

Wealden
District Council

Planning for the Needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

Interim Topic Paper February 2026

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1 Introduction

1.1 This topic paper has been prepared to set out the approach and evidential basis in planning for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople (GTTSP) needs in Wealden District to support the provision 'option' identified in the Focused Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026).

1.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in December 2024[1] emphasises that the planning system should be plan-led, with local plans setting out a framework for meeting housing needs. Paragraph 11 b) of the NPPF states that:

> *"Strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas[2], unless:*
>
> *i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area[3]; or*
>
> *ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."*

1.3 Paragraph 62 of the NPPF states that *"to determine the minimum number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment".* Paragraph 63 of the NPPF then further elaborates on this and requires that *"within this context of establishing need, the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies. These groups should include... travellers".*

1.4 The Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) was first published alongside the first NPPF in 2012, and was last updated in December 2024[4], at the same time as the latest NPPF. This document contains specific policies applicable to both plan preparation and decision taking for gypsy, traveller

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[1] National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), December 2024

[2] As established through statements of common ground (see paragraph 28 of the NPPF).

[3] The policies referred to are those in this Framework relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 194 of the NPPF) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, a National Landscape, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 75 of the NPPF); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

[4] Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS), December 2024

and travelling showpeople development. The PPTS contains a definition of what the terms gypsies and travellers and travelling showpeople mean for the purposes of planning policy. At paragraph 3 of the PPTS, it is clear that "*the Government's overarching aim is to ensure fair and equal treatment for travellers, in a way that facilitates the traditional and nomadic way of life of travellers while respecting the interests of the settled community".*

1.5 The PPTS and the NPPF are to be read alongside one another, with paragraphs 2 and 4 in each respective document making it explicit that both should be read in conjunction. Both also state that these policies must be taken into account in the preparation of development plans.

1.6 With regard to changes to these documents, a revised PPTS and NPPF were published on 12 December 2024. Paragraph 234 of the NPPF sets out the transitional arrangements for plan-making. It explains that policies within the NPPF (December 2024) will only apply to plans reaching Regulation 19 stage after 12 March 2025. As the draft Wealden Local Plan will reach the Regulation 19 stage after this date, it will be examined against the current NPPF (December 2024).

2 Background to planning for GTTSP needs in Wealden

2.1 Prior to publication of the first NPPF in 2012, responsibility for the provision of GTTSP accommodation needs primarily sat within the housing function of the Council, considered as part of the ongoing management and liaison work between housing teams and wider sectors of the community. However, following publication of the NPPF in 2012, and the explicit need to plan for provision in local plan making, responsibility for provision and future demand of GTTSP accommodation lies largely within the planning function in undertaking the role of the local planning authority in the Wealden District.

2.2 In the undertaking of local planning authority functions and planning for future housing need, the Council published their first Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) in March 2010, assessing sites that had been submitted since August 2008. These sites were sourced via various means, as set out in the most up to date Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) (January 2026)[5]. All sites were detailed in a SHELAA New Site/Submission Form, and as this form was amended over time, proposals for any gypsy and traveller development were to be detailed in general development proposals set out. Proposals and their assessments were therefore capture in the SHELAA process, alongside all other development types. However, in 2020, the Council amended the

[5] Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA), January 2026

SHELAA submission form to specifically detail and therefore capture proposals for GTTSP accommodation in the district.

2.3 In addition, in 2020, the Council also undertook work to source an updated Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTAA). This followed a previous GTAA undertaken by the Council in 2016, where, at the time, the district had 51 authorised permanent pitches (households) with the assessment, indicating that for the period from 2016/17 to 2037/38, there was an additional need for 21 permanent pitches for 'travelling' households in the district.

2.4 Owing to ongoing local plan preparation, and changes to the legal interpretation of gypsy and traveller needs, an update to this work was sought in 2020. It was also noted that neighbouring and other East Sussex local planning authorities would need to establish these same accommodation needs in respective areas. Therefore, the new GTAA was agreed to be undertaken on a county wide basis, across the area of East Sussex. The assessment was therefore jointly undertaken by Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council, Rother District Council, Wealden District Council, and the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) in their role as local planning authority for this part of the National Park in East Sussex. The East Sussex Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTAA) was published in May 2022[6].

2.5 The GTAA (2022) identified the level of need for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople accommodation in each local planning authority area, based on the need as was defined in the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) (August 2015) applicable at that time. It also included the need based on a broader 'ethnic' definition and a need based on a 'work' definition. The broader 'ethnic' definition identifies households as Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople that would not meet the 'travelling' part of the definition contained within the PPTS i.e. they have ceased on a permanent basis to travel.

2.6 The GTAA (2022) identified that the Wealden District had the highest Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople population within East Sussex, in addition to the largest number of existing plots and pitches. The GTAA shows that for the study period between 2021 to 2040, there is an accommodation need under the 'ethnic' definition for Gypsies and Travellers of 51 pitches in total. It was also shown that there was accommodation need for 3 plots for Travelling Showpeople in the

[6] East Sussex Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment – May 2022

district; the only need for Travelling Showpeople identified in East Sussex.

2.7 These accommodation needs were used to inform strategic policies in the provision of GTTSP accommodation, as required by paragraph 63 of the NPPF and paragraph 9 of the PPTS. These accommodation needs were initially set out in the Wealden Local Plan Direction of Travel Consultation (November 2020)[7], in paragraphs 6.12, 6.13 and 6.37. The policy options at that time stated that "*we will consider (policies)…. to safeguard existing gypsy, traveller and travelling showpeople sites from redevelopment to other uses and to meet the future accommodation needs of gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople as part of the new Local Plan".*

2.8 The subsequent draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024)[8] included policies to meet these aspirations. Draft Policy SS3 (Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople – Accommodation Needs) highlighted the GTTSP accommodation needs in Wealden and confirmed that the Council intend to make provision for 51 pitches for Gypsies and Travellers and 3 plots for Travelling Showpeople that aligned with the 'ethnic' definition, rather than the PPTS definition, at that time, following domestic and European Court judgements at that time. However, the policy did not detail sites on which this provision would be met, nor any allocations for GTTSP sites/development, as this would be part of the continuing work on the local plan. Draft policy HO9 (Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople – Site Criteria) listed site criteria appliable when determining planning applications for new or extended GTTSP sites, and draft policy HO10 (Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople – Safeguarding Sites) sought to safeguard existing Gyspy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites.

2.9 Draft policies SS3 and HO9 have been revised in the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026) to take account of ongoing work on site selection, to account for several national planning policy changes that have taken place, alongside collaborative working with neighbouring local planning authorities, since publication of the previous Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18) in March 2024. Accompanying text to draft Policy SS3 identifies six potential sites for GTTSP accommodation, subject to further work and ongoing consultation. Draft policy HO9 makes minor revisions to site criteria assessment, as a result of comments on the policy at the previous consultation stage and national planning policy changes as set out.

[7] Wealden Local Plan – Direction of Travel Consultation, November 2020

[8] Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18), March 2024

2.10 This work has been undertaken based on the detail set out below, with further work identified prior to publishing the Pre-Submission Local Plan at the Regulation 19 stage later this year.

3 GTTSP Accommodation Needs

3.1 As set out above, the GTAA 2022 identified that for the study period applicable at that time (between 2021 to 2040) there is an accommodation need under the 'ethnic' definition of 51 pitches for gypsy and traveller accommodation in the Wealden District. It was also shown that there was an accommodation need for 3 plots for Travelling Showpeople in the district.

3.2 Since undertaking the GTAA in 2022, the PPTS (December 2024) has revised the definition of Gypsies and Travellers. Annex 1 of the PPTS now states that the definition includes "*all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a caravan".* As a result, this broader PPTS definition largely aligns with the previously considered 'ethnic' definition considered in the GTAA (March 2022) and set out in the previous draft Regulation 18 Local Plan (March 2024). The PPTS (December 2024) retains a separate definition for Travelling Showpeople. On this basis, and at this stage, the Council is continuing to plan for the 'ethnic' definition, as set out in the amended policy SS3 (Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople – Accommodation Needs) in the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026).

3.3 The Council is mindful that this national change to the definition for Gypsies and Travellers requires further consideration. The Council will therefore seek an update to the GTAA, alongside other local planning authorities in East Sussex, to consider updated accommodation needs in line with this definition across the district. The updated GTAA will also align with the revised Plan period up to 2042.

3.4 This updated GTAA is due for completion and publication later in 2026. The outcome of the updated accommodation needs assessment, alongside concurrent work on site selection and consideration of representations received during 'Focused' Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation will all be taken into account in drafting revised policies as part of the Pre-Submission Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 19) later this year.

4 GTTSP Provision

4.1 Policy SS3 (Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople – Accommodation Needs) of the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026) states that the Councill will endeavour to make provision for 51 pitches for Gypsies and Travellers, and 3 plots for Travelling Showpeople in the district up to

2040. Significant work has been ongoing and is planned in how to meet this, as set out below.

Site Sourcing

4.2 As set out in the Council's SHELAA (January 2026), the Council have sourced sites for land availability assessments since 2008, with the first SHLAA published in 2010. Any development of GTTSP accommodation has been sought and assessed via this same process, as set out in previous SHELAA publications up to March 2024.

4.3 Since this time, targeted work has been ongoing to try and address the significant and long-standing need for GTTSP accommodation in the Wealden District. This work, and the assessment of subsequent sites, is set out for the first time in a dedicated Gypsy and Traveller Land Availability Assessment (January 2026). A large part of this work has focussed on sourcing sites, as set out below.

4.4 In terms of collaborative working, the Duty to Cooperate Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs group in East Sussex has been held regularly since Autumn 2024. This group seeks to work collaboratively to ensure appropriate co-ordination and planning for strategic planning issues relating to Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople matters. Local authorities involved in this joint work are Wealden District Council, Rother District Council, Lewes District Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council and the SDNPA.

4.5 The work of this group has involved undertaking a joint 'Call for Sites' for GTTSP accommodation across the entirety of the East Sussex area between 5 August and 5 October 2025, encouraging site submissions in all parts of East Sussex. Each local planning authority hosted an individual 'Calls for Sites' on relevant webpages/consultation portals, but the event was published county wide, jointly by all authorities and East Sussex County Council (ESCC). The 'Call for Sites' was actively promoted and managed by the County Council during the live 'call' period, including through social media engagement, making national press headlines at its launch. In addition, each local authority managed individual promotion of the event in their area, by sharing the 'Call for Sites' with all site promoters and/or publicising in weekly/monthly news bulletin at agreed stages.

4.6 As part of this collaborative work, the group also presented the 'Call for Sites' to relevant public sector organisations in their capacity as landowners. In this regard, Wealden District Council represented the wider GTTSP Working Group for East Sussex group in liaison with the Strategic Property Asset Collaboration in East Sussex (SPACES) group. This is partnership made up of nineteen public sector, and community and voluntary organisations, in East Sussex. An introductory letter was sent detailing the

general ‘Call for Sites’ process for both housing and GTTSP development in April 2025, with a subsequent meeting in May 2025. A further meeting was attended by the Development and Enablement Group in July 2025, with publication of the targeted GTTSP ‘Call for Sites’ shared with all on 1 August 2025.

4.7 In the Wealden District specifically, further work was also undertaken to source as many GTTSP site submissions as possible. This involved the creation of bespoke GTTSP SHELAA Submission forms, reduced in length from 10 pages to 3 pages for site submission information, to ease the process of submission and to encourage its use. A dedicated phone line was also publicised to encourage people to call with any questions or assistance with form completion. The Council then collated this information in a letter drafted to all occupiers of existing GTTSP pitches/plots in the district. The Council hand delivered all letters to all existing plots and pitches on 31 July 2025.

4.8 The Council also sought to review all site submissions previously submitted until this dedicated ‘Call for Sites’, noting that previous submissions were encompassed in historic SHELAA site submission forms proposed alongside other uses. The Council therefore reviewed all 1,265 SHELAA site submission forms, received up to 31 October 2025, to ascertain if any sites proposed GTTSP accommodation specifically, or proposed more general development noted under titles such as ‘*Any development considered’* or *‘Development for Council to decide’.* These sites were then assessed alongside any sites proposed for GTTSP development either via historic SHELAA submissions or more recent dedicated GTTSP site submissions.

Site Assessment

4.9 Following this work on ‘site sourcing’, these sites were then collated for assessment as part of the Councils GTTSP LAA (January 2026)[9]. This was on the basis that all sites were submitted to the land availability assessment process at some time, indicating some form of proposal and/or availability. Further work will continue in terms of sourcing additional sites for assessment prior to formulating the Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Wealden Local Plan. This work will include sourcing sites in the district that may benefit from a temporary or personal consent for current GTTSP accommodation; sourcing sites that may make better use of existing GTTSP sites or parts thereof; and sourcing sites that may come forward on, or as part of, strategic allocation sites within the Wealden Local Plan. An ongoing ‘Call for Sites’ remains open and will be publicised alongside the ‘Focused’ Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026).

[9] Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Land Availability Assessment (GTTSP LAA), January 2026

4.10 All sites submitted for potential GTTSP accommodation as of 31 October 2025 have been included in the GTTSP LAA (January 2026). A total of 14 sites have been submitted to the Council for GTTSP accommodation, both via the SHELAA process and the targeted GTTSP 'Call for Sites' process.

4.11 All 14 sites submitted have been assessed using the East Sussex Site Assessment Methodology, contained in Appendix 1 of the GTTSP LAA. This methodology was created by members of the Duty to Cooperate Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs group in East Sussex. It follows the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment guidance (updated November 2025) and collates relevant parts of each authority's land availability assessment criteria, for example, combining absolute constraints from each area into one county wide table. The assessment also uses a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) status methodology to assess site suitability, achievability and availability. This enables the formulation of 'potential' sites to be considered, especially at this Regulation 18 stage of the Focused Draft Wealden Local Plan, where further options and sites can still be considered.

4.12 Applying the methodology above, it is considered that of the 14 sites submitted, 2 sites were unable to accommodate the minimum one pitch requirement due to site size and planning permission granted. An additional 2 sites were located in an area of absolute constraint. As such, only 10 sites proceeded to detailed assessment via Stage 3 of the methodology.

4.13 All 10 of those sites were assessed against the 15 suitability criteria set out at Stage 3. The assessment of whether these sites were concluded as Suitable (Green), Potentially Suitable (Amber), or Not Suitable (Red) in each respect were made based upon information and evidence available, officer site visits, and professional judgment on the criterion established. The overall suitability assessment was based not solely on the quantity of 'Not Suitable' outcomes, as applied in some instances, but also the ability to mitigate or overcome these issues that made a site 'Not Suitable'. Where these issues affected the fundamental principle of development on site, the overall site outcome was deemed 'Not Suitable'.

4.14 The 6 sites identified as potentially suitable through this GTTSP LAA methodology were assessed via the Council's Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process. A separate appendix of the SA (2026)[10] identifies the assessment outcome of these sites.

4.15 When considering issues of availability and achievability, the methodology as set out in the GTTSP LAA were followed. In summary, all sites submitted exclusively for GTTSP purposes and/or solely via the GTTSP targeted 'Call for Sites' are deemed available, and all sites submitted for GTTSP

[10] Wealden District Council Regulation 18(2) Sustainability Appraisal (SA), January 2026

accommodation alongside other options are identified as potentially available. For achievability, all sites submitted exclusively for GTTSP accommodation are deemed to have some level of viability, including those proposed as extension to existing sites. However, some sites are subject to further assessment, noting that works required to overcome constraints are not fully scoped. As a result, a number of sites are shown as potentially achievable pending further assessment.

4.16 The outcome of this is that the 6 sites identified as 'potentially suitable' are also all identified as 'possible options' to accommodate GTTSP development in the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan. These sites are set out in Table 7 of the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026)[11]. All those sites are subject to further detailed testing to understand whether the sites are suitable, or suitable in part, for this type of development. Specifically, this relates to access arrangements, flood risk, and the assessment of landscape impact; most notably for sites located within the High Weald National Landscape. The key issues to explore for each option are identified in the table set out, copied below for ease.

Table 7 Potential Sites for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation

Local Plan Reference	SHELAA Reference	Site	Parish	Number of plots/pitches expected	Further issues for assessment
OGT1	835/1510	Land at Polly Arch, Lynholm Road, Polegate*	Polegate	4	Flood risk along access track to site and viability issues.
OGT2	467/1310	Development Land at Station Road, Hailsham (part)	Hailsham	10	Likely suitable in part only. Further assessment needed on impact on ecology and green infrastructure; Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) proposals; odour assessment; and viability.
OGT3	230/1210	Monkhurst Field, Sandy Cross Lane, Heathfield	Heathfield	5	Likely suitable in part only. Further assessment needed on landscape impact; heritage; and access.
OGT4	1262/1980	Five Badgers and Little Robins, Stonehurst Lane, Mayfield*	Hadlow Down	4	Likely suitable in part only. Further assessment needed on landscape impact and access.
OGT5	1261/1610	The Stables, Hawkenbury Road, Bells Yew Green*	Frant	3	Likely suitable in part only. Further assessment needed on landscape impact; ecological buffers; and access
OGT6	959/1210	Little Rose, Meres Lane, Cross in Hand, Heathfield*	Mayfield and Five Ashes	1	Further assessment needed on ecology and buffer areas, and landscape impact.
			TOTAL:	**27**	

* Extension/Adjacent to existing GTTSP Site.

4.17 Any additional GTTSP sites submitted between 1 November 2025 and the close of the 'Call for Sites' following the consultation on the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026) will be subject to further assessment. The methodology for this assessment may be revised pending the consultation process on the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026) and any comments received.

[11] Draft 'Focused' Wealden Local Plan, February 2026

5 Current Position

5.1 Following the work set out above, the current position on planning for GTTSP needs is that the Council continues planning to meet the needs identified in the GTAA (2022), as set out in draft policy SS3 (Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople – Accommodation Needs) of the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026). The Council will continue to plan to meet the needs for 51 pitches for Gypsies and Travellers, and 3 plots for Travelling Showpeople.

5.2 The Council has for the first time published a GTTSP Land Availability Assessment (January 2026), specifically designed to identify and assess sites for GTTSP accommodation. The follows extensive work through the Duty to Cooperate Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs group in East Sussex, and included a targeted joint 'Call for Sites,' as well as specific work by the Council to engage local travelling communities, including through the delivery of hand delivered letters to encourage site submissions.

5.3 This work has resulted in 14 sites being proposed for GTTSP accommodation, 6 of which are potentially suitable for development. All 6 of these sites are identified in Table 7 of the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026) as potential options for GTTSP development, pending further evidence being submitted and obtained, and thereafter assessed.

5.4 Of the 6 potential sites identified, 4 of these sites already accommodate or are adjacent to existing Gypsy and Traveller sites. These sites, or parts thereof that are deemed 'potentially suitable', may yield up to 27 pitches/plots for GTTSP use.

6 Next Steps

6.1 Given the significant accommodation needs identified in Wealden District for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople and the requirement to meet these needs as far as possible through site allocations, additional work will continue as Local Plan progresses to the Regulation 19 stage.

6.2 Policies within the Local Plan must continue to be informed by an up-to-date accommodation needs assessment, as set out in the PPTS (December 2024) and NPPF. The Council will therefore undertake an update to its GTAA with other local planning authorities in East Sussex to ensure that we have the latest information on accommodation needs for the updated Plan period up to 2042. This GTAA will be presented when available and used to inform policies within our Pre-Submission Local Plan at the Regulation 19 stage.

6.3 The identification and assessment of suitable sites will continue alongside this. Firstly, the Council will continue to assess those sites listed in Table 7 of the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan, seeking additional information on

the matters identified. Whilst the Council needs to undertake further work to fully understand the implications of allocating these ‘potential sites’, we are also keen to understand the views of our community in terms of the sites themselves, and how we might meet any further need for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople development.

6.4 Noting that the above sites, even if all allocated for development, only go partway to meeting to district’s need, we will also undertake a further ‘Call for Sites’ for Gypsy and Traveller development concurrently with the ‘Focused’ Draft Wealden Local Plan consultation taking place.

6.5 Further work will also be undertaken in sourcing and identifying potential additional sites. This will include sourcing sites in the district that may benefit from a temporary or personal consent for current GTTSP accommodation, and sourcing sites that may make better use of existing GTTSP sites or parts thereof. Consideration will also be given to the site selection process, noting the need to consider and plan for both Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople needs, and the need to differentiate suitable sites for those distinct needs.

6.6 Consideration will also be given to other policy measures that may be utilised to meet GTTSP needs. This will include an assessment of whether other sites allocated for bricks and mortar housing development can accommodate on-site provision for Gypsy and Traveller development, or whether use of other policy mechanisms, in consultation with partners, would yield benefits.

6.7 Work will continue with the Duty to Cooperate Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs group in East Sussex, considering opportunities for policy alignment and other joint working initiatives. We will consider these site options, as well as other sites submitted, and will further test those sites already submitted, prior to publishing our Pre-Submission Local Plan at the Regulation 19 stage.