



## Irish Traveller Movement in Britain

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### Gypsy and Traveller Site Funding under the Coalition



### An Irish Traveller Movement in Britain Report

March 2012

**About ITMB:** The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB) was established in 1999 and is a leading national policy and voice charity, working to raise the capacity and social inclusion of the Traveller communities in Britain. ITMB act as a bridge builder bringing the Traveller communities, service providers and policy makers together, stimulating debate and promoting forward-looking strategies to promote increased race equality, civic engagement, inclusion, service provision and community cohesion. For further information about ITMB visit [www.irishtraveller.org.uk](http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk)

## Executive Summary

- There is a mismatch between need and where the money has gone. Parts of the Midlands, South West, Yorkshire and the North East have done reasonably well, but many areas have been unwilling to submit bids. Essex, Kent, Cambridgeshire, Surrey, and Hertfordshire with 25% of England's caravans have only received 4% of the funding.
- If account is taken of transit sites, replacements for existing sites and a Travelling Showman scheme, the programme will fund 510 additional pitches, not 620.
- It is likely many of the 510 won't be delivered because of the difficulty in getting planning permission. Sites haven't been identified for over half the new pitches and less than 20% have planning permission.
- The level of applications for funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) for new and improved Gypsy and Traveller pitches has been poor, and partly explains the cost of schemes: £62,900 per additional pitch, £49,400 per improved pitch.
- The accommodation crisis and tensions over Travellers being forced to occupy unauthorised sites means we need to make better use of the funds. We propose allowing bids where there is unmet need and the council has failed to allocate sites, a major focus on schemes from Travellers, and challenging lack of progress in high need, high conflict areas.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 In January 2012 the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) announced the successful bidders for funds for new and improved Gypsy and Traveller pitches. With £60m available for the 2011 – 2015 period, they announced grants of £47m: £38.8m for 620 additional; and £8.2m for 170 improved pitches.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.2 Lord Eric Avebury approached the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITMB) to look at the effectiveness of the programme. He was concerned that it might not deliver on the claims made for it, because for many schemes sites had not been identified and planning permission not obtained.
- 1.3 Ministers see the HCA's programme as central to addressing Travellers' needs.<sup>2</sup> They claim it will provide sites in ways that work for local areas, and contrast it with what they describe as the failed system under the previous Government where Whitehall tried to dictate where sites should go. In his 27 February letter, responding to Council of Europe Commissioner, Thomas Hammarberg's criticisms of the impacts of Government policies on Travellers' Human Rights, Eric Pickles again emphasised the central importance of the HCA programme to solving the Traveller accommodation crisis:

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<sup>1</sup> HCA, 5 January 2012, *HCA announces Traveller Pitch Funding allocations to 2015*  
<http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/news/traveller-pitch-funding-allocations-2015>

<sup>2</sup> DCLG, 7 January 2012, *Stunell: New site funding offers fairer deal for travellers and the settled community*  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/housing/2061166>

*'Rather than imposing top-down targets which fuelled opposition to development, we are offering councils real incentives to develop additional traveller sites in their area. We are providing £60 million in England up until 2015 to help local authorities and other registered providers provide new and refurbished traveller sites in consultation with local communities. Successful bids totalling £47 million were announced on 5<sup>th</sup> January, which will help provide over 750 new and refurbished pitches for travellers, and will, in turn, help to reduce the number of unauthorised sites, which create tensions between travellers and the settled community.'*<sup>3</sup>

- 1.4 This report investigates whether the Secretary of State's planned '750 new and refurbished pitches' will be built. It concentrates on the projects for additional, rather than improved pitches. Although the modernisation and improvement of older sites is important, the crucial challenge is to get more pitches developed to address the national shortfall.

## **2. Approach to the Study**

- 2.1 The findings in this report are based on information obtained through phone interviews with officials (using the questionnaire at Appendix 1 as a starting point) and information on local authority and housing association websites. We spoke to 13 local authorities and 8 housing providers who had received HCA funding for Traveller developments. We also spoke to a number of HCA officials, supplemented by information from planning consultants and others.

## **3. Findings**

### **The level of applications**

- 3.1 The level of applications has been poor relative to the funding available. Many areas have been unwilling to submit bids. It is quite exceptional for funds managed by the HCA to be undersubscribed. The Agency approved nearly all of the bids they received, and only rejected four on the basis that they represented very poor value for money, yet because of the low level of applications, have only been able to award grants for £47m, leaving £13m unallocated.

