

FINAL

**LEICESTERSHIRE, LEICESTER & RUTLAND
GYPSIES' AND TRAVELLERS'
ACCOMMODATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT
(2006-16)**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PREPARED FOR

**Blaby District Council
Charnwood Borough Council
Harborough District Council
Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council
Melton Borough Council
North West Leicestershire District Council
Oadby & Wigston Borough Council
Leicester City Council
Rutland County Council
Leicestershire County Council**

BY

**Centre for Urban and Regional Studies
University of Birmingham**

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Background

1. In early 2006 the Partner authorities (Leicestershire County, Leicester City, Rutland County, Blaby District, Charnwood Borough, Harborough District, Hinckley & Bosworth Borough, Melton Borough, North West Leicestershire District and Oadby & Wigston Borough) commissioned the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham, with John Bloxsom of John Bloxsom Housing Services, to carry out a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment for the Study Area of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. The main objectives were to produce detailed information about local Gypsies and Travellers and to generate reliable estimates of future accommodation and housing-related support needs.
2. The study follows government guidance and adopts a definition of Gypsies and Travellers which includes people with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a caravan, and all other people of nomadic habit of life including those who have stopped travelling for health or educational reasons or because of old age, including those living in housing. The study covers Travelling Showpeople; findings relating to Showpeople are mostly reported separately since their characteristics and the issues they face are rather different from those of other Gypsy and Traveller groups.
3. The research methodology used was compatible with Draft Practice Guidance on *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments* issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Communities and Local Government) in February 2006. The research drew on:
 - **Secondary information** including the twice-yearly Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Counts published by Communities and Local Government; records of planning applications, unauthorised encampments and site management; and relevant strategies and policies.
 - **A stakeholder consultation:** interviews with representatives of the Partner authorities and written consultation with other stakeholders working with Gypsies and Travellers in the Study Area.
 - **Interviews with local Gypsies and Travellers:** there were structured interviews in autumn 2006 with 190 Gypsies and Travellers (95 on 23 authorised sites; 5 on 4 unauthorised sites; 29 with Gypsies and Travellers in housing; and 61 on 17 roadside encampments). In addition, 16 less structured interviews were carried out with Travelling Showpeople on 9 sites, including 2 without planning permission. Interviews with Gypsies and Travellers used structured questionnaires with a combination of tick-box and write-in answers. Interviews were carried out by CURS researchers and 3 community interviewers who were specially trained for the task. We are confident that the survey results are robust and provide a sound basis for analysis and needs assessment.

National and Regional Policy Background

4. National policy towards Gypsy and Traveller site provision has developed with the overall objective that *'Gypsies and Travellers and the settled*

community should live together peacefully'. Local authorities are required to assess the need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in their areas and to develop strategies which address the need through public and/or private provision. The Regional Planning Body, on the basis of local authority assessed need, will determine how many pitches should be provided across the region and will specify in the Regional Spatial Strategy how many pitches should be provided in each local authority area. Local planning authorities will be obliged to identify sites (not simply set planning criteria for sites) in their Development Plan Documents in line with the requirement identified in the Regional Spatial Strategy. The new system is set out in ODPM Circular 01/2006 *Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites* issued in February 2006. A draft Circular was issued for consultation in late January 2007 which recognises that Travelling Showpeople also face a shortage of appropriate accommodation and proposes a very similar planning process, based on needs assessment and identification of site locations, for future site provision.

5. New social rented Gypsy and Traveller sites are expected to contribute to site provision. Financial support is available through Gypsy and Traveller Sites Grants. In the East Midlands, a total of £6,216,000 has been agreed over the years 2006/07 and 2007/08. Both local authorities and registered social landlords (RSLs) can develop sites and access grant funding.

6. The *East Midlands Regional Housing Strategy 2004-2010* draws attention to the needs of Gypsies and Travellers (Policy 13). The *Draft East Midlands Regional Plan* (Regional Spatial Strategy) includes Policy 16 setting out Regional Priorities for Provision for Gypsies and Travellers. Interim Pitch Requirements, for both residential and transit purposes, amount to up to 65 pitches (up to 95 caravans) for the Study Area. The Interim figures will be superseded by pitch requirements derived from GTAAs when complete.

