Medway Local Plan 2041 Examination

Matter 3 – Meeting Housing Need (contd.) Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Hearing Statement Medway Council

Issue

- **Whether the Plan meet the needs of the specific housing requirements of the Gypsy, Travellers & Travelling Showpeople communities and the approach taken is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.**

Introduction

This Hearing Statement has been prepared in response to the Inspectors' Matters, Issues and Questions for Phase 2 of the Examination of the Medway Local Plan 2041.

The Council's answers are set out under each question raised by the Inspectors. References are given to the submitted Plan, examination documents, evidence base documents and statements of common ground where relevant.

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Questions

Need and Supply

3.62 The Council's Gypsy and Traveller Note (MLP/ED8) (PDF pages 2 and 3, under question 27) refers to a recent supply of pitches from planning applications that it considers contributes to need. Are these consents all permanent and not restricted by personal permissions?

Council's response

3.62.1 The table provided in MLP/ED8 under question 27 lists seven applications. All are permanent, with the exception of MC/23/2423 and MC/25/1099. The consented developments MC/23/2423 and MC/25/1099 include restrictions to personal permissions, as they reflected specific circumstances with growth needs within the family.

3.63 Please provide an update on the capacity of consented sites, as per the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Sites Report (MLP/ED17, paragraph 5.2.2).

Council's response

3.63.1 The Council has collated information on all consented sites, and identified sites where there is capacity for additional pitches. The Officers have contacted a number of agents and site owners to discuss options to provide additional capacity on sites. This has resulted in positive responses, and the Council is preparing a schedule of mapped sites for safeguarding, or providing additional capacity on specific identified sites as supply in the Plan. The Council proposes to publish this schedule for consultation on Gypsy and Travellers provision to inform main modifications to the Plan.

3.64 The Council's Gypsy and Traveller Note (MLP/ED8) (PDF page 4, under question 27) states that the Council has identified land suitable for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation that is being used for wider residential needs, including the potential use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO). Has consideration been given to the likelihood of CPO success as regards its effectiveness in bringing forward further Gypsy and Traveller sites?

Council's response

3.64.1 The Council considered the use of CPO powers in relation to an identified site that is in use for wider residential use by non- gypsy and traveller communities. The Council has concluded that this is not a preferred route to securing additional gypsy and traveller pitches. The decision has been informed by the likelihood in securing the

preferred use and time and expense associated with the CPO process. The Council has focused on actions that provide greater certainty on delivery of pitches.

3.65 Where the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Sites Report (MLP/ED17, paragraph 2.1.3) states that the three sites that were submitted during the Call for Sites 2022 were all deemed unsuitable, was need considered when that view was taken?

Council's response

3.65.1 Yes, the Call for Sites and subsequent assessments on CHR13, SR32 and SR41 were carried out by the Council seeking to meet identified development needs, where sites were suitable, available and achievable.

3.66 Do the sites that were considered in the review of sites in the Council ownership under the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Sites Report (MLP/ED17) include the site at Cuxton which is referred to in the supporting text to Policy T10 (paragraph 6.10.7)?

Council's response

3.66.1 Yes. This existing site has been considered in options to increase provision for gypsy and traveller pitches

3.67 Please provide an update on the potential site allocation at Wigmore, following the Full Council meeting on 15 October 2026, as referred to in the Update On Gypsy And Traveller Accommodation Needs (MLP/ED28)?

Council's response

3.67.1 The Council at its meeting on 15 October at Item 374 Decision b[1]) agreed to add £2,684,000 to the Capital Programme (funded by prudential borrowing) to deliver the initial proposals set out in the option agreed by the Cabinet on 4 August 2026 to develop and improve the current site and to approve consideration of future expansion into adjacent land as a second phase.

3.67.2 This demonstrates the Council's commitment to meeting the needs of gypsy and traveller communities, and provides certainty on delivery of an improved and extended site, designed to meet good amenity and environmental standards.

3.68 Please also provide an update on the timescales for updating evidence and the site consultation for the potential site allocation at Wigmore.

[1] https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=122&MId=6715&Ver=4

Council's response

3.68.1 Following the approval of funding for the development of the gypsy and traveller site at Wigmore, by Full Council on 15 October, planning officers are preparing materials on proposed site allocations for consultation, supported by updated evidence on safeguarded sites and sites identified for allocation for expansion of pitch numbers.

3.68.2 The Council proposes that it could start a 6 week consultation period on 13 November. Given the Christmas period, the consultation could close on 4 January 2027.

3.69 Please explain why the Wigmore site is achievable, having regard to its economic viability, the capacity of the developer to complete and let or sell the development over a certain period, as per the assessment of achievability in the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Sites Report (MLP/ED17) (paragraph 3.3.8).

Council's response

3.69.1 The Council's decisions at Cabinet on 4 August 2026 and Full Council on 15 October 2026 to support the use of the land at Wigmore for gypsy and traveller accommodation, and to finance its development provide certainty that the site is achievable. The Council as landowner has control of the site, agreement on funding, and is working with existing residents on plans to improve the site. The funding and the council led project are now in the Council's Capital Programme. The Council will manage the site and there is existing demand for the pitches.

