

**ACCOMMODATION NEEDS
ASSESSMENT OF GYPSIES &
TRAVELLERS IN MERTON**

**REPORT ON OCTOBER 2011
RESEARCH**

London Borough of Merton

Housing Strategy

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CARAVAN SITE REQUIREMENT OF GYPSIES & TRAVELLERS IN MERTON RESEARCH REPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION

Aim and Scope of Research

- 1.1 This Accommodation Needs Assessment aims to identify the 'need' or 'requirement' of the local Gypsies and Travellers for additional permanent caravan pitches in Merton, covering 'need' or 'requirement' for public sites (council-owned) as well as private sites over the next 10 years.
- 1.2 The 2012 Planning Policy Guidance now defines Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople collectively as 'travellers'. It should be noted that the requirement for temporary/transit sites and sites for Travelling Showpeople are not within the scope of this research. These are undertaken as separate exercises, by working with partners through Merton's Gypsies and Travellers Officers Group; with partners in neighbouring boroughs; and by learning from best practice elsewhere. Findings of these studies will be published separately.
- 1.3 As well as responding to the statutory requirement for local authorities to undertake local accommodation needs assessment to help inform caravan pitch target setting, as set out in paragraph 6c of the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (March 2012), this research was also undertaken to meet to the requirement set out in Section 225 of the Housing Act 2004, for local housing authorities to undertake Accommodation Needs Assessment of Gypsies & Travellers.
- 1.4 The term 'accommodation needs' covers the specific need of Gypsies & Travellers for caravan pitches, as well as their need for bricks and mortar housing. The requirement for local authorities to set pitch targets confirms the government's recognition that the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers can be different from other ethnic groups.
- 1.5 As the purpose of this research is to gather evidence for permanent caravan pitches target setting, the assessment of housing need through a housing needs survey is not within the scope of this research. 'Traditional' housing needs surveys assess housing needs (backlogs & newly arising) of the whole population against available housing supply, and would not provide the evidence required for caravan pitch target setting. A need for alternative accommodation due to factors such as homelessness, overcrowding and unsuitability of current housing, does not necessarily equate to a 'need' for caravan pitches and could be met by a suitable offer of bricks and mortar housing.

- 1.6 The use of the terms 'need' and 'requirement' are often interchangeable although the word 'requirement' can include an element of 'want' or 'desire'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'need' as "requiring something because it is essential or very important rather than just desirable" and defines 'requirement' as "a thing that is needed or wanted". For the purpose of this research only, Gypsies and Travellers preference for living on sites is defined as a 'requirement' or 'cultural preference' for caravan pitches, as opposed to a 'need' for bricks and mortar housing.
- 1.7 It is worth highlighting that while Housing and Homelessness legislation are very clear on what constitutes a housing need and the circumstances under which a household must be given priority for bricks and mortar housing under local allocation policies, there is no clear guidance on what constitutes a 'need' for caravan pitches. In its latest Planning Policy for Travellers Site (March 2012), the Government describes this as a "way of life" rather than a need, and the stated aim of the Policy is to "ensure fair and equal treatment for travellers, in a way that facilitates the traditional and nomadic way of life of travellers while respecting the interests of the settled community", thus recognizing the need to respond to Gypsies and Travellers cultural preference for travelling and living on caravan sites.
- 1.8 With regards to the issue of 'psychological aversion' to bricks and mortar housing, no direct question has been included in this research due to the lack of guidance on how this can be identified through research. However, respondents did have the opportunity to highlight this as an issue through one of the open questions.

Background

- 1.9 In the UK, Gypsies and Travellers cover occupational Travellers such as showmen working in fairgrounds or circuses, and traditional ethnic Travellers which include Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish Travellers, or Anglo-Roma. Romany Gypsies is the largest group who have been in the country for centuries. Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are formally recognised as racial groups under the Race Relations legislation (since 1988), and the Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations between people of different racial groups, and it is unlawful to discriminate against these groups. The 2012 Planning Guidance now defines Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Show People collectively as "Travellers".

1.10 Academic estimates of Gypsies and Travellers population in the UK vary from 90,000 to 120,000¹. It is estimated around half of all Gypsies and Travellers live in houses. Others live in public (council) or private caravan sites, and some live on unauthorized encampments. In London, 82% of Gypsies and Travellers live on socially rented public sites but no new sites have been built since 1996². The January 2002 official count showed 18,700 caravans, giving an estimate of 56,000 households if an assumed 3 person per caravan multiplier was applied. Doubling this to account for households living in bricks and mortar housing gives an approximate figure of 112,200 households.

1.11 In Merton, there is one permanent authorised public caravan site owned by the council, now managed by Merton Priory Homes under a Service Level Agreement following the transfer of council housing stock to the organization in March 2010. The site at Brickfield Road / Weir Road in Wimbledon has 15 pitches. At the time of the October 2011 research, we did not have full profile information on all occupants of the site. However, data gathered through the additional consultation exercise with site residents in December 2012, combined with information provided by Merton Priory Homes, show that there are currently 14 households officially occupying the site, with a total of 23 adult residents and about 7 children. More information is set out in Appendix II of this report.

1.12 The site was opened in 1972 and has been improved twice since its opening, initially in 1996, when Merton Council obtained £500k government grant to install facilities for individual pitches. Further improvements of nearly £190k were made to the site in 2007 and 2008, following two successful bids to the government, with match funding from Thames Valley Housing Association and the council. There are also many Gypsies and Travellers households living in bricks and mortar housing in Merton, mainly in the Mitcham area, according to the Sutton and Merton Travellers Education Service and representatives from the Gypsies and Travellers community, although prior to this research, no list of Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar housing existed. Recently released Census 2011 data show that 217 people in Merton have identified themselves as Gypsies and Travellers, although organizations working with this community believe that the actual number is higher.

¹ Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England July 2003, Pat Niner (Centre for Urban and Regional Studies University of Birmingham & ODPM)

² Pan London Gypsies and Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment 2008

1.13 It is “widely acknowledged”¹ that a range of accommodation is required for Gypsies and Travellers, from permanent housing to temporary housing to temporary stopping places. The report produced by Pat Niner outlined the types of provision as follows:

- Permanent Housing – Although there is a general aversion amongst the traveller community to permanent housing, a minority of gypsies have a desire to move into such accommodation.
- Public Residential Sites – Traveller sites that are owned by a local authority.
- Private Sites – Traveller site that is privately owned and managed rather than being in the control of a local authority.
- Transit sites – Provided for travellers to stay on for short periods of time, the period of time normally being limited.
- Emergency stopping places – Generally less well-equipped sites than transit sites, for example a lay-by, provided with the intention that stay is for a very limited period of time.

1.14 As set out under paragraph 1.1 of this report, the research presented in the main body of this report covers the ‘need’ or ‘requirement’ for permanent caravan sites only, including public and private sites, but not the requirement for transit sites or sites for Travelling Showpeople. Two separate studies are being conducted to identify the requirement for transit sites and stopping places for Travelling Showpeople. The findings of these will be added as appendices to this report.

