

# **Cherwell, West Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire Gypsy and Traveller Housing Needs Assessment 2012/13**

**Executive Report for Cherwell District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and South Northamptonshire Council**

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

In January 2012 arc<sup>4</sup>, working in partnership with Homespace Sustainable Accommodation (Homespace SA), were commissioned by the District Councils of Cherwell, West Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire to undertake a Gypsy and Traveller Housing Needs Assessment to identify the needs of Gypsies and Travellers from across the three districts.

The overall objective of the research was to provide a robust evidence base to inform future reviews of Supporting People Strategies, Local Development Frameworks (LDFs), and housing strategies.

## Methodology

The methodology for this study comprised:

- Interviews with Gypsies and Travellers;
- Desktop analysis of existing documents, data and pitch information; and
- A Key Stakeholder on-line Questionnaire for professionals who have direct contact with local Gypsy and Traveller communities.

The primary fieldwork for this study comprised survey work with Gypsies and Travellers. This work was managed by Homespace SA and undertaken by Gypsy and Traveller fieldworkers. Homespace SA was involved in the design of the questionnaire and in the recruitment of fieldworkers. A total of 142 interviews were secured (Table ES1), 99 with households living on a pitch on a private site, 13 living on local authority sites and 30 with people living in bricks and mortar accommodation.

**Table ES1** Summary of achieved interviews by District and type of dwelling

| Location                           | District |                  |                        | Total      |
|------------------------------------|----------|------------------|------------------------|------------|
|                                    | Cherwell | West Oxfordshire | South Northamptonshire |            |
| On Local Authority Site            | 0        | 13               | 0                      | <b>13</b>  |
| On Private Site                    | 61       | 14               | 24                     | <b>99</b>  |
| In Bricks and Mortar Accommodation | 19       | 11               | 0                      | <b>30</b>  |
| Total                              | 80       | 38               | 24                     | <b>142</b> |

In conjunction with interviews with members of the Gypsy and Traveller community, a range of complementary research methods have been used to permit the triangulation of results.

## Legislative and policy context

The report sets out the legislative and policy context within which the local authorities are working to address the needs of Gypsies and Travellers, which includes new guidance and definitions set out within the National Planning Policy Framework and the *Planning policy for traveller sites* documentation from CLG. The following definition of Gypsies and Travellers is adopted:

*'Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependants' educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling showpeople or circus people travelling together as such.'*

It is within this policy context that the local planning authorities will have to plan future provision for Gypsies and Travellers across their respective areas. The new National Planning policy emphasises the role of evidence and how it should be used within this context.

Paragraphs 8 and 9 of *Planning policy for traveller sites* state that;

*'Local planning authorities should set pitch targets for gypsies and travellers and plot targets for travelling show people which address the likely permanent and transit site accommodation needs of travellers in their area, working collaboratively with neighbouring local planning authorities'.*

*Local planning authorities should:*

- a) Identify and update annually, a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of sites against their locally set targets;*
- b) Identify a supply of specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for years six to ten and, where possible, for years 11-15;*
- c) Consider production of joint development plans that set targets on a cross-authority basis, to provide more flexibility in identifying sites, particularly if a local planning authority has special or strict planning constraints across its area (local planning authorities have a duty to cooperate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries);*
- d) Relate the number of pitches or plots to the circumstances of the specific size and location of the site and the surrounding population's size and density; and*
- e) Protect local amenity and environment.*

## The current picture: population, provision and pitch availability

According to CLG estimates (Table ES2) 0.6% of the population are Gypsies and Travellers. Applying this population data for the three local authority areas would result in a figure of around 851 residents in Cherwell, 629 in West Oxfordshire and 511 in South Northamptonshire.

**Table ES2** Estimate of Gypsy and Traveller Population (based on CLG, 2007)

| District               | Total Population <sup>1</sup> | Estimate of Gypsy and Traveller Population (0.6%) |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Cherwell               | 141,900                       | 851   |
| West Oxfordshire       | 104,800                       | 629   |
| South Northamptonshire | 85,200                        | 511   |

The extent of current authorised provision across Cherwell, West Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire is as follows:

- There are 83 authorised pitches across West Oxfordshire across ten sites;
- There are 70 pitches across seven sites in Cherwell; and
- In South Northamptonshire there are only three authorised pitches on one private site.

In total, across the three areas, as of 31st March 2012 there are 156 authorised pitches across 18 sites

In terms of unauthorised sites, in West Oxfordshire and Cherwell the number of unauthorised sites had been falling, with 13 encampments recorded in 2008 and 2009, and 10 in 2010. However in 2011 the number rose to 20, with the majority of these incidents taking place between June and September 2011. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 there were four reported unauthorised encampments in Cherwell, two in West Oxfordshire and two in South Northamptonshire. A site at Deanshanger in South Northamptonshire is a long-standing tolerated unauthorised site, located on land owned by Northamptonshire County Council that was acquired via Compulsory Purchase following road improvements to the A422 over ten years ago.

