



# **Thurrock Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson Accommodation Assessment**

**FINAL REPORT**

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# Executive summary

## Context of the study

1. In March 2006 Thurrock Council commissioned Fordham Research to conduct an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. This report is the result of the needs assessment. It provides an overview of the accommodation situation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in the Borough, estimates the extent of accommodation need for Gypsies and Travellers and also makes recommendations for extending assistance and improving service provision. This is in the context of the Housing Act 2004 which requires local authorities to include Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in their local housing needs assessment.
2. Beyond assessing current provision and potential need, the study also aims to give the Council a wider understanding of issues facing Gypsies and Travellers and examine the strategic implications of the research findings.
3. To achieve these aims the study drew on a number of data sources including:
  - **Review of secondary information**, including government policy and regional housing strategies
  - **Stakeholder consultation** with local and national organisations involved with Gypsy and Traveller affairs
  - **Survey of Gypsies and Travellers** living on sites and in bricks and mortar accommodation to examine their accommodation needs

## Review of secondary information

4. It is recognised that nationally there are insufficient numbers of pitches on authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites to accommodate all those who would like a permanent place to stop. As well as the Housing Act 2004, local authorities also need to have regard of their statutory duties, including those in respect of homelessness under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 and to their obligations under the Race Relations (Amendments) Act 2000. However the effectiveness of existing legislation has been limited by the extent of its requirements and a general failure to implement it. As a result local authorities have often failed to deliver adequate sites for Gypsies and Travellers.

5. Regionally and nationally the Gypsy and Traveller population is growing. However the number of caravans in Thurrock has fallen by 5% since January 2004, due to a decrease in the number of caravans on unauthorised encampments. No seasonal fluctuations are apparent in Thurrock's data although this may be due to changes in Caravan Count practices. Thurrock has a higher proportion of caravans on socially rented sites compared to other areas in Essex, East of England and nationally. However the area has proportionally more unauthorised sites and a very small amount of private sites.

### **Stakeholder consultation**

6. It was highlighted in the stakeholder consultations that the local authority sites in Thurrock were close to their full capacity with few empty pitches. Also noted was the lack of planning policy to bring forward new sites and prevent the occurrence of unauthorised developments. The condition and safety of the local authority sites was also raised, as was the need for separate transit provision.
7. While some outreach work by service providers took place with Gypsies and Travellers, funding and staff shortages resulted in limited and short-term services. It was reported that support was needed from the Council in the form of a coherent policy towards improving the health and education status of Gypsies and Travellers and their access to services. This would be aided by developing strategic process and joint-working practices.

### **Gypsy and Traveller survey**

8. A team of Gypsy and Traveller interviewers were used to carry out a survey in Thurrock. 48 interviews were conducted with Gypsies and Travellers living in local authority sites, self-owned authorised sites, unauthorised developments and housing. The Gypsy and Traveller population in Thurrock are well-settled, living on permanent sites for several years, with few intending to move or travel somewhere else.
9. The general consensus was that respondents were happy with where they lived, with the exception of Pilgrims Lane. Fears regarding child safety were raised, and concerns were expressed concerning the cost of pitches. Residents on all the local authority sites noted that the sites needed refurbishment, in particular the condition of day rooms need improving. Other issues include the management of sites, rubbish collection and electricity metering.



10. Overcrowding and a lack of accommodation provision for newly forming families was also a concern, as there was a strong expectation that children would continue living on sites in the Thurrock area. Preferably respondents would like to live on a private, family-sized site however planning constraints and local opposition were identified as barriers to achieving this.
11. The enrolment of Gypsy and Traveller children in education was high, as was respondents' registration with local GPs. Use of local services was high, although few respondents made use of Council services. Some respondents felt isolated from community services due to the lack of public transport; others said that they were not relevant or appropriate to Gypsies and Travellers.

### **Travelling Showpeople survey**

12. 64 interviews took place at the Buckles Lane site. This includes residents of the authorised part of the site, those on the land with temporary planning permission and the adjacent unauthorised land.
13. The vast majority of respondents had lived on the site for at least five years and were very happy with their living conditions and the facilities available; none wanted to live elsewhere. Most respondents no longer travelled, suggesting Buckles Lane is more of a permanent residential site than just winter quarters.
14. Respondents made good use of local services and facilities (including schools and healthcare). The main concerns of respondents were over the future of the site, particularly the uncertainty over planning permission and the lack of space for expansion. There was a strong expectation that children would continue living on sites in Thurrock and that they would need their own yard if they were to maintain a traditional lifestyle.

### **Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need**

15. Accommodation and need assessments were carried out for Thurrock's Gypsy and Traveller population in line with CLG practice guidance. The following table summarises the assessments and shows that the total extra residential pitch provision required in Thurrock by 2016 is 50 pitches, and is expected to further rise to 61 pitches by 2021. However this presumes that those families living on sites who said they would prefer to live in bricks and mortar accommodation are able to move. If they are not, the total would be 43 pitches, rising to 72 by 2021 (see 8.6).

<b>Assessment of need for residential site pitches: 2006 – 2016</b>	
Families on local authority site pitches	60
Families on authorised privately owned site pitches	18
<b>1. Total number of families</b>	<b>78</b>
Unused local authority pitches	5
Existing pitches expected to become vacant	-
Number of families on sites wishing to live in housing	11
New local authority pitches planned	-
Existing applications for private sites likely to gain permission	-
<b>2. Total pitch provision available</b>	<b>94</b>
Families seeking permanent site accommodation in area	20
Families on unauthorised sites	8
Families on unauthorised developments without permission	13
Currently overcrowded	6
New family formations from elsewhere	-
In housing but wishing to move to site accommodation	1
<b>3. Total additional demand</b>	<b>48</b>
Current shortfall (= 78 plus 48 minus 94)	32
Family formation 2006 – 2016	18
<b>Total extra pitch need 2006 – 2016</b>	<b>50 pitches</b>

## Travelling Showpeople accommodation need

16. Most of the need for Travelling Showpeople accommodation is created by the large number of families living on the section of Buckles Lane that is not fully authorised. However need is also created by overcrowding (particularly on the authorised part of Buckles Lane) and concealed households. The following table shows how many additional pitches in Thurrock are needed according to two scenarios. The first column shows how many plots are needed should the current situation at Buckles Lane continue with a large section having only temporary planning permission. 73 plots are currently required rising to 118 in 2021. The second column shows the level of need should all of Buckles Lane be fully regularised with permanent planning permission. The need in 2021 is therefore significantly lower, estimated to be an extra 55 plots. *NB: the table refers to need in Thurrock as a whole, so includes the need generated by both sections of Buckles Lane and by the Tilbury yard.*

**Table 9.5 Total extra plot provision in Thurrock, 2006 - 2026**

Year	Plots needed (Buckles Lane not regularised)	Plots needed (Buckles Lane regularised)
2006	73	11
2011	85	24
2016	100	38
2021	118	55
2026	137	74

## Recommendations

17. Based on the research findings, we make a series of recommendations for Thurrock Council to consider.

- **Site provision**

18. Another two residential sites are required to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers in Thurrock. This is substantially made up of families on site waiting lists. However given that there is little scope to expand the already large sites, and that Thurrock provides over a quarter of local authority provision in Essex, our view is that the RSS should ensure that extra need is met in other areas of Essex where there is a lower level of local authority provision.
19. The Council should identify suitable land for Gypsies and Travellers to buy, allowing them to establish small sites owned by the occupiers. The identified land should be suitably located, particularly as regards proximity to noisy and dangerous traffic, and access to public transport and local services. The possibility of applying retrospective planning permission to tolerated unauthorised developments should also be explored, as a way to reduce need and provide residents with security.

- **Facilities, access and service provision**

20. The Council should explore the possibility of providing children's play areas on local authority sites, either on site or easily and safely accessible from the site.
21. Safety at Pilgrims Lane was a major concern for residents. The provision of a foot path at the site and the implementation of speed humps would help increase road safety. The Council should engage with site residents to explain these measures and help allay safety concerns.

22. The refurbishment of the day rooms at Gammon Field and Ship Lane should be conducted, and larger utility blocks provided at Pilgrims Lane. Private postboxes should be available on all three sites.
23. Many survey respondents reported feeling isolated from local services and facilities. We recommend that Thurrock Council take into account the needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople when designing public transport routes.
24. Education and health services for Gypsies and Travellers were well established and positively regarded. However funding and staffing needs to be planned on a long-term basis to ensure current progress and outcomes are not lost.
25. The Council should lead efforts to form a coherent, multi-agency policy towards improving the health and education status of Gypsies and Travellers. The development of strategic processes and joint-working practices should be established to help achieve this.

- **Travelling Showpeople yards**

26. Thurrock Council should take steps towards granting full planning permission to the western section of Buckles Lane. This would substantially reduce the overall amount of need in Thurrock and would be more cost-effective than providing alternative accommodation for the families living on the unauthorised section.
27. Additional need is created by overcrowded and concealed households and new family formation among Thurrock Travelling Showpeople population. To increase provision, the Council should investigate the possibility of expanding the Tilbury site and identify small plots of land for Travelling Showpeople families to establish their own yards.
28. Given the size of existing sites, it is likely that new yards for Travelling Showpeople will be needed outside Thurrock. The Council should work with the Regional Assembly to increase the amount of accommodation for Travelling Showpeople in Essex.

- **Recording and monitoring process**

29. Thurrock should include Travelling Showpeople in the biannual Caravan Count. Although not required to include this group, accurate information on population levels is necessary for the strategic planning of accommodation.

30. Finally we recommend that Thurrock Council review the accommodation needs of its Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople every three to five years, to take into account the relatively young age at which new families form in the communities, and the preference of many young families to live on their own pitch on the same site as their wider family.

## **Conclusion**

31. While there is need for additional pitch provision in the Thurrock area (equivalent to two residential sites), Thurrock already provides a large proportion of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers. Consequently a joint approach with the Regional Assembly and neighbouring authorities should be taken to increase provision equally across Essex.
32. In Thurrock we recommend that existing sites be refurbished and highlighted problems solved in partnership with representatives of the Gypsy, Traveller, and Travelling Showpeople community. The concern that families will outgrow sites is also an issue that raises concerns and consideration into the extension of sites explored.
33. All service providers in the area would benefit from a coherent policy from the Council, and strategic processes and joint-working practices should be developed. Finally, the provision and commitment of funding and staff would assist with longer-term provision



## SECTION A: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

- A1 This report is the result of a Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation needs assessment undertaken by *Fordham Research* on behalf of Thurrock Council. It provides an overview of the accommodation situation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in Thurrock, estimates the extent of need and also makes recommendations for improving the provision of accommodation and services in Thurrock.
- A2 The report is divided into two sections. The first sets the scene for Thurrock, pinpointing key issues relating to Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, before analysing secondary data. The second section contains results from a stakeholder consultation, site survey and an estimate of accommodation need among the groups. It also contains a concluding chapter bringing together the main points from the research and making recommendations for Thurrock Council on Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation and service provision.





# 1. Introduction

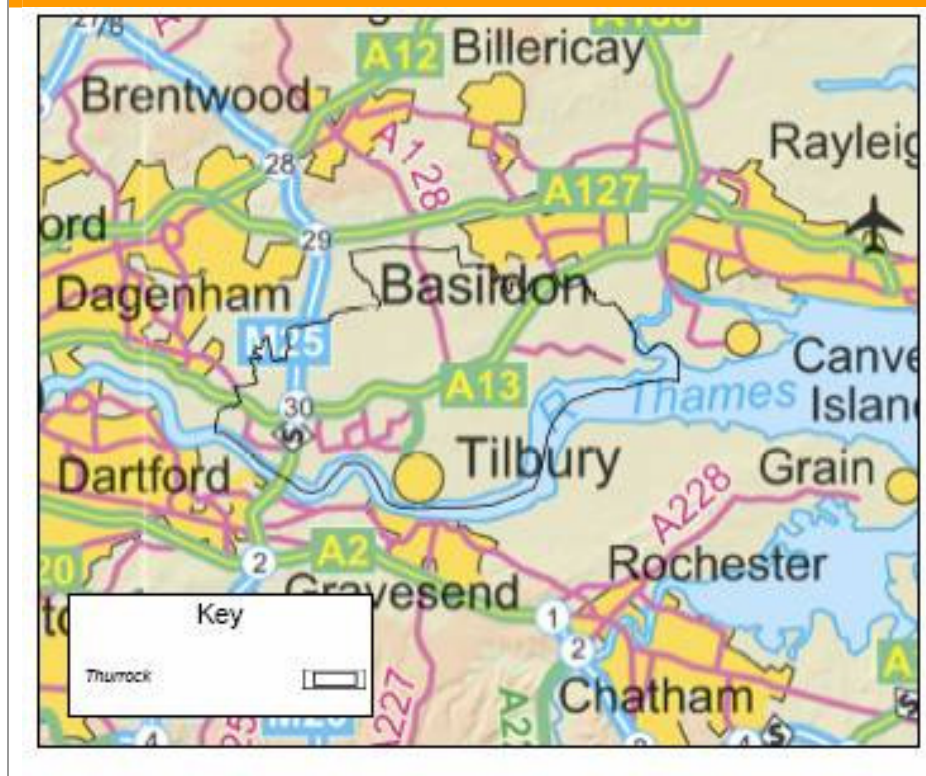
## Study context

- 1.1 In March 2006 Thurrock Council commissioned Fordham Research to conduct an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. The report was commissioned following an Essex wide Needs Assessment which was felt did not provide the depth that Thurrock had hoped for. This report is the result of the needs assessment. It provides an overview of the accommodation situation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in the Borough, estimates the extent of accommodation need and also makes recommendations for extending assistance and improving service provision.
- 1.2 Data collection and analysis for the assessment has been implemented in line with practice guidance set out by Communities and Local Government (CLG) in 'Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments' (October 2007) and 'Local Housing Assessment: A Practice Guide' (March 2005), obliging local authorities to assess the level of need for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites. These assessments are a key piece of research for local authorities, informing the Local Development Framework process.

## Aims and objectives of the research

- 1.3 The aim of the study is to examine current and potential accommodation need among Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in the Thurrock area. In view of this a number of additional objectives have been defined:
  - To obtain a wider understanding of issues facing among Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople
  - To examine the use of official sites and the problems encountered
  - To understand the effect on the level of need of extending planning permission to unauthorised developments
  - To examine the strategic implications of the research findings
- 1.4 The overall aim of the study is to assess whether there is a need to provide further accommodation provision within the Borough and, if so, how it should be provided to best meet the needs of Thurrock's travelling communities.
- 1.5 A map of the study area is presented below.

**Figure 1.1 Map of the study area**



## **Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in Thurrock**

- 1.6 Thurrock contains three local authority sites for Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers at Gammon Field (Grays), Pilgrims Lane (Grays) and Ship Lane (Aveley). They are of a similar size, and contain a combined total of 64 residential pitches. This accounts for over a quarter of all pitches in Essex. There are also five private sites with permission for a total of 30 caravans. In recent years Gypsies and Travellers have started establishing their own sites in breach of planning law and often in Green Belt land. Four of these unauthorised developments are tolerated, with a total of 20 caravans. Additionally there are 12 caravans on various sites that are not tolerated, including a few at authorised sites. There are few incidences of unauthorised encampments and the Council's 'zero tolerance' approach means they do not stay in Thurrock for a significant amount of time.
- 1.7 Thurrock has also historically been the base for a significant number of Travelling Showpeople. It should be stressed at this early stage that they have a different cultural identity to Gypsies and Travellers as well as a unique lifestyle. Traditionally sites are used as 'winter quarters' from which Showpeople travel for the rest of the year while working on fairs, and are used as a base for carrying out repairs and maintenance. However this traditional pattern has changed, with an increasing need for permanent, yearlong occupation, especially for elderly family members and children attending school in the area.

