



Site Allocations Development Plan Document

**Supplementary
Issues & Options Paper
November 2008**

**Frequently Asked
Questions on Gypsies
and Travellers**

Frequently Asked Questions – Gypsies and Travellers

We have prepared a list of frequently asked questions to help explain this subject and the Council's role more fully.

Part A: Gypsies and Travellers

Q1: Who are Gypsies and Travellers?

A: Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are defined as minority ethnic groups under the Race Relations Act (1976). There are a number of Gypsy and Traveller communities, each have different histories and traditions:

- Gypsies are Romany ethnic groups who have lived in Britain for around 600 years. Their ancestors originate from northern India.
- Irish Travellers are a nomadic group with a distinctive way of life who have been part of Irish and British society since ancient times.
- New Travellers are people of settled background who adopted a traveling lifestyle in the more recent past, although some are now in their third or fourth generation of travelling.

Q2: Do Gypsies and Travellers work?

A: Similar to the settled community, Gypsies and Travellers work in a range of occupations; for example as teachers, academics and health workers, while others work in the financial sector and in the sport, leisure and entertainment industries.

Traditionally, Gypsies and Travellers have also worked in a variety of trades such as landscape gardeners, agricultural workers, laying tarmac, motor trade workers, scrap metal dealers, tree fellers and so on.

Q3: Do Gypsies and Travellers pay tax?

A: The families currently resident in Dacorun do pay council tax and those families living on County Council owned sites pay rent to the County Council.

Q4: Why is most media coverage of Gypsies and Travellers negative?

A: There have been conflicts due to the establishment of unauthorised sites. If more authorised sites can be identified and provided then it should reduce the conflicts and lead to less negative coverage.

Questions for Gypsies and travellers

Q5: When are you going to ask us what we want?

A: Comments are welcome from all parts of the community, as part of the overall process explained in the Consultation Paper, "Site Allocations DPD: Supplementary Issues and Options Paper (November 2008)".

Q6: Why do people always think negatively of us?

A: There is no doubt that due to the shortage of authorised sites some Gypsies and Travellers have moved onto unauthorised sites. This has led to negative reactions from the settled community. If the Council can work together with Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community to identify sites for a relatively small number of additional pitches in Dacorun it should reduce such reactions in the future.

Part B: Gypsies and Travellers and their sites

Q7: What is a residential site?

A: Also referred to as permanent sites, these sites are either provided by local authorities or are owned by Gypsies and Travellers themselves. The sites are used as a long-term residence by Gypsies and Travellers. This is the type of site currently being considered by the Council. The residential sites are managed and have a number of amenities. This includes water supply, electricity, individual toilets and utility rooms.

Q8: What is a transit site?

A: Transit sites are authorised sites which are used for short stays by Gypsies and Travellers. The sites are provided on a permanent basis by local authorities and have basic amenities and services which include water supply, shared toilets, washing facilities/utility room, and waste disposal. All transit sites are managed and are subject to rent and council tax.

Q9: What exactly is a pitch?

A: A pitch is the space required to accommodate one household and their caravans, parking space and enough room for turning of vehicles. The average household size for Gypsies in the region is 1.7 caravans.

Q10: What is an unauthorised encampment?

A: Land that is owned by Gypsies and Travellers but does not have planning permission by the local authority for use as a residential or transit site.

In the past there have been a small number of such encampments in Dacorum. This Council has taken legal action to remove Gypsies and Travellers from such sites.

Part C: The need for more Gypsy and Traveller sites

Q11: There has been a lot of comment about providing more Gypsy and Traveller sites. How has this come about?

A: It is a Government requirement for councils to carry out an assessment of housing needs in their area. This now has to include assessments for the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. The Government advice in Circular 01/2006 says that councils such as Dacorum have to ensure that through their plan-making process, sites are identified for Gypsies and Travellers to meet any requirements which have been identified in this housing needs assessment.

Independent research published by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the East of England Regional Assembly found that the East of England needed 1,220 more caravan pitches for Gypsies and Travellers by 2011. The report also found that the shortage of sites had contributed to the problem of unauthorised caravan pitches.

Therefore local authorities have been asked to come up with solutions on how to meet this need. Options available include extending existing sites or identifying land for new sites.

Q12: Some people object to more sites in the borough. How can you justify providing more?

A: This Council has a responsibility to plan for housing needs for all members of the community. Gypsies and Travellers have accommodation needs as much as other sections of the community. The Government requires local councils to ensure that sites are identified to meet identified needs and if this Council does not take a reasonable approach it could have solutions imposed upon it.