The Local Population

7. There is no source of information about the size of the Gypsy and Traveller population in the Study Area. Our best estimate is that there are at least 1,815 Gypsies and Travellers.

Findings – Site Provision

8. One task of the study was to build up an estimate of current site provision for Gypsies and Travellers. There are:

- **3 socially rented sites** (2 owned and managed by Leicestershire County Council in Blaby and North West Leicestershire, and one by Leicester City Council) together providing 42 pitches. These sites accommodate just under 150 people. There are combined waiting lists of just under 50 applicants while, on average, about 5 pitches a year become available for re-letting. Residents have exclusive use of bath/shower and WC in individual amenity units provided for each plot. Survey respondents (13 interviews) had an average of 1.75 caravans/trailers for their family's use. 25% of respondents said that

this gave them too little space for their family's needs, and 58% said their pitch was too small. 33% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their site. Provision of children's play space was suggested as an improvement.

- **27 authorised private sites** (including 7 with temporary planning permissions only) together providing 210 pitches/families. The number of pitches is hard to estimate because many sites are not formally laid out and are flexible in use. Private provision (estimated pitches) is patchy across the Study Area: Hinckley & Bosworth (81), Blaby (56), Harborough (38) and North West Leicestershire (35). There is no authorised private provision in Charnwood, Melton, Oadby & Wigston, Leicester or Rutland. A feature of private site provision is the large number of rented pitches, estimated at around two-thirds of the total. Amenity provision on private sites, especially on those offering rented pitches, is relatively poor. Only around a quarter of respondents (based on 82 interviews) had an amenity block providing a WC and bath or shower for the family's own use. 38% had only shared access to a WC, and 28% shared a shower, while 45% had no access to a shower at all on site. Respondents on private sites had, on average, 1.9 caravans/trailers for their family's use and about a quarter said this did not give them enough space. Despite poor amenity provision, only 9% of respondents were dissatisfied with their site. Suggested improvements included better amenity provision and more space.
- **16 'sites' developed without planning permission**, accommodating an estimated 32 families (in Blaby, Charnwood, Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth and North West Leicestershire). Some of these 'sites' are where caravans are parked at the rear of houses on a fairly continuous basis; some, including the site in Harborough, are 'tolerated' by the local authority. 5 interviews were carried out with respondents on unauthorised sites which show better amenity provision and higher levels of satisfaction than authorised private sites.
- **20 Travelling Showpeople yards/sites** (in all areas except Melton and Oadby & Wigston), including 2 developed without planning permission and currently subject to enforcement action. There is 1 yard for Circus People in Rutland. 16 interviews were carried out with Showpeople on 9 sites/yards. Sites/yards fall into 3 broad types: sites comprising a number (up to 30+) individual family 'yards' of about 10,000 square feet combining residential accommodation and equipment storage and working areas; family 'yards' developed for a single extended family with mixed residential and work uses quite flexibly arranged; and sites offering rented pitches for Showpeople and retired Showpeople. Residential accommodation (including chalets, large Showmen's trailers and touring caravans) is usually of a high standard. The family yards visited were short of space to accommodate growing families on constrained sites.

9. The Caravan Counts show that the Study Area is unusual in the predominance of private sites. Plotting trends in caravan numbers in the Study Area since 1979 reveals a steady increase, particularly accounted for by the growth in private sites. There is nothing in the figures to suggest that growth might not continue in future.

10. Planning applications submitted for Gypsy and Traveller sites (including for sites for Travelling Showpeople) suggest continuing demand for site development. The crude success rate on the 47 applications recorded since 2001 was about 50%, including permissions granted on appeal. Applications were assessed against criteria-based policies in Local Plans, some of which are easier to comply with than others. Most current planning policies do not identify specific land for site development as will be required in future.

