



Cornwall Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive summary

Context of the Study

1. In November 2005 Fordham Research was commissioned to carry out an assessment of Gypsies and Travellers' accommodation needs in Cornwall. The study was commissioned by Cornwall County Council on behalf of all the local authorities in Cornwall. It was designed to assess the level of accommodation provision for Gypsies and Travellers in the County, estimate the extent of accommodation need and also make recommendations for extending assistance. This is in the context of the Housing Act 2004 which requires local authorities to include Gypsies and Travellers in their local housing needs assessments.
2. Beyond assessing current provision and potential need, the study also aims to give the Council a wider understanding of issues facing Gypsies and Travellers living on sites and in bricks and mortar accommodation, and examine the strategic implications of the research findings.
3. To achieve these aims the study drew on a number of data sources including:
 - **Review of secondary information**, including government policy and regional housing strategies
 - **Stakeholder consultation** with local and national organisations involved with Gypsy and Traveller affairs
 - **Survey of Gypsies and Travellers** living on sites and in bricks and mortar accommodation to examine their accommodation needs

Review of secondary information

4. It is recognised that nationally there are insufficient numbers of pitches on authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites to accommodate all those who would like a permanent place to stop. As well as the Housing Act 2004, local authorities also need to have regard of their statutory duties, including those in respect of homelessness under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 and to their obligations under the Race Relations (Amendments) Act 2000. However the effectiveness of existing legislation has been limited by the extent of its requirements and a general failure to implement it. As a result local authorities have often failed to deliver adequate sites for Gypsies and Travellers.

5. Regionally and nationally the number of Gypsies and Travellers has been growing. In Cornwall there has been an increase of 13% in caravan numbers between 2003 and 2005, largely on unauthorised sites. The County has a lower proportion of private sites than elsewhere in the South West and the rest of England, and a higher proportion of unauthorised encampments. In comparison with other counties in the South West, Cornwall has a relatively small Gypsy and Traveller population.

Stakeholder consultation

6. The shortage of authorised sites – both residential and transit – in Cornwall was highlighted by stakeholders, as was the lack of planning policy to bring forward new sites. Facilities on the local authority sites were criticised. As a consequence of authorised site shortages and traditional stopping places being barricaded off, some Gypsies and Travellers have bought their own plots of land but have failed to secure planning permission. This has exacerbated tensions with the settled community, as often the land is in open countryside or green field land.
7. There have been recent improvements in the provision of healthcare, education and social care services for Gypsies and Travellers, however access remains a significant problem. Some stakeholders felt that at present services are not sufficiently flexible for Gypsies and Travellers, and that more dedicated outreach positions are required.

Site survey

8. A team of Gypsy and Traveller interviewers were used to carry out a survey in Cornwall. 262 interviews were conducted with Gypsies and Travellers living on all site types and in bricks and mortar accommodation.
9. The survey found that all three local authority sites in Cornwall were fully occupied and that Boscarn Parc in particular suffered from overcrowding. Gypsies and Travellers living on their own land with planning permission were the most likely to be satisfied with their accommodation and to have homes in better condition. Almost a third of respondents lived on unauthorised sites, either due to a shortage of residential or transit pitches. Concerns were raised over the security, environmental health and the condition of their home. Respondents in bricks and mortar accommodation benefited from greater security and access to support services, but some found it isolating and would prefer a move back to a site.

10. The survey found a lack of awareness over official matters and confusion over sites' legal status. There was a widespread impression that many facilities and services are either not relevant or appropriate to Gypsies and Travellers, or are openly hostile to them (council planning departments in particular were viewed this way).
11. GP registration was very high for respondents living in permanent accommodation, but was significantly lower for those on temporary sites. There was a low use of support services, with the majority of respondents with health issues relying on extended family and friends for help. Dentist registration was very low, although this may be more due to a general shortage of NHS dentists in Cornwall. Health visits to sites were welcomed and having more was suggested, as was holding drop-in sessions at practices, avoiding the difficulties in making and keeping appointments. While almost all children of primary school age attend school, there was a significant drop-off at secondary level.
12. Many respondents felt that traditional patterns of work were threatened due to competition for jobs from economic migrants. Accessing employment was harder for Gypsies and Travellers who do not have authorised accommodation – whether transit or residential.
13. Half of respondents had travelled in the past year. Employment was given as the main reason for travelling, followed by cultural traditions and visiting friends or family. The vast majority stayed on an unauthorised site when travelling, and the lack of transit sites was given as the main reason for stopping travelling.
14. Respondents said there was a need for transit provision and smaller, family-sized residential sites. The majority would also like help with the process of buying a suitable site and securing planning permission. A major concern was that there was not enough provision for newly forming families wanting to live in the same area. While the vast majority of respondents would like to continue living in the same district, few respondents are currently living on their preferred site type, with an overriding preference for living on their own land with planning permission.

