

Researching the housing futures of minority groups: Gypsies and Travellers in England

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Abstract

This paper explores the complexities of understanding and researching the housing futures of one of the England's most marginalised ethnic groups: Gypsies and Travellers. Although around three-quarters of households (UK 2011 census) live in 'bricks and mortar' housing, there is a continued cultural need to live on pitches (and area of land occupied by a resident family) on Gypsy and Traveller sites (comprising a number of pitches). The Government currently requires Local Authorities to assess the future housing needs of this group and in particular the need for additional pitches on sites. However, the delivery of new sites remains highly controversial and generally subject to considerable public opposition. It is therefore essential that robust and defensible local evidence bases are created to assess future pitch requirements to support the housing futures of this group.

The paper brings together empirical research from studies for 40 Local Authorities over the past 5 years to establish patterns of housing need and travelling behaviour. It considers the factors underpinning future pitch requirements and how evidence needs to be carefully interpreted to establish future requirements. The paper also considers the challenge of researching marginalised cultural groups, the role of community fieldworkers in the research process, and how the findings of research are helping to shape local planning and land use policy.

The paper concludes that the use of community fieldworkers is central to the success of fieldwork; that analysis of pitch need requires careful interpretation to take account of household mobility and household formation trends; the extent to which the needs of households living in 'bricks and mortar' housing should be considered; that policy approaches need to be sensitive to cultural needs; and there continues to be a shortfall in pitch provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities across England.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Gypsy and Traveller groups are a well-recognised and established minority ethnic group and have resided in Britain for at least 500 years¹. Local Authorities (Councils) in England are required by the Government to carry out an assessment of the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers and in particular the need for pitches on which to live. The purpose of this paper is to scope out a practical approach to delivering robust and defensible intelligence to identify the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers.
- 1.2 This is a complex area of social research and this paper seeks to: firstly, explore definitions, demography and set out the housing circumstances and general policy context regarding Gypsies and Travellers; secondly, to review approaches to assessing the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers in terms of methods of data collection and modelling of data; thirdly to review the findings of our work and how this is helping to secure housing futures for this minority group; and finally, present conclusions regarding the approaches taken to assessing housing need and how ideas can be applied to researching other marginalised groups.
- 1.3 I trust that this paper helps other researchers to explore and discern the housing pathways of minority groups.

¹ Clark and Greenfields 2006 p.11

2. Definitions, demography, housing circumstances and policy context

Definitions

- 2.1 This paper adopts the definition²: of ‘Gypsies and Travellers’ set out within the Government’s ‘Planning Policy for Traveller Sites’ (March 2012) within which the following definition of Gypsies and Travellers is adopted:

‘Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family’s or dependants’ educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excluding members of an organised group of Travelling Showpeople or circus people travelling together as such.’

- 2.2 The questionnaire used in our work provides a comprehensive list of Gypsy/Traveller ethnicities that have been devised in consultation with Traveller organisations. We currently list the following groups³:

- Romany Gypsy
- English Gypsy
- Welsh Gypsy
- Scottish Gypsy
- New Traveller
- English Traveller
- Irish Traveller
- Welsh Traveller
- Scottish Traveller
- Showman(sic)
- Circus Traveller
- Other (state)

Demography

- 2.3 “The process of estimating the numbers of Gypsies and Travellers in Britain is a problematic one” (Clark and Greenfields p19). They comment that factors including the ‘hard to reach’ nature of these ethnic minority groups, the reluctance of people to declare their heritage (out of fear of discrimination) and inadequate representation in national statistics has led to few quality datasets being produced. Various estimates would suggest 250,000 to 300,000 across Britain⁴ but in 2011 the national census included Gypsy/Traveller as an ethnicity and this suggested a population of around 55,000 living in around 19,500 households across England.
- 2.4 The scale of G&T population in terms of rate per 1,000 of overall population at Local Authority level is illustrated in Map 1. This shows particular concentrations in southern and eastern England with smaller groups in the western and northern areas of the country.

