

Gypsy and Traveller housing issues

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Chapter 33. Gypsy and Traveller housing issues

33.1 Introduction

The challenge for the UK around Gypsy and Traveller housing includes:

- There are not enough sites nationally.
- 2004 Housing Act requires local authorities to identify need in line with ODPM Circular 1/06 which requires local authorities to identify sites.
- The regional spatial strategy (RSS) stipulates pitch numbers and distribution levels across the region. For more detail go to <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/preparingregionalspatial>
- Councils don't know if Gypsies and Travellers will pull on to land the local authority has selected although these groups will be consulted as policies are developed for Local Plans or Local Development Frameworks since Gypsies and Travellers have their own priorities and preferences for the distribution of sites.

33.2 Cambridgeshire Model

The *Cambridge Sub-Region Traveller Needs Assessment 2005-2010* was commissioned from Anglia Ruskin University and Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College by Cambridgeshire County Council for a consortium of public authorities, and reported in May 2006.

The Cambridgeshire and sub regional needs assessment provides figures up to 2010. Local Gypsy and Traveller community took part in the data collection and sampling. The team used local knowledge to shape delivery of national expectations and to inform the RSS.

33.3 Executive summary of the assessment

The project assessed service needs for Gypsies and Travellers in the Cambridge area. The area covered was the Cambridge sub-region, comprising Cambridge City, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Forest Heath (Suffolk), Huntingdonshire, St. Edmundsbury (Suffolk) and South Cambridgeshire, with the addition of Peterborough (unitary district) and King's Lynn & West Norfolk (Norfolk).

Cambridgeshire County Council commissioned the study on behalf of a consortium of these public authorities. It also provides an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers 'residing in or resorting to their district' (GTAA), as required under the Housing Act 2004 and following ODPM guidance (2006).

The main quantitative data sources were the findings of an interview survey of 313 Gypsies/Travellers within the study area (on sites of all types and in housing) undertaken in 2005, the official six-monthly counts of caravans since 1980, and local school rolls data.

The Gypsy/Traveller population of the study area (including those in housing) was estimated at 6500-7000, making them one of its largest ethnic minority groups. Survey respondents were asked to self-identify within six categories: English Gypsies/Romanies, Irish Travellers, new Traveller, Scottish Traveller-Gypsy, Showman and Other. Most English Gypsies in the study area were 'born and bred' within the region, and the survey found a quarter of the Gypsy/Traveller population to be Irish Travellers.

Accommodation assessment

Total caravan numbers in the study area have nearly doubled in 25 years (from about eight hundred to sixteen hundred), with an increase of two-thirds in the six years 1998-2004; this reflects both natural population increase and significant in-migration. Total numbers over that period have risen in five districts, and fallen in four. Two districts (South Cambridgeshire and Fenland) now have over 400 caravans, three (Peterborough, Kings Lynn & W. Norfolk and East Cambridgeshire) are in the range 100-200, and four (St Edmundsbury, Cambridge City, Huntingdonshire and Forest Heath) are below 100. The districts with the greatest increase in caravan numbers were South Cambridgeshire and Fenland (each doubling since 1997). Clustering in certain districts reflects both Gypsy/Traveller preferences, and local policy (e.g. planning policy and closure of sites). The counts record an average of 9% more caravans in July than January over 1980-2004, but that seasonal differential is declining.

Authorised accommodation is on council and private sites. In 1983 the study area had only four council sites, but by 2005 the number had risen to 15 (three other sites having closed). Three former transit sites have become mostly long-stay. Council site caravan numbers have fallen slightly since their peak of about 400 in the early 1990s. The number of private authorised caravans, overwhelmingly on owner-occupied sites, has grown, both nationally (from 14% to 25% of counted caravans in 25 years), and within the study area (from about 100 in 1980 to about 600 now).

Unauthorised caravan numbers have fluctuated, declining in the 1990s but rising sharply since about the year 2000. They are scattered in mostly rural locations, some on small, single-family sites, but increasingly in recent years have tended to concentrate on a few larger, high-profile sites, often next to authorised sites. They cause tensions and receive much negative publicity, but absolute numbers are small when compared, for example, with housing supply forecasts for the general population.

Data-sources are limited on numbers of Gypsy/Travellers in 'bricks-and-mortar' housing (whether private or council/social), or on movement into (and out of) housing. There are, however, potential 'best value' benefits if someone preferring to live in a caravan can move there from public housing: the development costs of a council caravan pitch are half that of a council house.

The survey interviews confirmed that there is a pressing need for more sites of all kinds (public and private, long-stay and transit). Gypsies/Travellers would prefer small, self-owned long-stay sites for family groups, preferably on the edge of a village, and near established Gypsy/Traveller communities.

Applying the ODPM (2006) preferred methodology, Gypsy/Traveller accommodation need in the nine districts of the study area is estimated as follows (in pitches, ranked and rounded). Taking into account existing authorised provision, the variables which together identify the need for more provision are:

- unauthorised demand
- over-crowding
- net transfer into and out of housing
- natural increase (household formation).

