

Matter 17, Appendix 1

(extract from ORD5 "Opinion Research Services for North Herts District Council (NHDC) entitled Gypsy, Traveller and Showperson Accommodation Update July 2014")

New Household Formation

3.23 Traditionally many studies of Gypsy and Traveller populations have assumed a net growth in the population of 3% per annum, and this figure was used in the East of England Regional plan. However, a 3% per annum growth rate will see household numbers double in 23.5 years and this figure has been used without any clear underlying evidence to support it, and is significantly higher than for the population as a whole.

3.24 In a study on behalf of Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2003 (Local Authority Gypsy and Traveller Sites in England Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003), Pat Niner identified that household growth rates of 2%-3% per cent a year were appropriate when projecting future formations.

3.25 Current guidance is clear that each individual assessment should use local evidence for future household formation rates. This position was further reiterated in the debate in the House of Commons on 4th February 2014 when the Planning Minister, Brandon Lewis MP stated:

'That leads me directly to the comment of my Hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire about the 3% growth rate in Gypsy and Traveller household net formation. He believes the figure to be closer to 1.5% and will know from his research that the 3% figure originates in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's 2003 report "Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England", which was probably written with the same pens that we still have many thousands of, paid for with taxpayers' money back then. The figure was restated in the Department for Communities and Local Government's 2007 report "Preparing Regional Spatial Strategy reviews on Gypsies and Travellers by regional planning bodies". My Hon. Friend makes a fair point, so, bearing in mind that we have moved away from regional spatial strategies, I will go away and examine whether we can reassess the guidance.'

3.26 The current position was confirmed dated 26th March 2014 from the Planning Minister, Brandon Lewis MP, which stated: in a letter

'The previous Administration's guidance for local authorities on carrying out Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments under the Housing Act 2004 is unhelpful in that it uses an illustrative example of calculating future accommodation need based on the 3% growth rate figure. The guidance notes that the appropriate rate for individual assessments will depend on the details identified in the local authority's own assessment of need. As such the Government is not endorsing or supporting the 3% growth rate figure, though in some cases we are aware that inspectors have, in considering the level of unmet local need when demonstrating specific traveller appeals, used the 3% growth rate figure in the absence of a local authority's own up-to-date assessment of need.'

3.27 ORS have also produced a detailed separate paper 'Household Formation Rates for Gypsies and Travellers: Technical Note' which demonstrates that the likely rate of growth for the population of Gypsies and Travellers across the whole of England based upon the best available evidence is closer to 1.5% per annum. Officials from Communities and Local Government have seen the technical note and confirmed that they have not undertaken any research on population or household growth for Gypsies and Travellers, and therefore have no information which contradicts this position.

3.28 A population growth rate of 1.5% will not necessarily equate to a household growth rate of 1.5%. Instead household growth rates may be higher. For example, across the whole of England for the whole population, the Office for National Statistics project in their 2011 based population highlight a natural change in the population of 0.5% per annum and an overall change of 0.83% per annum when the effects of migration are added. 2011 based household projections produced by Communities and Local Government show a projected rise in households on 0.95% per annum.

3.29 ORS believe that the 3% figure often used in Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments is demonstrably too high to be used as a fixed value for all studies and is not based upon any form of robust evidence. Instead we believe that a range of values should be considered in light of local evidence.

3.30 The household survey for North Hertfordshire indicates an age profile for the population includes a relatively high number of children. Across England as a whole, ORS typically use a 2% net formation rate, but given the relative youthfulness of the population an annual growth rate of 2.50% has been used in this assessment. Given that the evidence for population growth is as low as 1.5% per annum, we consider that this relatively high rate will provide enough pitches to accommodate all newly forming households in North Hertfordshire.

3.31 When including the impact of compound growth, a 2.5% growth per annum provides for 13% growth over 5 years, 28% growth over 10 years, 45% growth over 15 years and 60% over 19 years. We have used the 12 households on site households as a baseline for the growth in the population. On this basis, a growth rate of 60% would see an additional 7 households in the area by 2031.