² A useful discussion on definitions is provided in Clark and Greenfields 2006 Chapter1

³ Note that Showman/person and Circus Travellers are included in our work but not discussed in this paper

⁴ CRE 200,000-300,000 across Britain; G&T LRC 200,000; Gypsy Council 300,000; Clark and Greenfields 250,000

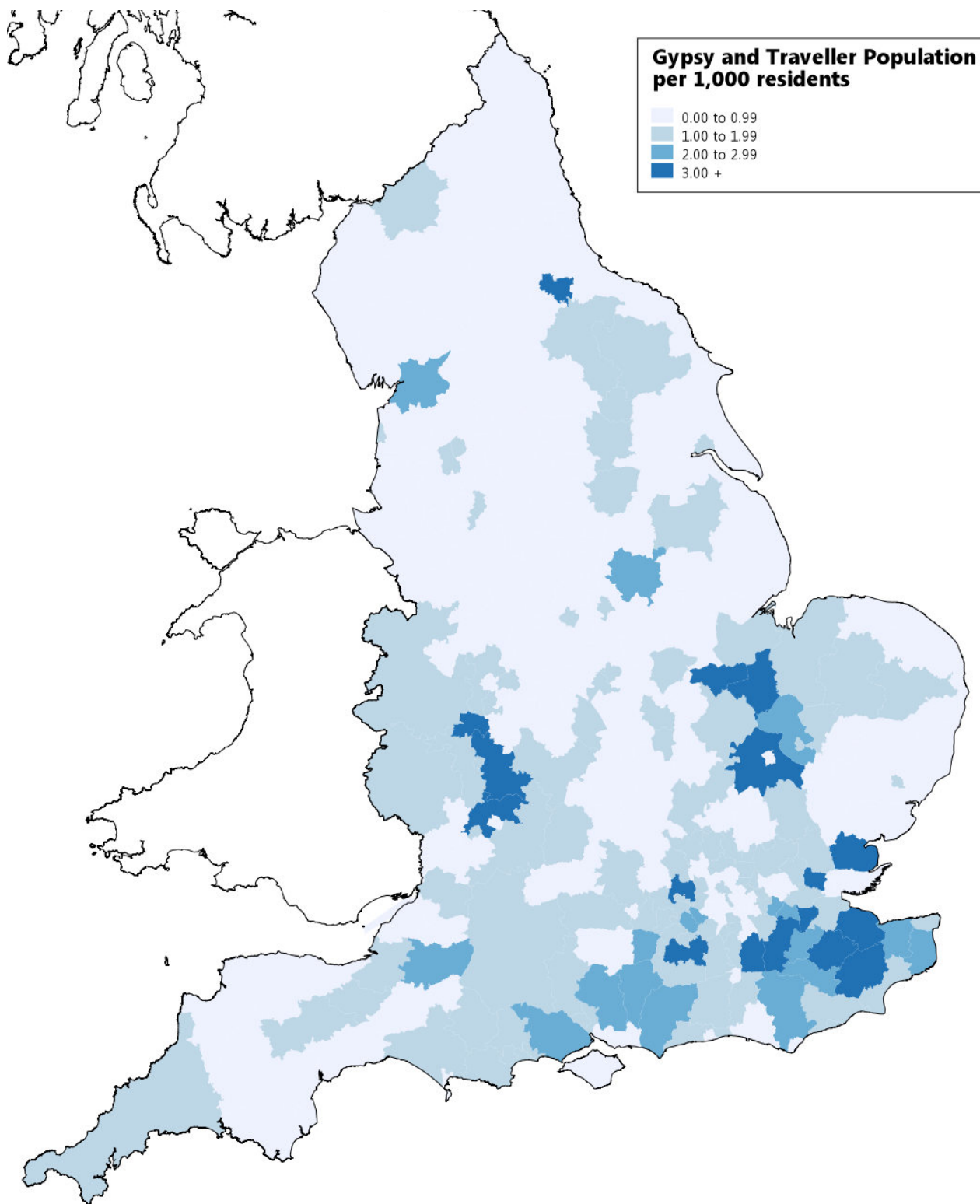
- 2.5 Notwithstanding that this data excludes Wales and Scotland, it clearly demonstrates that even though a robust national estimate has attempted to be derived at, it is in marked contrast to existing estimates. Our own research would also suggest that the census considerably undercounts the Gypsy and Traveller Population. For example, in a study for Cherwell in Oxfordshire, a total of 70 households were identified which compares with a census estimate of 37 households. Therefore, estimating overall numbers remains a problematic issue.