Findings – Unauthorised Encampments

11. The Caravan Count in January 2006 (which recorded a total of 379 caravans in the Study Area) recorded 36 caravans on unauthorised encampments, that is, on unauthorised sites not owned by Gypsies and Travellers. There were 41 caravans in July 2006. Records kept by the County and Leicester City show that between 2001 and 2006 there was an average of 86 encampments a year across the Study Area. The average encampment size was about 5-7 caravans and the average duration 6-7 weeks. Across the Study Area, the most common ethnicity of groups involved in encampment was English Gypsies, followed by Irish Travellers; in the City, Irish Travellers were most frequently involved. There appears to be a growing number of 'mixed' groups including both Gypsies and Irish Travellers involved in unauthorised encampments. Every district in the Study Area experienced unauthorised encampment since 1997, but the areas with most encampments were North West Leicestershire, Leicester and Charnwood.

12. All authorities, together with the Leicestershire Constabulary, have adopted the *Code of Practice for Travellers in Leicestershire, Leicester City and Rutland*. This is an agreement on the management of unauthorised encampments. Its basic message is that a stay on land is limited in time and dependent on the co-operation of Travellers in keeping groups small (up to 6 caravans) and causing no problems. The Code states that the local authorities will give consideration to the welfare and social needs of Travellers. In practice, encampments are often 'tolerated' for a period if small and not causing problems.

13. 61 interviews were carried out with people on unauthorised encampments in the Study Area between mid-July and October 2006. 38% said that they had other accommodation elsewhere, but were often reluctant to give details. 43% had travelled throughout the previous year as a 'way of life'. Most of these 'permanent travellers' would prefer to spend more time in one place, especially over winter, but wanted to continue to travel as well. Travelling was said to be getting more difficult because of problems finding places to stop, and over half of respondents had been forced to leave a stopping place in the previous year. The main reasons for being in the Study Area were given as:

passing through/travelling around, having family or friends nearby, work, and attending a Mission. Very few said where they would go when they left or when they were likely to move on.

14. Not surprisingly, access to amenities was poor. Water was usually from garages, electricity from generators, toilets at public toilets or shops/garages, and showers in leisure centres or service areas. However, the majority of respondents thought this was 'OK', or what they were used to. Over two-thirds assessed their current stopping place as good or fair. About 4 in 10 identified some risk to their family's safety at the stopping place.

Findings – Characteristics of Local Gypsies and Travellers

15. The survey identified some of the important characteristics of local Gypsies and Travellers:

- 'Household' size is larger than in the settled population at 4.0 persons across the whole sample. Only 23% of households include 1 or 2 people.
- A high proportion (48%) of families include 'children' or young adults aged over 16 not currently forming their own household. Among housed Gypsies and Travellers, the proportion is higher at 56%.
- Most survey respondents – including those on the roadside – had close family links with people in the Study Area, either living on the same site or nearby.
- The local population includes diverse ethnic groups. Romany/Gypsy is the largest ethnic grouping (57%), followed by Irish Traveller (20%). A further 20% of respondents preferred a fairly neutral term, either Traveller or English Traveller. Only 3% self-identified as a New Traveller.
- Just over half of Gypsies and Travellers on authorised sites travel for a period of the year, mostly in summer, and wish to continue to do so for cultural reasons. People on socially rented sites and in houses are less likely to travel than on private sites. All groups now travel less than they did, sometimes for health or education reasons, sometimes because it is increasingly hard to find places to stop safely.
- Someone was in work in 78% of respondents' families. Men were normally self-employed (predominantly in building and gardening activities), while some women were employed. A number of women would like to work but were prevented by family responsibilities or, in a few cases, by male attitudes to the role of women. Problems facing Gypsies and Travellers in getting work were thought to stem from discrimination and racist attitudes among employers, and poor basic literacy skills among Gypsies and Travellers.

- A fifth of respondents said that someone in their family had a long-term health problem or disability. Incidence of ill health was higher among families in housing (38%) than on sites or the roadside. About 1 in 10 was not registered with a GP. Issues were reported in getting health care with 'no fixed address', and GPs in the Study Area were said to vary in their willingness to register Gypsies and Travellers.
- Over 4 in 10 respondents with school-age children said that one or more of their children did not attend school regularly. Not surprisingly, the proportion was higher among those on the roadside. Some were receiving home tuition. Answers suggest continuing resistance to schooling for teenagers for cultural reasons. There was limited interest in education for adults or college courses.
- Around a third of respondents said they had experienced discrimination or harassment in the area. Most commonly this was name calling and verbal abuse, but occasionally much more serious.

