



## The Traveller Movement

Resource for London

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# Traveller Movement response to London Assembly Housing Committee investigation into Gypsy and Traveller site provision in London

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**About TM:** The Traveller Movement (TM) 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. TM 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 TM visit [www.irishtraveller.org.uk](http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk)

The Traveller Movement (TM) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the London Assembly Housing Committee investigation into Gypsy and Traveller site provision. TM is proud to work in partnership with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in London, together with service providers and policy makers to better promote social inclusion and community cohesion.

## Key Points

- A pan-London strategic approach to the provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation is essential to delivering Traveller sites. **TM recommends that the current London Plan be amended to include targets for Traveller pitches alongside the general housing targets for the boroughs.**
- London's 2008 Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment is a robust evidence base that was originally introduced and officially signed off by the Greater London Authority. **TM recommends that the 2008 needs assessment be updated by the GLA and that they build upon the good practice and methodologies developed by Fordham Research's original study.**
- There is little to no evidence of London Boroughs adhering to the duty to cooperate when it comes to planning for and delivering Traveller sites. **TM believe that the London Borough's would be far more likely to implement their duty to cooperate if there was a regional or pan-London strategic approach to guide them.**
- As far as TM are aware only 9 additional pitches have been/or are in the process of being built by London Boroughs since the 2008 GTANA, adding ever greater pressure to the demand for pitches on existing Traveller sites. **TM recommends the Housing Committee raise a matter with the Mayor these unacceptable figures highlighting the acute accommodation crisis facing these communities.**
- Current and historical accommodation insecurity negatively impacts on Gypsies and Travellers physical and mental health. **Effectively addressing accommodation insecurity/provision of sites will have a direct and positive 'knock-on' effect not just on community members health, but on the wider social determinates that impact on their intergenerational health and wellbeing (education, employment etc).**
- TM believe that the DCLG's September 2014 proposals to change current planning guidance and legislation for Traveller sites poses the significant danger of making it even harder for councils to plan for and develop Traveller sites. **Considering the Government's proposals are at an early stage of the consultation process, TM would urge the Housing Committee to focus on the issues in hand and not be too greatly influenced by the uncertainties posed by the Government's proposals.**

## 1. Barriers to provision of Traveller sites

In London and throughout the UK, many Gypsies and Travellers face discrimination on accommodation issues at the local level. This has led to a severe shortage of authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites which has been widely documented by Gypsy and Traveller organisations, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). In a 2009 research report on the lack of provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites, the EHRC concluded that 'the lack of secure accommodation for nomadic groups remains the lynchpin of a plethora of other inequalities.'<sup>1</sup> DCLG's 2009 *Progress Report on Gypsy and Traveller sites* stated:

*'The current position on site delivery remains unsatisfactory. It is clear that local authorities need to increase the pace at which suitable locations are identified that can be used as Gypsy and Traveller sites.'*<sup>2</sup>

TM believes there are two key reasons for the huge under-provision of Traveller sites in London:

- Cost of land cost of land, especially since council owned properties are increasingly being sold off. Additionally, the pressure to build more housing and the viability and deliverability tests introduced by the NPPF make the provision of low density, family accommodation such as Gypsy and Traveller sites very difficult.
- Unwilling local authorities, often unduly influenced by hostile local residents, are often the reason why there has been a failure to deliver the required number of sites in London and throughout the UK regions. In a 2009 report, the EHRC highlighted the obstacle preventing site provision as being 'resistance from the sedentary population to the idea of new sites for Gypsies and Travellers.'<sup>3</sup>

For these reasons TM believe it is essential that planning and provision of Traveller sites in London is a strategic issue and included in the London Plan, alongside 'bricks and mortar' housing. This would ensure a degree of oversight, support and guidance for London Boroughs in adhering to their duties to assess need, plan for and identify suitable locations for Traveller sites

## 2. Current provision

In 2008, the GLA provided support for the London boroughs to conduct the London Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA). The GTANA found an overall maximum shortfall of 554 new residential pitches in the next five years, which would require doubling the present stock of pitches for the need to be

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<sup>1</sup> EHRC, 2009, *Gypsies and Traveller: Simple Solutions for living together*, p.11  
[http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/gypsies\\_and\\_travellers.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/gypsies_and_travellers.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> CLG, 2009, *Progress Report on Gypsy and Traveller Policy*, p.5  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1284500>

<sup>3</sup> EHRC 2009, *Inequalities Experienced by Gypsy and Traveller Communities, Research Report*,  
<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/key-projects/good-relations/gypsies-and-travellers-simple-solutions-for-living-together/gypsies-and-travellers-research-reports/>

met. The authors explained that this was less than remarkable considering that there had been no new socially rented sites provided to Gypsies and Travellers in the past decade (1998-2008), while there had been a net loss of pitches during the same period.