1.15 The assessment of need for bricks and mortar housing also does not fall within the scope of this research, as their housing need has been considered equally alongside the housing needs of all Merton residents.

2. LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

Planning

2.1 The current requirements for local authorities to plan for sites are contained in the Government’s Planning Policy for Travellers Site, which came into effect at the same time as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 27 March 2012, and is to be read in conjunction with the NPPF. As set out above, the policy aim is to “ensure fair and equal treatment for travellers, in a way that facilitates

¹ Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England July 2003, Pat Niner (Centre for Urban and Regional Studies University of Birmingham & ODPM)

the traditional and nomadic way of life of travellers ...". Policy B in the Planning Policy stipulates that local authorities should set targets for permanent pitches and transit site for Gypsies and Travellers and for Travelling Showpeople, working collaboratively with neighbouring local planning authorities. Local authorities should make their own assessment to inform target setting, and to address any under provision by increasing the number of sites in appropriate locations with planning permission, and to maintain appropriate level of supply.

2.2 The full set of requirements for local planning authorities contained in Policy B in the Government's Planning Policy are as follows:

- a) identify and update annually, a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of sites against their locally set targets
- b) identify a supply of specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for years six to ten and, where possible, for years 11-15
- c) consider production of joint development plans that set targets on a cross-authority basis, to provide more flexibility in identifying sites, particularly if a local planning authority has special or strict planning constraints across its areas (local planning authorities have a duty to cooperate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries)
- d) relate the number of pitches or plots to the circumstances of the specific size and location of the site and the surrounding population's size and density
- e) protect local amenity and environment

Housing

2.3 Section 175(2) of the Housing Act 1996 provides that a person is homeless if he has accommodation but:

—

- (a) he cannot secure entry to it, or
- (b) it consists of a moveable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where he is entitled or permitted both to place it and to reside in it.

2.4 As such, gypsies and travellers on unauthorised sites could be eligible for assistance under Homelessness legislation if they approached the local housing authority and made a homelessness application. Under the Homelessness Act 2002, there is also an obligation for local authorities to develop a strategy that reviews the levels and predicted levels of homelessness within the authority's area, including homelessness levels amongst gypsies and travellers.

2.5 Under Section 225 of the Housing Act 2004, local housing authorities have a statutory duty to undertake regular assessments of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers either “living in or resorting to their area”, and to adopt a strategic approach, and to prepare a strategy in respect of meeting to meet identified accommodation needs, covering permanent and temporary sites, as well as bricks and mortar housing. Local authorities are required to take the strategy into account when exercising their housing and other functions, such as planning, education and social care.

Case Law

2.6 Recent case law demonstrates the distinction between meeting the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers under housing and homelessness legislation, and the provision of additional caravan sites to facilitate Gypsies & Travellers’ preferred way of life under Planning Policy.

2.7 On 21 March 2012, the Court of Appeal has ruled that Basildon council’s offer of bricks and mortar accommodation to homeless Gypsies and Travellers under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 was appropriate and did not destroy their culture. Three Travellers evicted from Dale Farm had argued that offers made to them by the Council were not acceptable as they preferred to live in caravans or mobile homes. They contended that they had an aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation and, in two cases, would be at risk of psychiatric harm if forced to live in a house or flat. They also argued that the council should have acquired land to accommodate them.

2.8 Their appeals were dismissed. The court had applied previous case law to the effect that someone’s cultural aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation was not enough to render an offer of such accommodation unreasonable. The court ruled that:

- The authority had considered all the medical evidence, noting that the appellants could access health care services, including mental health services, and had come to a rational and lawful conclusion
- There was no suitable sites in the area and the authority could not be compelled to purchase land for this purpose
- It was not realistic to expect a housing officer conducting a review under s.202 Housing Act 1996 to enquire as to the adequacy of the provision of caravan sites in the area, as the planning for more sites and pitches in the area is a matter of planning policy

2.9 The Judgement highlighted the different functions performed by local authority planning and housing departments, with the identification of Gypsies and Travellers accommodation needs/requirements typically undertaken by Housing through the preparation of housing strategies and Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs), and the addressing of identified needs/requirements are undertaken by other functions such as Planning and Social Care as well as Housing.

3. UNDERTAKING LOCAL RESEARCH

Fordhams Pan London Study 2008

- 3.1 In response to the requirement under the Housing Act 2004 to conduct accommodation needs assessment for the Gypsy and Traveller community, London boroughs jointly commissioned Fordham Research to undertake the Pan London Gypsies and Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA), which was completed in 2008. Findings of the assessment were available down to borough level, and for Merton, the assessment identified a demand for a minimum of 4 permanent pitches in Merton and a maximum of 16 permanent pitches over 10 years between 2007 and 2017.
- 3.2 The maximum figure included provision for households deemed to have a “Psychological Aversion” to bricks and mortar housing based on the questionnaire survey. It is stated in the Government’s research guidance that “those with a proven psychological aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation can present a need for a pitch within the context of other categories of unsuitability”. However, no guidance was provided as to how a psychological aversion can be proven in a survey research. Paragraph 3.4 below sets out the Mayor of London’s position on the robustness of psychological aversion identified through the GTANA.
- 3.3 Based on the findings of the Pan London GTANA, the GLA had consulted on setting pitch targets for London boroughs. However, following several rounds of consultation and subsequent revisions of the proposed pitch targets, the GLA had decided not to base target setting on the Pan London Study and instead stipulated that targets should be set locally, promoting an approach based on the Government’s ‘localism’ agenda, and making clear that boroughs are “best equipped” to address issues identified “in light of local circumstances and national policy requirements”³.

³ London Plan – Minor Alteration 2010

- 3.4 With regards to psychological aversion, in the London Plan – Minor Alteration 2010, the Mayor of London stated that the ‘aversion’ identified through the GTANA “does not provide an as yet sufficiently robust justification for specific planning intervention in the very tight London land market or the allocation of scarce public resources. It is more robust to recognize the distinct needs arising from those who live in caravans on sites and to closely monitor, and if necessary, subsequently address, the needs of those who are already housed in bricks and mortar accommodation.
- 3.5 Latest National Planning Policy now stipulates that local authorities should make their own assessment to inform target setting. The London Plan Policy 3.8 on Housing Choice also states that “The accommodation requirements of Gypsies and Travelers (including Traveling Showpeople) are identified and addressed in line with national policy, in co-ordination with neighbouring boroughs and districts as appropriate”.
- 3.6 Although the GLA had decided not to use the Pan London GTANA for target setting, the study nonetheless provide useful information on the accommodation of Merton’s local Gypsy and Traveller community, and its findings serve as a useful reference for our latest research. When making recommendation for a pitch target for Merton, the findings of the GTANA are taken into consideration.

