

Potential Gypsy and Traveller Sites

Dover District Council

Final Report

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Government planning policy on the statutory duties of local authorities to provide access to accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers are detailed in the Department of Government and Local Authorities (now the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government) 'Planning Policy for Traveller Sites' published in August 2015.
- 1.2 In the first instance this places an obligation on local authorities to undertake an evidence-based analysis of the need within its district, and thereafter set out a clear strategy through its Local Plan in respect of the appropriate mechanisms it intends to implement to meet any such identified housing need. This normally involves stipulating a specific target number of permanent and transit pitches that it believes it will require over a 5- year period as well as identifying possible locations and/or specific sites for such pitches.
- 1.3 Dover District Council had previously commissioned arc4 to prepare a comprehensive Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) which was published in September 2018. This established a cultural need for 30 pitches stretched over the full Local Plan period (2014 to 2037) and a specific need for 18 pitches from households meeting the qualifying criteria set out in the 'Planning Policy for Traveller Sites' document. The plan period has been revised to cover the period 2020 to 2040 (20 years) an applying annual needs figures results in a cultural need for 26 pitches and a PPTS need for 16 pitches. This overall reduction in need also takes account of new pitch supply at Hay Lane (at least 3 additional pitches).
- 1.4 Further fieldwork had identified several potential opportunities for either expanding existing sites or developing new opportunities. The purpose of this report is to advise the council of the suitability of these potential sites to meet the perceived need using the MHCLG's advice on the characteristics of a sustainable Gypsy and Travellers site with specific reference to the following:
 - Promote peaceful and integrated co-existence between the site and the local community;
 - Provide a settled base that reduces both the need for long distance travelling and possible environmental damage caused by unauthorised encampment;
 - Provide for proper consideration of the effect of local environmental quality (such as noise and air quality) on the health and well-being of any travellers that may locate there or on others as a result of new development;
 - Avoid placing undue pressure on local infrastructure and services;
 - Do not locate sites in areas of high- risk flooding, including functional floodplains, given the particular vulnerability of caravans; and
 - Reflect the extent to which traditional lifestyles (whereby some travellers live and work from the same location thereby omitting many travel to work journeys) can contribute to sustainability.

2. Location A – Land to the rear of the Meadows, Alkham Valley Road, Alkham, CT15 7EW

- 2.1 Situated just under 5 miles to the north-west of Dover, this is a private site that already has 8 pitches for Gypsies and Travellers currently occupied. The site is less than one mile from Alkham village, and is well positioned off the highway that connects to Folkestone via the A259 to the west and Dover via the A256 to the east. The site is set back slightly from the highway with an access through an electronic gate. The site is well screened with high perimeter fencing and is not overlooked by any neighbouring properties. Presently, there are 8 static mobile homes positioned within the site which roughly take up approximately 30% of the site's footprint. The owner, who also lives in one of the static homes, has been operating the site as a permanent Gypsy and Traveller development since 2008, and currently 14 adults and 5 children live in the development. The residents appear well integrated into the local community. The site has all services connected, and has capacity to expand with a further 10 pitches (see Appendix A) with the advantage of providing significant amount of amenity play space for children. The pitches are served from a gravel vehicular access and there is scope to enable emergency vehicles to access and egress the site directly onto the existing highway.
- 2.2 The site is not within a Flood Zone although the village itself did suffer from excessive flooding in 2014 due to an underground spring 'Drellingore Nailbourne' overflowing the high-water table and into the village centre.
- 2.3 Alkham has very few community facilities itself, with the nearest dental practice 'Pennypot Dental Practice' located off the Canterbury Road on the outskirts of Folkestone, whilst the closest doctor is on the High Street, Dover. Notwithstanding that neither facility is within a reasonable walking distance, both practices are accessible by public transport and private car. Similarly, with both primary and secondary schools, there are no facilities within the immediate locality but over 20 schools within 4 miles of the site, again either towards Folkestone or Dover.
- 2.4 This site is in effect a rural setting and therefore Policy C of the Planning Policy Act needs to be considered in so far as that the scale of the site does not dominate the nearest settled community. Clearly an expansion of the site to 18 pitches from 8 has the potential of doubling the occupancy by a further 20 travellers. However, the population of the wider immediate area is around 700 people and allowing planning consent for this development would only increase the net population by 3%. Balanced with this is that the site has been well established in the community for over 10 years, it is well managed and maintained, with excellent perimeter screening, and the capacity to expand without overdeveloping the site whilst still providing a high level of amenity provision. Consideration should be seriously given to allowing the owner/resident to expand further along the principle of the attached scheme layout (Appendix A).

