

Southern Staffordshire and Northern Warwickshire Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment

Executive Summary

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The Study

1. Recent legislation and guidance from the government has indicated a commitment to taking steps to resolve some of the long-standing accommodation issues for members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities. This legislation has an overarching aim of ensuring that members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities have equal access to decent and appropriate accommodation options akin to each and every other member of society. As a result, a number of Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) are now being undertaken across the UK, as local authorities respond to these new obligations and requirements.
2. A number of local authorities across the Southern Staffordshire and Northern Warwickshire area (Rugby Borough Council, Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Cannock Chase District Council, North Warwickshire Borough Council and Tamworth Borough Council¹) commissioned this assessment in May 2007. The study was conducted by a team of researchers from the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) at the University of Salford and assisted by staff at the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) at the University of Birmingham. The study was greatly aided by research support and expertise provided by members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities. The study was managed by a Steering Group composed of officers representing the Partner Authorities.
3. The assessment was undertaken by conducting:
 - A review of available literature, data and secondary sources;
 - A detailed questionnaire completed by housing and planning officers;
 - Consultations with key stakeholders; and
 - A total of 133 interviews with Gypsies and Travellers from a range of tenures and community groups.

Background

4. Following the Housing Act 2004, local authorities have been preparing to develop and implement strategies to respond to the accommodation needs of the Gypsy and Traveller communities living in their areas as part of their wider housing strategies and the Regional Housing Strategy (RHS). Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) are designed to provide the evidence needed to inform these

¹ For ease, these are referred to only by the borough, district or city name throughout this document.

strategies. However, as well as presenting evidence and information on accommodation needs at an immediate local level, the evidence collected and analysis produced have a wider regional role. The assessment of accommodation need and pitch requirements are also to be fed into the Regional Planning Body (RPB), in this case the West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA), for inclusion into the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The RSS then specifies pitch numbers required (but not their location) for each local planning authority (LPA) in light of the GTAA's conducted and a strategic view of need, supply and demand across the region is taken. The local planning authority's Development Planning Document (DPD) then identifies specific sites to match pitch numbers from the RSS.

Main Findings

Local Gypsies and Travellers and accommodation provision

5. There is no one source of information about the size of the Gypsy and Traveller population in the Study Area. Our best estimate is that there are at least 1410 local Gypsies and Travellers.
6. There are **2 socially rented sites** in the Study Area (North Warwickshire and Nuneaton & Bedworth) together providing 38 pitches. These sites accommodate 103 individuals. All residents have access to amenity blocks, WC and a water supply. Having taken over management of the site in Nuneaton & Bedworth, Warwickshire County Council now manages both sites. Very few of the residents had positive views about these sites, with site facilities and design viewed particularly negatively. Both Rugby Borough Council within its district, and Warwickshire County Council at the Griff Site, Nuneaton, have plans to increase the number of socially rented pitches available.
7. There are **34 authorised private sites** in the Study Area, together providing an estimated 214 pitches. The provision of authorised pitches is scattered throughout all local authorities (with the exception of Tamworth) with particular concentrations in South Staffordshire, Rugby and Nuneaton & Bedworth. It is estimated that around two-thirds of these pitches (68%) are rented. Most respondents on private sites reported access to WC, postal service, rubbish collection, a water supply and an electric supply. Respondents on private sites had, on average, 1.3 caravans per household with the vast majority commenting that this gave them enough space. Respondents on private sites were generally much more satisfied with their accommodation than were households on socially rented sites. However, it was noted that there may be some overcrowding on private sites, i.e. too many trailers for the space allowed.
8. There are **9 unauthorised developments** (land owned by Gypsies and Travellers but developed without planning permission) within the Study Area. These developments accommodated approximately 39

separate households. Due to their undeveloped nature, access to facilities on these sites was poorer than on authorised sites. However, most households that were consulted with as part of the assessment had access to WC, rubbish collection, water and a postal service. Most households also had access to an amenity block. The tenure arrangements on these sites were unclear.

