

Suffolk Cross-Boundary Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment



Executive Summary

By

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The study

1. 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.
2. This assessment was commissioned by five authorities in Suffolk County (*Mid Suffolk District Council, Babergh District Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council, Waveney District Council and Ipswich Borough Council*) in June 2006. The study was conducted by a team of researchers from the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit at the University of Salford with research support from members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities. The study was managed by a steering group composed of officers from the commissioning authorities.
3. The assessment was undertaken by conducting:
 - A review of available literature, data and secondary sources;
 - A detailed questionnaire completed by housing and planning officers;
 - Four focus groups with 23 key stakeholders;
 - An open-ended pro-forma completed by 32 Parish Councils; and
 - A total of 128 interviews with Gypsy and Traveller households from a range of tenures; reflecting around 63% of the 'known' local Gypsy and Traveller population.

Background

4. 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 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 East of England Regional Assembly (EERA), for inclusion into the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), in this case the East of England Plan. The RSS then specifies pitch numbers required (but not their location) for each local planning

authority (LPA) in light of the GTAA's conducted and a strategic view of need, supply and demand across the region is taken. The local planning authority's Development Planning Document (DPD) 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 41 pitches on one residential site managed by Ipswich Borough Council; 91 pitches on 15 private authorised sites; 1 unauthorised development containing approximately 19 pitches; a minimum of 29 families on unauthorised encampments; and at least 23 households in bricks and mortar housing. In all there was a minimum of 203 Gypsy/Traveller families on sites, houses or encamped at the time of the survey.

Table i: Current authorised Gypsy and Traveller site provision (public and private) by local authority area

Local Authority	Council owned/managed sites (nos. of pitches)	Authorised Private sites
Babergh	0	0
Ipswich	1 site (41)	1 site (2)
Mid Suffolk	0	13 sites (69 pitches)
Suffolk Coastal	0	0
Waveney	0	1 site (20)
Total	1 site (41)	15 sites (91)

- In total there are approximately 91 pitches provided between these sites with 72 pitches currently occupied.
- The average household size was 2.9 persons, significantly larger than the average in the settled community.
- 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 nearly a third of people reporting some form of disability or long-term illness. When affected by poor health or disability the Gypsies and Travellers in this study appeared to experience multiple incidences.
- Almost all of the respondents thought that education is important for their children. However, only just under half of the respondents reported that their children had regular attendance at school. Irregular attendance was particularly acute for those families living in bricks and mortar accommodation and private authorised sites.

- The Gypsies and Travellers consulted, reported being involved in a wide range of jobs. Self-employment was a key feature here with building, groundwork, dealing, hawking, roofing and gardening frequently mentioned. A small number of respondents worked in non-traditional Gypsy/Traveller trades including healthcare, hairdressing and catering. As a result of aspirations for further/higher education there may be a greater tendency, over coming years, for Gypsy and Traveller children to enter more non-Traveller trades more similar to those of the settled community. However, largely because of the influence of family roles and responsibilities, traditional Gypsy and Traveller trades will remain an integral part of the community.
- Nearly half of those interviewed considered Suffolk, or areas within Suffolk, as their 'home'. Approximately a third of the sample had travelled in some way over the previous 12 month period. There was no seasonal consistency in the travelling patterns of those that had travelled in the last 12 months.

Gypsy and Traveller perspectives on accommodation

- The vast majority of those interviewed thought that their site/accommodation was either OK, good or very good. Only 1 in 10 described their accommodation as poor or very poor. All of those we spoke to in bricks and mortar accommodation described their accommodation as OK, good or very good, no one described their accommodation 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 supply climate. Bricks and mortar housing, in particular bungalows for older people, was seen as attractive to a number of respondents. However, at the same time, a poor perception of the council and relationship with the local authority meant that social housing was seen by many as a poor option for them.
- Around a third of people in bricks and mortar accommodation expected to live in their current accommodation indefinitely, with the same amount of people expecting to return, at some point in the next 5 years, to site accommodation. The remainder were unsure about their plans for the future.

- By far the most preferred form of accommodation was a private site owned by either themselves or their family, followed by the maintenance of a travelling way of life where people move from site to site after a set period of time. Although living in bricks and mortar was seen as a poor option for most Gypsies and Travellers, owner-occupier status was preferable to local authority or RSL 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 55 encampments from August 2005-August 2006. The top two authorities which experience the highest levels of encampments were Mid Suffolk and Suffolk Coastal. Encampments tend to vary in size substantially from 2 to 55 caravans.
- A quarter of the households we spoke to on unauthorised encampments were actively looking for somewhere more stable and secure to live across the Study Area. Two-thirds were not looking to stay in the area. A number of households, who were on unauthorised encampments during the survey, wished to retain a travelling lifestyle across the Suffolk Study Area boundaries rather than live on a more residential site.
- According to the local authority officers, there appears to be a clear relationship between land ownership and duration of encampment. Encampments remained on private land longer than they did on public land.
- Gypsies and Travellers on unauthorised encampments were generally ambivalent to the area in which they were currently encamped; with only a small number describing the area of encampment in negative terms.
- There was diversity in responses on living conditions, with a number of households talking in very positive terms about their facilities, many of which they had made provision for themselves.
- According to the survey of local authorities there was 1 unauthorised development (Mid Suffolk) at the time of the assessment comprising of approximately 19 pitches. Respondents on the unauthorised development desired to stay on the site and, reportedly, had either neutral or positive relationships with the wider non-Traveller community in the area.