As far as TM are aware, since the 2008 GTANA there have only been 3 additional new pitches developed in London (Kingston), with 6 more in the process of being built in Hounslow. Considering London has the third highest population of Gypsies and Travellers in England (according to the 2011 ONS Census and TM research)<sup>4</sup> it is very worrying and completely unacceptable that culturally appropriate accommodation provision for these groups can be counted in single digits. This is especially true considering the specific duties on London Boroughs to assess and plan for the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

### **3. Importance of a Pan-London strategic approach to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation**

As already stated in this submission, TM believe there would be great benefits in the GLA conducting a London wide Gypsy Traveller accommodation needs assessment and integrating its findings into the strategic policies in the London Plan and the London Housing Strategy.

There are a number of key benefits to this approach:

- Would allow neighboring boroughs and/or clusters of boroughs to marry identified need with land use. It might be the case that one borough has a high need, however doesn't have land available to meet that need and could potentially work in partnership with another borough with more flexible land use. This approach requires a degree of strategic oversight, guidance and support.
- Provide an element of scrutiny of boroughs needs assessments and the progress they are making in delivering Traveller sites on the ground. It would also enable a more effective means of addressing cases of unauthorised sites in relation to unmet need.
- Would promote more robust and uniform local needs assessments which would inform a London-wide assessment.
- Would reinforce the duty to cooperate and promote good practice.

It is evident from TM's work in London and nationally that the Government's duty to cooperate is not being effectively implemented when it comes to the planning and provision of Traveller sites. We are only aware of two London boroughs (Kensington and Chelsea and Hammersmith and Fulham) who are working in a cooperative manner for the purposes of carrying out a needs assessment in their areas.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://irishtraveller.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Gypsy-and-Traveller-population-in-England-policy-report.pdf>

#### **4. How is access to health and education limited by the lack of sites?**

Soon to be published research by the TM for the Department of Health's Inclusion Health Board into the impact of insecure accommodation and the living environment on Gypsies' and Travellers' health had two key findings relevant to questions in this call for evidence on impact of access to health services by the lack of sites:

- Current and historical accommodation insecurity negatively impacts on Gypsies and Travellers physical and mental health. Effectively addressing accommodation insecurity/provision of sites will have a direct and positive 'knock-on' effect not just on community members health, but on the wider social determinates that impact on their intergenerational health and wellbeing (education, employment etc).
- Unauthorised and authorised sites for Gypsies and Travellers (including local authority owned and run) are all too often situated in environments which promote poor health (busy roads, beside heavy industry etc). Improving the environmental health factors of existing sites and promoting appropriate future development of Traveller sites will improve health outcomes in the long-term. Such measures are also likely to prove cost-effective in terms of reduced ill-health and disability, increased mental health etc.

TM is also very aware of the impact a lack of sites (and consequently increased unauthorised encampments and evictions) has on Gypsy and Traveller children's education and welfare. TM's experiences are summed up in a piece of research with Gypsy and Traveller children living on unauthorised/insecure site by the Children's Society:

*'Moving on from a site brought up a feeling of loss for some children. Where a site had been established for a while, children were leaving an area that was their home. Links that had been made with local communities were severed, such as friendships made at school ... where they were moved on by force there were feelings of fear ... A forced eviction can be a threatening and frightening experience for children. There is a fear of someone taking your parent away, taking your home away, or of people you care about being hurt.'* (Children's Society)

Children's Society, 1998, Children's Participation Project, *My Dream Site*. Midsomer Norton

#### **5. How should councils deal with unauthorised encampments?**

Firstly when councils are dealing with unauthorised encampments they should be aware that unmet need/the failure to meet need for Traveller sites within their area has a direct impact on incidents of unauthorised encampments. The long-term sustainable approach to addressing unauthorised encampments is for **ALL** councils ensure they are making appropriate provision.

Councils should be mindful of exiting legislation and guidance on taking enforcement procedures against Gypsies and Travellers on unauthorised encampments and make sure they carry out appropriate welfare assessments before taking any action. They should also be aware of ACPO guidance on unauthorised encampments. Shelter

provide a useful summary of councils responsibilities in such situations, as does ACPO in relation to the police's role:

[http://england.shelter.org.uk/get\\_advice/sites\\_for\\_gypsies\\_and\\_travellers/eviction\\_by\\_the\\_council](http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/sites_for_gypsies_and_travellers/eviction_by_the_council)

[http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/edhr/2011/20110913%20EDHR%20ACPO%20Guidance%20on%20Unauthorised%20Encampments%20Revised\\_Version%2013\\_Internet\\_June%202011.pdf](http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/edhr/2011/20110913%20EDHR%20ACPO%20Guidance%20on%20Unauthorised%20Encampments%20Revised_Version%2013_Internet_June%202011.pdf)

Ideally councils should refrain from taking enforcement action and instead should promote local authority use of **Negotiated Stopping Places** based on the model successfully piloted by Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange and Leeds City Council:

<http://www.leedsgate.co.uk/2013/11/25/negotiated-stopping-versus-transit-sites-whats-the-difference/>