

WEST MIDLANDS

INTERIM REGIONAL STATEMENT ON GYPSY & TRAVELLER POLICY:

SUPPLEMENT ON TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE

Purpose of the Supplement

1. In March 2007, the West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA) submitted an Interim Regional Statement on Gypsy and Traveller Policy to Communities Local Government (CLG). Travelling Showpeople were not included in that Statement, but paragraph 7 signalled the intention to produce a Supplement, drawing together information on current site provision and the accommodation needs of Travelling Showpeople and Circus Families.

2. Consequently, the Supplement demonstrates the urgency for the accommodation needs of Travelling Showpeople to now be recognised as a serious issue by local authorities across the WM Region. . These needs are further compounded, as the issues surrounding Travelling Showpeople provision are largely hidden and have a tendency to continue un-addressed. Therefore, local authorities should not wait until Phase 3 of the RSS Revision before beginning to address the issue of accommodation for Travelling Showpeople and considering the allocation of land for sites. Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments (GTAAs) are being carried out across the Region within six sub-regional groupings and will be broadly complete by the end of 2007. GTAAs will include fuller information on the needs of Travelling Showpeople. Local authorities should, on the basis of this information, urgently consult with local Showpeople and the Midland Section of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain to identify suitable locations for sites.

National Policy

3. National policy towards Travelling Showpeople accommodation is developing. Following consultation, a new Circular *Planning for Travelling Showpeople* (Communities and Local Government Circular 01/2007) was issued on 21 August 2007. The Circular acknowledges that previous guidance (Circular 22/91) had failed to deliver adequate sites for Travelling Showpeople; this is also true at regional level in the West Midlands.

4. The Circular indicates that the needs of Travelling Showpeople are to be treated in a similar way to those of Gypsies and Travellers as set out in ODPM Circular 01/2006. GTAAs are to include the needs of Travelling Showpeople¹, and these will be incorporated into revised Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) and Local Development Plans. RSSs are to provide an estimate of need for additional accommodation for Travelling Showpeople

¹ Statutory Instrument 2006 No 3190, *The Housing (Assessment of Accommodation Needs) (Meaning of Gypsies and Travellers) (England) Regulations 2006*

across the Region, and identify the number of plots² to be provided in each local authority. Paragraph 36 of the Circular sets out requirements to which the RSS should conform under transitional arrangements prior to full revision. This Interim Statement meets the requirements of paragraph 36.

Background

5. Travelling Showpeople are defined, for the purposes of Circular 04/2007, as:

Members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circuses or shows (whether or not travelling together as such). This includes such persons who on the grounds of their own or their family's or dependants' more localised pattern of trading, educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excludes Gypsies and Travellers as defined in ODPM Circular 01/2006.

Thus they are a group defined by their distinctive occupations – travelling around the country to provide, for short periods of time, fairs, rides and amusements with associated catering and other stalls. Background information presented below is drawn from interviews with representatives of the Midland Section of the Showmen's Guild, emerging GTAA's and the report a House of Commons Committee report on Travelling Fairs in 1999/2000³.

6. Travelling Showpeople are self-employed businesspeople that, because of their distinctive lifestyle, form a close-knit community with a distinctive culture. A feature of this culture is the importance placed on extended family links often reinforced by family business ties. Older family members, traditionally, are cared for and supported by their family when they no longer actively travel. It is important, culturally, to keep families together.

7. The nature of the occupation influences accommodation requirements:

- While many Showpeople travel to run fairs and so on, they need secure, permanent bases for the storage of equipment when not in use and for its maintenance and testing. Testing requirements are increasingly rigorous and lead to increased space needs.
- Most Showpeople need to live alongside their equipment, so sites must be suitable for both residential and business use.
- The pattern of work over the year is changing. Traditionally many Showpeople were in on the road between around Easter and Bonfire Night, and in 'winter quarters' for the rest of the year. The season has now extended over most of the year, but may be less continuous for an individual Showperson. Some Showpeople choose to travel less or

² A pitch for Travelling Showpeople. Plots may need to incorporate space or to be split to allow the storage and maintenance of equipment.

