

Housing Services Pitch Allocation Scheme

How Bath & North East Somerset Council allocates pitches to Gypsies and Travellers

Carrswood View

January 2015



Fraud

Fraud is unlawful and in some cases is also a criminal offence. In partnership with the site landlord, we are committed to identifying and dealing with fraud. Fraud may include giving false information or withholding information to obtain a pitch. Fraudulent applications will be cancelled and any offer of a pitch revoked.

If you have information about pitches or social housing within Bath and North East Somerset that you think are unlawfully occupied please let us know.



Bath and North East Somerset Council Housing Services PO Box 3343 Bath BA1 2ZH

Telephone: 01225 396118

Fax: 01225 477839 Minicom: 01225 477815

Website: www.bathnes.gov.uk
Email: Housing@Bathnes.gov.uk



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This document can be made available in a range of languages, large print and Braille.



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Introduction

The Gypsy and Travellers Pitch Allocation Scheme sets out how permanent pitches will be allocated to people interested in living in Carrswood View on the Lower Bristol Road in Bath. It is based upon similar principles to the Homesearch Allocation Scheme which is the scheme that allocates social housing, and gives priority to people with a local connection and the most housing need.

People who want a pitch must apply to join the scheme. Applicants tell us that they are interested in a pitch (we call this 'bidding'). After bidding time has closed, a shortlist of applicants is given to Elim Housing, Elim are the landlord and are responsible for managing the site. Elim will decide in agreement with Housing Services which of the households on the shortlist is offered the pitch.

Within the district there are a number of transit pitches allocated to Gypsies and Travellers by separate arrangements.

Housing Services offer a range of housing options and services to the public, such as access to private rented housing, shared ownership, mutual exchanges and extra care.

To apply for shared ownership, please contact Housing Services on 01225 477818

To apply for supported housing, please visit www.housingsupportgatewaybathnes.org.uk

To apply for social housing, private renting, mutual exchanges or transfers for existing social tenants, please visit www.Homesearchbathnes.org.uk

To apply for a transit pitch, please contact Elim on 01454 411172

All teams within Housing Services can also be contacted by telephone through the Council's switchboard on 01225 477000.

The Law

The Council will comply with the Mobile Homes Act 1983 and have due regard to the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010.

The Equalities Act recognises both Roma Gypsies and Irish Travellers as ethnic minorities against whom discrimination is unlawful. The Equality Act also places a general duty on public authorities to work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups in the carrying out of their functions.

The Council also recognises the definitions of Gypsies and Travellers as defined by the law, statutory guidance and judicially defined by case law which is listed in the table of authorities at the end of this document.

Aims of the policy

All pitch allocations will be made in a clear, fair and transparent manner. Priority for pitches will be given to those with greatest housing need and a local connection to the district. Gypsy and Traveller pitches will be managed effectively and the right to the peaceful enjoyment of the site by existing residents, who are legally occupying a pitch, will be protected.

Making an application for a pitch

Every person or family must complete an application form.



Online: www.bathnes.gov.uk/housing



In person:
One Stop Shop, 3 – 4 Manvers Street, Bath, BA1 1JQ
The Hollies, High Street, Midsomer Norton, BA3 2DP
Riverside, Temple Street, Keynsham, BS31 1LA



By phone: 01225 477000 to request a paper application



By post:
Bath and North East Somerset Council
Housing Services
PO Box 3343
Bath, BA1 2ZH

Applications will not be accepted unless all the information we ask for is provided. We will not contact other people or organisations without your consent.

We will check information and our checks can include (but are not limited to):

Financial information Identification (Birth Your passport or such as savings, salary Interviewing you in our certificate, National information from the and ownership details Insurance details or office or your home Home Office of caravans or mobile photographic ID) homes Social and welfare **Employment** Medical information Landlord reference information information

References

Elim will ask for a reference before offering a pitch to an applicant. Ideally the reference will be provided by a previous landlord. Where the applicant is unable to provide a landlord's reference Elim may consider a reference from the following persons.

Employers reference

Personal reference

The person who writes a reference is called a referee. The referee must live in the UK and must not be closely related or involved with the applicant, for example:

- Related by birth or marriage
- In a relationship or live at the same address as the person applying.

