

Darlington Borough Council Hearing Statement

May 2021

Matter 6 - Gypsy and traveller accommodation

Sites for additional gypsy and traveller accommodation (policy H9)

Q6.1. To be consistent with national policy and to ensure the Plan is effective in helping to meet the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers, should policy H9 be modified to allocate a specific site or sites, such as an extension to the Rowan West site?

No, a planning application for the Rowan/Rowan East Complex is at an advanced stage of preparation with an additional 25 pitches is to be submitted by the Council imminently which has the capacity to provide for the accommodation need of the Gypsy and travellers community for the next decade. Feasibility emerged in the last year by consulting with Homes England in relation to available funding in the new Affordable Housing Programme 2021-2026. (AHP)

Q6.2. Is there compelling evidence that windfall sites will continue to be a reliable source of supply of additional pitches for gypsies and travellers throughout the Plan period and, if so, is the assumption of an annual average of 4 additional pitches per year justified?

Yes, the Council has compelling evidence that windfall sites can be a reliable source of additional pitches for the accommodation needs for Gypsy and Travellers families in the borough. Evidence has been collected between 2002 and 2020 that has identified a windfall supply of 75 pitches during this period as provided in the Council's response to PQ38 (DBC1). This equates to an average annual provision of 4.16 pitches per year.

Due to the provision of an extension to the Rowan/Rowan East Complex off Neasham Road by the Council which will shortly be submitted as a Planning Application for 25 pitches a windfall quota of 4 pitches per year will be secured for at least 6 years from 2022. Further windfalls can be expected from private sites in suitable locations within the Borough over the rest of the plan period until 2036.

Q6.3. Where is the need for 6-8 plots for travelling showpeople expected to be met?

The needs for travelling showpeople can be met with existing pitches at Honeypot Lane Gypsy and Travellers site. Identified on site transit site pitches which have been not used or underused could be designated in future for the purpose of travelling show people with agreement of landlord and site management of the Honeypot Lane Site.

Q6.4. Are the criteria that proposals for new sites to provide accommodation for gypsies and travellers or travelling showpeople are expected to meet justified and consistent with national policy¹?

Yes – the criteria for new sites being provided are justified and in line with national policy such as the Planning Policy for Travellers Sites (DCLG 2015).

The Council as a Local Planning Authority have ensured via determination of planning applications that travellers sites have been delivered in a sustainable economically, socially and environmentally sound manner as outlined in PPTS paragraph 13. Policy H 9 will enable decisions to be made that ensure future provision meets the criteria set out in the PPTS.

The Council is confident that we adhere to the national policy to limit new traveller site development in the open countryside as outlines in PPTS paragraph 25. Rural sites would therefore be required to respect the scale and not dominate the open Countryside and do not place undue pressure on local infrastructure and nearby rural communities.

Policy H 9 as drafted will enable weighted decisions to be made in line with the considerations set out in PPTS paragraph 26.

¹ In particular PPTS paragraphs 13, 25 and 26.