



**WELWYN  
HATFIELD**

# **Joint Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2013-2032 and the East Herts District Plan 2011-2033**

**Birchall Garden Suburb/East of Welwyn Garden**

## **Examination Hearing Statements**

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### **Matters and Issues**

#### **Matter 9 - Gypsies and Travellers**

## Matter 9 – Gypsy and Travellers

### Issues

- 43) Is there a robustly proven need for the overall number of Gypsy and Traveller pitches proposed in this locality?**

### Response

- a) Yes. Welwyn Hatfield and East Herts Councils each have robust evidence of the need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches within their respective borough and district.
- b) The Welwyn Hatfield Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment 2016 (**HOU/16**) identifies a need for 61 additional pitches in Welwyn Hatfield over the period 2016 to 2032.
- c) For East Herts, the latest evidence, which demonstrates proven need within the district, is contained in the East Herts Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment Update (May 2016) prepared by ORS (**HOP/005**). This document identifies a need for 5 additional Gypsy and Traveller Pitches and 9 plots for Travelling Showpeople in East Herts over the plan period to 2033.
- d) The proposal for BGS is to provide an area sufficient to accommodate 15 pitches to contribute to the needs of both authorities.
- e) For East Herts, allocating 4 pitches to this location will help meet accommodation needs identified in East Herts between 2022 and 2027, and ensure sufficient provision to deliver need identified in the longer term. The *Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Identification of Potential Sites Study*, Peter Brett Associates (PBA), October 2014 (**HOP/007**), examined numerous scenarios for the provision of traveller pitches and plots in the district, but failed to identify any new sites to meet identified need in areas beyond the Green Belt. The basis for the proposed traveller site allocations in the District Plan is discussed in depth in the *East Herts Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Topic Paper*, (**TPA/007**)
- f) The Welwyn Hatfield needs assessment specifically considers need arising from the borough's existing Gypsy and Traveller sites (as well as from observed levels of unauthorised development around the borough and from a transit site outside the borough). An existing Hertfordshire County Council site at Holwell, Cole Green, is located within Welwyn Hatfield, close to the borough/district boundary between Welwyn Hatfield and East Herts and close to the BGS proposal.
- g) The assessment identifies a need for 12 pitches relating to the Holwell site (combined need from existing and newly forming households and evidence from the HCC Waiting List for a pitch on this site). The waiting list for a pitch on the Holwell site cannot be addressed unless additional site provision is made. New provision at BGS will be capable of addressing the need arising from the Holwell site, in reasonable proximity, with the final location of the Gypsy and Traveller site within the overall BGS development to be identified through the Masterplanning process.
- h) Like any residential development, Gypsy and Traveller pitches need to be located close to services and facilities such as schools and public transport.

- i) If provision is not made at Strategic Development Sites, such as Birchall Garden Suburb where a sustainable new neighbourhood is proposed, and on a proportionate basis to the scale of the overall development, then there will be a significant shortfall in provision in both authority areas. Other than those already identified, there are no other suitable alternative sites in East Herts or in Welwyn Hatfield that would allow for delivery in the timescales required.
- j) An MoU between Welwyn Hatfield and East Herts (East Herts ref: **ED106**; Welwyn Hatfield ref: **DTC/5**), notes that the authorities agree that a shared evidence base would be useful at the plan review stage. This would account the needs for a wider area, particularly having regard to the delivery of a Gypsy and Traveller allocation at the cross-boundary BGS site. In the meantime, the overall existing evidence base is considered to be proportionate and justifies the approach proposed.

**44) Has there been adequate consultation to establish the assumed need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches in this locality?**

**Response**

Yes. The Gypsy and Traveller allocations made in the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan and East Herts District Plan have been underpinned by a significant amount of stakeholder engagement. Consultation Statements of each authority set out how comments received at each stage of plan preparation have been taken into account.

