

Lancashire Sub-Regional Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation and Related Services Assessment



Executive Summary

By

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The study

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 (GTAAs) are now being undertaken across the UK, as local authorities respond to these new obligations and requirements.

The North West Regional Assembly, on behalf of a number of authorities within the Lancashire sub-region, commissioned this assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in July 2006. The authorities, which comprise this assessment, are: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council; Blackpool Council; Burnley Borough Council; Chorley Borough Council; Fylde Borough Council; Hyndburn Borough Council; Lancaster City Council; Pendle Borough Council; Rossendale Borough Council; Preston City Council; South Ribble Borough Council; West Lancashire District Council; Wyre Borough Council; and, Lancashire County Council¹. The study was conducted by a team of researchers from the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit at the University of Salford, assisted by staff from the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham and AVT-interventions, with research support from members of the Gypsy and Traveller community. The study was managed by a Steering Group composed of members from the aforementioned Lancashire authorities.

The assessment was undertaken by conducting:

- A review of available literature, data and secondary sources;
- A detailed questionnaire completed by housing and planning officers;
- Five thematic focus groups with 22 key stakeholders; and
- A total of 210 interviews with Gypsies and Traveller householdes from a range of tenures and backgrounds.

Background

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 (GTAAs) are designed to provide the

¹ Ribble Valley Council chose not to participate in the assessment. However, where there are instances when the position of Ribble Valley impacts upon the rest of the Lancashire Study Area (i.e. geographical spread of site provision and presence of unauthorised sites), information about Ribble Valley is provided.

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 accommodation need and pitch requirements are also to be fed into the Regional Planning Body (RPB), in this case the North West Regional Assembly (NWRA), 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 GTAAs conducted and a strategic view of need, supply and demand across the region is taken. The local planning authority's relevant Development Planning Document (DPD) – part of the Local Development Framework then identifies specific sites to match pitch numbers from the RSS.

Main Findings

Local Gypsies and Travellers

- At the time of the survey the Study Area had 93 pitches on five residential sites all managed by the respective local authorities; 262 pitches on 28 private authorised sites; a minimum of 10 unauthorised developments containing approximately 23 pitches; a minimum of 30 households on unauthorised encampments; and, at least 21 households in bricks and mortar housing. In all there was a minimum of 429 Gypsy/Traveller families on sites, in houses or encamped at the time of the survey. In addition, there was somewhere in the region of 8 Travelling Showpeople households on sites across the Study Area. The average household size was 4.6 persons, significantly larger than the average in the settled community. The estimated Gypsy and Traveller population of the Lancashire Study Area equates to a minimum of 1,973 people. This needs assessment accounts for approximately 968 Gypsies and Travellers, just under half of the 'known' estimated population. The average caravan to household ratio was 1.4 caravans per household.
- Survey responses suggested that there was a significant incidence of disability and ill-health with approximately 1 in 4 people reporting some form of disability or long-term illness within their household. Experience of multiple incidences of ill-health was not uncommon
- Eight in every ten respondents thought that education was important for Gypsy/Traveller children; however, only six in ten respondents reported that their children had regular attendance at school. Irregular attendance was particularly acute for those families living on unauthorised encampments.

- The Gypsy and Traveller households consulted reported being involved in a wide range of jobs. Self-employment was a key feature with building, groundwork, dealing, hawking, uPVC, roofing, and gardening frequently mentioned. There may be a greater tendency, over coming years, for Gypsy and Traveller children to enter more non-Traveller trades similar to those of the settled community. However, because of the influence of family roles and responsibilities traditional Gypsy and Traveller trades remain an integral part of the community.
- Over a third of those interviewed considered Lancashire, or areas within Lancashire, as their 'home'. Just under half of those interviewed reported that they had not travelled at all in the last 12 month period. The vast majority of those that had travelled in the last 12 months, had been engaged in seasonal travelling (i.e. travelling in late spring, summer and early autumn).

