

Places we're proud of



A short guide to providing and managing sites for Gypsies and Travellers



National Policy Advisory Panel
on Gypsy and Traveller Housing

January 2021

About this guide

This short guide shares some key lessons and strong examples to prompt more housing associations and local authorities to get involved in providing good-quality sites for Gypsies and Travellers.

It's produced by the National Policy Advisory Panel on Gypsy and Traveller Housing, which is a group of housing providers committed to extending provision and raising standards of this much-needed type of accommodation.

The guide is based on research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, undertaken by De Montfort University in Leicester and published by the Chartered Institute of Housing in 2016.¹ This showed how vital it is for existing sites to be well managed, before seeking political and public support for plans to build new sites. The 2016 study identified a list of essential ingredients for effective site delivery and management, which this guide amplifies and illustrates with successful case studies from across the UK.



Baroness Cathy Bakewell
Vice-Chair of the All Party
Parliamentary Group on
Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

Foreword

I am delighted to be able to welcome this guide to providing and managing Gypsy and Traveller sites, produced by the National Policy Advisory Panel on Gypsy and Traveller Housing. It is welcome to see housing providers driving debate on Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. There are excellent examples of housing associations and local authorities working together to provide and manage sites in their areas.

Their message is that housing providers can and should include Gypsy and Traveller sites in their plans for developing new housing. Their offer is for you to join them, to ask questions, share challenges and advice with other housing providers in order to support your own development ideas in providing accommodation, where it is needed for all members of our communities.

I feel confident that this is the start of a real change in accommodation provision. I congratulate Boris Worrall and Professor Jo Richardson on an excellent piece of work.

Front cover photo: Elim Housing's Greenfields Way site in Weston-super-Mare, opened in 2015.

Back cover photo: Young residents celebrating the tenth birthday of Broadland Housing Group's Brooks Green site near Norwich in 2019.

¹ [Richardson J. and Codona J. Managing and Delivering Gypsy and Traveller Sites: negotiating conflict, 2016](#)

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1. Why we need high-quality Gypsy and Traveller sites

Gypsies and Travellers are an important part of Britain's population, heritage and social fabric. Providing well-designed and managed sites for these groups supports happy and healthy communities and addresses wider determinants of health, education and employment.

This is not solely the realm of housing – other public services should care about this issue too, including public health, children's services and others, because the symptoms flowing from a lack of quality accommodation end up presenting in schools, hospitals, welfare services and prisons. As a business case, the delivery of appropriate sites has been shown to save public money from being spent on endless evictions from unauthorised encampments.

Broadland Housing's Brooks Green site at Harford on the outskirts of Norwich.



2. What works

This guide highlights five key success factors based on the Richardson and Codona (2016) study and lessons learned from the information and experiences shared through the National Policy Advisory Panel since 2018.

Ultimately, the key priorities for Gypsies and Travellers are that their site is in good and safe repair, clean and quiet so they can feel at home and have a place with the freedom to carry on their lifestyle without discrimination. Sitting alongside these five key ingredients is the need to take a considered and negotiated approach, particularly with respect to unauthorised encampments. We do not go into detail on negotiated stopping in this short guide, but there are a number of good sources of advice and best practice about this aspect of provision.²

These are the lessons that we see as the most important to housing providers in the delivery and management of sites:

1. Good site design with appropriate facilities
2. Strategic, not reactive, local planning decision-making
3. Clear plans, policies and lines of accountability – working with residents in order to build trust
4. Good site management, including clear processes for repairs and maintenance and intensive support for residents where necessary
5. Strong collaboration and communication

Neat streets – Elim Housing's Greenfields Way site.



2. [Negotiated Stopping \(2018\) Resources](#)

Richardson, J and London Gypsies and Travellers (2019) The potential for a negotiated stopping approach in London.

3. Good site design and facilities

Many of the key considerations involved in providing other types of housing apply to sites for Gypsies and Travellers.

