



SCC GYPSY/TRAVELLER SITES - PLOT ALLOCATION SCHEME

Introduction

- Surrey County Council is committed to the continued provision of plots on the permanent sites it manages within the County, to enable gypsy and traveller families to live in caravans/mobile homes.
- The Council understands and gives proper regard to the provisions of Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA), which prohibits discrimination, and the Equality Act 2010, which recognises both English/Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers as ethnic minorities; against whom discrimination is unlawful.
- The Council also recognizes and gives regard to all relevant published government guidance, in particular in relation to supporting the gypsy/traveller way of life.
- The purpose of the Scheme is to ensure the Council operates a fair and transparent process:
 - for all Applicants wishing to join the Council's Site Waiting List; and
 - for assessing Applicants for allocation of vacant plots when these arise.

Surrey County Council Sites

Surrey County Council manages the following residential gypsy sites within the County:

Site Name	No. of Plots	Location	District / Borough
Littleton Lane	10	Shepperton	Spelthorne
The Oaks	16	Claygate	Elmbridge
The Hatchington	16	Woking	Guildford
The Willows	10	Tongham	Guildford
Conifer Park	7	Epsom	Epsom
Pendell	4	Tandridge	Tandridge
The Paddocks	15	Runnymede	Runnymede
Elm Farm	15	Runnymede	Runnymede
Salvation Place	10	Leatherhead	Mole Valley
Conifer Park	4	Dorking	Mole Valley
Brambledown	3	Dorking	Mole Valley
Travellers Rest	3	Mickleham	Mole Valley

Plots:

A 'Plot' is an area of land on a Gypsy/Traveller Site which is rented under license to a sole and/or joint applicant and his/her family. Each Plot consists of a tarmac yard, a small garden and, on the majority of Council Plots, a small utility block with a bath/shower, kitchen area and toilet.

Plot Allocation

Surrey County Council delegates responsibility for granting licenses on Surrey County Council Land, including gypsy sites to Delivery and Estates Managers within the Property Services department, who will act upon the Gypsy Site Manager's Allocation Recommendation and any further Report (e.g. on compatibility).

Vacant plots will be allocated to gypsies and travellers on the Council's Site Waiting List, in accordance with the allocation criteria, based on need, links to the area and personal and other relevant circumstances. However, the Council recognises that, because of the particular circumstances of the Gypsy community, it is necessary to operate a flexible scheme.

The Gypsy Sites Waiting List

Applicants can apply to join Surrey County Council's Gypsy Sites Waiting List by completing a Gypsy Sites Application Form. These are available to collect from: County Hall, Penryhn Road, Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey, KT1 2DN.

The Applicant can express a preference for a particular Site or Sites but will in any event be placed on the Councils' general Site Waiting List.

Applicants can also contact the Gypsy Sites Manager via the Property helpdesk: (Tel: 020 8541 9000 - option 6; or when "out of hours" option 4; or by email to myhelpdeskproperty@surreycc.gov.uk); who can either deliver the form to them, or arrange appointments at County Hall to assist applicants with completion of the form.

Applicants are expected to maintain at least annual contact with the Council, or be available to respond to requests from the Council, with the purpose of obtaining updated information on their circumstances.

Contact from the Council will be made via any contact details provided by Applicants in their Application form (i.e. a postal address and/or email address and/or telephone number). Therefore, it is also the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that it keeps the Council notified of any changes.

If the Council are unable to contact and confirm updated information [for a period of 18 months], then the Council reserves the right to either suspend (pending further enquiries) or remove the Applicant from the Waiting List. Such removal will not prevent a fresh application being made by an Applicant at a future date but this will count as a new application and will not act to revive the earlier Application.

Assessment of Applications – Allocation Criteria

All vacant Council Plots will be subject to the Council's Allocation Scheme and process, even if they subsequently become occupied for any reason before the Allocation has taken place. This is to ensure that the widest field of applicants are considered for Plots when they become available.

In general, the Council will consider up to 8 Applicants for a vacant Plot but may consider a fewer or greater number where the circumstances justify this. If Applicants have expressed a preference for a Plot on the particular Site where the vacancy has arisen, the Council will generally endeavour to consider all these Applicants.

Applications will be assessed using the following 8 criteria. Each application is scored (between 1 to 10) against the criteria. The score is then multiplied by the applicable percentage weighting.

Criteria	Score		Weight	Total
Related / close family connection to existing resident(s)	1-10	X	20%	
Residing in, or previously resided / resorted to Surrey, and specific area where the Site is located	1-10	X	20%	
Family make-up (children etc)	1-10	X	15%	
Years on waiting list	1-10	X	10%	
Present circumstances (inc. health / welfare issues)	1-10	X	20%	
Relevant history (inc. known to Gypsy Site Manager)	1-10	X	10%	
In receipt of Income / Housing Benefit / ability to pay	1-10	X	5%	
TOTAL				

N.B. Relevant issues, such as compatibility with existing Residents / impact on site order and effective management, may also be taken into account - see further below.

No points will be given (and no entry onto the Waiting List) to Applicants:

- Who are not registered on Surrey County Council's Gypsy Sites Waiting List, or any register maintained by the District / Borough in which the Site is located;
- Who have a license to occupy a pitch elsewhere;
- Who have existing accommodation (house, plot or interest in another property);
- Whose age or immigration status prevents the grant of a license;
- Who have behaved, or have a history of behaving, in such an unacceptable way that this would have entitled the Council to take legal action had they been a licensee.