### **Value for money**

- 3.2 There is a link between the low level of bids, and the cost of the schemes: £62,900 per additional pitch; £49,400 per improved pitch. If, like other invitations to bid for funding, the sites programme was heavily over-subscribed, the HCA would have been able to go for those which were more cost effective, driven down costs, and got more pitches delivered for the available funding.

### **Where the money has gone**

- 3.3 There is a striking mismatch between need and where the money has gone. Parts of the Midlands, South West, Yorkshire and the North East have done reasonably well, but there have been few applications from London, the East and South East, and

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<sup>3</sup> Council of Europe, 1 March 2012

<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2041195&SecMode=1&DocId=1863410&Usage=2>

from much of the North West. Essex, Kent, Cambridgeshire, Surrey, and Hertfordshire are the five counties with the largest population of Travellers living in caravans. Between them they have 25% of England's caravans.<sup>4</sup> Yet they have been awarded only 4% of the funding, for one scheme each in Cambridgeshire and Kent, and both those are high risk without identified sites or planning permission.

- 3.4 Although there are many other areas of the country where the level of applications doesn't match up to the level of need, the critical areas – based on the very large gap between needs and zero or extremely low funding – are Essex, Kent and South Cambridgeshire, followed by Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Surrey, Warwickshire, and West Sussex.<sup>5</sup> These are priority areas where new provision must be made, if the national accommodation shortage is to be addressed.
- 3.5 This is the reality of localism. Money has gone where it has been requested and for schemes, which are locally seen as important, but not where it is needed. The areas surrounding London where Gypsies and Travellers are under acute housing stress have shown they are not motivated to address the issue.
- 3.6 This echoes the findings of the 2011 ITMB study, *Planning for Gypsies and Travellers: The impact of Localism*, which found that targets for additional sites recognised by local authorities would fall by over 50% following the abolition of regional strategies.<sup>6</sup> The study also revealed extreme reluctance among local authorities to positively allocate and bring forward sites.<sup>7</sup>
- 3.7 Relative to their size, the London boroughs and metropolitan districts got very little of the funding,<sup>8</sup> presumably in part because they are built up, with much of their undeveloped land green belt, and many of their Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar housing.
- 3.8 Very few two tier local government areas applied. This may be because of the split of powers with counties having responsibility for Traveller education and sometimes site management, and districts for housing and planning. In two tier areas there appears to be little ownership and leadership in regard to addressing Travellers' needs, which tend to fall in a gap between counties and districts, with districts' thinking often dominated by how they can avoid granting further planning permissions.

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<sup>4</sup> DCLG, July 2011, Count of Gypsy and Traveller Caravans, *4,500 out of 18,400 caravans nationally according to the latest count*  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/caravancountjul2011?view=Standard>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, based on the numbers of caravans on unauthorised sites in the most recent DCLG caravan count. We have not included Somerset and Suffolk, where many of the unauthorised caravans are occupied by New Travellers. While we recognise their needs, there isn't the crisis linked to racism and multi-dimensional deprivation to extent there is for Gypsies and Travellers.

<sup>6</sup> ITMB, 2011, June 2011, *Planning for Gypsies and Travellers: The Impact of Localism*, para. 3.7  
[http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/ITMB\\_Planning\\_for\\_Gypsies\\_and\\_Travellers1.pdf](http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/ITMB_Planning_for_Gypsies_and_Travellers1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, para. 4.11, 4.17

<sup>8</sup> Only Camden, Coventry, Solihull, Walsall, Barnsley, Doncaster & Leeds were awarded funding for new pitches.

- 3.9 By contrast unitary authorities<sup>9</sup> received 42% of the funding for new pitches, well in excess of the proportion of Travellers in their areas. This may be because they are better able to take a rounded strategic view, responsible for all services in an area, and with the exercise of their planning powers less influenced by localised opposition. An official in one area commented that establishing the county as a unitary gave an impulse to addressing an issue that had previously been regarded as too difficult.