Important design points include:

- Building homes, not units
- Making sites safe and accessible for people with disabilities
- Following site design and best practice guides³ to meet high architectural standards and health and safety regulations
- Providing child-friendly sites with safe spaces to play
- Including community spaces and buildings to help promote togetherness, combat loneliness and provide a hub for support services to residents
- Locating sites for sustainability, close to schools, shops and healthcare
- Providing parking for professional services and room for family and visitors to stop safely for a short while
- Investing in kind design, with soft aesthetic features rather than custodial elements like gates and locks
- Involving Gypsy and Traveller customers from the concept stage through 'planning for real' and other co-production approaches to community design
- Getting builders, repairs contractors and everyone else on board with awareness and equality training.



An enduring and important part of Gypsy and Traveller life – horse paddock at Rooftop Housing Group's Gables Close site in Solihull.

Good site design in action

1

**Greenfields Way,
Weston-super-Mare
and Carrswood View
Transit Site, Bath,
Somerset**

Elim Housing
elimhousing.co.uk
37 pitches
completed 2015

Elim's experience on these two sites highlight the importance of getting some key elements right at the earliest stages of design and planning:

- **Variety of pitch sizes** – including small, medium and large pitches at Greenfields Way enabled different sized families to be accommodated (equivalent to two, three and four-bedroom houses) and contributes to affordability.
- **Accessibility** – the schemes include eight accessible homes to cater for the higher proportion of households with people who have disabilities in the Gypsy and Traveller community. These homes feature wet rooms and mobility scooter charging points.
- **Clearly defined and practical pitch boundaries** – to make each household's responsibilities clear. Pitches provide safe and secure spaces for children and animals, with fencing that's easily removable to accommodate large static caravans or park homes. The whole site has 'folding fences' to enable mobile homes and vehicles to move in and out easily and safely.
- **Security** – including closed circuit television CCTV, entrance barriers and blocks to prevent unauthorised use of vacant pitches. Installing CCTV in communal spaces provides security but must be done in consultation with residents.
- **Sustainability** – including green roofs, solar panels and timber cladding to help the site blend in with the local landscape.
- **Collaboration with residents** – to adjust the amenities and arrangements as the sites mature.

Green roofs and security features at Elim Housing's sites in the south west of England.



2 Gables Close,
Solihull,
West Midlands

Rooftop Housing Group
rooftopgroup.org
11 pitches
completed 2015

The access roadway at Gables Close is wide enough for large vehicles, with LED streetlights, plenty of parking bays and a separate area to keep work vehicles. The homes are well-designed and insulated for energy efficiency, with water meters for every plot to give clarity about water use and bills.

There are two permanent pitches for two caravans, two car parking spaces and one 'Pod' (a compact living/bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, storage and utility room, designed by BM3 Architects⁴ and built by Speller Metcalfe⁵). In the centre of the site there's also a large green space with a pirate ship children's play area and a pony paddock.

Rents are in line with local bedsit accommodation and are sufficient for the scheme to break even in 23 years after completion. Total scheme costs were £1.2 million (including £960,700 works costs), funded by Homes and Communities Agency grant of £575,000 and a Rooftop loan of £635,739.

Interior and view of shared space and amenities at Gables Close.



4. [BM3 Architects/practice](http://BM3Architects/practice)
5. [Speller Metcalfe/About us](http://SpellerMetcalfe/Aboutus)

3

**Brooks Green
Harford, Norfolk**

**Broadland Housing Group
broadlandgroup.org
8 pitches
completed 2009**

The Brooks Green site is located close to the main A47 road on the outskirts of Norwich, so offers easy accessibility for residents. The permanent pitches are rented by occupiers in exactly the same way as Broadland's other affordable homes, and each has an attached building providing kitchen/dining, bathroom and toilet facilities, under a living green roof.



"I lived on a site when I was younger, and the facilities were tiny and very basic. Here we've got everything you would have in a house, except the bedrooms. When I first saw the plans, I was amazed. In fact, I never thought it would happen. Being here has massively improved life for the kids and for us all."

Betsy Mitchell, resident at Brooks Green who has 12 grandchildren born at the site.

Brooks Green – building a stable, successful and happy community.



