

Planning for Gypsies and Travellers

RTPI Good Practice Note 4 Part A: Communication, Consultation and Participation

About these Guidelines

One of the key roles of planning is to, “address accessibility for all members of the community to jobs, health, housing, education, shops, leisure and facilities”.¹

Whilst there are examples of good practice, planning has not addressed these issues well for Gypsy and Traveller communities. There are insufficient sites, services and opportunities for people who wish to pursue a nomadic lifestyle. New guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) seeks a step change in approaches and practice.

This Good Practice Note is presented in a series of five complementary parts. It aims to help practitioners deliver satisfactory services to Gypsy and Traveller communities. There is a strong focus on integrated, effective service delivery through the optimum use of stakeholder resources and partnership working.

This GPN series provides advice under five headings:

- **Communication, Consultation and Participation (Part A)**
- **Accommodation Needs Assessment (Part B)**
- **Accommodation and Site Delivery (Part C)**
- **Enforcement (Part D)**
- **Sources of Further Information and Advice (Part E)** only available online

The series is primarily intended for planning practitioners. However, it will provide assistance for other stakeholders involved in planning and service delivery processes.

¹ Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development
www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143804



RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

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Part B: Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment

Part C: Accommodation and Site Delivery

Part D: Enforcement

Part E: Sources of Further Information and Advice

All five parts of this Good Practice Note are available to download in full from the RTPI website at www.rtpi.org.uk

1. Introduction

Part A of this good practice note covers communication, consultation and participation between all stakeholders with an interest in improving the welfare of Gypsy and Traveller communities. It is recommended reading prior to:

- **Part B – Assessment;**
- **Part C – Delivery; and**
- **Part D – Enforcement.**

It does not deal with general principles of community participation.²

The terms of the 2004 housing legislation relating to service delivery require a considerable level of input from local authorities, irrespective of the size of the resident or transient Gypsy and Traveller communities in their area. However, continuous but flexible partnership and cooperative working can considerably reduce the consumption of resources. It is imperative that public sector officers do not operate in isolation, but that they communicate, consult and promote the participation of all stakeholders at the start of, and throughout projects and associated procedures.

Local authorities that make a significant investment in front-end procedures will reduce resource use later on in the delivery process, and will provide an enhanced and holistic service for Gypsy and Traveller communities.

It is evident that there is an inherent culture clash between service providers and users. Service providers tend to prefer to deal with just one or two individuals to present a single, coherent viewpoint that covers the main issues for all Gypsy and Traveller communities. However, most Gypsy and Traveller communities are simply not organised in a manner to be able to do this and many community organisations are not in a position to undertake this role, and would consider it inappropriate to do so. One or two active individuals are unlikely to represent the totality of views within all Gypsy and Traveller

² These are contained in RTPI 'GPN 1: Guidelines on Effective Community Involvement and Consultation': www.rtpi.org.uk/download/364/RTPI-GPN1-Consultation-v1-2006.pdf

communities. Similar difficulties arise with the settled community, whereby 'activists' are more likely to attend public meetings, whilst the silent majority stays at home.

Using effective and efficient techniques, appropriate for each intended audience is crucial to obtain high quality, relevant information from each stakeholder, and to facilitate constructive participation by all.

2. Definitions and Language

Language and methods of communication are constantly evolving.

So it is important to define any potentially confusing terminology used by professionals working in planning, housing, environmental health, justice, equality etc that may not be understood by the layperson.

For those who do not use public sector systems on a regular basis the complexity of legislation and guidance is a barrier to partnership working. If service users have limited literacy, this will also have an impact on effective communication. Gypsy and Traveller communities thrive on face-to-face dealings, and oral exchanges, whilst service providers tend to use written exchanges.

It is important that all stakeholders, including Gypsy and Traveller communities should fully explain the terms and abbreviations they use to reduce confusion and misunderstanding.

This consideration should be extended, and stakeholders should not assume that all other stakeholders are familiar with each other's activities. Each organisation should provide a brief outline of their remit, along with contact details. This will help others to understand different perspectives and obtain additional information.

