

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment in Northamptonshire

Executive Summary

March 2008



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Introduction

- S1. This report details the findings from the Northamptonshire Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA). The report was commissioned in response to the Housing Act 2004 which requires local authorities to consider Gypsies and Travellers accommodation needs in their local housing strategies.
- S2. Such an initiative was required due to Gypsies and Travellers being among the most disadvantaged sectors of society in terms of their accommodation. The traditional source of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers, in the form of communal land, was rapidly closed off after legislation in 1960. Thus the problem of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation is relatively modern.
- S3. This study considers a range of Gypsy and Traveller groups found in Northamptonshire, including English Gypsies, Irish Travellers, New Travellers and Travelling Showpeople across different tenure types. It draws on a range of data sources, including;
- **Secondary information;** including a literature review and secondary data analysis
 - **Stakeholder consultation** with local organisations involved with Gypsies and Travellers
 - **Face-to-face surveys** of Gypsies and Travellers
- S4. The report therefore includes a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data based on views and experiences of accommodation provision and wider service issues.
- S5. The aim of the study is to quantify the accommodation and housing related support needs of Gypsies and Travellers. This is in terms of residential and transit sites and bricks and mortar accommodation. The results will be used to inform the allocation of resources as an evidence base for policy development in housing and planning.

Literature review

- S6. Existing research into Gypsies and Travellers suggests that the legislation implemented since the 1960s has negatively impacted on Gypsy and Traveller communities, with the Housing Act 2004 and subsequent guidance designed to address this imbalance. The Race Relation Amendment Act 2000 has afforded Gypsies and Irish Travellers legal protection against discrimination, including from housing authorities.

- S7. However, it is apparent from the research that the most pressing issue remains the inadequate permanent and transit site provision. With around one quarter of Gypsies and Travellers residing in unauthorised developments or encampments, the Government has responded with increased funding for site provision. Despite increased powers for local authorities to deal with anti-social behaviour and to evict where necessary, the Government has acknowledged that increased site provision is the most effective means of dealing with unauthorised developments and encampments. Lastly, the need for detailed information regarding the current and future accommodation needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community further reinforces the need for GTAAs.

Population trends

- S8. While there are deficiencies in the Caravan Count, it remains the only national source of secondary data on caravan levels and is useful for determining trends in the number of Gypsies and Travellers living on sites. This has been used in conjunction with locally collected County Traveller Unit (CTU) data in order to look at Gypsy and Traveller population trends and estimates in Northamptonshire.
- S9. Northamptonshire demonstrates a higher than average Gypsy and Traveller count than other parts of the East Midlands, however it is lower than the national average. The majority of sites are, or soon will be, privately owned and not distributed evenly across the study area with particular concentrations in Wellingborough and no provision in South Northamptonshire.
- S10. Unauthorised encampments are found predominantly in Northampton: however when population is taken into account it is clear that there are also high levels of unauthorised encampments in Corby, Daventry and Kettering. In the past year, unauthorised encampments happened most frequently during the summer months.
- S11. Almost three-quarters of unauthorised encampments can be attributed to Gypsies and Travellers generally resident in Northamptonshire. However this varies dramatically between districts: 90% in Corby compared to just 3% in Wellingborough. This suggests that a few families who effectively live in Northamptonshire but lack a permanent place to stay comprise the majority of unauthorised encampments.
- S12. The number of caravans on authorised sites in Northamptonshire has declined, while across England as a whole there has been a slight increase. Unauthorised encampments have declined in recent years in Northamptonshire, more so than in England as a whole, particularly when measured in terms of 'Caravan Days'. Northamptonshire, however, does not appear to have followed the recent national trend of a counterbalancing increase in numbers of unauthorised but tolerated caravans. A possibility for this is Gypsies and Travellers moving into housing or leaving the County altogether.

Stakeholder Consultation

- S13. Focus groups were held with a range of stakeholders to provide in-depth qualitative information regarding the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. The aim was to obtain both an overall perspective of issues facing Gypsies and Travellers, and an understanding of local issues that are specific to Northamptonshire.
- S14. There was a strong consensus that more permanent / residential sites are needed in Northamptonshire and that these should be in districts with established Gypsy and Traveller communities. As well as socially rented accommodation, allocating land for Gypsies and Travellers to buy and develop could increase provision and offer Gypsies and Travellers their preferred option. Transit provision is also needed with close management to ensure they are properly used; however bringing forward permanent / residential sites should be the immediate priority.

