



Buckinghamshire Chilterns
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

West of England

Gypsy Traveller Accommodation (and other needs) Assessment
2006-2016

Commissioned from Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College
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ES1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment, in addition to calculating pitch requirements for the time-period 2006-2016, explores a comprehensive range of services and provision appropriate to improving accommodation and increasing social inclusion amongst Gypsy and Traveller communities in the study area.

ES2.0 The brief

- 2.1 This was devised in consultation with the client authorities, service providers and other stake holders including Gypsy/Traveller/Showmen Forum members and asked us to consider the following elements:

- a) To generate reliable estimates of future accommodation needs and to produce detailed information about local Gypsies and Travellers including:
- demographic characteristics;
 - current accommodation; and
 - aspiration for various types of accommodation.
- b) Secondary requirements included an exploration of the following elements:
- employment;
 - health and education (and access to such services);
 - experiences of discrimination;
 - experiences of homelessness services;
 - support needs of Gypsies and Travellers; and
 - mobility/movement and potential use of transit provision.

- 2.2 For the purposes of **s225 of the Housing Act 2004**¹, (duties of local housing authorities: accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers) “**gypsies and travellers**” (sic) means:

- (a) persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a caravan; and
- (b) all other persons of a nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin, including-
- (i) 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
- (ii) members of an organised group of Travelling Showpeople or circus people (whether or not travelling together as such).

- 2.3 Following draft Government guidance on undertaking GTAAs² the West of England study is based upon a new survey and supported by material from relevant public agencies and other sources such as pre-existing reports, planning decisions and

¹ Statutory Instrument 2006 No 3190, *The Housing (Assessment of Accommodation Needs) (Meaning of Gypsies and Travellers) (England) Regulations 2006*

² **ODPM** (2006a) *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments: Draft practice guidance*. (London, ODPM)

consultation with stakeholders. The survey for this GTAA comprised face-to-face interviews with Gypsies/Travellers/Showmen on sites of all types and in housing, within the study area, undertaken between March and June 2007. A total of 188 interviews were undertaken by a supervised team of mainly Gypsy/Traveller interviewers, and provided data on 744 individuals (408 of whom were dependent children), representing some 38% of the estimated Gypsy/Traveller/Showmen population of the study area.

ES3.0 National and Regional Policy Background

- 3.1 Local authorities are required to assess the need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in their areas and to develop strategies which address the need through public and/or private provision.
- 3.2 The Regional Planning Body, on the basis of local authority assessed need, will determine how many pitches should be provided across the region and will specify in the Regional Spatial Strategy how many pitches should be provided in each local authority area.
- 3.3 Local planning authorities will be obliged to identify sites in their Development Plan Documents in line with the pitch requirement identified in the Regional Spatial Strategy.
- 3.4 ODPM Circular 01/2006 *Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites* issued in February 2006 sets out the relevant guidance.
- 3.5 In early 2007 a draft Circular was issued for consultation which proposes a similar planning process for Travelling Showmen, in recognition of a shortfall in appropriate site provision available to them.

ES4.0 Study Population

- 4.1 No single clear data source exists which can accurately specify the size of the Gypsy/Traveller population of the study area. Showmen's Guild records are regarded as highly accurate in terms of assessing their membership which is believed to be the overwhelming majority of travelling Showpeople.
- 4.2 Applying a series of assumptions from health, education and caravan count data (specified in Appendix D) **we calculate that the Gypsy/Traveller population of the study area is approximately 2,000 people or 500 household units of whom approximately a third are living in housing. The proportion of housed/sited Gypsies and Travellers varies considerably between discrete UAs.**
- 4.3 We estimate that 25% of the Gypsy/Traveller population is resident in BCC (although only 5% of caravans) mainly living in housing. B&NES is estimated to have approximately 5% of the Gypsy/Traveller population with the remainder living in NS (16%) and SG (55%). We believe that our population estimates are as robust as are possible in the absence of other datasets.

ES5.0 Findings

- 5.1 The average **household size** for the communities surveyed is 3.9 people, (rising to

4 amongst housed respondents) with an average number of 2.5 caravans per household (site residents) varying between ethnicities and 'types' of Gypsy/Traveller. The average number of dependent children across the study was 2.1, varying between 3.4 for Irish Travellers and 1.2 for Showmen and New Travellers.

- 5.2 The population is young and growing at approximately 3% per annum (possibly a conservative estimate of growth). There is a considerable cohort of young people of all ethnicities, (although Irish Travellers are statistically predominant in the 0-16 age range) who will require accommodation within the next 10 years. It is likely that the majority of all these young people will seek caravan accommodation although not necessarily within the study area if marriage occurs with individuals from other localities.

