



Blaenau Gwent Gypsy and Traveller Housing Needs Assessment

June 2007

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Executive Summary

- i. *The main objectives of this study were to produce detailed information about local Gypsies and Travellers and to generate reliable estimates of future accommodation and housing-related support needs as required under the Housing Act 2004*
- ii. *The main quantitative data sources were the findings of a survey, carried out in June 2007, by the Environmental Health Section, of 20 Gypsy families on the one publicly owned site at Cwmcraehen and in Council Housing, and a report, produced by ORS: the "Newport, Torfaen, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent Local Housing Market Assessment: Needs of Specific Household Groups. This latter report is still in draft.*
- iii. *The main findings of this report are:*
 - a) *The Gypsy/Traveller population (including those in Council Housing) is estimated to be around 250, making them the largest ethnic minority group in Blaenau Gwent.*
 - b) *All respondents declared themselves to be Romany Gypsies and most were 'born and bred' within the region.*
 - c) *Total caravan numbers in the study area have increased by about 50% since 1996, which reflects both natural population increase and significant inward migration.*
 - d) *Only a few of the Gypsies families on Cwmcraehen travel for a period of the year, mostly in summer, and wish to continue to do so for economic and cultural reasons. They consider Cwmcraehen to be their 'home' and maintain their tenancy whilst on the road. Respondents told us that the level of travelling has decreased over the years due to the decline in some traditional occupations, desire to provide children with a more settled education and a national shortage of the site accommodation needed to support a travelling lifestyle.*
 - e) *The surveys did not indicate an unusually high incidence of serious health problems or educational disadvantage. Nearly all those interviewed said that they suffered no racially motivated animosity from the local settled community.*
 - f) *Authorised accommodation is on the Cwmcraehen site, owned and run by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. There are no privately owned sites and no illegal sites within the County Borough.*

- g) We have very few transient travellers settling in illegal encampments but each year we usually have a small number of Gypsy families that stop in the Borough for 5-7 days looking for short term work opportunities.*
- h) With little on site demand for Council Housing and less and less families travelling, the turnover of pitches is very low. In the past four years only 3 families have moved to bricks and mortar accommodation.*
- i) There are currently nine families on our site waiting list and one resident household has confirmed that they have two 16+ children who will be seeking accommodation on the site within the next 18 months.*
- j) Results from our survey show that at the moment there is no strong desire by families in bricks and mortar accommodation to return to a caravan site. Therefore when considering future site provision, house to caravan movement can be more or less disregarded.*
- k) The long term pitches at Cwmcraehen are in huge demand and currently we have to utilise transit pitches for permanent occupation. The only amenities available on transit pitches are a single WC and water stand-pipe between 3 families, and hook up points for electricity. This lack of basic facilities is totally unacceptable but tenants are prepared to tolerate the situation rather than look elsewhere for accommodation.*
- l) In assessing the additional residential pitches requirement we utilised the 'model' provided in ODPM's 2006 Draft Practice Guidance on Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments. This led us to conclude that in the next ten years we will need to provide an **additional 6 long-term pitches** in Blaenau Gwent. This could be achieved by extension of the Cwmcraehen site.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Under Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985, local authorities are required to consider the accommodation needs in their area and to carry out a periodic review of these needs. Section 225 of the Housing Act 2004 introduced a specific requirement for local authorities to assess the needs of gypsies and travellers within their area. This report is Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's response to that requirement and its main purpose is to provide:

- An overview of the current provision of site accommodation.
- Current levels of accommodation needs, including overcrowding and poor accommodation conditions.
- Financial ability to provide own accommodation, without specific reference to household income and savings.
- Household aspirations, preferences and concerns in terms of location, tenure, size and type of accommodation sought.
- The size and type of accommodation provision that is needed, including the demand for authorised sites (both static and transit) and for permanent affordable accommodation provision.
- Projected future levels of accommodation needed.
- An assessment of the educational needs of children.
- Health care needs including an assessment of how many Gypsies and Travellers access health care services and the barriers to assessing services.