Merton Research 2011 - Methodology

- 3.7 To help support the design and delivery of our latest local research in October 2011, a Research Project Group was set up by Merton Council’s Gypsies and Travellers Officer Group that involves representatives from various statutory and voluntary services, including the following:
- Merton Council Housing Strategy Team
 - Merton Council Planning Division
 - Merton Priory Homes
 - Merton & Sutton Travellers Education Service
 - The NHS
 - The Ambition Group
 - The Metropolitan Police
 - Libraries

- 3.8 The starting point of our local research is to identify the target population in Merton. We have records of the 15 households living on the Brickfield Road Caravan Site, but representatives of the local Gypsy and Traveller community from the Ambition Group and the Merton & Sutton Travellers Education Service have indicated that there is also a sizeable Gypsy and Traveller population living in bricks and mortar accommodation in Merton, particularly in the Mitcham and Pollards Hill area, with a proportion living in social housing. This is supported by the recent release of Census 2011 data, which shows 217 Gypsies and Travellers living in Merton. However, we do not have data on the size or distribution of the community living in bricks and mortar accommodation.
- 3.9 Although the council had included separate ethnicity categories for Gypsy and Traveller tenants to identify themselves as either 'Gypsy Roma' or 'Irish Travelers' prior to stock transfer, monitoring reports showed nil records for these categories as members were unwilling to identify themselves. The Pan London GTANA 2008 also reported that this lack of reliable data on the number of Gypsy and Traveller households was something that could not be overcome through the accommodation needs assessment. In summary, the following data sources were examined in order to identify Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar housing but found no information.
- Merton Priory Homes tenancy records for bricks and mortar housing
 - Merton & Sutton Travellers Education Service
 - The Ambition Group
 - Merton Council's Housing Register
- 3.10 The community is not visible and often unwilling to identify themselves as Gypsies and Travellers due to fear of discrimination, and even the known population at the Brickfield Road Caravan Site is not willing to engage directly with 'officials' and previous consultations with the residents there were conducted with the assistance of their 'housing' officers, who have established a working relationship with them through their site management functions. Working with local organizations that have links with the local Gypsy and Traveller community, including those represented on the Research Project Group, was therefore only route to access this 'hard-to'-reach' community.
- 3.11 When developing the methodology for this research, the Project Group adhered to the guidance contained in Policy A of the Government's Planning Policy for Travellers Site, which stipulates that "in assembling the evidence base necessary to support their planning approach, local planning authorities should:

- a) pay particular attention to early and effective community engagement with both settled and traveller communities (including discussing travellers' accommodation needs with Travellers themselves, their representative bodies and local support groups)
- b) co-operate with Travellers, their representative bodies and local support groups, other local authorities and relevant interest groups to prepare and maintain an up-to-date understanding of the likely permanent and transit accommodation needs of their areas over the lifespan of their development plan working collaboratively with neighbouring local planning authorities
- c) use a robust evidence base to establish accommodation needs to inform the preparation of local plans and making planning decisions.

3.12 As well as links with residents of the Brickfield Road Caravan Site through Merton Priory Homes' site management staff, Merton Council has also over a number of years established a close working relationship with the Ambition Group, a local performing arts organization that promotes the culture of Gypsies and Travellers. It engages around 50 young people and their parents, mostly from the Gypsies and Travellers community, and is the only known local group that is run by members of the community.

3.13 As it was not possible to adopt a census or sampling methodology for this research due to a lack of data on this community, the Research Project Group consulted the Ambition Group on the best means of engaging the community. The Housing Division had already held a number of informal focus group discussions with a small number of Ambition Groups members early in 2011. The Research Project Group agreed that a bigger Research Event should be held to consult the community, with performances provided by the Ambition Group, and 'headlined' by Jake Bowers, the Editor of the national publication Travellers Times, both acting as a draw to maximize attendance to the event.

3.14 The methodology adopted for the local research was therefore the Snowballing technique, a well-established non-probability sampling technique used by researchers to identify subjects of their studies that are hard to locate. This methodology enabled the research team to assess members of the Gypsy and Traveller community through a community group as well as through community representatives that are well-known and well-respected in that community. Those attending the event were asked to complete a questionnaire survey.

- 3.15 In addition, residents of the Brickfield Road Caravan Site are known to have links to other members of the Gypsy and Traveller community living in bricks and mortar housing in Merton, therefore they were engaged by the Site Management Team of Merton Priory Homes to 'recruit' other community members to attend the event. Additional efforts were also made by the council to contact the South London Irish Welfare Association, the Southwark Travellers Action Group, and the Irish Traveller Movement in order to establish contacts with other members of the community in Merton. However, these efforts did not appear to be successful as only one respondent stated his/her ethnicity as White Irish.
- 3.16 With regards to 'psychological aversion' to bricks and mortar housing, as aforementioned, no guidance is available on how 'aversion' can be identified through research and the Mayor has raised issues about the robustness of aversion identified through the GTANA. For these reasons, it was decided no specific question would be included in our local study on 'psychological aversion'. However, any aversion could be identified through the open question on 'Problems living in Bricks and Mortar' housing.

The Questionnaire

- 3.17 The research gathered data through a questionnaire survey, capturing mostly 'quantitative' information through 'closed' questions, but there were also a few 'open' questions that allowed the gathering of 'qualitative' information (explore opinions). The use of 'closed' questions is considered important as this provides the quantitative evidence required for target setting.
- 3.18 While the Research Project Group viewed the event as a rare opportunity to gather as much information as possible from members of the Gypsy and Traveller community to help improve our understanding of their requirements for accommodation, it was decided that a balance needs to be struck between obtaining information and maximising participation.
- 3.19 The Research Project Group therefore decided that the questionnaire should be kept short with no more than 20 questions. It was also decided that the number of questions asking for personal information should be limited as they may act as a disincentive to participation. However, to ensure that the research could identify the requirements of local residents, it was decided that respondents would be asked to provide their addresses. To help encourage participation, staff and volunteers were available during the event to assist participants with questionnaire completions, including volunteers recruited from the community.

3.20 As the purpose of this research is to identify the requirement for additional permanent caravan pitches in Merton, only questions relating to this were included in the questionnaire. Assessing the needs for bricks and mortar housing would require a much longer questionnaire that would capture information such as current housing circumstances, future housing intentions and newly forming households. Respondents to this research were also asked if they would be happy to be contacted again in future for further research and consultation. This helps provide a 'list' that could be used in any future housing needs assessments for the general population, to ensure that this 'hard-to-reach' community is included in such future assessments.