It is accepted best practice amongst Gypsy and Traveller communities to capitalise the letters, 'G' and 'T' and the RTPI endorses this stance.

3. Consultees and Participants

3.1 Identifying Stakeholders

There will be many stakeholders involved in providing services and support to Gypsy and Traveller communities, who should receive an invitation to take part in current and future initiatives. Not all will need, or wish to be directly involved on every occasion. It is not a worthwhile use of time and resources to involve stakeholders who are unable to contribute effectively, but the principal service providers should not make this decision alone. Instead, at the outset, the lead authority should ask each stakeholder when and how they wish to participate, and what they can bring to the table.

The starting place for identifying stakeholders is within the local authority leading the project. Many in-house departments will have established links with organisations involved in work with Gypsy and Traveller communities and they should be asked to provide a list of organisations they wish to issue invitations to. The participation of additional stakeholders, such as health or education specialists may be required at a later stage when considering the location of development sites for Gypsy and Traveller specific accommodation. Similarly, input from the police is important in relation to community liaison between Gypsy and Traveller communities and the settled community, crime prevention measures, and community safety issues.

It is important that exclusive stakeholder groups are not established, e.g. comprised solely of politicians, officers or community members. Exclusivity is likely to engender mistrust, misunderstandings and prevent the free exchange of information.

3.2 In-House Participants

Corporate involvement and support in the provision of services and development of sites for Gypsy and Travellers is vital. Securing a desirable level of corporate involvement will require high quality communication across

the authority, enabling the expertise embedded throughout the entire local authority to be harnessed. Developing effective links between 'caring' and 'regulatory' departments will bring added benefits, allowing officers to understand the full range of issues relating to service delivery for Gypsy and Traveller communities across the authority.

Elected members are an important element of the in-house team, and cross-party political support could smooth the process of identifying sites and delivering associated services. In some authorities, councillors are already active on sub-committees or advisory groups and are candid in their support of service delivery for Gypsy and Traveller communities. Other politicians may be reluctant to openly support the provision of services to Gypsies and Travellers, but their involvement with committees and access to equalities training should enhance their knowledge and awareness, leading to their greater involvement as 'community champions'. Officers can support politicians by regularly providing clear and comprehensive progress reports.

3.3 External Organisations

External organisations will come from many sectors, have a variety of structures and agendas, and have access to an array of resources. Although partnership working with colleagues in the public sector may be more straightforward than creating similar arrangements with not for profit organisations it is important to engage all organisations that can provide different information and resources.

Local authorities who work in partnership with other authorities in the area will be able to maximise resources and expertise. If there is little expertise within the region, officers should establish mentoring links with officers in authorities outside the region that regularly provide services to Gypsy and Traveller communities.

Whilst creating partnerships may appear resource intensive, once the relationships are established, along with procedures for communication, consultation and participation, the workload for the lead authority is likely to be reduced and processes speeded up. There will inevitably be a management and maintenance responsibility if partnerships are to continue, therefore there should be agreement early on who will coordinate the partnership. A well-delivered service will build understanding and confidence in communities and officers alike.

3.4 Gypsy and Traveller Communities

Many experienced community support networks and organisations are able to offer advice to local authority officers, or take a facilitating role if required. The planning authority should reciprocate by sharing information, e.g. community support agencies will need to understand the planning system, its processes and timescales to provide accurate information.³ Many county councils have a Gypsy and Traveller service team and it important to utilise the expertise of these units.⁴

Local authorities should encourage Gypsy and Traveller communities to engage with the planning system at an early stage. However, they may request other agencies that have well-established relationships with members of Gypsy and Traveller communities to undertake this role. There are a large number of voluntary groups working at the local level. They tend to be involved in specific projects, such as youth groups, play projects, literacy and employment schemes.⁵

³ The Handy Guide to Planning www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk/ is written for people with limited experience of planning, but would like to get involved.

