

GRT 08

Ymgynghoriad ar ddarparu safleoedd ar gyfer cymunedau Sipsiwn, Roma a Theithwyr

Consultation on the provision of sites for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Merthyr Tudful

Response from: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Are Welsh local authorities and Gypsies, Roma and Travellers communities managing to work together successfully to:

a) identify sustainable residential and transit sites, and

MTCBC are working closely with GT communities to identify any possible need for local cultural residential pitches. Currently there is no need found to extend our 24 pitches on the Glynmil site. MTCBC will be undertaking our next GTAA 2023 due to a further completion of a GTAA in 2018. Currently MTCBC are refurbishing our existing site with support of the Capital Site Grant.

Glynmil is now a 24 pitch Gypsy/Traveller site with a community centre. MTCBC signed a new 80 year lease from landowner on the 1st November 2020. The new lease is unique to that of any other LA site in Wales and with careful consideration, MTCBC decided that for the best interest of communities, to take over all management of the site, ensuring that residents and neighbouring communities voices are heard about where they live, and how the site is developed to ensure wellbeing and to fit into the LDP.

The site has taken on significant changes since November 2020, and has exposed many challenges to MTCBC.

As part of the solution to managing change, MTCBC applied for further funding via the Welsh Government Site Capital grant. The project has been produced in manageable phases. A Masterplan is being developed by Capita with the longer term vision for the site and for those residents. This is to be presented to WG to progress and seek longer term funding.

In January 2021 MTCBC was awarded phase one funding from the Welsh Government Site Capital grant which developed new utility management and more secure and sustainable use of the community spaces.

In January 2022, MTCBC secured £500,000 WG funding to refurbish the 24 amenity blocks on the site. This being the second phase of the master planning of the Glynmil Site, whilst creating further exciting opportunities to further phase works by priority and following further consultation. Through the capital site funds, MTCBC are able to offer high standard, modern and energy efficient homes offering a cultural way of life to Gypsy/Traveller families living within the borough. MTCBC employ both a Site Manager and a live in Site Warden to ensure the day to day running of the site is sufficient, safe and compliant.

b) discuss Gypsies, Roma and Travellers' accommodation needs?

Not all LAs have the staff to manage liaison with communities. Barriers could be staff roles not being specific to GRT, no community facilities or staff offices on sites and a lack of GRT awareness training.

2. Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAs) are intended to assess the accommodation needs of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. In your view, are Welsh local authorities as a whole, implementing, monitoring and reviewing GTAAs effectively?

The GTAA is generally quite costly with most LAs using consultants to complete research. With the correct liaison staff the process could be made more fluid and collected whilst working closely with residents and family encampments. Instead of once every 5 years, this assessment could be designed in line with the online caravan count.

3. Does the current statutory and policy framework ensure sufficient culturally-appropriate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller residential and transit sites across Wales and within individual local authorities?

The current policy framework does not put enough responsibility on LAs to offer cultural homes. Education on buying land is important, where greenspace should be offered to cultural living. The current framework supports all communities wanting to live a nomadic life not just those of a minority group, blurring the edges for need of

Gypsy and Traveller families. The need for Gypsy and Travellers is different to those who are Roma and those of the wider communities.

Providing LAs sites is actually detrimental to families wanting to live a cultural way of life.

What are the key challenges for Welsh local authorities, and the Welsh Government, in providing suitable and sufficient accommodation sites for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities?

The main issues are staffing, and relying on old data and norms. There is a lack of understanding of GT need for cultural homes and practices. There is a need for knowledgeable staff that are recognised and trusted by the communities.

Application for funding and its processes are timely and costly, and generally needed to be outsourced costing LAs more monies.

5. Do you anticipate that when/if the UK Government's Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill comes into force there will be:

a) Specific challenges to overcome, and/or

Currently there are no transit sites within Wales, with many LA spending resources to move encampments on. The main issues for Transit sites is staff, finding sufficient land and managing the sites, not only this but the timely and costly application processes for funding.

Regional transit sites have been considered to be shared among a wider remit appose to it being managed by one LA; however the lack of specialised staff and no regular Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Forum since before the pandemic has caused a lack of urgency. Inefficient staffing numbers within WG, has created a lack of motivation or understanding from LAs

in certain locations in Wales, related to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller sites?

The new bill will encourage LAs to ensure sufficient stopping places are implemented and to create urgency for possible transit sites within specific LAs or regions

6. Do you have any additional comments or observations about the provision of accommodation sites in Wales for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities?

There is a need for LA planning and estates teams to identify land for Gypsy/Travellers to acquire their own land responsibly so that they can appropriately live on adequate greenspaces. Currently land is sold off cheaply that is not fit for purpose causing anxieties for families wishing to own their own sites/land and life culturally.

Unfortunately under current legislation, we see more and more families living on benefit income due to the cost to live on LA sites. As an example, for a rented plot and mobile home combined as a dual cost is £720 a month. This equates to more than living in bricks and mortar within the borough. On top of these high costs, Gypsy/Travellers are forced to pay commercial rate utilities and are not able to access domestic rates.

Due to living on LA sites, families on benefits are expected to only leave their homes for a maximum of 2 weeks otherwise their benefits will cease, this also contradicts the culture traditions of travelling and living a nomadic lifestyle.

As such the current framework does not promote a cultural way of life.