North Somerset Council

Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Consultation 2011

(Site Location and Facilities)

Summary of Key Findings

March 2012
SUMMARY

This summary contains the key findings of a survey on Gypsy and Traveller residents of North Somerset undertaken by Margaret Greenfields and Liz Lowe of Buckinghamshire New University Research Unit.

The purpose of the survey was:

To produce reliable information that states the current and future accommodation needs of ‘sited’ and ‘housed’ local Gypsy and Traveller families.

Trained Gypsy and Traveller community interviewers were used to carry out the majority of the survey, supported by academic team members who monitored for quality control and performed the analysis and production of the full report.

Residents of 42 pitches out of 59 known to exist within the area were interviewed, which equals to a response rate of 71.7% of ‘sited’ Gypsies and Travellers. Most interviewees were resident on council and privately owned sites (both owner-occupied and rented). Also, a number of residents on a single private ‘tolerated’ site (without planning permission) were surveyed.

Unfortunately only an estimated 10% of housed Gypsies and Travellers in the area were surveyed because of difficulties with contacting this population in a short period of time.

Contact Suzette Perkins on 01934 426931 or by email at suzette.perkins@n-somerset.gov.uk for further information about this survey. A copy of the Executive Summary can be viewed on the council’s website at:

http://consult.n-somerset.gov.uk/consult.ti/Gypsy_traveller/consultationHome

Key Findings
General

- 52 (88%) of pitches are on private sites (either with planning permission or ‘tolerated’) with 7 pitches available on 3 council sites.

- The local ‘sited’ population contains a high level of Romany Gypsy households with a small number of ‘mixed’ (Gypsy/Non-Gypsy partners), Irish Traveller and New Traveller residents.

- The age range of respondents varied between 19 and 78 years of age with an average age of 38.3. Women were the majority (90.4%) of respondents.

- Average time of residence at their current location was 8 years, showing low levels of turnover of pitches.

- Households who had moved to their current site in the last year, most were already from or living in the North Somerset/West Country area with only 2 respondents having moved from further away.

- No ‘sited’ respondents had moved to their current location directly from a ‘roadside’ site. 1 housed respondent (25% of the small sample) had moved directly from a site because the facility was closed.

Satisfaction with current accommodation

- Fairly high level of satisfaction from respondents with their ‘type’ of residence.

- Respondents in self-owned sites had the highest levels of happiness, most of the respondents said they felt ‘neutral’ towards their place of residence or that they were ‘happy’ or ‘very happy’.

- Respondents, who said they were unhappy with their place of residence, most were unhappy with the maintenance (rented sites) or restrictions on types of accommodation (e.g. chalets) allowed on both rented and self-owned sites.
Accommodation Need

- Overall 62% of respondents said that there would be a need for new accommodation/pitches amongst their household in the next five years, showing a large and rising demand for site accommodation between members of the Gypsy and Traveller population in North Somerset.

- Strong preference for family members to live closely together and there was a clear demand for sites which could hold groups of siblings and/or adult children next to their parents and grandparents.

- Overcrowding levels remain high and a continued need exists for extra pitches for household members.

- In total 1/3 of households said they were ‘technically’ overcrowded (based on their own assessment in the absence of an official measure of overcrowding for residents of caravans).

- Residents of council sites and owner occupied sites with temporary or no planning permission were most likely to report overcrowding, as well as those on rented private sites.

- A high number of those on self-owned private sites reported overcrowding because of the terms on their planning permission which restricted the number of caravans allowed on site.

- Respondents were not making use of ‘official’ site waiting lists and this is likely to be because many respondents think that no pitches will become available or that ‘word of mouth’ contacts may provide potential residents to hear of available plots on the two connected private rented sites in North Somerset.

