

**Study to Identify Potential Gypsy, Traveller
and Travelling Showperson Sites in
Cheshire West and Chester**

**A Report for
Cheshire West and Chester Borough
Council**

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ANNEXES

The annexes are contained in a separate document and are:

- A SCHEDULE OF CONSULTATION ACTIVITY**
- B GYPSY AND TRAVELLER CONSULTATION SUMMARY REPORTS**
- C SITE APPRAISAL FRAMEWORK**
- D SCHEDULE OF REPRESENTATIONS**
- E LONG LIST OF POTENTIAL SITES**
- F LOCATION PLANS FOR SITES ON THE LONG LIST**
- G FILTERED LONG LIST OF POTENTIAL SITES**
- H LOCATION PLANS FOR SITES ON THE FILTERED LONG LIST**
- I LIST OF SURVEYED SITES**
- J LOCATION PLAN FOR SURVEYED SITES**
- K SITE PLANS FOR SHORTLISTED SITES**

Glossary of Terms

Term	Explanation
Amenity block/shed	These are buildings found on most residential Gypsy and Traveller sites that provide basic plumbing amenities (bath/shower, WC and sink). Generally there is one of these buildings on each pitch (see below for definition of 'pitch').
Authorised private site	This is a site that has planning permission and is owned by a private individual (who may or may not be a Gypsy or a Traveller).
Bricks and mortar	A house, bungalow or flat. Some Gypsies and Travellers choose to live in this type of property.
Caravan	Mobile vehicle that Gypsies and Travellers live in. Sometimes called a 'trailer' (see below for definition of 'trailer').
Chalet	Single storey buildings, often made with timber or metal frames and clad walls. They can look like mobile homes but do not meet the legal definition (see below for definition of 'mobile home').
Doubling-up	A situation where a pitch (see definition below) is shared
DPD	Development Plan Document. Part of the LDF (see below for definition), containing policies and proposals that will help guide future development within Cheshire West and Chester.
ELR	Employment Land Review. A review to provide an evidence base for employment land policies and allocations in future planning policy documents.
Gypsy	Members of Gypsy or Traveller communities. Usually used to describe Romany (English) Gypsies originating from India. This term is not acceptable to all Travellers.
Gypsies and Travellers	Consistent with the Housing Act 2004, inclusive of: all Gypsies, Irish Travellers, New Travellers, Showpeople, Circus People, Bargees, Roma Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar accommodation.
Gaujo/Gorger	Romany word used mainly, but not exclusively, by Romany Gypsies to refer to members of the settled community/non-Travellers
GTAA	Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment. This was a study carried out for the Council in 2007 to calculate the need for additional Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpersons accommodation.
LDF	Local Development Framework. A suite of documents which will guide development within Cheshire West and Chester.
Mobile home	Legally classified as a caravan but not usually moveable without it either being dismantled or lifted by a crane onto a lorry.
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework. Policies for making robust local and neighbourhood plans and development management decisions.

Term	Explanation
Pitch/plot	Area of land on a site that is generally occupied by one household. These can vary in size and have different numbers of caravans on them. They are also called plots, especially by Travelling Showpeople. In the Cheshire GTAA (see definition above), it was agreed that a pitch was a space for a static caravan, a touring caravan and an amenity block with parking.
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance. Notes prepared by the Government after public consultation to explain statutory provisions and provide guidance to local authorities and others on planning policy and the operation of the planning system.
PPS	Planning Policy Statement. Statements of the Government's national policy and principles towards certain aspects of the town planning framework.
Registered Provider	Registered Social Landlord or Housing Association.
Settled community/people	These are non-Travellers who generally live in houses, bungalows and flats.
SHLAA	Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. This is a study that the Council carries out to assess the amount of land that may be available for future housing development.
Site	An area of land where Gypsies and Travellers live in trailers and chalets.
Stopping place	Locations that Gypsies and Travellers stay whilst travelling, usually for short periods of time.
Trailer	Mobile vehicle that Gypsies and Travellers live in. Sometimes called a 'caravan' (see above for definition of 'caravan').
Transit site	A site intended for short stays by Gypsies and Travellers whilst they are travelling.
Travelling Showpeople	Commonly referred to as Showmen, these are a group of occupational Travellers who work on Travelling Shows and fairs across the UK and abroad.
Unauthorised Development	This refers to a caravan/trailer or group of caravans/trailers on land owned (possibly developed) by Gypsies and Travellers without planning permission.
Unauthorised Encampment	This is where Gypsies and Travellers stop for short periods on private/public land without permission (e.g. at the side of the road).