3.70 Please provide evidence of the discussions that the Council has had with the developers and landowners of the strategic development allocations over making provision for Gypsy and Traveller pitches that is referred to in the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Sites Report (MLP/ED17) (paragraph 4.1.1).

Council's response

3.70.1 Discussions were held in engagement meetings with developers and landowners of the strategic development allocations in rural and surburban areas. The lack of support from developers indicated that the inclusion of gypsy and traveller pitches would not be achievable.

3.71 Why would brownfield regeneration in urban centres and waterfront sites not be suitable for Gypsy and Traveller pitches, as is stated in the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Sites Report (MLP/ED17) (paragraph 4.1.1)?

Council's response

3.71.1 The Council considers that sites in urban centres and waterfronts identified as development allocations do not provide for suitable locations for gypsy and traveller sites. The land take and access requirements conflict with wider development needs and design requirements, as set out in allocation policies and guidance such as the Chatham Design Code. There is no market interest in this location, which indicates that sites are likely to be unachievable. From experience, gypsy and traveller communities in Medway are seeking sites in rural and peripheral suburban locations to meet their needs.

3.72 Why is there a concern about viability and impacts on integrating use for Gypsy and Traveller pitches in large scale 'bricks and mortar' developments on the wider strategic allocations in suburban and rural locations, as is stated in the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Sites Report (MLP/ED17) (paragraph 4.1.2)?

Council's response

3.72.1 The Council's GTAA consultant advised from experience across the country that this approach does not provide certainty in the delivery of gypsy and traveller pitches as part of wider strategic allocations. There is limited control on the implementation and engagement with gypsy and traveller communities, and sites are frequently not provided until the end of the build out period for the 'bricks and mortar' developments.

3.72.2 Developers have raised concerns about the impacts of integrating pitches in wider strategic development, including viability considerations. However as the Plan includes a number of large strategic allocations, to be built out into the 2040s, the Council will monitor and review this position and engage with developers, as masterplans develop, and specific site opportunities are better understood.

3.73 Where the Council's Gypsy and Traveller Note (MLP/ED8) (PDF page 4, under question 27) and the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Sites Report (MLP/ED17, paragraph 5.2.1) refers to site reconfiguration or space to increase capacity, has consideration being given to whether this would be justified with regard to the effect on the living conditions of the existing residents of those site(s)?

Council's response

3.73.1 Yes, this is an established consideration in the determination of planning applications, and in licensing arrangements, such as minimum distances between caravans to prevent the spread of fire. The Council recognises that 0.05 hectare per

pitch, or 20 pitches per hectare provides a useful starting point for consideration of capacity.

3.73.2 The Council will publish its methodology on site assessments as part of the proposed consultation on Gypsy and Traveller site allocations.

3.74 In considering the various responses of the Council on Gypsy, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople site provision (MLP/ED6, MLP/ED8, MLP/ED17, MLP/ED18 and A, and MLP/ED28) please provide an update on whether the Council can now meet the projected need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches over the first five years of the Plan and over the Plan period?

Council's response

3.74.1 The Council's decision making on the Wigmore site, and wider work in reviewing the potential for additional pitches on existing sites, and engagement with agents and landowners has provided updated evidence that the Plan can provide for the 5 year land supply requirements on suitable sites, currently available, and a realistic prospect that development will be delivered within 5 years. Provision is across five identified sites, including the Wigmore site and existing private sites.

3.74.2 There is a need for 7 pitches in years 6-10 of the Plan, and the Council identified potential suitable sites where there is a reasonable prospect that the site is available and could be viably developed.

3.74.3 The Council considers the later Plan period need for 6 pitches could be met through windfalls, based on supply through planning applications in recent years.

Policy T10 Gypsy, Travellers & Travelling Showpeople

3.75 Why does Policy T10 not consider sites with a condition limiting them to a temporary period or a specified person(s) to be authorised, by way of the definition it gives at the end of the 'Safeguarding existing sites' section, or is that simply to ensure that permissions that are subject to temporary and/or personal permissions are not taken into account in supply calculations?

Council's response

3.75.1 The GTAA (B11.1 and B11.2) considered households on sites with temporary planning permission as part of the need calculation, so were not taken into account in supply calculations.

3.75.2 However, the Council's approach in determining planning applications for gypsy and sites is for permanent consents. There are only two current sites in Medway with personal permissions, and these reflected growth needs within the family.

3.76 Under both the 'Safeguarding existing sites' and 'New Sites' sections of Policy T10, why must sites be 'well-screened' and is this consistent with national policy?

Council's response

3.76.1 The Policy refers to 'well-screened by existing or additional native vegetation'. This is consistent with Planning Policy for Traveller Sites paragraph 27 b), that local planning authorities should attach weight to sites being well planned or soft landscaped in such a way as to positively enhance the environment and enhance its openness.

3.76.2 The criterium seeks to secure appropriate landscaping for environmental amenity and avoid enclosing a site with dominant hard landscaping, high walls or fences.