⁴ The National Association of Gypsy and Traveller Officers is also a useful contact www.nagto.co.uk

⁵ Details of such organisations are provided in, 'Here to Stay' by Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Racial Equality Council www.chawrec.org.uk/

3.5 Settled Communities

In the past, settled communities have often only become aware of the intention to develop Gypsy and Traveller accommodation when the local authority issues a notice or consultation. The requirements for preparation of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation strategies and the identification of sites in development plans have the potential to raise the settled community's awareness of developments coming on stream far earlier in the process. Cultivating the support of the settled community for the development of sites should start as soon as possible.

There is a sound case for front-loading and sharing information with small groups in the community, rather than trying to manage large public gatherings at the start of the process. Again, it may be beneficial for the local authority to work in partnership with organisations with established links in the community.

The settled community is not a homogenous whole. There will be separate groups with different perceptions and concerns, which the local authority must take account of. For example, people with children may be concerned about the attendance of Gypsy and Traveller children at the local school; others may be concerned about a potential rise in crime.

There may well be a great deal of hostility and resentment amongst members of the settled community to the proposal of a Gypsy and Traveller settlement and upgrading of services within their area, which needs to be properly acknowledged and addressed by the local authority. This reaction can place local authority officers in a stressful and difficult situation, especially at large public meetings, where they can come under attack from the 'audience'.

The development of a robust communication strategy can go a long way to avoiding such situations. When service-providers notify the settled community of the need to identify sites to accommodate Gypsies and Travellers, without being able to provide information on matters such as the number of households or the design and ongoing management of the development, they are likely to generate a fearful and hostile response.

4. Procedures Requiring Communication, Consultation and Participation

4.1 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment

Gypsy and Traveller communities must be meaningfully involved and fairly represented in the housing needs assessment process if local authorities are to be able to incorporate their views and gain valuable information from the assessment.

The Cambridge Sub-Regional Traveller Needs Assessment, published in May 2005⁶ assessed the service and accommodation needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities within the Cambridge area. The unique feature of this study is the way it involved and engaged with Gypsy and Traveller communities. The main sources of information were the results of surveys carried out with 313 Gypsies and Travellers on sites and accommodation of all types by a team of specialist interviewers, along with the bi-annual caravan counts starting from 1980, and local school rolls data. This assessment is a sound model of community involvement, but stakeholders should investigate other examples before proceeding with the needs assessment for their area.

Securing direct access to members of Gypsy and Traveller communities can be difficult. Local authorities should work with representative bodies, support groups and liaison officers. Similarly, Gypsies and Travellers should proactively engage in the assessment to ensure their views are fully considered at this important stage in the delivery process.

4.2 Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS)

Regional planning bodies are required to prepare, publish, and review a statement of public participation setting out how they will achieve public engagement in the RSS review. Some regional planning bodies have developed innovative methods to facilitate consultation during the first round of

⁶ www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/E4504D9E-D264-4B98-8967-B75F0A1A1B5F/0/TravellersSurveyFinalReport_May06.pdf

reviews, including representative opinion polling, household leafleting, widespread media coverage and advertisements.⁷

Encouraging active participation in the RSS process should draw on techniques for engagement established when delivering other services to Gypsy and Traveller communities.

4.3 Statements of Community Involvement

The Local Development Framework (LDF) includes a statement of community involvement (SCI) setting out the local planning authority's policy for involving the community in the preparation and revision of all local development documents and planning applications.

Planning authorities must comply with the Race Relations Act (2000) and promote race equality in the preparation and outputs of their local development documents. Community involvement in the planning process must incorporate all the different racial groups in the area. The statement of community involvement must identify these groups and set out when and how consultees will be able to participate and how their comments will feed into the preparation or review of local development plan documents.

4.4 Development Plan Framework Preparation

One of the aims of the LDF system is to:

“strengthen community and stakeholder involvement in the development of local communities”.⁸

Therefore, service providers should encourage the early involvement of Gypsy and Traveller communities in line with the ‘front-loading’ approach, so that the two parties can work together more effectively. Gypsy and Traveller communities may require help with making representations on consultation documents and assistance should be provided, perhaps by referring people to the RTPI Planning Aid service.⁹

⁷ ChangeUp is a programme of capacity building for the infrastructure of the voluntary and community sector www.changeup.org.uk.