- 1.8 There are three sites for 'winter quarters' in Thurrock, at Tilbury, West Thurrock and Buckles Lane, South Ockendon. The site at Buckles Lane, which is private, is one of the largest in Europe. Land to the west of the authorised site has been granted temporary planning permission for Showpeople, granted at appeal in the absence of alternative provision for the families. However the site has recently also over spilled into adjacent Green Belt land which is subject to enforcement action by the Council.
- 1.9 While they are not included in the CLG circular 01/2006 as Gypsies or Travellers – they are currently covered in their own circular 04/2007 – the guidance on conducting needs assessments counts Travelling Showpeople in the definition. Circular 04/2007 requires that separate needs assessments are conducted for both groups in recognition of their separate identities and different lifestyles.<sup>1</sup>

### **Accommodation need in Essex**

- 1.10 In May 2005, Essex Planning Officers Association commissioned the University of Salford to carry out an assessment of the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers in Essex.<sup>2</sup> The report concluded that a projected 59 additional pitches would be necessary by 2016 in Essex. It also recognises that 442 (221 pitches) caravans are on unauthorised sites and will need accommodation provided. However there are several methodological reasons why this is likely to be an underestimate of the true scale of need.
- 1.11 The assessment was based on secondary data from the Caravan Count however, as explained in Chapter 4, this often undercounts the true number of caravans. In the absence of survey data, the method used to estimate household formations was based on future household increases in the local, general population. Consequently the report fails to account for the difference formation patterns of local and Gypsy and Traveller communities. Another methodological problem arises from the formula for estimating the projected number of additional pitches as it assumes that more than one family can share a pitch. This is contrary to the CLG draft practice guidance (February 2006, page 22), which came out after the research was conducted, and the Cambridge Sub-Region Traveller Needs Assessment, which informed the guidance. Both documents support one family per pitch, as providing a pitch for more than one family can create tension.

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<sup>1</sup> Communities and Local Government Circular 04/2007, *Planning for Travelling Showpeople*. .

<sup>2</sup> Anya Ahmed, Phillip Brown and Andy Steele (2006) *Looking Back, Moving Forward: Assessing the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers in Essex* (draft final report), Essex Planning Officers Association, University of Salford.

## **Policy background**

- 1.12 The government is committed to ensuring that members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities should have the same access to decent and appropriate accommodation as every other citizen and that there are sufficient resources available to meet their needs.
- 1.13 It is recognised that there are insufficient numbers of pitches on authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites to accommodate all those who would like a permanent place to stop. Public sites provided under the Caravan Site Act 1960 have reduced the shortfall, but the effectiveness of subsequent legislative changes has been limited both by the nature of the legislation and a failure to implement it.
- 1.14 Obtaining planning permission has also been identified as one of the major obstacles to further site provision. Gypsies and Travellers attempting to buy their own site frequently fall foul of the planning system whereby they buy land, try to develop it without planning permission, and subsequently find themselves facing enforcement action. Many Travelling Showpeople have been displaced from sites in recent years and this has led to unauthorised developments.
- 1.15 Under provisions introduced by the Housing Act 2004 local authorities are required to include Gypsies and Travellers in their local housing needs assessments and to take a strategic approach, including drawing up a strategy demonstrating how their accommodation needs will be met, as part of their wider housing strategies.
- 1.16 One of the tests of soundness of a Development Plan will be whether it is founded on robust and credible evidence, and data from these assessments is an important part of the evidence base for Regional Housing and Spatial strategies.
- 1.17 Local authorities will also need to have regard to their statutory duties, including those in respect of homelessness under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 and to their obligations under the Race Relations (Amendments) Act 2000 which prohibits racial discrimination by planning authorities in carrying out their planning functions.

## **Methodology**

- 1.18 A steering group was formed to oversee the research, comprising representatives from Thurrock Council's Strategic Planning department and service providers and agencies working with the local Gypsy and Traveller communities. It advised on methodology and site access and was consulted on the design of the survey questionnaire.
- 1.19 Our research design contains two core components of primary data:

- A3 **Stakeholder consultation** with representatives involved with local organisations involved with Gypsy and Travelling Showpeople affairs
- A4 **Survey of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople** on sites and in bricks and mortar accommodation, to assess their level accommodation need

## **Report Format**

1. Chapter 2 clarifies the Gypsy and Traveller definitions that are used in this study. Chapter 3 outlines the Gypsy and Traveller policy debate and examines current regional and national strategies. There then follows a chapter summarising the stakeholder consultation which precedes an analysis of the results from the survey in Chapter 5. The extent of accommodation need is assessed in Chapter 6, before a final chapter containing overall conclusions and policy recommendations for Thurrock Council to consider.



## 2. Definitions and terminology

### Introduction

- 2.1 Any discussion of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople must first address the question of definition. That is, to whom do the terms actually refer, and therefore who is being considered in the context of this study? This is an important point to raise and subject to considerable debate because, to date, no universally accepted definition exists. As already stated, both culturally and in terms of some government legislation, Travelling Showpeople are considered different to Gypsies and Travellers and so are discussed separately.

### Definition of a Gypsy or Traveller

- 2.2 The definition of a Gypsy or Traveller is far from clear cut. Though they make up a small proportion of the British population, their distinctive cultures, characteristics and accommodation needs present significant and complex issues. It is important therefore to attempt to describe some of the characteristics of Gypsies and Travellers as a context to the central and local government policies which follow.
- 2.3 The legal definition of a Gypsy was first set out in the 1968 Caravan Sites Act and stated that the term *meant 'persons of nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin, but does not include members of an organised group of travelling showpeople or persons engaged in travelling circuses travelling together as such'*. However this definition was deemed unsatisfactory and was clarified by the Court of Appeal in 1994 as *'persons who wander or travel for the purpose of making or seeking their livelihood (not persons who move from place to place without any connection between their movements and their livelihood)'*.
- 2.4 Through focusing on their way of life, the definition was seen as a way of defining Gypsies without reference to their ethnicity. However, concentrating on lifestyle and nomadism leads to a possible distinction between 'born' Gypsies and Travellers, and members of the settled community who have adopted a travelling lifestyle by choice. This raises questions about the length of time or the number of generations required to establish a 'nomadic habit of life' by people taking to travelling and, conversely, the period of 'settlement' which would break a 'nomadic habit of life'.

- 2.5 There are currently two definitions of Gypsies and Travellers in government policy – a ‘housing’ one (set out in the practice guidance) and a ‘planning one’, as in Circular 01/06. The difference between the two is that the planning definition specifically excludes Travelling Showpeople. The housing definition is therefore more inclusive and has been used for the purpose of the Thurrock GTAA:

*‘Persons of a nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds of their family’s or dependents’ educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism and/or cultural dwelling.’*

### **Definition of a Gypsy or Traveller site**

- 2.6 In addition to the need to have a clear definition of what constitutes a Gypsy or Traveller, it is also important to understand what is considered to be a traveller site. It is sometimes argued that ‘Gypsy sites’ are a construct of the settled community through planning and caravan sites legislation, which has been ‘foisted’ on the Gypsy and Traveller community in an attempt to enable continued caravan dwelling and mobility while conforming to settled community ideas of land ownership and authorised land use. None the less defining the term is an important part of outlining the study area considered in this report.
- 2.7 ‘Gypsy sites’ as described in the 2003 CLG *publication Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England* are caravan sites provided explicitly for Gypsies and other Travellers. On local authority sites and some private ones the norm is for Gypsy and Traveller families to live in owner-occupied caravans or mobile homes on plots rented under licence from the site provider. Private sites are typically owned by the occupying family, although there are examples of commercially developed private sites. Very few publicly provided sites cater for transit need, and most are designed for residential use with hard standing, water, electricity and standard amenities provided on an individual family basis.
- 2.8 At the other extreme, some Gypsies and other Travellers engaged in full-time travelling lack any form of authorised accommodation, living in caravans on unauthorised encampments on a variety of sites including the roadside, public open spaces, fields and woodlands, industrial estates, car parks and playing fields. Gypsies and Travellers on unauthorised sites experience great uncertainty as to the permitted length of stay, and can be subject to rapid eviction for trespass. In addition, Gypsies and Travellers experience a lack of basic taken-for-granted services and facilities which is unique in the UK today.



- 2.9 A further complication is that all Gypsy and Traveller sites, including those provided by local authorities, must have planning permission. Getting planning permission has been identified as one of the major obstacles to further site provision. Gypsies and Travellers seeking to provide sites for themselves frequently fall foul of the planning system when they buy land and move on without permission and are faced with enforcement action. In view of these pressures many Gypsies and Travellers now live in bricks and mortar accommodation. Although this has been the case for many years, very little is known about Gypsies and Travellers living in housing.

### **Definition of a Travelling Showperson**

- 2.10 As stated, the definition of Gypsies and Travellers in the most recent planning circular 01/06 specifically excludes Travelling Showpeople. They are subject to their own circular, 22/91, although an update is currently being consulted on.<sup>3</sup> The current circular defines Travelling Showpeople as *'self-employed business people who travel the country holding fairs, chiefly during the summer months'*. It explains that, despite their work being *'of a peripatetic nature'*, they require permanent bases for storing equipment and for residential purposes. While traditionally these operated as 'winter quarters', more recently they are occupied by some members of their family permanently, particularly older family members and children.
- 2.11 Since Travelling Showpeople were specifically excluded from the 1968 Caravans Site Act, they did not benefit from the duty on local authorities to provide Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. In common with Gypsies and Travellers, they have found it considerably difficult to obtain alternative sites with planning permission, particularly as traditional sites have been displaced by other forms of development. This has caused overcrowding on existing sites and unauthorised developments, with Travelling Showpeople buying their own land but living on it without planning permission.

### **Definition of a Travelling Showpeople site**

- 2.12 Most Travelling Showpeople are members of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, which provides an exemption from Gypsy and Traveller site licensing requirements, and a code of practice on the use of their sites. They are nevertheless required to seek planning permission for their sites.

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<sup>3</sup> Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople, DCLG, January 2007.

- 2.13 As with Gypsies and Travellers, local planning authorities are required to consider the needs of Travelling Showpeople when preparing Development Plan Documents. Importantly in the case of Thurrock, where an areas has a tradition of Travelling Showpeople sites, the Circular states that *'plans may make specific proposals for sites which would be suitable locations for showpeople's quarters'*. In terms of the design of sites, good vehicular access is recommended, as is regard to the potential nuisance to neighbours from vehicular movement and the test of equipment. The Circular also states that *very special circumstances have to be demonstrated to justify allowing development for purposes not normally appropriate in the Green Belts'*.

## Summary

- 2.14 There is currently no universally accepted definition of a Gypsy or Traveller and their cultural characteristics pose significant and complex issues. The current legal definition focuses on their way of life, without making reference to ethnicity, and this raises questions about distinction. Travelling Showpeople are included in the housing definition of Gypsies and Travellers, but are specifically excluded from the latest Gypsy and Traveller planning guidance (Circular 01/2006) and are subject to their own Circular (04/2007). For the purpose of this report the definition used comes from the CLG's practice guidance on GTAA's. This is an inclusive definition, which includes Travelling Showpeople.

## 3. The policy context

### Introduction

- 3.1 There is a serious shortage of sites for Gypsies and Travellers across the country and this has led to a growing tendency for Gypsies and Travellers to buy land and develop it without planning permission. A study for CLG by Pat Niner<sup>4</sup> suggested that there was a considerable shortage of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers. It stated that between 2003 and 2007, 1,000 – 2,000 additional residential pitches would be needed, as would 2,000 – 2,500 additional transit pitches. In 2003 and 2004, only 130 pitches were provided per year – equivalent to only 15% - 25% of the need identified by Niner and, if continued at this rate, would take over thirty to years to reach the target.<sup>5</sup>
- 3.2 Recent work in the East of England, using GTAA's where available and secondary data, estimates that 1,220 additional residential pitches are required in the region, with 440 in Essex.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.3 In view of this the government has introduced a series of reforms, which have important implications for the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites. The government's aim is to ensure that members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities should have the same access to decent and appropriate accommodation as every other citizen and that there are sufficient sites available to meet their needs.
- 3.4 Under new measures introduced in the Housing Act 2004, local authorities are required to include Gypsies and Travellers in their Local Housing Needs Assessment process and to have a strategy in place which sets out how any identified need will be met as part of their wider housing strategies. The new Planning Circular 01/2006 requires local authorities to identify appropriate sites in local plans for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.

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<sup>4</sup> Pat Niner (2003), *Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England*, Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, University of Birmingham.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Home and Margaret Greenfields (2006), *Cambridge Sub-Region Traveller Needs Assessment*, Anglia Ruskin University and Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College.

<sup>6</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2007), *Preparing Regional Spatial Strategy reviews on Gypsies and Travellers by regional planning bodies*, Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (University of Birmingham), Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit (University of Salford) Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (Sheffield Hallam University).

- 3.5 However, it is important to have a historical perspective since local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites are the product of past and not current legislation and funding regimes. The relevant policy context for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation includes legislation and guidance specific to site provision and management, unauthorised camping, land use planning, human rights and equal opportunities, social exclusion and housing. This chapter presents a summary of some of the main issues.

## **Legislative background**

- 3.6 The starting point in modern legislation related to accommodation provision was not actually specific to Gypsies and Travellers. The Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 aimed to regularise static residential caravan sites within the land use planning system and to raise standards for caravan dwellers. The 1960 Act required that land used as a caravan site has both planning permission for that use and a caravan site licence with conditions determining basic standards of amenity, spacing and safety. The effect of these controls, although not specifically directed against them, was that in large numbers of cases Gypsies and Travellers were unable to find legitimate authorised pitches for themselves because local authorities were under no duty to provide sites.
- 3.7 Part II of the Caravan Sites Act 1968, which came into force in April 1970, imposed a duty on County Councils and London Boroughs to provide adequate accommodation for Gypsies residing in or resorting to their area. Councils were to designate what sites were to be provided and to acquire the necessary land. However they were only required to provide for fifteen caravans to fulfil their duty. No time limit was set to fulfil the duty and initially no specific financial assistance was given. The government could, at any time, give directions to a local authority requiring it to provide additional sites for a specified number of caravans, but this was rarely used.
- 3.8 The policy of designation also brought enhanced powers to tackle unauthorised camping by making it a criminal offence to park a caravan with the purpose of residing in it other than on an authorised site. While it seems to have been intended as an incentive to site provision, just 38% of English local authorities achieved designation while legislation was in place. For many its effectiveness was limited both by the nature of the legislation and a failure to implement it. Furthermore designation was heavily criticised as creating 'no-go' areas for Gypsies and Travellers and for criminalising a minority group since the enhanced trespass powers applied only to them.

- 3.9 Under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, local authorities, as landowners, were given civil powers to recover land from trespassers, including unauthorised campers. The 1994 Act gave local authorities in England and Wales powers to make directions to leave the land being used by itinerant groups and it is an offence to fail to comply with such a direction. The 1994 Act also gave the police powers to direct trespassers to leave the land. It also removed the 1968 obligation for LAs to provide sites. Civil rights workers and Gypsy and Traveller bodies have argued that these powers were draconian and effectively criminalised unauthorised camping with disproportionate effect for a particular minority group. These implications were seen as particularly serious given the shortage of authorised sites.
- 3.10 Dealing with unauthorised camping by Gypsies and Travellers is currently high on the policy agenda, fuelled particularly by complaints about the disruption and nuisance caused to the settled community and businesses by troublesome encampments. Noise; aggressive, criminal and anti-social behaviour; rubbish and fly tipping; and damage to the land and buildings are common causes of complaint, although it is possible that many of the complaints stem from the mere presence of unauthorised campers regardless of their behaviour. There is a widespread dissatisfaction with the powers available to deal with unauthorised camping, largely because anti-trespass powers allow campers to be moved on but offer no solution to the problem.

