

Gypsy and Traveller sites – frequently asked questions

What is the purpose of this consultation?

This consultation is on changes (known as main modifications) to the Local Plan. The draft Local Plan consists of three documents that set out a range of planning policies which will be used as the basis for making decisions on future planning applications. As part of this consultation the council are consulting on site allocations for three Gypsy and Traveller sites. Site Allocations set out site specific policies for sites across the borough to meet identified development needs.

What stage is this in the process?

Following several rounds of consultation the draft Local Plan is now at an advanced stage in the process known as Examination. The document was submitted to the Secretary of State for Independent Examination in February 2020. The Secretary of State appointed the independent Planning Inspectors Jonathan Manning BSc (HONS) MA MRTPI and Christa Masters MA (Hons) MRTPI to undertake the independent examination into whether the London Borough of Islington Local Plan is sound and complies with all the legal requirements. The Examination Hearings took place between September and October 2021. Both during and following the hearings the Inspectors made clear where modifications to the draft Local Plan were necessary to achieve a sound and legally compliant plan.

The identification of Gypsy and Traveller sites to meet the identified need is one such area. The council did attempt to identify Gypsy and Traveller sites in the earlier stages of the plan making process, but without success.

In the councils written statement and at the Examination hearings the council explained that it was intending to continue the search for sites. The council added that, if no site can be found in the borough, then the council would work with neighbouring boroughs and the GLA to determine the scope for accommodating need on a sub-regional basis.

At the hearings the Inspectors identified significant concerns that a site/sites had not been found and requested that the council work to try to identify Gypsy and Traveller sites as part of this Local Plan process.

The council continued the site search and identified three potential sites which are now included as Modifications to the draft Local Plan.

All modifications have to be consulted on before the Inspectors can make recommendations on them. The Inspector's recommendations, and the reasons for them, will be set out in the Inspectors' report which marks the end of the examination. The recommendations received in the Inspectors' report are binding on the Council for it to adopt the draft Local Plan. The formal adoption of the draft Local Plan is made by the Council.

What happens following the consultation?

The council will send all the responses it receives to the Planning Inspectors and they will consider all of the responses to the consultation. If the Inspectors consider that it is necessary to re-open the Examination hearings, they can do so. Either way they will set out their views on the proposed sites and any changes that need to be made to the Local Plan in the Inspectors' report. The Planning Inspectorate provides guidance¹ on procedure for Local Plan examinations.

Who are Gypsies and Travellers?

There are three broad groupings of Gypsies and Travellers in England: traditional English (Romany) Gypsies, traditional Irish Travellers, and New Travellers. Travelling is not a defining characteristic of these groups, but only one characteristic amongst others. The majority of Britain's estimated 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers are thought to live in conventional housing, some by choice, and some because of the severe shortage of sites.

The definition of Gypsies and Travellers as set out by the government is set out below:

“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, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling showpeople or circus people travelling together as such”.

Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are covered by the protected characteristic of race under the Equality Act 2010.

Why do we need to identify sites in Islington?

Councils are required to assess the accommodation needs of all people living in the area they are responsible for and this includes Gypsies and Travellers.

The Housing Act 2004 places a duty on local housing authorities to undertake regular assessments of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers either living in, or resorting to their area.

A detailed study carried out by Islington Council to inform the Local Plan preparation, identified the need for six Gypsy and Traveller pitches in the borough under the government's definition. The Islington Gypsy and Traveller Assessment² can be found in the draft Local Plan examination library. Under national planning policy Islington are required to meet this need – the identification of sites is the key way to do this. Currently Gypsies and Travellers are living in conventional housing in the borough.

What is a pitch?

A pitch is the space required to accommodate one household and will vary according to the size of the household. A traditional family pitch will provide space for a mobile home and touring caravan, space for parking, and an amenity block. Depending on the community needs another example of what might be built on a pitch can be found on Millfields Road in Hackney, which includes bungalows instead of the mobile homes.

¹ [Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/401222/Procedure_Guide_for_Local_Plan_Examinations_-_GOV.UK.pdf)

² Islington Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation assessment 2019
[20190903gypsyandtravelleraccommodationassessmentjuly2019.pdf \(islington.gov.uk\)](https://www.islington.gov.uk/media/20190903gypsyandtravelleraccommodationassessmentjuly2019.pdf)

How did the council identify Gypsy and Traveller sites?

A site search and assessment process has been carried out. This considered land against a set of planning criteria. The set of planning criteria helped to identify the sites which were suitable. Given the borough's context identifying any suitable sites is challenging. The sites identified for allocation are considered to provide good residential amenity including overlooking, suitable site access and be of sufficient overall size to meet needs.

Why not provide houses instead of sites?

For many Gypsies and Travellers, living in a caravan is not a 'lifestyle choice' but a result of their social and cultural heritage and an essential part of their ethnic identity. This is true whether they are nomadic or settle for long periods in one place.

National planning guidance recognises the needs of Gypsies and Travellers even when they may have stopped travelling, temporarily or permanently, so to enable the cultural traditions of being a Gypsy or Traveller to be maintained.

It is increasingly difficult for families to live on the road as they used to. There are fewer places to stop, and work patterns have changed, for example as agricultural practices have been modernised. Families increasingly require safe and secure 'base sites' from which to travel from should they wish. The lack of legal permanent sites makes accessing key services and facilities much harder. Everyone should have the opportunity of a decent home that meets their needs, and this includes Gypsies and Travellers who need sites to accommodate caravans.