Using Table 1 it is desirable, therefore, to plan for a range of 405-535 additional pitches over the next five years, concentrating upon sites for long-stay accommodation first rather than transit sites or emergency stopping places, neither of which are Gypsy/Travellers

preference. Self-help provision should be promoted during the inevitably slow transition to further public site provision.

Table 1: District Gypsy/Traveller accommodation need for pitches 2005-2010 (ranked and rounded)

District	Need for pitches 2005-2010
Cambridge City	15
East Cambridgeshire	25-45
Fenland	160-205
Forest Heath	15-20
Huntingdonshire	15-25
Kings Lynn & West Norfolk	45-60
Peterborough	10-15
South Cambridgeshire	110-130
St Edmundsbury	10-20
Total	405-535

Although not part of the statutory assessment of needs, the authors of the report recommended various allied activities, including:

- Initiating a programme of site provision, which should include:
 - Investigate suitable land in council ownership to contribute, either for transit sites or for sale as private sites.
 - Identify and encourage suitable social housing providers to prepare for future bids under the Regional Housing Strategy, in consultation with Gypsy representatives.
 - Monitor and review planning policy and planning decisions on private Gypsy sites, with a view to increasing the supply of private authorised accommodation.

A sub-regional or county-level group should be created, bringing elected members, officers and Gypsy / Traveller representatives together on a regular basis to agree future provision strategies, focussing particularly upon reducing the shortfall of authorised accommodation, agreeing a mix of sites between districts and between public and private, and improving relations between the Gypsy / Traveller and settled communities.

The findings will also be used to:

- Inform the single issue review of the RSS and the subsequent allocation of pitch requirements to local authorities.
- Inform the development of Local Development Frameworks, particularly the identification of suitable site locations.
- Inform individual planning applications.

Other issues

The survey established that types of work have changed in recent years, with a decline in traditional farm work, and increased competition from cheaper immigrant labour, contributing to severe economic disadvantage and social exclusion. Family networks and informal reciprocal arrangements are important for encouraging and sustaining economic activity, and seasonal social security benefits are important income sources, especially for those on council sites. Since this survey, further research has shown family networks to be influential in accommodation arrangements and preferences. This is the case for both movement on to privately developed sites on purchased land, and for movement between Local Authority sites (see paragraph 35.4 New Provision Planning).

The survey confirmed a high incidence of serious health problems (especially children's special educational and care needs) and educational disadvantage. Other problems included high levels of racism from neighbours, feelings of isolation and loss of identity, and drug abuse on estates.

Other recommendations are to:

- Provide Gypsies/Travellers with better advice on local services available to them.
- Improve training for public authority staff on Gypsy/Traveller needs and cultural factors.
- Promote understanding of Gypsy culture through libraries, museums and material for schools.
- Achieve greater involvement of the Gypsy/Traveller community in future service and accommodation assessments.

33.4 New provision planning

Following the needs assessment, further work has been undertaken to refine existing criteria used to assess suitability of sites. The aim is for the criteria to better reflect, and work in with, the practical issues which local Cambridgeshire Gypsy Travellers are likely to face when taking up any new provision. The project will use this new, locally relevant criteria to undertake a thorough, robust, inclusive (while objective) assessment of land availability across the sub-region to meet the needs identified. This has been progressed by the County Council's Traveller Liaison Team.

The Assessment (May 2006) was the largest in the UK, and identifies that:

- The County has the largest number of Travellers in the UK.
- This community represents the county's largest ethnic minority.
- New provision across the County is a sensitive issue and requires close and sensitive development with District partners.

The assessment has been cited in CLG guidelines for Best Practice. CCC offers training to support Government Offices in designing assessments for effective provision planning.

Cambridgeshire is now at the stage of collating provision planning to truly reflect local need to make change as effective and as comfortable as possible in accordance with the Single Issue Review of the RSS for Gypsy & Travellers, due to be completed by 2009.

Local Development Plan Documents will determine the criteria to be used within each district, and work is ongoing to inform this process in the light of the above.

33.5 Single issue review of RSS for Gypsy & Travellers

Planning Circular 01/06 (ODPM) "Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites" requires Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) to identify the number of pitches required for each local planning authority (but not the locations). The Single Issue Review of the RSS will identify the specific number of new pitches required for each district. The Options Consultation carried out in May 2007 identified 3 different scenarios for allocating pitch provision to 2011. There were

- Option 1 – Distribution based solely on where need arises.
- Option 2 – Distribution based on option 1 amended to increase the minimum level of pitch provision within each local council area to 15 pitches.
- Option 3 – Distribution based on option 2 further amended so that the four local council areas with the greatest level of need is spread to adjoining council areas so that no council area is required to provide for more than 60 pitches.