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Recent Government guidance and legislation has reiterated the strong commitment to addressing the accommodation problems that face Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpersons. The Council is committed to adopting a positive, pro-active approach to the provision of sites for Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpersons. It fully recognises its pivotal role in meeting the locally identified accommodation needs of these communities.
- 1.2 The Council commissioned ekosgen, in conjunction with Vision Twentyone, to prepare this study to identify Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson sites in Cheshire West and Chester. The purpose of the study is to identify potential sites for the provision of pitches for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpersons to meet the need identified locally through the 2007 Cheshire Partnership Area Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation and Related Services Assessment (GTAA).
- 1.3 In Cheshire West and Chester, the GTAA identifies an overall additional need for between 31 and 45 residential pitches and 10 transit pitches for Gypsies and Travellers between 2006 and 2016. It also identifies the need for 10 additional plots for Travelling Showpersons over the same period. To date, none of this additional need has been met.
- 1.4 This study has sought to identify potential sites by undertaking a thorough and objective selection process. It provides the evidence base upon which proactive planning to meet the local need for pitches can be based. The delivery of sites will help to address existing tensions between Gypsy and Traveller communities and the settled communities, where unauthorised developments have taken place and subsequently obtained temporary planning permission, generally at appeal, because of a shortage of permanent sites.
- 1.5 Selecting a good site in an appropriate location is crucial. In identifying the potential shortlist of sites, in excess of 1300 sites were assessed based on their suitability, availability and achievability. Key assessment criteria were agreed in consultation with the steering group and subject to public consultation. Sites which were too small to accommodate a Gypsy, Traveller or Travelling Showperson site and/or subject to constraints rendering them unsuitable for residential development (including flood risk, environmental or heritage designations), were discounted. The remaining sites were assessed against the key assessment criteria.
- 1.6 Following a process of desktop appraisal, site visits by the consultant team and a series of workshops with relevant Council officers (including representatives of the Council's Property Services, Environmental Health, Highways, Housing and Planning teams and the Cheshire Partnership Gypsy and Traveller Coordinator) the following shortlist of potential sites was agreed:

Ref	Site address / location of site	Size (hectares)	Pitches
1176	Blakeden Lane/Browning Way, Winsford	2.24	20
849	Buildwas Road, Neston	0.92	12
1348	Bumpers Lane, Chester	6.94	15
924	Rosfield Road, Ellesmere Port	2.00	15
853	Road One, Winsford	13.84	10

- 1.7 It is clear that the Council needs to act quickly to bring forward sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpersons. There is a growing backlog of need. No permanent additional provision has been made to meet the need identified in the 2007 GTAA and there are no publicly-provided sites in the Borough.
- 1.8 In order to achieve a breakthrough in provision in the short-term the control of sites is critical. We have presented a shortlist of sites in the Council's control that could provide a short to medium-term supply of additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches and Travelling Showpersons plots.
- 1.9 Our recommendation to the Council is that these sites should be proactively brought forward through planning applications. As part of the planning application process, the Council will need to include consultation with Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpersons and with the settled community.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 ekosgen, in conjunction with Vision Twentyone, has prepared this study to identify Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson sites in Cheshire West and Chester. The study has been commissioned by Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council (the Council).
- 2.2 The purpose of the study is to identify potential sites for the provision of pitches for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpersons to meet the need identified locally through the 2007 Cheshire Partnership Area GTAA.
- 2.3 In Cheshire West and Chester, the GTAA identifies an overall additional need for between 31 and 45 residential pitches and 10 transit pitches for Gypsies and Travellers between 2006 and 2016. It also identifies the need for 10 additional plots for Travelling Showpersons over the same period. To date, none of this additional need has been met.

Background

- 2.4 The presence of Gypsies in Britain can be traced back to the 16th Century. The first authenticated record in England was in 1514 and in Scotland in 1505. Irish Travellers were first recorded in Britain in the 8th Century. For the purposes of the planning system, Gypsies and Travellers are defined as:

'Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependants' educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excluding members of an organised group of Travelling Showpeople or circus people travelling together as such' (Circular 01/06).

- 2.5 Many Gypsies and Travellers continue to pursue an active itinerant lifestyle and are generally self-employed people. However, increasing numbers of people within these communities are becoming more settled.
- 2.6 Gypsies and Travellers are not a uniform, homogeneous community but rather a group of communities, which share some features but have their own histories and traditions. Even within each main group, there can be fragmentation between different families which emphasises the lack of cohesive communities and the need to avoid over generalisations. However, the main groups include Romany Gypsies (Welsh, Scottish and English) and Irish Travellers.
- 2.7 Romany Gypsies (Scottish and English) and Irish Travellers are recognised in law as distinct ethnic groups and are explicitly protected from discrimination under the Race Relations Act.
- 2.8 Travelling Showpersons have traditionally been involved in holding fairs and circuses for many hundreds of years. For the purposes of the planning system, Travelling Showpersons are defined as:

'Members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circuses or shows (whether or not travelling together as such). This includes such persons who on the grounds of their family's or dependants' more localised pattern of trading, educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excludes Gypsies and Travellers as defined in ODPM Circular 01/2006' (Circular 04/2007)

- 2.9 The Housing Act 2004 (Section 225) requires local authorities to undertake regular assessments of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers either living in, or resorting to, their area, under the Local Housing Needs Assessment process, set out in Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985. It also requires the local housing authority to include the needs of Gypsies and Travellers in any housing strategy they produce under Section 87 of the Local Government Act 2003 and to take any such strategy into account in exercising their functions. This includes the statutory responsibility for local authorities to consider the need for additional transit and permanent accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers in their area.

The Study Area

- 2.10 Cheshire West and Chester covers 916 sq km of the North West region and consists of a mix of both urban and rural areas. The main settlements within the authority are Chester, Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford. There are a number of smaller market towns and the remainder of the authority is made up of a large number of villages of varying sizes. A significant area of the authority is designated as Green Belt.
- 2.11 There are currently 60 residential Gypsy and Traveller pitches on six sites with **permanent** planning permission. These are listed in the table below. All these sites are privately-owned.

