

**Partial Review of the South East Plan: Gypsies and Travellers
Oxfordshire Steering Group – 13th September 2007**

Stakeholder consultation – summary of results

Introduction

1. This paper reports on the feedback received from stakeholders consulted to assist with the development of spatial option B that seeks to deliver a distribution of pitches based on consideration of environmental, social and economic matters, as an alternative to a distribution based on need where it arises. This is in accordance with advice to local authorities on preparing advice on the spatial distribution of future pitch requirement¹.

Who were involved?

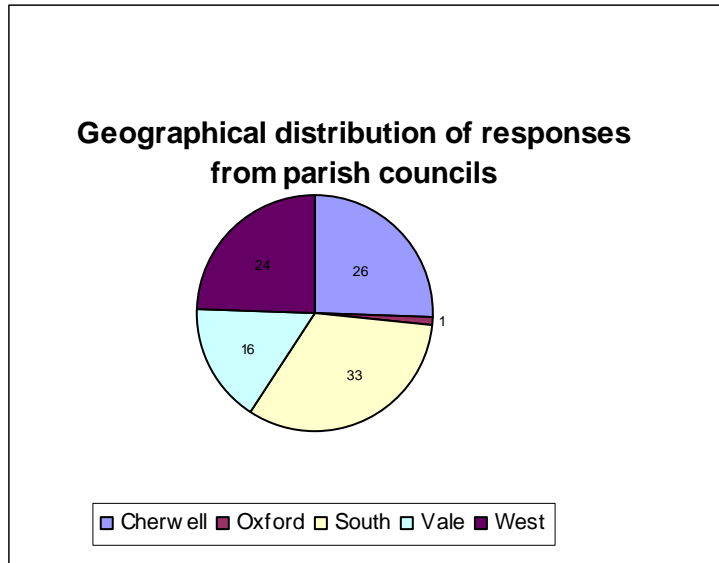
2. The stakeholder consultation was undertaken between 6th July until 3rd August, extended until 21st August. The following stakeholders were consulted: Gypsy and Traveller representative organisations, all town and parish councils in Oxfordshire, social registered landlords, health trusts, the Police Authority and the Gypsy and Traveller community in Oxfordshire.

Consultation summary – main findings

The number of responses received:

3. In total, 138 responses were received. Of these, 88 were from parish and town councils, 43 from the Gypsy and Traveller community in Oxfordshire and two from representative organisations, and 5 from organisations (The Housing Corporation, Oxford Citizens Housing Association and the Oxford Green Belt Network, The Thames Valley Police Authority and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue).
4. The following pie chart shows the geographical spread of responses received from parish and town councils in Oxfordshire:

¹ South East England Regional Assembly Partial Review of the South East – Provision of Caravan Sites for Gypsies and Travellers. Brief of Submission of Advice by Local Authorities, 1 December 2006



- Geographically, the largest response has been received from local councils in South Oxfordshire followed by Cherwell, with West Oxfordshire close behind.

Summary of responses:

- For the purpose of comparative analysis, the responses have been divided between respondents excluding Gypsy and Travellers and responses from the Gypsy and Traveller community including their representative organisations.
- Question 1** asked people to indicate where they considered new sites should be provided. The results were as follows:

	Respondents (exc Gypsies and Travellers)		Gypsies and travellers	
	Number	%	Number	%
Extend existing sites	38	41	3	7
Create new sites	2	2	11	24
Both	22	24	10	23
No preference indicated	31	33	21	47
Total	93	100	45	100

- Of those who indicated a preference, respondents (the majority parish councils) expressed a preference for existing sites to be extended while the gypsy and traveller community express a preference to see

new sites created, or both to have sites extended and new sites created.

