



**ESTIMATING GYPSY  
AND TRAVELLER  
ACCOMMODATION  
NEEDS**



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# Outline of presentation

- The policy context
- Approaches to assessing Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs
- Some indications of the estimated extent of requirements in the West Midlands

Obviously a time of some uncertainty and policy change with the new Government

# Policy context

- Local housing authorities have to assess Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs as for everyone else (Housing Act 2004 s225)
- Housing and planning strategies/policies must reflect these needs
- *ODPM Circular 01/2006 Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites:*
  - *Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) to set pitch allocation targets for each LA*
  - *Local Authorities must allocate land in their Local Development Frameworks to accommodate these pitch targets*

# Policy context 2

- The new Government has clearly signalled intent to abolish RSS and house building/site pitch targets (letter of 27 May 2010 from Eric Pickles to local authority Leaders)

# Policy context 3

## □ Conservative Party Open Source Planning Green Paper:

- ‘we will also scrap John Prescott’s controversial guidance on Travellers’ (Circular 01/2006?) BUT
- ‘local authorities have a role to ensure the provision of suitable authorised sites to tackle genuine local need for their area in consultation with local communities.’
- recent case law has clarified that councils need to provide authorised sites locally if they are to take effective action against unauthorised sites

# My reading of this . . .

- There is still acknowledgement of the need to provide additional authorised sites for Gypsies and Travellers
- Assessing the need for accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople is still legally required and must still form the basis of plans and strategies

# Definitions

- The 'Housing Act' definition of Gypsies and Travellers used for GTAAs is based around a nomadic lifestyle or a cultural tradition of nomadism or living in a caravan
  - it allows people to 'retire' from travelling for specified reasons
- It includes New Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

# Objectives of a GTAA

- Provide estimates of requirements for additional site provision for at least 10 years:
  - residential pitches for Gypsies and Travellers
  - transit pitches for Gypsies and Travellers
  - plots for Travelling Showpeople
- Wider information about local Travelling communities and their service needs
- Through the process of the GTAA, enhance inclusion of Travelling communities and improve inter-community communications and relationships

# GTAA approach

- Practice guidance from CLG issued in October 2007
  - non-prescriptive but obviously very influential
- Learning from others and what seems to work well
- Client LA's requirements, brief and local circumstances

# Approach 2

- Most GTAAs to date carried out at a sub-regional (multi-LA) scale
- Most to date carried out by one of a small number of consultants
  
- Essentially two elements involved:
  - collecting base information and evidence
  - making an estimate of pitch/plot requirements

# Usual methods used to collect evidence

- Analysis of secondary data
  - literature review
  - Caravan Count for context and trends
  - LA records on site provision, planning applications, unauthorised encampments, site management etc
- Stakeholder interviews
  - perception of issues
  - hard information

# Usual methods used to collect evidence

- A survey of Gypsies and Travellers involving face-to-face interviews
  - usually a combination of tick-box questions for quantitative analysis and open questions for ‘feel’
  - last 20-30 minutes
- More qualitative work with Gypsies and Travellers – depth interviews or focus groups (optional)

# Challenges to evidence collection

- Accuracy of the Caravan Counts
- Inconsistent and incomplete LA information
- Problems of identifying all sites, and locating Gypsies and Travellers in housing
- Framing survey questions which make sense
- Gaining trust of the communities for a good response and accurate answers
- Practical and logistic fieldwork issues
- Important to involve the communities

# Assessing residential pitch requirements

- Aim to bring into line with mainstream housing needs assessments as far as possible
- Identify elements of 'need' and 'supply' with special reference to Gypsies and Travellers
- Difference between estimated need and supply is the requirement for additional pitches

# Elements of need

- ❑ Overcrowding and concealed households
- ❑ Future family formation
- ❑ Unauthorised developments
- ❑ Unauthorised encampments
- ❑ Movement, including from houses to sites
- ❑ Other – eg end of temporary planning permissions

# Elements of supply and requirements

- Supply
  - any unused pitches brought back into use
  - any new pitches planned
  - pitch vacancies arising
- Requirement for additional pitches
  - difference between need and supply for Years 1-5
- Years 5-10+ usually a simpler approach based on family formation only (4%pa)

# Challenges to the estimates

- Some philosophical issues – what is ‘need’ versus ‘demand’ or ‘aspiration’?
- At a technical level, there is great variability in the information used, the assumptions made and the way calculations are carried out – each GTAA is essentially unique to date
- Some particularly problematic areas, eg:
  - establishing the base population
  - dealing with movement between housing and sites
  - estimating need from unauthorised encampments
  - what is ‘local’ need?

# Assessment of progress with GTAAs

- The whole of England is now covered
- Much more and better information available on Travelling communities than previously – scope for better policies
- Findings have been challenged:
  - by Gypsies and Travellers as too low
  - by some LAs and others as too high and reflecting ‘demand’ rather than ‘genuine need’
- Hard to be sure about robustness, but accepted at most EiPs as the best evidence available

# West Midlands pitch/plot requirements

- Interim Policy Statement on New Accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople
- Brought together 6 sub-regional GTAAs as evidence
- Estimated regional requirements
- Allocated requirements between LAs on the basis of assessed need and ‘a strategic view’

# West Midlands Region

Type of provision	Current provision	Requirements 2007-2017
Residential pitches for Gypsies and Travellers	1094	938
Transit pitches for Gypsies and Travellers		219
Plots for Travelling Showpeople	209	118 (2007-12)

# Comments on requirements

- The requirements represent a big increase over current levels of provision for Gypsies and Travellers – more than double over 10 years – reflects a backlog of pitch supply
- However, figures are modest relative to housing figures – 1,275 pitches/plots relative to about 183,000 over 10 years (RSS Phase 2) or less than 1%
- Those requirements will remain for LAs to meet, even if the RSS is abolished