

**COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

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**GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION ASSESSMENT**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**OCTOBER 2007**

## 1. Introduction

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments (GTAA) are required to be undertaken by local authorities under the terms of the Housing Act 2004. Guidance on the conduct of GTAAs was issued by CLG in October 2007. However, this study was conducted in accordance with the earlier ODPM Draft Practice Guidance, February 2006, albeit the outcomes are considered to remain valid.

The GTAA was commissioned in two phases by a Project Group of officers representing Gloucestershire County Council and the six District Councils. Phase 1 comprised a sample survey of Gypsies and Travellers residing within Gloucestershire and was based around structured interviews and questionnaires. Jigsaw Associates led this work and the outputs were published in August 2007 in a report entitled *Results of the initial data collection for sub regional assessment of the needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople in Gloucestershire*. Phase 2 conducted by Ark Consultancy entailed evaluation of the available survey data, a literature and policy review together with assessment and calculation of accommodation needs. Further work was also undertaken by the Project Group in relation to the circumstances of traveller households in bricks and mortar accommodation.

The CLG co-ordinate biannual counts of Gypsy and Traveller caravans but this data does not include travelling Showpeople. In the circumstances the GTAA has utilised data and site information produced by the Project Group which is considered to be more accurate and comprehensive.

## 2. National and Regional Policy

Removal of the statutory duty on local authorities to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers had not delivered the expected level of new sites by the private sector and the travelling community. In consequence the Government reviewed the policy position and required local authorities to conduct GTAAs as part of their housing duties. Guidance on best practice has been issued to support this approach and two Circulars were published in 2006 and 2007 setting out the required planning considerations for site provision for both Gypsies and Travellers and Showpeople. Circular 4/2007 *Planning For Showpeople* makes clear the differing requirements for site design for plots for Showpeople where far greater space for vehicle and equipment storage and workspace is a necessity.

At a regional level the South West Regional Assembly is required to consider the results of GTAAs in drafting the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and to identify the number of pitches that need to be delivered. Regional Housing Strategy will also have to reflect the need for additional site accommodation. Local planning authorities must include policies for site provision in their Core Strategies and Development Plan Documents. Failure to do so could lead to intervention by the Secretary of State. Similarly, district council Housing Strategies ought to address the issue of site provision and Homelessness Strategies and policy must take account of the particular needs of the travelling community.

In the South West £4.5m has been provided for Gypsy and Traveller site grants from the Regional Housing Pot in 2007/08 and with 'flex' in the Housing Corporation's Affordable Housing Programme this can rise to £5.3m. The South West Regional Assembly has

submitted a proposal to Government in relation to the next round of housing funding allocations to the regions. The submission *Proposed allocation of Regional Housing Pot resources 2008-2011* identifies a spending requirement of £12.66m for Gypsy and Traveller site provision in the period 2008-2011. The proposal specifically states that funding allocated for these grants during the period should be 2% of the Regional Housing Pot or £5m per annum, whichever is the less.

Gypsies and Irish Travellers are specific ethnic groups recognised in equalities legislation and they enjoy the same rights of protection as everyone else under the terms of the Human Rights Act 1998.

### **3. The Gloucestershire Context**

Within the County the local planning authorities are in transition between the former County Structure Plan and Local Development Plan system and the more recent Local Development Framework. Until the LDF is fully implemented the old style 'Local Plans' remain extant. Although the policy references to Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople vary across the six Local Plans of the District Councils there is no reason why development of new sites cannot still be considered against this policy background and taking into account the latest Government guidance.

The opportunity arises for the local planning authorities to work together to ensure that emerging Core Strategies contain complementary policies in relation to Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople. Furthermore, it would be of benefit if a joint Development Plan Document could be produced for the six Districts covering detailed policies in relation to site location and provision. A similar approach to housing and homelessness strategies could also be pursued.

The Supporting People Strategy for Gloucestershire recognises that no services are currently provided to the travelling community. It states that there are high rates of illiteracy, poor health and social exclusion from mainstream services. Some 40-50 households are believed to be in need of assistance. Approval has now been given to a 12 months trial of a floating support service to the travelling community.

National research has established that educational attainment levels of Gypsy and Traveller children are much lower than their peer groups. In Gloucestershire education of travelling children is largely accommodated within the general schooling arrangements across the County. Records are maintained of school placement of Gypsy and Traveller children and Gloucestershire County Council has issued specific guidance for schools on the educational needs of these pupils. A low level of outreach educational provision has also been made. However, perhaps the greatest area of need and difficulty still to be successfully tackled is the poor level of adult literacy amongst the travelling population.

There are also recognised issues relating to the health of Gypsies and Travellers. Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust has started to consider the health inequalities that affect the travelling community. However, the PCT Business Plan 2006/2007 contains no specific reference to Gypsies and Travellers but does acknowledge the need to further monitor the

needs of black and minority ethnic groups. Further work is clearly necessary to ensure that this disadvantaged group receives the same level of health care as the wider population.

There is no data compiled on the level of criminal offending or anti-social behaviour either perpetrated by, or committed against, the travelling community. Anecdotal evidence suggests some degree of local hostility against Gypsies and Travellers in the County but similar claims of hostility against them are made by the settled population when large unauthorised encampments arise.

