



Gypsy/Travellers and the Scottish Planning System

A Briefing for the Media

#5 in a series of 5



Gypsy/Travellers and the Planning System - 2015

This guide forms part of a series of five on Gypsy/Travellers and the Scottish planning system, as listed below:

#1 Gypsy/Travellers and the Scottish Planning System - A Guide for Gypsy/Travellers

#2 Gypsy/Travellers and the Scottish Planning System - A Guide for Local Authorities

#3 Gypsy/Travellers and the Scottish Planning System - A Guide for Elected Members

#4 Gypsy/Travellers and the Scottish Planning System - A Guide for Community Councillors

#5 Gypsy/Travellers and the Scottish Planning System - A Briefing for the Media

Acknowledgements

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Ministerial Foreword



The Gypsy/Traveller community is an important Scottish community, with a long and proud history. Gypsy/Travellers have made, and continue to make, a significant contribution to Scotland.

Unfortunately, Gypsy/Travellers also face many challenges and barriers to accessing services and participating in society, in ways that most people take for granted. This includes securing good quality accommodation that meets their cultural needs and has the amenities that people need for everyday living.

The Scottish Government is fully committed to meeting the needs of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers. Our role is to set a robust framework and promote good practice, so that those needs can be properly assessed and met at a local level. To this end, we are working to develop an overarching strategy and action plan for Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland.

As part of our work, we want to promote good practice in relation to Gypsy/Traveller sites. Dialogue is the best way of increasing trust, understanding and respect between our diverse communities. We have, therefore, been pleased to fund and support PAS in its Gypsy/Travellers as Young Change Makers project. The purpose of this project was to increase awareness and knowledge of the planning system and engagement between Gypsy/Travellers, planning professionals, elected members and community councillors.

These guides have been produced by PAS, and represent its advice and views on Gypsy/Travellers and planning in Scotland. Those views are, quite rightly, independent of the Scottish Government. The guides are the end product of the Gypsy/Travellers as Young Change Makers project and the result of engagement and wide ranging discussions. I hope the guides will be well-used and that they will give all concerned the information and knowledge to meet the needs of Scotland's Gypsy/Travellers.

Alex Neil MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights



Photo: Damian Le Bas

Foreword



This series of guides has been developed by PAS to help raise awareness of Scottish Gypsy/ Traveller culture, and how this impacts upon land use planning for their needs.

I believe Gypsy/Travellers' unique culture should be celebrated and recognised in Scotland.

I very much hope you enjoy reading this guidance. It sets out clear and realistic means of improving media good practice when considering the accommodation needs and expectations of Gypsy/Travellers, as a recognised ethnic group, living in Scotland.

Councillor Harry McGuigan, COSLA Local Government Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing and Safety



Photo: Graham Noble

Purpose of the Briefing

This document addresses the topic of Gypsy/Traveller accommodation and the role of the planning system and the media in reporting on such matters. It gives some background information on Gypsy/Traveller issues, focuses on the accommodation needs of Gypsy/Travellers, the negative impacts when there are not enough sites, and the positive contribution that proper site provision can make.

It concludes with some suggestions for improving professional journalistic practice when covering Gypsy/Traveller stories.

Background information

Terminology

The official Scottish Government term for people in the Travelling community is '**Gypsy/Traveller**' (the G and T should always be capitalised)¹. Not all members of the Travelling community accept or identify with this term, which covers Scottish, English, Irish and Welsh Travellers. Many in Scotland choose to go by the terms 'Scottish Traveller', or simply 'Traveller'. It is important to understand that these are not a single group but a diverse set of communities, with differing identities, cultures, histories, lifestyles and languages².

Those outwith the Gypsy/Traveller community are referred to as the 'settled community'.

Legal status

Scottish Gypsy/Travellers have been officially recognised as an ethnic minority in Scotland since 2008 and are protected by the *Equality Act 2010*, which requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people with different protected characteristics, including race.

Population

The size of the Gypsy/Traveller population in Scotland is contested. In the 2011 Census, 4,200 people in Scotland identified themselves as 'White: Gypsy/Traveller'³. However, not all Gypsy/Travellers are willing to be identified as such. Organisations working with the Gypsy/Traveller community in Scotland have estimated the true figure to be in the order of 15,000-20,000 people, which may itself be an underestimate⁴.