### **Housing and planning legislation and guidance**

- 3.11 The Government is committed to ensuring that members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities should have the same access to decent and appropriate accommodation as every other citizen and that there are sufficient sites available to meet their needs. As discussed, new legislation has been introduced to deliver adequate sites for Gypsies and Travellers.
- 3.12 This includes the Housing Act 2004, which requires that local housing authorities produce a housing assessment that will have to take into account the needs of Gypsies and Travellers. This includes the need for authorised sites to station their caravans, and to have a strategy in place which sets out how any identified need will be met as part of their wider housing strategies. The local housing assessment process will be the key source of information enabling local authorities to assess the level of provision that is required, particularly when preparing their local documents.
- 3.13 Local authorities will also need to have regard to their statutory duties, including those in respect of homelessness under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 and to their obligations under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

- 3.14 All Gypsy and Traveller sites, including those provided by local authorities, must have planning permission. However, gaining planning permission has been identified as one of the major obstacles to further site provision. Gypsies and Travellers seeking to provide sites for themselves frequently fall foul of the planning system when they buy land and occupy it without permission and are faced with enforcement action.
- 3.15 Department of the Environment Circular 1/94, 'Gypsies and Planning', set out planning policy for Gypsy site provision. It was intended to reflect the Government's shift in policy towards self-provision by Gypsies and other Travellers, ensuring that 'the planning system recognises the need for accommodation consistent with gypsies' nomadic lifestyle' (DoE, 1994).
- 3.16 Circular 1/94 drew attention to local planning authorities' continuing requirement to indicate in development plans the regard that they have had to meeting accommodation need among Gypsies and Travellers. It noted that local and unitary development plans should, wherever possible, identify locations suitable for Gypsy and Traveller sites, and where this is not possible, should set out clear, realistic criteria for suitable locations.
- 3.17 Despite this guidance, Gypsies and Travellers continued to have great difficulty in gaining planning permission for sites and the necessary increase in provision has not occurred. In view of this, the new Circular 01/2006 'Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites' strengthens the requirement that local authorities identify and make provision for appropriate sites in their local plans.
- 3.18 The Circular contains a new definition of Gypsies and Travellers that is based on 'nomadic habit' and includes those who are too ill or old to pursue a nomadic lifestyle but specifically excludes Travelling Showpeople. It also places a new emphasis on consulting Gypsies and Travellers, their representative bodies and local support groups in the planning process. Travelling Showpeople are subject to their own Circular 04/2007. This advises producing a separate assessment for Travelling Showpeople within the wider GTAA process, which has been done for the Thurrock GTAA.
- 3.19 Consultation is also stressed in CLG guidance on Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessments, published February 2006. It recommends that steering groups should be formed and that questionnaires should be drawn up with input from Gypsies and Travellers. It also suggests that the use of Gypsies and Travellers themselves can be helpful in obtaining access to the community.

- 3.20 As Circular 01/2006 outlines, the Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessment (GTAA) is integral to the planning process. It will assess need and identify pitch requirements for each local authority area. The information will feed into the overall assessment of need which informs the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) housing policies. The RSS can modify the pitch requirements of the GTAA to ensure that a strategic view of Gypsy and Traveller needs across the whole region are considered.
- 3.21 The GTAA also informs the preparation of Development Plan Documents (DPDs). The DPD identifies the specific location for the additional provision, matching the pitch requirements specified in the RSS. These policies should be reviewed regularly to ensure they meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and to avoid any potential for disagreements with the settled population that might otherwise arise because of inappropriate location, in land-use planning terms, or inadequate explanation of proposed development.
- 3.22 With such policies in place in Local Development Frameworks there will be more certainty for all concerned when planning applications are determined by local planning authorities or appeals are considered by the Secretary of State. Better understanding of needs should ensure that provision meets the requirements of the Gypsy and Traveller community and that it is fully used. In turn it is intended that this will help to avoid future unauthorised camping and development.

### **Human Rights and equal opportunities**

- 3.23 In addition to housing specific legislation and guidance there is a range of other policy strands which are particularly relevant to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation matters, because they place duties on local authorities to recognise and meet the needs of minority and disadvantaged groups. It is important to note therefore that the Race Relations Act 1976 recognises Gypsies and Irish Travellers as distinct ethnic groups, due to their shared culture, language and beliefs.
- 3.24 The Human Rights Act 1998 incorporates into UK law the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and public authorities – including local authorities – must act in a way that is compatible with this. In particular local planning authorities should consider the consequences of refusing or granting planning permission, or taking enforcement action, on the rights of the individuals concerned, and whether it is necessary and proportionate in the circumstances.

- 3.25 Linked to this the Race Relations Act 1976 (RRA 1976) prohibits racial discrimination by planning authorities in carrying out their planning functions. In addition, the majority of public authorities, including local authorities, have a general duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to actively seek to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in all they do.
- 3.26 Homelessness legislation also takes into account the needs of Gypsies and Travellers. Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 provides that a person is homeless if he has accommodation but cannot secure entry to it, or it consists of a movable structure and there is no place where he is entitled or permitted both to place and to reside in it. Simply on this definition, it would be possible to regard all unauthorised campers without a legal base as homeless. If a duty to secure accommodation arises the housing authority are not required to make equivalent accommodation available, but should consider whether such options are reasonably available, particularly where this would provide the most suitable solution to the applicant's accommodation needs. Recent case law identifies that such is the extent of Gypsies and Travellers aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation, the local authority should use their best endeavours to attempt to locate a site or a pitch.<sup>7</sup>

### **Thurrock Council's strategies and policies**

- 3.27 Thurrock Council is currently preparing its Local Development Framework (LDF), which will outline its spatial strategy, policies and proposals to guide the future development and use of land in Thurrock up to the year 2021. It will replace the current statutory plan, the Thurrock Local Plan (1997). Policy H15 of the Plan refers to the Council ensuring there is a sufficient provision of caravan sites to meet Gypsies' and Travellers' needs, 'including the provision of temporary stopping places in appropriate locations'. It outlines how the Council had established a third permanent site at Gammon Field, in addition to those at Ship Lane and Pilgrims Lane. While it states that planning applications for private sites will be considered if they satisfy certain criteria, it also states that sites will no longer be considered appropriate if they are in the Green Belt. These points are reiterated in the deposit Unitary Development Plan 2003, the preparation of which has since been superseded by the LDF.

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<sup>7</sup> R (Margaret Price) v Carmarthenshire County Council; Codona v Mid-Bedfordshire District Council.



- 3.28 The Council's 2004 Housing Strategy refers to the three sites and their population of 61 families accounts for approximately 35% of all Gypsies and Travellers in Essex. It mentions issues regarding support needs, providing larger family size permanent accommodation and managing sensitivities between different ethnic groups. It also says that consultation in 2003 found that residents did want the sites to be expanded. Although the Strategy says that the forthcoming Housing Needs Survey will investigate population growth and the location of the sites, there are no mentions to Gypsies and Travellers in the 2004 Survey.
- 3.29 No other housing strategies relevant to Thurrock mention Gypsies and Travellers. These include at a sub-regional level, the Thames Gateway South Essex Sub Regional Housing Strategy 2005 – 2008, and at a regional level, the draft East of England Plan 2004. Gypsies and Travellers are not referred to in the Council's Homeless Review and Strategy 2003 – 2007, or in the 2003 Community Strategy.
- 3.30 Thurrock Council's Race Equality Scheme 2005 – 2008, lists the appointment of an Education and Welfare Officer for Gypsy and Traveller communities as one of their 'successes over the past two years', although this was a short-term measure and the position has not existed for over two years. Essex Police's Equality Scheme 2005 – 2008 refers to Gypsy and Traveller representation on the Strategic Independent Advisory Group, and how Gypsies and Travellers are now included in ethnicity monitoring to help ensure policies and functions are applied fairly.
- 3.31 Essex Police, in conjunction with the Council, have also produced a Joint Protocol for Unauthorised Encampments of Travellers in Thurrock (2006). This explains how, compared to the national rate and level of shortfall, 'Thurrock has clearly provided its fair share of pitches available to the Travelling community'. Consequently, 'the Council does not accept illegal encampments . . . the Council will act to ensure that eviction will be as quick as possible' on land owned by the local authority. It also outlines the process for evicting Gypsies and Travellers staying on unauthorised encampments from private and council owned land. As part of this, it describes the legislative context for decision making and the occasions when the Police will use their powers under the Civil Procedure Rules 1998 Part 55 and the Criminal Justice & Public Order Act Sections 61 and 77.

## Summary

- 3.32 The policy context for Gypsy site provision includes legislation and guidance that is specific to site provision, unauthorised camping, land use planning, human rights and housing. The effectiveness of this however has been limited both by the nature of the legislation and a general failure to implement it. As a result local authorities have also failed to deliver adequate sites for Gypsies and Travellers.

- 3.33 In view of this the Housing Act 2004 has placed a duty on local housing authorities to take into account the needs of Gypsies and Travellers, including the need for legal sites to station their caravans, when producing a housing assessment, and to have a strategy in place which sets out how any identified need will be met as part of their wider housing strategies. However there is a balance to be struck between the accommodation needs of Gypsy families and the good of the community as a whole.
- 3.34 Clearly one element of this study is to inform the LDF and, in turn, the RSS. While the Council's Local Plan and Housing Strategy refers to the current level of local authority site provision in Thurrock, few other strategies focus on Gypsies and Travellers. Evidence suggests that, in light of recent government guidance, there is room for improvement, particularly as regards identifying suitable land for Gypsies and Travellers to buy and clearly outlining the criteria for assessing private site's suitability. The recently developed Joint Protocol between the Council and Essex Police is welcomed for clearly setting out joint-working practices between agencies when dealing with unauthorised encampments.

## 4. Population characteristics

### Introduction

- 4.1 Having examined the strategic policy context surrounding Gypsy and Traveller issues, it is now appropriate to examine some of their population characteristics. This chapter presents information from the ODPM Gypsy Caravan Count for the population in Thurrock with consideration also given to the regional and national situation. It is important to stress that Travelling Showpeople are not included in the Caravan Count.
- 4.2 This information is important as it will establish a foundation for an assessment of accommodation need. Before an analysis of the ODPM Gypsy Caravan Count can go ahead however, it is perhaps first worth considering the adequacy and accuracy of the count and the overall usefulness of the data.

### The Caravan Count

- 4.3 The Gypsy Caravan Count was introduced in 1979 and places a duty on local authorities in England to make twice yearly returns to the ODPM on the number of Gypsy caravans and families in their area. The count was intended to estimate the size of the Gypsy population for whom provision was to be made and to monitor progress in meeting need.
- 4.4 Although the duty to provide sites was removed in 1994, the need for local authorities to conduct the count has remained. Count practice varies between local authorities and subsequently concerns surround the accuracy of the figures.
- 4.5 Perceived inaccuracies include a lack of commitment on the part of local authorities, problems detecting mobile groups (particularly on unauthorised sites), poor counting practices, geography, the exclusion of New Travellers, and the application of inconsistent definitions of 'Gypsies' and 'families'. It has also been suggested that some authorities deliberately under-count Gypsy caravans to minimise apparent need for sites and other services.

- 4.6 In general, information for authorised sites, and in particular local authority sites, is likely to be more accurate than for unauthorised sites. However, despite fears about accuracy, the count is thought valuable because it effectively provides the only source of information on numbers and distribution of Gypsy and Traveller caravans and families. The main use for the information is within the planning system, and as this chapter will demonstrate, it also contributes to assessments of need for Gypsy site provision.

## **Population changes**

- 4.7 The total Gypsy and Traveller population living in the UK is unknown, although it is estimated that 90,000 to 120,000 live in England.<sup>8</sup> There are uncertainties partly because of the number of different definitions that exist, but mainly because of an almost total lack of information about the numbers of Gypsies and Travellers now living in houses or flats. Estimates produced for the ODPM (2003) suggest that at least 50% of the overall Gypsy and Traveller population are now living in permanent housing.
- 4.8 Local authorities in England provide a count of Gypsy and Traveller caravans in January and July each year for the ODPM. The January 2006 Count (the most recent figures available) was 15,746 caravans. Applying an assumed three person per caravan multiplier would give a population of just over 47,200. Again applying an assumed multiplier and doubling this to allow for the numbers of Gypsies and Travellers in housing, this gives a total population of around 94,500 for England. However this figure can only be very approximate given that caravan counts are known to be very approximate and probably under estimate the number of Gypsy caravans.
- 4.9 It is now worth considering this information in more detail and Table 4.1 examines the results of the five most recent caravan counts. The results show that the population in Thurrock has increased by 15% in the past year, although this may be the result of the Council using a more robust counting methodology rather than solely an increase in the population. Since January 2004 the number of caravans has dropped by 5%. This is in contrast to a regional increase of 10% since January 2004 and a 9% increase nationally.

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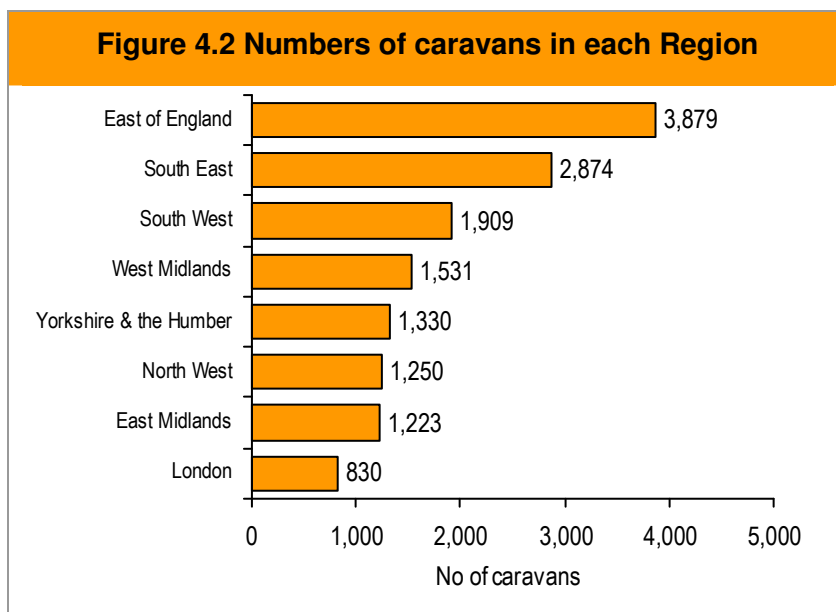
<sup>8</sup> Pat Niner (2002), *The Provision and Condition of Local Authority Gypsy and Traveller Sites in England*, University of Birmingham.

**Table 4.1 Caravan Count results over past five surveys**

Area	Thurrock		East		England	
	Number	% of Jan '04	Number	% of Jan '04	Number	% of Jan '04
Jan-06	161	95%	4,044	110%	15,746	109%
July-05	130	76%	3,980	108%	15,863	110%
Jan-05	139	82%	3,915	107%	15,369	107%
Jul-04	230	135%	3,788	103%	15,119	105%
Jan-04	170	100%	3,669	100%	14,411	100%

### The national perspective

- 4.10 Having looked at some of the basic characteristics of the Gypsy and Traveller population, we now examine these features in slightly more detail. Given that one of the distinctive characteristics of the population is its mobility, it is first of all necessary to consider the national situation as this will help put the situation in Thurrock into context.
- 4.11 Figure 4.2 shows the average number of caravans recorded in the count between January 2004 and January 2006 in each region of England. Thurrock is in the East region which has the largest Gypsy and Traveller population in the country. The average number of caravans recorded over the period is around a third higher than that recorded in the South East – the second most populous region.



4.12 Table 4.3 shows the number of caravans the population has changed by at the regional level and the size of the increase in percentage terms. Overall the Gypsy and Traveller population of the East has increased by 10% since January 2004. This is the fifth largest increase nationally. The East has the largest increase in authorised socially rented provision (including sites provided by local authorities and RSLs), with almost a quarter more caravans on these sites than in January 2004. Private authorised sites have increased by the same amount (22%) and there is a corresponding fall in unauthorised sites (down 15%).

Table 4.3 Changes in population (January 2004 – January 2006)								
Region	Authorised - Socially rented		Authorised – private		Unauthorised		Total	
South West	38	<b>6%</b>	136	<b>22%</b>	201	<b>47%</b>	375	<b>22%</b>
North East	131	<b>-48%</b>	13	<b>60%</b>	-57	<b>-41%</b>	87	<b>20%</b>
North West	51	<b>12%</b>	46	<b>7%</b>	80	<b>67%</b>	177	<b>15%</b>
East Midlands	13	<b>4%</b>	109	<b>22%</b>	-34	<b>14%</b>	88	<b>14%</b>
East of England	246	<b>22%</b>	302	<b>22%</b>	-173	<b>-15%</b>	375	<b>10%</b>
West Midlands	80	<b>13%</b>	164	<b>39%</b>	-133	<b>-32%</b>	111	<b>8%</b>
Yorkshire & Humberside	75	<b>11%</b>	52	<b>15%</b>	-69	<b>-34%</b>	58	<b>6%</b>
South East	65	<b>6%</b>	126	<b>13%</b>	-127	<b>-17%</b>	64	<b>2%</b>
London	24	<b>4%</b>	-37	<b>-44%</b>	-74	<b>-40%</b>	-87	<b>-9%</b>
England	723	<b>12%</b>	911	<b>18%</b>	-386	<b>-8%</b>	1248	<b>9%</b>

- 4.13 Table 4.4 presents the characteristics of changes in caravan levels within the East of England. This highlights that the Gypsy and Traveller population in Thurrock has fallen slightly, by 5% or 6 caravans, between January 2004 and January 2006, largely due to a 42% reduction in caravans on unauthorised sites and a corresponding increase on socially rented sites. Thurrock is one of three areas in the region that has shown a drop in caravan numbers. The number of caravans on the three local authority sites in Thurrock has increased by 42%, higher than the regional average of 22%. However, while caravans on authorised private sites have increased by 22% in the region, Thurrock is the only area to record a fall, by three caravans.