16. An examination of housing histories and movement intentions showed:

- There is considerable mobility among people living on authorised sites: 43% had been living on their site for less than a year. This was particularly a feature of rented plots on private sites.
- Most respondents on authorised sites had lived on another private residential site or the roadside before coming to their current site. Most in houses had either previously been in another house or on the roadside. Two-thirds of those on authorised sites who gave an answer said that their last address had been outside the Study Area. The main reasons for coming to the area included being near family, work and to get '*something different*'.
- Most of those on authorised sites saw coming to their current site as a matter of choice rather than lack of opportunity. This contrasts with views expressed by housed respondents where 59% said they had moved to their current home because of lack of opportunity rather than as a matter of choice. This was not, however, reflected in satisfaction levels which were high in housing.
- There is evidence of relatively limited movement between types of accommodation. Only 20% of respondents on authorised sites had ever lived in a house. 71% of housed Gypsies and Travellers had experience of living on a site.

17. Travelling Showpeople are distinguished by their occupation (or former occupation) and have a distinctive lifestyle and culture derived from travelling to provide fairs and amusements and associated services. Family businesses form important reinforcing bonds between extended family members. Most of those interviewed had been in the Study Area for at least 20 years and had strong local links. They had positive attitudes towards local health and

education services, and towards education for their children. Many noted that Travelling Showpeople regularly face prejudice and discrimination from members of the settled community.

Findings – Perceptions of Accommodation Needs and Aspirations

18. 9 out of 10 respondents on authorised sites and in housing thought that more permanent sites are needed in the Study Area where Gypsies and Travellers can stay as long as they want. They thought both local councils and Gypsies and Travellers should provide sites. There was no consensus on the size of site to be provided, ranging from 5-10 to 20 pitches and over. Many said all types and sizes of sites are needed *'everywhere'*. There was slightly less support for transit site provision in the Study Area, but the majority thought transit sites are needed and would be well used. Most favoured well-equipped transit sites with individual WCs and showers. Again, councils and Gypsies and Travellers should provide transit sites. The balance of opinion was towards on-site management of transit sites by a resident Gypsy or Traveller although some disagreed strongly.

19. All interviewees were asked whether there was anyone in their immediate family (for example a son or daughter) who is likely to want their own independent accommodation in the next 5 years. Overall, just 50% said that there was. The proportions were slightly higher among those living in housing. A total of 46 individuals were identified by respondents living on authorised sites as likely to want independent accommodation (equivalent to 48% of interviewees); 23 individuals were identified by housed respondents (equivalent to 79% of interviewees). Not everyone indicated what sort of accommodation these potential new households would want or where they would want to live, but where they did, most were said to want a trailer on some sort of site (91% on authorised sites and 69% in housing). Locations mentioned were mostly in the Study Area.

20. 23% of respondents on authorised sites wanted to move within 5 years, and many more were undecided. Reasons included feeling like a change and wanting something better. About a quarter of housed Gypsies and Travellers wanted to move in the next 5 years, especially to get a place on, or develop, a site. Overall, 41% of respondents in housing expressed interest in moving to a site in the Study Area, as did 30% of respondents on the roadside. Very few were on a site waiting list. Interest in moving to housing in the Study Area was more limited (7% on authorised sites and 15% on the roadside). Generally, the thought of moving to bricks and mortar was unattractive to respondents living in caravans, largely for cultural reasons.

21. When asked about their accommodation preferences, the majority of respondents favoured sites over bricks and mortar. The majority favoured private rather than social site provision. Perhaps not surprisingly, a Gypsy caravan site owned by their family was most attractive to the largest number of respondents. Just more than half of respondents who did not already own their pitch or site said that they would like to develop a site of their own.

However, only 16% said that they would be able to afford to buy land, and only 7% thought that they would get planning permission.

22. The most attractive stopping places while travelling were informal – staying with family or friends among respondents on authorised sites and in houses, and ‘green fields with space for children to play’ among those interviewed on the roadside. While the majority of respondents interested in travelling said that they would use transit sites were a network to be developed, these did not emerge as particularly attractive options as ‘ideals’.