⁸ Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143846

⁹ Further details on Planning Aid www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

4.5 The Planning System

Gypsies and Travellers will often need to communicate with planning officers. The following good practice points will help Gypsies and Travellers to use the planning service:

- Planning enquiries from Gypsies and Travellers should be directed to an officer with specialist knowledge of Gypsy and Traveller culture and their development requirements;
- Provide all necessary information, including the officer name and contact numbers, plus contact details for other organisations able to provide assistance, e.g. RTPI Planning Aid, Gypsy and Traveller liaison officer and support groups;
- Explain clearly all relevant in-house processes and timescales, and the roles of internal and external bodies and individuals, e.g. councillors, statutory consultees, nearby residents;
- Some people have difficulty understanding written documents. It is important to find out if this is an issue and offer help. This can include explaining all requirements verbally and giving contact numbers of individuals able to help complete forms and prepare supporting documents;
- Advise potential applicants of the benefits of employing a professional to assist with them with making an application or submission. Provide information on who will be able to help them choose suitable assistance;
- Discussions should be conducted in a fair, sensitive, understanding and mutually respectful manner;
- Ensure all necessary advice and information is given so that any matter can be dealt with quickly and smoothly, e.g. by trying to ensure the person provides all the information required at the start of any procedure;
- The applicant or their agent may wish to raise special needs considerations, which have a bearing on the application. The planning officer should consider carefully how much of this information is recorded as part of the planning decision;

- The planning authority should try to negotiate a solution to any non-compliance or breach of planning legislation;
- If the planning authority has implemented revised enforcement procedures during the transition period to full provision of sites, Gypsy and Traveller communities in the area must be informed;
- Many Gypsies and Travellers submit applications retrospectively and may apply for a certificate of lawful use. The planning officer should explain the circumstances where this type of application is acceptable and be very clear about factors that will affect the success of the application; and
- Explain the requirement to comply with any conditions attached to an approval, the possibility that further details of such matters as access and boundary treatments may have to be submitted to and approved by local authority officers, and that the applicant may need to secure additional approvals such as building regulations and a caravan site licence.

5. Methods of Communication, Consultation and Participation

5.1 Resources and Budgets

Effective involvement inevitably means the commitment of financial and other resources. Given the limited resources available to many stakeholders, it will pay dividends for all parties to be creative in sourcing and utilising a range of resources. Partnership working will increase access to alternative budgets and resources.

Whilst European, lottery, charitable or sponsorship funding will not be available for public sector initiatives that are a legal requirement, it may be possible to secure this type of funding for specific procedures within the overall project, and for facilitating, managing or maintaining project outputs.

Securing corporate support and multi-departmental participation is important because it draws in resources from other departments and budgets. For example, training members of Gypsy and Traveller communities to carry out assessment interviews may draw down financial support from an education budget. Resources may be available from IDeA/PAS and the Regional Improvement Partnerships. Stakeholders should identify what resources they have, when they are available and what they can specifically be used for.

Voluntary and community organisations often have very limited resources, which are in high demand. Service providers should consider the possibility of funding established community or voluntary organisations as consultants. This has the added value of building trust between stakeholders. Voluntary or community organisations should, as a minimum be reimbursed for any expenses incurred. The lead authority should consider paying a daily rate for attendance that leads to self-employed community members taking time away from work to participate in a project. This will further redistribute funding to the community.

Stakeholders should carefully consider the entire programme for the project to ensure that the participation and consultation timeframe allows sufficient time for meaningful engagement. The lead authority should attempt to accommodate any time constraints of stakeholders.

