

No place to stop: Research on the five year supply of deliverable Gypsy and Traveller sites in the South East of England

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There is a chronic national shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites in England. 13% of caravans in the Government's July 2019 national caravan count were on unauthorised land, largely as a result of this¹. This means that many Gypsy and Traveller families are statutorily homeless and have difficulties accessing basic amenities, such as water, sanitation, education and healthcare.

In July and August of 2019, we undertook a piece of research to ascertain if local authorities were meeting their statutory requirements under Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) 'to identify and update annually, a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide 5 years' worth of sites against their locally set targets'². We carried out this research because the Government does not collect this data centrally. We asked the following questions, under the Freedom of Information Act, to the 68 local authorities and planning authorities in the South East of England³:

- What is the need identified by your authority's Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Need Assessment (GTANA) for new pitches, and what period does this GTANA cover?
- What is the figure identified by your authority for its up to date '5 year supply of specific deliverable sites'?
- Please provide copies of the relevant extract of your authority's Local Plan and/or any other documentation in which the up to date '5 year supply of specific deliverable sites' is identified.

Key Findings

- Only 8 local authorities, out of 68 local authorities in the South East of England, had identified a 5 year supply of specific deliverable sites for Gypsies and Travellers⁴⁵.
- 15 local authorities had no identified need for new sites in the next five years⁶.
- Local authorities who did carry out a GTANA identified a combined assessed need for 720.5 pitches in the South East of England over the next 5 years for people meeting the PPTS definition and 636.3 pitches for people who don't meet the PPTS definition⁷.
- By 2043, a total of 1170 additional pitches are needed in the South East of England, for those meeting the PPTS definition, and a further 1025 for those not meeting the definition⁸.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/848868/TCC_November19_Stats_Release.pdf

² Published by the then Department for Communities and Local Government in August 2015

³ This includes 66 local authorities plus the South Downs National Park and the New Forest National Park

⁴ This included Fareham, Lewes, Maidstone, Milton Keynes, New Forest National Park, Sevenoaks, South Oxfordshire and Woking

⁵ Hart District Council stated their assessed need was -5. They claimed this is because they would meet their need through vacancies arising from current plots. However in their previous GTANA they had identified a need for 28 plots.

⁶ This included Chiltern, Crawley, Eastbourne, Epsom and Ewell, Gosport, Hastings, Mid Sussex, New Forest, Oxford City, Portsmouth City, Rushmoor, South Buckinghamshire, Vale of White Horse, Worthing and Wycombe

⁷ 47 local authorities separated the types of need to include the non PPTS need

⁸ The Local Plans covered different periods - 2043 was the furthest date covered.

Analysis

This research is an update on the research we carried out in 2016 which found that 10 out of 66 local authorities had identified a 5 year supply of specific deliverable sites⁹. The situation has worsened since then. This research clearly highlights that the mechanism to ensure more sites for Gypsies and Travellers are provided in the immediate future is not working. In the meanwhile Gypsies and Travellers continue to be evicted from one place to the next. These chronically excluded communities become even more vulnerable as a result of the constant cycle of evictions.

Despite this, the Government has recently issued a consultation on increasing police powers of eviction and criminalising unauthorised encampments¹⁰, yet they are not addressing the failure of Planning Policy for Traveller Sites to deliver sites. In addition, in the current round of the Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme 2016-2021 not a single Traveller site pitch has been approved.¹¹

The majority (184) of the 285 local authority Traveller caravan sites in existence today were built in the period 1968-1994 when there existed a statutory duty to provide sites, and a 100% central government grant to do so, under the Caravan Sites Act 1968. This duty and grant were repealed under the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. Since then an average of less than 3 sites a year nationally have been built.

Somewhat ironically, one of the 15 authorities with zero identified accommodation needs – Epsom and Ewell were successfully granted an injunction to prevent stopping on 57 sites across the authority area in May 2019. This was a three-year injunction granted to extend a previous temporary injunction. In evidence supplied by the council to the court to secure the injunction, they reported that there had been just one “incursion” in February 2019 which was an improvement on 11 unauthorised encampments reported in the previous year. There is a clear data gap between the numbers reported by authorities in evidence to the court, and numbers reported by authorities in their GTAA's.

A further six local authorities in the South East (Basingstoke & Deane, Canterbury, Elmbridge, Reigate and Banstead, Runnymede and Wycombe) also have, or have recently had interim, injunctions to prevent Travellers stopping on land in their authority area, yet none of these local authorities have identified a five year supply of land for sites to meet their assessed need.

Conclusion

This research is an update on the research which we carried out in 2016 which found that 10 out of 66 local authorities had identified a 5 year supply of specific deliverable sites¹²¹³. The situation has worsened since then. This research clearly highlights that the mechanism to ensure more sites for Gypsies and Travellers are provided in the immediate future is not working. In the meanwhile

⁹ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Five-Year-Supply-Research-Findings-Statement-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-police-powers-to-tackle-unauthorised-encampments>

¹¹ Response to Parliamentary Question asked by Baroness Whitaker on 10 January 2019.

¹² The research in 2016 considered 66 local authorities, whilst this research considers 66 local authorities plus the South Downs National Park and the New Forest National Park.

¹³ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Five-Year-Supply-Research-Findings-Statement-FINAL.pdf>

Gypsies and Travellers continue to be evicted from one place to the next. These chronically excluded communities become even more vulnerable as a result of the constant cycle of evictions.

Recommendations

- The Ministry for Homes Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) should monitor compliance with the requirement in PPTS to have a 5 year supply of deliverable sites and should act to ensure the requirement is met.
- The MHCLG should re-introduce targets, and a statutory duty to meet the assessed accommodation need of Gypsies and Travellers, as introduced in Wales in March 2016 (section 103 Part 3, Housing (Wales) Act 2014).

About us

Friends, Families and Travellers is a leading national charity that works on behalf of all Gypsies, Roma and Travellers regardless of ethnicity, culture or background.

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