

Tees Valley Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs 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, Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) have been undertaken across the UK, as local authorities respond to these new obligations and requirements.
2. This research and report was commissioned by a number of partner authorities (*Darlington Borough Council, Hartlepool Borough Council, Middlesbrough Borough Council, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit*¹) in July 2007. The study was conducted by a team of researchers from the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit at the University of Salford with assistance by staff at the Centre for Urban and Regional Research at the University of Birmingham. The study was greatly aided by research support and expertise from members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities. The study was managed by a Steering Group composed of officers representing the Partner Authorities and other key stakeholders including representatives of the Gypsy and Traveller communities.
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 149 interviews with Gypsies and Travellers from a range of tenures and community groups.

Background

4. Following the Housing Act 2004 and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase 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, planning policies and the Regional Housing Strategy (RHS) and Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) are designed to provide the evidence needed to inform these strategies. However, as well as presenting evidence and information on accommodation needs at an immediate local level the evidence collected and analysis produced has a wider regional role. The assessment of

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

accommodation need and pitch requirements are also to be fed into the Regional Planning Body (RPB), in this case the North East Assembly (NEA), for inclusion into the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The RSS then specifies pitch numbers required (but not their location) for local planning authorities (LPAs) in light of the GTAA's produced, and a strategic view of need, supply and demand across the region is taken. The local planning authority's Local Development Framework (LDF), composed of Development Plan Documents (DPDs), then identifies specific sites to match pitch numbers from the RSS or outlines criteria against which future sites can be assessed.

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 1320 local Gypsies and Travellers.
6. There are **2 socially rented sites** in the Study Area (Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees), together providing 43 pitches. These sites accommodate 106 individuals. All residents have access to amenity blocks, WC and a water supply. Residents on Metz Bridge (socially rented site in Middlesbrough) were, generally speaking, more dissatisfied with their accommodation than were residents on Mount Pleasant Grange (socially rented site in Stockton-on-Tees). In addition, all of the Metz Bridge residents had concerns about health and safety compared to only 2 residents from Mount Pleasant Grange. At the time of the fieldwork there were plans to re-open a previous socially rented site in Redcar & Cleveland on a leased basis.
7. There are **15 authorised private sites** in the Study Area, together providing an estimated 75 residential pitches and 24 transit pitches. The spread of the provision of authorised pitches throughout the Study Area is uneven as only two local authorities (Darlington and Stockton-on-Tees) have private sites. Only Darlington expected the number of authorised private sites to increase in their area over the next 5 years.
8. All 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, 1.6 caravans per household with all but one respondent 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.
9. There are **5 unauthorised developments** (land owned by Gypsies and Travellers but developed without planning permission) within the Study Area accommodating approximately 12 separate households. Four of the 5 unauthorised developments are in Darlington – one is in Stockton-on-Tees. Unfortunately only one interview was achieved on unauthorised developments. The respondent viewed the site positively and had access to all facilities with the exception of waste disposal/collection and postal service.

10. There is one yard for **Travelling Showpeople** in the Study Area. The yard is in Middlesbrough and is used for residential purposes. The yard is privately owned and accommodates approximately 10 extended families. In total ten interviews were achieved on the yard. Although only one household was thought to require independent accommodation in the next five years, the respondents were keen to mention that the current yard is full to capacity and there were not enough yards for Travelling Showpeople in the Study Area.

Unauthorised encampments

11. The Caravan Count in January 2007 recorded 15 caravans on unauthorised encampments (on land not owned by Gypsies and Travellers). January figures are regarded as a more reliable 'base' than July figures which may be affected by seasonal travelling. Records kept by the local authorities show that the Study Area experienced around 44 encampments over the previous full calendar year (2006). The average encampment size was just over 5 caravans. Most encampments stayed for a relatively short period of time with the average duration being almost exactly two weeks. Most of the encampments occurred in Darlington, Stockton-on-Tees and Redcar & Cleveland.
12. A total of 11 interviews were carried out with people on unauthorised encampments. The average number of caravans owned by households on unauthorised encampments was 1.5 with around 2.2 people living in each caravan. Most households felt that they had enough living space for their needs apart from one household who required more/bigger trailers.
13. Access to facilities was largely restricted for households on unauthorised encampments with respondents commenting that they obtain water from nearby garages and used the toilets in local supermarkets. Just over half of the respondents had access to waste disposal/collection.
14. Four respondents on unauthorised encampments had a base elsewhere. Two respondents currently lived on Mount Pleasant Grange, Stockton-on-Tees and were visiting Yarm Fair; one respondent had a base in York and one respondent had a base in Morecambe. This highlights the complex nature of unauthorised camping.

Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar housing

15. All authorities make specific reference to Gypsies and Travellers in local authority housing strategies. There is no mention of Gypsies and Travellers in homelessness and BME housing strategies by any of the five local authorities. Most local authorities (with the exception of Middlesbrough) were unable to quantify the number of Gypsies and Travellers in social or private bricks and mortar housing. Middlesbrough estimated that 10–50 Gypsy and Traveller families live in social housing in the area. From information gathered via the Traveller Education Service and from fieldwork experience it is estimated that there are at least 267 families in housing within the Study Area – however, it is acknowledged that this is probably a significant underestimate.