The referee giving a personal reference must have known the person applying for at least 2 years and work in (or be retired from) a recognised profession or be 'a person of good standing in their community'.

Registration letter

People who meet the eligibility and qualification criteria will be told in writing:

Their priority for a pitch: Effective date and group

The terms of the agreement to occupy a pitch

How to bid for a pitch

Waiting time indication: The number of applicants waiting and average waiting times

 $^{^{\}rm 1}\,{\rm To}$ be taken from the list of persons approved to countersign a passport application

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Assessment of applications and housing need

Eligibility and qualification criteria

Housing Services and Elim want to help local people in housing need and to provide a well-managed site so that the community living on the site can peacefully enjoy their homes. Pitches are designed and appropriate for a household of 6 people or less.

Applications from the following people will not be accepted:

- People who are not a Gypsy or Traveller
- People under the age of 16 or those aged 16 or 17 without a guarantor²
- People who are serving a prison sentence of longer than 6 months
- People who have a history of unacceptable behaviour serious enough to make them unsuitable as a prospective tenant or to be part of the site community
- People who have income above the financial resource limit of £60,000³
- People who own a property (this does not include a caravan or other mobile home)⁴
- People who own their own land to place their home or have been granted planning permission to build on land
- People who do not have a habitable caravan (or the means to get one) to put on the pitch
- People from abroad who are subject to immigration control under the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 and are ineligible for an allocation of housing accommodation
- People who are not habitually resident in the Common Travel Area⁵
- People whose only right to reside in the UK is derived from their status as a jobseeker
- People whose only right to reside in the UK is an initial right to reside for a period not exceeding three months
- People whose only right to reside in the Common Travel Area is a right equivalent to one
 of the rights mentioned above.

If the application does not meet the eligibility and qualification criteria the applicant will be given the reasons for this decision.

² Guarantor has the same meaning as the Homesearch Allocation Scheme.

³ Financial resource limit has the same meaning as the Homesearch Allocation Scheme.

⁴ Condition relevant to owning a property is the same as the Homesearch Allocation Scheme.

⁵ Common travel area is defined as the UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland.

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Definition of a Gypsy or a Traveller

The scheme is only available to Gypsies or Travellers. There are a number of definitions for the term Gypsy and Traveller. The Council will use the Planning Policy definition to decide if a person is a Gypsy or a Traveller and is eligible to join the scheme. However, the other legal definitions, appropriate guidance and case law may be used to inform this decision.

Caravan Site and Control of Development Act 1960

 A persons of a nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin.

Housing Act 2004

- Persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a caravan; and
- •All other persons of a nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin, including
- •Such persons who, on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependant's educational or health needs or old age, have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently; and members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people (whether or not travelling together as such).

Planning policy

•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 or permanently, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people travelling together as such.

The following questions are relevant and can form part of the assessment process⁶:

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R v Shropshire CC ex p Bungay [1991]; R v South Hams DC ex parte Gibbs [1994]; Hearne v National Assembly for Wales [1999]; Wrexham CBC v the National Assembly for Wales and Berry [2001]; O'Connor v the First Secretary of State and B&NES [2002]

Does the person have a tradition of travelling?

Is the person travelling in a group?

Is the person travelling with an economic purpose?

What is the person's history?

What are the reasons the person has ceasing to travel? Are they in abeyance or abandoned?

What are the person's future wishes and intentions to resume travelling when the reasons for settling have ceased to apply?

What is the person's attitude to living in a caravan rather than a conventional house?

Grouping system

The grouping system sets out how the scheme will organise priority. There are three groups A, B, and C. The grouping system takes into account legal requirements and the Council's local strategic priorities. Applicants in group A have the greatest priority. Priority decreases from group B to group C.

Any changes in the circumstances of an applicant must be checked to see if they change the group that the application is placed in.

Priority between applicants within groups A and B will be decided by the applicant's effective date. Priority between applicants in group C will be decided by how closely they are living to the district of Bath and North East Somerset and their suitability for a pitch.