³ House of Commons, Environment Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, *Ninth Report Travelling Fairs*, 1999/2000, HC 284-I (also Evidence published as HC 284 II and III)

over shorter distances. Older Showpeople may not travel at all. 'Base' sites can be (partially) occupied throughout the year.

- Progressively larger equipment and associated vehicles not only places demands on space within sites but also on road access. The ideal site has fairly direct access from a major road or motorway.

8. Sites for Showpeople take a variety of forms. At least three types of site have been described:

- 'Modern' sites comprise individually owned 'yards' of about 100x100 feet (approximately 30.5x30.5 metres) or larger off an internal access road. Plots are provided with hardcore, electricity, water and sewage connections and basic fencing. The arrangement of living and working accommodation within the yard is up to the individual owner. This is the format favoured by the Showmen's Guild. They work on 100x150 feet (30.5x45.7 metres) modules for yards and say that 150x200 feet (45.7x61 metres) would better meet the needs of an 'average' family given the increasing need for space.
- Some sites offer rented plots. They are owned and run by local authorities, the Showmen's Guild or individual Showmen. Such sites have a variety of layouts with different arrangements of residential and business uses.
- Some sites comprise a yard occupied by a single (extended) family. These yards combine living and working facilities, with some flexibility of arrangements for privacy and most efficient functioning.

9. There is a strong preference among Showpeople for site ownership rather than renting.

10. Showmen's sites are found in a variety of locations. Some traditional town and city centre sites have been displaced by land values and more 'appropriate' land-uses. Some previously peripheral sites have been engulfed by urban development which now constrains expansion and can lead to access problems. The problems Showpeople have faced in getting planning permissions for new sites (acknowledged in Circular 04/2006) are said to have led to the continued occupation of 'unsuitable' locations and to overcrowding on existing sites.

11. There appears to be a cultural preference among Showpeople for living in trailers. Showmen's trailers are larger than touring caravans and may have 'pull-outs' to provide more internal space when stationary. Modern trailers have full bathroom facilities. Families often have more than one living unit as older children have their own trailer or touring caravan which acts as their bedroom and personal space, and may also be used for shorter business trips. Some Showpeople prefer 'chalets' (park homes), or even bricks and mortar accommodation if they have a more settled work pattern and there is always someone on the site/yard for security. As preferred living

accommodation gets larger, again demand for space on the site or yard increases.

The Evidence Base: Current Provision

12. There is no direct source of information on the current provision of sites for Travelling Showpeople. Travelling Showpeople are explicitly excluded from the Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Count. Local authority registers of caravan sites rarely include sites for Showpeople either because of exemptions for members of the Showmen's Guild or because planning arrangements mean the site is not licensed under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960. At present there are no completed Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments in the Region to provide information. A picture of current provision has been assembled through:

- An e-mail survey of local authorities in the Region. Completed questionnaires have been returned providing information on 26 local authorities (out of 34 or 76%). Partial information on specific sites has been provided by 5 further authorities (bringing total coverage to 91%).
- An interview with representatives of the Midland Section of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, and information provided by the Guild. The Showmen's Guild represents the great majority of Travelling Showmen (not Circus Families). The Midland Section covers the West Midlands together with Leicestershire (where there are several sites). The Section was able to provide a list of member sites for the West Midlands Region, but no details of size or type of site or associated needs. The Section may be able to provide fuller information in winter when the main travelling season is over and members are available and less busy.

13. The table in Appendix 1 summarises the information collected. We believe that all sites in the Region have been included but, as can be seen, full details are not always available.

14. There are thought to be 28 sites across the Region. Site size is measured in different ways (plots, caravans, families) and sometimes is just not known. Equating plots, yards and families; allowing 2 caravans per family where the number is given in caravans; and counting an unknown as a single unit (likely to be an under-estimate) gives a minimum estimate of 144 plots/families. Table 1 summarises this and shows the very uneven distribution by sub-region (defined as the areas to be covered by GTAAs). The clustering is still more marked in that almost half of the sites reported by local authorities are in Sandwell (together with a site just over the boundary in Dudley in Cradley Heath) and in Walsall (together with a site just over the boundary in Cannock Chase in Pelsall). Because the sites in and near Sandwell and Walsall are larger than average, some 61% of plots/families are currently provided for in the Black Country Sub-Region