Examples (not exhaustive) of unacceptable behavior includes

- Significant rent arrears or breach of site licence conditions
- Serious nuisance or annoyance to neighbours, or the local community, including Anti-Social Behaviour
- Any conviction for violence, or threats of violence, including domestic violence or for using or allowing plot to be used for immoral or illegal purposes, such as drug dealing
- Any conviction for theft, fraud or dishonesty
- Any attempts to transfer or buy/sell a Plot on a Council Site from a resident outside the Council's Allocation Scheme
- Damage or neglect of a property
- Persistently keeping animals that are incompatible for housing on a residential gypsy/traveler site
- Breeding animals for sale / unlawful fighting

These examples are not exhaustive and the Council expressly reserves the right to consider any issues of conduct which it reasonably considers relevant to allocation.

50 % Reduction in Points will be applied to Applicants:

- Who have Planning Consent to build on land they own, unless they can demonstrate that they cannot afford to carry out the necessary work to make it habitable;
- Who have applied to the Council's Site Waiting List or a Local Authority Housing register and have declined an offer of a Plot or an offer of traditional housing accommodation within a 12 month period;
- Who have moved on to a vacant Council Plot without securing the appropriate advance consent / permission from the Council and have refused to vacate the Plot on request, whether pending an Allocation exercise/decision or otherwise.

Supporting Evidence

The Council's Scheme will take account of Applicants' links to the specific Site and/or prioritise allocation to Applicants who are already resident and/or with links to the Surrey area. Accordingly, evidence is required to demonstrate that Applicants are residing in, or have previously resided / resorted to Surrey, and the specific area where the Site is located. Evidence is also required to demonstrate receipt of any benefits and access to any local services (e.g. schools):

As many as possible of the following documents should be provided:

- Electoral Register
- Council Tax
- Housing Benefit / Income Support / Working Family Tax Credit / Child Benefit
- Utility Bills
- VAT or Income Tax returns
- School attendance letters

Letters from doctors or hospitals may be submitted to provide information on any relevant health / welfare issues that Applicants wish to be taken into account but will not be accepted to demonstrate residence, since experience has shown that patients (not just gypsies and travellers) often stay with the same doctor even when they change their address.

It is the responsibility of Applicants to provide any/all documentation to support their Application. Other than in exceptional circumstances, the Council will not be responsible for an Applicant's failure to provide such documentation, or if an Allocation decision proceeds without information an Applicant considers should have been taken into account but was not made available to the Council at the time.

Compatibility

Due to the very nature of gypsy sites and the close proximity of plots, the compatibility of a new licensee with existing licensees is of paramount importance. With this close proximity, any incompatibility can give rise to very serious problems - for other site residents; for the management of the site and for the local community; and for other public partner organisations and services, such as the Local Council, the Police and schools.

Incompatibility can occur for a variety of reasons, religious practices, ethnicity, life style and personality. The Council takes no position or judgment, and will remain impartial to all parties but recognises that it is unreasonable to expect two families on gypsy/traveller sites who are incompatible to live in close proximity without creating serious problems for themselves, the Council or the surrounding community.

Gypsy Site Manager Report

Surrey County Council may be aware of reasons why an applicant would be incompatible for allocation of a plot on a particular site. This information will be included in a Gypsy Sites Manager's Report and taken into account at the time an application is assessed.

Also, where one or more persons have scored equally against the criteria, the Gypsy Site Manager will make further enquires with the relevant site residents and then refer their Report to the Delivery / Estates Manager for a final decision to be taken, taking into account compatibility and any other relevant circumstances.

Transfers

Notionally, a Transfer Waiting List is held in a similar format to the Gypsy Sites Waiting List. If a plot vacancy arises, the Gypsy Sites Manager may support an existing licensee's application for a transfer and then letting the resulting plot vacancy to a new applicant.

However, any purported transfers or sale of Plots which take place between Site residents without the Council's permission are expressly forbidden and will be treated as "unacceptable behavior" within the terms of this Scheme.

Provision of Information

Every Applicant is entitled:

- to request general information that will enable them to assess how their application will be treated;
- to be informed of any decision about the facts of their case which have been, or are likely to be, taken into account in considering whether to allocate a plot to them;
- to be informed of any decision that they have been found unsuitable to be allocated a plot.

Reviews

Applicants have a right to ask for a review of a decision by the Delivery / Estates Manager in the following circumstances:

- Where their entry to the Gypsy Sites Waiting List has been refused because of:
 - immigration status; or
 - unacceptable behavior exclusion;
- Where their points have been reduced because they have applied to the Council Waiting List or a Local Authority Housing register and have declined an offer of a Plot or traditional housing accommodation
- Where their points have been reduced because they had moved onto a vacant Plot without obtaining the Council's permission and refused to leave when requested
- Where their application has been cancelled for lack of contact / updating information.

The Review will be carried out by the Head of Property Services and may, at the discretion of the Head of Property Services, take account of any new information that the Applicant may wish to have considered. The decision of the Property Services is final and binding.

Repeat Applications

Unless there are any significant changes of circumstances, any application which has been rejected (either for entry onto the Waiting List or for a particular vacant plot), will not be reconsidered within any 12 month period.

Monitoring

The allocation criteria are kept under review to ensure they take account of changes in legislation / guidance. They will also be reviewed periodically to take account of experience of applying the criteria, or the views of site residents / applicants.

The Head of Property Services may make minor changes to the Allocation Scheme / Criteria as a result of such monitoring. However, these changes should not significantly affect the majority of applicants. Any significant changes will be more widely consulted upon before any change is implemented.

Property Services

Reviewed: November 2015
Next review date: November 2016