3. Location B – Land at Hay Hill, Ham, Eastry, CT13 0ED

- 3.1 This is an established settlement of 6 separately owned and managed small sites let out as serviced pitches to Gypsies and Travellers. The site is located equal distance between Ham and Eastry, and is located off a country lane some 1 mile from the village centre and the A256 Sandwich to Dover Road.
- 3.2 Each site consists of 4-8 pitches and vary in terms of the standard of pitch space offered. However, they are reasonably set back from the road so present no problem with safe access and egress for vehicles and pedestrians alike. The road is quiet which would make it easier for vehicles pulling static vans or campervans to enter. There does appear to be a number of spaces vacant as well as potential to intensify the number of serviced pitches by expansion. Certainly, from my inspection there appeared to be approximately 6 void pitches but with potential to increase existing sites by perhaps a further 4-6 spaces.
- 3.3 The site is close to local amenities and social facilities, much of which is located at Eastry including a primary school whilst medical facilities are accessible in nearby Sandwich. The population of Eastry and the surrounding area was registered at over 5,000 people in the most recent Census of 2011 which suggests that the expansion of the current Gypsy and Traveller site by 10 families as a maximum would have very minimal impact on local services. The positive consideration here is that the site is already an established development and consequently there pre-exists a degree of integration and acceptance by the wider community. Once again referencing back to Policy C of the Planning Policy Act of ‘any development not dominating the nearest community’, the intensification of these plots within the existing footprint will be in accordance with that specific policy. Balanced against that is that the plots are managed on a very commercial basis and whilst they are designed with their own gates which provide a level of privacy and security, there is very little enclosed amenity provision for children.
- 3.4 There is no doubt that an intensification of these sites would assist the council in achieving their target for new pitches over the lifetime of the Local Plan, however there would need to be an understanding and acceptance by the owners that to progress any strategy for increasing the number of plots that some thought must be given to integrating the design across all plot owners. Obviously, any such proposal would need to comply with planning and perhaps some discussion would need to be held with the owners of the potential of a consolidated planning application by all the owners rather than on a piecemeal basis.

4. Location C – Land to the North of Snowdown Caravan Site, Aylesham, CT15 4LS

- 4.1 This site is located roughly one mile south-east of Aylesham village and is conveniently accessed from the A2 Road/B2046 Adisham Road. The highway leading to the site is quite a steep incline with the site currently open land situated to the rear of a substantial detached property. Natural access would be through the existing Snowdown Caravan Park which appears to have around 12 static mobile homes. If this is not feasible then safe access and egress to the site for vehicles will be a challenge although not impossible depending on land ownership considerations. Certainly, early dialogue with Dover Council Highways Department would be recommended.
- 4.2 In terms of location, the site as mentioned above does have an existing caravan development which establishes the principle of a Gypsy and Traveller conurbation in this locality. The access highway is sufficient to accommodate cars with trailers or caravans, and the location of the site is semi-rural in context with little impact on any neighbouring houses. The eastern boundary of the site is a railway line and any development benefits from the potential of being a well-designed scheme with sufficient space for two vehicle pitches, amenity provision for children, and turning heads for emergency vehicles.
- 4.3 The local village is in close proximity and has sufficient schools, health care facilities and shops to provide the appropriate social infrastructure for a community to thrive. Bellway Homes are close to completing the latest phase of their new executive estate at Dorman Avenue North in the village, and therefore any provision of Gypsies and Travellers would be construed as having minimal impact on existing local services given that planning consent was given to Bellway Homes for a scheme of over 500 new homes.
- 4.4 The site is not within a flood zone nor is it in close proximity to any hazardous waste or businesses that would impact on the health of the residents. It is rural and any development must be quite low density not to be a detriment to the established rural tranquillity of the area. The issue is really one about forming an access to the site, either new or through the existing caravan park. If this can be agreed with the owners and highways engineers then certainly this site has potential for Gypsies and Travellers.

5. Location D – Land South of Ash Road, Sandwich, CT13 9JA

- 5.1 This site is privately owned and is presently open fields accessed off Ash Road which is the main highway leading from the village of Sandwich to the A256 that leads onto Dover. The access to the site is already established and clearly visible off a fairly straight highway and is 400m from the A256 roundabout. There would be no problem manoeuvring cars with trailers or caravans along this highway although improvements would need to be undertaken to the access to enable substantive traffic. Certainly, early discussions with Highways Engineers would be warranted especially in respect of ensuring safe egress from the site for vehicles with trailers. (See Appendix A).
- 5.2 The site is perhaps one mile from Ash Village which has all the healthcare and lifestyle facilities required, and is not near any residential properties that may cause community discord. It is neither in a flood plain nor situated close to any hazardous waste which would impact on the health of the residents.
- 5.3 One of the main drawbacks from the site is the lack of serviced utilities given its rural setting. The necessity to install such services coupled with the appropriate highway improvements may impact on the viability of any development unless the consent was for a significant number of pitches which is perhaps not warranted by the GTAA. On the plus side the development of the site would not impact on the local community, and is well positioned for the residents to access local services.