7. **Question 2** asked people to indicate where they considered sites should be located. The results were as follows:

	Respondents (exc Gypsies and Travellers)		Gypsies and travellers	
	Number	%	Number	%
Within Towns/Cities	10	11	5	11
Edge Towns/Cities	43	46	20	44
In or next to Villages	1	1	2	4
Countryside	1	1	6	13
No preference indicated	38	41	12	27
Total	93	100	43	100

- All respondents express a greater preference to see any new sites located on the edge of towns and cities; with least preferable shown for sites situated in or next to villages.
8. **Question 3** asked people to tick, from a list of seven, the three factors which they considered most important for deciding the locations of new sites. The results were as follows:

	Respondents (exc Gypsies and Travellers)		Gypsies and travellers	
	Number	%	Number	%
Access to public transport	12	5	19	17
Employment Opportunities	23	10	7	6
Access to main road network	21	9	89	7
Proximity to major settlements and their services	50	21	25	22
Protecting AONB	51	21	17	16
Making best of previously developed land	29	12	18	17
Protecting the Green Belt	54	23	17	16
Total	240	100	112	100

Note: The total is based on those who ticked one or more factors. Not everyone ticked three factors or completed this section.

- Of the responses received from respondents (mostly parish and town councils) the top three factors were protecting the Green Belt,

protecting AONBs and proximity to major settlements and their services.

- Of the Gypsy and Traveller community, proximity to major settlements and their services was the top key factor followed by access to public transport, making the best use of previously developed land, protecting the AONB and protecting the Green Belt.
9. **Question 4** (5 on the form) asked people to indicate if there were other factors that should be taken into account in determining the size and distribution of new sites. The following list the responses received (number of comments in brackets):

From town and parish councils:

- **Site size:** Keep sites small (18) to aid integration with the wider community; to avoid areas becoming ghettos, and to reflect family size.
- **Infrastructure and services:** Sites should be located close to infrastructure and services (12) such as schools, doctors, mains water and sewage supply.
- **Location** (16): even distribution between districts; to give more choice; in adjoining or neighbouring districts (including four parishes in West Oxfordshire felt their district had taken its fair share so additional pitches should be located elsewhere); locate sites adjacent to urban developments; not in or near villages as impact disproportionate
- **Site design and planning** (5): should be well landscaped; well equipped; environmentally acceptable for families; well regulated and managed; must suit travellers.
- **Other:** views of local people essential; crime an issue; Rossitiers a good model; provide sites to prevent illegal occupation; need to balance needs with rest of the community and the environment.

From Gypsies and Travellers:

- **Site size:** most commented that sites should be small – for families that get on; too many families can cause trouble. 2 wanted bigger sites.
- **Site design:** good sized amenity blocks needed, well located on site; new sites should not have shower and toilets together as unhygienic to place together (10); play area for children with some greenery and good lighting (12).
- **Other** (7): more sites to get people off the roads and laybys; population size so as not to overwhelm local inhabitants; don't take too long to make a site they are needed; site at Tinging Lane should be bigger so family members can stay; putting same families on same site is asking for trouble.

10. **Question 5** (6 on the form) asked people to comment on how we should be providing for the Gypsy and Traveller community in the future.

From town and parish councils:

- **Site management** (11): sites need to be well managed; monitored; Police consulted and involved more; should be regularly cleared of rubbish.
- **Infrastructure and services** (7): close to services and facilities such as doctors, schools, jobs.
- **Other:** Comments were wide ranging, including: numbers should be controlled; Gypsies and Travellers should take more responsibility over their role in the community; sites should be self-funding; attitudes are a problem; no site should be considered if unsuitable for housing; a lot of areas not suitable for expansion, acknowledge that their needs need to be catered for, ask travellers what they want, relax restrictions where travellers find their own site; a burden we could do without – can travellers stay as travellers.

From Gypsies and Travellers

- Comments received were wider ranging: Extend existing sites (3); larger amenity blocks required with facilities separated (3) don't build sites in undesirable locations e.g. next to waste disposal sites, train lines etc. (3); families in the area should have priority (8); make more sites (5); need play areas (4).

Comments from organisations:

Thames Valley Police

Site size: Smaller sites are preferred by Thames Valley police. Experience shows that smaller sites tend to be occupied by single family groups. Large mixed family sites experience a higher level of tension and therefore disorder. Larger sites are more difficult to manage by Local Authority staff and if problems occur that require policing assistance larger sites require a higher level of resources to resolve the difficulties. Predictably this demand tends to slow the police response due to the availability of officers

Location of site: The location of sites in relation to local services is critical (e.g. access to schools, health, transport facilities).