History

There is uncertainty and disagreement around the origins of Scottish Gypsy/Travellers. What is known is that there has been a Gypsy/Traveller presence in the country for several centuries. Twelfth century documents mention itinerant smiths who travelled looking for work, and dealing with metals remains a significant business activity for Gypsy/Travellers. Unfortunately, legal discrimination of the community also has a long history, with laws passed from the 16th century onwards which persecuted Gypsy/Travellers. In 1609 the Scottish Parliament passed the 'Act against the Egyptians', which made it lawful to condemn, detain and execute people solely on the basis of them being known or suspected Gypsies. The process of repealing such laws only began in the late 18th century⁵.

More positively, Gypsy/Travellers are justly proud of their part in Scottish history, especially the service of the community in the armed forces and home front in both world wars. This is in addition to their varied contributions to Scottish culture, art and music⁶.

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1. Scottish Government, accessed 28.10.14, 'Gypsy/Travellers', <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/gypsiestravellers>
 2. Cadger, B. (2012) *What A Voice*, Article 12 in Scotland
 3. National Records of Scotland (2013) *2011 Census: Key Results on Population, Ethnicity, Identity, Language, Religion, Health, Housing and Accommodation in Scotland - Release 2A*
 4. Equality and Human Rights Commission (2013) *'Gypsy Travellers In Scotland-A resource for the media'*
 5. Cadger, B. (2012) *What A Voice*, Article 12 in Scotland
 6. Equality and Human Rights Commission (2013) *'Gypsy Travellers In Scotland-A resource for the media'*

Discrimination

Discrimination has been an everyday fact of life for Gypsy/Travellers for centuries. While there have been some improvements, in many instances Gypsy/Travellers continue to be treated unequally. In the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (2011):

- > 37% of respondents⁷ said they would be unhappy with a close family member forming a relationship with a Gypsy/Traveller
- > 46% felt that a Gypsy/Traveller would be unsuitable for the job of a primary school teacher

Approximately 90% of Gypsy/Traveller children have suffered racial abuse, and nearly two thirds have been subjected to bullying or physically assault⁸.

Family

Family is very important in Gypsy/Traveller culture, and it is common for extended families to live, work and travel together⁹.

Education

Generally speaking, the Gypsy/Traveller community places emphasis on teaching practical and vocational skills to their children, which are usually passed on through practical learning and oral instruction¹⁰.

This does not mean that Gypsy/Travellers are not interested in their children receiving mainstream education.

Background information

There is an increased recognition of the value of formal learning and qualifications, but this desire for children to attend school has been frustrated by discrimination and bullying, and through uncertainty regarding accommodation.

Gypsy/Traveller families who have no secure base or reliable stopping places are at continual risk of being moved on. As a result, children are often unable to attend school, or end up attending a string of schools in a short space of time. This severely disrupts their education and has a long-term negative impact on their skills and employment prospects¹¹.

Health

As a result of often overcrowded and substandard accommodation, discrimination and a lack of access to healthcare, Gypsy/Travellers suffer a disproportionate level of physical and mental health problems, lower than average life expectancy and higher than average infant mortality rates^{12, 13}.

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7. Scottish Centre for Social Research (2011) *Scottish Social Attitudes survey 2010: Attitudes to discrimination and positive action*
 8. Lane, P., Spencer, S. and Jones, A. (2014) *Gypsy, Traveller and Roma: Experts by Experience*
 9. Cadger, B. (2012) *What A Voice*, Article 12 in Scotland
 10. Cadger, B. (2012) *What A Voice*, Article 12 in Scotland
 11. Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009) *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*
 12. Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009) *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*
 13. Cadger, B. (2012) *What A Voice*, Article 12 in Scotland