4. THE RESEARCH EVENT

Publicity

4.1 The research event with the Gypsy and Traveller community in Merton, was held jointly by the council and the Ambition Group at the Morden Assembly Hall on 7th October 2011. The event was publicized widely through the following means:

- Publicity through Travellers Times, a national publication for the Gypsy and Traveller community
- Further publicity was also requested from Travellers Times the Editor of which chaired the research event
- Distributing 400 publicity leaflets 'save the day cards' at the 'Travellers Got Talent' event at the Southbank Centre on the 20th of August 2011
- A further 1,000 leaflets publicizing the forthcoming research event were produced and distributed locally through:
 - Members of the Gypsy and Traveller community (Ambition Group)
 - Merton Priory Homes who notified residents of the Brickfield Road Caravan Site
 - Residents of Brickfield Road Caravan Site who have links with Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar housing
 - Moat Housing Association to residents living in the Pollards Hill area
 - Pollards Hill Library
- Online social media pages of the Ambition Group

Participation

4.2 The Research Event, held on 7th October 2011, was the first such event planned for the Gypsy and Traveller community in Merton. With the involvement of the Ambition Group and other members of the community, the event successfully engaged 138 people, the majority of which were from the Gypsy and Traveller community. The total number of households represented was a lot smaller as many attendees were members of the same households. As well as providing a direct method of engaging with Merton's Gypsy and Traveller community, the event also acted as a showcase of the Gypsy and Traveller culture, with performances from the Ambition Group as well as from a number of Gypsy and Traveller artists. In summary:

- 138 people attended the research event, but the number of households represented was smaller
- A total of 49 questionnaires were completed
- Of the 49 completed questionnaire, 36 respondents identified themselves as a member of a Gypsy and Traveller community
- Of the 36 respondents from the Gypsy and Traveller community, 19 identified themselves as Merton residents, although only 13 provided verifiable addresses (all bricks and mortar accommodation)
- The 19 questionnaires completed by Gypsies and Travellers living in Merton compared well to the average of 18 interviews achieved in the Pan London research for individual boroughs, although the number of interviews achieved in Merton for the Pan London research would have been lower than average, due to a smaller than average population identified by Fordham for Merton
- A representative from the Brickfield Road Caravan Site attended the event, although the resident did not take part in the research

4.3 It is also worth highlighting that the number of Merton Gypsy and Traveller engaged in this research is just above the average achieved by the Pan London study, and likely to be much higher than the number of interviews achieved by the Pan London for Merton. While acknowledging that no Brickfield Road resident took part in the research, the presence of one of the residents at the event provided evidence that the event was successfully communicated to site residents, although they could not be compelled to take part. In view of the lack of participation from site residents, it was decided that a supplementary piece of work would be undertaken jointly with Merton Priory Homes in December 2012. The aim is to gather profile data for all site residents and to encourage them to complete the questionnaire for this research.

5. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- 5.1 Listed below are the key findings from the research. As the purpose of this research is to identify site requirement by the Gypsy and Traveller community, only responses from the 36 respondents who have identified themselves as a member of the community are included in this research analysis.
- 5.2 Detailed quantitative data tables are set out in Appendix I to this report. With regards to 'qualitative' responses, some attempts have been made to group together similar responses to aid understanding of the responses but individual response are also set out in the Appendix I.

Profile of Respondents

- Respondents from a variety of age groups participated in the research but the most common age group was 46-55 year olds
- Of the 36 respondents from the Gypsy and Traveller community, 50% described their ethnicity as Romany, Romany Gypsy or Gypsy Roma
- 13 respondents were Merton residents (verifiable addresses were provided)

'Requirement' for Caravan Pitches

- 91% of respondents from the Gypsy or Traveller community rated living on a caravan site as either essential, very important or important to Gypsy and Travellers
- 95% of respondents said living on a caravan site was essential, very important or important because of cultural reasons
- 72% of respondents from the Gypsy and Traveller community gave a positive reasons to living on a site e.g. freedom to travel, culture and community
- A sizeable proportion of respondents (28%) from the Gypsy and Traveller community gave positive reasons to living in bricks and mortar housing, which include better facilities and security
- 33% of respondents listed a problem of living on site compared to 56% who stated a problem of living in bricks and mortar housing
- Problems associated with living on caravan sites include management issues, prejudice, insecurity in tenure and difficulties claiming benefits.
- Problems associated with living in brick and mortar housing identified by respondents are mostly cultural, such as "no freedom" or "not treated the same as when we were amongst our own people". None of the problems cited indicate an 'aversion' to bricks and mortar housing.
- 6 Merton residents cited a "lack of site provision" as reason for not currently living on site, of these 2 are owner-occupiers and 4 are renting, either in social

- housing or in the private rented sector
- This translates into a preference or requirement for 4 publicly provided pitches, and a preference or requirement for 2 private pitches

Size & Location of Sites

- A third of respondents preferred large sites with more than 30 pitches, 23% preferred sites with between 16 and 30 pitches, while 43% preferred smaller site with less than 16 pitches
- Amongst respondents there was a variety of views as to where sites should be located, but 2 main preferences emerge. One preference is for sites to be located near town centres and amenities such as schools, health services and shops, and the other is for sites to be located in the countryside, in open space or green belt land

6. DETAILED FINDINGS

- 6.1 In designing and undertaking this research, the Research Project Group has paid close attention to the requirements set out in Policy A of the Government's Planning Policy for Traveller Sites in engaging both the settled and travelers communities, through their representative bodies and local support groups. The Project Group has also adopted the well-established 'snowballing' research methodology commonly used for engaging hard-to-reach groups, achieving a response level comparable to that achieved by the Pan London research.
- 6.2 Information gathered through this research shows that the majority (91%) of the Gypsy and Traveller community consider maintaining their traditional way of life as essential, very important or important, and 72% of respondents have stated a positive reason for living on site.
- 6.3 While confirming that living on a caravan site is the preferred way of life for many members of the Gypsy and Traveller community, this research also shows a sizeable proportion of the community (28%) do recognize the benefits of living in bricks and mortar housing, such as better facilities and security. Two respondents referred to bricks and mortar accommodation as being 'better', and one respondent who cited overcrowding as being a problem also indicated that he or she does not "mind bricks and mortar housing".
- 6.4 Respondents also identified problems with both 'site' and 'bricks and mortar' accommodation, although a smaller proportion (33%) cited problems with living

on site compared to those who stated a problem of living in bricks and mortar housing (56%). Problems associated with living in brick and mortar housing identified by respondents include social isolation, lack of freedom and being misunderstood by the community or “not treated the same as when we were amongst our own people”. It is important to note that none of the problems cited indicate an ‘aversion’ to bricks and mortar housing.