5.2 Dialogue Methods

It is important to understand that the experience of many Gypsies and Travellers liaising with public sector agencies and the settled community is a negative and frightening one. Consequently, there should be no expectation that Gypsies and Travellers will participate in 'open' meetings. Stakeholders should investigate suitable methods of bringing together individuals from the respective communities in an environment that will facilitate a constructive exchange of information and smooth the progress of breaking down animosity and hostility.

Public meetings related to the provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers are frequently extremely difficult to manage and the value of outcomes negligible.

To improve the value of public meetings stakeholders should:

- Commit resources to related community work, with a view to de-fusing conflict and conducting the meeting in a calm atmosphere;
- Lay down clear ground rules at the outset;
- Not permit inflammatory or racist language;
- Provide examples of racist language. Some people are genuinely puzzled when told their language and assumptions are racist;
- Have a contingency plan to prevent the meeting being disrupted or hijacked by groups seeking to further discriminatory agendas; and
- Consider employing the services of organisations with a track record of facilitating community participation at potentially inflammatory meetings.

Organisations with experience of working within both Gypsy and Traveller and settled communities should be able to disseminate and gather information and opinions. RTPI Planning Aid has conducted a number of successful seminars and workshops in relation to service provision for Gypsies and Travellers and may be in a position to assist with devising and implementing an effective communication strategy.

Advice and support groups from the Gypsy and Traveller and settled communities may be active in the local area and already holding regular meetings. These groups may be willing to extend their work to include specific local authority initiatives and include officers in their discussions. Alternatively, the local authority may wish to include members of these groups in a new forum or advisory group.

Service providers should avoid consultation overload. Activities should be targeted, managed and effective. It is good practice to hold stakeholder forums as and when they are appropriate and each meeting should have a clearly

defined purpose. Each forum should not have so many members that the meetings are unmanageable, intimidating or allow insufficient time for each attendee to contribute.

The location of meetings is crucial to achieving full stakeholder participation. While public sector personnel are unlikely to have reservations about attending meetings in local authority offices, such locations can be intimidating for members of the public, and a neutral venue is preferred. The timing and duration of meetings may also be a deterrent to community members. Stakeholders will need to reach agreement on these matters to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to take part.

The methods of communication used are also crucial. The literacy skills of some people in the Gypsy and Traveller, and settled communities may compromise full engagement in all the processes if the only or primary method of communication is through the written word. There are many alternative methods of communication and stakeholders should facilitate their use, e.g. recording the outcomes of meetings, and the contents of reports. Video conferencing, webcams, creating CDs and DVDs are potentially excellent mechanisms to ensuring the participation of all stakeholders. Irrespective of the media used, all communications should be in plain and clear language.

Local authorities should consider the advantages of providing an explanation of the processes involved in delivering services for the layperson. The provision of briefings on the planning system to Gypsy and Traveller and settled community organisations may prove a cost-effective mechanism for the dissemination of accurate information to their respective communities.¹⁰

¹⁰ The Planning Pack is a series of information sheets providing a detailed explanation of the planning system aimed at the non-professional www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

6. The Media

The media has a significant role to play in the successful delivery of sites and accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers. In the past, reporting has been exceptionally damaging and has seriously compromised the ability of the local authority and others to achieve their Gypsy and Traveller service delivery objectives.

Strategies to deliver accommodation services to Gypsies and Travellers should include details of how to manage the media in a positive manner. It should be remembered that the media has a commercial agenda and timescale, and liaison by the local authority should be tailored to meet these. Some authorities have in-house press or public relations departments, and prevent other personnel from liaising with the media. Each local authority will have protocols to suit its circumstances.

