

HD 13 Merton Council Sites and Policies Plan examination

Main Matter 3 Accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

04 February 2014

At the Hearing session on Wednesday 29 January 2014, the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit presented three additional documents on Main Matter 3: Accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. As these three documents were presented at the Hearing for the first time and had not been referred to before in Hearing Statements or earlier representation, the Inspector gave the council the opportunity to read and respond to the documents. The council's response is below.

To avoid repetition, the response assumes that the reader has access to each of the documents.

The documents are:

HD.9 Working with housed Gypsies and Travellers: a good practice guide, West London Housing Partnership (Fordhams 2010)

HD10 We are Londoners too – letters from Gypsies and Travellers, Nov 2011

HD11 Proposed changes to the Position statement on meeting the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers, LGTU 21 January 2014

HD.9 Working with housed Gypsies and Travellers: a good practice guide, West London Housing Partnership (Fordhams 2010)

1. It is the council's view that this research strongly supports the methodology and findings from the council's research SP5.61 Accommodation needs assessment for Gypsies and Travellers in Merton. These similarities are laid out below.
2. HD.9 (page 33, para 6.1) research drew on two primary data sources: a consultation event with gypsy and traveller stakeholders and interviews with Gypsies and Travellers living in the relevant accommodation.
3. The council considers that there are strong similarities between the interview methodology used for HD.9 and SP5.61. HD.9 (paras 6.2 and 6.3) states that interviews with Gypsies and Travellers were arranged with the collaboration of trusted stakeholders to who offered to put the researchers in touch with Gypsies and Travellers and assist with their participation. Participants acted as conduits to other contacts, whether by inviting family or friends to participate in focus groups or passing on contact details of other potential participants.
4. The council's research SP5.61 used the same "snowballing" methodology to invite participants to the research event. SP5.61 illustrates that the council also used volunteers

from the local Gypsy and Traveller community to act as facilitators in the event to assist with participation.

5. HD.9 para 6.4 illustrates that some research took place at another event and that interviews lasted place between 20 mins and an hour. SP5.61 illustrates a similar approach, and that interviews lasted a similar length of time, with some being longer than others in accordance with the wishes and level of participation of the people involved.
6. HD.9 para 6.7 illustrates that the research area covered seven boroughs in north and west London and a total of 29 Gypsies and Travellers were interviewed for the research, either through focus groups or face-to-face interviews.
7. SP5.61 illustrates that a total of 48 Gypsies and Travellers were interviewed for the research: either through the Ambition Group event (36 interviews) plus 12 interviews on site. Even if only the interviews that contributed to Merton's assessment of accommodation need are considered, this leads to a total of 25 interviews (13 from the Ambuition Group event, 12 on site) sourced from one borough.
8. HD.9 para 6.9 states *"Efforts were made to make the interviews as informal as possible, rather than conducting a survey-style interview based on closed questions. This encouraged participants to feel comfortable discussing often personal issues relating to their experience and wellbeing. This was aided by stakeholders explaining the nature of the research prior to interview. The presence of trusted stakeholders lent legitimacy to the project and also helped reassure participants that they could speak freely to someone they did not know. Interviews were semi-structured allowing participants to raise issues of concern not included in the topic guide"*
9. It is the council's view that this validates the research methodology underpinning SP5.61, where open questions were used rather than closed questions, these were conveyed by a trusted stakeholder and interviews were semi structured, allowing participants to include as much (or as little) as they wanted in their answers.
10. Although this is not raised in their statement to Main Matter 3, at the Hearing Sessions on Main Matter 3, the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit criticised this approach to research as unprofessional, stating that the council should have used structured interviews and closed questions.
11. HD.9 Appendix 2 "Gypsy and traveller interview guide" sets out the questions that Gypsies and Travellers were asked in the research. These open ended questions, such as *"what do you think is good about living in a house?"* *"Are there any negatives about living in a house?"* are very similar to the questions in SP5.61 *"What are the benefits of living in on site?"* (Table 2.1) *"What are the problems of living in a house?"* (Table 2.4)

12. It remains the council's view that the approach Merton took to constructing the research and the interviews is justified and robust and it is the council's view that HD.9 uses a similar approach, thereby supporting the methodology for the research as appropriate, justified and robust for this purpose.
13. The LGTU submitted HD.9 to the Hearings without any request from the Inspector, the council or other parties. The council's assumption therefore is that the LGTU view this "good practice guide" as appropriate, justified and robust.
14. HD.9 chapter 8 (pages 43-52) deals with the different factors that contribute to psychological aversion to bricks and mortar housing. Paragraph 8.1 states *It is important to note that the motivations for moving into housing and the desire to live on a site or in housing are based on individual experiences. This often involves a range of reasons particular to personal circumstances*". This statement is born out by the findings in the rest of Chapter 8, where the "benefits of living in housing", "downsides of living in bricks and mortar accommodation", "benefits of living on a site", "negatives of living on a site" are expressed through people's personal circumstances and views. Paragraph 8.32 states *"Many housed travellers wished to return to a site, while others wanted to remain in housing or change tenures and move from privately rented accommodation to council housing. Not all travellers living on sites wanted to stay there. Some desperately wanted to move into housing. Others were adamant they could never cope with living in a house"*
15. SP5.61 received very similar findings to those expressed in Chapter 8 of HD.9: people's personal circumstances dictating whether and when they would prefer to live on site or in bricks and mortar accommodation. Age, illness, living expenses, personal preference and family circumstances are some of the factors participants summarised in SP5.61 as to the positives and negatives people expressed about living in different types of accommodation.
16. In conclusion, the council considers that the LGTU recommended best practice guide HD.9 contains a very similar methodology to the council's research SP5.61. The LGTU criticised elements of this methodology as unprofessional (such as not using a structured interview and not using closed questions and holding the interviews at an event using other stakeholders.) It is the council's view that HD9 supports SP5.61's methodology as justified and robust.

HD10 We are Londoners too – letters from Gypsies and Travellers, Nov 2011

17. This report summarises the letters from 45 members of the Gypsy and Traveller community from north and west London who wrote to the Mayor of London during the production of the London Plan, commenting on the Mayor's position with regarding to accommodating Gypsies and travellers.

18. The council's view is that this qualitative research is interesting but has no bearing – positive or negative – on Merton's research SP5.61 or Merton's draft Sites and Policies Plan. The council recognises psychological aversion to bricks and mortar in SP5.61.

HD11 Proposed changes to the Position statement on meeting the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers, LGTU 21 January 2014

19. As stated at the Hearing Sessions to Main Matter 3 and in the council's statements to Main Matters 1 and 3, the council refutes many of the claims made by the LGTU in HD.11. It is the council's view that these issues have been thoroughly debated at the hearings and in the Hearing Statements and don't require further specific response to continue to refute them.