1.2 The research methodology used was compatible with Draft Practice Guidance on *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments* issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Communities and Local Government) in February 2006. The study adopts a definition of Gypsies and Travellers which includes people with a cultural tradition of nomadic living in a caravan, and all other people of nomadic habit of life including those who have stopped travelling for health or educational reasons or because of old age, including those living in housing. .

1.3 The research drew on:

- **Secondary Information:** records of planning applications, unauthorised encampments and site management; and relevant strategies and policies:ORS report on "Newport, Torfaen, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent Local Housing Market Assessment: Needs of Specific Household Groups"
- **A Stakeholder consultation:** interviews with representatives of the Partner authorities and written consultation and other stakeholders working with Gypsies and Travellers in the Study Area.

- **Interviews with local Gypsies and Travellers:** there were structured interviews in June 2007 with 11 of the 19 Gypsy and Traveller Families on the publicly owned Cwmcraehen caravan site and 5 families in housing.

2. Existing Site Provision

- 2.1 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council area has traditionally had a very static Gypsy Traveller population. We currently have one permanent site at Cwmcraehen, Nantyglo and a Gypsy settlement has been in this area for over 200 years.
- 2.2 Due in part to our geographical location we have very few transient travellers settling in illegal encampments but each year we usually have a small number of vans that stop in the Borough for 5-7 days for short term work opportunities. The general policy is to meet with them on arrival, determine what their intentions are and just generally monitor the situation from a distance. If required we will provide portable WC facilities and a means of waste disposal.



Arial photo of Cwmcraehen Travellers site



Site location map

- 2.3 In June 2007 the Cwmcraehen Site had 21 family units consisting of 30 adults and 27 children and we estimate that there are over 30 families in Council accommodation. We do not have any Gypsy families occupying caravans on private residential sites or on land that they own.
- 2.4 The permanent Cwmcraehen Gypsy Traveller Site was provided in 1967 by the Monmouthshire County Council and underwent extensive refurbishment in 1995. Blaenau Gwent ran the site for the Gwent County Council (formerly Monmouthshire County Council) and took ownership in 1996 following the reorganisation of Local Government.
- 2.5 The site has 17 permanent pitches, which have a utility block containing a WC, shower and 'washing' area. In addition there are 7 transit pitches, which share one WC and a cold water tap. There are electricity connection points on the permanent and transit pitches.



WC facility on transit site



General view of transit area Cwmcraehen caravan site

- 2.6 The purpose of the transit pitches is to accommodate Gypsies that may just be travelling through the area or more usually families visiting relatives on the site. It was the intention that the maximum occupancy time on a transit site would be 3 months, however pressure for full time accommodation in Cwmcraehen has meant that we now have four of them permanently occupied.



General view of Cwmcraehen caravan Site

2.7 The site is administered by the Council's Public Protection Division and a warden is on site Monday to Friday 0900 to 1300 and 1700 to 1900.

Site 1: Cwmerachen Caravan Site

Unitary Authority location:	Blaenau Gwent
Site managed by:	Unitary Authority
Site type:	Mixed
Age of site:	40 years
Approximate date of site establishment:	1965 (major refurbishment 1995)
Approximate area of site:	2,150m
Resident caretaker / warden?	No
Caretaker / warden office provided?	Yes
Total number of pitches:	24
permanent pitches:	17 (all single pitches)
temporary / transit pitches:	7 (all single pitches)
Total number of amenity blocks:	17
Average amenity blocks:	Less than 1 per pitch
Nearest public transport:	1km-5km
Nearest post office:	1km-5km
Nearest primary school:	1km-5km
Site considered to be overcrowded:	No
Visual quality of site entrance:	Good
Visual quality of general site:	Good
General quality of pitch surfaces across site:	Very good

Extract from University of Birmingham report "Physical Condition Survey – Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales" 2006