- a) **Welwyn Hatfield:** The Council has consulted on both accommodation needs and the provision of sites to meet the need for additional pitches throughout plan preparation.
  - 2009 - Core Strategy Issues and Options Paper (**LPD/1**): Consultation with relevant consultation bodies and the wider community. Existing sites were not considered suitable for expansion. Over 1,000 responses received. Provision of new sites within areas identified for urban expansion was the most preferred option. (**SUB/1f**, pages 97/98).
  - 2009 – Core Strategy Issues and Options Paper (**LPD/1**) – Q2: Criteria to guide the allocation of sites. Service providers agreed there was a need for pitches in appropriate locations, with adequate service provision. Sites with 5 to 15 pitches assist with effective site management. (**SUB/1f**, page 98).
  - 2009 - Consultation with the local Gypsy and Traveller community indicated a need for additional sites. Sites should be able to co-exist with the settled community, either on the edge of existing settlements or alongside new housing. (**SUB/1f**, pages 145-147).
  - 2011 - Accommodation Needs Assessment (**HOU/3**): The Council worked with the local Gypsy and Traveller community, traveller community representatives and service providers. The need for access to good bus services, GP and dental surgeries, schools and shops was highlighted. Sites of between 10 and 20 pitches are easier to manage than larger sites. The importance of children having access to education was noted, but integrating within society can be problematic due to prejudice frequently encountered.

- 2012 - Emerging Core Strategy Consultation (**LPD/4**): Consultation with relevant consultation bodies and the wider community. Policy CS7 indicated that pitch provision would be made to meet assessed need, including at Broad Locations for Growth. The County Council Gypsy section worked with the borough's Gypsy and Traveller community to help residents take part in the consultation event.
- 2013 – “*Call for Sites*”: The event was publicised working with groups representing the interests of Gypsies and Travellers. The local Gypsy and Traveller community, public sector bodies and landowners were contacted to explore the availability of potential sites. A Land Availability assessment was published in 2014 (**HOU/13**), subsequently, updated in the HELAA (**HOU/19**).
- 2015 - Local Plan Consultation (**LPD/5**): Consultation with relevant consultation bodies and the wider community. Confirmed no sites available in urban areas. The pressing need for additional pitches meant that sites would need to be allocated in the Green Belt (CS4). Pitch provision would be made at [Strategic] Sites WGC4, WGC5, Hat1, Hat2 and at other smaller sites within the borough.
- 2016 – Needs Assessment (**HOU/16**): The Council engaged with the Gypsy and Traveller community to update its evidence of accommodation needs.
- 2016 - Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission (**SUB/6**): Consultation with relevant consultation bodies and the wider community. Proposed site/pitch provision in association with Strategic Development Sites. The Reg. 22 Consultation Statement provides a summary of responses received (**SUB/1**).

b) **East Herts:** East Herts Council has carried out significant consultation with traveller communities to identify both levels of accommodation need and locational preference. This has taken place through the:

- East Herts Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment, Opinion Research Services (ORS), April 2014 (**HOP/006**);
- The East Herts Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment, Update, ORS, May 2016 (**HOP/005**); and,
- The Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Identification of Potential Sites Study, Peter Brett Associates (PBA), October 2014 (**HOP/007**).

c) These studies illustrate that every traveller household present in the district at the time that fieldwork was carried out has been provided with the opportunity to input into the Council’s traveller-specific evidence base, which underpins the approach taken in the District Plan, on at least three occasions. Extensive efforts were also made to seek to identify any travellers in the district not previously known to the authority.

d) Further opportunities to engage with the District Plan process more generally have been offered to both traveller and settled communities through the various public consultation stages:

- At the Issues and Options stage in 2010 (**PDP/002**), the need to provide sufficient accommodation in sustainable locations that would ensure successful co-existence between settled and travelling communities was identified.
  - At the Preferred Options 2014 consultation (**PDP/001**), draft Policy HOU7 provided a framework for delivery, but did not identify specific draft site allocations at that time.
  - At the Pre-Submission 2016 consultation (**SUB/001**), with an up to date and revised ‘Planning policy for traveller sites’ compliant evidence base in place, draft Policy HOU9 provided the opportunity to comment on both proposed allocations (which included the Birchall Garden Suburb site) and the criteria based approach, which is intended to provide a basis to guide those allocations and for decisions in case applications should come forward beyond those allocations.
- e) The Council’s Regulation 22 Consultation Statement (**SUB/009**), details (at section 3.0) the methods utilised by the Council to publicise the Regulation 18 and 19 consultations. A summary of responses made in respect of Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople matters in the Pre-Submission Consultation is also available at Appendix I14, Chapter 14 Housing (section 14.10).