4

**Haldon Ridge,
near Exeter, Devon**

**Teignbridge District
Council and
Teign Housing**
teignbridge.gov.uk
teignhousing.co.uk
**18 pitches
completed 2014 and 2018**

Owned by Teignbridge District Council⁶ and managed on its behalf by Teign Housing, this is an attractive and environmentally friendly site, which includes a reed-bed foul water system. Detailed consultation and negotiation with residents and the local council enabled Teign to include semi-detached utility rooms each with a small kitchen and washroom, plus log-burning stoves for heating to mobile homes and vehicles.

There is a welcoming communal space and on-site office, which creates a pleasant environment for residents, visitors and activities.

New amenities provided by Teign Housing at Teignbridge Council's Haldon Ridge site.



6. Shears, P. How to provide good sites for Gypsies and Travellers. *Inside Housing*, 3 May 2018 (registration required)

5

South Treviddo Transit Site, Liskeard, Cornwall

Cornwall Housing
cornwallhousing.org.uk
16 pitches
completed 2019

This site has many elements of best practice in design. It's based on the recommended circular design, with occupiers' safety and security a high priority. A closed circuit television system sends a continuous live feed to a monitoring station, and there's adequate and appropriate lighting throughout. The site is located near to a dual carriageway, but careful planting design creates an effective noise break and privacy.

Safe parking and toilet facilities at South Treviddo.



4. Strategic local planning

It's important for local planning policies and decisions to take a truly strategic approach, not just react to short-term issues. Housing providers will also want to engage with Government strategies and funds (for example, the Affordable Homes Programme in England) to realise capital investment to build sites.

In Cornwall, existing Gypsy and Traveller sites were already full to capacity, and the Local Plan identified a need for 60 additional transit pitches by 2030. This included a particular need for a transit site in south-east Cornwall. Cornwall Council granted permission for the 15-pitch site at South Treviddo, to avoid needing to move on repeated unauthorised encampments around Liskeard and Saltash.

Elim's Gypsy and Traveller sites significantly benefitted from the positive support of key local councillors in Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset to help unlock planning permission for 37 affordable homes. Both sites were developed by Elim in partnership with the local authorities and part-funded by the Homes and Communities Agency.

Mid Devon District Council's Local Plan requires developers to deliver sites for Gypsies and Travellers in planned, mixed-use, urban extensions. The Council commissioned research to investigate the challenges facing this policy approach,⁷ which concluded that certainty increases viability. Well-scoped plans can reduce the risk and uncertainty felt by developers and lenders, while flexibility and negotiation in the planning process can hasten the delivery of much-needed sites. The Mid Devon Local Plan makes clear that pitches should be provided on-site in urban extensions unless it is demonstrated that off-site provision will achieve an 'acceptable outcome' for Gypsies and Travellers on pitch numbers, site facilities and accessibility to services.



⁷ [Mid Devon District Council \(2020\). *Negotiating the delivery of Gypsy and Traveller sites through local planning*](#)

Teignbridge District Council also took a strategic view of providing for Gypsies and Travellers, with the Haldon Ridge site forming part of its 2013 Local Plan. The Plan set a target of delivering 70 pitches over 20 years, either through direct provision or by supporting planning applications from the community. This led to a joint approach between the Council and Teign Housing to develop suitable sites in semi-rural locations with good transport links.

"Our joint approach has brought forward land which would not have otherwise been forthcoming."

Graham Davey, Housing Enabling and Development Manager, Teignbridge District Council

Broadland Housing took the strategic decision to apply to the Affordable Homes Programme to fund an additional site for Gypsies and Travellers. In January 2021 the group secured £806,000 in grant from Homes England for a scheme in Norwich to provide 13 pitches. Developed as a partnership with Norwich City Council, the new site had a ten-month timetable for completion with particular emphasis on good design and build quality.



Good planning pays dividends – attractive homes using materials that complement the surrounding landscape..