As well as identifying Gypsy and Traveller accommodation, the Council must make provision for 17,000 additional homes between 2006 and 2031 in Dacorum. The level of additional pitches for Gypsies and Travellers will represent a very small percentage of the overall total.

Q13: What benefit to the (settled) community will new sites provide?

A: If sites can be identified through the planning process it will prevent the need for illegal encampments which often cause conflict with the settled community and can cost the Council money if legal action has to be taken.

It is better for all members of the community if sites can be identified by agreement following consultation in suitable locations. By taking a positive approach we can have greater control over the identification of sites. It also means that if illegal encampments occur in Dacorum the Council will be far more likely to be successful if it has to take action against those sites.

Q14: How many Gypsy and Travellers sites are there in Dacorum?

A: There are currently two sites in Dacorum both of which are owned and managed by the County Council :

- Long Marston - 6 pitches.
- Three Cherry Trees Lane, Hemel Hempstead – 30 pitches.

Q15: Why do we have to have more sites in Dacorum?

A: A need has been identified in South and West Herts for additional pitches and it is not unreasonable for Dacorum to accommodate a proportion of this. The Council together with a number of other Hertfordshire districts commissioned the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) at the University of Birmingham to carry out a needs assessment in south and west Hertfordshire. Their report, which was published in 2005, identified a need for 90 additional permanent pitches and 30 transit pitches in south and west Hertfordshire. It also found that up to 35 additional pitches may be needed to accommodate family formation from existing site residents over the next five years.

More information on the CURS report is available from the Council's website (www.dacorum.gov.uk).

The East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) has proposed that Dacorum should make provision for up to 15 additional pitches by 2011 with a growth rate of 3% thereafter. This would equate to 59 pitches in total in Dacorum between now and 2031. The Council has challenged the rate of growth as being too high. In early 2009 a Panel of Inspectors will recommend the policy Government should take.

Q16: Why are more sites needed when there has been no indication of additional demand?

A: More authorised sites are needed because a significant number of Gypsy and Travellers currently live on unauthorised sites across the country. Further needs stem from new household formation, which also occurs in the settled community.

Part D: Selecting potential locations in Dacorum

Q17: What is the Scott Wilson report and what were they commissioned to do?

A: The report stems from Circular 01/2006 “Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites”, which:

- states that local authorities must allocate sufficient sites for Gypsy and Travellers;
- sets out advice on the location and design of these sites; and
- emphasises that new provision should be in accordance with identified needs.

As the first step in identifying possible sites in south and west Hertfordshire, the Councils decided to appoint independent planning consultants (Scott Wilson) to undertake an initial assessment of possible sites. This was undertaken jointly with St Albans, Three Rivers, Watford and Hertsmere Councils and the County Council. The Scott Wilson report was the result. They were specifically asked to:

- develop criteria for site selection;
- identify broad areas and individual locations for potential site provision;
- appraise potential sites; and
- recommend preferred options.

Q18: What does the Scott Wilson report say?

A: The Scott Wilson report identifies 85 possible sites for Gypsies and Travellers in South and West Hertfordshire. It identifies 24 areas in Dacorum where new sites could possibly be located, and from this five sites have been given their highest scoring of 1. These sites are:

D1 Featherbed Lane, Hemel Hempstead
D3 Swing Gate Lane, Berkhamsted
D11 Icknield Road (south side), Tring
D15 Highwood (Holtsmere End Lane), Hemel Hempstead
D18 Bovingdon Airfield

Q19: Where can I see the Scott Wilson report?

A: You can download the Scott Wilson Report from the Council's website (www.dacorum.gov.uk) or, alternatively it can be viewed at the Civic Offices, and in the public libraries in Dacorum.

Q20: Why are all of the Dacorum sites identified in the Scott Wilson report on Green Belt land?

A: All of the borough's towns and larger villages are tightly surrounded by the Green Belt. There are just no suitable non-Green Belt sites available in Dacorum. Any potential sites are already allocated for housing development, employment use or public open space. In areas such as South West Hertfordshire it is almost inevitable that if some additional sites are to be found they will be in the Green Belt.

A substantial proportion of the dwelling provision in the future will also need to be accommodated within the Green Belt.

Q21: Are Gypsy and Traveller sites exempt from Green Belt policy?

A: No. Government policy does allow for exceptions to be made to Green Belt policy where there are very special circumstances that outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. The lack of suitable alternative sites to meet an identified need can be put forward as part of a case of very special circumstances.

Q22: Why can't a brownfield site be found?