- 6.5 It is worth noting that some of the problems with living in bricks and mortar housing cited by respondents, such as social isolation and “being misunderstood by the community”, are not dissimilar to the “prejudice” they had identified with living on sites. This shows that more needs to be done to promote community cohesion between the Gypsy and Traveller community and the wider community in Merton, rather than focusing purely on the type of accommodation required by this community
- 6.6 Overall, the research findings indicate a general cultural preference for living on sites as opposed to bricks and mortar accommodation. However, when respondents were specifically asked to say why they were not currently living on site, only 6 out of the 13 respondents currently living in Merton gave ‘a lack of sites’ as a reason, and 2 of the 6 own their own homes with the remaining 4 living in social or privately rented housing.
- 6.7 It is worth noting that, as mentioned above, available records do not point to any ‘need’ or ‘requirement’ for additional pitches. For example, there have been no homelessness applications by Gypsies and Travellers from unauthorised encampments and no planning applications for new sites in the last 10 years, and there have been no application to go on the Brickfield Road waiting list since 2006. The responses gathered through this research event therefore provide the only evidence of local Gypsy and Traveller residents’ preference for living on caravan sites alongside the Pan London Study, indicating a requirement of an additional 4 publicly provided pitches and 2 private pitches, and could be used to inform the setting of caravan pitch target for Merton.
- 6.8 The identified need or requirement is a period of 10 years, as respondents to this research included younger members of the Gypsy and Traveller community aged 16 and above who are likely to form their own households over the next 10 years. It is not possible to identify requirement over a 15-year period through this research as stipulated in the Planning policy guidance for travellers sites (March 2012), as it would need to involve respondents below the age of 16.

6.9 As mentioned in paragraph 4.3 above, this research has succeeded in involving more members of the Gypsy and Traveller community in Merton than the Pan London study, due to the engagement of a local Gypsy and Traveller community organisation, and community representatives that are well known to members of the community. There were also a number of agencies representing the community on the Research Project Group, with Merton Priory Homes leading on the engagement of Brickfield Road site residents. In the absence of a 'sampling frame' for this community based on either Census data or records of social landlords, the 'snowballing' research technique was considered the most appropriate methodology for this research. The methodology adopted by this research therefore closely reflect the requirements set out in Policy A of the 2012 Planning Policy Guidance, as set out in paragraph 3.11 above.

6.10 It is acknowledged that this research did not capture any feedback from Brickfield Road site residents. Additional consultation with residents of the site have since been undertaken (in December 2012), and results of this consultation exercise, which are set out in Appendix II, have been taken into account and used to inform the setting of Merton's caravan pitch target.

7. PLANNING FOR FUTURE PROVISION & RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 In responding to the requirement for local authority to respect the interests of the settled community when setting caravan pitch target, the council needs to consider the requirement for additional caravan pitches within the wider context of meeting the housing needs of the whole local community through making best use of available land. At present, there are more than 7,500 households on the council's Housing Register, of which over 3,000 have 'reasonable preference' under the Housing Act 1996 due to their high level of housing need. With limited supply of housing sites, the development of additional affordable housing is considered one of the key priorities in the council's Housing Strategy 2012-2015 to help meet the high level of housing needs for 'bricks and mortar' affordable homes amongst all residents, including member of the Gypsy and Traveller community. The same considerations should also apply to the planning of 'private' caravan pitch provision.

7.2 Although the scope of this research does not cover the assessment of housing need, it is worth noting that Merton does not have a history of Gypsies and Travellers affected by homelessness, and to date the council has not received

any homelessness application from members of the Gypsy and Traveller community. As part of Merton's multi-agency Protocol for dealing with the small number of unauthorized encampments in the borough, the Housing Division would make contact with these Gypsy and Traveller households through outreach, offering assistance and informing them that they could approach the council and make a homelessness application, but none have done so to date and they usually moved out of Merton after a short period of time.

- 7.3 With regards to the requirement of an additional 4 publicly provided pitches and 2 private pitches identified through this research, this needs to be considered against available supply as well as the need to “respect the interests of the settled community” as set out in the Government Planning Policy for Travellers Sites (March 2012).
- 7.4 In relation to supply, as set out above, there is one permanent council-owned site in Merton with 15 pitches now managed by Merton Priory Homes. A waiting list for this site is held separately from the council's main Housing Register, although there has been no application made by Gypsy and Traveller households to go on the list since 2006. In terms of relets rate, Merton Priory Homes record shows 2 pitches had become available for relet over the last 5 years, with another 2 pitches due to be vacated shortly and available for 'relet'. Based on this information, it is estimated that a total of 4 pitches would become available for relet over the next 10 years, it is therefore likely that the requirement of 4 'public' pitches over the next 10 years identified in this research could be met entirely by pitches becoming available at the Brickfield Road site. However, this position may change following completion of the supplementary work in November 2012 to consult residents of the Brickfield Road site.
- 7.5 It is also important to note, as highlighted in paragraph 6.4 above, that some of the problems with living in bricks and mortar housing cited by respondents, such as social isolation and “being misunderstood by the community”, are not dissimilar to the “prejudice” they had identified with living on sites. This shows that more needs to be done to promote community cohesion between the Gypsy and Traveller community and the wider community in Merton, rather than focusing purely on the type of accommodation required by this community. More could be done to help make bricks and mortar housing the preferred choice of accommodation for more Gypsies and Travellers.

- 7.6 Taking all the above into consideration, it is not considered necessary for the council to seek to provide additional caravan pitches over the next 10-years based on the findings of this research, as the re-letting of vacancies on the Brickfield Road presents itself as the most deliverable approach to meet government guidance, therefore the current recommended target for additional Gypsy and Traveller caravan pitches is zero.
- 7.7 The separate work being undertaken on the requirement for transit sites and sites for Travelling Showpeople, once completed, will inform the setting of targets for these type of sites.

DETAILED RESEARCH DATA

As the purpose of this research is to identify pitch 'need' or 'requirement' by the Gypsy and Traveller community, only respondents who have identified themselves as a member of the community are included in this research analysis, i.e. 36 respondents. Set out below are the detailed data tables on respondents profiles; the requirement for caravan pitches; and the preferred size and location of caravan sites.

1. PROFILES OF RESPONDENTS

Age

Table 1.1 below shows the respondents from a variety of age groups participated in the research. The most common age group was 46-55 year olds with nearly 3 out of 10 respondents belonging to this age group. The youngest respondents were 16-17 year-olds (3 respondents) and the oldest being 2 respondents aged 80 plus.

Table 1.1 – Age			
	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
16-17	3	8.3%	8.6%
18-25	1	2.8%	2.9%
26-35	7	19%	20.0%
46-55	10	27.8%	28.6%
56-65	6	16.7%	17.1%
66-80	6	16.7%	17.1%
80+	2	5.6%	5.7%
Sub Total	35	97.2%	100%
Not Known	1	2.8%	
Total	36	100%	

Ethnicity

The 36 respondents included in this analysis all identified themselves as Gypsies and Travellers by answering 'Yes' to the question "Are you a member of the Gypsy and Traveller" community. In addition, the questionnaire also asked respondents to identify their ethnicity. They were not given ethnicity categories to choose from in order to give them the flexibility to describe their own ethnicity. Table 1.2 below shows 18 or 50% of respondents classified their ethnicity as Romany, Romany Gypsy.or Gypsy Roma.