Statutory homeless and owed the full housing duty by Bath & North East Somerset Council under s.193 (3) (65(2)) In urgent need because of medical, disability, welfare or hardship problems Granted discretionary housing priority Occupying unsanitary conditions

Group B is for local people who do not have a priority for a pitch

People who are local to Bath & North East Somerset and who do not qualify for Group A

Group C is for people who are not local to Bath & North East Somerset

People who are not local to Bath & North East Someset

Similarities exist between Homesearch and the Pitch Allocation scheme; therefore the policies and procedures contained in the Homesearch Allocation Scheme may be applied and adapted

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where necessary for legal or practical reasons to fit with this policy. This can include (but is not limited to) decisions on:

- Reducing priority when an applicant for example, is not ready to live independently or issues relating to poor behaviour or rental style payments
- Accepting and refusing applications from family members and friends
- Accepting and refusing fresh applications
- Assessing whether an applicant is a separated family
- Assessing an applicant's priority on medical or disability grounds
- Assessing an applicant's priority on welfare or hardship grounds
- Assessing whether an applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Making a direct property offers
- Making a decision to cancel an application
- Making a decision on whether an application is fraudulent or deliberately made their housing circumstances worse to receive priority for a pitch.

Occupying unsanitary conditions

Housing Services will undertake an assessment to decide whether an applicant is entitled to priority on the grounds of living in unsanitary conditions. Priority will only be awarded if the living circumstances of the household can be improved by moving home and it is not a life style choice of the household.

In determining whether to give an application priority the following factors will be relevant (but are not limited to):

- Living without access to running water
- Living without access to a toilet
- Living without access to bathing facilities
- Children living in the household and difficulties arising as a result of the condition of the home
- General condition on the site they are living
- Any health or safety concerns arising as a result of their living conditions.

Discretionary decisions

All applications will be considered on their own merit. In exceptional circumstances, where there is a good reason a special case can be agreed by a senior officer in Housing Services. A decision can be made to steer away from the policy normal rules and/or award an applicant priority.

The circumstances where this could apply are (but not limited to):

Discretionary grounds: Eligibility and qualification

A person does not meet the eligibility or qualification criteria

A person cannot provide a suitable reference

Discretionary grounds: Priority for housing

There is a strategic, management or legal reason for an applicant to move

Discretionary grounds: Bidding and offering a pitch

There is a need to steer away from the priority/bidding order to create a balanced community such as when the site is first let

Discretion is also afforded to offer other pitches than those applied for (where these may also meet the needs of the applicant, or where the household would otherwise have no choice but to reside on an unauthorised encampment). This decision will be made in partnership with Elim.

Effective date

The time an applicant has been waiting for a pitch will be taken into account when calculating their housing priority. This is known as the effective date. The effective date is when the Council receives a complete and comprehensive application.

If the applicant moves to a higher group after they have applied the effective date will change to the date they changed group. This means that people in the higher group have an effective date that is relevant to their increased need. If an applicant moves down a group the original effective date will be used.

Local to Bath and North East Somerset

Housing Services aim to help people who have a connection to Bath and North East Somerset above those who do not and ensure that wherever possible, pitches go to local people. .

Housing Services will consider the applicant's individual circumstances when deciding if a person has a local connection, or, in light of their circumstances whether it would be appropriate for them to qualify.

Housing Services will ensure that people in the Armed Forces will not be disadvantage when applying this condition and will have regard to the methods laid out in the Homesearch Allocation Scheme.

A person is local to Bath and North East Somerset if they meet the following criteria:

Residency

They have chosen to live in the district permanently for 6 out of the last 12 months or 3 out of the last 5 years.



They have permanent paid employment or substantial voluntary work in the district



They need to move to the area to receive or provide significant medical or welfare support to or from a close relative



They have a connection with the district through special circumstances, such as they need to receive specialist medical or support services within the district which cannot be provided elsewhere



They have been provided with accommodation in the district under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999



They have been accepted by Bath and North East Somerset as owed a duty under s 195 (2) or 193 (2) of the Housing Act 1996, Part 7, and are not subject to a referral to another local housing authority under s 198