Housing circumstances

- 2.6 Gypsies and Travellers are most likely to live in one of three types of home: a caravan/mobile home on a pitch on a site; a caravan on a roadside encampment; or living in bricks and mortar accommodation. Table 1 explores these options in more detail and differentiates the range of sites by nature of their planning status.

Table 1 Housing circumstances of Gypsies and Travellers		
Pitch	Area of land on a Gypsy/Traveller site occupied by one resident family usually located on a site.	
Site	An area of land laid out and used for Gypsy/Traveller caravans; often, though not always, comprising slabs and amenity blocks or 'sheds'. An authorised site will have planning permission. An unauthorised development lacks planning permission.	
	There are three principal types of site:	
	Authorised Site	A site with planning permission, usually owned by a Council, Housing Association or Privately owned.
	Unauthorised Site – not tolerated	A private site without planning permission.
	Unauthorised Site - tolerated	A private site which is not authorised but unlikely to be asked to leave the site.
Roadside encampment	Unauthorised encampments, whether literally on the roadside or on other locations such as fields, car parks or other open spaces.	
Bricks and Mortar	Households living in traditional houses, flats/apartments and bungalows	

Map 1 Gypsy and Traveller population in England per 1,000 resident population



Source: 2011 census

Policy Context

2.7 A considerable range of guidance documents have been prepared by central Government to assist Local Authorities in discharging their strategic housing and planning functions and a range of research and guidance documents have been published by other agencies⁵. It is not the purpose of this paper to review them but some of the key themes to emerge from the review of relevant literature include:

- Recognising the long-standing role Gypsies and Travellers have played in society and how prejudice, discrimination and legislative change have increasingly marginalised this distinctive ethnic group;
- A recognised shortage of pitches on Gypsy and Traveller sites;
- The importance of understanding Gypsy and Traveller issues in the context of recent housing and planning policy development;
- Recognition that Gypsies and Travellers are one of the most socially excluded groups in society and are particularly susceptible to a range of inequalities relating to health, education, law enforcement and quality of accommodation;
- Recognition of the considerable prejudice and discrimination faced by Gypsy and Traveller communities; and
- A need for better communication and improved understanding between, and within, Travelling communities themselves, and between Travelling communities and elected members, service providers and permanently settled communities.

2.8 In March 2012 the Government published its national planning policy document, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)⁶ and this was accompanied by a document 'Planning Policy for Traveller Sites'⁷. The PPTS encourages local planning authorities to make their own assessment of need for the purposes of planning and plan for sites over a reasonable timescale. National policy aims to promote more private Traveller site provision '*while recognising that there will always be those travellers who cannot provide their own sites*' (paragraph 4). It is within this policy context that local planning authorities will have to plan future provision for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople across their respective areas. The Planning Policy emphasises the role of evidence and how it should be used within this context. Paragraph 8 of 'Planning policy for traveller sites' states that: '*Local planning authorities should set pitch targets for Gypsies and Travellers and plot targets for Travelling Showpeople which address the*

⁵ Key sources include Common Ground: Equality, good race relations and sites for Gypsies and Irish Travellers, Commission for Racial Equality, May 2006; Guidance on Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments, DCLG, October 2007; RTPI Planning for Gypsies and Travellers 2007; DCLG Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites Good Practice Guide, May 2008; Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers, April 2012; Dealing with illegal and unauthorised encampments: a summary of available powers, DCLG August 2012; Planning Advisory Service spaces and places for Gypsies and Travellers: how planning can help September 2013

⁶ CLG National Planning Policy Framework March 2012

⁷ CLG Planning policy for traveller sites March 2012

likely permanent and transit site accommodation needs of travellers in their area, working collaboratively with neighbouring local planning authorities’.