Countywide, multi-agency protocols are in place for dealing with unauthorised encampments and the County Council has a specific policy in relation to Gypsies and Travellers covering matters such as toleration, site provision and enforcement activity. However, it is unclear as to the extent by which these protocols are adhered to by all parties. It would therefore be helpful to review the protocols and seek renewed commitment to them from all parties.

The extent to which policies on equalities and diversity relate specifically to the travelling community varies across the public service agencies in the County. It is most common to find that services are delivered as part of mainstream provision to the general population.

#### **4. Findings From The Survey**

For the detailed results of the survey reference should be made to the report of Jigsaw Associates but a few points of interest are set out here.

One of the most striking features is the degree to which the travelling community is 'settled' within the County. This sounds like a contradiction in terms but evidence shows that the majority of Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople have a strong local connection and have occupied their present sites for a prolonged period of time. 71% of respondents had also occupied another site in Gloucestershire before moving to their current site.

The largest groups within the travelling population in the County are:

- 34% Romany Gypsy
- 29% English Traveller
- 21% Fairground Traveller/Showpeople

The size of the Showpeople group is significant as the site design requirements for accommodation of Showpeople is quite different from the other groups and must be taken into account in land use planning.

17% of respondents stated that they had experienced some form of enforcement against them in the previous 12 months and 10% had been evicted from a site. No respondents were on waiting lists for bricks and mortar accommodation.

There was a strong body of opinion that transit sites were needed across the County.

## 5. Assessment of Accommodation Needs

Based upon the best available data a calculation has been made of the need for further site and pitch provision over the next 5 years. The main report sets out in detail the assumptions that underpin the calculation. The calculation follows the format promoted in Government Guidance relating to conduct of GTAA's.

The breakdown of necessary site provision is set out in the following set of recommendations arising from the GTAA:

## 6. Recommendations

1. That 187 additional permanent residential pitches be provided for Gypsies and Travellers within Gloucestershire and distributed as follows:

Cheltenham	4
Cotswold	17
Forest of Dean	30
Gloucester City	18
Stroud	20
Tewkesbury	98
2. That of these permanent pitches at least 18 plots be designated for occupation by Showpeople and designed to meet their needs for additional space. If the temporary planning permission for the site adjoining the Teddington Hands Roundabout is not renewed this figure should increase to 26 designated plots.
3. That 20 transit site pitches be provided within Gloucestershire located at two or three sites, one each of which should be provided in or close to Cheltenham and Tewkesbury.
4. That 35 stopping place pitches be provided within Gloucestershire located at up to 6 sites distributed across the County.
5. That design of new sites takes account of the latest guidance issued by CLG but that the specific needs of Showpeople and the more simple and eco-friendly lifestyle of New Travellers be taken into consideration.
6. That local planning authorities seek to work jointly to produce common policies for inclusion in Core Strategies, Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents in relation to the provision of additional sites to accommodate Gypsies and Travellers. This to extend to agreement on the allocation of land and types of site to be provided to support delivery of the additional pitches identified in this GTAA.
7. That local planning policies recognise the differing accommodation needs of Showpeople compared to Gypsies and Travellers and in particular the requirements for adequate space to support their livelihoods.
8. That local housing authorities reflect in their Housing Strategies and Homelessness Strategies the particular accommodation needs of the travelling community as

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represented by this GTAA. Targets should be set for meeting the requirements for additional sites and pitches including the proportion to be met by the public sector.

9. That a common review process be agreed to monitor the on-going provision of additional sites and pitches for Gypsies and Travellers and that Annual Monitoring Reports produced by local planning authorities state progress against target.
10. That local authorities and/or RSLs should take advantage of the capital grants available for new site provision and work closely with partners to optimise utilisation of such funds.
11. That further research is undertaken to fill in the gaps in knowledge about the demographic make-up of the Gypsy and Traveller population of Gloucestershire so that a more accurate picture of new household formation can be derived to inform future decision making. This is particularly relevant to the population of New Travellers.
12. That a protocol is established between local housing authorities and registered social landlords to identify and monitor the housing circumstances of Gypsies and Travellers in relation to bricks and mortar accommodation. It should include their accommodation needs, tenures and housing and transfer requests to ensure that the particular needs of this community are considered and met.
13. That regular inspections of sites are conducted to ensure compliance with site licence conditions. Enforcement action should be taken where appropriate to improve unsatisfactory conditions.
14. That the health inequalities between Gypsies and Travellers and the settled population are further investigated and remedied at a local level with the provision of specific services where mainstream provision is not dealing adequately with the problems faced.
15. That adult educational programmes are targeted on the Gypsy and Traveller community to improve standards of adult literacy and numeracy and to offer vocational training.
16. That Supporting People funding be confirmed to support work targeted on improving the circumstances and quality of life of the travelling community.
17. That the local authorities and agencies in Gloucestershire jointly establish improved lines of communication and consultation with the representative bodies and stakeholders for Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople across Gloucestershire. This should serve to assist the site provision process and better inform development of policy and services for the travelling community.
18. That the Travellers policy for the County and Protocol for Managing Unauthorised Encampments be reviewed and updated in the light of latest CLG guidance with a view to seeking renewed commitment to them from all partners.
19. That equality and diversity policies be reviewed to ensure that the needs of Gypsies and Travellers are adequately addressed in terms of policy development and service delivery.



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