9. There are **4 Travelling Showpeople Yards** which are all privately owned or privately rented and all were used for residential purposes. Interviews took place on three out of the four yards. It was clear that some of these yards required regularisation and permanency. There was also a need for more accommodation for Travelling Showpeople in the Study Area.

Unauthorised encampments

10. The Caravan Count in January 2007 recorded 21 caravans on unauthorised encampments (on land not owned by Gypsies and Travellers). Records kept by the local authorities show that the Study Area experienced around 47 encampments over the previous full calendar year (2006) which was seen by the local authorities as a similar level for previous years, and 26 encampments over the period of assessment (June–October 2007). The average encampment size was just over 5 caravans. Most encampments stayed for a relatively short period of time with the average duration being just under 3 weeks. Most of the encampments occurred in Rugby, Cannock Chase and Nuneaton & Bedworth.
11. A total of 9 interviews were carried out with people on unauthorised encampments. The average number of caravans owned by households on unauthorised encampments was 1.3, with around 3.5 people living in each caravan. Most households felt that they had enough living space for their needs although for some, affordability provided a major barrier to achieving more space.
12. Access to facilities was largely restricted for households on unauthorised encampments with just one respondent able to access basic facilities such as water and WC.
13. No respondents on unauthorised encampments had a base elsewhere.

Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar housing

14. All authorities with the exception of South Staffordshire and Rugby make specific reference to Gypsies and Travellers in their local authority housing strategies. The inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers in homelessness and BME housing strategies is less consistent. No local authority was able to quantify the number of Gypsies and Travellers in social or private bricks and mortar housing. From information gathered via Warwickshire County Council and from fieldwork experience it is

estimated that there are at least 47 families in housing within the Study Area – however, it is acknowledged that this is probably a significant underestimate.

15. We interviewed 23 households living in bricks and mortar housing across the Study Area. Around two-thirds of Gypsies and Travellers were tenants of some kind (both council and private), the remaining households being owner-occupiers. Almost a fifth of households still retained a trailer. The vast majority of respondents viewed their house positively. Two-thirds of respondents had lived in their accommodation for a number of years – a fifth for 5 years and over. Just 2 respondents were planning to leave the house in the near future. A third of households thought they would remain in the house indefinitely. The remainder did not know.
16. Family reasons, health, education and a lack of sites were all given as major reasons which stimulated a move into housing.
17. A quarter of all respondents had lived in a house at some point in the past. Just over a third of these viewed it as a positive experience, with nearly half viewing bricks and mortar living in a negative light. Respondents tended to cite marriage, cultural reasons or feelings of being enclosed and constrained as reasons for leaving bricks and mortar housing.

Characteristics of local Gypsies and Travellers

18. The survey of Gypsies and Travellers identified some of the important characteristics of the local population.

Household size is significantly larger than in the settled/non-Traveller population at 3.6 persons across the whole sample.

A significant minority of the sample (12%) were households over 60 years of age.

Young families are the predominant household type in the Study Area as a whole. However, there are a significant number of single households on the socially rented sites.

The majority of Gypsies and Travellers in trailers and in housing can be seen to belong, in some way, to the Study Area.

The majority of respondents, nearly three-quarters, felt they were 'local' to the area they were residing in. 'Family connections' was the main reason given when respondents were asked why they were living where they were.

The local population includes diverse ethnic groups. Romany Gypsy is the largest ethnic group (68%), followed by Irish Travellers (18%),

with much smaller numbers of others who described themselves as Showpeople, Welsh Gypsy or Traveller.

A third of school-age children do not regularly attend school or receive home education. Children on unauthorised encampments and socially rented sites had the poorest attendance levels.

The Gypsy and Traveller population was largely sedentary. However, around half of settled or authorised households still travelled seasonally – with some travelling more often than this. Feeling settled and poor health were the main reasons that were cited for not travelling.