Table 1.2 – Ethnicity			
	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Romany Gypsy	7	19.4%	21.2%
Traveller	2	5.6%	6.1%
Romany	10	27.8%	30.3%
'a great honour'	1	2.8%	3.0%
Gypsy	2	5.6%	6.1%
Church of England	1	2.8%	3.0%
English	1	2.8%	3.0%
Free and beautiful	1	2.8%	3.0%
White Traveller	1	2.8%	3.0%
Gypsy Roma	1	2.8%	3.0%
White British	4	11.1%	12.1%
White Irish	1	2.8%	3.0%
White	1	2.8%	3.0%
Sub Total	33	91.7%	100%
Not Known	3	8.3%	
Total	36	100%	

Living in Merton

Table 1.3 below shows 19 (53%) out of the 36 respondents live in Merton, and of these 13 provided a full address.

Table 1.3 - Living in Merton				
	All Respondents		Full Address Provided	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Living in Merton	19	53%	13	45%
Not Living in Merton	17	47%	16	55%
Total	36	100%	29	100%

Postcode of Respondents

Table 1.4 below shows the postcodes of the 29 respondents who have provided a verifiable address.

Table 1.4 - Postcode of Respondents		
	Number	Percent
SM4	12	33.3%
TN35	1	2.8%
SM5	1	2.8%
TN8	2	5.6%
KT4	2	5.6%
SM3	1	2.8%
RG7	1	2.8%
SM6	2	5.6%
CR4	2	5.6%
K22	1	2.8%
SW16	1	2.8%
KT22	1	2.8%
KT9	1	2.8%
RH5	1	2.8%
Sub Total	29	80.6%
Not Known	7	19.4%
Total	36	100%

2. REQUIREMENT FOR CARAVAN PITCHES

As set out under 'Aim and Scope of Research' on page 3, this research examines requirement for caravan pitches by looking at the 'preference' of Gypsies and Travellers for living on sites, rather than their 'need' for alternative accommodation due to factors such as homelessness, overcrowding and unsuitability of current housing. Various questions were asked to capture this preference, such as how important was it for them to live on a site and why. In addition, respondents were asked to list the benefits and problems of living on a site and in bricks and mortar accommodation., and to state the reason for not currently living on site.

Benefits Living on Site

Table 2.1 below shows 26 of respondents listed a least one positive reason to living on site. Benefits listed by respondents regarding living on a site included community and cultural preferences such as the freedom to travel. For example 11 respondents mentioned the word community when describing a benefit to living on a site.

Table 2.1 - Benefits Living on Site (open question)		
	Number	Percent
Close to the Gypsy and Traveller way of life and feel happy with our people. My father lived the Romany way and I would if I could	1	2.8%
Cultural and environmental	1	2.8%
Living the Romany	1	2.8%
'Problems we do not get treated like valued community members'	1	2.8%
'More freedom when on a mobile home site, no problems'	1	2.8%
'Close community'	1	2.8%
'Community and people look out for each other'	1	2.8%
Strong community	1	2.8%
'Travelling - countryside, way of life'	1	2.8%
'Benefits - family community spirit'	1	2.8%
'More Friendly'	1	2.8%
'We understand our needs better. Tough to live elsewhere due to racism, especially for children'	1	2.8%
'Good as all family around you, no strangers'	1	2.8%
'Sense of community'	1	2.8%
To continue our culture	1	2.8%
My freedom	1	2.8%
Freedom and family	1	2.8%
Community freedom	1	2.8%
Park/shared areas for children to play	1	2.8%
On a site you are within your own community	1	2.8%
To live my culture, my way of life. Also there no sites, my mother and grandfather all lived the Romany way	1	2.8%
You can live on a site and live your own way of life	1	2.8%
Because living on a site we can live our own way of life	1	2.8%
Community can support each other- benefits include supporting each other to achieve independent living	1	2.8%
Living with and around family members being more a community. Living by our culture being more true to ourselves	1	2.8%
To live my way of life, my culture. There are also no sites.	1	2.8%
Sub Total	26	72.2%
No Response	10	27.8%
Total	36	100%

Problems Living on Site

In contrast, 33% of respondents listed a problem of living on a site. Problems associated with living on sites can be categorised into management problems, general prejudice, specific prejudice when applying for work, instability in tenure and difficulties claiming benefits. These results are illustrated in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2 - Problems Living on Site (open question)		
	Number	Percent
'You can get kicked out, it's not stable'	1	2.8%
Bad management, bad locations	1	2.8%
'Small plots. Need bigger plots for family all to live together'	1	2.8%
'Stigma surrounding sites'	1	2.8%
'Accusations, not really involved in the community'	1	2.8%
'Harassment'	1	2.8%
'Prejudice'	1	2.8%
Discrimination	1	2.8%
Ignorant People	1	2.8%
No security, benefits	1	2.8%
Plots very close together. Time taken for council for repair things / respond to issues	1	2.8%
Lots of discrimination. Difficult to find and keep work. People shun you. Don't understand you'	1	2.8%
Sub Total	12	33.3%
No Response	24	66.7%
Total	36	100%

Benefits Living in Bricks & Mortar Housing

Table 2.3 below shows 28% of respondents cited a benefit to living in bricks and mortar accommodation. Benefits listed of living in bricks and mortar included better facilities and security.

Table 2.3 Benefits – Bricks & Mortar Housing (open question)		
	Number	Percent
Security	1	2.8%
'Prefer living in a house as there is easy access to household facilities'	1	2.8%
'Stable - bring your family up'	1	2.8%

'Where I live is very close to site, I spend most of my time on site'	1	2.8%
More acceptable	1	2.8%
'Better thought of if in a house'	1	2.8%
Better way of living	1	2.8%
Can get nice bath	1	2.8%
'Only benefit is a house is warmer'	1	2.8%
Better way of life	1	2.8%
Sub Total	10	27.8%
No Response	26	72.2%
Total	36	100%

Problems Living in Bricks & Mortar Housing

Table 2.4 below shows 56% of respondents identified a problem with living in bricks and mortar housing. Problems identified include social isolation, lack of freedom and being misunderstood by the community.

Table 2.4 Problems – Bricks & Mortar Housing (open question)		
	Number	Percent
Misunderstood by the wider community	1	2.8%
Isolation	4	11.1%
'We ain't treated the same as when were amongst our own people'	1	2.8%
'Fixed can't move it about'	1	2.8%
'Stuck where we are'	1	2.8%
'No problems'	1	2.8%
'Unsociable'	1	2.8%
'Children don't want to be in houses, society doesn't accept'	1	2.8%
'Currently overcrowded but don't mind bricks and mortar accommodation'	1	2.8%
Away from family and culture	1	2.8%
Stuck in one place	1	2.8%
Can get lonely and children can wander out on streets	1	2.8%
Neighbours do not accept gypsies and separated from family - no freedom	1	2.8%
Because you don't get treated the same as we are amongst our own people	1	2.8%

Because you are not treated the same as when we are amongst our own people	1	2.8%
I don't like sleeping upstairs, parking vans can be problematic and annoy neighbours, likely to experience victimization	1	2.8%
Lack freedom to travel and this is difficult	1	2.8%
Sub Total	20	55.6%
No Response	16	44.4%
Total	36	100%

Importance of Living on Site

Table 2.5 below shows 91% of respondents rated living on site as either essential, very important or important.