**Table 4.4 Changes in population in the East of England Region  
(January 2004 – January 2006)**

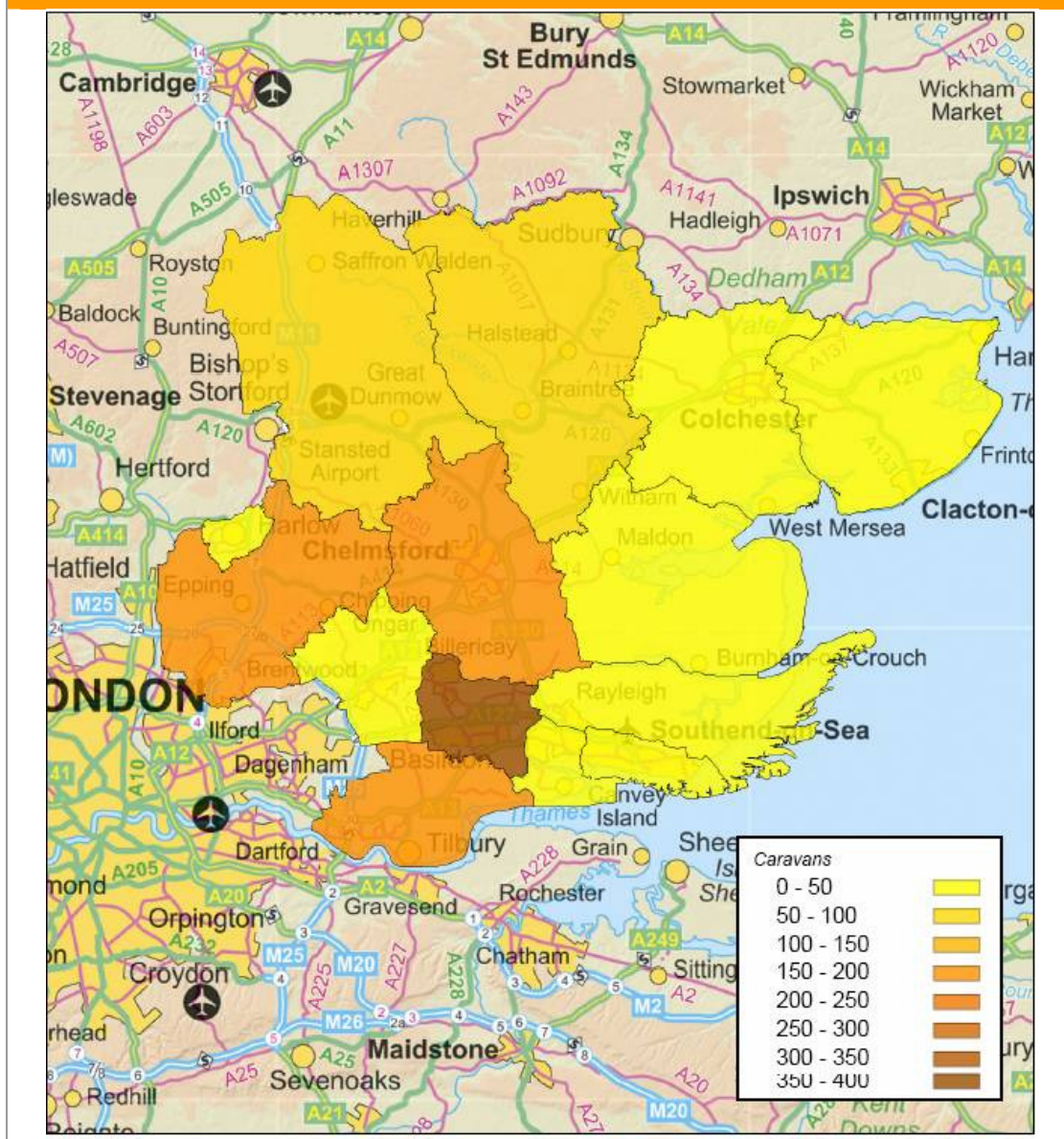
Area	Authorised - Socially rented		Authorised – private		Unauthorised		Total	
Bedfordshire	-12	<b>-13%</b>	23	<b>28%</b>	2	<b>3%</b>	50	<b>7%</b>
Cambridgeshire	86	<b>40%</b>	58	<b>9%</b>	-70	<b>-24%</b>	74	<b>5%</b>
Essex <sup>9</sup>	11	<b>5%</b>	96	<b>29%</b>	-49	<b>-13%</b>	58	<b>-3%</b>
Hertfordshire	-1	<b>0%</b>	27	<b>44%</b>	-30	<b>-49%</b>	-4	<b>-2%</b>
Luton UA	4	<b>18%</b>	0	-	0	-	4	<b>14%</b>
Norfolk	40	<b>42%</b>	13	<b>10%</b>	13	<b>16%</b>	66	<b>16%</b>
Peterborough UA	95	-	0	-	-5	<b>-100%</b>	90	<b>184%</b>
Southend-on-Sea UA	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-
Suffolk	-8	<b>-9%</b>	88	<b>40%</b>	21	<b>84%</b>	101	<b>49%</b>
Thurrock UA	31	<b>42%</b>	-3	<b>-30%</b>	-30	<b>-42%</b>	-6	<b>-5%</b>
East of England	246	<b>22%</b>	302	<b>22%</b>	-173	<b>-15%</b>	375	<b>10%</b>

### Site provision

- 4.14 It is also worth considering the types of provision available to Gypsies and Travellers in Essex. This will give an indication as to how Gypsies and Travellers in Thurrock meet their accommodation needs in comparison with other areas. It will also give an indication as to whether there may be a need for additional provision. The figure below shows the average number of caravans recorded by authorities in Essex between January 2004 and January 2006. It shows that Thurrock has one of the highest levels of caravans along with Chelmsford, Epping Forest and Basildon (which has the highest). There is a geographical dimension to caravan levels, with the west of Essex having higher numbers than the east.

<sup>9</sup> Essex refers to all the district councils in the county and so does not include the two unitary authorities of Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock.

**Figure 4.1 Average number of caravans in Essex**



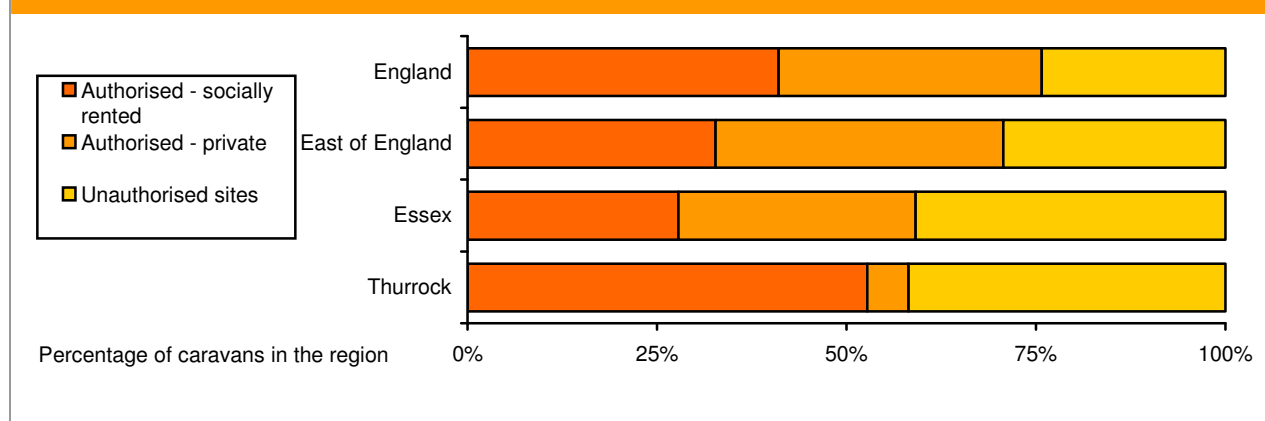
- 4.15 Table 4.5 shows the average number of caravans counted between January 2004 and January 2006. It shows that over a quarter (27%) of caravans on socially rented sites in Essex are found in Thurrock. However the area has one of the lowest levels of caravans on private sites. While Table 4.4 showed the level of caravans on unauthorised sites has fallen in Thurrock, it still has the second highest amount in Essex (after Basildon). The majority of these caravans are however on sites 'tolerated' by the Council.



**Table 4.5 Average number of caravans by site type, January 2004 – January 2006**

Area	Authorised - Socially rented	Authorised – private	Unauthorised	Total
Basildon	35	137	183	355
Braintree	36	11	27	74
Brentwood	0	15	19	34
Castle Point	0	0	2	2
Chelmsford	33	51	67	151
Colchester	0	9	17	25
Epping Forest	18	83	58	159
Harlow	47	0	1	48
Maldon	43	4	1	48
Rochford	0	2	13	14
Southend-on-Sea	0	0	0	0
Tendring	0	1	16	17
Thurrock	87	9	69	166
Uttlesford	25	43	4	73
Essex total	325	365	477	1,167

- 4.16 The following figure shows the proportion of site types in Thurrock compared to the rest of Essex, the East, and England. It shows that Thurrock has a far higher proportion of caravans on socially rented sites (over 50%) than elsewhere. It has twice the amount than in Essex as a whole. However there are far fewer caravans on privately owned sites than the average for the County, region or country.

**Figure 4.2 Distribution of caravans on site types, January 2004 – January 2006**

## Comparing numbers of caravans to numbers of households

- 4.17 As well as simply looking at the levels of caravans that are found in each authority, it is useful to have an awareness of the differences in relation to size between areas. A stable point of comparison between areas is the ratio of caravans to households. Table 4.6 compares the average number of caravans per 100,000 households at the national, regional, county and Thurrock levels. Please note that these figures are indicative only: the household data is drawn from the 2001 Census, as opposed to the 2004-06 count average for the caravan data.

**Table 4.6 Ratios of caravans to households**

Area	Average number of caravans, January 04 –January 06	Number of households, 2001 census	Caravans per 100,000 households
England	15,302	20,451,427	75
East of England	3,879	2,231,974	173
Essex	1,001	544,701	184
Thurrock	166	58,485	283

- 4.18 The results show that at the regional level the East of England has 130% more caravans per 100,000 households than the national level. However Thurrock has a significantly higher proportion than both Essex and the East region (respectively 54% and 63% higher). This strongly suggests that that sites are not evenly distributed throughout the region and that Thurrock has a higher proportion of sites.

## Summary

- 4.19 The Caravan Count data shows that nationally and regionally the Gypsy and Traveller population is growing. However the number of caravans in Thurrock has fallen by 5% since January 2004 due to a decrease in the number of caravans on unauthorised encampments. No seasonal fluctuations are apparent in Thurrock's data although this may be due to changes in Count practices. Thurrock has a higher proportion of caravans on socially rented sites compared to other areas in Essex, East of England and nationally. However the area has proportionally more unauthorised sites and a very small amount of private sites.

## SECTION B: PRIMARY DATA

- B1 This section describes the primary research elements of the study. This comprised a consultation with stakeholders and a survey of authorised and unauthorised sites in Thurrock.
- B2 Chapter 5 outlines the results from the stakeholder consultation. We then start the analysis of the survey data in Chapter 6. Two separate surveys were conducted: one with Gypsies and Travellers, and one with Travelling Showpeople. After explaining the methodology, we analyse the data from the Gypsy and Traveller survey (Chapter 6), and the Travelling Showpeople survey (Chapter 7). Both surveys cover accommodation circumstances, use of services, health education and employment, and respondents' views on the type of accommodation required presently and in the future.
- B3 Chapter 8 contains separate accommodation assessments for Gypsies and Travellers, and for Travelling Showpeople. These assess how much accommodation is needed to make up current shortfalls in need and estimates levels of need over the next five years.
- B4 The final chapter draws together the main findings from the research and makes a series of recommendations for Thurrock Council and service providers to consider.



## 5. Stakeholder consultation

### Introduction

- 5.1 In order to provide in-depth qualitative information regarding the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, stakeholder consultations were conducted. The aim was to obtain both an overall perspective of issues facing these groups, and an understanding of local issues that are specific to Thurrock.
- 5.2 A total of 14 confidential, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face or by telephone. Representatives from the following councils were included:
- **Thurrock Council:** Strategic Planning, Planning Enforcement, Housing Strategy, Children, Education and Family Services, Gypsy Liaison Site Manager, Grays Library, Thurrock Traveller Achievement Service
  - **Basildon District Council:** Planning Enforcement
  - **London Borough of Havering:** Planning Enforcement
  - **Essex County Council:** Gypsy Services
- 5.3 Other agencies interviewed were:
- Essex Police, Grays station
  - Shaw Primary School, South Ockendon
  - Thurrock PCT
  - Buckles Lane Travelling Showpeople site owners
  - Showmen's Guild of Great Britain
- 5.4 Themes covered in the interviews included: the need for additional provisions and facilities; travelling patterns; the availability of land; accessing services; and work taking place to meet the needs of Gypsies, Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople in Thurrock. This chapter presents summaries of the conducted interviews and highlights the main points that were raised.

## **Accommodation**

- 5.5 It was reported that the three local authority sites in the Thurrock area are full. In addition families on a waiting list for the sites, and the expansion of current families will further increase this problem. It is felt therefore that there is a need for an increase in authorised residential sites to prevent problems associated with unauthorised sites, although support for this may be difficult to gain due to the feeling that Thurrock has enough authorised sites.
- 5.6 The initial design of the sites and their safety was another issue that was raised. Facilities were not well maintained and the lack of lighting at night was a concern. A deficiency of a communal area impacts on the quality of life and the ability of services to provide for the community. The design of the site also neglected to take into account the needs of the animals, such as paddocks, and the availability of space for visiting caravans. Children's safety was recognised as a concern due to narrow, busy access lanes without pavements and the lack of designated play areas. Concerns were heightened since the death in 2005 of a Traveller child after an accident with a Council vehicle.
- 5.7 It was typically reported that Gypsies and Travellers often settled in order for their children to gain education, but access to transport facilities often prohibited this. Ideally Gypsies and Travellers wanted a piece of land for their families that they could manage themselves and use their caravans as a permanent base.
- 5.8 Bricks and mortar housing for Gypsies and Travellers was used mainly by older members of the community but the transition was often unsuccessful. Issues that were highlighted as affecting this transition were the distance from their community and the needs of the animals. These issues could be overcome if they were taken into account when allocating properties.
- 5.9 It was recognised by the stakeholders that there was a need for transit facilities in the Thurrock area that were separate from the residential sites. Again support for this may be difficult to gain as concerns were raised regarding the length of time Gypsies and Travellers would stay on these facilities for.
- 5.10 The site at Buckles Lane for the Travelling Showpeople raised concerns due to the unofficial status of an area to the south of the site that has temporary planning permission. It was felt that a final decision on the status of the land would help remedy the situation. Although stakeholders agreed that gaining planning permission would relieve problems of overcrowding, it was noted by one that Buckles Lane may not be an ideal location. The area was reported to be an unsuitable environment due to potential pollution and gasses in the ground that could affect the health of those living in the area.

- 5.11 The site was reported as being '*scruffy*' due to the nature of the work carried out on the land, and the need for a separate storage / work area was highlighted. Overcrowding at Buckles Lane was reported as a problem with the area spreading onto Green Belt land. This was seen as an issue as the problem was predicted to increase as families expand.

## **Community**

- 5.12 There is a strong sense of community within Gypsy and Traveller groups and they will live and grow together in small social groups. That said different groups do not mix well together and there is little interaction between them. Previous tensions between the Gypsies and Travellers were diminished when they were located to different sites.
- 5.13 There is a long history in Thurrock of Gypsies and they are well established in the community. It was reported that compared to other minority groups in the area, Gypsies and Travellers enjoyed a good relationship with the settled community. This said there was often a NIMBY attitude that made allocating land to gypsies problematic.
- 5.14 Media coverage was reported as being negative and often contributed to the problems facing Gypsies and Travellers. Education and integration were raised as methods with which to bring down barriers and gain understanding from both sides.
- 5.15 Travelling Showpeople were reported as wanting to disassociate themselves from Gypsies and Travellers. Their long history in the area meant they had a strong affiliation with Thurrock and were represented on local forums and associations. Similarly to Gypsies and Travellers they have a strong sense of community and family.