Tenancies at Cwmerachen since 1/04/2000			
Year	Tenancies started	Tenancies ended	Average length of ended tenancies in months
2000	6	1	3
2001	6	3	7
2002	1	2	20
2003	5	2	12
2004	3	6	19
2005	11	10	20
2006	2	6	20
2007 to 31 st March	2	5	10

- 2.8 The average length of tenancy at Cwmcraehen since 01/04/2000 is 16 months. During this period 51 tenancies have commenced of which 30 were moves within the site, 8 were recorded as no fixed abode, 6 were from bricks and mortar, 4 from caravan sites outside the Borough and 3 from none specified accommodation outside the Borough. There have been 12 allocations of Council housing to Cwmcraehen residents in the last 10 years and at present our records show that there are 3 families on the housing waiting list.

3. Housing Needs Assessment Interviews

- 3.1 As stated above the major component of the Accommodation Needs Assessment was a survey of the County Borough's Gypsy & Traveller population. The objective was to identify current households with housing needs and to assess likely household formation from within the existing households to help determine the demands for future site provision. The interviews took place between 16th and 21st June 2007 utilising questionnaires (a copy of the questionnaire may be found in Appendix 1)
- 3.2 The interviews were undertaken by Environmental Health Officers known to the Gypsy families and, despite some refusal, potential respondents were generally very cooperative. The main difficulty we encountered was that we attempted the survey during a period when a number of families were absent from the site undertaking seasonal agricultural work.
- 3.3 In total we were able to interview 13 families on the Cwmcraehen Site and 7 families living in bricks and mortar accommodation.
- 3.4 The families interviewed in Cwmcraehen contained 46 people in total representing 81.7% of the total population of the site. We do not know the exact numbers of gypsies in bricks and mortar accommodation, but looking at education and social housing records, we estimate it to be in the order of 230-250 people. Our sample for this latter group is therefore in the order of 10%.

4. Survey Findings

4.1 Family characteristics

- i. Average 'household' size is 2.65, which is slightly larger than the settled population at 2.35 persons. 54% of households include 1 or 2 people.
- ii. A high proportion (48%) of families include 'children' of young adults aged over 16 not currently forming their own household. Among housed Gypsies and Travellers interviewed, the proportion is higher at 56%.

4.2 Ethnicity

- i. The Gypsy/Traveller population of Blaenau Gwent (including those in "bricks and mortar accommodation") is estimated to be around 250, making them the largest ethnic minority group in the County Borough.

- ii. Survey respondents were asked to self-identify within six categories: English Gypsies/Romany, Irish Travellers, new Traveller, Welsh Traveller-Gypsy, Showman and Other. All those interviewed described themselves as Romany gypsies. None described themselves as Welsh Gypsies or Travellers and most were 'born and bred' within the region.

4.3 Travelling Patterns

- i. Only four of the Gypsies families on Cwmcraehen travel for a period of the year, mostly in summer, and wish to continue to do so for economic and cultural reasons. They consider Cwmcraehen to be their 'home' and maintain their tenancy whilst on the road.
- ii. Respondents told us that the level of travelling has decreased over the years due to the decline in some traditional occupations, desire to provide children with a more settled education and a national shortage of the site accommodation needed to support a travelling lifestyle.

4.4 Health

- i. 40% of respondents said that someone in their family had a long-term health problem or disability. Incidence of ill health was lower among families in housing (35%) than on sites.
- ii. All were registered with local General Medical Practitioners and Dentists.

4.5 Working Status

- i. Men are normally self-employed predominantly in scrap metal and gardening activities, and a number of women would like to work but are prevented by family responsibilities. It is claimed that problems facing Gypsies and Travellers in getting work stem from discrimination and racist attitudes among employers, and poor basic literacy skills among the Gypsies.
- ii. Within the sample of those interviewed 95% were unemployed and 5% were retired. It is clear that most of those interviewed were not comfortable disclosing information on employment status and so the data gathering may not offer an accurate picture.

4.6 Education

- i. All respondents with school-age children said that their children attended school regularly. However this is not a view endorsed by the Education Department who report higher than average truancy rates for gypsy children.

