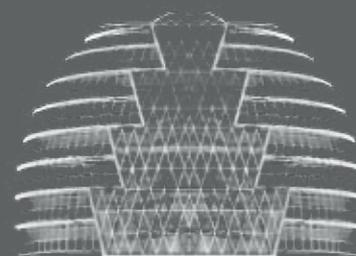


GYPSY TRAVELLER TARGETS

THE BOROUGH PERSPECTIVE



GLA CONSERVATIVES
LONDON ASSEMBLY

2010

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Context – London Plan and Whitehall Circulars	1
Methodology and the Fordham Report	3
Borough Responses	4
CONCLUSION	7

The Greater London Authority, under the direction of the Mayor is required to produce a spatial development plan that sets the strategic framework for planning and regeneration across the capital. This document is entitled “The London Plan”. Presently the plan is at draft consultation stage.

This report is primarily concerned with policy 3.9 of that report which pertains to providing appropriate accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Show People. The policy has set a borough by borough target for the provision of pitches for caravans.

We contacted all London boroughs to ascertain their ability to meet this new obligation. 11 boroughs responded to the survey, offering a cross section of opinion across the city, representing a balanced mix in terms of geography, political colour and socio-economic profile.

The results show clear trends. This policy will have a serious impact on local authorities both in terms of finance and in their ability to deliver wider affordable housing targets. The methodology used to reach these targets are questionable in their validity. This report attempts to present the view of local boroughs and to scrutinize the process that devised these targets, with the hope that this policy can be revisited in a serious way.

Tony Arbour AM, January 2010

CONTEXT – LONDON PLAN AND WHITEHALL CIRCULARS

The government has required London through Circulars 1/2006 and 4/2007 to provide additional capacity across the city for Gypsies, Travellers and Show People caravan pitches. These circulars apply nationally. For London, the vehicle for realization of these targets is the Mayor’s Spatial Development Strategy, known commonly as the “London Plan”. The policy within the plan is 3.9. This policy requires the following:

“In accordance with Government requirements, Boroughs should translate the relevant pitch targets into specific LDF site allocations on the basis of:

o Core strategy site allocation criteria which are fair, reasonable, realistic and effective in achieving these targets and reflect the priority to address needs arising from groups already living in caravans on sites

o This new provision being additional to existing capacity

During 2008 a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) was carried out. The draft London Plan used this as the basis of its pitch allocation targets:

“In light of the GTAA and a strategic view of needs across the region”

Below is a table of the numbers of pitches each borough is required to provide.

Borough	Present No. of	Additional Pitch
Barking and Dagenham	11	14
Barnet	0	22
Bexley	--	27
Brent	45	20
Bromley	62	58
Camden	5	6
City	0	0
Croydon	15	22
Ealing	36	26
Enfield	0	5
Greenwich	39	32
Hackney	26	19
Hammersmith & Fulham	0	5
Haringey	10	25
Harrow	3	9
Havering	7	42
Hillingdon	20	22
Hounslow	20	10
Islington	0	5
Kensington & Chelsea	20	7
Kingston Upon Thames	18	15
Lambeth	15	10
Lewisham	5	15
Merton	15	9
Newham	15	17
Redbridge	16	12
Richmond Upon Thames	13	9
Southwark	42	15
Sutton	26	10
Tower Hamlets	21	28
Waltham Forest	19	11
Wandsworth	11	10
Westminster	0	2
London Total	524	538

Boroughs will be required to incorporate the above targets within their Local Development Frameworks (LDF).

In October 2006, under the administration of Ken Livingstone, the Greater London Authority commissioned Fordham Research to conduct an assessment of the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers in London. The methodology used to reach the proposed need across the capital was flawed.

The report's data collection and use of assumptions instead of demonstrable evidence poses questions about the validity of its findings. Fordham Research openly admit that the basis for the information gathered in the report is unreliable:

“there remains a lack of reliable data on gypsy and traveller numbers which cannot be overcome through accommodation needs research”

The report states that there has been a drop of 10% in the number of caravans on socially rented sites. In overall terms, between 2003 and 2006 there was an overall 15% reduction in the number of caravans in London. Although the report makes assumptions about the reason for this decrease including gypsy and travellers having to move away from London to find more suitable accommodation, they are just that, assumptions. What the statistics do show is that the numbers using sites has declined significantly. Yet the report calls for a 104% increase in pitches.

The London Plan states that:

“72% of the need identified by the GTAA comes from gypsies and travellers who already live in bricks and mortar accommodation”

Government guidance says that those gypsies and travellers living in housing have a genuine need for pitches when they have a “proven psychological aversion” to living in bricks and mortar accommodation. The Fordham research admits:

“A medical assessment is clearly beyond the scope of a social survey, so a set of criteria has been drawn up which participants must satisfy if they are considered to have a need for a pitch”

The case for having a ‘psychological aversion’ to living in bricks and mortar housing has not been sufficiently proved through the criteria used by Fordham Research. The criteria they employed was based upon open ended survey questions and not on any medical or occupational health evaluations.

More than half of the interviews (58%) carried out to collect the data that form the basis of the needs assessment were conducted by members of the gypsy and traveller community. It could be argued that all interviews should have been carried out by professional researchers with a dispassionate interest, especially in light of some of the more technical questions relating to aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation

BOROUGH RESPONSES

During the summer of 2009 we contacted all London boroughs, sending them a proforma, with a view to assessing the possible impact on local authorities on having to deliver the gypsy and traveller pitch targets.