Name of Site Ward/Parish	Permission/Comments	Pitches
Maryburgh Caravan Park Gowy Hapsford	The site was originally owned by Cheshire County Council and was sold to the Gypsy Council in the early 1980s (Application date - 12 th December 1979)	22
Grassy Lane A5117 Elton Elton	Allowed at appeal (Application date - 28 th June 2004)	5 (Max 10 vans)
Country Meadow Fields Chester Villages Bridge Trafford	Allowed at appeal (Application date - 18 th Feb 2005)	3
Travellers Rest Winsford Wharton	Allowed at appeal (Application date - 29 th April 1994)	16
The Old Pumping Station Frodsham Frodsham	Allowed at appeal (Application date - 25 th January 2005)	13
Prevan Place Elton Elton	Allowed at appeal (Application date - 27 th April 2000)	1

- 2.12 There are a further 24 pitches on six sites that have been granted temporary planning permission. These six sites are all located in the north of the authority within the Green Belt. These permissions will clearly expire over time. The six sites are:

Name/Ward/Parish	Permission	Pitches
Green Meadows Chalet Park Gowy Alvanley	Temporary permission granted (May 2011) until May 2013	4
Whitegate Stables Chester Villages Mickle Trafford	Temporary permission granted (October 2008) until November 2011	5
The Paddocks Gowy Dunham-on-the-Hill	Temporary permission granted (November 2008) until November 2011	3
Little Meadow Park Elton Elton	Temporary permission granted (October 2009) until October 2014	4
Green Acres (Chider Thorton) Willaston & Thornton Ellesmere Port & Neston	Temporary permission granted (March 2011) until March 2014	3
Prevan Place Elton Elton	Temporary granted (December 2010) until December 2013	2
Land adjacent to Hillcrest Gowy Dunham-on-the-Hill	Temporary granted (May 2011) until May 2013	3

- 2.13 There is currently one site for Travelling Showpersons in Cheshire West and Chester. Situated in Winsford, the site provides 13 plots.
- 2.14 There are currently no local authority Gypsy and Travellers sites in Cheshire West and Chester. There is, however, an accepted Council site (a site without permission, but no pending enforcement action) in Ellesmere Port at Powells Bridge/Oil Site Road. This site accommodates 8 pitches.

Purpose of the Study

- 2.15 The Council is committed to adopting a positive, pro-active approach to the provision of sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpersons. It fully recognises its pivotal role in meeting the locally identified accommodation needs of these communities.
- 2.16 This study has sought to identify potential sites following a thorough and objective selection process. It provides the evidence base upon which proactive planning, to meet the local need for pitches evidenced in the GTAA, will be based. The subsequent delivery of sites will help to address existing tensions between the Gypsy and Traveller communities and the settled communities, where unauthorised developments have taken place and subsequently obtained temporary planning permission, generally at appeal, because of a shortage of permanent sites.

Report Structure

- 2.17 The report is structured as follows:
- Section 3 – Policy Context
 - Section 4 – Study Methodology

- Section 5 – The Long List
- Section 6 – Site Appraisal Process
- Section 7 – Potential Sites
- Section 8 – Site Delivery

3 Policy Context

Introduction

- 3.1 This section provides an overview of significant national, sub-regional and local policy and research that is relevant to the study.

Policy Context

- 3.2 **The Housing Act 2004** requires local housing authorities to include Gypsies and Travellers in their accommodation assessments. The GTAA will assess need and identify pitch requirements for each local authority.

- 3.3 **Circular 01/06 Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites** was introduced in February 2006 and provides guidance on the planning aspects of finding sites for Gypsies and Travellers and how local authorities and Gypsies and Travellers can work together to achieve that aim.

- 3.4 The circular states that *'The Government is committed to ensuring that members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities should have the same rights and responsibilities as every other citizen'*. It goes on to say that the Government intends to *'create and support sustainable, respectful and inclusive communities where Gypsies and Travellers have fair access to suitable accommodation, education, health and welfare provision; where there is mutual respect and consideration between all communities for the rights and responsibilities of each community and individual; and where there is respect between individuals and communities towards the environment in which they live and work'*.

- 3.5 By providing adequate sites it is intended that the conflict and controversy associated with unauthorised developments will be avoided and that enforcement of such developments will be more effective. Without the allocation of sites, it is likely that local authorities will find it harder to defend themselves against unauthorised developments and appeals against refused planning applications. Bringing forward sites will provide certainty for both the settled and Gypsy and Traveller communities.

- 3.6 **Circular 04/07 Planning for Travelling Showpeople** supplements the guidance in Circular 01/06 and addresses the specific needs of the Travelling Showperson community, as follows:

- Travelling Showpeople do not, in general, share the same culture or traditions as Gypsies and Travellers.
- Sites for Travelling Showpeople are normally for mixed residential and business use, to enable the effective storage and repair of significant amounts of equipment.
- The nature of Travelling Showpeople's businesses often means that equipment repairs and maintenance are necessary which can have a visual impact and can create noise in the immediate surrounding areas.