3.77 Are the criteria in the 'Safeguarding existing sites' section of Policy T10 (top of page 107) formatted as intended?

Council's response

3.77.1 No, this section of the Policy should be formatted with numbered points setting out the criteria.

Proposed Main/Minor Modification

3.77.2 To re-format the five criteria for consideration to the expansion of safeguarded sites into referenced separate bullet points.

Reason for proposed Main/Minor Modification

3.77.3 To clarify the interpretation of the Policy.

3.78 Under the 'New sites' section of Policy T10, how would the needs of Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople' who do not meet the definition under national policy (first bullet point) be addressed?

Council's response

3.78.1 The GTAA Addendum (B11.2) reflects the updated planning definition as including all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a caravan. The development needs in the GTAA were updated to reflect this policy change, and the assessed need for 56 pitches over the Plan period, includes all households that meet the current planning definition (41 pitches) and undetermined (15 pitches).

3.78.2 The criterium in the Policy seeks to secure provision for gypsy, traveller and travelling showpeople, and to avoid sites providing for general housing needs.

3.79 Is the reliance on expansion of authorised sites under the 'New sites' section of Policy T10 (second bullet point) consistent with national policy, as well as with this sub section title?

Council's response

3.79.1 Subject to proposed consultation on Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites, the Council proposes to modify the Policy, so that there is provision for allocations, in addition to the criteria to guide development proposals. This will provide greater certainty in meeting the identified needs and consistency with national policy. The Policy sub headings would be reviewed in this context to clarify proposed allocations and the development management criteria.

Proposed Main/Minor Modification

3.79.2 Subject to the outcome of consultation, the Council proposes to amend the Policy wording to clarify allocations and development management criteria.

Reason for proposed Main/Minor Modification

3.79.3 To provide greater certainty in meeting needs and consistency with national policy.

3.80 Are the list of the location exclusions under the 'New sites' section of Policy T10 (third bullet point) consistent with national policy and positively prepared?

Council's response

3.80.1 The list of location exclusions is largely consistent with national policy, with reference to footnote 7 of the Framework, December 2024. The Council has included reference to the best and most versatile agricultural land, of Grades 1, 2 or 3a. This reflects the Framework's Policy at paragraph 187 b), but the Council accepts that as much of Medway's land is within Grades 1, 2 and 3, this may be an overly restrictive criterium where development may be on sites where agricultural use may be compromised. This restriction could be considered as not meeting the requirements of a positively prepared plan. The Council would consider a modification to the Policy to qualify how it would consider the weight to be given to agricultural land quality to ensure consistency with national policy.

Proposed Main/Minor Modification

3.80.2 To amend the bullet point defining locational criteria to qualify the reference to: or the best and most versatile agricultural land, of Grades 1, 2 or 3a, **where development would adversely impact agricultural productivity**.

Reason for proposed Main/Minor Modification

3.80.3 For consistency with national policy.

3.81 The Council's Response to the Inspectors' Initial Questions on Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople (MLP/ED8) (PDF page 2, under question 26) refers to the need to update the supporting text to Policy T10 to reflect the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment - Addendum (B11.2) as a minor modification. Why would it be a minor, rather than a main modification?

Council's response

3.81.1 The Council accepts that the update to the supporting text to reflect the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment - Addendum (B11.2) should be considered as a main modification, as it sets out the development needs.

Proposed Main/Minor Modification

3.81.2 Paragraph 6.10.7 to be modified for consistency with the B11.2 evidence base:

...The GTAA identified a need of **56** ~~31~~ pitches for gypsy and travellers and **8** ~~3~~ plots for Travelling Showpeople, from households that meet the planning definition. ~~There is wider need from undetermined households and those that do not meet the planning definition.~~

Reason for proposed Main/Minor Modification

3.81.3 For accuracy and consistency with the evidence base.

3.82 The Council's Response to the Inspectors' Initial Questions on Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople (MLP/ED8) (PDF page 4 under question 27) and the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Sites Report (MLP/ED17, paragraph 5.2.1) refers to the potential for areas for expansion of existing Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites. Do these sites need to be included in Policy T10 and shown on the Policies Map?

Council's response

3.82.1 Yes, it is the Council's intention to identify existing sites in the Policy and to show on the Policies map as a proposed major modification.

Proposed Main/Minor Modification

3.82.2 The Council proposes to modify the policy wording to identify specific sites, following the outcome of additional consultation on provision for Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. The Policy will be added to the Policies Map as a modification.

Reason for proposed Main/Minor Modification

3.82.3 To provide certainty in planning for the needs of Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities.

3.83 In also considering the Main Modifications that the Council has indicated it would wish to make to this policy, is Policy T10 therefore positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

Council's response

3.83.1 The Council accepts that as currently drafted the Policy is not wholly consistent with national policy. However it considers that the proposed Main Modifications will demonstrate that the Policy is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy, as the modifications will provide greater certainty in meeting the needs of gypsy and travellers and travelling showpeople communities.