

Planning for Gypsies and Travellers

RTPI Good Practice Note 4

Part B: Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment

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



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mediation of space · making of place

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Part A: Communication, Consultation and Participation

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 B of this good practice note examines the assessment of Gypsy and Traveller needs through the use of accommodation needs assessments. It gives details of who should be involved, the processes for undertaking the assessment and the need for continuous review. It is recommended reading prior to:

- **Part C – Delivery, and**
- **Part D – Enforcement.**
- **Part A contains advice on Communication, Consultation and Participation.**

The assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs, and the production of an accompanying strategy is a statutory requirement under s.225 of the Housing Act 2004, which amends s.8 of the Housing Act 1985.

A sensitively and effectively implemented accommodation needs assessment can be an important mechanism for establishing long-term stakeholder relationships, which in turn will save resources and produce enhanced outcomes. Throughout the entire process, those conducting the assessment should be aware that there is a rising trend of intrusion by service providers collecting data from Gypsy and Traveller communities. A balance must be struck between the need to collect information to meet specific, named and agreed objectives, the requirement to provide high quality services for Gypsy and Traveller communities, and respect for equality and privacy boundaries. It is important that the lead authority provides clear information on the survey methodology to all stakeholders, and facilitates interested members of Gypsy and Traveller communities to engage in the initiative.

Although the accommodation needs assessment will typically be carried out by the local authority housing department, it is important that planning officers are able to influence the scope and design of the assessment as stakeholders from the start of the process. Planning officers will be using the results in future planning processes and it will be important to ensure that private as well as social accommodation needs are identified. A comprehensive and robust accommodation needs assessment to underpin strategies, planning and

associated policies will enhance the confidence of all stakeholders and speed up and enhance service delivery.

2. Definitions and Language

The precise definition of Gypsies and Travellers for the purposes of an accommodation needs assessment is:

“(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

Government advice is to include the needs of New Travellers and travelling show-people and circus people travelling together, (including their need for winter quarters) in an assessment of Gypsies and Travellers accommodation needs, as many of the issues are similar to those of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

To avoid confusion and inappropriate provision, the definitions of the terms and phrases used in relation to all aspects of the assessment, including the types of accommodation should be agreed by all stakeholders at the outset. For example, one of the terms that causes considerable difficulty and confusion is, ‘pitch’. As yet there is no formal definition of pitch, some may consider it to represent a single standing for a caravan, or to signify provision for a family comprised of three standings for caravans, or to describe provision for a larger extended family needing to occupy a family site suitable for five separate households. It is anticipated that forthcoming government guidance on best

² (The Housing (Assessment of Accommodation Needs) (Meaning of Gypsies and Travellers) (England) Regulations 2006 www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/si2006/20063190.htm

practice on Gypsy and Traveller site design will include information on what a pitch should consist of which should help to clarify the situation.

Definitions must then be applied consistently throughout all processes leading on from the needs assessment, through the planning system to the development on the ground, and to the provision of all subsequent services.

3. Preparation

3.1 Stakeholders

It is not easy to identify the most appropriate stakeholders to be included in the accommodation needs assessment without first identifying the purpose and objectives of the assessment itself. Similarly, it is difficult to define accurately the latter without the input and expertise of the former. One option is for the lead authority to host a preliminary forum, comprised of key individuals from neighbouring authorities and other relevant agencies.

Participants of the forum must identify likely internal and external stakeholders. The following list of examples is indicative and not exhaustive:

- Representatives from all local authorities covered by the Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs assessment (as delivery may be for a partnership of local authorities);
- Planning;
- Health;
- Education;
- Supporting people;
- Race equalities;
- Housing;
- Social services;
- Representatives from Gypsy and Traveller communities;
- Councillors from each participating local authority;

- Registered social landlords; and
- Police.

Given the significance of the corporate support required for the assessment and associated outcomes, invitees to an initial forum should include departmental directors, and others with the ability to approve budgets and resources needed to facilitate process and delivery.

It is constructive to secure as much political support and participation as possible. Local politicians should be encouraged to attend the initial forum, and their role be clearly defined. Councillors holding remits such as housing, planning and diversity are especially important. Similarly, Gypsy and Traveller communities' interests must also be represented from the outset and the Gypsy Liaison Officer and equalities staff should participate in the forum.