6. Location E – Land at Romany Acres, Belsey Lane, Ewell Minnis, CT15 7DY

- 6.1 This site is set within a rural setting and is currently open fields behind an existing caravan site. Access to the site is off country lanes that lead to Alkham Valley Road. There are a number of substantial properties within the immediate locality so connecting services to the site would not be an issue however the tightness of the access lanes may present problems for the local community if there was a substantive number of cars/trailers or caravan/motor homes accessing the site on a regular basis.
- 6.2 Local medical services and shops are either located nearer to Dover or Folkestone, and the site is quite remote for safe access to local buses etc.
- 6.3 The advantage of this site is that it is an established Romany Caravan Park however any expansion of it would certainly impact on the local infrastructure due to its rural setting. It is in the same locality as Location A but the access is not as good, the expansion of the site is not as easy, and the location is not as convenient.

7. Summary

- 7.1 In considering the individual aspects of each site in the context of the MHCLG's sustainability checklist, it is reasonable to state that all the sites score quite well (see below). The issue for many rural or semi-rural sites is rather the extent to which any development can be integrated into the existing community with minimal impact on local services and infrastructure. Clearly, those sites which are either an intensification or extension of existing provision will be much easier to smooth through the planning process given their current status and established position. Here we have 3 sites that meet that criteria of which sites A and B, are better positioned for access for vehicles and also ease for the actual residents to access local facilities.
- 7.2 Given that the objective of the council is to provide a supply of pitches over an initial 5-year plan and several years thereafter, it would seem prudent to engage with existing providers to see if successful planning applications can be brought forward to meet this supply requirement. In this respect, we can see from the assessment table below that Site A fully meets the criteria, and Site B also with a reservation regarding integrating amenity provision. Each of the other site(s) has an issue that needs to be addressed regarding access and utility services, which may impact on their deliverability. Regardless, sites A and B have the potential of delivering the 20 pitches required by the council.

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E
Peaceful Coexistence	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Settled Base	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Environmental Quality	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Avoid pressure on local services	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Avoid flood risk areas	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lifestyle	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

Note: This assessment is to some degree a subjective interpretation of the potential impact the the immediate environment may have on residents. Where the yes is yellow it reflects that in the main the site meets the criteria but with some reservations.

Appendix A: Further Site Information

Location A – Land to the rear of the Meadows, Alkham Valley Road, Alkham, CT15 7E

Photographs of site



south-east towards site entrance



south-east towards Alkham village



north-west view of static homes

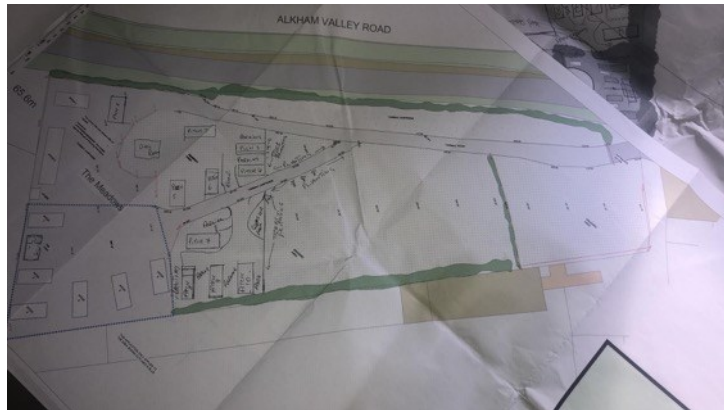


north east view of existing static homes



south-east view of the amenity provision

Site layout and potential pitches



Location B – Land at Hay Hill, Ham, Eastry, CT13 0ED

Photographs of site



North approach to the current sites



entrance to plot 1



Existing static homes on plot 3 (Strawberry Place) as well as vacant pitches on the same plot



Location C – Land to the North of Snowdown Caravan Site, Aylesham, CT15 4LS

Photographs of site



entrance to the existing caravan site



view west to east of the existing site



west to east view of the path of the southern boundary with the caravan site

Location D – Land South of Ash Road, Sandwich, CT13 9JA

Photographs of site



entrance to the site looking northwards



site access shared with adjoining landowner



access from Ash Road



looking south on Ash Road from site access



Location E – Land at Romany Acres, Belsey Lane, Ewell Minnis, CT15 7DY

Photographs of site



view of the access to the site off Belsey Lane



Site to the east off Belsey lane



existing entrance to Romany Caravan