

# Partial Review of the South East Plan – Provision for Gypsies and Travellers

## Transit needs in East Sussex and Brighton & Hove

### 1 Introduction

1.1 This note has been produced in response to SEERA's request for local authorities' final advice to the Assembly to also include a qualitative assessment of the demand for transit provision. The specific requirement is for a:

"Qualitative assessment of the demand for, and type of, transit provision and how this might be impacted by an increase in the provision of permanent caravan pitches."

1.2 As well as reflecting SEERA's brief, we have also had regard to the CLG guidance on *Preparing Spatial Strategy Reviews on Gypsies and Travellers* in developing this advice.

### 2 The need for transit sites

2.1 The CLG guidance suggests that a network of transit sites is needed to facilitate the mobility they are intended to serve, and that it might be appropriate for the Regional Spatial Strategy to broadly identify and allocate a number of transit sites where need is clearly established.

2.2 Although local measures of need are very difficult to establish for such a transient population, the CLG guidance suggests that Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAs) and the twice-yearly Caravan Counts, supplemented by local records, might help create a picture of local requirements.

2.3 However, another complicating factor is the variety of needs that might need to be met from some form of transit provision. This could include the need to provide:

- formal transit sites with full facilities where Travellers might live temporarily (for up to three months) – for example, to work locally, for holidays or to visit family and friends;
- stopping places with more limited facilities – for example, to cater for the needs of Travellers moving through the area; and
- temporary sites with only temporary facilities - for example, because of a local festival.

2.4 There are two transit sites in this area – one in Lewes district (at 'Bridies Tan') for 10 pitches; and one in Brighton & Hove (at 'Horsdean') for 23 pitches. Horsdean has very recently re-opened having been closed for a period while it was being refurbished. In East Sussex, Bridies Tan is to be rebuilt shortly (for 9 pitches). Together, these two sites in our area currently account for nearly three-quarters of the total transit pitch provision in the whole of the South East.

2.5 Identifying the extent and nature of needs for additional transit provision across the region is, therefore, going to be a very difficult exercise. As well as the issues highlighted above, the situation may be further complicated by the future implementation of planned increases in permanent pitch provision. In some situations, this might decrease any apparent need for transit provision but, in others, could increase demands by encouraging more Travellers to visit the area to see family and friends. Another complication is that some Travellers might choose not to take advantage of any formal transit provision that may be available – to avoid the weekly rent/deposit payable or becoming 'regularised' – and perhaps accept being 'moved on' as a consequence.

2.6 It is all these difficulties in identifying and assessing different types and levels of transit need that has led SEERA to only request qualitative information on transit requirements and how these might change in future. This more general advice will feed into a region-wide assessment that the Assembly is intending to commission to develop a clearer and more comprehensive picture of potential needs.

### 3 Estimating potential needs in this area

3.1 In the absence of further research into the patterns and timings of movements throughout the region, it is not yet possible to arrive at any hard and fast estimates of any needs locally for further transit provision. However, CLG guidance does suggest two quite simple methods for estimating the level of need for transit provision in any area. Both methods focus on the extent of unauthorised encampments (UEs) in the area.

3.2 The first ('residual') method looks at the number of Traveller households living on UEs at the time of the GTAA, some of whom may require permanent residential provision. The residual approach assumes that the needs of all the other households who are also camping on unauthorised sites at that time would best be met by additional transit provision.

3.3 At the time of our GTAA in July 2005, there were 70 caravans on UEs in this area. Based on our local GTAA survey finding that each household has an average of 1.3 caravans, we estimated in our original needs model that there were around 54 households living in these 70 caravans. Based on local monitoring records, it is believed that around 20 of these households require permanent site accommodation, with the implication being that the other 34 households are likely to need some form of transit provision.

3.4 This is the approach implicit in our consultation proposals for future permanent provision – where the original estimate of a need to provide an extra 80 pitches of all types by 2011 has been adjusted to exclude transit demands, an approach subsequently endorsed by Pat Niner for SEERA.

3.5 The residual method is summarised in the following table. It would appear to imply a relatively small need for further transit provision in East Sussex and a larger potential demand in Brighton & Hove.

	Total number of caravans on UEs in July 2005	Estimated number of households <sup>1</sup> living on UEs in July 2005	Number of households on UEs believed to require permanent pitch provision	<b>Residual number of households on UEs needing transit provision</b>
Brighton & Hove	48	37 <sup>2</sup>	8	<b>29</b>
East Sussex	22	17	12	<b>5</b>
GTAA area	70	54	20	<b>34</b>

<sup>1</sup> These estimates assume an average of 1.3 caravans per household, based on the evidence from our GTA (but see the note following).

<sup>2</sup> More recent monitoring information (for this year) suggests that UEs in Brighton & Hove are mainly occupied by Irish Travellers with larger families. The City Council therefore believes that it would be more appropriate to use the national average ratio of 1.7 caravans per pitch to estimate the number of households living on UEs in the city. If this national average is applied to the July 2005 Counts, it would suggest a total of 28 households on UEs in Brighton & Hove at that time, 20 of whom might need transit provision.