The following questions were included in the survey:

Questions – London Borough Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment

1. How many sites have you been allocated to provide under the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment? *Please include minimum and maximum numbers*
2. What will be the cost of meeting these proposed allocations?
3. Will you have to purchase additional land to meet your target, or can it be accommodated within existing land holdings?
4. Can you accommodate your target?
5. Can you accommodate your target without compromising wider housing targets?
6. Will you need to build on green space to accommodate your targets?
7. Do you believe an increase in official gypsy traveller sites will reduce illegal encampments in your borough?
8. Can you confirm the number of illegal encampments within your borough?
9. Do you believe the target laid out in the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment reflects the need within your borough based on current and historical data?

+Additional information

Eleven boroughs responded, around a third of all authorities within the greater London area. The responses offer a balanced representation of the boroughs in terms of the social economic profile, geographical location and party political control.

Analysis across the sample data shows the following:

- Two of the respondent boroughs' London Plan targets (Camden and Islington) exceed the maximum laid out in the Fordham accommodation needs assessment. An additional seven boroughs who did not reply to the survey also have London Plan targets that have been set higher than the Fordham needs assessment (Barking and Dagenham, Barnet, Croydon, Enfield, Havering,

Waltham Forest and Westminster).

- Six boroughs will need to purchase additional land to accommodate their targets (Bexley, Southwark, Bromley, Kensington Chelsea, Wandsworth and Merton).
- Four boroughs were prior to the publication of the London Plan and the final targets being set, unable to indicate whether they would need to purchase land (Hillingdon, Richmond, Camden and Islington).
- One borough, Lambeth, had no intention of purchasing additional land.
- Asked if they could accommodate their target, five boroughs responded that they definitely could not (Lambeth, Bromley, Hillingdon, Bexley and Kensington and Chelsea)
- Two boroughs felt it would be extremely difficult and or costly to meet their target obligation (Merton and Southwark).
- Three boroughs (Islington, Richmond and Camden) were prior to the publication of the London Plan final targets unable to answer whether they could accommodate their targets.
- Four boroughs stated that having to meet the new targets would mean their commitments to wider housing targets would be compromised (Bexley, Lambeth, Bromley, Hillingdon and Merton)
- Three boroughs stated that for a variety of reasons their wider housing targets could be compromised (Camden, Islington and Southwark) with one borough (Richmond) not making a judgment either way.
- Four boroughs confirmed that meeting the targets would translate into the need to build on green space (Lambeth, Bromley, Hillingdon and Bexley).
- Three boroughs would either not need to build on open space (Kensington and Chelsea) or refused to do so in order to meet targets (Islington and Richmond).
- One borough (Camden) put forward no definitive view on the need to build on green or open space, and two boroughs hoped not to, but did not categorically rule it out (Merton and Southwark).
- Two boroughs indicated that they felt the Fordham report proposed target for their area was broadly fair (Camden and Islington). Two boroughs expressed no view or needed further assessment before they made a public judgment (Lambeth and Richmond).
- Seven boroughs questioned the methodology of the Fordham report and the conclusions it reached (Bexley, Hillingdon, Bromley, Southwark, Merton, Wandsworth and Kensington and Chelsea).

A number of boroughs were concerned about the cost of implementing policy 3.9 of the London Plan. Bexley calculated that the cost translates into £65,000 per

pitch at the lower end of the scale of the Fordham report. They dispute the need for any additional pitch provision at all, based on an assessment carried out independently of the Fordham study by the borough itself. Southwark estimated the cost at £100,000 per pitch. Bromley quoted possible costs that land acquisition might range between £25,000 to £40,000 per pitch. Merton stated that the minimum figure cost to be £1million, their actual target is 9 pitches.

A clear trend of skepticism of the methodology used by the Fordham study was evident by respondents. In particular the calculations in relation to ‘aversion’ to bricks and mortar accommodation were questioned. Kensington and Chelsea stated:

“K & C and H & F (Hammersmith and Fulham) along with other west London boroughs have signed up to additional work required to more closely define need for households identi-

fied as requiring pitches due to a psychological aversion to bricks and mortar”

Hillingdon responded:

“Officers at the London borough of Hillingdon are concerned that the issue of psychological aversion has not been fully assessed and relates to housing preference rather than physical need. West London Housing Partnership has commissioned a study to assess this issue further”

Comments from boroughs also indicated conflict between providing wider housing numbers and meeting London Plan pitch targets for gypsies and travellers. Southwark’s response raised the issue of financial impact:

“We are concerned about the financial impact that this would have on our provision of affordable housing”

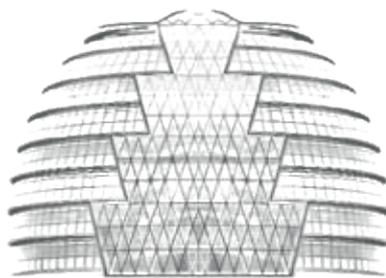


CONCLUSION

Policy 3.9 of the London Plan has the potential to cause a significant negative impact on London boroughs finances and have repercussions on other areas of delivery. The Fordham study's own figures indicate a drop in caravan numbers in the capital in recent years which is at odds with the high targets being set in relation to this policy.

The following recommendations should be taken forward:

- The GLA targets should be based on borough need, the individual borough should inform the GLA of the appropriate figure for provision of pitches within their jurisdiction.
- The case for the transfer of those living in bricks and mortar accommodation to pitches because of psychological aversion to bricks and mortar should be revisited. The criteria used in the Accommodation Needs Assessment is not a proven need.
- The Mayor should make representations to government about the extraordinary situation in terms of cost of land and availability of space which makes it particular difficult for London boroughs to meet this directive on pitch provision.
- It should be made clear in the London Plan that policy 3.9 should not be given priority over delivering wider housing targets.



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