## **Travelling patterns**

- 5.16 Gypsies and Travellers typically travel either for employment or cultural reasons. It was reported that the Gypsies would normally travel during the summer months to attend cultural fairs and visit families, whilst the Irish Travellers had no typical travel pattern but moved en-mass for family events.
- 5.17 The ability of many Gypsies and Travellers to follow their traditional lifestyle has been compromised in recent times. This is attributed to a decline in traditional employment opportunities following the influx of migrant labourers into Britain. Gypsies worked mainly in breeding, tree-felling, and roofing, whilst Irish Travellers often worked in tarmac block paving, both making use of the proximity of the M25.

- 5.18 Travelling Showpeople travel for work in fairs, but as the demand for this decreases nationally, they often turn to other forms of employment such as catering, painting and repairs. Typically they travel at Easter, but not all members of the community travel therefore sites are permanently occupied.

### **Availability of land**

- 5.19 It is the general consensus that Gypsies and Travellers prefer to buy their own land to develop, but affordability and planning permission often act as barriers to this aim.
- 5.20 Due to their traditional lifestyles Gypsies and Travellers need a large area of land in order to develop, and this has consequences on the price. Gypsies and Travellers cannot afford to buy land in urban areas and therefore move to rural areas. Where there is land to buy cost is a serious concern (although this equally applies to the settled community).
- 5.21 Buying land in rural areas is relatively straightforward and Gypsies and Travellers make use of resources available to them in order to understand planning permission, but the Green Belt and Thames Gateway complicates matters.
- 5.22 It was noted that there is land available to rent and buy, but these are not recorded. The stakeholders identified a need for the identification of land available to Gypsies and Travellers, but noted that this may not be a popular move within the settled community.
- 5.23 These problems were echoed in regards to Travelling Showpeople. Although the perception that the council were unaccommodating and would not grant planning permission was stronger in this community.

### **Access to health and education services**

- 5.24 In regards to education, access by Gypsies and Travellers is mixed. It is often reported that education for children is one of the primary reasons for prolonged stay in an area, and primary level school attendance is good within the communities. However there are barriers to attendance at secondary level. These barriers include cultural preference and the need for transport (which is supplied at primary level).



- 5.25 Education professionals highlighted the need for Gypsy and Traveller attainment targets (such as ones available for vulnerable groups) to ensure schools provide for them. The possibility of creating transition packs was also discussed in order to increase the number of Gypsies and Travellers attending secondary level education. It is also hoped that the future introduction of vocational education will attract more students.
- 5.26 A theme that was included by all service providers was the lack of structure in the Gypsies' and Travellers' traditional lifestyle. This includes difficulties with maintaining schooling hours and keeping appointments with health professionals. This highlights the need for a flexible approach to the provision of services for these groups.
- 5.27 With regards to health services, illiteracy acted as a barrier by limiting health knowledge to hear-say. The survey found no reported difficulties in registering with local GPs (although this was mentioned by stakeholders), but Gypsies and Travellers predominantly still used A&E services. Adult education is available, but there is low uptake of this service among Gypsies and Travellers.
- 5.28 It was reported that there was tension between proactively taking services to the sites, and using liaison officers to encourage Gypsies and Travellers to access. It was felt that those that did provide services on site were under-funded, and when projects were cut would weaken relationships between service providers and Gypsies and Travellers. When resources were already tight, it was also difficult in some instances to justify an outreach programme. This drew attention to the need for initiatives set by the Council.
- 5.29 The sites themselves also proved problematic. It was reported by one stakeholder that safety was a concern for outreach programmes, and many noted that the lack of a communal facility made delivery of provisions difficult. Overcrowding and a lack of private space was also a concern for the educational needs of children on the site.

- 5.30 Travelling Showpeople had fewer problems with accessing services. They have high literacy levels and therefore information is more accessible to them. It was also noted that they are articulate regarding their health and educational entitlements. Parents are concerned with their children's education ensuring that secondary places are held whilst they travel and that their children are kept up to date.

## **General**

- 5.31 The Stakeholder consultations also uncovered four issues that transcended the above themes for all groups: the need for agencies and departments to work together; funding; national and local governmental initiatives; and the local representation of Gypsies and Travellers.
- 5.32 The inability of agencies and departments to work together was a considerable barrier in accommodating and understanding the needs of Gypsies and Travellers. It was often noted that communication was poor between and within agencies and department and, at worst, that some were working in conflict which often made problems worse. For example the aim of enforcement officers was to move people on, whilst this made it difficult for health and educational services to provide for mobile groups. While there is a multi-agency group steered by the Traveller Achievement Service, it was suggested that more involvement from relevant Council departments would help with exchanging information and co-ordinating services.
- 5.33 The second issue that was consistently raised was that of funding. It was felt that in order to create continuity in services that more funding was required. The outreach projects were under staffed and under funded, and it was rumoured that some services had been cut due to funding problems. Some service providers theoretically approved on site provisions, but funding was not available. It was commented that although the Gypsies and Travellers population was increasing, resources were being cut.
- 5.34 It was also regularly mentioned that there was need for back up in local, national, political or departmental form. It was felt that if there were initiatives or specific guidelines to follow then justification could be given to allocation of resources and staff.

- 5.35 Another aspect that was referred to on a regular basis was the representation of Gypsies and Travellers. It was felt that the media coverage was often negative, unbalanced and not representative of the communities. Although there was some representation through a Racial Support Group, this was not specifically for the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and therefore did not produce a strong enough voice for them. It was felt that including Gypsies and Travellers in outreach projects would help identify and access their needs more effectively, and would also help to engage Gypsies and Travellers with the settled community and break down some of the barriers that had been created.
- 5.36 These themes were also present in stakeholder consultations made in the surrounding areas of Havering and Basildon. One of the main differences noted was the relationship between Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community. Both these areas have large Gypsy and Traveller communities, with Basildon having the largest in the UK, therefore some of the tensions may be due to the size of their populations. Both councils have taken a hard stance against their Gypsy and Traveller communities, and in response relations are antagonised. The Gypsy Liaison Site Officer and Traveller Achievement Service in Thurrock also stand out as assets.

## Summary

- 5.37 The stakeholder consultation highlighted how the local authority sites in Thurrock are full and the lack of planning policy to bring forward new sites and prevent the occurrence of unauthorised developments. The condition and safety of the local authority sites was also raised, as was the need for separate transit provision.
- 5.38 While some outreach work by service providers took place with Gypsies and Travellers, funding and staffing shortages meant they were limited and short-term. It was reported that support was needed from the Council in the form of a coherent policy towards improving the health and education status of Gypsies and Travellers and their access to services. This would be aided by developing strategic process and joint-working practices.



## 6. Gypsy and Traveller survey

### Introduction

- 6.1 This chapter outlines the results of a survey conducted among Gypsies and Travellers in Thurrock. After explaining the methodology used to conduct the interviews and outlining the profile of the respondents, the chapter looks at the accommodation circumstances of Gypsies and Travellers on the local authority and unauthorised sites. The chapter goes on to examine their use of local services, employment, travelling patterns and accommodation provision.
- 6.2 The survey questionnaire (see Appendix 2) contained a mixture of open and closed questions, producing qualitative and quantitative data. In broad terms the qualitative aspects of the questionnaire were used to gather opinions of facilities, services and quality of life, while the quantitative data was used to calculate accommodation need.

### Methodology

- 6.3 There are three local authority residential sites in Thurrock and interviews were conducted at each: Gammon Field, Pilgrims Lane and Ship Lane. Interviews were also conducted at privately owned sites, and unauthorised developments, some of which were tolerated by Thurrock Council.
- 6.4 Access to the sites was arranged by the Council's Gypsy and Traveller liaison officer. He introduced the field interviewers, all of whom have travelling backgrounds, and as many interviews as possible were conducted with site residents. One interview was conducted per family. The interviews were conducted in June and July 2006 when some residents were away travelling. A second fieldwork phase in September 2006 therefore took place. In total 48 interviews took place. All sites identified in the July caravan count were approached on three occasions before they were coded as a non-response. Visits took place during evenings and weekends to ensure as many interviews as possible were conducted. The main reasons given for not taking part in the survey were that the respondent no longer identified themselves as a Gypsy or Traveller, or did not regard themselves as having any accommodation need.

## Profile of respondents

6.5 Thurrock has three local authority sites, one private site with four caravans, and in July 2006, twelve unauthorised developments and two self-owned sites with planning permission. In total 48 interviews were conducted. Interviews took place on the three local authority sites, one self-owned authorised site and three unauthorised developments and with Gypsy and Traveller families living in bricks and mortar accommodation. Of the 48 respondents, 18 were male and 30 were female. The average size of the respondents' family group was 3.7 – higher than the Thurrock average of 2.5 persons per household (Census 2001), with the average caravan occupancy rate of 2.9. In terms of ethnic background, the respondents at Gammon Field described themselves as English travellers or Gypsies, at Pilgrims Lane as Irish Travellers and at Ship Lane as English Travellers or Gypsies. Two of the unauthorised encampments were inhabited by Irish travellers, two by English Travellers and the other by a Romany family.

## The local authority sites

6.6 36 interviews took place at the three local authority sites, with the breakdown as follows:

Table 6.1 Thurrock sites and response rates			
Site name	Interviews completed	Number of pitches	Number of families on site <sup>10</sup>
Gammon Fields	9	21	20
Pilgrims Lane	13	22	19
Ship Lane	14	21	21
Total	36	64	60

6.7 All three of the local authority sites were technically full at the time of fieldwork; although some families were away travelling, their pitch was kept vacant for their return. Just over half of respondents on the local sites felt they had enough space for their family's needs. However, this was not uniform across the sites. 44% and 46% of respondents at Gammon Field and Pilgrims Lane respectively said so, compared to 58% at Ship Lane. In terms of number of caravans per pitch, Ship Lane appears the least crowded: it had an average of 1.1 caravans per pitch, compared to 1.4 at Gammon Field and 1.7 at Pilgrims Lane. However the caravans on Ship Line are generally much larger than those at Pilgrims Lane.

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<sup>10</sup> This total includes the families who live for most of the year at the sites but who were away travelling during the fieldwork period.

- 6.8 Respondents were asked how long they had stayed at their current location and how long they intended to remain there. Perhaps not surprisingly for residential sites, all except for one family (at Pilgrims Lane) had stayed longer than three years, with 60% living there for more than five years. As the following table shows, respondents at Ship Lane were the most settled, with 85% living there for more than five years.

Table 6.2 Length of time on site					
Site	Less than a year	1 -2 years	3 -5 years	5+ years	Total
Gammon Field	-	-	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%
Pilgrims Lane	7.7%	-	53.8%	38.5%	100.0%
Ship Lane	-	-	14.3%	85.7%	100.0%
TOTAL	2.9%	-	36.1%	61.0%	100.0%

- 6.9 All respondents except for one said their current site was their main home. One respondent at Gammon Field said their main home was a house in south London, which they intended to move back to soon. The residents were also well-settled in terms of how long they expected to stay living in their site. Three quarters had no intention of moving, including 92% at Ship Lane and 89% at Gammon Field. Four respondents at Ship Lane said they had lived there since the site had opened: *'We lived locally and put our names down 27 years ago and got on the site'*. Just under half (46%) at Pilgrims Lane did not expect to move, with two families (15%) expecting to move within three months.
- 6.10 One reason why residents at Pilgrims Lane were less likely to expect to stay there was the perception of safety on the site, partly prompted by the death on the site last year: *'I want to move somewhere safe for me and my kids. We've got bad memories of the child being run over'*. Three respondents mentioned moving to Stanford-Le-Hope and a local authority site, although as no such site exists, this may reflect their aspirations rather than a move they intend to realise.
- 6.11 Residents said they found the site through a variety of means, including friend or relative notifying them of an available pitch (47%), and the Council notifying them (25%). However only a quarter said the site was easy to find, largely due to the lack of alternative sites in the area or spare capacity on the sites. These comments were typical: *'We were lucky – we were in the right place at the right time; 'I was on the waiting list for years before someone moved off and I got a pitch'*.

- 6.12 In terms of facilities and services, similar issues were raised by residents on all three sites. Residents on all sites complained about the state of the day rooms: *'They're damp and they need heating'* [Gammon Field], *'We need a bigger day room – there's not enough room for us all to sit together or when visitors come'* [Ship Lane]. The next most frequent complaint was over the electricity: *'it should be on a meter provided by the electricity board, not the Council'* [Gammon Field]; *'the electricity is expensive and paid via the warden and no one is allowed to read the meter'* [Ship Lane]. The collection of rubbish was also an issue on all three sites: *'sometimes the rubbish is not collected because the truck claims it cannot reverse in but they can'* [Ship Lane].
- 6.13 Residents at Pilgrims Lane raised the issue of safety: *'there need to be humps on the road and fencing round the pylons to make it safer for the kids. Also a footpath so they don't have to walk on the road. A child was killed by a dustcart and another electrocuted and nothing has been done.'* Residents at Ship Lane also said there should be a children's play area.
- 6.14 Post was mentioned by some residents at Gammon Field and Ship Lane, who resented having it delivered by a warden and not directly to a postbox on their pitch. All respondents said they received post on their site however.
- 6.15 71% of respondents said their site had problems with pests or infestations, including 92% of those at Pilgrims Lane: *'rats are everywhere, around the bins, on the plots'*. Snakes were also mentioned as a problem on this site. A third said security onsite was in issue, including a majority (56%) of those at Gammon Field. The main concern on all three sites was dangerous traffic: *'its not usually too fast but there is not enough room for 2 way traffic so cars end up driving on the pavement which isn't safe for kids'* [Ship Lane]. 41% overall said their site suffered from dangerous traffic, including 69% at Pilgrims Lane and 44% at Gammon Field.
- 6.16 The following table shows respondents' overall satisfaction levels with their site. On both Gammon Field and Ship Lane the vast majority of respondents are happy with their site (89% and 72%). Residents at Gammon Field were most likely to praise how peaceful the site is: *'it's quiet, the warden is good, the kids are safe and I have my family around me'*. The security and pleasant atmosphere were emphasised by residents at Ship Lane: *'it's a safe base, my friends and family live here and the kids can go to school'*. The price of electricity and the drainage were highlighted as negative aspects at Gammon Field, while the lack of space for cars was a concern at Ship Lane: *'the road is too narrow and there's nowhere for cars to park'*. The lack of postboxes and Royal Mail deliveries was highlighted by three Ship Lane residents: *'mail should be delivered to a box but it's delivered by a warden'*.



**Table 6.3 Satisfaction with current site**

Site	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither / nor	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Total
Gammon Field	11.1%	77.8%	11.1%	-	-	100.0%
Pilgrims Lane	-	23.1%	7.7%	15.4%	53.8%	100.0%
Ship Lane	7.1%	64.3%	14.3%	14.3%	-	100.0%
TOTAL	5.7%	51.5%	11.4%	11.4%	20.0%	100.0%

- 6.17 Less than a quarter (23%) of respondents at Pilgrims Lane were happy with where they lived. Two respondents mentioned the proximity to local shops as a positive aspect, and another two that they had their family close by. However the safety of the site was a major concern: *'safety & health for kids. The site is dangerous & feels as if the authorities are neglecting us so much they don't care if we are killed here'*.
- 6.18 In terms of the condition of their home, all respondents at Gammon Field mentioned damp being a problem in the day rooms: *'you put wallpaper up and it peels off in a few weeks', 'dayrooms used to be very damp and full of mildew but since the Council put in air holes it's improved'*. Damp was mentioned by almost all residents at Pilgrims Lane, although the drainage was also mentioned by a similar amount. Fewer problems were reported at Ship Lane, although five respondents suggested the dayrooms need refurbishing: *'the breezeblocks in the dayroom are old and crumbling and the roof is leaking'*.
- 6.19 Affordability of pitches was also a problem at Pilgrims Lane: 85% said it was a problem, in contrast to 44% at Gammon Field and just 13% at Ship Lane. However on Gammon Field the main complaint seemed more to do with the cost of electricity, rather than the rent of pitches in itself: *'we want our own key meters so we can see how much we're paying for electricity'*. When asked how much they could afford to pay, the average amount suggested by residents at Pilgrims Lane was £20 per week, including water charges. 70% of respondents at Pilgrims Lane were looking for alternative accommodation in the Thurrock area, compared to 27% at Ship Lane and none of those at Gammon Field. This was partly because of a lack of alternatives, as some respondents pointed out: *'there's no room on any of the other sites and I've no family there. They mostly also have issues with health and safety'* (Pilgrims Lane).
- 6.20 Five respondents (14%), including four at Pilgrims Lane, had lived in a house at some point. In total, eleven respondents (31%) said they would live in a house if they had the chance. This is a surprisingly high figure although it should not be assumed that a stated preference for returning to bricks and mortar accommodation necessarily means the respondent will actually move off a site.