### **The schemes being funded**

- 3.10 The number of additional residential pitches will be much less than the Government's figure of 620. At least 64<sup>10</sup> will be transit pitches, which can be helpful in addressing local conflicts, but do not provide the secure, permanent residential pitches, which Travellers need.<sup>11</sup> The schemes in Suffolk and West Sussex are replacements for existing sites. One of the two in Gloucestershire is for Travelling Showmen (we support funding to meet the needs of Travelling Showmen, but it should not be claimed such a scheme meets Gypsy Traveller needs.) Together these schemes reduce the number of additional residential pitches by 110 to 510.
- 3.11 A significant group of the new pitches, around 18%, are extensions of various sizes to existing established sites or, in the case of one of the two Doncaster schemes, upgrading and reopening a closed former transit site into a permanent residential site.<sup>12</sup>

### **Sites, planning permission and delivery**

- 3.12 It is highly likely that many of the 510 additional residential pitches won't be delivered, because for over half, the sites haven't been identified. (At least publicly: in a number of cases officials indicated that sites had been chosen, but they hadn't gone public because of the perceived sensitivity.) In an even higher number of cases, over 80%, planning permission hasn't been obtained.
- 3.13 The HCA has accepted bids and agreed funding in principle in advance of sites being identified and planning permission granted. They hope this will attract more bids and provide greater certainty to help local authorities and housing associations through the challenges of getting agreement and planning permission. However, this means a high proportion of schemes are at risk of failing. Evidence has proven that getting planning permission for developments by Travellers is often extremely difficult

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<sup>9</sup> HCA, According to the HCA spread-sheet, Bedford, Bristol, Cornwall, Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Durham, East Riding, Leicester, North Somerset, Northumberland, Plymouth, Redcar & Cleveland, Shropshire, Stoke on Trent, and Wiltshire were all awarded at least one grant.

<sup>10</sup> 25 in Dorset, 15 in Plymouth, 16 out of 30 in Cornwall, and 8 of 11 in Northumberland.

<sup>11</sup> Transit sites also often pose management problems and in a number of cases across the country have been converted to permanent residential use.

<sup>12</sup> Getting exact numbers was difficult. A number of areas indicated they were looking at options, including both new sites and site extensions

because of the strong opposition, often racist in origin, from some local residents.<sup>13</sup> One HCA official said '*The difficulties with getting planning permission through local councils are the biggest single barrier to the success of the programme.*'

- 3.14 To gain an idea of the possible impact of the high number of applications not having identified sites or obtained planning permission, the research team developed a methodology to assess the risks. Although we took account of specific local factors – for instance the need in one case for approval of a compulsory purchase order – we generally classified sites with planning permission or extensions to existing sites as low risk, sites which were identified, but without planning permission as significant risk, and bids, which were speculative without sites identified, as high risk. On this basis 28% of additional pitches were low risk, 30% significant risk, and 43% high risk.
- 3.15 Considering the high number of bids classified as significant or high risk, we would be surprised if half of the 510 additional pitches are actually delivered. Our concerns are supported by the fact that local authorities find it an extremely difficult, and often long process, to identify land for Traveller sites and obtain planning permission for such land.<sup>14</sup> As a result delays and refusals are a common occurrence leading to the national shortage of sites. Even if all the 510 HCA bids were successful, it would still be a very small contribution, approximately 1 in 11 of the 5,821 additional pitches required to meet immediate needs across England and Wales.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Further bids**

- 3.16 The HCA is keen to attract more bids and to move funds to alternative schemes if some fail, but the money is only available until March 2015. This is extremely tight to identify sites, work up schemes, get planning permission, and implement schemes. There is no mechanism to roll the money forward, and it will be harder to justify funding of such a scale in future if the current programme under performs.

#### **Leadership**

- 3.17 A significant problem is the lack of leadership at the local level to develop bids and overcome the barriers to new site development.
- 3.18 From the interviews we conducted it was apparent that local leadership was the key to successful bids and future site developments. We heard evidence of it across the five Cumbria districts by the Homespace sustainable association, in the bids from two housing associations with experience of working with Travellers (Nottingham based

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<sup>13</sup> EHRC, 2009, *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*, p. 11 [http://equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/research/12inequalities\\_experienced\\_by\\_gypsy\\_and\\_traveller\\_communities\\_a\\_review.pdf](http://equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 8

<sup>15</sup> Brown Henning and Niner for the Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010, *Assessing local authorities' progress in meeting the accommodation needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities in England and Wales, 2010 Update*, executive summary viii (Their estimate of need was based on the first round of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs assessments and is, almost certainly, an underestimate.) [http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/research/rr68\\_gt\\_web\\_version.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/rr68_gt_web_version.pdf)

Framework, and Rooftop in Worcestershire), and by the local authority driven proposals in Cornwall, Doncaster and Wiltshire. But these were the exceptions.

