

**Luton**

**Gypsy and Traveller**

**Accommodation Assessment**



**Addendum to 2015 Final Report**

**January 2016**

# 1. Executive Summary

## Introduction and Methodology

- 1.1 The primary objective of the 2015 Luton Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) was to provide a robust assessment of current and future need for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation in Luton. The GTAA provided a robust and credible evidence base to be used to aid the implementation of Development Plan policies and the provision of new Gypsy and Traveller pitches and Travelling Showpeople plots for the period to 2031. The outcomes of the study superseded the outcomes of the Luton Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment that was published in December 2013.
- 1.2 The GTAA sought to understand the accommodation needs of the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople population in Luton through a combination of desk-based research, stakeholder interviews and engagement with members of the travelling community. Initial fieldwork was undertaken during April and July 2015 and a total of 18 interviews were completed with Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople living on sites and yards, and 5 interviews with households living in bricks and mortar in Luton. A total of 12 telephone interviews were also completed with Officers from Luton Borough Council and Officers from neighbouring local authorities.
- 1.3 Following the completion of the fieldwork the Government issued a revised version of Planning Policy for Travellers Sites (PPTS) in August 2015. This now requires a GTAA to determine whether households living on sites, encampments and in bricks and mortar fall within the new definition of a Gypsy, Traveller or Travelling Showperson. Only if households fall within the new definition will their housing needs need to be assessed separately from the wider population, as required by the Housing Act (2004). The new definition now excludes those who have ceased to travel permanently.
- 1.4 This Addendum seeks to address the implications of the changes to PPTS on the outcomes of the 2015 Luton GTAA.
- 1.5 Whilst some information on the travelling activities of households was obtained during the initial households interviews it was felt that further information would be required from some households in order to properly assess each household against the new definition of a Traveller as set out in the revised PPTS. Further interviews were therefore undertaken with 14 Gypsy and Traveller households and 1 Travelling Showperson household during October 2015. This provided a robust set of household data against which to assess against the new definitions of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

## Key Demographic Findings

- 1.6 Ethnicity data was captured from all of the households that were interviewed on the Gypsy and Traveller sites. The majority of households stated that they were English Travellers and the

remainder were Irish and Scottish Travellers. The majority of households stated that they had lived on their current site for over 15 years, with 9 households stating that they had lived there for over 25 years.

- 1.7 The interviews identified 80 residents living on the Gypsy and Traveller sites and in bricks and mortar. This was made up of 42 adults and 38 children and teenagers aged under 18. This equates to 53% adults and 47% children and teenagers. Although not a direct comparison, data from the 2011 Census for Luton as a whole (the settled community and the Gypsy or Irish Traveller community) has been compared to the demographics recorded in the household interviews. This shows a significantly lower proportion of those aged under 18 in the Luton population as a whole.

## New Definition of Gypsies and Travellers

- 1.8 Information that was sought during the interviews allowed each household to be assessed against the new definition of a Traveller. This included information on whether households have ever travelled; why they have stopped travelling; the reasons that they travel; and whether they plan to travel again in the future. The table below sets out the travelling status of households that were interviewed in Luton. This shows that, apart from the Travelling Showpeople and 1 unknown household living on the St Thomas’s Road site, no households that were interviewed in Luton meet the new definition of a Traveller. Whilst there were a small number of households who stated that they did travel, none of these were able to demonstrate that they travelled for the purpose of work, so therefore did not meet the new definition.

**Figure 1**  
**Travelling Status of Households Interviewed in Luton**

	Meets New Definition	Does Not Meet New Definition	Unknown
St Thomas’s Road	0	19	1
Stopsley Mobile Home Park	0	2	0
Bricks and Mortar	0	5	0
Wigmore Lane (Showpeople)	1	0	0

## Additional Pitch Needs – Gypsies and Travellers

- 1.9 Based upon the evidence presented in the study and following an assessment against the new definition of a Traveller, the additional pitch provision needed in Luton to 2031 for the 22 Gypsy and Traveller households on the St Thomas’s Road site and the Stopsley Mobile Home Park, and the 5 households living in bricks and mortar is for **no additional pitches**. Whilst it was not possible to determine the travelling status of 1 household living on the St Thomas’s Road site, they have lived on the site for over 17 years and appear to be settled.
- 1.10 In addition the site fieldwork identified potential need from 2 extended families living on unauthorised encampments around the Luton area and other neighbouring local authorities. Whilst it was not possible to complete interviews with these households, the stakeholder interviews identified that the families have strong links to Luton and their children attend local schools. The families have said to the stakeholder that transit accommodation is not suitable to meet their needs

and that they are looking for permanent pitches in Luton. The encampments that the 2 families live on usually contain approximately 12 caravans and therefore it is recommended that 6 additional pitches could meet this need should it be confirmed that the households meet the new definition of a Traveller. Should Travelling status for these households be confirmed the majority of this need could be met by the supply of 5 pitches that was identified from the St Thomas's Road site (2 vacant due to evictions, 2 from households moving to bricks and mortar, and 1 due to a household moving to another local authority).