3.2 Assessment Scope and Purpose

It is becoming increasingly important to achieve better integration, horizontally and vertically of national, regional and local strategies and policies. To this end the local authorities involved should identify relevant strategies and policies such as rural exception policies, regional/local housing strategies, the community strategy etc. which bear on the assessment, and work towards their integration.

Local authorities might consider the use of a 'snapshot in time' assessment. However, this may not represent value for money or address long term need. A continuous data set should be used instead. It will provide a reliable foundation to facilitate the continuous monitoring and management of the accommodation needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities avoiding the need to commission future research.

It is critical to identify and understand the principal purpose of the accommodation needs assessment, and then identify the following:

- Clear, straightforward and achievable objectives;
- A management strategy for the project;
- The lead local authority department and accountable officer;
- Actions required to achieve the objectives;

- Available resources;
- Whether others should be engaged to undertake the project;
- The lead bodies and individuals for each action;
- Timeframes and deadlines;
- Mechanisms to draw together existing data and strategies; and
- Appropriate administrative mechanisms and resources.

All participants, especially the lead authority must develop an understanding of data protection legislation and its implications for the collection and sharing of appropriate new and existing information. In the past, some agencies have failed to collect important information in the mistaken belief that to do so would contravene the provisions of the legislation.³ Stakeholders should agree a strategy for information management and sharing, outlining what information they will share, for what purpose and between which stakeholders.

Sharing information is a very sensitive issue for Gypsy and Traveller communities. In areas that are geographically small, and where there are few households, there is a genuine risk of individuals and their personal circumstances being identifiable from their responses to surveys. A prerequisite may well be total confidentiality, but it could be that with satisfactory explanations and guarantees, respondents may agree to the information being shared more widely.

3.3 In-House or Consultant Delivery

A decision will have to be made whether to carry out the assessment in-house to appoint consultants or to use a mixed model. There are many issues to consider, not least the advantages of drawing on the experience of in-house staff, the opportunity to increase in-house understanding of Gypsy and Traveller culture and needs, and the opportunity for officers from different departments to work together to achieve common objectives. Similarly, the assessment process provides chances for local authorities to increase positive involvement and forge long-term relationships with Gypsy and Traveller communities across a range of services.

³ Data Protection Act, 1998 www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/19980029.htm

Alternatively, there are consultants with considerable experience related to the provision of services for Gypsies and Travellers. If the preferred option is to engage consultants, the lead authority must ensure that adequate resources are available to deliver a robust assessment. They also need to decide who will prepare the project brief. Whoever does so must have the necessary experience and background knowledge to draft a clear and comprehensive document. All stakeholders, possibly through the initial forum, should be involved in any review of an existing brief or development of a new brief, to ensure that the anticipated outputs will satisfy all of the objectives.

Whichever method is chosen, the involvement of representatives of Gypsy and Traveller communities from the start of the process will mean that the best way of carrying out assessment interviews can be fully explored. Interviews can be carried out either by local authority officers, local groups, consultants or members of Gypsy and Traveller communities. There are strong views within Gypsy and Traveller communities about the use of other Gypsies and Travellers as peer interviewers. Some Gypsies and Travellers welcome this way of working, feeling that higher levels of trust and cultural understanding can be achieved if peer interviewers are used, whilst others feel uncomfortable sharing personal information with members of their own or related communities.

Employing members of Gypsy and Traveller communities as interviewers for the Cambridgeshire Sub-Regional Needs Assessment ⁴ generated considerable interest. Gypsy and Traveller activists and community members involved in that assessment expressed the hope that other authorities will adopt similar practices. There, the employment of Gypsy and Traveller interviewers contributed towards capacity building and the development of transferable skills, which can be used by other departments and agencies on future survey work e.g. the bi-annual caravan counts. Gypsy and Traveller stakeholders are able to assess the integrity of data and identify and locate households, for example by drawing up family trees, providing expertise on related issues such as site design and bringing an additional dimension to the stakeholder group.

However, not all studies report these positive outcomes. Care is needed and a

very strong emphasis must be placed on the need for early talks with Gypsy and Traveller representatives to try and work out how communities in a particular study prefer to be engaged.

There must be an appropriate mix of gender, age and ethnicity in any interview team in order to access information effectively and avoid breaching cultural norms amongst 'ethnic' Gypsies and Travellers, who have a highly gendered and age-structured community.