Under these different draft options, the number of new pitches required to be identified for the period to 2011 are:

Table 2: The number of new pitches required to be identified for the period to 2011

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Cambridge	15	15	15
East Cambridgeshire	35	35	54
Fenland	180	108	60
Huntingdonshire	20	20	39
South Cambridgeshire	120	72	60
Total	370	250	228
% of regional total	30%	20%	19%

Source: Single Issue Review of the RSS

33.6 Responses to the review

The five district councils within Cambridgeshire are at different stages within the Local Development Framework process for allocating specific sites that will need to be identified to meet the relevant pitch provision required by the Single Issue Review of the RSS. To summarise:

- South Cambridgeshire District Council has issued their Gypsies and Travellers Development Plan Document for consultation. This does not, as yet, identify specific sites but invites suggestions. Consultation on potential sites will begin in 2008. In the interim, temporary planning permissions have been granted for nine sites.
- ECDC published an Issues and Options Paper for consultation in 2006, looking at site selection criteria and seeking suggestions of potential gypsy sites. From this the Council has developed an 'LDF Sites Assessment Methodology' but only received one potential site suggestion. As part of this process ECDC approached the County Council and other major landowners. East Cambridgeshire's Sub-district Gypsy Needs Assessment was also carried out in 2007, to ascertain how the estimated CCC/RSS pitch numbers could best be distributed.
- Huntingdonshire District Council has approached CCC informally to work together to produce an evidence base for their plans.

- Fenland have progressed so far as to already investigate 3 specific potential locations for sites and are considering these before inviting further suggestions.
- Cambridge City has looked at a number of sites, but has been unable to identify any suitable location to date. The City has a cross-party elected member steering group progressing site identification, and has signed up to the Cambridgeshire Horizons project.
- All Districts will need to approach the County Council about the County's land holdings in their area.

Districts have demonstrated different local priorities for different elements of the planning criteria submitted to EERA. Local knowledge of Gypsy Traveller families' own preferences and priorities for selection criteria for new provision have shown discrepancies between what a district may look for and what Traveller families may need or prefer. This discrepancy is likely to be a national one.

The County, in partnership with ECDC and Cambridgeshire Horizons, has the capacity to address these issues with Districts in planning for new provision and will aim to offer a Local Government model for making the process successful and repeatable across the UK, and so has appointed consultants to facilitate the process.

33.7 The Provision Horizons project

The aims of the Provision Horizons Planning project include establishing:

- A knowledge base of local (initially County) land holdings for potential consideration by Districts in the preparation of their LDF documents, in particular the identification of new pitches to meet the requirements of the Single Issue Review of the RSS.
- A workable set of planning and selection criteria that accords with national planning policy and guidance, has been subject to discussion with district planners and compliments the needs and priorities of the local Traveller population looking for land or pitches.
- A robust mechanism to apply this knowledge base to wider land searches (to be offered to 'roll out' to other Districts).

The Model

- The generation of a county-based (in this case Cambridgeshire) land selection criteria which involves direct consultation with Travellers and planning and liaison officers to further infuse the criteria with more 'local' meaning through the LDF process.
- A sample surveying technique for consulting with Travellers on land selection.
- A case study in ECDC of how to widen land search beyond Local Authority or major public land (based on their sub district survey work and Site Assessment Methodology).

The Land Search

- A map/list of Cambridgeshire depicting CCC land in all Districts which may be suitable for new provision according to County-specific criteria.
- County Council land with other development prospects will be excluded from the search area.

- A wider map/ list of ECDC depicting other public and private landholdings may be suitable for new provision according to County-specific criteria.

Project Outline

Stage 1

- Establish a Cambridgeshire Selection Criteria for New Traveller Provision.
- Use EERA 4.4 Response 2006, consult with CCC Strategic Planning.
- Consult with local authorities with the support of CCC: Traveller Liaison; County & District Planners and Traveller families who have approached local authorities.
- Work with ECDC Traveller Consultation on selecting land.

Stage 2

- Apply Cambridgeshire Criteria to CCC Land Search in all Local authorities.
- Work with CCC Property & Asset Managers and Press/ PR departments with partners.

Stage 3

- Apply Cambridgeshire Criteria to further public / private land in ECDC.
- Liaise with ECDC Property officers to define parameters and widen search to other local landowners.

Stage 4

- Evaluation.
- Collate feedback from all partners, especially ECDC.
- Consult with ECDC, other local authorities and the DCLG on likely demand for model from other local authorities.

Stage 5

- Present New Provision Model for wider roll out.
- Cost out realistically for local authorities & forecast appropriate timescales.
- Consult with others to market roll-out model.

33.8 Conclusions and issues

The Provision Horizons project is well on its way to redefining land search in Cambridgeshire - now, and for future generations of both planners and Gypsy / Travellers themselves. Research data already suggests that slight alterations to some existing district-specific criteria could open up more local land options for families in Cambridgeshire who are actively seeking new land.

The project has also had a very positive indirect impact on Cambridgeshire's progress to improving provision planning: local Gypsy Travellers and planners are gaining more ground-level practical understanding of the challenges that both Local Authorities and individual families face. This research has the potential to leave a strong legacy of confidence in the delivery of new provision, both here and in the wider region.