- <sup>1.11</sup> Whilst households who do not travel fall outside the new definition of a Traveller, Romany households and Irish and Scottish Travellers continue to have a cultural need and right to a caravan site under the Equalities Act 2010. Provisions set out in the new Housing and Planning Bill are seeking to include a requirement to assess the needs of people living on sites on which caravans can be stationed, or on places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored, under S8 of the 1985 Housing Act that covers the requirement for a periodical review of housing needs. The implication is therefore that the housing needs of the 27 Gypsy and Traveller households who do not meet the new definition of a Traveller will be assessed as part of the wider housing needs of an area. The Luton & Central Bedfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) Update (Summer 2015) established the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) for housing to be 17,800 dwellings in Luton borough over the 20-year period 2011-31, and confirmed that this included the needs from all Gypsy and Traveller households. The previous Luton GTAA (December 2013) assessed the need to be 17 pitches over the 15-year period 2013-28 under the previous definition of a Traveller, and the needs of these families will be included within the overall OAN identified by the SHMA Update (with pitches representing a form of dwelling). On this basis, it is evident that the needs of Romany households and Irish Travellers represent a relatively small proportion of the overall housing need (around 0.1% of the OAN); however the Council will need to ensure that arrangements are in place to properly address the needs of these households.

## Transit Sites / Temporary Stopping Places

- <sup>1.12</sup> Whilst there was no need identified for additional permanent pitches in Luton, given the sustained levels of unauthorised encampments over the summer and winter months that have been identified in Luton, and the possibility of changes to PPTS resulting in increased levels of travelling, it is recommended that there is a need for the Council to consider transit provision. The 2013 GTAA recommended that there was a need to deliver 10 transit pitches. However given the current levels of uncertainty following the new PPTS, it is recommended that as an interim measure the Council consider the provision of 5 temporary stopping places, as opposed to more permanent transit site provision. The situation relating to levels of unauthorised encampments by households that meet the new definition of a Traveller, and occupation levels of the temporary stopping pitches should be continually monitored whilst the changes associated with the new PPTS develop.

## Travelling Showpeople Needs

- <sup>1.13</sup> The outcomes of the study identified that the households living on Travelling Showpeople yards in Luton do meet the new definition of Travellers as they travel all year round for work purposes.

- 1.14 Residents on one of the yards are aware that the existing yard is becoming over-crowded. However the residents stated that they own land in a nearby local authority and are exploring whether they can get planning permission to develop a proportion of this land to provide the family with a new yard to meet their needs. The other yard is used predominantly for storage purposes. Therefore **it is not recommended that the Council should provide for any additional Traveling Showpeople plots at this time**. The situation regarding the potential development of the new yard in an adjacent local authority should however be closely monitored.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Need for Gypsies and Travellers

- 1.15 Following a detailed assessment of the travelling activities of residents living on the public site at St Thomas's Road and the Stopsley Mobile Home Park it was found that none of the residents meet the new definition of a Traveller as set out in the revised PPTS. Therefore the need for additional accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers in Luton as required by PPTS for the period to 2031 is for no additional pitches. However the Council should be aware that the accommodation need for these households should now be considered under the wider requirements of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.
- 1.16 The need for the 2 family groups households identified as living on unauthorised encampments should be considered once their travelling status can be determined and if they meet the new definition their needs could be met through vacancies on the public site at St Thomas's Road.

### Need for Transit Provision

- 1.17 Given the current levels of uncertainty following the new PPTS, it is recommended that as an interim measure the Council consider the provision of 5 temporary stopping places, as opposed to more permanent transit site provision. The situation relating to levels of unauthorised encampments by households that meet the new definition of a Traveller, and occupation levels of the temporary stopping pitches should be continually monitored whilst the changes associated with the new PPTS develop.

### Need for Travelling Showpeople

- 1.18 The Travelling Showpeople households in Luton were found to meet the new definition of a Traveller, and the household interview found that the yard was over-crowded. However the households own land in a nearby local authority and are seeking planning permission to develop this land to meet their future needs. Therefore there is no additional need that needs to be addressed for Travelling Showpeople in Luton to 2031 should planning consent be granted for the new yard.