Irrespective of the background of interviewers, it is probable that some data will be unreliable or even unobtainable. These qualifications are most likely to apply to financial and employment data. However, information on employment patterns appears to be more easily accessible than data on 'affordability' of sites and benefit uptake.

3.4 Steering Group, Sub-Committees and Advisory Groups

Steering Group

A strategic steering group should be established to coordinate and facilitate the project, comprised of councillors, in-house senior officials and senior representatives from external stakeholders. Members of the steering group should hold senior and responsible positions, have access to budgets and represent corporate support for the project. It is also important that representatives from Gypsy and Traveller communities are included. Membership is likely to be drawn from the initial forum (see section 3.1).

Sub-Committees

The option of convening small sub-committees with responsibility for in-house development and delivery should be considered, particularly in a larger authority or for partnership delivery.

Advisory Groups

Stakeholder advisory groups can be established to provide additional support. They are likely to include more non-professionals, members of Gypsy and Traveller communities and, if appropriate, members of the settled community.

They should focus on the interface between service providers and service users in relation to each of the processes and will facilitate 'front-loading'.

3.5 Identifying the Community

It is often difficult to identify all Gypsies and Travellers in an area as some individuals may not self-identify or participate in the community, whilst others may be passing through or temporarily out of the area. The involvement of Gypsy and Travellers can contribute significantly to providing accurate information. 'Word of mouth' is one of the most effective ways to raise awareness of the assessment and to encourage participation.

Given the requirement for data and its analysis to be robust, the sample survey must be representative. There are benefits in interviewing as large a sample as possible.

One of the key difficulties is identification of the significant number of Gypsies and Travellers living in permanent homes. Stakeholders must resist the temptation to make assumptions about the aspirations of such households and their reasons for ceasing to travel. A number of needs assessments have found that a proportion of 'housed' Gypsies and Travellers wish to resume travelling. Some suggest that declines in travelling have in part been a product of unsupportive public policies, rather than the underlying wishes of Gypsy and Traveller communities. If this is the case then a move to planning and housing policies that more closely respond to communities' desires to travel may result in an increase in travelling. Second generation households in permanent housing may also wish to re-engage with their cultural heritage and travel in some way, perhaps on a seasonal basis.

Any increase in provision will remove a constraint on travelling and may result in an increased demand for permanent and transit accommodation. Any increase in demand is most likely to originate from those in permanent housing. It is important these households are included in the accommodation needs assessment; the involvement of Gypsy and Traveller communities are best able to identify both households in housing and those currently travelling.

3.6 Households to Include in the Assessment

Government guidance requires authorities to address the needs of all groups within Gypsy and Traveller communities, this includes:

- English Roma/Gypsies;
- Welsh Roma/Gypsies;
- Travellers of Irish Heritage;
- Scottish Gypsy/Travellers;
- New Travellers;
- Travelling show and circus households; and
- Other households falling within the definition contained in the Housing Act 2004 regulations.

3.7 Accommodation Types

There must be a clear understanding of what 'units' of accommodation the planning system is expected to deliver. Site allocations must be realistic, reflect the needs of the end-user, facilitate the development of a range of accommodation, and include an element of flexibility. For example, planning authorities should take into account the possible need for a family to have one standing for a fixed caravan, one standing for a touring caravan and a spare transit standing for guests. There should also be sufficient provision in the local area to enable reasonable geographic mobility, including transfers (as with social housing) and sufficient provision for those households aspiring to purchase their own private accommodation or site. In essence planning should facilitate a diverse accommodation market, similar in function to the housing market that exists for settled communities.

Stakeholders should discuss at the outset what types of accommodation and associated facilities the identified sites are able to accommodate, as there are implications related to the size, topography and location of the sites.

Where there are traditionally used stopping places, planning authorities should consider the value of developing these sites as transit accommodation during

the transition period to full provision, or their occasional, temporary or emergency use.

Travelling show and circus households have specific needs. They are not usually travelling or stopping on unauthorised sites as they are going to known and licensed fairgrounds. However, they do have larger than average families, leading to high rates of population growth, prefer to live in family 'clusters' and require large sites for storage of rides and associated vehicles and equipment.

4. Assessment Process

4.1 Review of Existing Programmes and Strategies

Stakeholders should identify all existing programmes, strategies and plans, with a connection to the accommodation needs assessment and assess the evidence upon which they are based. Completion of the assessment is likely to prompt a review and possible revision of these existing documents.