Traveller perspectives on accommodation

- The vast majority of those interviewed thought that their site/accommodation was either OK, good or very good. In total, 18% described their accommodation as poor or very poor, the main reason for 'poor' judgements was being the size of the site and their family pitch. Almost all of those we spoke to in bricks and mortar accommodation described their accommodation as OK, good or very good. A minority of respondents described their home as poor or very poor.
- Very few respondents expressed a desire to move from their accommodation within the next five years. It is clear that Gypsies and Travellers are afforded few accommodation options – any movement from sites is constrained by a perceived lack of space on other authorised sites. Generally speaking, residents who have stable accommodation do not wish to return to travelling in the current climate. Bricks and mortar housing is attractive to a number of families; however, at the same time, poor experience of bricks and mortar living has discouraged those that have already tried this form of accommodation from returning to it.
- Over a third of people expected to live in their current accommodation indefinitely, while a small group (15%) thought they would leave at some point in the next 5 years to return to travelling.
- By far the most preferred form of accommodation was a private site owned by either themselves or their family. This was followed by staying on either a network of transit/short-stay sites or a site owned by the local authority. A form of 'group housing' was seen as broadly favourable, but there appeared to be a lack of understanding as to what this actual meant in practice, probably due to having little experience of this kind of accommodation.

Gypsies and Travellers on unauthorised encampments and unauthorised developments

- Analysis of the records held by local authorities on unauthorised encampments showed a total of 106 encampments from August 2005-August 2006. The authorities which experienced the highest levels of encampments were Lancaster, Blackburn with Darwen, and Burnley. Encampments tend to vary in size substantially from 1 to 30 caravans.
- Just over half of households on unauthorised encampments were actively looking for somewhere more stable and secure to live within the Study Area.
- According to the survey the areas in which Gypsies and Travellers were currently encamped were not their preferred stopping places. The majority considered these areas in negative terms largely due to feelings of insecurity and environmental considerations (i.e. industrial areas, near roads, near waste ground). Furthermore, those households on unauthorised encampments had very poor living conditions; lacking access to water, toilets, showers or waste disposal. Only a third of unauthorised encampments had access to electricity.
- According to the survey of local authorities there were 7 unauthorised developments at the time of the assessment, comprising of approximately 13 pitches (3 in Blackburn with Darwen, 2 in Hyndburn, and 2 in West Lancashire). From the survey of Gypsies and Travellers, the project team found further unauthorised developments in Lancaster, Preston and Blackpool.

Accommodation need and supply

Nationally, there are no signs that the growth in the Gypsy and Traveller population will slow significantly. Although the supply of authorised accommodation has declined since 1994, 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.).

Given the presence of unauthorised encampments, household concealment, and future household formation, the current supply of appropriate accommodation appears to be significantly less than the 'need' identified. It is the conclusion of the project team that there is a need for more pitch provision for Gypsies and Travellers within the Lancashire Study Area.

Based upon a number of indicators of accommodation need, it has been identified that over the next five years (2006-2011) there is a need for around **126 - 147 additional permanent residential pitches** across the Study Area.

With current trends and policies, this need is unlikely to be met since the only source of supply is 4 pitches on one local authority site. Furthermore, there is a need for around 7 additional residential pitches for Travelling Showpeople 2006-2011. (See Table i)

Table i: Summary of estimated need for residential pitches at a Lancashire Study Area level 2006-2016

Driver of pitch site need/demand	Pitch need 2006-2011
Concealed/doubled-up household	7
Household formation	51
Waiting lists	24
Unauthorised developments	33
Movement from bricks and mortar housing	6 – 20
Unauthorised encampments	9 – 16
Sub-Total	130 - 151
Driver of supply for residential pitches	No. of pitches 2006-2011
Closed pitches	2
Vacant pitches	2
Sub-Total	4
Estimated pitch requirements	No. of pitches
Total additional Gypsy and Traveller residential pitches required 2006-2011	126 - 147
Total additional Gypsy and Traveller residential pitches required 2011-2016	79 - 84
Total additional Travelling Showpeople residential pitches required 2006-2011	7
Total additional Travelling Showpeople residential pitches required 2011-2016	2
Total additional Gypsy and Traveller transit pitches required	48-84