5. Clear plans, policies, accountability and trust

Sites for Gypsies and Traveller sites are the same as any other community – they and local services can only succeed in the long term through the active involvement and support of the people who live there. Where possible, housing associations and local authorities should work together and across geographical boundaries to provide accommodation where it is needed.

For Elim's sites in Somerset, early engagement with each local authority's relevant strategic and operational teams was critical. This gave everyone the opportunity to input on allocations processes and site management plans, and develop mutually understood policies and procedures to establish expectations and create successful mixed-heritage environments. This collaboration formed the basis for robust new management approaches for the sites.

At Carrswood View, the permanent and transit pitches are identical in size, with the same bathroom, kitchen and living facilities. This offers great advantages for residents using the transit site, but has downsides in terms of site management and enforcing short-term stays. For this reason, Elim plans to focus more on long-term accommodation in its future sites.

Rooftop puts and keeps residents at the heart of its approach, from initial site concepts stage through to delivery and management. To keep people engaged, earn their trust and learn lessons the organisation involves end users in site design, taking care to consult about and include customers' knowledge and preferences. Asking children about the design of play areas is especially important. Developing good links with people before they become tenants is invaluable in building longer term sustainable and professional relationships with occupiers, their families and visitors.



Utility room at Elim Housing's Carrswood View site in Bath.

6. Good site management, maintenance and support

The soft skills and services involved in housing management, repairs, maintenance and community support are just as important as the hard product of designing and building sites.

The lower density of occupation and profile of some people's needs mean that intensive management is required on Gypsy and Traveller sites. This needs to be reflected in the financial model for their development, supervision and upkeep, and is why government grant support in the form of higher levels of capital grant funding and revenue support for intensive housing management are required. Putting in place strong management and intensive support reaps longer term rewards in happy residents and homes that are well looked after.



A site resident meets staff from Rooftop Housing Group's Money Advice Team.

Rooftop has a specialist neighbourhood officer working with residents on its two sites. They deal with every aspect from allocation of pitches to site management, resident involvement and bespoke social exclusion and education projects. The officer is known and trusted by residents, and is there to provide on-the-spot support whenever it's needed. The post has been particularly beneficial in engaging with young people living on sites.

Rooftop also has very clear processes for repairs, which are carried out through their mainstream contractor in the same way as for any other social housing customers. The sites also have a dedicated handyperson to deal with the sorts of minor repairs and maintenance issues that frequently come up (for example, fences and gates, removing debris and general wear and tear), and keep an eye on any health and safety issues. Having this known and trusted person alongside the housing management presence increases trust and enables Rooftop to identify and resolve problems quickly and effectively.

Both the neighbourhood officer and handyperson can assist with access to the site and escalate action to tackle more serious repairs or neighbourhood concerns as soon as they arise. The group's model is based on a strong core management and intensive support service backed up by additional knowledge and on-site presence.

At the South Treviddo Transit Site, Cornwall Housing handles general repairs in the same way as those for its the general housing stock. Defects can either be reported to staff who will arrange repairs or reported directly by residents themselves. The closed circuit television security system acts as a deterrent to fly tipping, and a refundable deposit incentivises occupants to leave their pitch in good condition when they move on.

7. Strong collaboration and communication

Since the Joseph Rowntree Foundation study was published in 2016, the importance of collaboration and working together has become even clearer. It's a vital cross-cutting ingredient in any plans to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers and in running them effectively.

Whether it's different departments working together to refurbish a site, or local authorities in a region bringing together resources and ideas for 'negotiated stopping', good communication and collaboration are essential. To offer safe, successful places for Gypsies and Travellers to call home, organisations must listen to residents and adopt a multi-agency approach.

Elim acknowledges that building high-quality Gypsy and Traveller sites can involve higher costs compared to general needs housing. The reasons for this include the extremely low density of most sites, higher staffing ratios and the use of land or locations where complexities need to be overcome before development can begin.

For example, Elim's sites were built on a mix of Green Belt and brownfield land, with one location close to a main rail line, which required special acoustic fencing. The level of another site had to be raised by a metre to counter flood risk.

