determine whether these are likely to come forward in the plan period.

Option GT1- 'Save' the existing policies and allocated undeveloped sites in the DPD

Allocate further sites and yards in the Local Plan, to meet the demand identified in the revised GTAA. Amend the Local Plan policy to reflect this. Consider using an approach of negotiated stopping places for temporary stays.

Option GT2- Review policies of the DPD and H4 to combine into a single policy in the Local Plan

Carry over allocated sites from the DPD into the Local Plan update. Allocate additional sites and yards, to meet the demand identified in the forthcoming revised GTAA. Consider using an approach of negotiated stopping places for temporary stays.

An additional Option GT3 could work with both Option GT1 and Option GT2:

Option GT3 Provide pitches or plots within strategic urban extensions/ strategic development to be identified in the Local Plan, to meet the demand in the forthcoming revised GTAA.

Consideration could be given that any strategic allocations within the Local Plan should also include pitches and plots for Travellers.