

Policy Approach for Gypsies & Travellers

- The policy will need set out Gypsy & Traveller Pitch Provision requirements by district for both permanent and transit sites.
- Outcome from the Options Consultation and associated workshops was overwhelmingly in support of Option 3

Working with sub-regional partnerships and the Gypsy & Traveller Community agree a more balanced share of meeting need across districts, reflecting a wider range of factors other than solely the 'need where it arises' basis. This would see pitch provision distributed to meet the requirements for Gypsies & Travellers, so that they had the same chance to enjoy equal (or comparable) access to services and facilities, social and economic opportunities, as the settled community, and thus contribute towards community cohesion and sustainable communities.

- Actual numbers and distribution for pitch provision will not exactly replicate outcomes of published the sub regional Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA's) given the acknowledged constraints \ caveats \ implications of the 'need where it arises' basis of the CLG methodology which has been used in all the sub regional GTAA's.
- Over the next few months, 4NW is proposing to have face to face dialogue, on a sub regional basis, with both Local Authorities (planning and housing professionals) and representatives from the Gypsy & Traveller Community to hopefully try and reach consensus on the scale and distribution of new pitch provision.
- 4NW will also explore whether the policy approach also needs to set out any criteria relating to quality, locational or site requirement issues.

Recommendations from Sustainability Appraisal

Option 1 promotes allocating pitches throughout the region on a 'need where it arises' basis. Currently, Gypsies and Travellers are not evenly spread throughout the region (although they are spread more evenly throughout the region than is the case for Travelling Showpeople). Option 1 will reinforce this unequal distribution, whilst Option 3 will distribute new pitches for Gypsies and Travellers throughout the region in a more 'balanced' fashion.

It is likely that Gypsies and Travellers have chosen to concentrate around certain areas for reasons such as proximity to friends and family. It is also likely that, in some instances, Gypsies and Travellers will have chosen to live in a particular area for economic reasons, although in practice Gypsies and Travellers are less likely to have strong economic ties to a particular area than is the case for members of the settled or Travelling Showpeople communities. Conversely, many Gypsy and Traveller families will have chosen to live in a certain area for little other reason than the fact that opportunities elsewhere for a pitch on an authorised site are hard to come by.

It is likely that there would be benefits to the approach promoted by Option 3. In particular, benefits would be felt in those parts of the region that currently have a high concentration of Gypsy and Traveller pitches as these areas would avoid any further concentration of pitches (as is promoted by Option 1). A high concentration of Gypsy and Traveller pitches could generate some negative sustainability effects that would impact upon the receiving environment, community or economy. A particularly significant effect is worsening social relations between the Gypsy and Traveller community and the settled community in the area, signified for example, in concerns about crime levels. It is important to consider that many

effects felt by the receiving environment and settled community in the vicinity of Gypsy and Traveller pitches may be insignificant or non-existent if pitches are authorised as it can be assumed that authorised pitches are sensitively located. Furthermore, any negative effects associated with new authorised sites have the potential to decrease over time, as it is more likely that there will be the potential for harmonious relationships and cultural understanding to develop between the settled and Gypsy and Traveller communities.

For these reasons, it is difficult to predict with any certainty negative effects on the environment or non travelling economy / community associated with Option 1 (or benefits associated with Option 3) because there might be the possibility that Option 3 could lead to an increase in the number of unauthorised pitches. However, it is difficult to predict with any certainty whether this will occur as evidence does suggest a strong preference for permanent pitches, with a preference for authorised sites, a resort to privately owned unauthorised sites where an authorised pitch cannot be obtained and a final resort to unauthorised encampments.

Gypsies and Travellers are currently more dispersed around the region than is the case for Travelling Showpeople, and so it might be suggested that promoting a more balanced dispersal would be something that Gypsies and Travellers find acceptable. The potential for unauthorised pitches remains uncertain, but what is certain is that unauthorised pitches are much more likely to negatively impact upon the receiving environment, economy and communities. It might also be argued that perpetuation of the current uneven balance may not be in the interests of the Gypsy and Traveller community in terms of their equal access to services and opportunities.