- ii. Primary and Secondary schools are within 10 minutes walk of the Cwmcraehen Site and all the known families in bricks and mortar accommodation.

4.7 Levels of vehicle ownership

- i. All households except three had at least one vehicle. The level of vehicle ownership (excluding caravans but including cars vans and lorries) was as follows:
 - 33% one vehicle
 - 48%two vehicles
 - 4% three or more vehicles.

4.8 Accommodation Needs and Aspirations

- i. There is evidence of relatively limited movement between types of accommodation. Few of the respondents on Cwmcraehen had ever lived in a house and only one family is currently on the Council housing waiting list. Our records show that since 1993 twelve households have moved from the site to Council property and three of them have subsequently moved on; one returned to Cwmcraehen, one moved out of the area and the other we believe bought a house locally. All of the respondents in bricks and mortar accommodation said that they missed the travelling life but would not move back to a site.
- ii. The respondents in “bricks and mortar” accommodation gave various reasons for moving from Cwmcraehen. In two cases it was due to chronic health problems, in another it was due to marriage outside the gypsy community and the new partner not wanting to live in a caravan. Another family moved due to overcrowding.
- iii. Nine out of ten respondents on Cwmcraehen and in housing thought that more permanent pitches were needed in Blaenau Gwent where Gypsies and Travellers can stay as long as they want. There was also support for increased transit site provision but only to accommodate visiting friends and family, not “new travellers” or “Irish” Most who expressed a preference said that transit sites should be at Cwmcraehen and they should be provided with individual WCs and showers.
- iv. All interviewees were asked whether there was anyone in their immediate family (for example a son or daughter) who is likely to want their own independent accommodation in the next 5 years. Two families on Cwmcraehen said that their two sons would shortly want to live independently on the site and one family in Council housing

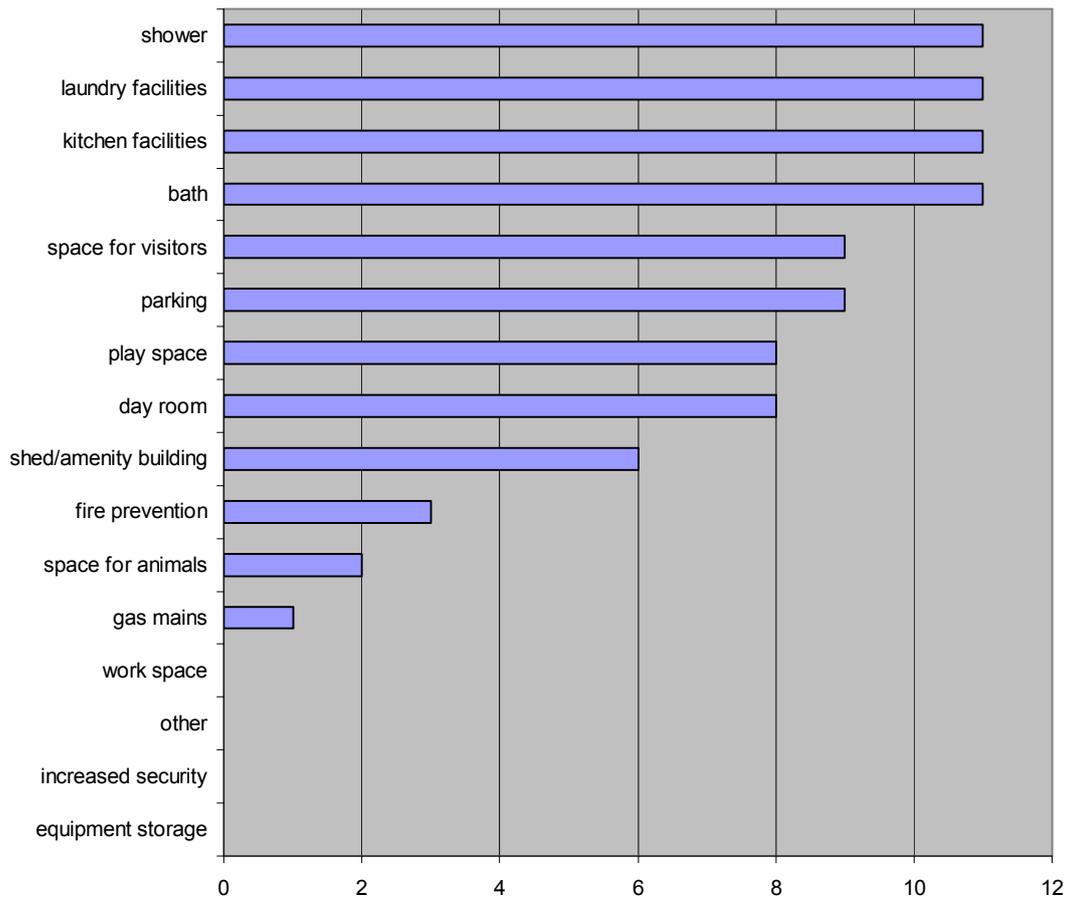
informed us that their daughter was about to place her name on the Council Housing list.

- v. None of the respondents on Cwmcraehen thought it likely that they would move out of the immediate district within the next 5 years.
- vi. When asked about their accommodation preferences, the majority of respondents favoured sites over bricks and mortar. The majority favoured social rather than private site provision and surprisingly none expressed a desire to buy land to set up their own encampment.

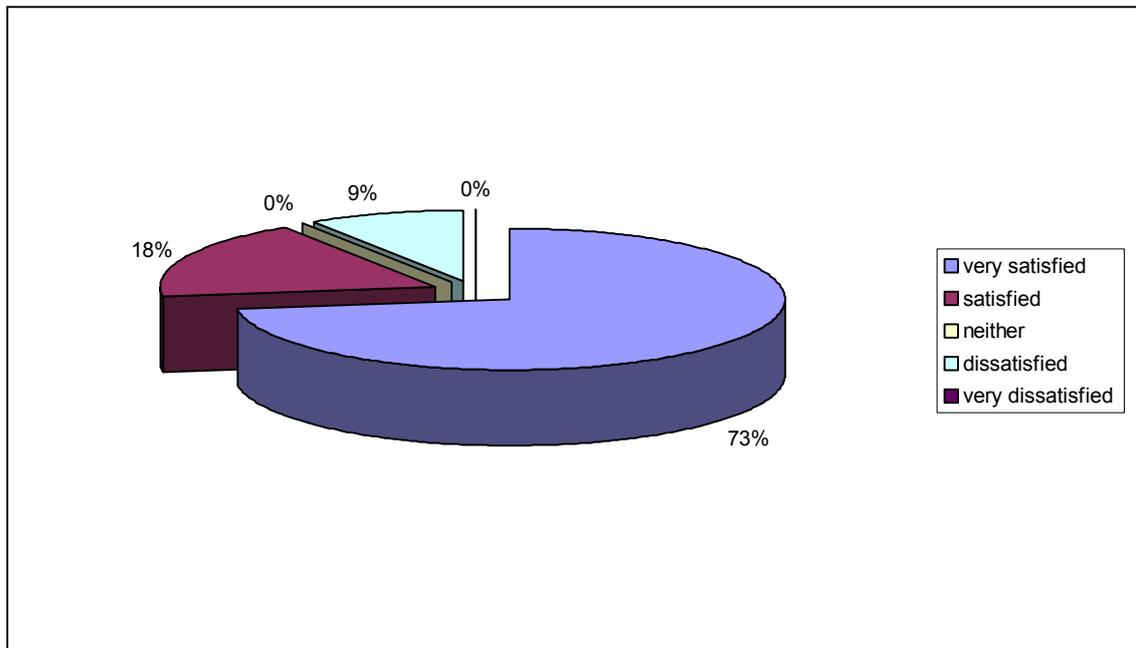
4.9 Satisfaction with the Cwmcraehen Site