What do Gypsy and Traveller sites look like?

Properly set up managed and landscaped modern Gypsy and Traveller sites are designed to make possible a healthy, safe and secure environment for residents and to maintain visual and acoustic privacy for residents and for those living nearby.

Typical pitches on modern Gypsy and Traveller sites typically include an area of hardstanding for a caravan or chalet style mobile home plus landscaping and vehicle parking. Minimum site requirements include mains water, sewerage and electricity.

The Guidance document 'Places we're proud of' provides some examples of good quality new Gypsy and Traveller sites and their management. The guidance has been produced by the National Policy Advisory Panel on Gypsy and Traveller Housing, a group of housing providers committed to extending provision and raising standards of this much-needed type of accommodation³.

Islington's intention is that the sites will be designed to be high quality and sustainable, (this could include renewable energy, as well as measures to ensure sustainable drainage). Providing for a good quality of life for residents who live on them. The site allocations also emphasise the need for site design to mitigate impacts on neighbouring properties. The details of site design will be developed through a consultation process.

The intention is for the council to manage the sites and to work closely with future occupiers, local communities and other relevant agencies to provide the right support when required in their operation.

³ [Places We're Proud Of by Rooftop Housing Group - Issuu](#)

How will the allocated sites impact the existing local community?

The site allocations are clear about the need for the future use of each site to provide good quality housing, provide a good level of residential amenity and mitigate impacts on surrounding residential properties. The site allocations highlight the importance of engaging with the existing local community, as well the Gypsy and Traveller community, through the site design process which will also help to identify other impacts which may need to be considered and mitigated. Each site will be provided with essential infrastructure (e. g water, sewerage and electricity) prior to occupation. The council will consider how the movement of vehicles in and out of the site can be done safely and a transport assessment will be provided as part of a future planning application. Because the sites are intended to meet the needs of the Gypsies and Travellers living in conventional housing in the borough the residents will already be part of the community using local services so from an infrastructure point of view there is no increase in demand for schools or for healthcare.

What sustainability measure will be included?

As part of the site design process the council will identify how sustainability measures can be incorporated consistent with other planning policies, for example, the approach to greening of the site, drainage and surface water run-off as well as options for the inclusion of renewable energy.

Will the development be car free?

Islington's car-free development policy applies borough-wide and aims to reduce the dominance of cars in the borough. Car-free development means that no parking provision will be allowed on-site and occupiers will not have the ability to obtain parking permits, except for required accessible parking. The policy also allows parking if this is essential requirement of the use itself. In order to respect Gypsy and Travellers way of life and enable the movement of caravans cars will need to be able to access the site.

Islington's car-free policy approach also recognises that some residents moving into car-free homes might face exceptional circumstances, in particular, existing residents in social rented housing who have a parking permit, who move to different accommodation. These exceptional circumstances may apply to the households who wish to move onto the site and this will be considered in detail as part of the planning application for the site.

Who will live here and how will sites get allocated?

The identified need for Gypsy and Traveller sites is from families and households that currently live within the borough in conventional housing. There will be a process of engagement with Gypsy and Traveller communities in relation to the allocation of sites and the council will develop an allocations criteria which will be used to assess specific housing needs as part of this process.

Are they permanent pitches or transit pitches?

The sites will be permanent residential sites. The sites will be used long-term by Gypsy and Traveller households.

Rent, council tax and payment for utilities

Permanent pitches will be rented by occupiers in the same way as other affordable homes. Gypsy and Traveller sites are charged Council Tax and utilities bills the same as other residential dwellings.

What will happen in relation to access to the Highbury Roundhouse Community Centre?

The Highbury Roundhouse Community Centre is an important community resource and safe and inclusive access to the site is important. The draft policy for the site is clear that proposals should accommodate suitable pedestrian and vehicular access to the new community centre to the north of the site, including turning space for emergency services vehicles. The site boundary has been drawn to allow flexibility in site design. Maintaining access to the community centre is essential. The delivery of the access route for the community centre can continue and does not need to be held up by the proposal. The allocation should not impede on the operations of the community centre.

What will happen to the existing community use at 207a Junction Road?

It is recognised that this is a valued community use. The council will work with the current occupiers of the site to identify a suitable site for the re-location of the existing martial arts centre within the local area which should be of equivalent quality, quantity and accessibility. The suitable re-location will need to be found before the site can be delivered for a Gypsy and Traveller site. It is important to note that the previous draft of the allocation for housing would have required re-location of the existing use, at least on a temporary basis. With the proposed modification, it is considered that there would be limited scope to re-provide the existing use alongside Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.

What are the next steps?

Once the sites are allocated (which is still subject to public consultation, the Inspectors' consideration and their formal report) and before any development can happen, a planning application for Gypsy and Travellers accommodation will need to be submitted, consulted on and approved by the Council for the allocated sites. The planning application process will determine the detailed aspects of development such as design, highways access and landscaping before development can commence. This will mean further information in the form of ecology and highways assessments may still be required on individual sites to gain planning permission and further local consultation will take place for any planning application.

Who should I contact if I want to find out more?

Email the planning policy team at planningpolicy@islington.gov.uk