Requiring some Gypsies and Travellers to relocate to parts of the region that are a significant distance from where they would ideally choose to live would need to be done with a great deal of precaution to ensure that such families would not become isolated from the wider Gypsy and Traveller community. If Option 3 is pursued it will be important that a robust strategy is developed for addressing the local political challenges involved in pursuing this approach.

Option 3 promotes working with the Gypsy and Traveller community to determine the exact regional allocation. However, it also promotes starting from the premise that pitches will be distributed in a 'balanced' fashion, and so it is questionable whether any further decisions still to be made will represent anything other than fine-tuning of sub-regional allocations. Option 3, to be successful, would need to be achieved via genuine engagement with individual Gypsy and Traveller families, including hidden households, as well as via identification of sites that do provide access to services and facilities. This would require strong co-operation between sub regional authorities and would need to proceed on the basis of an agreement of how to determine what is considered equitable access to services, facilities, social and economic opportunities. These measures would provide some safeguards against the risk of political negotiations between sub-regional authorities forming the real basis for site allocations under this option.

Option 2 is an intermediary option, and the sustainability effects predicted for Option 2 reflect this. It will still require some Gypsies and Travellers to live in parts of the region that are a long way from where they would ideally choose to live, with the effect that some Gypsies and Travellers could become isolated from the rest of the community. Option 2 could result in particular potential for effects to be felt by individual families.

In conclusion, Option 3, developed and implemented well, could achieve a more sustainable outcome for all, but developed and implemented badly, could have damaging effects on the Gypsy and Traveller community.

Supporting text

The policy is drawing its justification from:

- Evidence Base - sub regional GTAA's have now been completed in all sub regions. 4NW has been given permission to and has published on its RPB technical website, the reports for:
 - Cheshire Partnership area
 - Cumbria
 - Lancashire
 - MerseysideIn addition we have been supplied with a copy of the recently completed Greater Manchester GTAA.
- Outcome of RSS Options consultation and workshops.
- Outcome of Sustainability Appraisal

Linkages with other policies in RSS

Policy DP1 – Spatial Principles

Policy DP2 – Promote Sustainable Communities

Policy DP5 – Manage Travel demand; Reduce the Need to Travel, and Increase Accessibility

Policy L3 – Existing Housing Stock & Housing Renewal

Policy L4 – Regional Housing Provision

Policy L6 – Affordable Housing

Linkages to other strategies

- Local Development Documents will identify how the provision figures set out in RSS will be delivered via site allocations \ criteria based policy approaches.
- RSS policy along with GTAA evidence base will be used by 4NW in its role as Regional Housing Board to advise Government on scheme bids by local Authorities for Gypsy & Traveller Site Grant's to provide new site provision. [It should be noted that other sources of funding \ provision are also encouraged eg private sector].
- Provision of Gypsy & Traveller Pitches should be seen as part of work to tackle the wider homelessness issue and wider accommodation requirements (including the issue of overcrowding on existing sites).
- Links into the delivery of the Regional Housing Strategy in seeking to improve the quality and sustainability of the accommodation offer.

Monitoring

- New pitch provision is already a national RSS Annual Monitoring Return core indicator and as such work is currently underway by 4NW to collect data as part of the 2008 AMR preparation.
- Need to work with sub regions to ensure that GTAA's are reviewed and kept up to date on a regular basis in the future.

Implementation

- Local Development Documents will identify how the provision figures set out in RSS will be delivered via site allocations \ criteria based policy approaches.
- RSS policy along with GTAA evidence base will be used by 4NW in its role as Regional Housing Board to advise Government on applications by local Authorities for Gypsy & Traveller Site Grant's to provide new site provision.