4.2 Use of Existing Data

The local authority will need to evaluate which historical data is useful in identifying trends and the weight to give to each data set.

Some planning inspectors have described data from the caravan count used in appeals as being insufficiently robust. Furthermore, some Gypsy and Traveller community organisations also have strong concerns regarding the value of the caravan count data in terms of providing accommodation. Local authorities should use caravan count data with caution as over-reliance on caravan count data alone may result in 'hidden' effects, such as overcrowding, being missed.

The following list shows examples of information available:

- Official six-monthly caravan counts;
- Local school rolls and Traveller Education Service data on 'mobile' children supported in the locality;
- Local authority (various departments);

- External agencies and voluntary organisations;
- Gypsy and Traveller organisations; and
- Research reports (local, regional and national).

Gypsy and Traveller stakeholders are able to validate existing data, e.g. identifying sites, such as 'tolerated' sites, not included in caravan counts, and suggesting the likely number of households that move in and out of settled housing.

4.3 Collecting New Data

Inevitably, existing data will not provide all the information required to produce a robust accommodation needs assessment. However, local authorities should collect only essential new data, completing the process quickly. The time lapse between conducting interviews and the draft report should be as short as possible to maintain the trust, interest and cooperation of Gypsies and Travellers.

4.4 Questionnaires

Questionnaire design frequently overlooks the importance of consistency over time, and the value of building up time-series from questionnaire returns. Changes to survey questions in subsequent years makes it difficult to identify trends, develop robust projections, and monitor and manage provision.

When devising questionnaires, the local authority should consider what data is required to satisfy the purpose of the accommodation needs assessment and what is useful for other purposes, and can be collected effectively at the same time. In some instances, it may be more appropriate to collect certain information at a later time, e.g. when a household applies for local authority accommodation or sites.

Stakeholders should not frame questions in a manner that predetermines responses and outcomes. However, local authorities will need to consider the practicalities of coding and analysis, completely open questions can be time consuming to analyse.

In addition to collecting factual data there are benefits in using an explorative and discursive interview technique, e.g. creating a visioning scenario by asking the

interviewee how things might be if the world were perfect, which is an established planning tool. It is preferable to design two questionnaires, one for households living on the road or on authorised sites and another for households in housing.

4.5 Assumptions and Estimates

All assumptions should be clearly stated and justified, including the reason for making assumptions rather than collecting the information. Estimates must be treated in the same way. Trend calculations should also be transparent.

4.6 Travel Patterns

A robust survey must include data on travel. This is particularly important for the provision of transit accommodation. Current travel patterns may be constrained by a history of lack of provision or enforcement activity. Questions should be designed to gather information about travel intentions in the short and longer term, when more permanent and transit accommodation may be available.

An important consideration is the provision of transit accommodation for households resident outside a region, but who travel through it. There is a danger that the survey may not identify this particular need. Travel patterns, whilst not fixed, are generally consistent, so regional authorities should share information relating on cross boundary movements.

5. Outputs

5.1 Outputs of Accommodation Needs Assessments

The assessment will inform both the Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents and enable planning authorities to identify the broad accommodation needs in the area.

Current Provision

A comprehensive assessment of current permanent provision will identify the:

- Number and type of sites;
- Number of hard standings/pitches;
- Location of provision;
- Type and quantity of provision;
- Tenure types; and
- Standard of existing provision.

Planning officers should be aware that the condition of existing sites is relevant to the assessment of future needs. For example, if a condition survey indicates a large volume of substandard provision, this may drive proposals for the development and enhancement of provision.

Accommodation Need

The assessment will provide data on:

- Household growth and formation;
- Overcrowding in households and sites;
- Unsatisfactory sites that should not be inhabited;
- Waiting lists and requests for alternative accommodation;
- Unauthorised development of sites and encampments;
- Tolerated sites;
- Homelessness;
- Need for adapted or specialist accommodation (age, disability etc);
- Existing provision in unsatisfactory locations, e.g. adjacent to health threatening infrastructure or industrial activities;
- Tenure preferences; and
- Potential demand for affordable accommodation.

Projected Level of Need

Government guidance recommends that projections of need should be made for 5 – 10 years. Local authorities and regional planning bodies may find it is preferable to link projections, and hence review the timescale of other strategies.