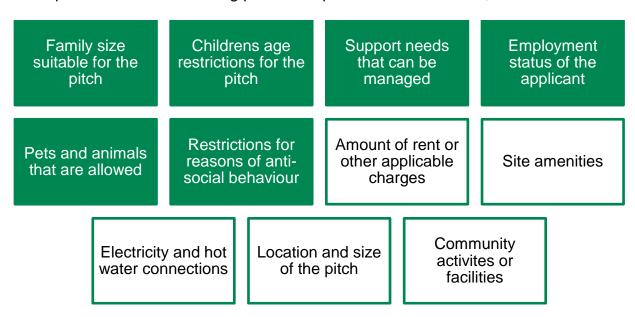
Bidding for a pitch

Advertising vacant pitches and letting criteria

Vacant pitches will be advertised in a similar way to all other social housing in the area and will be widely accessible. When a pitch is advertised every eligible applicant who is registered with the Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Allocation Scheme can place a bid. Advertisements will be made public on:



Vacant pitches advertised on the Council's website will include as much information as possible about the pitch and about the letting plan of the pitch. This can include, but is not restricted to:



Making a bid 'bidding'

An applicant can make a bid in any of these ways:



Online: www.bathnes.gov.uk



In person:
One Stop Shop, Manvers Street, Bath, BA1 1JQ
The Guildhall, High Street, Bath, BA1 5AW
The Hollies, High Street, Midsomer Norton, BA3 2DP
Keynsham Civic Centre, Market Walk, Keynsham, BS31 1FS



By phone: 0845 270 1239



By post: Bath and North East Somerset Council Housing Services PO Box 3343 Bath, BA1 2ZH

Assisted bidding

Assistance and help to bid for a pitch is available at Council Connect offices.

Friends, relatives and support workers can bid on behalf of a vulnerable applicant with specific needs. They can also assist with the applicant's correspondence subject to the applicant's permission being confirmed to Housing Services.

Applicants with the following support needs may require help:

- English is not a first language
- Literacy problems
- Learning difficulties
- Diagnosed with a mental health problem
- Diagnosed with a long-term disability
- Live a chaotic lifestyle, such as misuse of drugs or alcohol
- Undergoing a crisis, such as a victim of domestic violence
- Socially excluded, such as a person sleeping on the streets.

Assessment of bids

Pitches can be advertised to a single group or a combination of groups. Group A have the highest priority and will get more opportunity to bid for a pitch.

An applicant can contact Housing Services to see their position in relation to other applicants who have also placed a bid.

If Housing Services or Elim have a good reason to be concerned about the risk of conflict between existing residents and an applicant or their family they will consider the following action:

- Discuss their concerns with existing residents and the applicant
- Carry out a risk assessment.

Residents living on the site may be consulted about applicants who have placed a bid for a pitch. Living in close proximity to each other means it is important that both the applicant and the existing residents are respectful of each other's kinship network and cultural needs. The applicant's personal information will not be disclosed to site residents.

Family connections and personal preferences can be considered when deciding the most suitable applicant for the pitch.

Invalid bids

All bids will be checked to make sure that they are valid. After close of bidding, an applicant's circumstances will be reassessed and verified. The reassessment will check:

- Suitability to the advertised letting criteria
- Priority under the grouping structure
- Eligibility and qualification
- Effective date
- Ability to afford the rent and service charge.

Bids can be removed if an applicant does not meet these requirements or has failed to keep their application up to date.

An applicant's bid can also be removed in the following situation:

- Fails to co-operate
- Fails to reply to telephone calls or a letter
- Fails to attend a meeting
- Fails to make a decision on whether to accept a pitch within a reasonable timescale
- Suspected of making a fraudulent or misleading application.

An applicant will be told in writing if their bid is invalid or if their group, effective date, eligibility or qualification has changed as a result of reassessing their application.

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Offering a pitch

In group A and B, pitches will usually be offered to the applicant with the earliest effective date within the highest group. If there is more than one application with the same effective date and group, a decision will be made by the Housing Service Manager based on an assessment of the applicants' circumstances. In carrying out the assessment, regard will be given to the policy quotas, the personal circumstances of the applicant and whether the Council is subject to a statutory duty.

If there are no suitable applicants in group A or B a pitch can be offered to an applicant within group C. Decision about which applicant within group C will be offered the pitch will be decided with regard to the following factors:

- The proximity of the applicant's current residence to the boundary of Bath and North East Somerset and any prior history they have with the district
- Any issues relating to whether the applicant would be a suitable resident, such as a history of antisocial behaviour
- Their effective date and housing need

Priority for the pitch will usually be given to the applicant who lives nearest to the district of Bath and North East Somerset and would be the most suitable tenant for the pitch. Other factors, such as effective date and housing need are secondary considerations.