Accommodation need and supply

5. Nationally, there are no signs that the growth in the Gypsy and Traveller population will slow significantly. Even though 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.).

6. Given present trends, Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need and local policies, the supply of appropriate accommodation appears to be significantly less than the need identified. It is the conclusion of the project team that this suggests a requirement for more accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers across the Suffolk Study Area. This need can be broken down by each district on a need where it is seen to arise basis as follows:

Table ii: Residential and transit accommodation need arising from existing district level Gypsy and Traveller populations 2006-2011

Authority	Total residential need in pitches (1)	Supply of pitches (turnover) (2)	Total residential need (3) = (1) – (2)	Estimated transit pitch need (+/- 2) (4)	Total pitch need (3) + (4)
Babergh	1	Nil	1	10	11
Ipswich	26 – 28	25	1-3	10	11-13
Mid-Suffolk	41 - 43	Information not available	41-43	10	51-53
Suffolk Coastal	30-32	Nil	30-32	10	40-42
Waveney	1	Information not available	1	10	11
Total	99-105	25	74-80	50	124-130

Note: The overall assessed need for the Study Area was calculated as 98 – 103 and 73-78 residential pitches (see page 103 of the full report) and differs by 1-2 units because of rounding numbers up during the calculation for individual authorities.

7. Table iii provides the distribution of extra pitch provision as identified by the assessment across the Suffolk Study Area for the period 2011-2016.

Table iii: Residential accommodation need arising from existing district level Gypsy and Traveller populations 2011-2016

Authority	Total residential need in pitches (1)	Supply of pitches (turnover) (2) ¹	Total residential need (3) = (1) – (2)
Babergh	Nil	Information not available	Nil
Ipswich	11	Information not available	11
Mid-Suffolk	14-15	Information not available	14-15
Suffolk Coastal	5	Information not available	5
Waveney	3	Information not available	3

Recommendations and key issues

8. 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.

9. In order to achieve this, this assessment has provided a wide range of recommendations, at a regional/county, general and local level, for the authorities to consider. An overview of these recommendations is given below:

Recommendations relating to communication, dialogue and engagement include:

- Gypsies and Travellers should be fully involved and informed about accommodation changes and development occurring across the Study Area over the coming years;
- members of the 'settled community' need to be involved and included in any process of change and opportunities should be taken to raise awareness of some of the issues and dispel some of the myths about Gypsies and Travellers; and
- there is a need for effective communication and dialogue across districts and Counties to assist the development of joined-up and sustainable options for accommodation provision.

Recommendations relating to accommodating transient Gypsies and Travellers include:

- authorities should ensure that there is a variety in transit provision in order to cater for the variety of needs. This might range from formal transit sites, through to less-equipped stopping places used on a regular basis, as well as temporary sites with temporary facilities available during an event or for part of the year;

¹ As a result of the potential changing pattern of provision over the 2006-2011 period, estimating the potential supply of pitches (based on pitch turnover) beyond this point (2011 onwards) is likely to present an inaccurate (under/over) assessment.

- 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; and
- the authorities should develop 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.

Recommendations relating to developing accommodation include:

- a need for those involved in site design (both residential and transit) and bricks and mortar design to approach this in a creative and innovative manner. Site developers should take a range of issues into consideration;
 - Location to local services and transport networks.
 - Pitch size.
 - Amenities.
 - Sheds.
 - Management.
 - Mixture of accommodation (chalet, trailer etc.).
 - Utility of outside space (driveways, gardens etc.).
 - Homes for life principles.
 - Mobility and health issues.
 - Health and safety
 - Tenure mix
- Gypsies and Travellers should be involved in all stages of the design and development of accommodation;
- appropriate options need to be developed depending on the background of the Gypsy and Traveller population; for example, taking into account different ways of living between the different Gypsy and Traveller groups; and
- the development of permanent residential accommodation is a priority. Until this shortfall is addressed, it may be difficult to develop transit accommodation without them turning into permanent sites by default.

Recommendations relating to strategies, policies and systems include:

- authorities should develop a standardised and centralised method of recording the number of unauthorised encampments and the needs of those households;

- authorities should formalise and standardise site waiting lists in order to be able to see fluctuations in need/demand and deal equitably with future demand. There also needs to be transparent allocation policies in order to avoid the perception of bias with regards to allocating a vacant pitch;
- authorities should ensure that Gypsies and Travellers are recognised in all of their ethnic monitoring forms;
- the tenure accommodation aspirations of Gypsies and Travellers need to be understood and policies and practices should be developed to work with this;
- all racial harassment policies should explicitly recognise the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and all policies need to ensure they comply with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000; and
- authorities should ensure that their bricks and mortar allocation policies do not unwittingly discriminate against Gypsies and Travellers wishing to access this form of accommodation.

Recommendations relating to housing-related service issues include:

- it is important each authority takes account of the strong family links that Gypsy and Traveller households have when developing accommodation in the future. A degree of detachment and familial isolation may occur if families are, in effect, forcibly dispersed; this may be particularly acute for vulnerable sections of the communities such as older people, people with disabilities and those with ill-health;
- care needs to be taken to ensure sites are accessible to transport links and local services. This does not mean they have to be in towns or at the side of major roads, but thought must be given to ensuring that Gypsy and Traveller residents are able to access local services and communities. The provision of accessible public transport might assist this; and
- Supporting People teams will need to be embedded into the strategic planning and delivery of services.