The projected level of need will include the:

- Demographic profile of Gypsy and Traveller communities;
- Rate of household formation;
- Historic growth patterns; and
- Inward and outward migration.

Geographical Location

When identifying sites in development plan documents the planning authority must consider:

- Gypsies and Travellers' preferred locations;
- Access to health, education and public transport facilities;
- Vicinity of extended family households;
- Community cohesion;
- Safety;
- Topography; and
- Need to relocate existing provision.

Type of Future Provision

The value of existing accommodation should be evaluated alongside the preferences expressed by Gypsy and Traveller interviewees. A range of accommodation could be made available, but it is important that all the options are explored and evaluated before reaching a decision.

5.2 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Strategy

The completion of a Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs assessment represents only the first stage in the provision of suitable accommodation. How this need will be met should be set out in a Gypsy and Traveller accommodation strategy, alongside plans for meeting need in the wider housing market. It should be a delivery strategy, rather than simply signposting other strategies.

The strategy should include details of how and when the local authority will involve Gypsies and Travellers and other stakeholders in the programme. It

should clearly state the enforcement policies which will operate during the transition period between inadequate and unsuitable provision, through site identification to development on the ground.

An action plan is a key aspect of the strategy. The objectives must be achievable within the stated timeframe and available resources. It should identify:

- Detailed and specific targets (annual and lifetime of the strategy);
- An achievable timeframe, capable of review and revision;
- Priorities;
- Resource requirements;
- A programme of management and monitoring;
- A lead stakeholder or department responsible for each stage of delivery;
- Details of any revisions to in-house procedures and policies required;
- Arrangements for formal review and revision;
- Performance indicators; and
- The way sites will be delivered, whether compulsorily or by agreement.

The strategy should include stakeholder intentions regarding issues such as:

- Types of accommodation to be provided/facilitated;
- Site and accommodation design;
- Management of sites and facilities, including funding;
- Charging regimes for public sector sites and accommodation, including those to be provided by housing associations;
- Provision of affordable accommodation;
- Provision of emergency accommodation;
- Backup, training and support for stakeholders to secure delivery;
- If and how traditional economic activities will be accommodated; and
- Allocations policies.

The local authority should review and monitor the accommodation needs assessment data on a continuous and pro-active basis to facilitate the effective delivery of policies, programmes and objectives.

6. Monitoring, Review and Subsequent Assessments

Local and regional authorities should work together on monitoring systems to minimise duplication and costs. Planning authorities should also link their monitoring procedures with initiatives from other sectors e.g. health, education etc. This continuing partnership approach will create an enhanced knowledge base that will inform subsequent assessments and strategies.

The involvement of other stakeholders in the monitoring process will strengthen their commitment and enable a joined-up approach that allows the sharing of information and minimises duplication. The continued monitoring of partnership working is crucial to ensure fair representation of all stakeholders.

The outputs of the accommodation needs assessment and strategy set a valuable basis on which to monitor progress in the delivery of site provision. Performance indicators can take many different forms, including the monitoring of planning application approvals and refusals, the results of caravan counts and other surveys, etc. In addition, local development framework regulations require the preparation of an annual monitoring report.

It is important to keep up to date with new guidance and evolving best practice. Procedures should be regularly reviewed to ensure they are effective and do not impose unnecessary burdens on staff or stakeholders.

Involving of communities in the monitoring and review process will be an important factor in its success, by helping to build awareness and understanding. It is important to review the involvement of Gypsy and Traveller communities and provide opportunities for engagement in line with equalities best practice.

This good practice note also gives advice on:

- **Communication, Consultation and Participation (Part A);**
- **Accommodation and Site Delivery (Part C);**
- **Enforcement (Part D); and**
- **Sources of Further Information and Advice (Part E).**

7. Sources of Further Information

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments: Draft Practice Guidance

www.communities.gov.uk/pub/404/GypsyandTravellerAccommodationAssessmentsDraftpracticeguidancePDF225KB_id1163404.pdf

(The Housing (Assessment of Accommodation Needs) (Meaning of Gypsies and Travellers) (England) Regulations 2006

www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/si2006/20063190.htm

Cambridgeshire Sub-Regional Needs Assessment (2005)

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

Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000034.htm

Data Protection Act, 1998

www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/19980029.htm

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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