Gypsy/Traveller accommodation

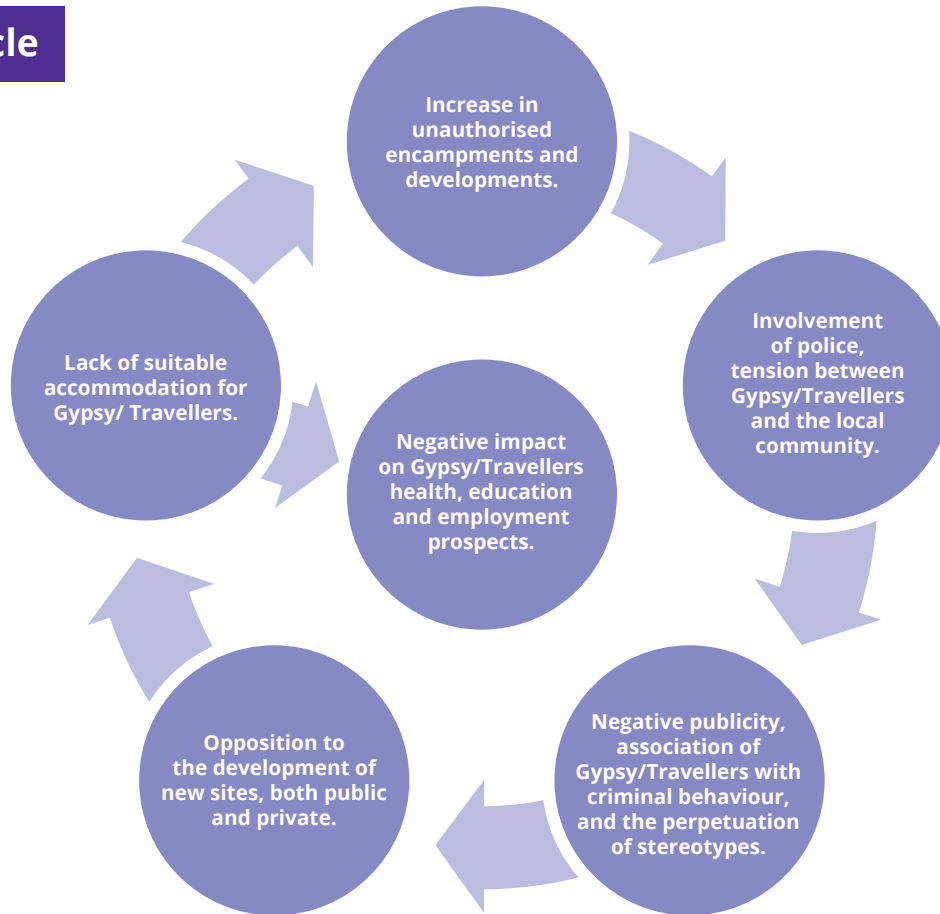
Accommodation is central to the Gypsy/Traveller way of life, but a lack of appropriate accommodation has contributed to the Gypsy/Traveller community suffering from a range of inequalities, in areas including health, education and employment. Historically Gypsy/Travellers have used common or private land, often associated with their employment. However, in recent years these sites have been developed for other purposes, or have been blocked off. This has driven a rise in unauthorised encampments and settlements, which create conflict with the settled community and encourage stereotyping and discrimination, especially when publicised by the media.

There are three types of Gypsy/Traveller sites:

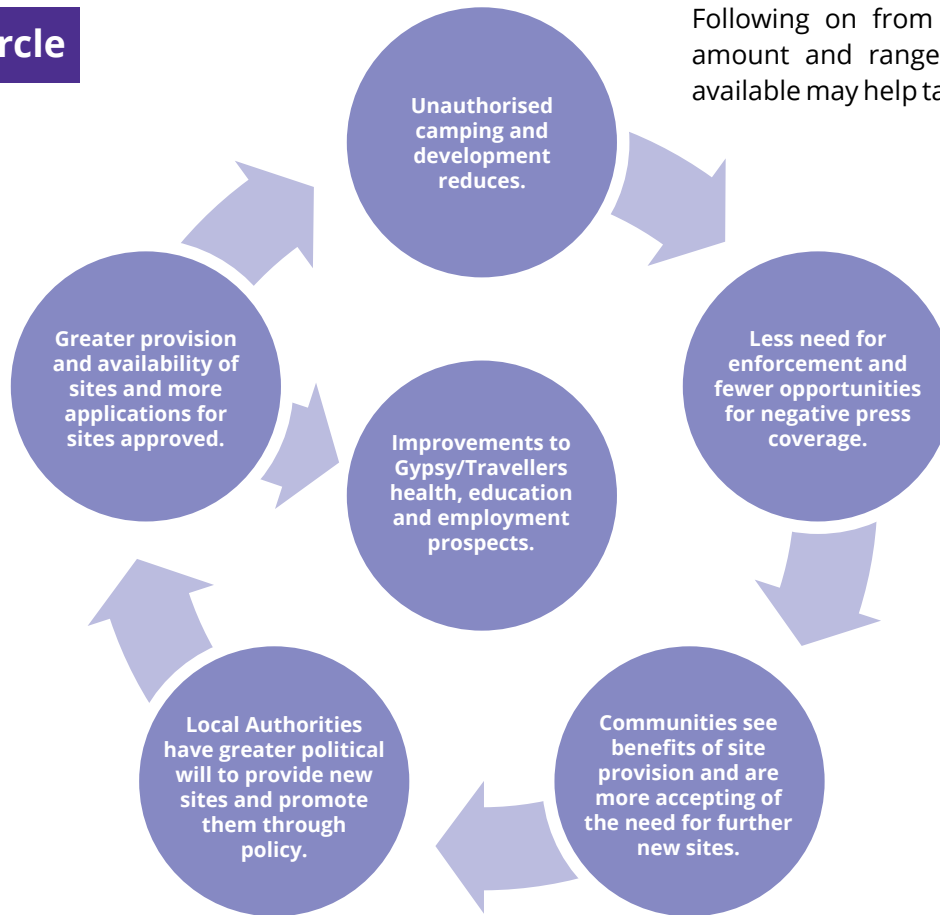
- **Permanent sites** provide residents with permanent accommodation. These can be run by local authorities or registered social landlords, or privately owned by their residents. Gypsy/Travellers typically stay on-site for the majority of the year, only travelling for a few weeks.
- **Transit sites** are permanent developments which are only used temporarily by their residents, usually when they are en route between more long-term locations. They provide more basic amenities than permanent sites.
- **Stopping places** are pieces of land where Gypsy/Travellers have traditionally stayed for short periods of time.