- 3.7 The Communities Secretary has recently published a draft national Planning Policy Statement: **Planning for Traveller Sites Consultation**. Following future adoption, the National Planning Policy Statement will replace circulars 01/06 and 04/07.

- 3.8 The ministerial foreword to the draft statement identifies *'a widespread perception that the system is unfair and that it is easier for one group of people to gain planning*

permission, particularly on sensitive Green Belt land. This creates resentment and damages community cohesion’.

- 3.9 The consultation draft statement seeks to align planning policy for Traveller sites much more closely with the policies for other forms of housing and in doing so, provides greater environmental protection. It also proposes to put planning for sites back in the hands of the local authority, giving them the responsibility for setting pitch targets. It should be noted that the Coalition Government still expects councils to assess the need for sites and meet this need through the planning process. In this respect, there is no proposed change to this key element of national planning policy.
- 3.10 There is similarly no material change to how Gypsy and Traveller development will be considered in the Green Belt. It is currently inappropriate development and will remain so. Inappropriate development can only be permitted if justified through the demonstration of very special circumstances. The Coalition Government is suggesting that its proposed removal of the phrase ‘normally’ inappropriate development in Circular 01/2006 will put Gypsy and Traveller development on the same footing as any other inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It is questionable, however, whether this has any practical consequence.
- 3.11 The proposed application of a five year supply requirement for pitches/plots and the proposed requirement for local planning authorities to ‘treat favourably’ applications for temporary permission where there is supply of less than five years, arguably shifts the balance towards granting temporary planning permissions in the Green Belt.
- 3.12 In 2007, the Department for Communities and Local Government published guidance on the design of sites for Gypsies and Travellers. **Local Authorities and Gypsies and Travellers: A guide to responsibilities and powers** also includes useful advice on selecting appropriate sites and the powers available to local authorities in dealing with anti-social behaviour.
- 3.13 The guidance promotes the provision of appropriate sites as an effective tool against illegal and undesirable behaviour. It identifies that well maintained sites are not only important for social cohesion but can also offer local authorities significant financial savings. ‘Moving on’ unauthorised encampments and enforcement against anti-social communities can be expensive and ineffective. A well managed site reduces the likelihood of these problems and as a result, local authority resources can be freed up for other uses.
- 3.14 An example given is that of Bristol City Council which was spending £300,000 a year managing extensive unauthorised sites. After investing £425,000 on developing a purpose built site in 1998, the Council has reduced its yearly spend to approximately £5,000. A more local example is Halton Borough Council, which, along with private businesses, was spending in the region of £200,000 a year managing unauthorised encampments and their impact. After investing £750,000 developing a purpose built transit site, which opened in February in 2009, both the Council and the businesses have greatly reduced the cost incurred and the impact.
- 3.15 In 2008, the Department for Communities and Local Government published further guidance, **Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Good Practice Guide**. This document is intended to familiarise developers with the key elements necessary to design a successful site and identifies good practice, using case study examples to illustrate different approaches. The guidance is primarily intended to cover social site

provision for Gypsies and Irish Travellers and covers a range of provision including permanent and transit sites.

- 3.16 The document provides guidance on:
- Site location/selection
 - Site access, layout and orientation
 - Site services and facilities
 - Health, safety and accessibility
 - The layout of individual pitches.
- 3.17 The level of need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation within Cheshire West and Chester has been identified through the **Cheshire Partnership Area GTAA**, published in January 2007. In Cheshire West and Chester, it identifies an overall need for between 31 and 45 residential pitches and 10 transit pitches between 2006 and 2016, for Gypsies and Travellers. The level of need for Travelling Showpeople was 10 plots.
- 3.18 The Gypsy and Traveller accommodation preferences highlighted in the GTAA (2007) were:
- Residential Sites:
 - Management/Ownership – local authority ownership was the preferred option, followed by a site owned by their own family. Only 3% wanted to live on a site owned by another Gypsy or Traveller.
 - Size – varied from 10-12, 15-20 and 20-30 pitches per site. All requested pitches big enough to accommodate a number of trailers and space for travelling guests.
 - A need for chalets/bungalows for those who wished to be more settled, was identified.
 - Location – a wide variety of potential localities were identified including Ellesmere Port, Winsford and the outskirts of Chester.
 - Transit Sites:
 - There was significant support for transit provision, which Gypsies and Travellers believed to be preferable to the current alternatives, offering security, stability and safety.
 - Gypsies and Travellers believe such sites would offer a good solution if there was an emergency in the family and support was needed for a short-time.
 - Size – the majority suggested a site with between 10-15 pitches, with each pitch big enough for 2 trailers and 1 vehicle. Others suggested 20-30 pitches.
 - Location – a network of transit sites across the region. However, a number of locations were mentioned: Ellesmere Port and between Winsford and Chester.
 - Own Land:
 - 29% of people expressed interest in developing their own site.
 - However only 6% thought they would be able to afford it.