Building new sites: A full review and assessment needs to be completed for all proposed sites on an individual basis. The Police Crime Prevention Design Advisors must be involved. Early engagement with the settled community is also critical.

Transit sites are very important but have to be properly managed by the local authority. A well managed site or a permanent site with a few transit plots preferably, can reduce the impact of unauthorised encampments on all agencies and considerably reduce the cost of dealing with unauthorised encampments.

The Police response contains detailed comments on design issues. authorities. A copy has been made available to all the local authorities.

Housing Corporation

Where need has been demonstrated, there could be minimal delay in identifying sites & beginning development, not waiting for the Regional process to complete.

Location decisions should critically involve the Gypsy and Travellers community, and allow access to key services such as schools with vacancies & social services/health support

We have had advice that 6-12 pitches are ideal in terms of management.

Guidance is being prepared by the Tribal and funded jointly by CLG and the Housing Corporation on site design (can be viewed on the CLG website). This should be used for good practice in location decision making. One key point is that no sites should be considered for a site which would not be suitable for ordinary housing and flood risk should seriously be avoided. We would also highlight that RSLs can now bid to provide G&T accommodation and are potential providers.

Fire and Rescue

As the sites create a particular life risk due to their materials of construction (in a fire situation) this service favours that they are in or near to urban centres having fire and rescue service response facilities

Any site should comply with appropriate planning guidance regarding site safety matters. Particular attention should be made to access arrangements, caravan spacing provision of fire fighting and fire alarm facilities

Comments from G&T Representative Groups:

Friends, Families and Travellers

- there is a desire amongst some Travellers for affordable owner occupancy – possibly a route to providing small family sites
- may be scope for extending existing sites but care would have to be taken that sites do not become over large and present difficult management problems.
- involve the local Gypsy and Traveller community to ensure that solutions will work in practice; particularly important with helping decide the proportion of RSL, 'affordable' accommodation and private provision which will need to be catered for. The existing evidence base is not robust enough at the moment to provide the sort of information required and we would hope that all the Oxfordshire Authorities will urgently build on the base provided by the GTAA.

- Circular 1/2006 gives advice about locations for Gypsy and Traveller sites; there are a wide range of possibilities.
- the sustainability section in 1/2006 provides guidance about site location and clearly easier access to local services is important although there is no reason why some sites, particularly private ones, should not be located in a similar way to rural exceptions housing.
- Slavish adherence to a tight set of locational criteria set at a regional or even a sub-regional level may prove counterproductive in the long run and make it difficult to identify available and achievable sites – see the RTPI Good Practice Advice Note No 4.
- small family oriented sites work best
- need should be satisfied where it arises - Gypsies and Travellers wish in general to stay in the districts where they are presently located, in some cases families have long connections to certain districts
- there is concern about talk of dispersal. Also concern about some alarming undercurrents - it would be unacceptable to say of any ethnic minority group that there were too many in a particular area and that they should therefore be dispersed. Runs counter to notions of equity.
- However in view of the probable conservative nature of the needs assessment, the lack of robustness of the base data and presence of hidden Gypsy and Traveller families there may well be an argument that each district should make some sort of provision to ensure that at least one site in each district is provided for.
- The land identified for sites should be equally suitable in terms of the living environment as that provided for accommodation for the wider community.
- Dangerous and marginal space should be challenged; too many local authority sites have been located in highly unsuitable places, exacerbated problems which this community faces.
- In some cases Green Belt land may have to be redesignated to facilitate site and other forms of accommodation provision.
- exceptions sites, like that for affordable housing in rural areas, could provide a significant part of the need requirement... for people with local connections
- Land already in the hands of Gypsy and Traveller community may well provide some of the land needed in that it is readily available and planning decisions should be revisited in light of changed circumstances.
- land in public ownership should be included as potentially available for site development . Compulsory purchase powers are also available and councils should consider whether it is appropriate for them to exercise these powers to acquire appropriate sites.
- Sec 106 agreements with developers on large housing sites could well provide some sites though time scales are an important issue here and such agreements, unless well advanced may not be able to make provision within a reasonable timeframe.