Site Preferences
• Respondents were asked to choose from a number of possible new site locations in North Somerset and state their preferences.
  - Weston-super-Mare (Most Favoured)
  - Clevedon-Yatton
  - Nailsea-Backwell
  - Portishead-Gordano (Least Favoured)

• Respondents favoured sites with 20-30 pitches, closely followed by those suggesting less than 10 pitches, with this final group wanting fairly small family sites which they would often hope to self-provide.

• Not a big difference in numbers of respondents who would prefer to have a ‘visiting’ site manager compared with those who preferred to have a live-in manager.

• Over half of respondents felt that sites should be available to anyone in need, with a significant minority however believing that priority should be offered to relatives of current residents.

• High interest between all respondents in providing transit pitches, which could be used when travelling themselves (or to contain relatives and other Travellers passing through the area).

• Statistics on illegal campsites over the year 2010-2011 show a very small number of occasions when this provision would have been needed in North Somerset, it may be that clear interest does not link to the actual level of likely need.

• Only a small number of respondents felt that it would be suitable to provide ‘transit’ pitches next to residential ones.

• One third of respondents were happy to live on ‘mixed’ sites (with groups of different cultures and traditions) but 45% did say they only wanted to live with other Romany Gypsies.

• Respondents were clear that New Travellers should not be able to live with other ‘ethnic’ Gypsies and Travellers because of different life-styles and backgrounds.
Respondents wished to have all available facilities e.g. GP, shops etc nearby to any new site that is provided.

Barriers to Residence in Preferred Accommodation

- Not enough pitch numbers which meant that they were overcrowded or unable to live with relatives.
- Affordability of land to self-provide a site.
- Concerned that if they did buy land they would not be able to get planning permission.

Affordability of Sites

- Some residents were unclear if they could afford to buy land to self-provide a site if support was available with getting planning permission.
- Most respondents felt that they were either not in a financial position to buy land (or housing).
- If mortgages on land were available and support would be offered to get planning permission most respondents expressed a very keen interest in buying land and self-providing a site; in some cases with members of their wider family.

Community Land Trusts (CLTs)
• Little knowledge between respondents about CLTs. Once explanation provided there was a keen interest in this method to deliver sites.

Travelling Patterns

• A fairly high number of respondents (47.8%) travel for social and cultural reasons at certain times of the year. No ‘housed’ respondents did with many cases mentioning not being able to have a caravan at their place of residence, as holding back their ability to travel.

• Most of the travel between Gypsy and Travellers is short-term and linked to family and cultural events although 31% of those who do travel do for financial reasons.

• A large number of respondents who do travel for financial reasons said they travel between 3 and 6 months each year.

• Residence on a private rented pitch is more likely to be linked with larger amounts of travel and for a longer time each year.

• Residents of both council sites and self-owned sites with permanent planning permission were more likely to be ‘sitting’ than those residents with pitches on council sites who travel for short periods for social/cultural reasons.

Use of Local Authority Provided Services
• Overall there were very low rates of use of services such as support with energy saving insulation, homelessness services and adaptations to their home to help disabled household members (and no ‘sited’ respondents had made use of energy efficiency services compared to housed interviewees).

• Satisfaction levels with the services provided by the homelessness department and teams working to provide adaptations were high.

• Just under 17% of households requested assistance with completing forms or dealing with bureaucracy as a result of literacy problems.

Experiences of Racism/Harassment/Intimidation

• Gypsies and Travellers in the North Somerset area are a lot less likely to experience abuse than in many other parts of the country and also feel more confident in reporting any abuse to agencies. Levels of racial harassment however experienced by Gypsies and Travelers are still unacceptably high.

• Extra work may be needed to deal with “anti-Gypsyism” in daily life, mostly in school settings.

• 45.2% of site residents and 100% of ‘housed’ Gypsy and Traveller families stated having experienced cases of harassment in their life (in some cases many years in the past).

• Large number of reports by respondents who experienced racist abuse when stopping at roadside locations (although in some cases many years in the past and not necessarily in North Somerset).