3. Assessing the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers

- 3.1 Notwithstanding the difficulties in estimating the total Gypsy and Traveller population and that households live in a range of circumstances, Local Authorities are encouraged to assess the need for pitches through the preparation of a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA).

Approaches

- 3.2 In order to deliver the requirements of Government Guidance⁸ the methodology for GTAAs comprises:
- Interviews with Gypsies and Travellers living in all types of housing circumstances (as illustrated in Table 1);
 - Collection of baseline pitch/site information;
 - A census of sites reviewing total number of pitches, number of pitches occupied and vacant, and total number of households; and
 - A Stakeholder on-line questionnaire for professionals who have direct contact with and knowledge of local Gypsy and Traveller communities to share views, experiences and perspectives.
- 3.3 GTAAs also consider the need for transit provision to facilitate travelling and the needs of Travelling Showpeople but this paper focuses specifically on permanent pitch requirements of Gypsies and Travellers. When carrying out GTAAs, we seek to interview all households living on pitches and seek to identify households living in bricks and mortar accommodation. Interviews are undertaken by trained members of the Gypsy and Traveller community. We have found that the use of Gypsy and Traveller interviewers contributes significantly to the receptiveness of community members, increases interview response rates and ultimately delivers a more comprehensive picture of need. Fieldwork also takes place at times to fit in with Gypsy and Traveller lifestyles and care is taken to respect cultural sensitivities.
- 3.4 Over the past three years, arc⁴ has carried out GTAAs for over 43 Councils across England. As several are not yet in the public domain, this paper focuses on the findings from 39 studies and interviews from studies for Councils and interviews from 1,530 Gypsy and Traveller households. Having delivered this scale of research, it is possible to explore trends in the data and provide a broader context for future work.

⁸ CLG Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments Guidance October 2007 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7838/accommneedsassessments.pdf

Modelling of housing need

- 3.5 The model which has been developed to review need seeks to understand the range of housing 'pathways' of both existing and emerging household linked to their current housing circumstances. This then results in an assessment of the number of households living on pitches and how this is likely to change in the future. In summary, the modelling of need considers: the number of households living on authorised and unauthorised pitches; the number of households living in bricks and mortar housing; the number of households expected to move or emerge over a five year time horizon and require a pitch; the supply of authorised pitches; and reconciles both need and supply to establish the extent to which there is a shortfall or excess of pitches. The stages of the model are shown in Figure 1. Modelling is based on a five year period and longer-term projections are subsequently calculated using household demographic information.
- 3.6 The model is populated by data from household survey data.

Figure 1 Housing need model factors

NEED		SUPPLY	
1.	Total current households Total number of households living on pitches (a) Authorised (b) Temporary Authorised (c) Private Tolerated (d) Unauthorised	6.	Current supply of authorised pitches (a) Supply of occupied authorised pitches (b) Vacant authorised pitches (c) Pipeline provision
2.	Households in B&M (baseline estimate)	7.	To derive BASELINE SUPPLY (6(a)+6(b)+6(c))
3.	Existing households planning to move (a) On sites (b) In bricks and mortar	8.	Turnover on pitches
4.	Emerging households (a) On sites (b) In bricks and mortar	9.	To derive TOTAL SUPPLY (7+8)
5.	To derive TOTAL NEED (1+3+4)		
RECONCILIATION			
10.	TOTAL NEED (from 5)		
11.	TOTAL SUPPLY OF AUTHORISED PITCHES (from 9)		
12.	AUTHORISED PITCH SURPLUS/SHORTFALL (11-10)		

- 3.7 Further details of each component of the model are presented in Appendix A.

Longer-term projections

- 3.8 The NPPF recommends that Local Plans prepared by Councils cover a 15 year time period. As evidence from GTAAs is an important component of Local Plans, it follows that GTAAs should attempt to derive longer-term pitch requirement figures. Demographic data from household surveys can usefully estimate potential future requirements. Gypsies and Travellers tend to form households at a young age and therefore analysis considers when children in households will reach 18. The proportion that are likely to form households can be estimated and 50% is commonly used as this takes account of gender. The likely number of new households based on demographic data can then be ascertained up to 2032.