The Housing Services Manager may decide an applicant's case is so exceptional that they should be offered a pitch even though they do not live nearest to the district of Bath and North East Somerset.

The decision about who is offered a pitch will be made by Housing Services in partnership with Elim. The decision will be based on the merits of the application, without undue influence from those already living on site. All applications will be considered fully and fairly.

Applicant property refusal

If an applicant bids for a property, but after viewing decides it is not suitable, the applicant and Elim will need to contact Housing Services.

Refusal of an applicant

Elim can refuse to offer the pitch to the first applicant in line for nomination. They must tell Housing Services if they wish to reject an applicant.

There may be circumstances when they feel that an applicant or a member of their household is considered unsuitable for a pitch. If an applicant is refused for a pitch it will be offered to the next person in line for nomination. Elim can refuse an applicant on the following grounds:

- An applicant has a history of anti-social behaviour and housing the applicant is likely to have a significant effect on neighbouring residents
- An applicants has support needs and does not have a support plan in place
- An applicant is unsuitable for the property because of a recent tenancy management issue on the site
- An applicant has unmanaged rent arrears relating to a current or former tenancy or site
- An applicant was previously evicted from a site or tenancy for breach of the conditions in the last 2 years
- An applicant has displayed threatening, violent or otherwise unreasonable behaviour, such as towards a member of staff or neighbouring residents in the last 12 months
- An application appears to be false or misleading and further investigation is required
- An applicant is unable to afford the rent for the pitch
- An applicant does not have a caravan or mobile home (or unable to immediately purchase one) or their current dwelling is considered to be unsuitable for the site for reasons such as disrepair or size
- An applicant has been found guilty of tenancy or benefit fraud relevant to their suitability to be a resident
- An applicant is unable to provide a reference and has been given a reasonable opportunity to do so.

All applicants will be considered individually. Elim will comply with the Equality Act 2010 and evidence their reason for refusing an applicant for a pitch.

A decision to refuse an applicant for a pitch should be made in partnership with Housing Services. Elim will write to the applicant to:

Explain their reasons for refusing an applicant

Include information on how to appeal to a senior manager



Administration of the scheme

Appeals

There may be circumstances when an applicant disagrees with the way their application has been dealt with. An applicant can only ask for a decision made on their application to be reviewed if they disagree with:

- The facts of their case which are likely to be, or have been, taken into account in considering whether to allocate a pitch, and
- Whether they are eligible or qualify to join the scheme.

Appeals can be in writing or in person but must be received within 21 days of the decision which is being appealed. Housing Services or Elim will conduct a review of the decision and tell the applicant in writing the outcome of that review.

Residents' forum

Housing Services and Elim will listen to the views of residents (if a forum exists) and give them an opportunity to improve the pitch allocation process. Through listening to residents it is hoped the allocation process will be seen to be fair and transparent as well as promote equality of opportunity and good race and community relations.

Consulting residents about applicants who have placed a bid for a pitch will be undertaken through a residents' forum. To be worthwhile and representative of the site as a whole, a quorum of three residents must be willing to attend a meeting. The Council may decide to proceed without reference to the residents' forum where there is limited or a lack of interest. These paragraphs do not intend to imply that a qualifying residents' association has been created.

Welcome to the site

New residents will be clearly told what they can expect as tenants, and what is expected of them by Elim. They will be asked to sign an Agreement to Occupy a Pitch. The terms of the agreement will be explained verbally before they sign the agreement. An applicant will not be permitted to occupy a pitch until the agreement is signed.

Applicants will be given a tour of their pitch and boundaries of the site. As well as being provided with an information pack that includes:

- Welcome document
- Agreement to Occupy the Pitch
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- How to pay and what is covered in the rent
- Repairs and maintenance
- Other services provided
- Responsibilities of the resident
- Resident involvement
- Complaints
- · Changes to the household
- Moving out
- Useful information, such as, nearby schools, help lines, travel information, locations of places of worship and other useful telephone numbers.

Through the Council's Gateway, each person, where necessary will receive an individual support plan. The plan will look at all of their needs and support them in leading an independent lifestyle. Every child can also receive support to cover their health and educational needs.