The costs of developing Elim's sites made local media headlines, so it's important to explain and challenge misconceptions about the use of resources. The organisation's funding strategy was supported by a really clear and positive social narrative to explain why the additional investment was needed and justified. This helped Elim and its local authority partners, to shape the strategic rationale for new sites, and help the investment and planning process impact more effectively with local stakeholders, including Councillors and the public. The more sensitive or challenging a scheme is, the more crucial it is to handle local perceptions.

Teign Housing has found resident participation and engagement to be the most important aspect in managing its Gypsy and Traveller sites. Occupiers were initially fearful and suspicious of the site being developed to replace the unauthorised encampment nearby. But these concerns were allayed by the site manager's efforts to promote use of the community room. In line with the social distancing required because of the Coronavirus pandemic, the amenity has become very well used for twice-weekly yoga sessions, family parties, a summer barbeque and Christmas craft event.

Rooftop worked closely Solihull Council during development of the Gables Close site. The Council quickly recognised the benefits of the group's rigorous approach and invited it to take over the refurbishment of a second phase of plots to match the standards achieved on the first pitches. The second phase of seven homes was completed and handed over to families in 2018.



8. Next steps for housing providers

Providing well-designed, managed and maintained sites for Gypsies and Travellers is an important component of housing providers' wider mission to address Britain's housing shortage. Meeting the needs of this community has positive knock-on effects in other parts of the housing market and improves social cohesion.

To create places that everyone can feel proud of, the authors hope that progressive and ambitious housing organisations will consider and reach conclusions to three key questions:

Why?

Reflect on the possibilities and challenges for Gypsies and Travellers, how providing accommodation is at the heart of improving community wellbeing, and why you should get involved.

How?

Think about utilising Government funding to deliver new sites (for example, in England, the Affordable Homes Programme).⁸ Talk to those who do this already, and use their expertise to understand whether and how you could get involved in providing accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers in your area. The Panel is happy to welcome you to its meetings to share ideas and talk about your local context.

What?

Discuss with your colleagues, board, local authority partners and other stakeholders to explore ways in which you can provide housing and support to all members of the community, including Gypsy and Traveller sites.

Help and advice

There are many useful online resources on this topic, including:

Friends Families and Travellers: www.gypsy-traveller.org

Leeds GATE (Gypsy and Traveller Exchange): www.leedsgate.co.uk

⁸ www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-affordable-housing-funding

“Our job is to create places where people can build communities. The Gypsy and Traveller community is often misunderstood, but we refuse to accept that any group should be second-class citizens.

The idea that families are constantly moved on – even when they include people with terminal illness and children of all ages – denies them the ability to be part of the kind of community that most of us take for granted.”

Michael Newey, Chief Executive, Broadland Housing Group



Members of the National Policy Advisory Panel on Gypsy and Traveller Housing visiting the Rooftop Housing Group at Gables Close in Solihull. (L to R: Boris Worrall Rooftop Housing Group, Graham Davey Teignbridge District Council, Jo Richardson De Montfort University, Tony Henderson Rooftop Housing Group, Amanda Nicholls Teign Housing, Matt Bagley Leicestershire County Council).

9. About the National Policy Advisory Panel

The National Policy Advisory Panel on Gypsy and Traveller Housing was established by housing providers who deliver and manage Gypsy and Traveller sites and who are passionate about improving this sort of provision and accommodation.

There is a huge need for good-quality and well-managed social housing for the Gypsy and Traveller community. Where this is done well and in partnership with local councils and communities, sites can and do thrive. Success depends on providing and managing sites in harmony with other local residents and enabling families to access and engage effectively with local schools and other services.

Our Panel was formed to promote this kind of housing and to share best practice on how it can be delivered and effectively managed. We aim to encourage positive perceptions of Gypsy and Traveller people, to tackle negative stereotypes and engage with government and others to ensure a supportive policy and funding environment. We want to see better provision and life chances for this community.


Please contact or join us if you think you or your organisation can contribute.




Boris Worrall and Professor Jo Richardson, joint Panel chairs



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Edited and designed by: creative-bridge.com

Supported by:

