

# Islington Local Plan Gypsy and Traveller Site Search process update – June 2022

This note provides an update to the site search note that was produced in August 2021 for the Housing Policies matters statement (matter 3). The note explains the criteria used and the site search process.

## Criteria

Site search criteria were identified including the need for good residential amenity including overlooking, site access and overall size.

Overlooking was considered in terms of proximity of existing adjacent properties, and how significant that overlooking is. Overlooking from tall buildings was also identified. Site access was considered in terms of whether direct access already existed onto either a residential road or a more significant road.

Initially minimum site size requirements were applied. To meet the need of 6 pitches would require a site of between 0.19Ha and 0.3Ha<sup>1</sup>. There could be variation depending on site shape and access. The initial overall approach to having one site to meet the total need was later re-considered. Restricting the search to sites that were generally more than 0.19Ha was reducing the pool of sites that could be considered, particularly given the dense and built up nature of the borough. This decision was made as it was becoming increasingly clear that seeking one site to meet all need for the whole plan period was reducing potential opportunities. Therefore greater flexibility in site size was applied.

Other site criteria were also identified – related to infrastructure provision and other factors that can impact on amenity, including the effects of noise, vibration, flood risk and air pollution were also considered relevant. Other considerations such as heritage assets were also noted.

Finally, following consideration of the above criteria, deliverability and availability of sites was also considered.

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<sup>1</sup> The Islington Gypsy Traveller Needs Assessment paragraph 7.34 identifies an approximate pitch size of between 325sqm and 500sqm per pitch based on previous and current DCLG guidance.

# Site Search

## 1. Initial site search early 2020 – summer 2021.

Following completion of the Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment in summer 2019, discussions were initiated with the Islington New Build team. A set of minimum requirements were agreed (see Criteria above) to form the basis of an ongoing search across the potential sites for delivering affordable housing. This focused on opportunities that sit within the council's portfolio of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land. The search for suitable and deliverable land for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation was initiated in early 2020.

As part of Islington's New Build Programme there is an ongoing site search for suitable sites for additional housing, with a particular focus on council owned housing estates. Exploration of sites' potential suitability to accommodate pitches for Gypsies and Travellers was added to this work stream, initially looking at smaller sites not in the pipeline programme for development. Sites identified as 'build over' opportunities were sifted out immediately.

As identified previously the results of this initial search resulted in no obvious sites being identified. From a list of over 60 sites assessed, most of them had significant constraints. Common issues included insufficient site size, compromised highways access but the commonest issue was multiple angles of overlooking from existing residential properties nearby.

## 2. Further site search: autumn 2021 – spring 2022

Following requests from the Inspectors at the examination hearings, the council renewed the site search, this involved:

- Looking at opportunities within the council's wider land ownership.

As part of the scoping of land opportunities with the council's housing department it was agreed that other land in council ownership, which accommodates various other council functions and services, should be searched too. The Planning Policy Team worked with the council's Property Services team to explore if there are any potential sites as part of a review of the council's assets. This involved the analysis of sites on the council's property database against the site criteria. No sites were identified following this review.

- Looking at opportunities on the commercial market.

The council commissioned a property agent to undertake a review of potential suitable private sites that might be available on the market. The agent found that identifying potential sites presents various challenges with much of the borough already built up. At the time of the search whilst three sites were available on the market as development opportunities, these sites were discounted as potential sites for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation due to not meeting criteria, including overlooking and amenity. There were also issues with deliverability.

- Revisiting HRA land opportunities

Officers revisited the list of HRA sites with housing colleagues again. In particular this focused on a more flexible approach to the site size and potential for smaller sites. Through this search the site at 71 Ronalds Road site (site allocation GT3) was identified.

- **Reviewing site allocations**

The council reviewed the draft site allocations, analysing the allocations against the criteria set out above. As with other sites that the council looked at, the main issues were overlooking, site size and amenity. With a more flexible approach to site size, this review led to the identification of the site at 207a Junction (site allocation GT1).

- **Reviewing opportunities on other sites.**

Officers reviewed other potential opportunities on third party land that might meet the criteria. This involved desktop research to look for potential plots of land that could meet the criteria. Through this process 154 Junction Road (site allocation GT2) was identified – this site was also previously put forward for housing development in the last Local Plan. Whilst not part of the site criteria, it was also considered that the location of the site near to 207a Junction Road site also provides the opportunity for related families to live in close proximity.

### **3. Conclusion**

Following the site search the three sites identified (GT1, GT2 and GT3) are the only sites identified and no other alternatives exist.