Support and care

Support and care needs can include, but are not limited to:

- Age
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Rough sleeping
- Physical disability
- Mental illness
- Learning difficulties.

Statutory and voluntary agencies who are working with an applicant are able to provide a support plan. A support plan should be person centred and aims to identify areas where an applicant needs support with their life. It will put in place strategies to provide that support. Support needs can have an impact on the community and it is in the interests of everyone that support needs and the applicant's suitability for a pitch will be considered.

Change of circumstances

Circumstances may change during an application, for example when an applicant moves home or a member of their family leaves or arrives or a new baby is born. Changes like these may affect an application. An applicant must update their application if their circumstances change as this could affect:

- Their entitlement to join the scheme
- Their group

Monitoring

Housing Services will review this policy on an annual basis and carry out satisfaction surveys to take into account applicants and residents feedback on the application of this policy. Outcomes for applicants will be monitored to ensure that applications are being processed in a fair and transparent manner.

Information sharing

Personal data about applicants will be administered consistently with the Data Protection Act 1998. This means that personal information will be shared with Elim and may also be shared with other agencies including local authorities, the Home Office, Immigration and Nationality Directorate and other government departments and agencies.

Letting outcomes will be published on the Council website by group and effective date. They provide valuable information to help other applicants understand how long they are likely to wait for a pitch. Where providing information might put the successful applicant at risk of violence or intimidation by other individuals or a member of the public, information will not be published.

An applicant who wishes to discuss their application will be asked to comply with the following procedure.

- Confirm their name, address and date of birth and
- Answer a security question.

All information provided will be treated confidentially and all enquiries will be made in a sensitive and appropriate manner.

Periodic review

Periodic reviews will ensure that all applicants registered on the scheme require a pitch. Applications will be checked to see whether there are any changes in the circumstances of an applicant.

Periodic reviews also provide an opportunity of discussing other housing options with an applicant. This review will normally occur every twelve months.

An applicant who fails to respond to the review will have their application cancelled. Housing Services will ensure a letter and telephone call is made when an applicant has a support need.

Limitations of the scheme

This document explains how the process of allocating a pitch will work in practice. It is not nor does it claim to provide the policy or procedures on agreement to occupy a pitch or site management.

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Quotas

Pitches are a standard size and are suitable for families, couples and single people. Housing Services will decide the size of the household which will be entitled to bid for the pitch. People with dependent children will have more chance of being allocated a pitch than those without dependent children and this is reflected in the guota.

Housing Services will broadly comply with the quota but have the discretion to allocate the pitch to a family rather than a household without dependent children where there is good reason.

Housing Services will set broad targets on an annual basis which will be monitored throughout the year. The target reflects the aims of the allocation scheme and will be discussed with Elim. These targets are subject to change in agreement with the Housing Services Manager.

There could be a difference between the advertising quota and the number of pitches allocated to the quota. A possible reason could be because there were no suitable household for the pitch. The quota will be monitored for advertising and allocation to ensure the scheme is fair and creates a sustainable community.

This table shows the broad percentage of pitches which will be targeted to household types.

Quota for pitch size

75% for households with dependent children

25% for households without dependent children

Table of authorities

Legislation and regulation	Caravan Site and Control of Development Act 1960 Caravan Sites Act 1968 Mobile Homes Act 1983 Children Act 1989 Part III Environmental Protection Act 1990 Town and Planning Act 1990 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 Housing Act 1996 Human Rights Act 1998 Homelessness Act 2002 Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 Housing Act 2010 Localism Act 2011	Case law	R v Shropshire CC ex p Bungay [1991] R v South Hams DC ex parte Gibbs [1994] Hearne v National Assembly for Wales [1999] Wrexham CBC v the National Assembly for Wales and Berry [2001] O'Connor v the First Secretary of State and B&NES [2002]	Statutory guidance	Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment Guidance [2007] Gypsy and Travellers Site Management Good Practice Guide [2009] Planning Policy for Travellers Sites [2012] National Planning Policy Framework [2012]	Other guidance/consultation	Bath & North East Somerset Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment [2012] Bath & North East Somersets Homesearch Scheme [2013] Bath & North East Somerset Pitch Nomination Agreement CLG Consultation: Planning and Travellers [2014]

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