Positive media liaison will require:

- A single point of contact within the local authority for each initiative. The liaison officer should have received public relations training, feel comfortable in the role and have an in-depth knowledge of the initiative and the background information;
- A liaison officer who has responsibility for compiling and releasing briefings and building positive relationships with editors, journalists, radio and television presenters etc;
- Internal and external stakeholders to provide timely and wholly accurate briefings to the liaison officer throughout the lifetime of the project;
- Providing media briefings on future activities, but officers should not 'jump the gun' and anticipate the outcome of any meetings, reports, surveys etc. For example, briefings on the accommodation needs assessment should not be released if it has been validated by all stakeholders;

- Officers to anticipate when and where the most sensitive and contentious issues will arise by using their local knowledge. A good media strategy will include a risk assessment and procedures to prevent or mitigate any negative impact when it does happen;
- Using the media to engage with Gypsy and Traveller communities via newspapers, radio and television that have specific target audiences, e.g. Rokker Radio, the Gypsy and Traveller radio station, and the Traveller Times. The settled community can also be reached through the local radio and local newspapers; and
- Stakeholders to provide politicians with clear, accurate and comprehensive briefings; as the media is likely to want to speak to politicians if an initiative is considered contentious.

Enforcement action is often highly emotive and very newsworthy.

Consequently, the local, and possibly the national media will report on enforcement action taken in relation to Gypsies and Travellers. Individual enforcement officers should be discouraged from dealing directly with the media, in favour of selecting a well-briefed but neutral officer. However, enforcement officers should provide them with regular briefings, which include details of each stage of the enforcement procedures and all related action the stakeholders are taking to resolve both immediate and long-term issues.

All stakeholders are responsible for cultivating positive relationships with the local media and explaining clearly to journalists what they are trying to achieve and why. The value of securing media support should not be underestimated.¹¹

¹¹ Further information on public relations and managing the media www.planningmatters.co.uk

7. Ongoing Communication, Consultation and Participation

Maintaining stakeholder goodwill will facilitate the delivery of future services. Having committed resources to establishing effective communication, consultation and participation methods for the duration of an initiative, the stakeholders can maximise the resources used by continuing to support the most effective mechanisms. These should be formal processes, although informal communication networks are useful, they tend to break down when individuals move on.

The delivery of some services, such as the identification of sites in development plan documents, is the end of one process and the start of another. The various committees and advisory groups established to participate in the process of site identification and the accommodation needs assessment will have considerable background information and expertise embedded in their membership. This will prove useful in the management and monitoring of subsequent work.

The continuing involvement of stakeholders is vital to maintain robust data, which the local authority should update on an ongoing basis to reduce resource expenditure on review and revision of policies and strategies. Whilst ongoing engagement with all service users is important, it is especially important with regard to Gypsies and Travellers, given their long history of marginalisation.

This good practice note goes onto give advice on:

- **Accommodation Needs Assessment (Part B);**
- **Accommodation and Site Delivery (Part C);**
- **Enforcement (Part D); and**
- **Sources of Further Information and Advice (Part E).**

8. Further Information

Guidelines on Effective Community Involvement and Consultation

RTPI Good Practice Note 1:

www.rtpi.org.uk/download/364/RTPI-GPN1-Consultation-v1-2006.pdf

The Handy Guide to Planning

Written for people with limited experience of planning, but who would like to get involved. www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk/

The Planning Pack

A series of information sheets providing a detailed explanation of the planning system aimed at the non-professional www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

The National Association of Gypsy and Traveller Officers

www.nagto.co.uk

Here to Stay

Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Racial Equality Council www.chawrec.org.uk/

Cambridge Sub-Regional Traveller Needs Assessment (2005)

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/E4504D9E-D264-4B98-8967-B75F0A1A1B5F/0/TravellersSurveyFinalReport_May06.pdf

ChangeUp

A programme of capacity building for the infrastructure of the voluntary and community sector www.changeup.org.uk.

Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks

www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143846

This guidance is written for town planners working within the English planning system, however much of the advice is relevant to all parts of the UK.

In 2007, the Royal Town Planning Institute assembled a Gypsy and Traveller advisory group of expert individuals to research and debate, the lack of suitable accommodation for Gypsy and Traveller communities. The advisory group has steered the publication of this good practice note.

The RTPI established specialist sub-groups of expert volunteers and staff to draft this guidance; volunteers came from the RTPI Associations and Networks, Planning Aid and external organisations. In order to draw in yet more experience, specialist practitioners participated throughout the ongoing consultation process.

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