- 3.19 In a number of areas it was difficult to find somebody to interview who knew about the project, or officials were nervous to talk about a project which was seen as contentious. These examples were among the areas which had submitted bids.
- 3.20 For this bidding round, the HCA has accepted bids from Traveller community groups working with registered providers, rather than just local authorities and housing associations. As far as we are aware, the only application that falls into this category is the cross Cumbria scheme from a community interest company with Traveller leadership, which has already developed a new site in Carlisle.
- 3.21 Few housing associations are keen to take on or develop new sites and see it as a business opportunity. One housing association board member we spoke to said housing associations don't want to do things that local politicians don't welcome. The HCA has worked hard to increase the number of associations interested in taking on such a role and officials from two associations commented that they were putting their toes in the water in response to HCA pressure.

## 4.0 The Way Forward

- 4.1 Our research found that the HCA Traveller sites programme fails to address the full scale of the accommodation crisis facing the Gypsy and Traveller communities and the community tensions resulting from Travellers being forced to occupy unauthorised sites.
- 4.2 Without changes the programme will most likely under spend and may only deliver half of the additional pitches required. The new pitches won't be well located relative to the areas of greatest need. The HCA is doing a good job encouraging bids in difficult circumstances. The problem is the lack of leadership, capacity or interest in many areas, particularly those areas surrounding London, which have the largest Gypsy and Traveller numbers.
- 4.3 The bidding process is dependent on local support. The HCA can currently only accept bids, which are supported by the local authority. This is inconsistent with emerging planning policy, which suggests, where there is robust evidence of need, that local planning authorities should set pitch targets and identify sites for 15 years of needs, and, where they fail to do so, temporary planning permissions should be looked at favourably.<sup>16</sup>
- 4.4 It may also be that local authorities with very high levels of need, but without plans to address that need, may be failing in their duties under the 2010 Equality Act to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations.
- 4.5 We need to make better use of the funds available, treating it as a crisis programme to make a real difference over the next three years. We specifically propose:

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<sup>16</sup> DCLG, April 2011, *Planning for traveler sites*, para. 6c, 8, 9a, 26  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1886164.pdf>

- Building partnerships and challenging lack of progress in high conflict, high need areas. We identify Essex, Kent and South Cambridgeshire, together with Surrey, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Warwickshire, and West Sussex as priority areas where local authorities, housing associations and Traveller groups should be asked to submit bids. We look to Ministers to make clear that for such areas it is unacceptable not to site development programmes;
- Allowing bids without local authority support, where there is robust evidence of need and the local authority has failed to allocate sites, as will be established in some areas through planning appeal decisions;
- A major drive for Travellers and their supporters promoting schemes themselves;
- Encouraging further bids for extensions to existing sites, converting transit sites to permanent residential use, and reopening closed sites as easy wins;
- The HCA should develop a list of housing associations who are able to develop and manage sites so that there is a network of such associations across all parts of the country;
- Withdrawing the grant offers for transit sites;
- Reviewing the programme to identify schemes with a high risk of failure and giving deadlines to achieve defined milestones, or lose the funding; and
- Local authorities, particularly those with high levels of unmet need and conflict, should include strategies for Gypsies and Travellers and site provision in their equality objectives they are required to publish by 6 April.

## **Appendix 1: Telephone interview questionnaire**

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### **Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Traveller sites grant funding to 2015**

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this study

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain has been asked by Lord Avebury of the All Party Parliamentary Gypsy Roma Traveller Group to do some quick research on the projects that have received grant from the HCA for additional Gypsy and Traveller Pitches to 2015.

**Date**

**Name of your local authority or Housing Association?**

**What is your name and job title?**

**Is the grant for residential or transit pitches, or both?**

**Has the site for the pitches been identified?**

**Have you got planning permission?**

**Are you confident the scheme will be delivered?**

**How will the site be managed?**

**Is there anything particular you would like to tell us about this project, such as the challenges, innovatory aspects etc.**

**(For Housing Associations only.) Is your Association interested in developing & managing further Traveller sites?**

**Thank you for your time**