## Tenure

Overall, 51.5% of respondents owned their own home, 34.6% rented privately, 10.8% rented from the Council and 3.1% rented from a Housing Association. Of those living on a pitch on a site, 57% owned, 34% rented privately and 9% rented from a social landlord. Of those living in bricks and mortar accommodation, 36.7% rented privately, 33% owned their own home and 30% rented from a social landlord

## Facilities

Facilities vary from site to site, and were generally inadequate to meet the needs and requirements of residents. Analysis of responses shows that only 47.3% of respondents living on a pitch on a site had a shed; access to kitchens, toilets and bathrooms was overwhelmingly poor and few respondents had access to laundry facilities. Only 37.5% respondents had access to mains water and sewerage facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: ONS, 2011 Census

There was a significant incidence of shared facilities with 29.6% of respondents sharing a toilet, 25.4% of respondents sharing a bath with another household, 9.2% a kitchen and 3.5% a laundry. This is a situation commonly faced by residents on sites across the study area.

## Repairs and improvements

In terms of repairs and improvements needed for those living on pitches on a site, the biggest problems were associated with the need for more space on a pitch, with 94.3% finding a lack of space problematic. There were also issues with kitchens/bathrooms, particularly in West Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire. CLG guidance states that sites should provide, as a minimum, access to a separate toilet, bath/shower room, and a kitchen and dining area should be provided. This is clearly problematic on a number of sites within the study area.

For respondents living in bricks and mortar accommodation a range of issues were identified including a lack of space and improvements needed to bathroom and kitchen facilities, drives, roofs, doors and windows.

## Space standards and overcrowding

73.9% of respondents felt there was sufficient space overall on their pitch. Respondents in South Northamptonshire were most likely to state there was insufficient space, with 57.9% stating this.

The majority of respondents (93.7%) did not feel that their home was overcrowded; compared to only 6.3% who did. Overcrowding would seem to be a greater issue in South Northamptonshire where 16.7% of respondents described themselves as overcrowded. No-one living in bricks and mortar accommodation felt that they were overcrowded.

## Satisfaction and safety

Satisfaction with the location of the home of respondents is high, with 77.1% overall stating that they were very satisfied or satisfied. Only 1.4% stated a degree of dissatisfaction.

Interviewees were asked how happy they were with the neighbourhood in which they were located; overall the majority of respondents were either very happy or happy (80.7%) with their neighbourhood.

In terms of safety, virtually all (97.8%) of respondents felt safe in their neighbourhood, although respondents living in bricks and mortar were more likely to say they did not feel safe (7.4%) compared with 0.9% of respondents living on pitches.

## Cost of accommodation and services

Respondents were asked about the cost of accommodation and services provided. On the basis of responses given, the majority of respondents (96.3%) paid between £60 and £70 each week for their accommodation. Most people living on pitches paid

up to £70 each week with the exception of South Northamptonshire where only 25% paid up to £70 per week; here 50% of respondents paid between £100 and £150 each week.

The cost of services (in particular gas, electricity and oil) was identified as an issue across the majority of respondents, in particular those living in bricks and mortar accommodation.

## Planned moves

Respondents were asked whether they planned to move over the next five years. The vast majority of residents plan to stay where they are (112 out of 130 respondents).

## Pitch requirements

There is a total demand over the next five years (2012/13 to 2016/17) for five pitches in Cherwell, six in West Oxfordshire and six in South Northamptonshire (Table ES3).

**Table ES3** Summary of current pitch supply and shortfalls 2012/13 to 2016/17

|  | Cherwell | West Oxfordshire | South Northamptonshire | Total |
|--|----------|------------------|------------------------|-------|
| Existing supply (at 31st March 2012)         | 70       | 83               | 10 <sup>2</sup>        | 163   |
| Future pitch requirements 2012/13 to 2016/17 | 5        | 6                | 6                      | 17    |

Modelling assumes a five year time horizon but it is feasible to extrapolate the findings over a longer time-frame. Assuming there is no significant change in demand for pitches or pitch availability; analysis would suggest a total 15 year requirement (2012/13 to 2026/27) of 15 pitches in Cherwell, 18 in West Oxfordshire and 18 in South Northamptonshire (see Table ES4).