A lack of accommodation can be the root of several problems (see *Vicious Circle* graph overleaf).

Vicious Circle



Virtuous Circle



Following on from this, increasing the amount and range of accommodation available may help tackle these problems.

The role of the media

The media is an important source of information about planning matters, and members of the settled community are often only made aware of proposals for Gypsy/Traveller sites through press coverage. As a source of information and opinion, the media can have a powerful role in determining whether or not Gypsy/Traveller sites receive planning permission. Many members of the public have no direct experience of Gypsy/Travellers, and much of their awareness and feelings on Gypsy/Travellers will be shaped by media coverage.

As mentioned above, high levels of discrimination are experienced by the Gypsy/Traveller community, and this is often more visible and vocal than that directed at other minorities. **The media has a responsibility to challenge such beliefs, and not support them through inaccurate reporting.** Unfortunately, Gypsy/Travellers and organisations working with them view the media as a significant factor in the negative stereotyping of themselves and their culture, and this has an impact on the decision-making process.

Coverage of Gypsy/Traveller planning applications can be inaccurate and sensationalist. This encourages prejudice and division between Gypsy/Travellers and the settled community. It may also be illegal, as Section 19 of the Public Order Act 1986 prohibits the publication or distribution of written material which is threatening, abusive or insulting and likely to stir up hatred against any racial group. Of particular relevance are online newspaper comments sections and bulletin boards. Editors must ensure that those associated with Gypsy/Traveller stories are regularly monitored for offensive comments.

The role of the media

Such stories reinforce prejudice and negative stereotypes of Gypsy/Travellers, their culture, traditions and role in society. It can also place considerable pressure on planning officers and Elected Members tasked with making decisions on planning applications. Opposition, often aggravated by the media, has in many places thwarted efforts to increase the level of site provision, resulting in ongoing issues with unauthorised encampments and developments. These can in turn perpetuate negative associations with the Gypsy/Traveller community.

Local Authorities have a responsibility as public bodies to resolve Gypsy/Traveller issues with due regard to human rights, equality and diversity. They have a duty to adequately assess and make necessary public provision for Gypsy/Travellers in their Local Authority areas, and should take proactive steps to facilitate private site development.

In comparison to the wider housing needs of the settled community, the scale of the accommodation required by the Gypsy/Traveller community is small, but it cannot be overlooked. Decent homes are needed for any sustainable community, and Gypsy/Traveller individuals and their families are no exception to this principle.

Finally, it should be recognised that a dedicated Gypsy/Traveller media does exist, most notably the Travellers' Times. This could potentially act as a source of information and an alternative journalistic perspective on stories and issues.

Useful Contacts

PAS

3rd floor, 125 Princes Street
Edinburgh
EH2 4AD

Planning advice: 0845 603 7602

Email: office@pas.org.uk

Website: www.pas.org.uk

Other organisations who work with Gypsy/Travellers

Article 12 in Scotland

PO Box 7182
Montrose
DD10 9WW

Phone: 01674 674086

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Website: www.article12.org

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