Recommendations and key issues

The overarching recommendation resulting from this assessment is that the authorities across the Study Area engage pro-actively 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, the main points arising from the research are stated as a series of recommendations to the local authorities in the Lancashire Study Area. A total of 37 recommendations are made under six broad themes: overall strategy, systems and policy framework; accommodating transient Gypsies and Travellers; communication and engagement; developing accommodation; Travelling Showpeople's accommodation; and, health and housing-related support issues.

The research brief did not require the study team to explore the likely costs arising from the recommendations which have been put forward. The resource implications and the business case for addressing each

recommendation will have to be considered, as part of any joint working across the sub-region.

Recommendations

Strategy, systems and policy framework

1. The authorities, which comprise the Study Area, should seek to address the under provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation (residential and transit) by working across administrative boundaries both sub-regionally and across regional boundaries.
2. The Lancashire Study Area authorities should seek to establish a sub-regional body which could help facilitate cross-authority strategies and accommodation allocation across the area.
3. There is a need for a standardised and centralised method of recording occurrences of unauthorised encampments, and the needs of those households on these encampments. Steps should be taken to produce a countywide Caravan Count in order to take a much more strategic and accurate view of accommodation need, travelling patterns and trends. This should feed into other North West counts compiled at a regional level.
4. In order to adhere to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and to ensure the high quality of on-going monitoring, authorities should ensure that Gypsies and Travellers are recognised in all their ethnic monitoring forms, most urgently in relation to housing and planning.
5. Residential and transit site waiting lists should be:
 - Accessible to all resident Gypsies and Travellers in the Lancashire sub-regional area
 - Available to be accessed in advance via telephone or ICT systems
 - Clear and transparent in terms of allocation policies
 - Formalised
 - Centralised
 - Standardised
6. Authorities should ensure that principles of equality, in relation to Gypsies and Travellers, are embedded in relation to the wide range of services provided. In particular this includes:
 - Housing policies
 - Homeless policies
 - Harassment
 - Communication and engagement
 - Statement of Community Involvement

- Site management
 - Housing-related support
 - Choice-Based Lettings
 - Allocation policies
 - Planning policies
7. Authorities should be sensitive to the different cultural and support needs of Gypsies and Travellers who may present as homeless and those who may require local authority accommodation.
 8. All authorities should take a common approach to the Welfare Needs Assessment. This should be grounded in good practice and be proactive in meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers.
 9. Authorities should separate the role of enforcement from Gypsy and Traveller liaison.
 10. Housing officers, site managers and other relevant personnel should liaise to ensure that advice on allocation policies and procedures is always up-to-date and that site managers or other liaison staff can assist people through the system.
 11. The practice of licensing pitches should be discontinued and replaced by more formal tenancies. A tenancy would assure the resident of greater security and encourage feelings of ownership in their site/accommodation.

Accommodating transient Gypsies and Travellers

12. There needs to be a variety in transit/transient provision in order to cater for the variety of needs. This might include formal transit sites; less-equipped stopping places used on a regular basis; and, temporary sites with temporary facilities available during an event or for part of the year;
13. There is a need to work across districts, with private landowners and key Gypsy and Traveller groups in order to provide feasible and appropriate options for mass gatherings. Mechanisms will be needed to accommodate this level of diversity.
14. In some cases it may be appropriate to develop larger pitches on residential sites to provide the potential to meet the needs of short-term friends and family of site residents. This should be done with close consultation of the site residents as visitors to any residential accommodation can seriously impact upon the community equilibrium;

15. As a result of the use of land by Gypsies and Travellers whilst travelling, potential partnership working should be pursued between the authorities and key stakeholders (i.e. private land-owners, farmers, holiday campsites), who may be in a position to assist with accommodating transient Gypsies and Travellers either in the short-term or long-term.
16. The authorities should develop at least one new transit site as a pilot scheme in the near future and monitor its usage and management in order to learn lessons for further provision. Authorities should also learn good practice lessons from elsewhere.
17. The level of accommodation provision across the Lancashire sub-region should remain under constant review.