	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Essential	14	38.9%	42.4%
Very Important	13	36.1%	39.4%
Important	3	8.3%	9.1%
Not Important	2	5.6%	6.1%
Don't Know	1	2.8%	3.0%
Sub Total	33	91.7%	100%
No Response	3	8.3%	
Total	36	100%	

Reasons for Importance Rating

Table 2.6 below shows responses to a question asking respondents to explain the rating they have given to the previous question, as shown in Table 2.5 above. A variety of reasons were given, many of these are linked to the culture of the community and their traditional way of life.

	Number	Percent
Evictions	1	2.8%
'Gypsy sites are refuges for Gypsy culture and extended family lives'	1	2.8%
'Sense of who you are'	1	2.8%
'You live in a close community with others'	1	2.8%

'So they can be with their family and community'	1	2.8%
'If they were born and brought up on site they should have the right to continue to live on site'	1	2.8%
It is right of culture to live together. Society also pushes us together because of racism. Even casualty department.	1	2.8%
As you don't lose your culture	2	5.6%
'It's our way of life and we should be able to live how we choose'	1	2.8%
People are racist	1	2.8%
'It is our community and people don't understand us'	1	2.8%
It's our way of life	1	2.8%
It's their human rights	1	2.8%
Saves people from living on fields, gives proper place to stay	1	2.8%
Because of the community	1	2.8%
It is essential for health reasons- family culture - The Romany way of life- site provisions are needed	1	2.8%
Keeps the community together reduces chances of victimisation, care and support can be provided by the community	1	2.8%
Essential for health reasons, family culture- the Romany way of life site provisions are needed for our ethnic minority	1	2.8%
Sub Total	19	52.8%
No Response	17	47.2%
Total	36	100%

Reasons Not Living on Site amongst Merton Residents

Having examined general preference for living sites, respondents were then specifically asked to give reason for not currently living on site. Table 2.7 below shows responses from the 8 Merton residents who have provided verifiable address details only. Apart from one respondent who cited "eviction" as a reason and another who identified the "lack of disabled facilities on site", the remaining six all stated a lack of site provision as the reason.

This indicates that these 6 households would live on a site had there been pitches available on site. Of these 6 households, 4 have tenancies in either the social or private rented sector, and the other 2 are owner-occupiers living in their own bricks and mortar housing. The findings of this research therefore suggest a 'need' or 'requirement' of 4 'public' pitches and 2 'private' pitches.

Table 2.7 – Reason for Not Living on a Site (open question)				
	Owner Occupier	Renting	Living with Friends/Relatives	Total
Evicted	0	0	1	1
'Because you cant stop no where'	1	0	0	1
"Traveller family- parents had no where to pull into	0	1	0	1
Not had the opportunity to - limited sites and land'	0	1	0	1
Lack of disabled facilities on site	0	1	0	1
There is none	0	1	0	2
Lack of sites	1	1	0	2
Total	2	5	1	8

3. SIZE & LOCATION OF SITES

Size of Sites

Table 3.1 below shows aggregated responses to the question asking how many pitches a site should hold. There is a variety of views ranging from the preference for small sites with below 5 pitches to large sites with more than 30 pitches. A third of respondents preferred large sites with more than 30 pitches, 23% preferred sites with between 16 and 30 pitches, while 43% preferred smaller site with less than 16 pitches. Only 1 respondent stated a preference for a small site with between 1 to 5 pitches.

Table 3.1 – Size of Sites			
	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
1-5 pitches	1	2.8%	3.3%
6-10 pitches	6	16.7%	20.0%
11-15 pitches	6	16.7%	20.0%
16-20 pitches	4	11.1%	13.3%
26-30 pitches	3	8.3%	10.0%
31 or more pitches	10	27.8%	33.3%
Sub Total	30	83.3%	100.0%
No Response	6	17.3%	
Total	36	100%	

Location of Sites

Table 3.2 below outlines responses to the question on where sites should be located. The answers were varied but 2 main preferences emerge. One preference is for sites to be located near town centres and amenities such as schools, health services and shops (11 respondents). The other preference is for sites to be located in the countryside, in open space or green belt land (7 respondents)

Table 3.2 - Location of Sites (open question)		
	Number	Percent
'Don't mind as long as I'm with my own people'	1	2.8%
In suburban and rural environments. Near shops and schools not near dumps or flyovers'	1	2.8%
'Near schools, shops and hospitals on a small piece of land'	1	2.8%
'By the sea and country'	1	2.8%
'All over the country'	1	2.8%
'Away from everyone'	1	2.8%
Countryside	1	2.8%
'In the country and town'	1	2.8%
Between the town and the country	1	2.8%
'Big enough ground near schools & shops but space for the animals'	2	5.6%
'Anywhere, but amenities like schools, GP practices'	1	2.8%
'Should be sites in every borough'	2	5.6%
In all towns	2	5.6%
In all areas and towns	1	2.8%
Near schools, hospitals, greenbelt land	1	2.8%
Greenbelt, fresh air	1	2.8%
Near shops and facilities	2	5.6%
Greenbelt areas	1	2.8%
Near to town centre	1	2.8%
Small pieces of land - near to shops and schools and health facilities. Not near a rubbish dump or flyover	2	5.6%
Near local amenities	1	2.8%
Near to local amenities on a small bit of land	1	2.8%
Near to town walking distance for old people -close to shops	1	2.8%
Near open space so the horses can be attended to	1	2.8%
Sub Total	29	80.6%
No Response	7	19.4%
Total	36	100%

Ideal Sites

Table 3.3 examines responses to a question asking what ideal caravan sites should consist of. Facilities required for an ideal site include proper electricity, wash rooms, play areas, weekly waste disposal, parking space, disabled access, green space and 'modcons'.