- 6.21 Respondents were asked whether extra site capacity was needed in Thurrock. A quarter felt there was enough provision already: *'Thurrock has three sites already. Neighbouring boroughs should build some sites because everyone is getting packed into this area'* [Ship Lane]. However the majority felt more provision was needed. Many of these felt the emphasis should be on local authority residential sites: *'they should be sites with larger pitches, proper utility rooms – safer sites, away from motorways, railways and rubbish dumps'* [Pilgrims Lane]. However half said the focus should be on helping Gypsies and Travellers to set up private sites: *'planning permission should be granted for people on their own land. Traveller communities don't want to be split up. Council sites are ok for some, but a lot of Travellers don't want to live on them; they want to be independent'* [Pilgrims Lane]. A third said transit sites were also needed: *'you see the same people on unauthorised sites. There should be transit sites for visiting populations and seasonal travelling'* [Gammon Field].

### **Gypsies and Travellers living on their own land**

- 6.22 Three interviews was conducted on private authorised sites and six were conducted at unauthorised developments – some tolerated by the Council. Two were owned by Romany Gypsies, three by English Travellers, two by Irish Travellers, one by a Traveller and another by a person of English heritage. All but one said they had enough space for their needs. One respondent had lived on the site for less than three months; three had lived on their sites for between 3 and 5 years, whilst five had been there longer than five years. Eight of the respondents answered that they did not intent to move, whilst one was unsure.
- 6.23 None of these respondents said they had difficulty finding their site. They had either come across it through family connections (*'a family member offered us plot after they bought it'*) or through knowledge of the local area (*'we have travelled in this area for a long time and just came upon this piece of land'*). Two commented on how difficult it had been to obtain planning permission: *'it was a long and stressful and expensive process but we got there in the end'*.

- 6.24 Satisfaction levels among these respondents were high, with none reporting dissatisfaction with the sites. The advantages of living on their own site were clear to the respondents, and all said they were very satisfied with where they live: *'we get on with the locals. Our family and community are here. There's enough space for business'; 'We get on with the locals, access to shops in village just a walk away. We can live next to stable where horses are kept 'We're on our own and can do as we want'.* None had any complaints about their accommodation or the facilities on site and none would prefer to move to another site or into bricks and mortar accommodation. However all of these respondents felt that more provision was needed in Thurrock: *'there should be more Traveller owned sites with planning permission, we should be able to buy our own land.'*

## Facilities and services

- 6.25 Thurrock's Gypsies and Travellers were asked a series of questions about their awareness and usage of local services, and how accessible they found them. Respondents appear to be well connected to local services (including shops, banks, Post Office), with three-quarters saying they used all local services or *'all we need'*. Within this, however, only half said they used public transport and several respondents commented on how isolated their site was: *'There's no public transport here, no taxis will come and we're blacklisted for deliveries – there are no signs to the site'* [Gammon Field].
- 6.26 Use of local services was much lower. The following table represents which council and advice services respondents had used. It shows that the Benefits Agency and the Library were the only ones which a majority of respondents had used. While only a third used the Gypsy liaison officer, this varied across site types. Not surprisingly none of those on the private sites had contact, however two thirds at Gammon Field had, as opposed to a third at Pilgrims Lane and a quarter at Ship Lane. When asked why the services were not used, the main reason given was that the service was not needed, rather than not having awareness of it: *'I've used the liaison officer in the past but have no need for him anymore'* [unauthorised development]. Access was also an issue:

Table 6.4 Use of services	
Service	Total
Benefits Agency	57.1%
Library	57.1%
Housing Department	38.1%
Education services	35.7%
Gypsy liaison officer	26.2%
Job Centre	28.6%
Citizens Advice Bureau	19.0%

- 6.27 Respondents were asked directly whether they had ever been discriminated against when trying to access services. 55% said they had, all of whom lived on one of the local authority sites. Many respondents were non-specific about when the discrimination occurred: *nothing specific but sometimes if people find out who you are they think bad of you* [Gammon Field]. The main source of discrimination was with healthcare providers: *'doctor's refused to take us on and the ambulance won't come onto the site without the police, even in emergency'* [Pilgrims Lane]; *'the doctor can be funny at times – he won't do home visits'* [Ship Lane]. A fifth mentioned discrimination from local services: *'they follow you round the shop because they think you will steal'* [Ship Lane]. A small majority (60%) said they had been the victim of racism, crime or bullying because of being a Gypsy or Traveller.
- 6.28 Respondents were asked about their experiences of the police in Thurrock. Hardly any had any concerns, apart from several respondents at Pilgrims Lane. Some of these related to a recent raid on the site (*'I had my home searched by police for firearms and stolen goods - nothing found'*), but particularly to the fact that visitors to the site are often escorted by police: *'they escort everyone on here and wear bullet proof vests as if we are animals'*.
- 6.29 Respondents at Pilgrims Lane were also the least likely to have a positive impression of the local media in terms of how they report Gypsies and Travellers. This is partly because Irish Travellers were the focus of stories: *'it's mostly lies and discrimination. They never have a good word to say about a Traveller'*.

## Health, education and employment

- 6.30 All respondents were permanently registered with a GP surgery in Thurrock except for a quarter (three respondents) at Pilgrims Lane who had temporary registration, and one who was not registered. Fewer were registered with a dentist – 59% overall, but just a third at Pilgrims Lane. 39% of respondents also said they made use of a health visitor. Two-thirds reported a health issue in their family, with depression being the most prevalent, given by a quarter of respondents. Interestingly respondents at Pilgrims Lane were the most likely to report a problem – all apart from two said they or a family member had a health issue. None of those on private sites reported any problems.

- 6.31 A majority (58%) said they had at some stage used a hospital's Accident and Emergency department because they could not see a GP. Just over a third (36%) said they encountered problems when using health services, in terms of getting an appointment and being treated with respect. Those who answered yes to this question were frequently from authorised sites; *'the only access we can get is from the temporary health centre catering for travellers, homeless & refugees'* [Pilgrims Lane]. Others disagreed that they were discriminated against: *'No - we're the same as everyone else and expected to be treated the same. It's hard for anyone to get an appointment round here'* [Ship Lane].
- 6.32 In terms of education enrolment, only a third of under fives use pre-school nursery or playgroup facilities<sup>11</sup>. While all children of the relevant age were enrolled at a primary school, only two-thirds were with a secondary school. On one respondent's case this was attributed to the lack of transport to a school.
- 6.33 The vast majority (89%) felt it was vital for their children to attend school. Main reason for seeing education as important was that it improves opportunities: *'a better education is a better chance in life'* [Gammon Field]; *'it's more important now as there's less work for Gypsies'* [Ship Lane].
- 6.34 Although enrolment was high, many respondents had found it difficult to enrol their children in school. The main barrier was a lack of a permanent address or seasonal travelling: *'when we were on the road it was hard to keep our son in school'* [private site]. However a few complained about an inappropriate curriculum or bullying.
- 6.35 As regards employment in the Thurrock area, just under a quarter of respondents said it was difficult to find work, however the largest proportion (48%) said it was neither easy nor difficult, whilst ten respondents (32%) said it was difficult or very difficult to find work in the area. None of the women in the sample worked, however the most popular form was labouring (including road maintenance and construction), mentioned by two-thirds of respondents. A quarter mentioned tree surgery or gardening, and the same amount trading or hawking. A few respondents stressed how they did not work locally but *'go away to work on roads'* [Gammon Field].

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<sup>11</sup> This compares to 65% of under fives in the general population in 2004/05 (Social Trends 36, Office for National Statistics).

- 6.36 When asked if a lack of preferred work had led them to seek alternative forms of employment, a quarter said it had. Just 11% felt that employment opportunities affected their ability to maintain a travelling lifestyle, although almost two thirds (60%) thought they had been denied work because of their background. These comments were typical: *'when employers realise where I live they react badly because they know it's a Travellers' site'* [Ship Lane]; *'On numerous occasions when employers find out you're a Traveller they "have to let you go" or don't employ you in first place'* [private site]. A quarter of respondents at Ship Lane felt that site restrictions preventing them doing certain type of work, specifically the lack of space for commercial vehicles: *'The size of the pitch; I would like to have room to store some tools & machines for work here. Lock-ups off site aren't safe'*.
- 6.37 Just over a third (37%) expected their children to continue doing the same type of work, with the majority either unsure or feeling that their children would decide for themselves: *'it's up to them what they do'* [unauthorised development]; *'I'd like them to do something different but they can choose for themselves'* [Gammon Field].

## Travelling patterns

- 6.38 The overwhelming majority (88%) of the respondents had not travelled in the past year – including all of those at Pilgrims Lane – partly reflecting how most of Thurrock's Gypsies and Travellers have lived long-term on residential sites. All those who had travelled in the past year were able to keep their pitch when travelling. Travelling routes were short distance and included other parts of Essex, Suffolk and London, for no more than two weeks. All the families travelled in spring and summer and none had stayed on unauthorised sites, rather holiday parks or with family on local authority residential sites.

## Accommodation provision

- 6.39 Overall two thirds of respondents did not think there was enough space for Gypsies and Travellers in Thurrock. A concern was that there would not be enough space for children to live when they grow up: *'we need more space so our kids have somewhere to go and set up their own homes'* A small majority (58%) said that more local authority site were needed, however almost as many (44%) said private sites with planning permission were needed: *'we need another council site but also opportunities to buy our own land and set up planning permission'* [Pilgrims Lane]. 15% said that a transit site was needed.

- 6.40 Respondents were then asked what they felt acted as a barrier to accessing sites. The following table shows that obtaining planning permission was seen as the main barrier, followed by opposition from local residents. This suggests there may be considerable interest in buying private land to live on but that the planning process deterred Gypsies and Travellers, and that the impression that an application would not be viewed fairly due to opposition from local people and the Council: *'A few years ago I wanted to buy land & enquired about getting permission but I was put off by cost & process'* [Ship Lane].

**Table 6.5 Main barriers to accessing sites**

Barrier	%
Planning constraints	82.2%
Local opposition	80.0%
Opposition from Council	71.1%
Cost of buying land	55.6%
Finding suitable land	48.9%

- 6.41 In terms of accommodation preferences, the majority (62%) respondents would like to live on their own site with planning permission. 33% said they would rather live on a site owned by a Gypsy or Traveller, and the same amount said a local authority site. Overall 20% said they would ideally like to live in bricks and mortar accommodation – either in the social rented or private rented sector. All except for one respondent would stay in Thurrock as their main place of residence.
- 6.42 Respondents were asked whether anyone in their family is likely to move into their own separate accommodation within the next five years. A third of respondents said that at least one new family would be formed in this way. There was a strong expectation that they would continue living in Thurrock – all apart from three respondents said they thought the newly forming families would live there – and often on the same site or close to other family members.

## Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar accommodation

- 6.43 Although considerable efforts were made to involve Gypsies and Travellers who live in bricks and mortar accommodation, only three interviews were completed. Approximately twenty Gypsy and Traveller families live in housing in Thurrock (mainly in Tilbury). However when they were approached by the liaison officer or education support worker during the research project the majority declined to take part. The reason given was that they no longer viewed themselves as Gypsies or Travellers (mainly because they no longer travelled), and therefore did not deem themselves as suitable candidates with a relevant input. The following will therefore be an outline of the findings from three interviews, and should therefore only be used as a general observance.
- 6.44 It was firstly noted that the level of overcrowding for the three families was very high. They all noted that there was not enough space for their families, with one household compromising of eight individuals and three bedrooms. All respondents had had difficulties accessing their current accommodation and had been on waiting lists in excess of 9 months: *'We had to fight to get the accommodation and had to live in a hotel for a while as the caravan and all possessions were stolen'*.
- 6.45 In regards to local services, those that weren't used were mainly not needed. Both respondents noted that the proximity of a local leisure centre was a barrier. One of the respondents explained that local parks and children's play areas were inaccessible *'because of trouble with local people'*. Local council and information services were used when needed.
- 6.46 When asked whether they had been discriminated against whilst trying to access services, both respondents answered that they had. Problems with doctor's surgeries were mentioned by both, and one respondent believed that due to their status as a traveller they had been allocated substandard housing accommodation.
- 6.47 Two respondents reported that they had been the victim of racism, crime or bullying because of who they are. It was reported that they had received verbal abuse and vandalism to their property. With regard to experience of the police in Thurrock they replied that they had been *'called on numerous occasions and they don't come at all or days later'*.
- 6.48 The respondents had permanent registration with a local GP and a dentist, although one had used A&E when appointments were not available. Respondents reported that they encountered problems using health services in the area, mainly with the distance from their homes and difficulties with appointments.



- 6.49 Both respondents considered attendance at school as vital for Gypsy and Traveller children, but bullying and an inappropriate curriculum were reported as barriers.
- 6.50 It was reported by both respondents that finding employment in the area was very difficult. Although one respondent noted that they didn't know if this was due to their Gypsy and Traveller background, the other perceived this to be the case; *'As soon as you ask about a job and they find out you're a traveller that's it, no job.'*
- 6.51 None of the respondents had travelled in the previous year; all had adopted a settled lifestyle. The reason for this choice was reported as having no where else to go as they kept being moved on. Two noted that there was a need in Thurrock for more sites (including private land to buy) and two also noted that there was a need for more suitable housing.
- 6.52 One respondent answered that a member of the household would be in need of separate accommodation in the next 2 to 5 years, and thought that they would like to be accommodated on a Gypsy and Traveller owned site. None wanted to move back to a site, but wanted to move to more suitable house in Thurrock: *'I've got friends and family here but would like a house in a better area'*.

## Conclusion

- 6.53 Interviews were conducted on the three local authority sites, and private and authorised developments in Thurrock. The Gypsy and Traveller population in Thurrock are well-settled, living on permanent sites for several years, with few intended to move or travel somewhere else.
- 6.54 Overall the vast majority of respondents were happy with where they lived, with the exception of Pilgrims Lane. Fears that the site is dangerous and unsafe for children remain, and concerns raised about the cost of pitches. Residents on all the local authority sites said that the sites needed refurbishment, in particular the condition of day rooms need improving. Other issues include the management of sites, rubbish collection and electricity metering.
- 6.55 Overcrowding and a lack of accommodation provision for newly forming families was also a concern. There was a strong expectation that children would continue living on sites in the Thurrock area. Ideally respondents would like to live on a private, family-sized site however planning constraints and local opposition were identified as barriers to achieving this.

- 6.56 The enrolment of Gypsy and Traveller children in education was high, as was respondents' registration with local GPs. Use of local services was high, although few respondents made use of Council services. Some respondents felt isolated from community services due to the lack of public transport; others said that they were not relevant or appropriate to Gypsies and Travellers.

## 7. Survey of Travelling Showpeople

### Introduction

- 7.1 As described in Chapter 2, Travelling Showpeople are included in the definition of Gypsies and Travellers for the purposes of housing strategies, but are subject to separate planning guidance. Given the strong presence of Travelling Showpeople in Thurrock and that they face similar accommodation issues to Gypsies and Travellers in the area, they have been included in this report. However in recognition of their different cultural identity, a separate questionnaire was administered leading to a separate accommodation needs assessment in Chapter 8 (as recommended in the guidance).<sup>12</sup> The questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was adapted to recognise the different accommodation requirements that Travelling Showpeople may have.