Of those households who still travelled, around a quarter of respondents intended to engage in quite local travelling (within the local area, Study Area or West Midlands region) with a third planning to travel to other parts of the UK.

Self-employment was a major source of income for respondents with the type of work people engaged in including gardening/tree work, carpet related trades, uPVC and guttering and scrap.

Gypsies and Travellers and housing-related support

19. There were no Supporting People funded services targeted specifically for Gypsies and Travellers at the time of the assessment.
20. The kind of housing-related services Gypsies and Travellers expressed an interest in receiving assistance with included: accessing health care, claiming benefits, harassment issues, finding accommodation, support with planning and accessing legal services.
21. Over a third of respondents felt that they had experienced some form of harassment or discrimination as a result of being a Gypsy or a Traveller.

Accommodation preferences and aspirations

22. All households were asked whether there was anyone living with them who were likely to want their own accommodation over the next 5 years. Overall, 20 households reported that there was, which equated to 24 individuals who will require their own accommodation by 2012.
23. There was support for the creation of additional long-stay residential sites within the Study Area with a quarter of respondents interested in moving to a new residential site/pitch – this included households who were currently accommodated on sites within the Study Area. Respondents voiced a preference for residential sites with pitch capacities of between 10 and 15 pitches.

24. Nearly a fifth of respondents wanted to see the development of more transit/short-stay sites in the Study Area. Interest in such sites was shown from households from all accommodation types. For households on authorised/settled accommodation the creation of more authorised short-stay accommodation would enable an increase in family visits and help to maintain the tradition of travelling. According to the views of Gypsies and Travellers who would use such sites, these should be around 10 pitches in size with a large number of people expecting to use the site for between 1 and 4 weeks.
25. Respondents were asked to comment on a range of differing accommodation types in order to ascertain their preferences. The clear preference was for a small private site which they/their family owned, followed by travelling around on authorised transit sites, followed by a site owned by the local authority. Living in a local authority or RSL house was the least favoured option.

Accommodation need and supply

26. Nationally, there are no signs that the growth in the Gypsy and Traveller population will slow significantly. The supply of additional authorised accommodation has slowed since 1994, but the size of the population of Gypsies and Travellers does not appear to have been affected to a great extent. Instead, the way in which Gypsies and Travellers live has changed, with increases in unauthorised accommodation, innovative house dwelling arrangements (living in trailers in the grounds of houses), overcrowding on sites and overcrowding within accommodation units (trailers, houses, chalets, etc.). In order to respond effectively and appropriately to the lack of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers, the regional planning body (West Midlands Regional Assembly) has the role of ensuring that all local authorities contribute to resolving the current shortage of authorised site accommodation in a strategic manner, which helps redress current imbalances in the pattern of provision, and enhances the sustainability of the Gypsy and Traveller site network.
27. The 'models' for assessing the numerical requirement for additional residential pitches have developed significantly over the past few years. The calculation used here is an adaptation of the example provided by the CLG.² The calculation for years 1–5 (2007–2012) takes account of need arising from the following indicators: expiry of temporary planning permissions, household growth, need from unauthorised developments, movement between sites and housing, need from closing sites, and need from households on unauthorised encampments. On the supply side, the calculation takes account of: pitch vacancies on socially rented sites, unused pitches and

² CLG (2007) *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments – Guidance*. London: HMSO.

known/planned developments of sites/pitches. These calculations are estimates based on information drawn from: local authority information, knowledge of key stakeholders, survey findings and assumptions based on the professional experience of the study team.