ES6.0 Showmen

- 6.1 The needs of this group were assessed separately from other Gypsies/Travellers. The overwhelming majority of Showmen reported that their children would remain in the same business, and accordingly new provision for yards (large enough to hold equipment and rides) was required. We found extremely high levels of suppressed households and over-crowding amongst Show families, in part because of the need for space associated with their trade.
- 6.2 Showmen are an extremely well organised business community, familiar with dealing with legislation and contractual requirements. The majority of Showmen are literate and have access to finance appropriate to the self-provision of sites.
- 6.3 Accordingly, if suitable land is identified across the study area, based upon the findings from the survey and information received from the Showmen's Guild, it is likely that the majority of new Showmen's sites (Yards) will be self-provided or privately rented pitches.

ES7.0 Accommodation Preference

- 7.1 Approximately half of the housed respondents to the survey were very satisfied living in houses, although some dissatisfaction was expressed at the inability to keep a caravan at some RSL/LA properties, curtailing what was felt to be a 'cultural' behaviour. 38% of housed respondents were 'dissatisfied or very dissatisfied' with their housing, most commonly citing problems with the neighbourhood such as drug dealing or vandalism, experiencing extremely high levels of racist abuse (see further below) and generally feeling '*trapped*', and wishing to live on a caravan site. High rates of depression were reported by housed respondents (particularly where they were caring for a disabled or elderly relative: often their route into housing) with loss of community and inability to settle into 'bricks and mortar' expressed as a key factor in their unhappiness.
- 7.2 **The overwhelmingly expressed accommodation preference was for owner-occupied sites.** Both housed and sited respondents were equally keen on exploring this concept further and in excess of 40% of respondents reported that they would be able to self-fund site provision (on their own or with family members) if they were able to obtain planning permission.
- 7.3 Forum members were particularly interested in the concept of exploring shared-

owner schemes or public-private finance schemes to fund public pitches for families who were unable to self-finance a site completely.

- 7.4 **A relatively high level of preference was also declared for privately rented and public funded (local authority) sites across the study area.**
- 7.5 **The net impact of house to site and site to house transfer led to a (small) net increase in transfer to site from housing provision. A proportion of respondents who were owner-occupiers, reported that they would prefer to move to a self-provided site if possible, although tenants of social housing expressed greater aspirations for such accommodation.**
- 7.6 **Housed Gypsies and Travellers caring for an elderly or disabled relative, or those had been resident in housing for several years, were least likely to express a desire to move from housing, often stating 'I like my comforts now'.**
- 7.7 New Travellers were more likely to report a desire to live at an unauthorised encampment or low-impact 'Green Lane' or traditional stopping place.

ES8.0 Location of Sites

- 8.1 **The majority of respondents interviewed had close family connection to the locality in which they resided**, and an expressed desire to live within their current UA.
- 8.2 While many respondents simply stated 'where I am now' expressed locational preferences for sites are as follows:
SG - 46 cases;
NS - 10 cases;
BCC - 6 (or if 'Bristol Area' is counted as within the UA 12);
B&NES - 5.
- 8.3 Other respondents reported 'the South-West' in some cases identifying preferences for the Mendips or South Somerset.

ES9.0 Overcrowding

- 9.1 Overcrowding is difficult to identify as there is some overlap with suppressed households. Fifty-three percent of respondents reporting being overcrowded, although in the case of New Travellers and Showmen this was particularly likely to relate to external (site) conditions.

ES10.0 Travelling Patterns

- 10.1 Respondents throughout the study area reported a high degree of travelling, most particularly in the summer months. These stated behaviours are supported by official count data. **There is evidence of considerable demand for both a network of short term stopping places and transit sites across the study area.** In addition, lifting planning restrictions or considering the development of appropriate forms of permissions would permit residents of private sites to offer transit pitches to friends and families passing through the area. There was general support for this idea although the majority of households would not wish to allow a stranger onto their site

through fears over security of themselves and their families.

- 10.2 On being asked to identify **suitable locations for transit sites the majority of respondents cited proximity to motorways and main routes**. General support was given to the idea of a transit site in B&NES and also SG. Pitch recommendations are provided in the aggregated table of need within this summary.