Key findings from studies

- 3.9 Analysis of overall need and supply of authorised pitches based on the 39 studies carried out is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 Summary of 5 year pitch requirement analysis⁹		
NEED		
Existing households on pitches	Number	% of need
On Authorised pitches	1272	64.0
On Temporary Authorised	103	5.2
On Unauthorised pitches	63	3.1
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>1438</i>	<i>72.3</i>
Additional need over 5 years		
Existing hhs wanting to move in next 5 years	27	1.4
Emerging households on sites wanting to move to a pitch	474	23.8
Existing hhs in B&M wanting to move to a pitch	33	1.7
Emerging HHs in B&M wanting to move to a pitch	16	0.8
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>550</i>	<i>27.7</i>
Total Need	1988	100.0
SUPPLY		
Current supply of authorised pitches	1284	
Vacant pitches	129	
Turnover	426	
Total supply (including turnover)	1839	
Total supply (excluding turnover)	1413	
OVERALL SHORTFALL IN PITCHES		
Including turnover	149	
Excluding turnover	574	

- 3.10 The overall need for pitches comprises both need from households already living on pitches and need from emerging households. Overall, over the five year time horizon, 72.3% of pitch requirement is from households already living on pitches. A further 27.7% is additional need that is mainly from emerging households currently on sites and wanting their own pitch.
- 3.11 The combined studies provide details on 267 households living in bricks and mortar accommodation. Evidence would suggest that 12.3% of existing households living in bricks and mortar would prefer to live on a pitch along with a need from 16 emerging households from bricks and mortar which is equivalent to 6% of all households living in bricks and mortar.
- 3.12 The total supply of authorised pitches is 1,284 and including vacant pitches this increases to 1,413. Excluding any turnover on pitches this would indicate a shortfall of 574 that is equivalent to 45.1% of current supply. However, if turnover is considered (see Appendix A for further discussion), the shortfall reduces to 149 which is equivalent to 11.7% of current supply. Needs analysis would

⁹ Note that the five year period will vary by study

therefore suggest that Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision should increase by at least 11.7% across the areas studied over a five year time horizon.

- 3.13 A further point to make on turnover is that although households tend to state that they are not intending to move, trends in housing history would suggest that households tend to be more mobile. Of households living on permanent pitches around 70% had lived at their current pitch for less than five years which equates to an annual turnover of around 14%¹⁰.

¹⁰ Based on 661 households pitches moving in previous five years from a total of 954 households using results of 34 studies

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 Assessing the pitch requirements of Gypsies and Travellers remains an important element of planning policy in England. This paper has demonstrated that an analysis of future pitch needs requires a careful analysis of household mobility and formation patterns. The paper has explored the range of household 'pathways' that contribute to need and how these should be reconciled with the current supply of existing authorised pitch provision and turnover on pitches to determine the mismatch between supply and need. This includes a need to consider the housing circumstances of households living in bricks and mortar accommodation and preferences for living on pitches.
- 4.2 The use of Gypsy and Traveller interviewers contributes significantly to the receptiveness of community members to participate in the study, increases interview response rates and ultimately delivers a more comprehensive picture of need.
- 4.3 Our work also concludes that there continues to be a shortfall in pitch provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities across England. The evidence we produce helps to secure additional pitch provision to enhance the housing futures of Gypsies and Travellers in England.

Appendix A: Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Needs Assessment

Need

Total current households (1)

As the purpose of the needs modelling is to assess the total number of households requiring an authorised pitch, the starting point of analysis is to assess how many households there are on all types of pitch (authorised and unauthorised) within a local authority area. Councils are asked to provide accurate information on the number of sites in their area and the number of pitches on each site. In terms of supply, the model considers the number of occupied pitches on authorised and unauthorised sites, tolerated sites and unauthorised encampments. This establishes an estimate of the total number of households living on pitches in a local authority area. These data are generally corroborated with a 'site census' that is carried out independently by the field team to ascertain number of households, pitches occupied and vacant pitches.

