

GRT 09

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 Sir Gâr
Response from: Carmarthenshire County Council

Carmarthenshire County Council response to Senedd consultation on the provision of pitches for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers

Please note that the responses below all relate to Carmarthenshire specifically.

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

a) identify sustainable residential and transit sites, and

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

Response: a) We have seen an increase in private applications for Gypsy and Traveller pitches, a high proportion of which have been successful. The local authority continues to work with Gypsies and Travellers to identify potential locations for additional pitches which will be developed by the Council. The success of private applications means that there is a growing understanding that resolving the need for additional pitches is about partnership between the Council and Gypsy and Traveller communities, with all partners contributing to the development and management of new pitches.

b) The effect of Covid has made it difficult to engage with Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities in traditional working group meetings. However, this will be picked up again now that restrictions are being relaxed. We were not in contact with the Roma community before Covid, but are now developing these links thanks to joint working with Hywel Dda Health Board.

2. Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA's) 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 GTAA's effectively?

Carmarthenshire updated its GTAA on time in November 2019, and our need figures are based on the outcome of that update. We plan to update the GTAA again in 2024.

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?

We need to recognise that the current policies are trying to correct a massive historic shortage of pitches across Wales, and in our case in Carmarthenshire. This will not be sorted out in one five year period. However, a great deal of progress has been made in reducing the shortage, and we foresee that continuing.

Our initial discussion with members of the Roma community have not indicated that they wish to live on pitches, but if this changes by the time of the next GTAA, this will of course also be taken into account.

4. 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?

Identifying suitable sites for local authority provision will always be challenging, for two main reasons:

1. Very few sites in statutory ownership will meet all the criteria in the Welsh Government guidance on developing new Gypsy / Traveller pitches. None of the additional pitches developed under private planning applications would have met these criteria, yet they were given planning permission. When we did a 'call for sites' as part of preparation for the LDP deposit draft, no private landowners came forward with sites. A number of sites were proposed by the Gypsy / Traveller community, which they did not own.
2. There can be significant local opposition to planning applications for Gypsy / Traveller sites in or near urban areas. Experience of recently-developed private sites shows that the fears of local communities are often un-founded, and the new Gypsy / Traveller occupiers of these pitches get on with their lives in harmony with the local community. Standards of maintenance and cleanliness tend to be extremely high, and from outside do not look very different from bricks and mortar housing nearby.

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

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

It is not inevitable that there will be any additional problems to what we have now. Wales should continue to provide additional pitches in response to identified need, and to deal sensitively but firmly with unauthorised encampments. It is the responsibility of local authorities and the police service to continue to respond appropriately, and not to invoke the criminal law when it is not necessary to do so.

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

Our experience of provision on both private and local authority sites is that smaller sites tend to work better, both for the settled community and the Gypsies / Travellers themselves. This necessarily implies *more* sites will need to be developed, rather than developing a small number of large sites.

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