

HELPFUL FAQs

PROPOSED GYPSY AND TRAVELLER SITES IN BOURNEMOUTH

NOTE: Public Consultation on the recent proposals will take place from 18 November 2011 to 10th February 2012. At that time the Council will produce consultation documents and information on the subject to go with them. However, as it has become clear, Forum Members are anxious for accurate information now and we therefore reproduce the FAQs that were released by the Council in February 2009, for a previous application.

This page will be updated as soon as further information is released by the Council.

Secretary

BOURNEMOUTH BOROUGH COUNCIL GYPSY AND TRAVELLER FAQs

February 2009

Who are the Gypsies and Travellers?

Romany Gypsies have lived in Britain for hundreds of years. Irish Travellers also have a long tradition of travelling in Britain. More recently people known as New Travellers have pursued a nomadic tradition. There are now children of these families born on the road with no experience of house-dwelling. Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are two separate recognised ethnic groups and are protected under Race Equality legislation. **All Travellers, including New Travellers, have their right to roam protected** by Human Rights Legislation, by the Housing Act 2004, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Children's Act 2004 and the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Does the Council have to provide a site?

The Housing Act 2004 requires Councils to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers and to provide accommodation based on the findings of that assessment. We also have to help meet that need by identifying sites in local planning documents. If we fail to identify sites the Government can direct us to do so. We don't have to build all of the homes ourselves, **but we do have to allocate specific pieces of land in our Local Development Framework**, which Gypsies or Travellers can apply for planning permission on and expect to receive consent.

More generally, the Council has a duty to promote good race relations, equality of opportunity and community cohesion. Providing a transit site and allocating specific pieces of land throughout the Borough helps fulfil this duty to the Gypsy and Traveller communities. We want to do our bit to ensure that Gypsies and Travellers have access to the facilities they require, such as a transit site and the opportunity to buy or rent a culturally appropriate home of their own.

What is a transit site?

Also called a stopping place, this is a place that Gypsies and Travellers can use for short periods

of time while they are travelling. They may stay for days or weeks, up to a maximum of three months. The site will have sanitation facilities, power supply and other supports. This is the equivalent to a settled person's B&B or hotel and like a hotel, it is pre-paid and typically, pre-booked.

Transit sites make sense, but why do Travellers need permanent sites?

Over the centuries, more and more traditional stopping places have been closed up or sold for development. These days, it is extremely difficult for families to live well on the road as they used to. Cold calling and traditional work is harder and harder to come by and education is becoming increasingly critical for all of us, in finding work, or even working for ourselves, whether Settled or Traveller. Traveller parents still have a cultural aversion to bricks and mortar, but have now come to understand the need to ensure a stable education for their children. Permanent sites offer a compromise solution that everyone can live with and that gives the best possible chance to the future generations.

Why provide for people who don't pay any council tax and who leave rubbish everywhere?

Gypsies and Travellers camping in an unauthorised manner in Bournemouth do not pay any Bournemouth Council Tax *because we offer no mechanism for them to pay*. As soon as they can rent a pitch on a Transit site, part of that fee will pay their water, electricity, council tax, rubbish collection and other services as part of their bill, just as we do when we pay for a night at a hotel or B&B. As part of the managed site rubbish removal costs and Council Tax will be included in the price of their stay and they will be required to keep the site tidy or they will be asked to leave. At present the Council is spending your hard-earned tax money, dealing with unauthorised sites – legal costs and clean up costs – these costs will markedly reduce, *once proper accommodation is made*.

Why do it now?

Making this provision for these groups fulfils a duty that we have; it's the right thing to do. Bournemouth currently has no provision. The Government is encouraging this provision by making funding available. If we identify a site that meets the Department for Communities and Local Government's (CLG) criteria, with a use period of at least 10 years, we can apply for this funding to convert that site and make it 'fit for purpose'. If we don't progress a site we will be forced to do so by Government and have to fund this ourselves.

Bristol City reduced their costs to £5,000 a year by providing a transit site completely funded by Central Government (so local Council tax did not go up). Now they spend the money they used to spend on moving people along, for local initiatives and projects, benefiting local communities.

What will the benefits be?