Communication and engagement

18. The authorities should engage in efforts to raise cultural awareness and dispel some of the persistent myths around Gypsies and Travellers.
19. Authorities should develop their communication and engagement strategies already in place for consultation with non-Travelling communities and tailor these, in an appropriate manner, to Gypsy and Traveller community members. The expertise within the Northern Network of Gypsy and Traveller groups around the 'We're Talking Homes' initiative could provide one opportunity for the authorities to begin such dialogue and exchanges.
20. Planning departments should offer appropriate advice and support to Gypsies and Travellers on the workings of the planning system, and the criteria to be considered in applications which should serve to improve success rates.
21. Each authority should identify a clear lead officer who manages each authority's response to Gypsies and Traveller issues.
22. Each authority should develop communication networks within the authority involving all partner agencies, in order to remain updated as to key issues. For instance, housing colleagues should be fully involved in all decisions relating to planning and site provision.

Developing accommodation

23. Those officers and agencies leading the planning, design and development of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation should involve the target Gypsy and Traveller population in all stages.

24. Those involved in Gypsy and Traveller site (both residential and transit) and 'housing' design should approach this in a creative and innovative manner. Preferences and aspirations of Gypsies and Travellers should be taken into consideration. Important things to consider include:
 - Location to local services and transport networks
 - Pitch size
 - Facilities
 - Amenity blocks
 - Sheds
 - Management
 - Mixture of accommodation (chalet, trailer etc.)
 - Utility of outside space (driveways, gardens etc.)
 - Homes for life principles
 - Health and related support issues
 - Tenure Mix
 - Health & Safety
25. Authorities should ensure that existing statutory guidelines and emerging good practice are used in relation to residential and transit site design and health and safety issues.
26. The management of sites needs to be evaluated at regular intervals.
27. The principles and methods used by authorities and RSLs of promoting affordable accommodation to members of the non-Traveller communities should be adapted to the accommodation used by members of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

Health and Housing-Related Support Issues

28. It will be an important component, in order to produce sustainable solutions for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision that all relevant statutory departments engage with Gypsy and Traveller needs. This is particularly the case for Supporting People teams who should be embedded in the strategic planning and delivery of services.
29. Authorities should work with Supporting People to create additional floating Gypsy and Traveller housing support workers. Such officers could offer support and assistance to enable those people wishing to remain in bricks and mortar accommodation or live on sites, to do so.
30. Supporting People teams should network with Supporting People teams locally, regionally and nationally in order to share and disseminate good practice on meeting the housing-related support needs of Gypsy and Traveller community members.

31. The profile of Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) should be raised in relation to Gypsies and Travellers who wish to remain in their own homes. It is important that such agencies are able to engage with people living on private sites as well as those living in bricks and mortar accommodation.
32. There is a need for more research into the health needs of Gypsies and Travellers in the Lancashire sub-regional area.
33. There is a need for more research into the needs and preferences of Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar accommodation.

Travelling Showpeople accommodation

34. When developing new site provision for Travelling Showpeople authorities should take a strategic view of allocation of sites which accommodates logistical issues (i.e. travelling with large equipment) and the pattern of fun fairs across the area.
35. Authorities should consult with the local branch of the Showmen's Guild to discuss plans to increase and develop the accommodation provision for Travelling Showpeople.
36. Authorities should be aware of, and implement, the guidance issued by the CLG around planning and Travelling Showpeople sites.
37. In order to adapt to current working and living patterns of Travelling Showpeople, authorities should move towards the establishment of permanent provision rather than temporary accommodation.