

DARTFORD LOCAL PLAN

**Inspector's Initial
Questions 19-23,
Gypsies and Travellers:
DBC Response (Paper D)
March 2022**

19. The GTAA indicated that the overall need in DBC over the period to 2035 is 70 pitches. The national Planning Policy for Traveller sites states at paragraph 9 that Local Planning Authorities should set pitch targets for gypsies and travellers. Why does the Local Plan not identify the pitch requirement for the full plan period and how will these needs be met?

- 1.1 The GTAA identifies that the overall need in DBC for those who meet the planning definition over the period to 2035 is 70 pitches. It should be noted that the GTAA was carried out in 2019 and there have been some changes since then which are outlined in the Meeting the Needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Report Sept 2021 (GAT-2).
- 1.2 As stated in paragraph 5.107 of the Submission Local Plan (page 152 of COR-1) and supported by information in paragraph 3.7 of the Meeting Needs Report (pages 7-8 of GAT-2), various planning permissions have been granted since the GTAA was carried out resulting in a net gain of 18 permanent pitches. N.B. the reference to a net gain of 11 pitches in the written text of paragraph 3.7 of GAT-2 is incorrect and should refer to 18. This reduces the need to 2035 to 52 pitches on the basis of the latest available information. Over the period to 2026, this reduces the need to 34 pitches (paragraph 5.107 on page 152 of COR-1).
- 1.3 There are a number of reasons why DBC has not set pitch targets for the whole of the plan period or so far has not been able to provide full details of how these needs will be met:
 - The nature of the existing sites from which need arises
 - The work that is being carried out on identifying capacity for new pitches/caravans within existing sites where need is arising
 - The fact that a search for sites has not identified any potential new sites
 - The monitoring framework and need to review needs for pitches

Nature of Existing Sites

- 1.4 Paragraph 1.13 of the GTAA (page 7 of GAT-1) makes clear that a number of sites are occupied by extended family groups and are not sub-divided into individual pitches. It states that it is likely that the accommodation needs of concealed or doubled-up adults and teenagers who will be in need of a pitch of their own in the next 5 years could be met through additional touring caravans or shared static caravans, tourers and dayrooms on existing sites. For this reason, policy M12 (criterion 1a) of the Submission Local Plan (page 154 of COR-1) focusses on realising the potential for additional accommodation within existing authorised and tolerated sites, where needs arise. The nature of the sites is such that, in the longer term, it is possible that space will become available on existing family sites for the younger generation as older family members move into bricks and mortar housing. This is another reason for focussing on meeting needs in the shorter term.

Capacity Work

- 1.5 Additional potential sites have been identified for further consideration. However it has not yet been possible to quantify these and count their overall contribution to capacity. To address this, DBC has commissioned work to establish the capacity of existing authorised and tolerated sites where there are known needs either currently or within the next 5 years. This will provide clearer numbers of caravans/ pitches which can be accommodated in accordance with policy M12 (criterion 1a). Further information is set out in paragraph 3.3 below.

Search for New Sites

- 1.6 The Council carried out a search for potential new suitable and available (i.e. deliverable or developable) sites for gypsies and travellers. This involved an assessment of whether any traveller pitches could be accommodated:
- within any of the Submission Local Plan strategic site allocations and identified areas with potential for future development;
 - on other land within Ebbsfleet Garden City; and
 - on council owned land (Dartford Borough Council and Kent County Council)
- The information on this can be found in paragraphs 4.9-4.19 of the Meeting Needs Report (pages 13-16 of GAT-2). These options were considered as being the most likely to have any prospect of coming forward. No sites were identified using this approach. Even if DBC had been able to identify sites, there is no guarantee that they would be suitable to meet the specific needs of gypsies and travellers living in the Borough.
- 1.7 Given the nature of needs in the Borough established through the GTAA (GAT-1), no general assumptions have been made that new land that may be identified by DBC would actually translate to a site that is taken up by those gypsies and travellers in the Borough who have needs both currently and in the future. DBC has given proper regard to the deliverability of sites. The focus has been on the identification of sites which have the likelihood of implementation to meet needs arising rather than meeting a numerical target with sites which may not meet actual needs. If a potential site could be identified, it would be relevant to consult with the occupiers of the existing sites from which needs are arising in order to establish whether or not it would be suitable to meet their needs.