Table 1 : Summary of Site Provision by Sub-Region		
GTA sub-region	Number of Sites	Number of plots/families
Shropshire etc	4	6
South HMA	5	28
North Staffordshire	2	2
A5 corridor	4	14
Black Country	12	88
Birmingham etc	1	6
West Midlands	28	144

15. Only 8 of the existing sites have full planning permission for use as a Showman's site, in one instance granted on appeal. Limited permissions (affecting one site each) are:

- Occupation limited to 11 months
- Winter quarters
- Equipment storage only
- Personal permission
- Temporary permission (renewed several times)

8 sites have lawful or existing use and could not be subject to enforcement action. 3 have no current permission, but are not regarded as unauthorised developments. The planning status of 4 sites reported by local authorities is unknown.

16. The number of sites provided has remained static over the past 5 years except in Birmingham where a site in Stechford has closed.

The Evidence Base: Future Need for Accommodation for Travelling Showpeople

17. Emerging GTAs across England and the House of Commons Committee Report⁴ suggest that accommodation need for Showpeople arises from:

- Loss of existing sites to other land-uses.
- Existing sites which need to re-locate because of inadequate space, infrastructure or access, or surrounding uses.
- Overcrowding on existing sites which leads to poor living conditions and harms efficient business operation.
- Family increase which cannot be accommodated on existing sites/yards.

⁴ House of Commons, Environment Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, *Ninth Report Travelling Fairs*, 1999/2000, HC 284-I (also Evidence published as HC 284 II and III)

Shortage can become manifest in over-crowding, unauthorised development and encampment, high rents on sites offering plots, massive over-subscription of any new sites, and in Showmen staying on the road throughout the year even when it is not profitable to do so.

18. It is also apparent that there is growing demand for better living conditions and for site/yard ownership to provide greater security and control. While some Showpeople need rented plots, many aspire to ownership. Interviews carried out with Showpeople in Leicestershire⁵ indicated that the main obstacles to site development are finding suitable land and getting planning permission. Showpeople mainly want to be helped to help themselves, not provided with social sites. Affordability becomes an issue if Showmen are directed to land zoned for industrial or residential use where land prices are impossible for a relatively extensive, low density, low value use.

19. These factors are all likely to apply in the West Midlands although there is no definitive evidence at present. Indications of need come from the survey of local authorities and the Showmen's Guild, set out in turn below.

20. An initial point to make about need for sites for Travelling Showpeople in the West Midlands is that it is largely hidden. Local authorities are rarely aware of it as an issue – indeed finding out any information about existing sites often requires some detective work. There is no unauthorised development of sites in the Region which would draw the issue to the attention of planners, although some West Midlands Showpeople have been involved in unauthorised development outside the Region (personal communication regarding a development in Tewkesbury). Some of the reported requests for assistance in site finding are obviously seen as routine contacts from the Showmen's Guild or consultants rather than evidence of real 'need' on the part of individual Showpeople. On their side, representatives of the Guild said how reluctant they and their members were to draw attention to the poor conditions and gross overcrowding on some sites in the area in case enforcement action meant that some families were displaced or accommodation lost. They quoted instances where precisely that had happened. They saw little hope of new site development under current policies. In these circumstances, it is extremely difficult to evidence need or demonstrate its urgency in any robust manner.

Information from the Local Authority Survey

21. The survey reported 9 planning applications received since 2001 in the 26 authorities providing such information. However, 2 of these were for renewal of temporary permissions (both granted); 2 were for improvements to an existing site involving no additional accommodation (refused as not meeting appropriate standards); and 1 was for storage only (granted). No further details were provided for 2 applications (both granted) but current provision suggests these also must have been either for storage or renewal of

⁵ GTAA available at <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/gypsiesandtravellers>

a temporary permission. Only 2 applications (both in Wychavon) were for new sites. Both were refused – one for a number of reasons including isolation from settlements, visual intrusion in a sensitive site in the countryside, highways and access concerns and concerns over surface drainage, noise and disturbance; the other was refused because of unsatisfactory access arrangements for the increase in use proposed, insufficient information submitted to assess damage to verges and visual intrusion in the countryside.