### Methodology

- 7.2 There are three Travelling Showpeople sites in Thurrock, all are privately owned. Buckles Lane is the largest Travelling Showpeople site in Europe and is divided over three sections. The original site has been occupied for fifty years and has planning permission. To the west of the authorised section is a large area which was given temporary planning permission at a public inquiry in 2001, and renewed for three years in 2005. The site has recently extended to the north and this section has lawful use. A smaller site is at St Chads, Tilbury and is occupied by up to 80 people. Finally there is a long-established site at West Thurrock occupied by three families.
- 7.3 64 interviews were conducted at the Buckles Lane site. This includes residents of the authorised part of the site, those on the land with temporary planning permission and the adjacent unauthorised land. Interviews were conducted in June and July 2006. As with the Gypsy and Traveller survey, several visits were made to the site, with one interview conducted per family. Access was not given by site owners to the West Thurrock or Tilbury sites. Information collected in the interviews was supplemented by data from a survey of the three sites that Thurrock Council conducted in June 2007. This collected details on resident numbers and yard occupancy rates.

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<sup>12</sup> DCLG (2007) *Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople*.

- 7.4 The cultural practice of Travelling Showpeople is to live on a site yard in static caravans or mobile homes, along with smaller caravans used for travelling or inhabited by other family members (for example, adolescent children). Their equipment (including rides, kiosks and stalls) is kept on the same plot. It should consequently be borne in mind that the amount of land needed to live on is greater than for Gypsies and Travellers.

## Buckles Lane

- 7.5 The average number of people living on each yard at Buckles Lane was 4.7. However some yards had sublet space for 'staff' to live. Staff worked with the Showpeople families, but do not consider themselves to be Showpeople and so have not been included in this assessment. Almost all Showpeople families had at least one member who lived there all year round, suggesting that the site is no longer solely used for winter quarters, but is the main residential base. All respondents said it was their main home. Almost two-thirds (64%) said they had enough space, although those living on the Buckles Lane extension were more likely to say they had enough space (72% against 69%). 94% were members of the Travelling Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.
- 7.6 Respondents were likely to be well-established at the site: 95% said they had lived there for more than three years, and 71% for more than five. 88% said they had no intention of leaving. Most had found the site through a friend or relative telling them about spare yards. Half said it was easy to find although a third said it was difficult: *'it's a long established site so we knew about it but there's not much space available and it's a long-term battle with the Council to stay here'*.
- 7.7 In terms of what facilities the site needed, most respondents were happy with what was available: *'we don't need anything else – the site has been here for over 20 years and has everything we need'*. A quarter of respondents said the site needed mains sewage, and 10% said the road in the site should be tarmaced. Only two said that security on site was an issue, and just three said that noisy or dangerous traffic was a concern. It is therefore not surprising that satisfaction with the site was very high. As the following table shows, almost half (48%) said they were very satisfied:

Table 6.6 Satisfaction with current site		
	Number	Percentage
Very satisfied	31	48.4
Satisfied	27	42.2
Neither / nor	3	4.7
Dissatisfied	3	4.7
Very dissatisfied	-	-
TOTAL	64	100%

- 7.8 When respondents were asked for the benefits of living on the site, security and sense of community were the most frequent reasons given: *'the yard's big enough for my equipment, it's secure here, safe for the kids and there's a community spirit'; 'there's access for large vehicles onto the M25 – we can lead a Showmen's life here'.*
- 7.9 The main negative aspect of the site was the lack of space, given by over a fifth (22%) of respondents overall, but the majority of those on the authorised section (54%): *'there's not enough space as it is and there's no room for expansion'*. The lack of permanent planning permission and uncertainty regarding the availability of future yards was a concern to 12% of respondents. Other concerns included the traffic on Buckles Lane, the distance to local shops and services, and people renting statics to non-Travelling Showpeople. The cost of the yards was an issue for just 16% of respondents, and 9% were looking for alternative accommodation in the area in the form of their own land. Homes were well maintained, with only two respondents complaining about the condition (in both cases a leaking roof).

## **Facilities and services**

- 7.10 As discussed in the stakeholder consultation, Travelling Showpeople tend to be less excluded from local facilities and services (including education and healthcare) than Gypsies and Travellers. This is borne out in the survey, with respondents stressing that when facilities were not used it was because there were not needed by Travelling Showpeople: *'we've no need for them as we're largely self-regulating and look after ourselves.'* When asked if they had ever been discriminated against when accessing services, 11% said they had: *'schools, doctors - you explain to them you are from a fairground and they don't want to know, they lump you in with Gypsies'*. In terms of healthcare, 97% were permanently registered with a GP in Thurrock, and 92% with a dentist. Just 8% said they encountered problems when accessing health services.
- 7.11 All children of primary school age were enrolled in school, however 16% of secondary aged children were not. One respondent said their eldest child was educated at home due to a lack of places in local schools. 97% said they thought it was vital for children of Travelling Showpeople to be educated: *'there's less traditional work available – kids need education for alternative employment and to change career.'*

- 7.12 The difficulty in finding traditional work forms was stressed by respondents. Only 14% said it was easy to find work in the Thurrock area and, as well as working on fairgrounds, a range of other work was done by respondents, particularly in the off-season. This included catering, tree surgery, haulage, factory work, retail and markets. A third said the lack of preferred employment had led to seeking alternative forms of work and a fifth said that employment opportunities affected their ability to maintain a traditional, travelling lifestyle: *'we'll always be showmen but often we do other jobs in order to make a living'*. Three-quarters of those with children expected them to continue as Travelling Showpeople: *'yes I would like children to continue showmen tradition but hopefully they'll have the option to do something else.'*
- 7.13 Just over a quarter (28%) said they had been denied work because of being a Travelling Showpeople. This was mostly attributed to the fact that any work would be temporary: *'Sometimes it's difficult to get temporary work off-season as employers know that showmen will soon move on'*. Others said it was due to being associated with Gypsies: *'people believe we are Gypsies and untrustworthy'*.

### **Travelling patterns**

- 7.14 Almost two-thirds (62%) of respondents had not travelled in the past year, underlining how Buckles Lane is no longer used as winter quarters. Of those who had travelled, all had some so in spring and summer, two-thirds in autumn and less than a quarter in winter. Most travelling was short distance in Essex, London and the Home Counties, and other parts of the East of England. A few respondents travelled further afield, including Cornwall, Somerset and Cheshire. Stays were short, typically over a weekend or up to a week. All respondents said that work was the main reason for travelling, although a third also said that they travelled to maintain their cultural traditions or to see family. All stayed on authorised fairground sites mostly council parks or festival show sites.

- 7.15 60% of those who still travelled could foresee a time when they would stop travelling, although the majority thought this would be over ten years away. In all cases this would be due to working ending: *'work will finish as the fairs end'*.

### **Accommodation provision**

- 7.16 Almost three-quarters (73%) did not think there was not enough accommodation for Travelling Showpeople in Thurrock. The main concern was the lack of space for future families. These comments were typical: *'our family is outgrowing our plot. Our children may not be able to go into the showman's business if there is not sufficient space for their rides, stall and mobile homes'*; *'not at the moment but future generations will need somewhere to live as community growing. Showmen don't want or need anything from the Council except to be able to purchase suitable land & get planning permission to live'*. It was also stressed that it should be easier to live on their own land with planning permission, as many Travelling Showpeople were trying to buy land for their extended family.
- 7.17 The process of obtaining planning permission was also criticised, as was the unresolved situation over the extension to Buckles Lane: *'we're having to re-apply for planning on established site. It's a terrible problem – we fought for 2 and a half years and it's not properly resolved yet'*; *'we were successful after substantial loss and anxiety and we still only have temporary permission'*. There was however little call for help with the planning permission process – just 14% said they were like assistance.
- 7.18 All respondents wanted to stay living on Buckles Lane. 78% said they would prefer to keep their equipment on the same yard rather than a separate compound on the same site. Only a fifth said they would feel comfortable living close to Gypsies or Travellers.
- 7.19 The survey found that half of all respondents expected at least one person in their family to require separate accommodation in the next five years. This high figure is partly a reflection of the large extended families who live on each yard, and that adult Travelling Showpeople require their own yard to store their equipment. The expectation was that they would have their own plot in Thurrock, if not on Buckles Lane itself.

## **Summary**

- 7.20 Interviews were conducted on the Buckles Lane site, including on the authorised and unauthorised extensions. The vast majority of respondents had lived on the site for at least five years and were very happy with their living conditions and the facilities available; none wanted to live elsewhere. Most respondents no longer travelled, suggesting Buckles Lane is more like a permanent residential site than just winter quarters. Concerns were raised about overcrowding on the authorised section and the renting of land to non-Showpeople.
- 7.21 Respondents were well connected with local services and facilities (including schools and healthcare). The main concerns of respondents were over the future of the site, particularly the uncertainty over planning permission and the lack of space for expansion. There was a strong expectation that children would continue living on sites in Thurrock and that they would need their own yard if there were to maintain a traditional lifestyle.



## 8. Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need

### Introduction

- 8.1 We have conducted an assessment for Gypsies and Travellers (contained in this chapter) and one for Travelling Showpeople (chapter 9). In both cases we have applied our survey findings based on the approach outlined in the CLG guidance (page 24-25). In broad terms this calculates the current amount of supply (including pitch vacancies and site residents wishing to move to bricks and mortar accommodation) and then subtracts the current demand (including overcrowding, unauthorised encampments and new family formations). This chapter estimates the levels of need for site and bricks and mortar accommodation, before assessing the requirement for additional pitches over the next five years. The assessment is based on one pitch per household. The final figure provides an indication of the extent and nature of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need in Thurrock.
- 8.2 The situation in Thurrock is heavily affected by the proportion of unauthorised developments that are tolerated by the Council. In line with the GTAA guidance, they are included in our assessment as contributing to accommodation need.

### Current residential supply

- 8.3 At the time of fieldwork, there were 60 occupied local authority residential pitches and 18 on private sites. The total number of occupied authorised pitches is therefore **78**.
- 8.4 To this total is added the number of unused pitches on local authority and private sites. During the fieldwork this was **five pitches**, however this includes two pitches at Pilgrims Lane which are damaged and need repairing before they can be inhabited.
- 8.5 Also included in the calculation of supply is the number of site residents expressing a desire to live in bricks and mortar accommodation. Eleven residents on three local authority sites would like to move to housing. Assuming suitable housing is available, this would potentially release **eleven pitches**. However it is recognised that this is a theoretical preference, based on their availability of suitable social housing. Our survey also found a much higher transfer from sites to housing than typically found in GTAAs. Consequently we have produced two figures for pitch need with the second based on no Gypsies and Travellers moving into housing. (see paragraph 8.15).

- 8.6 There are three other factors used for calculating supply: existing pitches likely to become vacant in the near future; new local authority pitches planned for the next year; existing applications for private sites likely to gain planning permission in the next year. No pitches in Thurrock are expected to come forward in any of these ways.
- 8.7 Thurrock's **total pitch provision** is therefore **94 pitches**.

### Current residential demand

- 8.8 The first element in estimating demand is the amount of Gypsies and Travellers seeking permanent site accommodation in the area. There are 20 families on the waiting lists for the local authority sites so **20 pitches** would be required. There are also 20 caravans on unauthorised developments tolerated by the Council and 12 on other unauthorised sites. The residents here would create the need for **21 pitches**.
- 8.9 The next element to consider is overcrowding. Niner's ODPM research<sup>13</sup> assumes 10% of council sites are overcrowded. In the case of Thurrock, our survey analysis (including caravan occupancy rates and respondents' views on whether they had enough space) suggests 10% is a fair estimate and that there are six families in overcrowded accommodation. An additional **six pitches** would meet this need.
- 8.10 Finally, one respondent living in bricks and mortar accommodation wanted to move to a site. **One pitch** should be supplied to meet this need. There was no overcrowding or concealed households among Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar accommodation
- 8.11 The **total current demand** in Thurrock is therefore **48 pitches**. This figure, along with the total Gypsy and Traveller families on sites, is subtracted from the total provision, giving a **total current shortfall of 32 pitches**.

### Newly forming need

- 8.12 As well as current supply and demand, we also assess future demand created by new family formation over the next five years. We have applied a family formation rate of 3% per annum, as used by Niner and adopted in the Guidance, and assumed that 70% of new families will require a pitch. This would create the need for **10 pitches** over the next five years.

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<sup>13</sup> P. Niner, *Local Authority Gypsy / Traveller Sites in England*, ODPM 2003, pp189-190.

## Summary of residential need assessment

- 8.13 The table below summarises the assessment and shows the total extra pitch provision in Thurrock.

<b>Table 8.1 Assessment of need for residential site pitches: 2006 – 2016</b>	
Families on local authority site pitches	60
Families on authorised privately owned site pitches	18
<b>1. Total number of families</b>	<b>78</b>
Unused local authority pitches	5
Existing pitches expected to become vacant	-
Number of families on sites wishing to live in housing	11
New local authority pitches planned	-
Existing applications for private sites likely to gain permission	-
<b>2. Total pitch provision available</b>	<b>94</b>
Families seeking permanent site accommodation in area	20
Families on unauthorised sites	8
Families on unauthorised developments without permission	13
Currently overcrowded	6
New family formations from elsewhere	-
In housing but wishing to move to site accommodation	1
<b>3. Total additional demand</b>	<b>48</b>
Current shortfall (= 78 plus 48 minus 94)	32
Family formation 2006 – 2016	18
<b>Total extra pitch need 2006 – 2016</b>	<b>50 pitches</b>

- 8.14 There is therefore a current shortfall of 32 pitches rising to 50 by 2016. However the total would be reduced should the pitch provision be increased by granting planning permission for the unauthorised developments. For example, if five unauthorised developments receive planning permission, then the current shortfall would fall to 27 pitches. As stated in 8.6, the current shortfall is based on some residents moving into suitable housing. Should this not be realised, the total would be 43 pitches, rising to 61 by 2016.
- 8.15 The assessment estimates need up until 2016. However to meet the planning requirements of the East of England Plan, an assessment is needed until 2021, which is supplied below. It should however that there is very limited accuracy in producing an assessment over five years, and that Gypsy and Traveller populations can fluctuate greatly. We would also point to recommendation in the following chapter that Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs should be reviewed every three to five years.

**Table 8.2 Total extra pitch provision  
in Thurrock, 2006 - 2026**

Year	Pitches needed
2006	32
2011	41
2016	50
2021	61
2026	72

## Conclusion

- 8.16 Using the site survey data and following latest government guidance, we have produced an assessment of accommodation need in Thurrock. To make up the shortfall in current provision – substantially created by the numbers on site waiting lists and unauthorised developments – 32 additional pitches are required on authorised residential sites. However provision should be indexed to newly forming need, and rise to 50 pitches over the next ten years. How Thurrock Council can provide the additional accommodation and improve its service provision to Gypsies and Travellers is discussed in the final chapter.

## 9. Travelling Showpeople accommodation need

### Introduction

- 9.1 Given the distinct lifestyle of Travelling Showpeople, some of the assumptions in the Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessment are not relevant. For example, yards are privately owned and not socially rented, and have different space requirements. The assessment has therefore been modified to reflect these differences. We have produced a separate assessment for each of the three yards.

### Buckles Lane

- 9.2 As described in chapter 7, the largest section of Buckles Lane only has temporary planning permission and so is not fully authorised. We have produced two assessments based on two different scenarios. The first is for Buckles Lane as it current exists, with a large section only having temporary planning permission (Table 9.1); the second is based on the unauthorised section being fully regularised by receiving permanent planning permission (Table 9.2).
- 9.3 As Table 9.1 below show, the main driver of need is the 62 families living on the unauthorised section of Buckles Lane. Regularising the unauthorised section of the site would substantially reduce the total current shortfall from 68 to 6 plots, as Table 9.2 shows. However need is also presented by overcrowding on the authorised section of the site – 12 yards are overcrowded – and by newly forming families. These are estimated to produce a need for 23 plots by 2016 across all of Buckles Lane.
- 9.4 Overcrowding and new family formation means that, even if the whole yard was regularised, Buckles Lane would either have to be extended or alternative accommodation found to meet the needs of overcrowded and newly forming families.