28. Additional requirements beyond 2012 are based on estimated household growth. Following the principles used in the West Midlands Interim Statement on Gypsy and Traveller Policy this is assumed to be a 3% increase between 2012 and 2016, 2.5% each year between 2016 and 2021, and 2% each year between 2021 and 2026. This follows commonly accepted assumptions as to the growth of the population.³
29. Transit requirements (2007–2012) are calculated by the average number of households on unauthorised encampments seeking a transit/short-stay pitch in the area; an allowance for vacancies is included in order to manage their operation effectively. No further transit provision is estimated to be required beyond 2012 on the assumption that the level of travelling will not increase in the foreseeable future and other surrounding local authorities will also have developed appropriate transit options.
30. Requirements for the additional residential provision for Travelling Showpeople are estimated on the basis of survey findings and local authority information.
31. Because of the historical inequalities in pitch provision, Gypsies and Travellers have constrained choices as to where and how they would choose to live if they had real choice. So while choices for the non-Travelling community are generally much wider, as there is social housing available in every authority in the country, there are no local authority sites in 138 of the 353 local authorities in England, and only in 71 authorities is there more than one site. Some authorities have no authorised private sites. Over time, this has inevitably meant that Gypsies and Travellers have generally moved to areas they see as offering the best life chances, for example: an authority which provides a site; an authority which is perceived as having more private authorised sites than others; or, an authority that is attractive in some other way (slower enforcement, transport links, friends and family resident, etc.). Therefore, there is a tendency, when the need for additional accommodation is assessed, for the needs assessment to further compound these inequalities in site provision. For example, authorities which already provide Gypsy and Traveller accommodation (publicly or privately) are assessed as having greater need for

³ Household growth rates of 2% and 3% a year were suggested as appropriate in Pat Niner (2003) *Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England*, ODPM. A 3% growth rate was also used in the recent report from Communities and Local Government (2007) *Preparing Regional Spatial Strategy reviews on Gypsies and Travellers* by regional planning bodies, HMSO. For more information see West Midlands: Interim Regional Statement on Gypsy & Traveller Policy <http://www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=303>.

additional pitch provision than authorities with little or no pitch provision. This is compounded further the longer-term the assessment is made (i.e. to 2016).

32. As requested in the research brief, Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs have been identified at a sub-regional and a local level. This has been done on a **'need where it is seen to arise'** basis. However, the results of this apportionment should not necessarily be assumed to imply that those needs should be actually met in that specific locality. This distribution reflects the current uneven distribution of pitch provision and the Gypsy and Traveller population across the Study Area. Decisions about where need should be met should be strategic, taken in partnership with local authorities, the County Councils and the West Midlands Regional Assembly – involving consultation with Gypsies and Travellers and other interested parties – which will take into account wider social and economic planning considerations such as equity, choice and sustainability.

Table i below presents the 'needs where they arise' requirements.

Table i: Accommodation need arising from existing district level Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople populations

	Study Area Total	Cannock Chase	Lichfield	North Warks	Nun & Bed	Rugby	S Staffs	Tamworth
Current authorised residential provision⁴ (pitches)	261	44	2	24	37	66	88	0
Additional residential need 2007–2012 (pitches)	171	30	9	12	21	48	45	6
Additional residential need 2012–2016 (pitches)	53	9	1	5	7	14	16	1
Additional residential need 2016–2021 (pitches)	64	11	2	5	9	17	19	1
Additional residential need 2021–2026 (pitches)	57	10	2	5	7	15	17	1
Additional suggested transit need 2007–2026 (pitches)⁵	35	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Estimated total additional residential pitch need 2007–2026	345	60	14	27	44	94	97	9

Note: For pragmatic reasons these figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole pitch

⁴ These are approximations of the provision (public and private) based on information obtained from the authorities during the course of the assessment. This includes Travelling Showpeople sites.

⁵ This is an illustration of the equitable split of the identified need. Transit requirements are particularly difficult to quantify with any accuracy. Consideration will need to be given to the appropriate number, size and distribution of transit pitches in each authority.

Recommendations

33. The overarching recommendation resulting from this assessment is that the authorities across the Study Area engage proactively to meet the accommodation needs that have been identified as a result of this assessment and that a strategic joined-up approach is taken. More specifically a number of recommendations have been made for the Partner Authorities – these can be found in the main report.