- Only 7 interviewees had actually done so, with varying degrees of success.
- 3.19 **Planning Policy Statements (PPSs)** explain statutory provisions and provide guidance to local authorities and others on planning policy and the operation of the planning system. They also explain the relationship between planning policies and other policies, which have an important bearing on issues of development and land use. Local authorities must take their contents into account in preparing plans. The guidance may also be relevant to decisions on individual planning applications and appeals.
- 3.20 A number of PPSs and Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) are particularly relevant to this study, including:
- PPS1 Sustainable Development
 - PPG2 Green Belts
 - PPS3 Housing
 - PPS12 Local Spatial Planning
 - PPS13 Transport
 - PPS23 Planning and Pollution Control
 - PPS24 Planning and Noise
 - PPS25 Development and Flood Risk
- 3.21 The Coalition Government has committed to replacing the existing suite of PPSs with a National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The draft NPPF was published for consultation in July 2011. In a single document, the draft NPPF provides a concise framework for the planning system that safeguards the environment while meeting the need for sustainable growth. The draft NPPF promotes sustainable development and proactive development management by councils to deliver new homes, whilst seeking to protect the environment (including the Green Belt and natural environment).
- 3.22 Work is currently underway to produce the **Local Development Framework (LDF)** for Cheshire West and Chester. Work on the Core Strategy is ongoing with adoption anticipated early 2014. The LDF will, in time, replace the saved policies from the Local Plans that were produced by the former authorities of Chester City Council, Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council, Vale Royal Borough Council and the Cheshire County Council.
- 3.23 The **Chester District Local Plan** was adopted in May 2006. A key focus of the Local Plan was to address the need for affordable housing in the area and the availability of quality housing for residents. There is one Gypsy caravan site identified in the Local Plan and is considered to be sufficient provision for the families residing in Chester. The site was identified as being suitable for extension, should more pitches be required. The Local Plan states that proposals for new Gypsy and Traveller sites would be considered in consultation with the National Gypsy Council.
- 3.24 The **Ellesmere Port and Neston Local Plan** was adopted in January 2002. The Plan identifies current and future land use requirements and provides a framework for future development and planning applications. An overriding theme of the Local Plan is to enable sustainable development whilst protecting the environment for future generations. The Local Plan does not specifically address Gypsy and Traveller site

provision although states that it would be considered in line with housing requirements.

- 3.25 **The Vale Royal Borough Local Plan First Review Alteration** was adopted in June 2006. The Local Plan provides that 'sufficient need should be demonstrated' in support of new sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople and that all development should be implemented in line with national policies. It suggests that transit sites should be situated along existing Gypsy and Traveller primary routes and that Travelling Showperson sites should take into account their particular settlement needs in relation to their equipment. An existing Gypsy site on Rilshaw Lane, Winsford and a Travelling Showpersons site at Bradford Road, Winsford are both highlighted.
- 3.26 Each of the Local Plans identifies environmental assets (including Green Belt) to be protected from unsuitable development and allocates land for new development. These land use allocations and environmental designations are important considerations in the assessment of site suitability for development of Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson provision.

Summary

- 3.27 National and local planning policy recognises the need for additional sites to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpersons. National and local planning policies provide the framework within which sites should be assessed for development.
- 3.28 The current and emerging planning policy should be considered in the context of the range of broader policy initiatives that have been announced by the Government. The Government's key policy initiatives include:
- The inclusion of Traveller sites in the New Homes Bonus scheme to incentivise local planning authorities to provide appropriate sites.
 - Providing Traveller Pitch Funding from April 2011.
 - Setting up a cross-Government, ministerial-level working group to address the discrimination and poor social outcomes experienced by Traveller communities.
 - Bringing local authority Traveller sites into the Mobile Homes Act (1983) to give residents improved protection against eviction.
 - Contributing funding to Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly Improvement and Development Agency – IDeA) to support their programme of work with elected members on Traveller site provision.
 - Limiting opportunities for retrospective planning applications, in relation to any form of development.
 - Providing stronger enforcement powers for local planning authorities to tackle breaches of planning control.

4 Study Methodology

Overview

- 4.1 The Cheshire West and Chester area has direct experience of the significant issues that can be associated with unauthorised developments, including significant local concerns and opposition by the settled community to Gypsies and Travellers. Whilst unplanned or unauthorised development can create significant problems and local tension, it highlights the necessity to meet the needs of all citizens and plan for the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. Careful and thorough assessment of potential sites and engagement with the Travelling and settled communities can help to identify and address the potential challenges and enable all members of the community to resolve any outstanding differences.
- 4.2 A productive engagement in the site selection methodology for this study as well as ongoing communication with all parties is viewed as vital to planning effectively to meet the needs of Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople.
- 4.3 The methodology for the study was developed to take into account relevant Government, local and other guidance on planning for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpersons as well as the experience of the consultant team in undertaking similar research elsewhere in the country. The methodology was discussed and agreed at an inception meeting between a steering group for the study and consultants. It has been regularly reviewed throughout the preparation of the study to reflect changing circumstances (i.e. political change and emerging policy).

Methodology

- 4.4 This is a six stage process as follows:
1. Compiling a long list of sites
 2. Site appraisal
 3. Filtering the long list
 4. Site Surveys
 5. Site Assessment
 6. Establishing the shortlist and site delivery.
- 4.5 The work associated with each stage of the process is outlined below and explained in more detail in the remainder of the report.