Survey Methodology

- S15. Based on CTU data, a sample was constructed reflecting the distribution of Gypsies and Travellers in Northamptonshire over the past four years. A total of 222 interviews were completed, representing 91% of the target number. Fieldwork took place from March to September 2007. A questionnaire was designed in consultation with local stakeholders and Gypsies and Travellers. Access to participants living on sites and in housing was arranged via members of the CTU. The breakdown of interviews was as follows:

Table S1 Breakdown of the sample

Area	Accommodation type				Total	Target number	% achieved
	Authorised site	Unauthorised site	Housing	Travelling Showpeople			
Corby	5	9	-	-	14	26	53.8%
Daventry	11	17	-	3	31	24	129.2%
East Northants	16	-	-	-	16	25	64.0%
Kettering	17	17	4	-	38	40	95.0%
Northampton	19	16	29	-	64	62	103.2%
South Northants	0	2	2	-	4	16	25.0%
Wellingborough	18	10	7	20	55	52	105.8%
Total	86	71	42	23	222	245	90.6%

S16. Fewer unauthorised encampments than expected occurred during the fieldwork period in South Northamptonshire, hence the number of completed interviews was lower than the target. Likewise, unauthorised encampments in Corby had been temporarily moved out of the borough during the fieldwork period. Overall this sample, although it would be small by quantitative housing needs analysis, is large for qualitative research and in comparison to other GTAAs. It is a larger sample than most GTAAs, especially when compared with per head of the population. Therefore it provides the soundest possible basis for the relevant analysis.

Key findings from the survey

Gypsies and Traveller on local authority sites

S17. A total of 49 interviews were conducted on the four sites currently owned by local authorities in Northamptonshire, representing 58% of current residents. Participants were well-settled on their sites with a small majority having lived there for more than five years and over four-fifths expecting not to move from their current site. The exception was Kangaroo Spinney, which has a higher turnover of residents and shorter expectations of staying there. One reason for this may be the poor conditions and amenities on the site and generally high levels of dissatisfaction. Less than a quarter said they were satisfied at Kangaroo Spinney, in marked contrast to the other sites where the majority said they were happy.

S18. While all four sites are council-owned, only one is also managed by a local authority (the Pastures, Kettering); the remainder are privately managed. The different management arrangements are significant as the local authorities do not have nomination rights over the privately managed sites. This means that the site managers have the final say on who can move onto their sites. Participants raised a number of problems that third party management incurred, particularly if the managers were also Gypsies or Travellers. The majority of the other sites would prefer to be managed directly by a local authority.

Gypsies and Travellers on private sites

S19. A total of 46 interviews were conducted on ten of the eleven private sites in Northamptonshire. As with those living on local authority owned sites, participants were well-settled with almost three-quarters not expecting to move from their current site. Few issues were reported surrounding the condition or availability of sites, suggesting that private sites are generally of a higher standard. This is perhaps not surprising that some sites are owner-occupied by a single family. Satisfaction with sites was high, particularly when compared to the responses from those on local authority sites.

- S20. While there was a strong preference for living on self-owned land where possible, it was recognised that the ability to do so was constrained by planning requirements and also the affordability of suitable land.

Gypsies and Travellers on unauthorised sites

- S21. A total of 61 interviews were carried out with participants on unauthorised sites, comprising 79% of the population.
- S22. It is clear that many of the participants in the sample were living on unauthorised sites due to a shortage of residential pitches. Due to enforcement policies directed by Government guidance, many were moved from one site to another within the same district. However the majority had lived in Northamptonshire for more than one year, suggesting that there is a permanent population living on the roadside in Northamptonshire but unable to access permanent / residential sites.

Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar accommodation

- S23. 42 interviews were carried out with Gypsies and Travellers living in housing, comprising over a fifth of all interviews. The majority of these participants currently lived in the social rented sector, although a quarter owned their home. For three-quarters of participants, their last home had been on a site, with almost half on an unauthorised site.
- S24. A large majority (79%) were satisfied with their current accommodation, however those who had previously lived on unauthorised sites (and therefore had less choice about moving to housing) were the least likely to be satisfied. They were also most likely to be living in overcrowded housing (44%), although the proportion in such conditions was extremely high for all survey participants (33%) living in bricks and mortar accommodation.
- S25. While almost half said they would ideally like to move to a site, just 14% thought they would do so in the next five years. It was stressed that smaller, family-sized sites were optimum, or those owned and managed by the local authority.