**Table 9.1 Assessment of need for Buckles Lane, not regularised:  
2006 – 2016**

Families living on authorised sections	39
<b>1. Total number of families</b>	<b>39</b>
Unused plots	2
Existing plots expected to become vacant	0
Number of families on plots wishing to live in housing	4
New authorised plots planned in Thurrock	0
Existing applications for private plots likely to gain permission	0
<b>2. Total plot provision available</b>	<b>45</b>
Families seeking permanent yard accommodation in area	0
Families on land without permanent planning permission	62
Currently overcrowded	12
<b>3. Total additional demand</b>	<b>74</b>
Current shortfall (= 39 plus 74 minus 45)	68
Family formation 2006 – 2016*	23
<b>Total extra plots need 2006 – 2016</b>	<b>91 plots</b>

NB: The family formation, housing transfer and overcrowding figures apply to the 101 families living on both the authorised and unauthorised sections of Buckles Lane.

**Table 9.2 Assessment of need for Buckles Lane, fully regularised:  
2006 – 2016**

Families living on authorised sections	101
<b>1. Total number of families</b>	<b>101</b>
Unused plots	2
Existing plots expected to become vacant	0
Number of families on plots wishing to live in housing	4
New authorised plots planned in Thurrock	0
Existing applications for private plots likely to gain permission	0
<b>2. Total plot provision available</b>	<b>107</b>
Families seeking permanent yard accommodation in area	0
Families on land without permanent planning permission	0
Currently overcrowded	12
<b>3. Total additional demand</b>	<b>12</b>
Current shortfall (= 101 plus 12 minus 107)	6
Family formation 2006 – 2016*	23
<b>Total extra plots need 2006 – 2016</b>	<b>29 plots</b>

NB: The family formation, housing transfer and overcrowding figures apply to the 101 families living on both the authorised and unauthorised sections of Buckles Lane.

## Tilbury (St Chads)

- 9.5 Approximately 80 Showpeople live on the Tilbury yard, although numbers decrease to approximately 40 during the summer. The site at Tilbury is at full capacity with all the plots occupied. While there is no formal waiting list, residents stated that families of Travelling Showpeople have been turned away. Drivers of need are overcrowded and concealed households, although we have also made a small allowance for families who have been turned away from the yard due to lack of capacity. To meet this need, an additional 9 plots will need to be provided by 2016, either by expanding the site or supplying additional accommodation elsewhere.

**Table 9.3 Assessment of need for Tilbury: 2006 – 2016**

<b>1. Total number of families</b>	<b>16</b>
Unused plots	0
Existing plots expected to become vacant	0
Number of families on yards wishing to live in housing	0
New authorised yards planned in Thurrock	0
Existing applications for private yards likely to gain permission	0
<b>2. Total plot provision available</b>	<b>16</b>
Families seeking permanent yard accommodation in area	3
Families on land without permanent planning permission	0
Currently overcrowded	2
<b>3. Total additional demand</b>	<b>5</b>
Current shortfall (= 16 plus 5 minus 16)	5
Family formation 2006 – 2016	4
<b>Total extra plot need 2006 – 2016</b>	<b>9 plots</b>

## West Thurrock

- 9.6 There is a small Travelling Showpeople site at West Thurrock where three families currently live. There is no evidence of overcrowding and the site would appear to be sufficiently spacious for newly forming families to live. The site therefore presents no accommodation need.

<b>Table 9.4 Assessment of need for West Thurrock: 2006 – 2016</b>	
<b>1. Total number of families</b>	<b>3</b>
Unused plots	0
Existing plots expected to become vacant	0
Number of families on yards wishing to live in housing	0
New authorised yards planned in Thurrock	0
Existing applications for private yards likely to gain permission	0
<b>2. Total plot provision available</b>	<b>3</b>
Families seeking permanent yard accommodation in area	0
Families on land without permanent planning permission	0
Currently overcrowded	0
<b>3. Total additional demand</b>	<b>0</b>
Current shortfall (= 16 plus 5 minus 16)	0
Family formation 2006 – 2016	0
<b>Total extra plot need 2006 – 2016</b>	<b>0 plots</b>

## Future need

- 9.7 The three assessments estimate need up until 2016. However, as with Gypsies and Travellers, an assessment for Travelling Showpeople is needed until 2021 to meet regional planning requirements. The same qualifiers on accuracy apply here. Table 9.5 shows how many additional pitches in Thurrock are needed according to two scenarios. The first column shows how many plots are needed should the current situation at Buckles Lane continue with a large section having only temporary planning permission. 73 plots are currently required rising to 118 in 2021. The second column shows the level of need should all of Buckles Lane be fully regularised with permanent planning permission. The need in 2021 is therefore significantly lower, estimated to be an extra 55 plots. *NB: the table refers to need in Thurrock as a whole, so includes the need generated by both sections of Buckles Lane and by the Tilbury yard.*

<b>Table 9.5 Total extra plot provision in Thurrock, 2006 - 2026</b>		
Year	Plots needed (Buckles Lane not regularised)	Plots needed (Buckles Lane regularised)
2006	73	11
2011	85	24
2016	100	38
2021	118	55
2026	137	74



## Conclusion

- 9.8 Separate Travelling Showpeople accommodation assessments have been produced for each of the yards in Thurrock. In total, 71 additional plots are required to make up the shortfall in current provision. However this would be substantially reduced to 11 plots should the unauthorised section of Buckles Lane be regularised. Nevertheless, overcrowding, concealed households and family formation mean that the amount of provision will need to increase to meet the needs of Thurrock's Travelling Showpeople population. Mechanisms for achieving this are discussed in the next chapter.



# 10. Conclusions and recommendations

## Introduction

- 10.1 The research on which this report is based comprised multiple components, including a review of legislation and policies, a stakeholder consultation with agencies and service providers, and a survey of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in authorised and unauthorised accommodation in Thurrock. This final chapter brings together the key findings from the research under a series of recommendations for policies Thurrock Council could pursue to meet Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation needs. In total we make thirteen recommendations, grouped together into four sub-group categories; Gypsy and Traveller site provision; facilities, access and service provisions; Travelling Showpeople yards; and recording and monitoring processes.

## Gypsy and Traveller site provision

- 10.2 The needs assessment illustrated the need for an additional 50 residential pitches by 2016 for Gypsies and Travellers in the Thurrock area. This is substantially more than the 31 pitches which the Essex study<sup>14</sup> estimated would be required across the whole County, although as explained in Section 1.11, there are several methodological reasons why the Essex assessment is likely to be severely underestimated. While this assessment is a snapshot of need (in line with the guidance), analysis of the last five Caravan Counts show little variation in Thurrock's Gypsy and Traveller population (see chapter 4). There is little reason therefore to believe that the findings are a one-off or an exaggeration of need.
- 10.3 However there are three issues that drive this figure in Thurrock; expanding families; unauthorised developments; and families on waiting lists.
- 10.4 One driver of need is expanding families. Ideally this would mean the expansion of current sites rather than the construction of new sites. However there is little potential to increase the size of the three local authority sites which are already large. The survey found a preference for smaller sites, which tend to be easier to manage.

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<sup>14</sup> Anya Ahmed, Phillip Brown and Andy Steele, (2006) op. cit.

- 10.5 The figure for 50 residential pitches includes a number of unauthorised developments that are well established and tolerated in Thurrock. In total unauthorised developments make up half of the total figure of need. We recommend that efforts should be made to grant planning permission retrospectively (where feasible) to reduce need and to provide residents with security. For Gypsies and Travellers who wish to set up their own sites, assistance with the planning process should be proactively offered from an early stage, perhaps through the Gypsy and Traveller liaison officer in conjunction with the Planning Departments. Specific sites available to buy should be outlined in future DPDs and criteria laid out on the type of land that is likely to obtain planning permission as well as land that is *unlikely* to.
- 10.6 It was reported that there are 11 families that wish to live in bricks and mortar accommodation. While it should not be assumed that all who state a desire to move would eventually make the transition, identifying appropriate accommodation could theoretically free up to 11 pitches. The transition from sites to bricks and mortar accommodation can be isolating and, to stand a chance of succeeding, tenancy support is needed particularly in the first six months. Allocating housing close to other Gypsies and Travellers helps maintain the sense of community, as demonstrated by the group living in housing in Tilbury.
- 10.7 Even with these measures, two new residential sites would be required to meet the current and future need of Thurrock's Gypsies and Travellers, including those on site waiting lists. However it is noted that Thurrock provides over a quarter of local authority pitches in Essex. Our view is that the RSS should ensure that the accommodation need in Thurrock is met in other areas of the region, preferably in south Essex to ensure where ties exist to the Thurrock economy and community, they can be maintained. It is also acknowledged that there is a high level of unauthorised encampments in Basildon and that this is likely to affect the distribution of future sites in Essex.
- 10.8 New residential sites should have between eight and ten pitches. Sites of this relatively small size would meet respondents' preferences for smaller sites, living with their own family network and the same ethnic group. Smaller sites are also less likely to cause tensions with the settled community. We would advise that the pitches on any new sites should be of sufficient size to accommodate at least three caravans. Space for parking commercial vehicles should also be included. This would reduce pressures of overcrowding and allow space for visitors. Ultimately, the flexibility of larger pitches will prolong the usefulness of the new site provision.

- 10.9 The precise location, design and facilities of the new site should be drawn up in consultation with Gypsies and Travellers to ensure the extra provision meets their needs. The health and safety implications of a new site's location should be considered in finding a balance between offering sites in good locations and the additional land costs this would entail. The settled community neighbouring the sites should also be involved in the consultation from an early stage.
- 10.10 It is recognised that funding and resources will affect the ability of the councils to enact some of the recommendations, particularly those relating to new site provision. However it should be borne in mind that government funding is available until 2008 and that it can be accessed through joint-bidding by local authorities.
- 10.11 The research suggests that there is no need to provide transit sites within the Thurrock area since the occurrence of roadside encampments is low, partly due to a robustly enforced protocol on evictions. There are currently no transit pitches in Essex, therefore there is a need, but this research does not support the need for these sites to be located in Thurrock.
- 10.12 Our first two recommendations therefore concern the provision of sites to meet Thurrock's needs.
- Thurrock Council should work with the East of England Regional Assembly to ensure another two residential sites are provided in Essex which would meet the needs of the Gypsies and Travellers on waiting lists for Thurrock sites. The Essex study should also be taken into consideration at this point as it identifies unauthorised sites throughout Essex.
  - The Council should identify suitable land for Gypsies and Travellers to buy, allowing them to establish small sites owned by the occupiers. The identified land should be suitably located, particularly as regards proximity to noisy and dangerous traffic, and access to public transport and local services. The possibility of applying retrospective planning permission to the unauthorised developments that are currently tolerated should also be explored.

## **Facilities, access and service provision**

10.13 As well as site capacity, a series of recommendations can be made to improve current facilities available to Gypsies and Travellers, and their access to services in the wider community. Both the surveys and stakeholder consultations regarded safety on local authority sites to be of concern, in particular concerns at Pilgrims Lane were high. The condition of the facilities on sites was also highlighted in the survey and consultation. We therefore recommend:

- The possibility of providing children's play areas on local authority sites should be explored, either on site or easily and safely accessible from the site.
- The provision of a foot path at Pilgrims Lane and the implementation of speed humps to increase road safety. The Council should engage with site residents to explain these measures and help allay safety concerns.
- The refurbishment of the day rooms at Gammon Field and Ship Lane should be conducted, and larger utility blocks provided at Pilgrims Lane. Private postboxes should be available on all three sites.

10.14 The location of the sites has created some issues with feelings of isolation, and can be problematic for accessing local services. Transport would enable Gypsies and Travellers to more easily gain access to local services, and it is felt that this would also greatly enhance the likelihood of secondary level education enrolment.

- We recommend that Thurrock Council take into account the needs of Gypsies and Travellers when designing public transport routes.

10.15 Although few Gypsies and Travellers living in housing were included in the sample, they all reported problems with their social rented accommodation, including the condition and overcrowding. There is also anecdotal evidence from stakeholders that Gypsies and Travellers are often victimised by neighbours when living in housing.

- Given these difficulties, we recommend that the tenancy support for Gypsies and Travellers in housing is reviewed. We also recommend that, where possible, housing allocations should have regard to the additional space for vehicles and trailers that Gypsies and Travellers often require. However it is recognised that this may not be feasible due to the nature of Thurrock's social housing stock and the balance of need with the settled community.

10.16 Education and health services for Gypsies and Travellers were well established and positively regarded. However outreach services were reported as being under funded and under resourced leading to limited and short-term provision.

- Funding and staffing needs to be planned on a long-term basis. Current funding arrangements for outreach services should be at the very least sustained or matched from other sources to ensure current progress and outcomes are not lost.
- The Council should lead efforts to form a coherent, multi-agency policy towards improving the health and education status of Gypsies and Travellers. The development of strategic processes and join-working practices should be established to help achieve this.

## **Travelling Showpeople yards**

- 10.17 Thurrock has three Travelling Showpeople site, with the largest – Buckles Lane – spread over three sections. The largest section is not fully authorised and currently has temporary planning permission. A finding from the survey was how the lack of security was a concern for some residents on this section and the uncertain future inhibited investment in their yards. The assessment shows that regularising the section of Buckles Lane would substantially reduce the current shortfall in plots, from 71 to 11.
- 10.18 However the survey also found significant overcrowding and concealed households on the authorised section of Buckles Lane, and at higher levels than on the unauthorised section. The Tilbury yard is also full to capacity and has overcrowding. This means that the amount of accommodation will have to be increased in addition to regularising Buckles Lane. There appears to be little scope for further expanding Buckles Lane without a detrimental effect on visual amenity and the surrounding environment.
- 10.19 As with Gypsies and Travellers, there is the question of whether the additional need from Travelling Showpeople should be met in Thurrock or elsewhere in Essex. Given the relative size of Thurrock's Travelling Showpeople population and the limited opportunities for expanding Buckles Lane, it may be that additional provision should be met elsewhere in Essex.
- Thurrock Council should take steps towards granting full planning permission to the western section of Buckles Lane. This would substantially reduce the overall amount of need in Thurrock and would be more cost-effective than providing alternative accommodation for the families living on the unauthorised section.
  - Additional need is created by overcrowded and concealed households and new family formation among Thurrock Travelling Showpeople population. To increase provision, the Council should investigate the possibility of expanding the Tilbury site and identify small plots of land for Travelling Showpeople families to establish their own yards.

- Given the size of existing sites, it is likely that new yards for Travelling Showpeople will be needed outside Thurrock. The Council should work with the Regional Assembly to increase the amount of accommodation for Travelling Showpeople in Essex.

## **Recording and monitoring process**

10.20 The population level and accommodation situation of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople is not static and is liable to change over time. Having accurate secondary data on population levels and site type is therefore crucial for the strategic planning of accommodation and services for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. Conducting the Caravan Count jointly between the Gypsy Liaison Officer and the Planning Department appears to have improved the accuracy of the figures. However, although not required as part of the Caravan Count, accurate figures on Travelling Showpeople population levels are needed in Thurrock, particularly given the relatively large size of the population.

- We recommend that a biannual count of Travelling Showpeople takes place in Thurrock.
- We also recommend that Thurrock Council review the accommodation needs of its Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople every three to five years, to take into account the relatively young age at which new families forms in the communities, and the preference of many young families to live on their own pitch on the same site as their wider family.

## **Conclusion**

10.21 The overall findings of our research is that while there is need for two additional Gypsy and Traveller residential sites in the Thurrock area, the proportional amount that Thurrock already provides in comparison to the surrounding areas in Essex should be taken into account when deciding where the sites should be located. In this light we recommend that a joint approach be taken with other authorities in Essex to ensure the provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation is more evenly shared across the region, with those regions with less provisions taking further responsibilities for Gypsies and Travellers Thurrock Council should provide advice on securing planning permission for Gypsies and Travellers wishing to set up their own site and take action to regulate the unauthorised developments which are tolerated.



- 10.22 In Thurrock we recommend that existing sites be refurbished and highlighted problems solved in partnership with other agencies and service providers. The concern that families will outgrow sites is also an issue that raises concerns and consideration into the extension of sites explored. At Buckles Lane the status of the land should be determined at the earliest possible date to everyone's advantage.
- 10.23 All service providers in the area would benefit from a coherent policy from the Council, and strategic processes and joint-working practices should be developed. Finally, the provision and commitment of funding and staff would assist with longer-term provision.
- 10.24 As regards Travelling Showpeople, steps should be taken to regularise the entire Buckles Lane yard. Additionally, the Council should assist Travelling Showpeople in obtaining planning permission for their own small yards in Thurrock. However it is recognised that the opportunities for increasing provision in Thurrock are limited and that a view needs to be taken at a regional level as to where new Travelling Showpeople yards should be provided.