Table 3.3 – Ideal Sites (open question)		
	Number	Percent
Playgrounds, community centre, space for grazing, room for visitors, good management	1	2.8%
'It should consist of all modcons and be able to cater for disabled, children etc'	1	2.8%
'Easy access to facilities'	1	2.8%
Facilities	1	2.8%
'Wash facilities, community hall for big sites'	1	2.8%
'Clean and tidy, electricity, modern facilities - day room, community space / entertainment	1	2.8%
'Green areas'	1	2.8%
'Out houses for wash houses'	1	2.8%
Romany culture family is so important to us, we do travel to stay with families'	1	2.8%
Play area for children, good parking area for cars and lorries. sheds for washing, showers etc'	1	2.8%
'Proper electricity supply clean water access'	1	2.8%
Fair size dwellings	1	2.8%
Proper facilities'	1	2.8%
Neighbours	1	2.8%
Shower, wash area	1	2.8%
Showers, toilet cubicles, play areas for children	1	2.8%
Should consist of modcons and be able to cater for disabled, children etc	1	2.8%
A good toilet and washing block	1	2.8%
Waste disposal once a week fire extinguishers	1	2.8%
A mobile home should consist of all mod cons cater for disabled, (be near) hospitals, play area	1	2.8%
Sub Total	20	55.6%
No Response	16	44.4%
Total	36	100%%

Other Housing Need Issues

Table 3.4 shows responses to a question asking respondents to list other issues regarding housing need within the Gypsy and Traveller community that they may wish to raise. Here the requirement for more caravan was again mentioned (by 4 respondents). Other issues referred to include raising awareness of the Gypsy and Traveller culture, the need for health drop in centers and the possibility of a traveling school.

Table 3.4 - Other Housing Need Issues (open question)		
	Number	Percent
More sites are desperately needed to ensure community survival but should be kept in local authority ownership'	1	2.8%
'Need to educate people about diversity and in schools and in the work places'	1	2.8%
'Not enough sites'	1	2.8%
'Need more sites and transit sites'	1	2.8%
'More awareness and less public put downs and awareness to culture and background'	1	2.8%
'Romany culture family is so important, we do travel to stay with families	1	2.8%
Happy as long as have our facilities especially a loo	1	2.8%
Human and ethnic rights	3	8.3%
A traveling school would be useful	1	2.8%
More sites, more health drop in centres, more help in education	1	2.8%
Sub Total	12	33.3%
No Response	24	66.7%
Total	36	100%

ADDITIONAL CONSULTATION WITH BRICKFIELD ROAD CARAVAN SITE RESIDENTS

The Consultation

As only one resident from the Brickfield Road Caravan Site attended the research event in October 2011, who chose not to complete a questionnaire survey, it was decided that additional consultation with residents of the site should be conducted. This was undertaken throughout December 2012, with assistance from Merton Priory Homes. A letter was put through the letterbox of all residents explaining the purpose of the consultation, and a number of visits were made to the site to contact the residents. The aim of this exercise is to gather profile data for all residents and to encourage them to complete a questionnaire for this research to identify their future accommodation need.

The assistance by MPH was very important to the engagement of site residents, as MPH's housing officer for the site has established a working relationship with residents on the site, and has helped put council officers with two of the households living on site, and these two households in turn helped engage other households on site.

Site Residents

Of the 15 pitches, 14 are officially being occupied at the time of the visits, although 2 of the 14 households are temporarily away, with one living in a care home, and another staying in hospital for medical treatment.

Of the 14 households, 8 are single person households and 1 consists of a couple. Of these, 4 have adult children who are now living in bricks and mortar housing. The remaining 5 households consist of 3 families with non-dependent children and 2 families with dependent children.

In total, the site has 23 adult residents, including the two who are temporarily living away, and about 7 children aged between 1 and 16. The age profiles of the 23 adult residents are as follows:

Age Band	Number of Adult Residents
18-25	5
26-50	7
51-60	3
61-70	4
71-80	4
Total	23

None of the residents living on the site identified their ethnicity as Gypsies and Travellers, supporting the assertion by organisations working with the community that official data on Gypsies and Travellers, such as the figures shown in Census 2011, are not likely to show the true size of the community.

Ethnicity	Number of Adult Residents
English	10
White British	7
White / White Other	2
White Irish	1
Not Known	3
Total	23

Results of Consultation

Through this consultation exercise, the council successfully made contact with 10 of the 12 households currently living on site, with the remaining 2 single-person households currently living away from the site (in hospital and in a care home).

Although contacts were made with 12 households, the level of participation differed considerably with some willing to talk to council officers at length, while others are only willing to respond to certain questions. None of the households contacted were willing to complete a questionnaire survey form, therefore the consultation undertaken was unstructured, with the aim of identifying 1) issues with living on site; 2) their future accommodation need over the next 10 years; and 3) any specific requirement for additional caravan pitches over the next 10 years.

Highlighted below are the results obtained through this consultation. As we were unable to conduct a structured survey, the results are mostly qualitative consisting of quotes from the residents:

Issues on Site

- “This is a hard life and this way of life is dying out”
- Some expressed dissatisfaction with the housing development next to the site – “The flats are blocking the sunlights. If we are living in houses, the building of those blocks would not be allowed to happen”
- The high costs of heating the caravans has been identified as an issue – “My heating bill is so high”, “Now I have central heating but I can’t really afford it as it costs £10 a day”
- Affordability of living on site was also cited as a concern – “We all rent our caravans. I have 2 rent accounts, one for the caravan and one for the licence fee”
- There are concerns that fire engines would not be able to get into the site - “Parking to our entrance is a big problem as there are no parking restrictions on our access road”

Future Accommodation Need

- 5 of the households have indicated that they would prefer or consider move into bricks and mortar housing
- Their preference is to move into houses or bungalows with gardens, as these type of accommodation would allow them to live a similar way of life – “If you have houses to offer, then a lot of people on this site would be interested. Nobody wants to live like this”
- Of these 5 households, 2 households are already on Merton Council’s Housing Register, while the other 3 have asked for information on applying for bricks and mortar housing
- One of the 5 households has express the wish to move to another borough which is nearer the countryside and has more open space
- 2 of these 5 households would also consider moving to a smaller site of about 6 plots
- In addition, one single-person in his 70s has indicated that he would consider moving into bricks and mortar housing in the future, although he is quite happy living on site at the moment
- In addition to the 2 single-person households temporarily living in care home and hospital due to ill health, 4 persons have serious health issues (e.g. stroke, heart attack, cancer) and all are in their 60s (1 person) and 70s (3 persons). It is possible that over the next 10 years that alternative accommodation might be required to meet their health needs
- With regards to future caravan pitch requirement, one adult non-dependent child has indicated a possible need for a separate pitch within the next 10 years

- The 2 households with dependent children have not indicated a requirement of additional pitches for their children over the next 10 years

In summary, the results of this consultation exercise with Brickfield Road Caravan Site residents show a possible need for one additional caravan pitch over the next 10 years, although this need is likely to be met by existing provision, given that a large number of households living on site have said that they would prefer or consider moving into bricks and mortar housing. The results of this consultation will be used to inform Merton Council's Housing Strategy, and actions will be taken to respond to some of the residents wishes to move into bricks and mortar housing. It is therefore likely that further caravan pitches on the Brickfield Road will become available for re-let over the next 10 years, in addition to the 4 pitches already projected in the main body of this report for the 10-year period.

The results of this consultation exercise support the conclusion of the main research that the re-letting of vacancies on the Brickfield Road presents itself as the most deliverable approach to meet government guidance, therefore the current recommended target for additional Gypsy and Traveller caravan pitches is zero.