22. Authorities were asked whether they had received any requests since 2001 from Travelling Showpeople or Circus Families for help in finding land to develop, or had any other indications of need. 9 authorities across the Region had received requests for assistance (35% of all responding authorities). The requests ranged from circular letters from the Showmen's Guild to contacts from local families because of family increase. Only Walsall indicated that the contact had resulted in a site search, currently underway. The general impression given by questionnaire responses is that there is little local authority awareness of need across the Region apart from a few instances where local families are growing and have no accommodation or where planning applications have been submitted.

Information from the Showmen's Guild

23. The Midland Section of the Showmen's Guild has carried out an assessment of accommodation needs among its members across its region (which also includes Leicestershire). They looked at current overcrowding and at likely family formation over the next 10 years:

- Across their region they estimate an existing need of at least 61 families or around 250 people (around 16% of the population) from overcrowding.
- Looking at the age profile of member families they find that 13% of the population is currently aged between 16 and 24 (203 people). They then apply a factor of 45% to the age group as an indication of likely family formation over the next 10 years, and estimated mortality rates to those aged 65 and over which might free places in sites and yards. They conclude that at least 65 additional families will need accommodation (17% of the population).
- Adding present need from overcrowding and projected family increase results in at least 126 families (516 people) in need of additional accommodation over the next 10 years.

24. Guild representatives were unable to apportion their regional requirement geographically and to say what proportion might be attributable to the West Midlands Region. On the basis of the distribution of current provision it appears that the Region might account for between half and two-thirds of the total accommodation. Applying this proportion to the need figures leads to regional requirements over the next 10 years between **63 and 84 additional**

plots. This is obviously an approximation, but the best indicator of the likely extent of need currently available.

25. At an interview with representatives of the Showmen's Guild, they commented that the provision of four 12 yard/family sites (48 yards/families in all) in the Region would probably meet current needs. The additional plots required above would cater for family formation to 2016.

Location and Nature of Need

26. The current distribution of site provision for Showpeople is very uneven across the Region. Insofar as need arises from current site overcrowding or displacement and family growth, it will be generated from existing sites and thus equally unevenly distributed with a concentration in the Black Country. **This is not, however, a direct indication of where need should be met.**

27. Interviews with Showpeople in Leicestershire⁶ who were actively looking for land to develop for sites revealed wide search areas, usually spanning several local authority areas and sometimes more than one region. The extent of the search area depended on travelling patterns and the perceived importance of links built up with the local area. Generally the impression was given that the existence of suitable land, likely to meet planning criteria, was more important than its location within one or other local authority. Locational criteria for a multi-yard site (that is, a site divided between individually owned yards) include:

- Up to 5 hectares of relatively level and well drained land.
- Good access to the main road and motorway system.
- An edge or near-settlement site rather than on actually within an existing settlement.
- Affordable land, ie not inflated by prime residential or industrial development values.
- Shops and schools within reasonable distance, perhaps up to 2 miles.
- Environment suitable for residential purposes and bringing up children.

A single (extended) family yard would require a smaller site, but other criteria would be similar.

28. Ideal site criteria are likely to be similar in the West Midlands. Important constraints to finding such sites are the extent of the current built up areas and Green Belts.

⁶ See GTAA available at <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/gypsiesandtravellers>

Building on the Evidence Base

29. The accommodation needs of Travelling Showpeople will be included in Phase 3 of the RSS Revision. At that stage information from GTAAs will be available to supplement and, if appropriate, amend this interim assessment of need of between 63 and 84 additional families/plots. The Showmen's Guild will be further consulted in the revision process. In particular the RSS will take a strategic view of need and provision on the premise that needs should be met in the most appropriate places having regard to the social and economic circumstances of the communities, families and individuals concerned as well as sound planning principles.

30. Evidence collected to inform the development of the Supplement suggests that that the issue of accommodation need is serious in the West Midlands and that local authorities should take action to identify suitable land for development for sites for Travelling Showpeople in emerging Local Planning Frameworks prior to the RSS Revision.