Access to services

- S26. A third of all participants said they had been discriminated against when accessing services, particularly council housing departments, health services and local amenities. A similar amount said they had been a victim of racism. In general participants preferred to use a single source of advice that they trusted, such as a health visitor, who could help with a range of issues, rather than engaging with several different service providers.

- S27. Registration with GPs was very high (82%) except among Gypsies and Travellers living on unauthorised sites, where more than a third were registered. Participants on unauthorised sites often used Accident & Emergency departments at hospitals because they reportedly could not access a GP.
- S28. Primary school enrolment was very high among families on residential pitches and in housing, although the figure was lower at secondary level. A third expected their children to go to a form of Further Education. Bullying and a lack of permanent address were given as the main reasons for not attending school.

Travelling Showpeople

- S29. Twenty-three interviews were conducted with Travelling Showpeople families, representing over two-thirds of the population in Northamptonshire. The survey found a great deal of concern about a lack of space on existing yards, whether for sorting equipment or living space for current and future family. The main barrier to bringing forward new yards was the difficulty in obtaining planning permission, whether on new yards or for the expansion at existing ones. Affordability was seen as a less significant issue. Participants stressed that, where possible, existing yards should be expanded.
- S30. A third of participants lived all year round on their yard, rather than using it as traditional winter quarters. The fact that almost 90% had lived there over five years and were well-integrated into the local community is one reason why satisfaction with where they lived was very high. This would also help explain why there was a strong preference for expanding existing yards rather than moving to a new, larger one.

Accommodation need

- S31. Accommodation need was assessed using a model in line with the Practice Guidance issued by the CLG. Separate assessments were carried out for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. It contains seven basic components; five assessing need and two assessing supply, which are applied to each sub-group of Gypsies and Travellers, based on the survey data. The total requirement over ten years is as follows:
- 92 residential pitches
 - 20 transit pitches (on two sites, one in the north and one in the west sub-region of the County)
 - 10 Travelling Showpeople plots.
- S32. The following table shows the results for each council and housing sub-region over ten years:

Table S2 District breakdown, 2007-2017			
Area	Residential pitches	Transit pitches	Travelling Showpeople plots
<i>North sub-region</i>			
Corby	3*	3	0
East Northants	9	2	4
Kettering	10*	3	0
Wellingborough	19*	2	2
<i>North sub-region total</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>West sub-region</i>			
Daventry	9	3	2
Northampton	32	5	0
South Northants	10	2	2
<i>West sub-region total</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>4</i>

* In addition to newly built pitches in 2008

Conclusions

S33. As well as quantifying accommodation need, the study also make recommendations on how provision can be brought forward. The main ones can be summarised as follows:

- Based on a survey with local Gypsies and Travellers, the preferred size for permanent / residential sites is 11 – 15 pitches, which tend to have fewer inter-family tensions and are therefore easier to manage. In terms of tenure, affordability issues means that approximately 90% of the identified need will have to be provided through the social sector.
- Amongst those currently living on socially rented sites and those on unauthorised sites there was a preference for council owned and managed sites. Third party management was seen as partial and prone to allocating vacant pitches on the basis of personal preference rather than need.
- While the vast majority of Gypsy and Traveller need will have to be met through the social rented sector, a minority of families are able to provide sites for themselves. Specific sites available should be outlined in future DPDs and guidance offered on the type of land that is likely to obtain planning permission as well as land that is *unlikely* to. Specific advice on the planning process should also be offered.
- Such an approach would also assist Travelling Showpeople, for whom the shortage of accommodation is derived from difficulties obtaining planning permission for new land or extensions on existing yards.

- While the survey and stakeholder consultation suggested a requirement for a network of transit pitches in Northamptonshire to further reduce the number of unauthorised encampments, the priority should be in bringing forward residential pitches. If transit pitches are provided before the shortfall in residential pitches is met, there is a risk that they will effectively be used as permanent / residential sites with all the ensuing management issues this would incur.
- There is an extremely high level of overcrowding in bricks and mortar accommodation, especially those who had previously lived on unauthorised encampments and for whom a suitable residential pitch was not available in the County. Reducing overcrowding levels will need to be considered through local housing strategies.
- Providing a floating support service for Gypsies and Travellers would help with a range of accommodation issues found in the survey.
- Local housing authorities should include Gypsy and Irish Traveller categories on ethnic monitoring forms to improve data on population numbers, particularly in housing.
- The population size and demographics of Gypsies and Travellers can change rapidly; their accommodation needs should be reviewed every three to five years.
- The work of the GTAA Steering Group should be continued to improve communication with Gypsies and Travellers and promote engagement with their accommodation and wider service needs.