The key to reducing unauthorised camping is to provide authorised sites. Unauthorised sites cause community tension. An authorised site should prevent unauthorised camping and enable the Police to deal swiftly with any unauthorised encampments that do occur. In addition, Gypsies and Travellers experience the worst health and education of any disadvantaged groups in Britain. Providing more authorised sites nationally will help to tackle this, improving their quality of life and ultimately reducing demands on health services. Further, a decent access to an

education, facilitated by safe, legal places to stop, will greatly improve life chances of future generations, offering Gypsies and Travellers a genuine chance to contribute positively to a society that has historically kept them at arm's length. The 2004 Children's Act stipulates that every child has the right to an equal place in society. Every child includes every Gypsy & Traveller child as well.

Who would manage the stopping place?

The transit facility will be developed and managed by a housing partner. This means they will design and build the facility and then be responsible for its running and maintenance, arranging the reservations / booking process and ensuring it is well run. They will also deal with any problems that occur, as would any hotel/motel manager.

Will the stopping place be free to use?

No, anyone booking a place at the transit facility will have to pay a fee, exactly as they would at a hotel or B&B. A licence agreement will be in place for each pitch setting out the charge, rules for use of amenities, maximum stay and the basic terms and conditions, again exactly as is posted on the back of every hotel room door. Anyone staying beyond their agreement, or not keeping to the agreement in terms of behaviour, will have to leave, receiving the exact same sanctions as anyone causing a disturbance in a hotel would. In short, a stopping place is the culturally appropriate equivalent to a motel or B&B.

What will you do to stop Gypsies and Travellers pitching where they like?

Having an authorised site and a good booking and management system will prevent this from happening in the first place in the vast majority of cases. For those visitors who don't choose to play by the rules, the introduction of a transit site means that the Police will have greater powers to move immediately (within one hour) any Gypsies or Travellers who pitch elsewhere, directing them instead to the pay-as-you-go transit site.

What happens if the site is full?

Recent experience shows that we have relatively small groups on unauthorised sites, so in the main we expect that this site (for up to 12 pitches) will be adequate. It could also be the case that for extended periods of time the site is not occupied. Our neighbouring Councils must also provide sites, or face direction. A network of such sites in the local area should adequately cater for demand. In the highly unlikely event of overflow, we can resort to the temporary provision of an emergency stopping space, again, pre-paid, pre-organised, monitored & controlled.

What happens if the Gypsies or Travellers leave the site in a mess, like we've seen before, who will clean it up and pay?

This is the same as asking, "What if someone smashes up a hotel room?" The answer is the same: the hotel/site management will deal with it to the fullest extent of the law.

What will be done if the Gypsies or Travellers overstay the maximum time allowed on the transit site?

This is the same as asking, “What if someone refuses to leave his/her hotel room once their stay is completed?” The answer is the same in both cases, which is that the management will take appropriate action to have the guest removed. Further, it is unlikely that that guest will ever get another booking in the future!

What about anti social behaviour?

The Council and Police have a range of powers to deal with anti social behaviour which apply to all communities. We will use these powers to tackle any anti social behaviour that arises on the site, whether from local residents or from visitors. This is the policy that applies to all Bournemouth neighbourhoods.

Can you explain the different kinds of sites?

A *permanent site* is a dwelling for local resident Gypsies or Travellers. A *transit site*, or stopping place, can accommodate families up to 90 days and is the cultural equivalent of a motel. An *emergency stopping place* is a piece of land chosen and set aside to accommodate families in the absence of transit provision. It would offer a standpipe, portaloos and rubbish collection. It is not an acceptable long term solution, but would deflect unauthorised encampments in the short to mid term and begin to improve the antagonistic relationship there has historically been between the Settled and Travelling peoples, making way for a more peaceful and mutually respectful co-existence from here forward.

What are the CLG criteria?

There are a whole host of criteria, covering site layout & access, on-site facilities, health & safety, fire safety, etc. The full criteria can be found on the Communities and Local Government website at www.communities.gov.uk. However, while this work is still in our hands, we have a great deal of flexibility as to how we achieve our obligations.

And finally.....

Our “*Diversity Promise*” is to ensure that at Bournemouth Borough Council, we treat all people fairly, whatever their age, sexual orientation, religious belief, disability, gender or race. Our aim is not just to meet our duties under the various aspects of Equalities Legislation, but also to *make the Borough of Bournemouth a place where everyone matters and are treated as equals, according to their needs.*

A recent study has found that of those domestic householders interviewed before and after the creation of a site, most had no specific complaints and many acknowledged that their previous opposition had been groundless. It is perfectly normal to worry about “what if’s” when something new is being discussed. Together, Traveller and Settled, we can work through these worries to collectively ensure a properly sited, designed, managed and run stopping place that pays for itself and that improves everybody’s lives.