Therefore, local authorities are urged to:

- Increase their awareness of the issues around the accommodation needs of Travelling Showpeople in their area and enter into positive dialogue with local Showpeople to increase understanding of needs and to identify positive ways forward. Local authorities may need to take a much more corporate approach to ensure that current information is shared and used effectively.
- Obtain an understanding of the problems related to overcrowding and/or very poor conditions and make a commitment to ensuring that enforcement action on existing sites should not be taken without positive action to assist any Showpeople who would be displaced to find alternative accommodation (including recognising their needs in emerging planning documents).
- Consult the West Midlands Section of the Showmen's Guild. It would be good practice to consult on the results of GTAAs as they become available. Consultation on a sub-regional basis should clarify needs and gain greater understanding of the locational requirements for sites for Travelling Showpeople and possible suitable locations. This is particularly important because new sites must be sustainable and capable of providing bases from which Showpeople can operate successful businesses as well as providing high quality residential accommodation. This requirement is not confined to areas where Showpeople currently live.

On the basis of this improved information and consultation, authorities should pro-actively start the process of identifying land suitable for sites for Travelling Showpeople for inclusion in their local development plans as soon as possible.

Appendix 1: Current Provision of Sites for Travelling Showpeople

Local authority	Site address	Plots/yards	Planning status	Comments
Shropshire, Herefordshire, Telford & Wrekin (and Powys) GTAA				
Bridgnorth	Netchwood Farm, Monkhopton	1 yard	Permission for 6 vehicles for residential occupancy 11 months of the year	
Oswestry	Smithfield, Shrewsbury Road, Oswestry	5 caravans	No permission. Winter use of car park permitted by Oswestry Town Council	
South Shropshire	Jolleys Farm, Edgton, Craven Arms	1 yard	Permission for winter quarters	Circus
Telford & Wrekin	Haybridge Road, Hadley	Not known	Not known	
South GTAA				
Bromsgrove	White Lion Park, Alvechurch	4 families	Granted on appeal	
Malvern Hills	Birchwood Drive, Malvern	11 plots	Authorised site	
Redditch	The Grove, Lakeside, Redditch	5	Established use	
Warwick	Lowsonford Site, Lapworth	5 plots	Lawful use	
Wyre Forest	Keens Farm, Callow Hill, Kidderminster	Thought to be 3	Lawful use	

Local authority	Site address	Plots/yards	Planning status	Comments
North Staffordshire GTAA				
Stoke on Trent	Adams Avenue, Tunstall	1	Established use	
Newcastle under Lyme	Hardingswood Road, Kidsgrove	1	Unknown	NB : Information from Guild – site confirmed to exist but no further detail available at present
Southern Staffordshire/Northern Warwickshire GTAA				
South Staffordshire	Kingswood Colliery, Churchbridge	5 families	No current permission	
South Staffordshire	Cannock Road, Featherstone	c9 caravans	No current permission	Winter use mainly
Cannock Chase	Grove Colliery, Pelsall	Unknown	Series of temporary permissions	
Nuneaton & Bedworth	Old Station Yard, Nuneaton	3 households	Established use	

Local authority	Site address	Plots/yards	Planning status	Comments
Black Country GTAA				
Dudley	Dudley Wood Road, Cradley Heath	10	Full permission from 1984	Occupied throughout the year
Sandwell	St Annes Road, Cradley Heath	7-10 plots	Unknown	Mainly used in winter
Sandwell	Woodhall Street, Cradley Heath	Unknown	Personal permission	
Sandwell	Newlyn Road, Cradley Heath	Up to 12 caravans	Permission granted 1988 for no more than 12 caravans	
Sandwell	Bannister Street, Cradley Heath	Unknown	Permission for single planning unit, to be used by Showmen families and not sub-divided	
Sandwell	Silverthorne Road, Cradley Heath	Unknown	Permission granted on appeal	
Walsall	Goscote Lane, Pelsall	20	Established use	
Walsall	Goscote Lane, Pelsall	10	Established use	
Walsall	Goscote Lane, Pelsall	11	Established use	
Walsall	Reaymer Close, Walsall	14 yards	Planning permission 1998	Yards in individual ownership

Walsall	Lindon Road, Walsall Wood	Unknown	Planning permission for storage of equipment	Guild understands there is also residential use for an extended family
Wolverhampton	Thompson Avenue, Parkfields	5	Permission	
Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull GTAA				
Birmingham	Shipway Road, Hay Mills	12 caravans	Unknown	