23. A range of accommodation needs was revealed by interviews with Travelling Showpeople including displacement from unauthorised sites by enforcement action, overcrowding, inadequate site access and family growth. Interviewees in need wanted to remain in the Study Area and several were actively looking for land to develop as a site, but finding it extremely difficult to identify available and affordable land likely to be approved by planners. There were strong preferences for ownership.

Estimated Additional Pitch Requirements

24. ‘Models’ for assessing requirements for **additional residential pitches** have developed significantly over the past 2 to 3 years. The ‘model’ used here is an adaptation of the example provided in ODPM’s 2006 Draft Practice Guidance on *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments*. The ‘model’ for Years 1-5 (2006-2011) takes account of need arising from: net movement between sites and housing; unauthorised developments; unauthorised encampments; expiry of temporary planning permissions; and new household formation over the period. On the ‘supply’ side it takes account of: unused pitches being brought into use; new sites in the pipeline; and vacancies likely to be created over the period on socially rented sites. Estimates of requirement are made using baseline information, survey findings and realistic assumptions based on professional experience.

25. Additional residential pitch requirements are estimated for the period 2011-2016 on the basis of family growth only. This is assumed to be a 3% increase each year.

26. **Transit requirement** 2006-2011 are calculated on the basis of the average number of caravans to be accommodated (from Caravan Counts since 2001) and an allowance for vacancies equal to the required capacity. A generous vacancy rate is required for sites to function effectively and to allow periodic site cleaning and repair. No further provision is estimated to be required 2011-2016 on the assumption that the level of travelling will not increase.

27. Requirements for additional provision for **Travelling Showpeople** are estimated on the basis of survey findings of need for site re-location and family growth grossed to the Study Area.

28. The table below summarises estimated requirements. The split between local authorities is purely on the basis of ‘**need where it arises**’ and thus reflects the current uneven distribution of the Gypsy and Traveller population.

Summary of Site Requirements			
Authority	Residential pitches	Transit caravan capacity	Showpeople families
2006-2011			
Blaby	13	Up to 10	1
Charnwood	9	Up to 10	4
Harborough	19	Up to 10	24
Hinckley & Bosworth	26	Up to 10	2
Melton	6	Up to 10	-
North West Leicestershire	32	Up to 20	8
Oadby & Wigston	1	-	-
Leicester City	24	Up to 20	3
Rutland	2	Up to 10	3
Study Area	132	100	45
2011-2016			
Blaby	13	-	2
Charnwood	2	-	5
Harborough	11	-	5
Hinckley & Bosworth	16	-	1
Melton	2	-	-
North West Leicestershire	11	-	2
Oadby & Wigston	-	-	-
Leicester City	15	-	2
Rutland	1	-	3
Study Area	71	-	20

Recommendations on Site Provision

29. Recommendations on site provision include:

- New site provision should cater for the variety of needs and preferences which result from the diversity of the local Gypsy and Traveller population. This means variety of tenure, site size, location and design. A series of small sites seems more likely to meet both needs and preferences than a single large site.
- New site provision must meet need. This has implications for:
 - **tenure** – the proportion of social rented site pitches is relatively low in the Study Area. Despite preferences expressed for private provision, there will be a need for social provision for those unable to afford their own sites who prefer not to rent from

another Gypsy or Traveller. As a guide, 25% of new pitch provision should be socially rented. Existing sites should not be expanded.