Stage 1 – Compiling a long list of sites

- 4.6 This stage involved determining which sources of sites should be included in the assessment, a desktop review of existing information and agreement of a long list of sites for consideration. The stage included reviewing relevant literature, studies and policy; an identification of sites in or previously subject to the planning process; workshops with Council Officers to identify other sites and a public call for sites.
- 4.7 Details of this study and a call for sites were widely circulated and advertised. The information comprised a Member briefing, Parish Council briefing, a public call for sites (advertised via a press release, mail shot and the Council's website) and liaison with Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson communities. The Council issued a press release in October 2009, which went in the local papers. News of the study was

also placed on the front page of the Council website and information has constantly been available on the Spatial Planning web pages. Members were briefed in October 2009 and letters were sent to all Parish Councils, approximately 150 stakeholders and other interested parties, informing them of the study, the call for sites and inviting comments on the assessment criteria. Information was also placed in all libraries and Council offices. Details of the information provided to the public are included in **Annex A**.

Stage 2 – Site Appraisal Framework

- 4.8 This stage involved the development of a set of key assessment criteria agreed in consultation with the steering group and subject to public consultation. The appraisal framework was designed to consider the suitability, availability and achievability of sites. To ensure broad public participation in site selection from the outset, members of the public and key organisations were consulted on the proposed criteria. It was envisaged that this approach would ensure more constructive engagement in the process and deliver a clearer and more robust process by which sites were shortlisted.
- 4.9 Consultation on the site appraisal criteria was undertaken via the Council's website. Interested parties, including Council Members, Parish Councils and representatives of the Gypsy and Traveller community, were invited to review and comment upon the draft site appraisal criteria. A schedule of representations received on the site appraisal framework and call for site is included at **Annex D**.
- 4.10 Members of the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson communities were consulted and invited to provide feedback on their accommodation preferences by location, type of provision and potential tenure. Summary reports for this consultation are included at **Annex B**. The key findings were that the Gypsy and Traveller communities are relatively relaxed about site location, citing site availability as being more important than location. The Travelling Showperson community favoured locations in the east of the study area, where access to the M6 is better. There were mixed views about whether urban or rural areas are preferred, although all respondents appreciated the benefits of good access to services and facilities. There was broad support for the criteria adopted in the site appraisal criteria.
- 4.11 The final site appraisal framework is included at **Annex C**. The appraisal framework is set out under three headings: site suitability, site availability and site achievability. The detailed criteria against which sites were assessed and the scoring mechanism are set out. The scoring mechanism was not used as an absolute assessment of a site's suitability, rather it was used to inform the overall assessment of each site.

Stage 3 – Filtering the Long List

- 4.12 The long list of sites was filtered using GIS in order to remove sites which were either too small to accommodate a Gypsy, Traveller or Travelling Showperson site and/or subject to constraints, rendering them unsuitable for development (particularly residential development). Sites subject to the following constraints were discounted:
- Size (sites less than 0.3 hectares)
 - Green Belt
 - Flood risk
 - Open countryside

- Protected open space
- Significant nature or heritage conservation designations

Stage 4 and 5 – Site Surveys and Assessment

4.13 This stage involved applying the agreed site appraisal criteria to the filtered long list of sites. A desk based appraisal of the sites was undertaken, covering issues such as the proximity to public transport, shops and services. This was followed by site visits to the most favourable sites, undertaken by trained consultants to check the results of the desk-based appraisal and appraise the sites against the remaining criteria (neighbouring uses, site access and landscape).

Stage 6 – Establishing the shortlist and site delivery

4.14 This stage of the process involved a review of the surveyed sites by the steering group and ekosgen to agree which sites were considered to perform best overall in planning terms. This was complemented by work relating to site delivery, including the identification of potential timescales and phasing, and assessment of the steps necessary to deliver the shortlisted and reserve listed sites in order to meet the identified need in Cheshire West and Chester.

4.15 These stages are described in detail in the next sections of the report.

5 The Long List

5.1 Compiling the long list of sites included the following elements:

- **Identification of sites in or previously subject to the planning process** – This included identification of extant permissions (temporary and permanent), sites subject to enforcement proceedings and planning application refusals for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpersons sites.
- **Desktop review to identify other sites** – This included analysis of all data sources which were likely to include sites potentially suitable for Gypsies, Traveller and Travelling Showpersons sites. These sources included existing Development Plan Documents (DPDs), land use studies (including for example Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments, Employment Land Reviews and past Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson site studies), housing land monitors, the Council's land and property information, National Land Use Database entries, the Register of Surplus Land and local intelligence.
- **Call for sites** – A public call for sites was advertised on the Council's website and through a press release. In response, four representations were received proposing 9 sites for consideration. All of these sites were also identified through other sources, either being existing temporary sites or previously identified in SHLAAs.
- **Officer consultation** – Workshops were held with officers from the Council's Planning, Property Services and Highways and Transportation teams to identify potential Council land or other locations considered suitable for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpersons sites.