A: Most brownfield sites in Dacorum have already been developed or are earmarked for future development. This Council has been very successful in encouraging brownfield sites to come forward for development and over the past five years nearly 100% of new housing in Dacorum has been built on brownfield land, exceeding the national target of 60%.

Q23: Who owns the sites specified in the Scott Wilson report?

A: They are virtually all privately-owned sites.

Q24: Where have the two additional sites not specified in the Scott Wilson report come from?

A: They have come forward as suggestions from members of the public and are located adjacent to Longbridge Close, Tring and adjacent to Bourne End Mills, Bourne End. The Council needs to assess whether they represent reasonable alternative locations to those already identified.

Part E: Developing and managing new sites

Q25: How will new sites be set-up and funded?

A: There are a number of options for this. Sites could be provided and funded by Gypsies and Travellers themselves. The County Council could provide a site and rent out pitches, as is currently the case in Dacorum (see Q14). Housing Associations are now also providing sites again for rent.

The Government provides grants for the establishment of new sites and the improvement/extension of existing sites.

Q26: Will the Council compulsory purchase land for this purpose?

A: Whilst the Council does have compulsory purchase powers to bring land forward to meet identified development needs, it has not needed to use them and almost certainly will not in the case of Gypsies and Travellers. If there were a need for an additional site in Dacorum the Council would seek to negotiate with the relevant landowner to ensure that it is made available.

Q27: If you can compulsory purchase land for gypsy provision why can't you do it for other members of the community?

A: The Council can. It just has not needed to. This is very much a last resort option.

Q28: Could you compulsorily purchase land to build a gypsy site having previously refused the landowner planning permission on Green Belt development grounds?

A: The Council could only compulsory purchase land when a site is identified in its Development Plan for development and the landowner refuses to release the land by negotiation. In allocating sites for development it is this Council's policy to ensure that the site will be made available and it will only allocate sites when it is confident that the landowner accepts the allocation of the site for development.

Part F: Potential Impacts of Sites

Q29: What consideration will you give to the local infrastructure?

A: It must be stressed that no decisions have yet been made on the exact number of sites and where they might be provided.

Consideration would always be given to access to services such as schools and doctors. However, it must be recognised that compared to 17,000 additional houses from 2006 to 2031, the potential level of additional pitches for Gypsies and Travellers is unlikely to place much strain on the local infrastructure.

In identifying possible sites the Government advises that “local planning authorities should first consider locations in or near existing settlements with access to local services e.g. shops, doctors and schools.”

Q30: Will schools be overwhelmed?

A: There are around 664 gypsy and traveller children currently in Hertfordshire schools, widely split across the areas with most having one, two or three children. There is no evidence to suggest any school will be overwhelmed.

Q31: What about the traffic impact?

A: In assessing any potential sites this Council will consider the impact of any additional traffic generated on the local highway network and will ensure that any access into and out of the site meets the requirements of the Highway Authority (the County Council).

Q32: Will neighbouring residents be compensated for any loss in housing value?

A: This is not a planning issue.

Q33: Are local taxes going to increase to fund additional police / schooling / rubbish etc?

A: No. Gypsies and Travellers pay council tax to help fund local services.

Part G: Size and design of new sites

Q34: Why shouldn't all Gypsies and Travellers be accommodated on one big site in the borough?

A: Advice from the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham (CURS) (see Q15) and from the Government (see Q35), suggests a normal maximum size of 15 pitches. This would equate to about 1 hectare of land (or a very large football pitch).

The advice is based on experience of sites around the country:

- Gypsies and Travellers are not a homogeneous group, and they reported to prefer to smaller rather than larger sites.
- There are fewer management issues on sites of this size.
- Smaller sites are easier to integrate into their surroundings.
- Smaller sites have little impact on local roads, schools and other infrastructure (see Qs 29, 30 and 31).

Q35: How would a new site be designed?

A: Any new sites should be designed to meet the good practice advice in the Department

of Communities and Local Government's "Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites – Good Practice Guide (May 2008)" and minimise the impact on its neighbours.

Part H: What happens next?

Q36: What will the next steps be?

A: After this consultation, the Council will need to consider responses with the aim of reducing the potential pool of locations being actively investigated. The locations finally short-listed will be selected on the basis of our interpretation of the Scott Wilson criteria, the ability to deliver sites, and the overall level of pitches needed. The latter will be confirmed through the review of the East of England (Regional) Plan by the East of England Regional Assembly (see Q15).



**Ver Meadow Gypsy Site,
Redbourn**