- 3.6 An alternative approach to estimating the potential demand for extra transit pitches focuses on the 'seasonal differences' that may be apparent in the number of caravans on UEs.
- 3.7 As a popular seaside resort, Brighton & Hove draws in increased numbers of Gypsies and Travellers in the summer months in much the same way as it attracts short-stay and day visitors from the settled population, regionally and nationally. Reasons for Traveller visits will include summer work opportunities, holidays, special events, visits to friends and family and combinations of these reasons.
- 3.8 By comparing the Caravan Counts for January and July, and by looking at time-series data to counter the weaknesses potentially associated with any snapshot data for a single year, the CLG guidance suggests it may be possible discern any seasonal element in travelling patterns that might best be served by additional transit pitches.
- 3.9 The table below estimates potential transit demands for this area based on such seasonal differences in the number of caravans on UEs. It is based on averages for the last three years, 2004-2006, for which we have complete data.

	Average number of caravans on UEs in January, 2004-2006 <sup>3</sup>	Average number of caravans on UEs in July, 2004-2006	Difference in the annual average figures for January and July	<b>Estimated number of households needing transit provision <sup>4</sup></b>
Brighton & Hove	8	42	34	<b>26 <sup>5</sup></b>
East Sussex	9	14	5	<b>4</b>
GTAA area	17	56	39	<b>30</b>

- 3.10 The above analysis confirms a clear seasonal pattern to the nature of travelling, particularly to and from the Brighton & Hove area. It also indicates levels of potential need for transit provision that are not dissimilar to those suggested by the residual approach.

#### **4 Future transit provision in East Sussex and Brighton & Hove**

- 4.1 Each of the local planning authorities has reviewed their own records in considering any requirement for additional transit provision in their own area.

##### East Sussex

- 4.2 This work has been quite informative in identifying potential requirements in some parts of East Sussex that may not be readily apparent from the rather crude estimates presented above. Based on current patterns of movement, these records appear to suggest a need for some further modest provision of transit sites in the county. It would seem that these requirements might best be met by making some form of additional transit provision on one or two small sites further along the coast to meet the needs of Travellers moving through the rest of East Sussex (Eastbourne, Hastings, Rother and Wealden).

<sup>3</sup> The actual July 2004 count for caravans on UEs in Wealden has been adjusted from the total of 64 actually counted to an estimate of 4 for this calculation. This represents the average for the equivalent counts in Wealden in July 2003, 2005 and 2006. The adjustment has been made so as not to distort the average by a figure for one year that was exceptional, reflecting as it did a one-off fair held in the area that attracted an extraordinary number of Gypsies and Travellers.

<sup>4</sup> As with the previous table, these estimates assume an average of 1.3 caravans per household (but see the note following).

<sup>5</sup> Again, the City Council believe it might be more appropriate to assume an average of 1.7 caravans per pitch/household. This would reduce the potential level of need for further transit provision in Brighton & Hove from around 26 to 20 pitches.

## Brighton & Hove

- 4.3 In Brighton & Hove, the City Council has been reviewing its provision for Gypsies and Travellers and is now implementing a new approach that it anticipates will substantially affect the future pattern of demands.
- 4.4 Central to this new approach has been the refurbishment and re-opening of the transit site at Horsdean with 23 pitches. Prior to this, the site had not been operating as a true transit facility and was actually occupied on a semi-permanent basis by a group of van dwellers who, predominantly, are not considered to be Travellers by either lifestyle or ethnicity. However, new management arrangements and allocation conditions have been introduced at the refurbished site that should ensure it will now mainly be used by Gypsies and Irish Travellers, in transit, enjoying short-term lets of up to three months. Parallel to this, the City Council is addressing the needs of the previous group of occupants through its housing and other strategies rather than through further site provision.
- 4.5 The Council expects that these changes will substantially reduce the future extent of UEs around the city. This is because local evidence shows that the vast majority of such encampments were occupied by Gypsies and Irish Travellers who have, in the past, not wanted to take up available pitches on the 'old' site because of the nature of its previous occupation.
- 4.6 As part of its new approach, the City Council has also established a new, inter-agency Traveller Team to manage and respond to Traveller issues in and around the city more effectively. This is particularly the case regarding enforcement action in relation to UEs, especially those on sensitive sites and/or where illegal or anti-social behaviour may be occurring. Provided that sufficient space is also made for visitors, the planned provision of permanent residential pitches should also reduce the demand for transit accommodation in the city.
- 4.7 Taken together, it is believed that the package of measures included in the City Council's new approach to meeting the accommodation needs of Travellers will obviate any need for additional transit provision in Brighton & Hove. Although further consideration might need to be given to the format and use of the refurbished site at Horsdean (which is acknowledged to be somewhat 'large' in relation to good practice guidance), the site itself would appear to provide an appropriate level of provision to accommodate the city's largely seasonal transit needs. This situation will, of course, require continuous monitoring.

## **5 The impact of further permanent provision**

- 5.1 By making appropriate provision through their traveller, planning and housing strategies to meet the varied accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers, there should be a substantial reduction in the incidence of unauthorised encampments across East Sussex and Brighton & Hove. There is, of course, a possibility that the provision of additional permanent residential pitches could attract more visitors to the area. However, this will not necessarily give rise to any need for additional transit sites so long as the need for modest visitor space is included in the configuration and management of new permanent sites.