5.2 The output of this stage of the process is the long list of sites comprising 1347 sites. The long list of site is included at **Annex E** and a site location plan is included in **Annex F**. The long list includes the following information for each site:

- Site address
- Source (ELR, SHLAA, past Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpersons Study, sites previously subject to the planning process, etc.). A number of sites appear in a number of source and unless the site extent differs, these sites have only been included once on the long list.
- Site size
- Whether sites duplicate or overlap other sites on the list
- Information relating to the filter of the long list, including minimum size and major policy constraints (e.g. Green Belt, Flood Risk and other environmental considerations)
- Whether the site failed against any of the initial discounting criteria

5.3 Following application of the filters mentioned above (i.e. size and major policy constraints), the long list was reduced to 299 sites. These sites were considered against the site appraisal criteria detailed in the next section.

6 Site Appraisal Process

The Site Appraisal Criteria

- 6.1 Draft site appraisal criteria were prepared by the consultant team in consultation with the steering group. The site appraisal criteria sought to assess the suitability, availability and deliverability of potential sites, reflecting national policy and guidance and local planning policies. The criteria were derived utilising a mix of tried and tested criterion from other housing studies that the Council, ekosgen and Vision Twentyone has been involved with, combined with specific guidance on site selection in national policy and guidance documents (Circulars 01/06 and 04/07, Local Authorities and Gypsies and Travellers: A guide to responsibilities and powers and Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Good Practice Guidance). The site appraisal framework is attached at **Annex C**.
- 6.2 The suitability of each site was assessed in terms of the following:
- Does the site lend itself to development, is it free from existing use and what is its capacity?
 - Does the site have acceptable access to services and facilities, including:
 - Primary school (within 600m)
 - Secondary school (within 1500m)
 - Local shops (within 800m)
 - Superstore/district centre (within 2000m)
 - Major commercial centre (within 5000m)
 - Health centre/doctor (within 1000m)
 - Major employment location (within 5000m)
 - Sports centre (within 2000m)
 - Is there access to public transport?
 - Is there suitable site access (including highway, pedestrian, cycle and HGV access)?
 - Is a Gypsy and Traveller or Travelling Showpersons site compatible with surrounding land uses?
 - The location within the district – is it where Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople have expressed a preference to live?
- 6.3 The achievability of each site was assessed in terms of the following:
- Is there planning permission for development of the site and if so for what use?
 - Does the use fit with planning policy – is the site allocated within the development plan and does the proposed use fit with the allocation?
 - Is the impact on nearby residents and/or other land uses acceptable?
 - Is there an impact upon areas of environmental importance, nature importance and built heritage?

- 6.4 The deliverability of the site was assessed in terms of site ownership.
- 6.5 The site appraisal criteria was widely circulated and posted on the Council's website alongside the call for sites. Briefings were provided to Council Members and Parish Councils. Comments were invited on the proposed selection criteria.
- 6.6 Members and representatives of the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpersons communities were consulted on the site appraisal criteria. They were also asked to identify broad locations favoured for new sites.
- 6.7 The schedule of representations received on the site appraisal criteria is attached at **Annex D**. Summary reports of consultation meetings with the Gypsy and Traveller community, Irish Traveller community, Showmans Guild and Travelling Showpersons are attached at **Annex B**.
- 6.8 There was a general consensus of support for the site appraisal criteria. Individual views were expressed about the relevance of a number of the suitability criteria, with suggestions that proximity to services and facilities and public transport accessibility are not important because it is possible to drive. Conversely other individuals supported these criteria.
- 6.9 A number of representations were received from individuals and Parish Councils suggesting particular sites or locations were not appropriate. The suitability of particular sites or locations has, appropriately, been assessed through this study.
- 6.10 Taking account of the representations received, the steering group agreed to use the site appraisal criteria for assessment of the filtered long list of sites. It was agreed amongst the steering group that, given the level of post office and public house closures in recent years and that these facilities are no longer central to in many communities, proximity to these facilities would be removed from the site appraisal criteria.

The Site Appraisal Process

- 6.11 The site appraisal process was completed in three stages:
- **Desktop analysis of the sites on the filtered long list.** The 299 sites on the filtered long list were analysed by trained consultants using a combination of GIS and web-based search facilities to assess the proximity of sites to services and facilities. Desktop analysis also assessed the planning policy fit, ecological and heritage constraints. Results were recorded for each site, based on the agreed site appraisal criteria and scoring. The results of the desktop analysis are presented on the filtered long list attached at **Annex G** and a site location plan is included in **Annex H**.

Having completed the desktop analysis, a list of the 77 most sustainable sites was agreed with the steering group for site visits to be conducted. This schedule of sites and the location plan are included at **Annexes I and J**.
 - **Site visits** to the 77 sites were completed by ekosgen's in-house consultants who are experienced in carrying out such surveys. During the site visits details were recorded on the characteristics, suitability and apparent availability of sites. Again, consistent results were recorded using the site appraisal criteria and scoring.
 - **Analysis of the surveyed sites** was undertaken in a further series of workshops with relevant Council officers. Representatives of the Council's

Property Services, Environmental Health, Highways, Housing and Planning teams and the Cheshire Partnership Gypsy and Traveller Coordinator were present to review and complete the assessment for each of the 77 sites. Three workshops were held covering Chester, Ellesmere Port, Northwich and Winsford and their surrounding rural areas.