**Table ES4** Summary of current pitch supply and shortfalls 2012/13 to 2026/27

|  | Cherwell | West Oxfordshire | South Northamptonshire | Total |
|--|----------|------------------|------------------------|-------|
| Existing supply (at 31st March 2012)         | 70       | 83               | 10 <sup>3</sup>        | 163   |
| Future pitch requirements 2012/13 to 2026/27 | 15       | 18               | 18                     | 51    |

<sup>2/3</sup> Note: Of the existing supply (10), 7 are from tolerated unauthorised pitches.

## Type of new provision

Respondents were asked if there is a need for new permanent sites for Gypsies and Travellers across the three districts and, if so, what sort of provision this should be and where should it be located.

The majority of respondents, 125 out of 131, agreed that there was a need for new provision across the three Districts. Respondents from Cherwell and West Oxfordshire also agreed this new provision should be owned and managed privately by non-Gypsies and Travellers (69.4% Cherwell, 56.3% West Oxfordshire - 64.9% overall). Only 18.1% of respondents wanted new provision to be managed by Housing Associations, and 15.6% by Councils. No views were expressed by respondents from South Northamptonshire.

The greatest expressed preference for location of new provision was for Oxford and Headington. Respondents were asked how many new pitches they felt were needed in their current district of residence over the next five years. A majority of respondents in Cherwell and West Oxfordshire suggested up to 20 additional pitches. Across South Northamptonshire, a majority of respondents felt there was a need for at least 20 additional pitches over the next five years.

## Travelling practices and experiences

Around half of respondents (46.8%) had travelled in the previous year, but this varied according to dwelling type, with 58.2% of those on pitches on sites having travelled compared with 34.5% of those living in bricks and mortar accommodation.

Of respondents that had travelled in the previous year, a majority (58.4%) had travelled for less than one month, with 18.1% travelling for less than 13 days and 40.3% travelling for between two weeks and one month. A further 30.6% travelled for between one and three months, with 11.2% travelling for at least three months but not more than ten months.

A range of problems can be experienced whilst travelling and respondents were asked to identify these. Most frequently the problems mentioned were no places to stop over (83.6%) and the closing of traditional stopping places (82.1%). Other frequently mentioned problems included police behaviour (64.2%), lack of toilet facilities (61.2%) and abuse, harassment or discrimination (58.2%).

## Transit sites

Views were sought on the current provision of transit sites across the Districts and 86.4% of respondents said that there was a need for provision of new transit sites across all three Districts, whilst 13.6% said not. At District level, 86.3% of respondents in Cherwell, 91.7% in South Northamptonshire and 82.9% in West Oxfordshire felt that there was a need for additional transit sites to be provided.

## Homelessness

Overall 21.3% of respondents said that they had experienced homelessness within the past five years. Rates of homelessness were higher amongst those living on a pitch on a site, at 22% compared to 18.5% for those living in bricks and mortar accommodation.

## Wider service and support needs

The vast majority of respondents interviewed stated that they were registered with a doctor (89.4%) and 58.5% were registered with a dentist. The proportion of respondents registered with a doctor and dentist were consistently higher amongst residents living in bricks and mortar accommodation; residents in Cherwell and West Oxfordshire were also more likely to be registered.

The most used services were Doctor (GP) and Dentist. GP services were accessed by 91.3% of respondents in South Northamptonshire, 90.8% of respondents in Cherwell and 83.3% in West Oxfordshire. Dentists were accessed by 64.5% of respondents in Cherwell, 77.8% of respondents in West Oxfordshire and 52.2% of respondents in South Northamptonshire.

The proportion of respondents using other services tended to be considerably lower. For instance, the next most frequently used services by respondents in Cherwell is the Citizens' Advice Bureau (32.9%), Traveller Liaison Service (26.3%) and Accident and Emergency services (26.3%). In South Northamptonshire, the next most frequently used services are Accident and Emergency (30.4%) and Traveller Education (17.4%). In West Oxfordshire the next most frequently used services are Citizens Advice Bureaux (22.2%), Traveller Education (19.4%) and Traveller Liaison (19.4%).

## Long term illness and disability

Arthritis and asthma are the main long-term illnesses identified, with particularly high levels amongst those living on pitches on sites. Similarly, incidences of depression (the next most common long-term illness in Cherwell and West Oxfordshire) are higher amongst those living on a pitch on a site than for those living in bricks and mortar accommodation. In both Cherwell and South Northamptonshire issues with hearing and sight were particularly noted.

## Stakeholder consultation

Stakeholders identified the following key issues as those most affecting Gypsies and Travellers across the three districts:

- Lack of land/sites;
- Prejudice and discrimination;
- Illiteracy;
- Lack of job opportunities;

- Isolation;
- Access to healthcare;
- Lack of understanding from settled community; and
- Lack of local authority commitment to facilitate additional provision.