16. A total of 53 households were interviewed who were living in bricks and mortar housing across the Study Area. Over half of the Gypsies and Travellers interviewed were owner-occupiers; the remaining households were tenants of some kind (socially rented or private). Around four in ten of households still retained a trailer. The majority of respondents viewed their house positively and had access to all the basic facilities that we enquired about. Overall most of the respondents had lived in their accommodation for a number of years – just under half had lived there for 5 years and over. Five respondents had lived in their bricks and mortar accommodation for less than one year. Just one respondent was planning to move in the near future to a bigger house. Over a third of households thought they would remain in the house indefinitely. The remainder did not know how long they would stay in their current accommodation.
17. A quarter of all respondents had lived in a house at some point in the past. Just under a fifth of these viewed it as a positive experience, with over a third viewing bricks and mortar living in a negative light. Respondents tended to cite cultural reasons or feelings of being enclosed and constrained as reasons for leaving bricks and mortar housing. Just over one in ten respondents said they would consider living in a house in the future.

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 3.3 persons across the whole sample.

A significant minority of the sample (13%) 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 and Travelling Showpeople Yards.

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 (75%), followed by Irish Travellers (14%), then by Travelling Showpeople (7%) with much smaller numbers of others who described themselves as Traveller (non-specified) and Scottish Gypsy or Traveller.

Overall, 90% of school age children 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, over half of settled or authorised households still travelled seasonally – with some travelling more often than this. Feeling settled, getting older 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 Study Area) with two-thirds 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, landscaping, carpet related trades, uPVC and guttering, roofing and tarmacing.

Gypsies and Travellers and housing-related support

19. Each of the five authorities mentioned Gypsies and Travellers in their Supporting People 5 Year Strategy. Reference is commonly made to the lack of services that are specifically provided for Gypsies and Travellers and also to the lack of awareness of evidence of the need for services for this group. Redcar & Cleveland have a Minority Needs Support Officer who provides support to Gypsies and Travellers.
20. The kind of housing-related services Gypsies and Travellers expressed an interest in receiving assistance with included: accessing legal services, harassment issues, accessing health care, support with planning and filling in forms.
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 was likely to want their own accommodation over the next 5 years. Overall, 37 households reported that there was, which equated to 60 individuals (41 of which were on site-based accommodation) 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 around a third of respondents interested in moving to a new residential site. Respondents voiced a preference for residential sites with pitch capacities of between 10 and 15 pitches.

24. A total of 61 respondents, just under half of the sample, 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 a site owned by another Gypsy or Traveller and then by 'group housing' (site with long-stay and short-stay provision). Travelling around often staying on authorised transit sites and living in a privately owned house were both rated reasonably favourably. Living in a local authority or RSL house was the least favoured option, followed by living on a site owned by a private landlord (not a Gypsy or Traveller).

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 (North East Assembly) has the role of ensuring that all local authorities contribute, by working together, 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 CLG² with input from work the authors have been involved in around testing the robustness of GTAAs.³ 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

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

³ CLG (2007) *Preparing Regional Spatial Strategy Reviews on Gypsies and Travellers by regional planning bodies*. Wetherby, CLG.

households on unauthorised encampments. On the supply side the calculation takes account of: pitch vacancies on socially rented sites, unused pitches and 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. This follows commonly accepted assumptions as to the growth of the population.⁴
29. Numerical transit requirements have not been provided although an indication of how to provide for short-stay households is provided on a local authority basis. This indicates that all local authorities should look to provide accommodation for short-term users. More formal provision should be provided in Darlington, Stockton-on-Tees and Redcar & Cleveland. However, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough should also look to provide options for transient Gypsies and Travellers.
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 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).

⁴ Household growth rates of 2% and 3% a year were suggested as appropriate in Pat Niner, *Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England*, ODPM, 2003. 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.

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 and the North East 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 whilst being informed by the views of the Gypsies and Travellers who participated in this study. Table i below presents the 'needs where they arise' requirements.

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

	Study Area Total	Darlington	Hartlepool	Middlesbrough	Redcar & Cleveland	Stockton-on-Tees
Current authorised residential provision⁵ (pitches)	128	62	0	25	0*	41
Additional residential need 2007–2012 (pitches)	79	61	4	4	-7	17
Additional residential need 2012–2016 (pitches)	26	15	1	3	1	7
Additional residential need 2016–2021 (pitches)	38	22	1	4	2	10
Estimated total additional residential pitch need 2007–2026	145	98	6	11	-4	34

Note: For pragmatic reasons these figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole pitch
 * Redcar & Cleveland has a site which was temporarily closed at the time of the assessment. This is to be re-opened after refurbishment and has been included in the requirements as an element of supply.

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.

⁵ 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.