- 6.12 The detailed analysis of the 77 sites resulted in a number of sites being discounted because of detailed site constraints; being unavailable for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson sites; or being promoted for alternative development that would preclude such use or render it unviable. It was agreed that it would be easier and quicker to deliver suitable Council-owned sites than privately-owned sites. This was particularly felt to be the case given the very low level of potential sites proposed following the call for sites.
- 6.13 It is clear that the Council needs to act as quickly to bring forward further sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpersons. There is a growing backlog of need. No permanent, additional provision has been made to meet the need identified in the 2007 GTAA. In order to achieve a breakthrough in provision in the short-term, the control of sites is critical. In section 7 we present a shortlist of sites in the Council's control that could provide a short to medium-term supply of additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches and Travelling Showpersons plots. Our recommendation to the Council is that these sites should be proactively brought forward through planning applications. Maps of these sites are included in **Annex K**.

7 Potential Sites

Shortlisted Sites

7.1 Five sites are considered to have real potential for becoming Gypsy and Traveller or Travelling Showperson sites in the short to medium-term. These sites are:

Site	Comments
Blakeden Lane/ Browning Way, Winsford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.24 hectares across two vacant sites • Council-owned • Adjacent to Police HQ • Would need to extend the Industrial Estate road for access, but the Council own the land • Mitigation measures may be required to address ecological and environmental issues • No highways or contamination issues • A good, sustainable location, not immediately adjacent to the settled population • Available in the short-term • This site would be capable of providing 20 pitches
Buildwas Road, Neston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.92 hectare site • Council-owned • Allocated land • Available in the short-term • This site would be capable of providing 12 pitches
Bumpers Lane, Chester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.94 hectare site • Council-owned • Protected route of Chester Western Relief Road and would require flood risk mitigation and land remediation • This site would be capable of providing 12 to 15 pitches
Depot, Rossfield Road, Ellesmere Port	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 hectare site • Council-owned • Delivery dependent upon decision regarding future use. Timeframe 3 – 5 years • No highways issues, good sustainable location • Would need a contamination survey and remediation may be required • This site would be capable of providing 15 pitches

Site	Comments
Road One, Winsford	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large undeveloped 13.84 hectare site• Council-owned• Located on Winsford Industrial Estate• A small portion of the site could be developed• Unlikely to be contamination or highways issues• Mitigation measures may be required to address ecological and environmental issues• Considered to be a suitable site for Travelling Showpeople.• Available in the short-term• This site would be capable of providing 10 plots

8 Site Delivery

- 8.1 In Section 7 we identified a shortlist of sites we believe are suitable and deliverable for Gypsy and Traveller pitches or Travelling Showperson plots. The shortlisted sites will be examined and tested further through any planning application process.
- 8.2 A number of the existing Gypsy and Traveller Pitches in the authority are on sites within the Green Belt, permitted under temporary planning permission. The Council will need to consider whether the provision of any additional permanent sites could be linked to the relocation of families from temporary Green Belt sites. There is also a need to find a suitable and permanent site in the Ellesmere Port area to accommodate the Travellers who currently occupy the Council's 'accepted' site.
- 8.3 As part of the planning application process, the Council will need to include consultation with Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpersons and with the settled community. Whilst it is for the Council to determine the exact form and nature of the consultation, the Council must follow legislative requirements and the approach set out in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

Policy Options

- 8.4 To meet medium and longer-term needs, it is recommended that the Council considers planning for these needs proactively, through the development of appropriate site allocations, to be set out in its LDF. There are two main policy options for the development of appropriate site allocations as part of the allocation of future sites through the LDF.
- 8.5 The first option is to include allocations for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpersons in the Site Allocations DPD. The second option is to consider the preparation of a dedicated Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson DPD.
- 8.6 The simplest approach would be to produce a separate Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson DPD. Utilising this approach, the authority could include site allocation along with site design and development management criteria in a discreet DPD.
- 8.7 The alternative approach to include Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson sites within a comprehensive site allocations DPD, would allow the authority to identify sites as a part of comprehensive land-use allocations. However, this approach could result in site allocation being delayed whilst potential issues relating to wider housing, employment and other land use allocations are considered.
- 8.8 The Coalition Government intends that local communities will be able to prepare Neighbourhood Plans. These can set out a land-use planning framework (Neighbourhood Development Plans) and grant planning permission for development (Neighbourhood Development Order/Community Right-to-Build). These could also be vehicles through which sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpersons could be identified, although our expectation is that they are highly unlikely to do so.
- 8.9 In either case there will be extensive consultation with both the settled community and the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson communities. Additionally, each site allocated in the DPD will need to have been subject to a sustainability appraisal.
- 8.10 The Council could also consider a policy approach of requiring large new housing urban extensions to provide for Gypsy and Traveller needs, as part of delivering balanced, mixed and inclusive communities.

Site Delivery

- 8.11 The Council should continue to work with the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson Communities to support them in the acquisition and delivery of private sites.
- 8.12 To meet the need for public managed and affordable pitches, the Council should investigate ways of delivering public site provision with other public agencies including Registered Providers.
- 8.13 In general, it is recommended that the Council should continue to actively look for suitable sites over the long-term, specifically focusing on areas outside the Green Belt and in close proximity to existing settlements, with a good range of services and facilities. It is also important for the Council to review the site availability of surveyed sites regularly, to identify potential new sites for the future.