Accommodation need

15. Accommodation need assessments were carried out for each of the districts in Cornwall in line with DCLG draft practice guidance. The following table summarises the assessments and shows that the total extra residential pitch provision required in Cornwall by 2011 is 147 pitches. In addition it is estimated that there is a need for up to 45 transit pitches.

Cornwall assessment of need for residential site pitches: 2006 – 2011	
Occupied local authority residential site pitches	64
Occupied authorised privately owned site pitches	30
1. Total number of families	94
Unused local authority pitches & vacancies on private pitches	0
Existing pitches expected to become vacant	0
Number of families on sites wishing to live in housing	12
New local authority pitches planned in year 1	10
Existing applications for private sites likely to gain permission in year 1	10
2. Total pitch provision available	126
Families seeking permanent site accommodation	3
Families on unauthorised encampments	42
Families on unauthorised developments without permission	76
Currently overcrowded	27
New family formations from elsewhere	0
New family formations from existing families in area	4
In housing but wishing to move to site accommodation	6
3. Total additional demand	158
Current shortfall (= 94 + 158 - 126)	126
Family formation 2006 – 2011	21
Total extra pitch need 2006 – 2011	147

Recommendations

16. Based on the research findings, we make a series of recommendations for local authorities in Cornwall to consider.
 - **Site provision**
17. One social rented residential site should be provided in Penwith (where currently none exists). Caradon should provide an additional residential site with two more in Carrick, Kerrier and Restormel. It is recommended that Restormel take steps to regulate the Minorca Lane site. Alternatively it should provide a further three residential sites to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers living there.
18. Future residential sites should be of between eight and ten pitches, with each pitch having space for three caravans and parking for commercial vehicles. The precise location, design and facilities of the new site should be drawn up in consultation with Gypsies and Travellers to ensure the extra provision meets their needs. The settled community neighbouring the sites should also be involved in the consultation from an early stage.

19. The local authorities in Cornwall should urgently identify suitable land for Gypsies and Travellers to buy, allowing them to establish small sites owned by the occupiers. Assistance with the planning process should be proactively offered from an early stage, with specific sites available to buy outlined in future planning documents. A model planning policy should be introduced to ensure a standard approach across the County is used to assess the suitability of planning applications.
20. Given the immediate shortage of pitches, councils should work with the owners of mobile home or caravan parks and farming land where Gypsies and Travellers live to help secure their accommodation and negotiate an affordable rent.
21. A network of up to 45 transit pitches on eight dedicated sites should be provided throughout Cornwall.
22. Cornwall County Council and the district councils should develop a Gypsy and Traveller Strategy aimed at addressing the communities' needs and promoting joint-working practices. District councils should address Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need and particularly the requirement for new sites through their Local Development Framework processes.

- **Facilities, access and service provision**

23. The Wheal Jewel site should be refurbished to improve the provision of basic facilities, including the utility blocks and providing hardstanding for caravans on all pitches.
24. The possibility of providing children's play areas on the local authority sites should be explored, either on site or easily and safely accessible from the sites.
25. To improve access to health services among Gypsies and Travellers on temporary sites, we recommend that a 'Passport to Health' scheme is made available in Cornwall.
26. Current funding arrangements for health, education and social care provision for Gypsies and Travellers should be sustained to ensure current progress and positive outcomes are not lost. The number of dedicated outreach positions should be increased.
27. Efforts should be made to foster longer term engagement with Gypsy and Traveller communities and build on the links established in the course of this research. A possible method would be through establishing Gypsy and Traveller consultation forums.

- **Recording and monitoring processes**

28. Cornwall local authorities should draw up a common set of guidelines for undertaking the Caravan Count and so establish consistent practices. Councils should consider employing Gypsies and Travellers to assist with the surveying.
29. The accommodation needs of Cornwall's Gypsy and Traveller communities should be reviewed every three to five years, to take into account the relatively young age at which new families form in Gypsy and Traveller communities, and the preference of many young families to live on their own pitch on the same site as their wider family.
30. All district councils should consider identifying a position to take or coordinate responsibility for monitoring Gypsy and Traveller sites. Mechanisms should be put into place for other council departments to contribute to this.

Conclusions

31. Between eight and eleven more residential sites are needed in the County. However they should be smaller and less obtrusive than the provision currently available. A network of transit sites is also required which would help reduce the occurrence of unauthorised encampments. The provision of authorised sites can also be increased by councils actively encouraging Gypsies and Travellers to set up their own private sites with planning permission. District councils should identify suitable land to buy in their Development Plan Documents.

Positive developments have been made in providing health, education and social care services for Gypsies and Travellers in Cornwall. Funding and staffing commitments would help these agencies continue and enhance their current approaches. Finally, the involvement of Gypsies and Travellers in the research gives the Cornwall local authorities an opportunity to foster long-term engagement with the communities.