## Local authority summaries

### Cherwell

Across Cherwell District there are seven private sites with a total of 70 pitches. The largest sites are Smiths Caravan Site, Bloxham with 36 pitches and Bicester Trailer Park (Rossiters) in Bicester with 8 pitches.

An analysis of future demand which takes into account current pitch provision, future moving intentions of existing households and emerging need from newly-forming households, indicates a shortfall of 5 pitches over the five year period 2012/13 to 2016/17 and a shortfall of 15 pitches over the fifteen years 2012/13 to 2026/27. This should be viewed as a minimum requirement based on the data received from the Gypsy and Traveller community and regularly reviewed.

A key option available to deliver additional pitch provision is the granting of planning permissions for the expansion of existing sites (e.g. Rossiters in Bicester)

### West Oxfordshire

Across West Oxfordshire District there is one Local Authority site at Standlake (16 pitches) and 67 pitches across nine sites, the largest of which are Ting Tang Lane (23 pitches) and the Beeches near Chadlington (20 pitches).

An analysis of future demand which takes into account current pitch provision, future moving intentions of existing households and emerging need from newly-forming households, indicates a shortfall of 6 pitches over the five year period 2012/13 to 2016/17 and a shortfall of 18 pitches over the fifteen years 2012/13 to 2026/27. This should be viewed as a minimum requirement based on the data received from the Gypsy and Traveller community and regularly reviewed.

Key options available to deliver additional pitch provision are the granting of planning permissions for the expansion of existing sites and a review of unauthorised sites to explore if planning permission can be granted on them.

### South Northamptonshire

Across South Northamptonshire there is one authorised private site at Abthorpe and a tolerated site at Deanshanger.

An analysis of future demand which takes into account current pitch provision, future moving intentions of existing households and emerging need from newly-forming households, indicates a shortfall of 6 pitches over the five year period 2012/13 to 2016/17 and a shortfall of 18 pitches over the fifteen years 2012/13 to 2026/27. This

should be viewed as a minimum requirement based on the data received from the Gypsy and Traveller community and regularly reviewed.

A key challenge for South Northamptonshire is to improve the accommodation situation of households living at Deanshanger. This is a well-established unauthorised encampment but conditions are poor and overcrowded pitches commonplace. Options would include authorising the site or providing an alternative site for households currently residing on the site.

## Key issues and how to tackle them

The key priority issues identified by the research include:

- Meeting pitch requirements;
- Addressing poor conditions on existing sites; and
- Tackling wider service and support needs.

## Recommendations for meeting pitch requirements

To enable the Districts to meet the identified pitch requirements it is recommended that consideration is given to the following:

- That the Districts continue to work collaboratively to meet identified need;
- That mechanisms are established to enable effective engagement with both settled and Traveller communities about identifying future sites;
- That appropriate sites are identified to meet requirements;
- That needs are monitored on an on-going basis;
- That options to secure provision of pitches through planning gain and exception sites are pursued;
- That the use of Community Land Trusts (CLTs) to meet needs is explored;
- That consideration is given to disposal of publicly owned land to meet pitch requirements;
- That consideration is given as to the ways in which Gypsies and Travellers can be supported through the planning application process;
- That a key point of contact is identified for each local authority to deal with all matters relating to Gypsy and Travellers;
- That key stakeholders are kept up-to-date and fully briefed on progress;
- That resources are identified to develop a proactive communications strategy, starting with dissemination of these research findings, to enable positive media coverage of Gypsy and Traveller issues;
- That, where necessary, training is provided for staff and elected members to promote better cultural understanding, counter prejudice and aid communication; and

- Develop demarked transit/stop-over provision on permanent sites to ensure effective management.

### Recommendations for addressing poor conditions on sites

To enable the Districts to address issues linked to poor site condition it is recommended that consideration is given to the following:

- That all planning applications ensure decent site design and layout, that is developed in partnership with the Gypsy and Traveller community, and is in accordance with CLG Design Guidance as a minimum;
- That appropriate planning policy guidance in respect of site design and layout is adopted within the three District's Local Plans; and
- That improvements in conditions on existing pitches are encouraged through on-going dialogue and partnership working with Gypsy and Traveller communities.

### Recommendations for tackling wider service and support needs

To enable the Districts to tackle wider service and support needs it is recommended that consideration is given to the following:

- That, in line with the best practice set out within this chapter, the Councils review how they engage with Gypsy and Traveller communities locally, and develop new methods of long-term, on-going engagement;
- Provision of additional support to Gypsy and Traveller communities to enable them to better access services and support;
- That the District councils liaise with Traveller Education services and local colleges and schools to identify opportunities to support and facilitate opportunities to improve literacy amongst Gypsy and Traveller communities;
- Continue to work with healthcare professionals to improve health outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers, including working to improve property conditions, which adversely impact upon the health of those living on pitches on sites.