- **disability/mobility** – the increasing number of older Gypsies and Travellers in the future means that consideration of mobility needs will be increasingly important in site design.
- New site provision should seek to meet Gypsy and Traveller preferences as well as needs so that sites will be fully used and deter future unauthorised development. This has implications for:
 - **location** – ‘edge of settlement’ locations seem especially favoured; transit sites need good access to the road network.
 - **tenure** – recognising the preference for private provision, and especially family-owned sites.
 - **pitch size** – preferences among both Gypsies and Travellers and Showpeople are for larger pitches to accommodate more and larger living units and for more flexible use, including the accommodation of visitors to reduce need for more formal transit provision.
- There are implications from the study for site delivery:
 - **access** – those in need must be able to access the pitches they need. Access is particularly hard to ensure on private sites offering rented pitches controlled by commercial Gypsies and Travellers who may exclude members of another ethnic group or family.
 - **affordability** – it is understood that approaches are being developed by Communities and Local Government to provide site ownership options to increase affordability. Study Area authorities should consider these options carefully.
- In relation to existing sites:
 - **site conditions** – some existing private sites have very poor amenity provision. Local authorities – as site licensing authorities – should start discussions with site owners about improvements which might be made while maintaining affordable supply.
 - **allocations on social rented sites** – existing social rented sites appear to function well and are generally popular with waiting lists which far exceed vacancies arising. A reason given by Gypsies and Travellers for not favouring social rented sites is the possibility of having very mixed neighbours. Authorities managing sites should explore how allocation processes can better identify those with compatible lifestyles while avoiding unlawful discrimination.
- The study revealed significant levels of perceived discrimination against both Gypsies and Travellers and Showpeople. Local authorities should act to fulfil their duties under race relations legislation to

promote race equality and good race relations. This is also important in social cohesion agendas.

Planning and Other Policies

30. Policies to be incorporated in Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) should apply five basic planning principles: sustainability, equity and choice, social inclusion, environmental protection, and the need for flexibility of provision. A series of detailed recommendations for LDF policies is given.

31. In terms of managing unauthorised encampments, the *Code of Practice for Travellers in Leicestershire, Leicester City and Rutland* and the working arrangements established between the signatories constitute good practice and appear to work well. We recommend retention of the Code of Practice. When transit sites have been provided, there should be a further review of approaches to enforcement, especially to consider, with the police, effective processes for using the enhanced powers of s62(a)-(e) of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

32. At present there are few policies related to Gypsies and Travellers in housing and homelessness strategies. Recommendations include the incorporation of categories for Gypsies and Travellers in ethnic monitoring systems, with subsequent monitoring and review of patterns of demand for, and access to, services. Council staff should be trained in knowledge and understanding of Gypsy and Traveller culture and the discrimination they experience. Sensitive allocations should take place wherever possible when housing Gypsies and Travellers, for example by offering corner plots. The housing support needs of Gypsies and Travellers should be considered and, if appropriate, assessed when tenancies are offered.

Housing-Related Support

33. The evidence gathered in the study on the support needs of Gypsies and Travellers indicates the need for assistance with accessing a wide range of services, tackling social exclusion and overcoming some of the effects of transience. More narrowly there is a need for housing-related support services (HRSS) as defined for the purposes of the Supporting People programme.

Conclusions are:

- Housing-related support needs can best be met on a floating basis, which could complement site-based support.
- In the City, beyond Meynells Gorse, the need which is most evident is amongst housed Travellers in social housing and hostels; in the County, beyond Aston Firs, the need is mostly amongst Travellers on private sites, both authorised and unauthorised.
- Those on private sites may be less likely to recognise or admit to housing-related support needs, suggesting that a service will need to be developed gradually and grow as it becomes known and trusted.
- Staff employed in statutory bodies who work with Gypsy and Traveller communities have a position of trust and any HRSS provided needs to

have strong links to these staff – the way in which this linkage might best be achieved should be a material consideration in deciding how HRSS should be configured.

- The training, knowledge and skills of staff known to, and trusted by, the Gypsy and Traveller community are critical, rather than the particular identity of the body which employs these personnel.
- Particular challenges arise when key personnel working with the Gypsy and Traveller community change, making it essential that planned succession strategies are in place.
- Development of a centre of expertise could bring together relevant services in different sectors and provide support to other services working with Gypsies and Travellers.
- Housing-related support should be available both in instances where the need is time-limited and where need appears to be continuing.
- The work of housing support workers, Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officers and other specialists needs to be co-ordinated in order to ensure that there is a continuity of support where this is required.
- Provision needs to be flexible to offer support when it is needed urgently, with scope to withdraw it on a phased basis or to continue its provision on a continuing basis as required.
- Housing-related support needs should be met where these needs arise. This could be achieved through joint commissioning across the GTAA study area, including the three SP authorities reviewing their plans and considering cross-boundary provision.