Households living in 'bricks and mortar' housing (2)

Excluding the 2011 census, there is no consistent dataset which provides an indication of the number of Gypsy and Traveller households living in bricks and mortar housing. A range of methods can be engaged to reach this group and the use of community fieldworkers and the use of family/kinship networks has proved to be a powerful tool to reach these households.

Household flows – existing households (3)

The next stage of the model considers the extent to which existing households are likely to move. The following diagram illustrates the range of flows that need to be considered in analysis.

Household type	Current place of residence	Flow	Overall Impact on pitch requirement
Existing households	On sites	Between pitches on same site	0
		To another pitch on different site in same district	0
		From pitch on site to bricks and mortar	-1
		To site in another district	-1
		To bricks and mortar in another district	-1
		Household on unauthorised sites	+1
	In bricks and mortar	To site from bricks and mortar	+1
		To another bricks and mortar	0

Household flows – emerging households (4)

The model then considers the number of emerging households expected to form in the next five years based on household survey responses. The following diagram illustrates the range of flows that need to be considered in analysis.

Household type	Current place of residence	Flow	Overall Impact on pitch requirement
Newly-forming households	On sites	Planning to live on current site	+1
		Planning to live on another site in same district	+1
		Planning to move to bricks and mortar	0
		Planning to move to site outside district	0
		Planning to move to bricks and mortar outside district	0
		Currently on unauthorised site but wants to live on a site in district	+1
	In Bricks and Mortar	Planning to move to site within District	+1
		Planning to move to site outside District	0
		Planning to move to another bricks and mortar property	0

Total need (5)

The scale of need is established by summing the total number of households living on pitches and the net impact of existing households moving and number of emerging households to derive a total need figure for the next five years.

SUPPLY

Current supply of authorised pitches (6)

This is based on the total number of occupied authorised pitches, the number of vacant pitches and any pipeline provision, for instance any planned sites or pitches being brought back into use after being refurbished. The total pitches derived in this element of the model produces a total baseline supply (7).

Turnover on pitches

A further aspect of the model considers the extent to which households are likely to move from their authorised pitch. Length of residence information collected in household surveys provides a mechanism to establish when the household being occupied moved to their current pitch. Alternative sources of turnover can be derived from the local knowledge of site managers and Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officers.

Turnover enables existing pitches to absorb current and future households considered to be in need of an authorised pitch. Where possible, only households who have moved to a pitch and were previously living in the district or had a connection with the area

they moved to should be included as the analysis is focusing on the ability of existing pitches to absorb need from within the local authority area. An example from a recent GTAA in Worcestershire illustrates how the provision of quality survey information on the origin of households and connections with the area can result in a clear view on the role of turnover in accommodating pitch need.

The analysis in this study showed that in the past five years, a total of 185 pitches had become occupied by a household moving to them. Of these, 124 became occupied by family units either from, or who had a connection with, the district the pitch was located in.

Table 3 Turnover rates on Gypsy and Traveller authorised pitches (based on turnover in previous 5 years)

	Bromsgrove	Malvern	Redditch	Worcester City	Wychavon	Wyre Forest	Worcestershire Total
Base (moving households)	14	21	0	11	110	29	185
Household with connections/ moved within study area	11	17	0	11	62	22	124
Household had no connection	3	4	0	0	48	7	61
% Household with connections/ moved within study area	81.8	82.6	0.0	100.0	56.7	75.0	67.0
% Household had no connection	18.2	17.4	0.0	0.0	43.3	25.0	33.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
5 year turnover	11	17	0	11	62	22	124
Baseline authorised pitches	24	19	0	20	182	84	329
5 year turnover rate	48%	91%	0%	55%	34%	26%	38%
Annual turnover rate	9.5%	18.3%	0.0%	11.0%	6.8%	5.2%	7.5%

Worcestershire GTAA 2014, arc⁴ Table 6.2