Monitoring and Review

- 1.8 The GTAA provides information from a snapshot in time when it was carried out in 2019. It sought to understand the accommodation needs of the gypsy, traveller and travelling showpeople population in the Borough through a combination of desk-based research, stakeholder interviews and engagement with members of the travelling community living on all known sites, yards and encampments (see paragraph 1.3 on page 6 of GAT-1). The previous GTAA for the Borough was carried out in 2014 and it would be anticipated that a further GTAA would be carried out within 5 years of the adoption of this Local Plan. The needs for pitches and plots change and evolve over time and DBC's approach towards policy and the determination of planning applications reflects this.
- 1.9 Table 9 of the Submission Local Plan (page 205 of COR-1) indicates that DBC will monitor the annual provision of new pitches, and the five year traveller pitch and travelling showpeople plot supply and context. The results of this monitoring will be used to determine whether needs are being met, when a new GTAA will be required and whether the policy approach needs to be reviewed.

20. The GTAA also identifies the potential for pitch needs for 9 households where the planning status was undetermined. Has the Council made any allowance in the plan for the pitch needs of Gypsies and Travellers where the current status is undetermined?

- 2.1 Figure 7 of the GTAA (page 34 of GAT-1) identifies the locations and numbers of pitches for which it was not possible to make contact and interview the occupants. This equates to nine households in total (see also paragraph 1.12 on page 7 of GAT-1). Paragraphs 1.14, 7.26-7.31 and Figures 1, 14 and 15 of the GTAA (pages 8, 42 and 53 of GAT-1) set out that there will be a need arising of two pitches as a result of household formation from undetermined gypsy and traveller households, one in the 2019-2024 period and one in the 2029-34 period.
- 2.2 Figure 7 of the GTAA (page 34 of GAT-1) includes information on the sites from which undetermined needs may arise. The list of these sites and information about them are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Undetermined Needs Site Information

Site	Information*
Claywood Lane	Site contains 11 pitches, only one household of which was not contactable as part of work on the GTAA. The work currently being carried out on site assessments (see paragraph 4.4 on page 12 of GAT-2) also includes whether this site has any capacity to accommodate additional caravans. The planning history means that there would be no need for planning permission for additional caravans on the site.
Knoxfield Plot 1	Only 1 of the 3 pitches is occupied. The planning history means that there would be no need for planning permission for additional caravans on the site.
Knoxfield Plot 2	Only 1 of the 3 pitches is occupied. The planning history means that there would be no need for planning permission for additional caravans on the site.
Rear of Woodside Cottages	Site contains 3 pitches, all of which are occupied.
Sauleskalns	3 of the 6 pitches are not set out. The planning history limits the number of caravans on this site to 6. It is a very large site which could accommodate more than caravans if it is demonstrated that there is a need for them.

* Occupation information derives from Figure 7 of the GTAA (page 34 of GAT-1)

- 2.3 In answer to the question, the Council has not made any allowance in the plan for the needs for two pitches for gypsies and travellers where the current status is undetermined. This is because it is not known from which sites the needs could potentially arise. It is also because, as set out in paragraph 2.2 above, there are opportunities to accommodate pitches within a number of existing sites where the status of the occupiers is undetermined. There is not even a need for planning permission for additional caravans on a number of these sites. For sites where planning permission is required, it is intended that the criteria-based part 2 of policy M12 (page 154 of COR-1) will apply.

21. What is the potential capacity (in pitches) within existing authorised and tolerated sites? Policy M12 indicates that the Council is seeking to allocate land for additional pitches at Tennis Courts Sutton at Hone and at Salinas Darenth Wood Road. What is the current capacity of these sites and what is the potential increase their capacity to meet identified needs?

- 3.1 The capacity of the various authorised and tolerated sites, including the Tennis Courts and Salinas sites, is not yet known. Paragraph 5.4 of the Meeting the Needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Report Sept 2021 (page 17 of GAT-2) states that some authorised and tolerated sites have been identified as having the capacity to accommodate additional pitches to meet needs arising. Paragraph 5.5 of the report further states that the quantification of the precise scale of contribution, the amount of pitches meeting the identified level of need, the capacity of these sites and the potential of other sites to provide additional pitches is subject to ongoing work (page 17 of GAT-2).
- 3.2 It should be noted that the appeal for the Eebs Stables site (see paragraph 3.8 on page 8 of the Meeting Needs Report GAT-2) was determined on 25 February 2022. The appeal was allowed and planning permission was granted for three pitches for a temporary period of three years. Given that it has been allowed on a temporary basis only, this does not reduce the overall need for 34 pitches to 2026.
- 3.3 The Council has engaged consultants to undertake the site capacity work which has been significantly delayed due to previous Covid-19 related tier and national lockdown restrictions and staff sickness. However, the Council met with the consultant on 1 February 2022 and is assured that the work is now underway. The Council will share the results of this work as soon as it is available. The authorised and tolerated sites shown in table 2 below are under consideration as they are sites where the occupants meet the definition, there is need arising within the next five years and the Council considers that they may have capacity to accommodate additional pitches/ caravans within the existing site:

Table 2: Authorised and Tolerated Sites subject to further work

Site	Current Pitches or Plots ¹	Total pitch needs 2019-26 ²	Total pitch needs 2026-35 ²
Castle Farm	3 authorised pitches	7	5
Eebs Stables ³	3 authorised pitches	2	2
Knoxfield Plot 3	3 authorised pitches	1	1
Salinas	4 lawful pitches 1 unauthorised pitch	3	4
Tennis Courts	1 authorised pitch	2	2
Forest Amusements	7 authorised plots	1	0
Maximum needs which could be met from these sites		15 pitches 1 plot	14 pitches

¹ Information from Appendix D of the GTAA (page 57 of GAT-1)

² Initial information from work currently underway for those who meet the definition except for Castle Farm where the figures may also include those who do not meet the definition

³ Whilst this is currently an authorised site, the temporary planning permission granted for it means that it is only authorised until 25 February 2025

22. I note that the proposed allocation boundaries were shown as proposed changes to the Policies Map to be excluded from the Green Belt. What evidence is there to support the consideration of exceptional circumstances necessary to justify an amendment to the Metropolitan Green Belt boundary?

- 4.1 Paragraph 3.12 of the Meeting the Needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Report Sept 2021 (page 9 of GAT-2) sets out that that all traveller and travelling showpeople's sites within the Borough are located in the Green Belt. Paragraph 4.1 of the Meeting Needs Report (page 12 of GAT-2) explains that many of the sites from which traveller and travelling showpeople's needs arise are unauthorised, occupied by extended family groups which contain concealed or doubled-up adults, and/or occupied by teenagers.
- 4.2 In view of this, it is considered that some needs are most likely to be met by providing additional caravans within (intensification) or extending existing authorised and tolerated sites. It outlines that these are exceptional circumstances which justify a limited alteration to the Green Belt boundary in accordance with the PPTS.
- 4.3 As set out in paragraph 1.6 above, the Council considered whether any suitable and available (i.e. deliverable or developable) new sites outside the Green Belt could be identified to meet the needs for gypsy and traveller pitches. In the event, it was not possible to identify any such sites and it is considered that this means that there are exceptional circumstances which justify the alteration of parts of the Green Belt to allow the provision of additional pitches for gypsies and travellers.

23. Policy M12 indicates potential for Traveller pitches to be found within Ebbsfleet Garden City. Has any assessment been made of the potential sites within the Garden City area having regard to the outline planning permission and subsequent areas where reserved matters have been approved and other masterplanned areas and how would this supply be achieved in these circumstances?

- 5.1 The overall approach to future development in the area is set out in the Ebbsfleet Implementation Framework (SPS-2). This draws on previous masterplans to outline a vision for the overall area and for its four strategic development areas. Three of these are within Dartford Borough – Ebbsfleet Central (which also extends into Gravesham Borough); Castle Hill, Western Cross (now known as Ashmere), Castle Hill and Ebbsfleet Green; and Swanscombe Peninsula (see pages 88-113 and 124-129 of SPS-2).
- 5.2 There is a significant and complex history to planning permissions in Ebbsfleet Garden City. It is not entirely clear which outline planning permission this question is referring to. For clarification, table 8 of the Spatial Strategy Topic Paper (page 37 of SPS-1) sets out the relevant planning permissions which apply to the areas covered by the Ebbsfleet Central and Alkerden and Ashmere Allocations under policies E4 and E5 of the Submission Local Plan. There is a historic extant outline planning permission for Ebbsfleet Central (policy E4) but this is not going to be implemented and the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation (EDC) are carrying out masterplanning work and preparation on a new planning application which is expected to be submitted this year. There is also an outline planning permission for Alkerden and Ashmere (policy E5) which is being implemented.
- 5.3 The Council carried out some initial high level assessments of the suitability of sites within Ebbsfleet Garden City for the provision of pitches based on the sites considered in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. The outcomes from these assessments are set out in paragraphs 4.10 and 4.11 of the Meeting the Needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Report (page 14 of GAT-2). In terms of the various sites which were considered:
- A number already have planning permission for residential development which is being implemented
 - A number were disqualified as they are either within the Green Belt or within the Swanscombe Peninsula Site of Special Scientific Interest (some of which are also unavailable due to the proposals for the London Resort)
 - One was found unsuitable as it is in an area at high risk of flooding (which is also unavailable due to the proposals for the London Resort)
- The only site which was found to be potentially suitable and available was Ebbsfleet Central.
- 5.4 DBC's interest in Ebbsfleet Central in this respect reflected the possible potential of certain parts of the then very large site. However the subsequent SSSI designation, and advancement of proposals by the EDC as landowner, is likely to have had a material impact on the scale of opportunity for accommodating gypsy and traveller pitches in this location.
- 5.5 As set out in paragraphs 4.14 and 4.15 of the Meeting Needs Report (page 15 of GAT-2), there has been correspondence between DBC and the EDC regarding the potential of the Ebbsfleet Central site to accommodate gypsy and traveller pitches. This has effectively been ruled out by the EDC due to the nature of the development coming forward in this location.
- 5.6 In their response dated 3 June 2021, the EDC stated that, in the event that the London Resort theme park does not proceed, there could be opportunities to explore gypsy

and traveller provision on parts of Swanscombe Peninsula that may be suitable for it (paragraph 4.16 on page 15 and page 26 of the Meeting Needs Report GAT-2).

- 5.7 There have not been any more detailed assessments of sites within Ebbsfleet Garden City which have outline planning permission, detailed planning permission or reserved matters approvals, including areas which are subject to masterplanning. DBC and the EDC would expect these to come forward for the uses for which they already have planning permission, i.e. residential and supporting community facilities and infrastructure, and this is the approach which has been taken forward in the Submission Local Plan informed by the Ebbsfleet Implementation Framework (see pages 103-113 of SPS-2). None of the outline planning permissions grant planning permission for gypsy and traveller sites within the description of development and there is no section 106 agreement to require such provision to be made. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that any landowner would seek to vary these permissions to provide for gypsy and traveller sites within the boundaries of the sites. Furthermore, they form an important element of DBC's housing land supply over the plan period to 2037 and are listed in full in table 2 of the SHLAA Findings (page 15 of HOU-1). Any reduction in the amount of mainstream dwellings being put forward for these sites could affect DBC's ability to meet the housing requirements set out in policy S4.