- i. General satisfaction with the site was high and all the families interviewed said that it was well run and provided a safe trouble free environment. A number of the respondents commented that it was in a good location with shops, schools and health care all within reasonable walking distance.
- ii. The main concerns were:
 - Bases too small
 - Lack of fencing or wall between bases
 - Standards of repair of the amenity blocks
 - Lack of constant hot water to showers
 - Lack of individual letter boxes
 - No play area designated for children
 - No gas provided at amenity blocks
 - No 'dayroom' for community gatherings
 - Insufficient parking
 - No laundry
 - Fire prevention measures on site

Residents' concerns Identified from survey June 2007



Overall levels of resident satisfaction with the Cwmcrachen site.



5. Estimated Additional Pitch Requirements

- 5.1 Models for assessing requirements for additional residential pitches have developed significantly over the past 2 to 3 years. The model used here is an adaptation of the example provided in ODPM's 2006 Draft Practice Guidance on *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments*.
- 5.2 The model for Years 1-5 (2006-2011) takes account of need arising from:
- Net movement between sites and housing;
 - Unauthorised developments;
 - Unauthorised encampments;
 - Expiry of temporary planning permissions;
 - New household formation over the period.
- 5.3 On the 'supply' side it takes account of:
- Unused pitches being brought into use;
 - New sites in the pipeline;
 - Vacancies likely to be created over the period on socially rented sites.
- 5.4 Estimates of requirement are made using baseline information, survey findings and realistic assumptions based on professional experience.

Current residential supply		
Current supply of occupied socially rented residential site pitches in local authority area	20	Based on data from local authorities 17 permanent pitches and 3 transit pitches with long term occupation
Current supply of occupied authorised privately owned site pitches in local authority area	0	Based on data from local authorities
Total households on authorised sites	20	
Number of authorised pitches not available for letting (due to a management problems, awaiting refurbishment etc)	0	Based on data from site manager
Number of existing pitches expected to become vacant and lettable through normal annual turnover	2	Estimate based on last 5 years records
Number of households in site accommodation expressing a desire to live in housing	2	Number of people on authorised sites who would take up housing if offered (results of survey)
New local authority pitches already planned	3	This supply will not be available if these planned developments do not go ahead
Existing applications for private site development / extension Households:	0	
On authorised encampments	0	No unauthorised encampments at time of survey
On unauthorised developments for which planning permission is not expected	0	No unauthorised sites
Concealed households in the region currently in need of accommodation (backlog of need)	9	Based on Cwmcrachen caravan site waiting list.
In housing but with a need for site accommodation	0	Survey and Council housing records suggest that no families return to Cwmcrachen from social housing
Estimated current backlog of need	9	
Additional household formation 2006 - 2011	5	Number of new households likely to form in next five years who will wish to take up site accommodation (based on 17% household growth taken from the survey)
Estimated need for additional permanent pitches 2007-2012	14	
Pitches available from current and planned supply over 2006-2011	20 2 6 0 0	Assumes vacancies arising on authorised sites over a five year period due to normal turnover additional vacancies created through those on authorised sites taking up housing (Number based on housing records 1993-2006) planned pitches come into use pitches brought back into use
Indicative need for additional permanent pitches 2006-2011	6	

6. Future Accommodation Proposals

- 6.1 This report has shown that the main accommodation concerns for the Gypsy and Traveller population, in Blaenau Gwent, is the lack of facilities and the poor condition of the amenity blocks at the Cwmcraehen site, along with the need to provide more permanent pitches.
- 6.2 In July 2007 we shall be submitting a bid to the Welsh Assembly Government for a grant to refurbish the site at Cwmcraehen. If we are successful it is our intention to upgrade the existing amenity blocks and to construct two new blocks on the transit pitches which are 'permanently' occupied.
- 6.3 This will effectively give us four of the six additional long-term pitches required, and land adjacent to the site entrance can be easily, and relatively inexpensively, upgraded to provide the transit pitches that are necessary to accommodate short-term visitors.