ES11.0 Health and Education

- 11.1 Both the **health and education status of Gypsy/Traveller residents of the study area compares very favourably with other locations** where the team have worked. We commend the work of the TES and the Travellers Health Project and their partnership working with local authorities.
- 11.2 Despite the generally good picture compared to some other areas, respondents reported a considerable degree of morbidity most commonly depression; arthritis and asthma/lung conditions. **Twenty-two percent of respondents were caring for a household member with a disability or long-term illness**.
- 11.3 **Residents of unauthorised encampments were largely not registered with a doctor**, tending to travel elsewhere to see a GP or make use of accident and emergency services. The rest of the survey population (86%) were registered with local health services.
- 11.4 Educational attainment was relatively low amongst the older cohort of respondents (and some individuals in their 20s were also functionally illiterate although this was relatively rare). **Irish Traveller respondents were the group most likely to report educational disadvantage and illiteracy, followed by Romany Gypsies, with Showmen and New Travellers both generally able to write a simple letter, complete a form and read a newspaper**.
- 11.5 The highest education attainment of any 'type' of respondent was found amongst New Travellers, although even amongst that group, only a low percentage had been through the higher education system.
- 11.6 The TES works closely young people and their families across the study area and we found an unusually high percentage of households reporting that someone within their home had undertaken post-compulsory training of some kind.
- 11.7 Respondents whose literary skills were very poor (functionally illiterate) were most likely to cite 'evictions' 'or being moved' as responsible for their lack of formal education.

ES12.0 Experiences of Homelessness and other local authority services

- 12.1 Sixteen percent of respondents had experienced Homelessness services at one or more of the unauthorised encampments. **In general a high level of dissatisfaction was expressed with the homelessness services available**, both in terms of type of accommodation available (for example, housing not sites) and the restrictive nature of homelessness legislation when meant that people who were childless or in good health were unable to access accommodation.

- 12.2 The extent of usage of other public services appeared to vary both by ethnicity and site location – for example, library services were used more by New Travellers and Showmen, and swimming pools and leisure centres attracted Irish Travellers and Romany Gypsies in greater numbers. All communities made use of public skips although some concerns were expressed over opening hours and the difficulties of disposing of work related waste.

ES13.0 Racism/Discrimination and Intimidation

- 13.1 We were extremely concerned at the high levels of discrimination and intimidation reported by respondents to the survey. **In total over 70% of the sample had experienced incidents varying from ‘name calling’ to having petrol bombs thrown at their caravans when parked up** – albeit not in the study area. Young people appeared to be particularly vulnerable to racist bullying at school with focus group and survey data providing graphic evidence of the verbal (and at times physical) abuse suffered by children. Several respondents spoke of wishing to leave their current residence to escape from abusive neighbours who in a number of cases were reported as suddenly becoming hostile when they realised they were living near to a Gypsy or Traveller. **Only low numbers of respondents felt that it was worth reporting racist incidents to the relevant authorities as ‘they won’t do anything anyway’.**
- 13.2 **We have provided a summary of the numerous recommendations pertaining to these findings: available at Appendix G of the full report and this summary should be read in conjunction with that Appendix.**
- 13.3 **We particularly emphasise the recommendation to work closely with the Gypsy/Traveller/Showman Forum** which was established for the purposes of this GTAA. The Forum members are willing to continue to meet with the UAs to assist with consultations over future site locations, the development of appropriate site provision and other service delivery.
- 13.4 Accordingly, the consultation Forum will not only assist with enhancing community engagement in the planning process, but will encourage greater stake-holding by Gypsy/Traveller/Showman communities across a range of initiatives. Enhancing community planning and consultation processes will aid UAs in fulfilling their equalities responsibilities under the Race Relations Acts and build greater social cohesion across the study area as Gypsies and Travellers become full partners in democratic processes.

ES14.0 Accommodation Assessment

- 14.1 The full report provides information on the formula utilised and process undertaken to reach an assessment of need for new pitches across the study area and disaggregated to UA level.
- 14.2 The key table which provides data on transit, residential and provision for Showmen 2006-2016 is produced below. Please note that the figures presented here are reflective of the assumed delivery of pitches the study team was advised were to be imminently delivered (by 2008). If these pitches are not granted permission within the specified time period the requirement will increase by the extent shown in the full calculation produced at Table 13 (Part 3 section 4.3, p 49 of the main report).

Table 1 ES: Estimate of requirement for residential and transit pitches for Gypsies/Travellers and Showmen 2006-2016 (Study and UA level): after allowance made for 'new pitches planned'

| Authority | Residential pitches | Transit caravan capacity | Showman Households |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| B&NES | 19 | 20 | 1 |
| BCC | 24 | 20 | 8 |
| NS | 36 | 10 | 0 |
| SG | 47 | 25 | 42 |
| Total (STUDY AREA) 2006-2011 | 126 | 75 | 51 |
| B&NES | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| BCC | 6 | 0 | 3 |
| NS | 13 | 0 | 0 |
| SG | 22 | 0 | 15 |
| Total (STUDY AREA) 2011-2016 | 44 | 0 | 18 |