

Response to the Further Alterations to the London Plan
10 April 2014
London Gypsy and Traveller Unit

Chapter 1 Context and Strategy

We consider that the changes introduced in the Further Alterations to the London Plan depart from the commitments made in Chapter 1 and 3 of the London Plan to reduce the social exclusion and deprivation faced by historically disadvantaged minority groups, through housing and infrastructure that meet the needs of all Londoners. In our view, based on experience from working with the Gypsy and Traveller community around accommodation issues and needs, some of the changes to the housing policies in the FALP will continue to have disproportionately negative impacts on disadvantaged groups of Londoners. The FALP will create pressure on the boroughs to intensify a particular type of housing development and maximise the land made available for this purpose. This will most likely result in an even more fierce competition for land between different uses. Uses that are considered politically contentious or marginal needs which cannot be met through the general housing model are likely to be squeezed out of the market altogether.

The further alterations are based on new data on population growth derived from the 2011 Census. The FALP outlines a set of assumptions to plan for London's population growth, which are focused on maximising economic activity and development intensification. It is assumed this is the only solution in the short to medium term to address the demographic challenges. We do not consider this approach to be sufficiently justified by evidence or appropriately balanced to overcome the negative impacts on those Londoners who are most disadvantaged and marginalised.

The evidence base supporting the FALP

We wish to raise a number of concerns regarding the evidence base informing these changes, which we consider to be superficial and lacking the robustness required by national planning policy. The limitations of this evidence base result in an inadequate set of changes, which do not benefit the London's deprived population. In our view the FALP would result in a deepening social polarisation and would exclude groups of the population such as Gypsies and Travellers from access to the housing they desperately need.

The evidence documents that fail to consider the implications of the FALP on the Gypsy and Traveller community are the Integrated Impact Assessment (which we consider here) and the 2013 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (which we consider under Chapter 3).

The Integrated Impact Assessment

Given the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Mayor's equality commitments, we do not consider the IIA gives sufficient emphasis to analysing impacts on equality groups. From evidence we have gathered since the 2012 adoption of the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites and from the Mayor's London Plan Monitoring

Report released this year, there was insignificant progress on delivering the required provision of Gypsy and Traveller pitches across London. The London Plan AMR indicates there were 10 pitches completed in the review year. We wish to point out this is not new provision, as the figure counts pitches that already existed, which simply got permanent planning consent. This is by no means provision of new pitches contributing to the acute need within the Gypsy and Traveller community.

The IIA fails to analyse the negative impact this lack of provision has on the Gypsy and Traveller community. We would note that previous Integrated Impact Assessments supporting the 2009 Draft Replacement London Plan and London Housing Strategy did consider these issues and made recommendations on improving the relevant policies.

From our experience in working with Gypsies and Travellers in London we know that poor housing is related to poor health, education and employment outcomes. The Scoping report for the IIA from December 2013 mentions some statistics from the 2011 Census and even these very limited figures provide some sort of insight into the deprivation facing the Gypsy and Traveller population. However, these are not carried through into the actual IIA, where the only mention to Gypsies and Travellers is related to the percentage of this population in overcrowded accommodation. There is a failure to link this with the policy on Gypsy and Traveller provision, and in our view this is an unsound approach because it misses the point of supporting policies with adequate evidence.

To conclude on this matter, we consider the starting point of the FALP, its supporting evidence base, to be fundamentally flawed. This is because of a lack of understanding of the specific needs of equality groups, using a very poor source of data and not assessing the impacts of a failing policy on equality groups. In the case of Gypsies and Travellers, this lack of adequate evidence results in leaving policy 3.8i unchanged and we do not consider this acceptable, given the extremely limited progress in meeting the needs of this group.

Chapter 2 London's Places

Policy 2.4 The 2012 Games and their Legacy

Point A of this policy states that through the LLDC, the Mayor will promote the social regeneration of the Olympic Park and the convergence objective. In our view this should translate into policy tools that aim to bring back into the LLDC area those communities who were displaced to make room for the Games and who were promised to benefit from the Legacy programme. The changes introduced in Policy 2.4 take the same approach as the rest of the FALP, promoting intensification of new development and investment in the area, and the transformation of the area into a Metropolitan Centre.

We wish to point out that one of the Gypsy and Traveller communities displaced from the Olympic Park, now living on the Parkway Crescent site in Newham, was promised to be relocated within the LLDC. This promise is yet to be fulfilled.

We object to the emphasis in Policy 2.4 on new development and we consider that in order to meet the convergence and social inclusion objectives, the changes should include a commitment to secure benefits for the more disadvantaged communities, in particular those who were displaced from the OP and are now living in close proximity. The Gypsy and Traveller communities in Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets would benefit from a planning strategy that will ensure their growing families will be accommodated within the LLDC area and benefit from the wider implications of a thriving Legacy programme.

We recommend that the following paragraph is introduced in Policy 2.4 C:

a. ensure that the future needs of the communities that were relocated to build the Olympic Park, such as the Gypsy and Traveller population will be met within the LLDC and that they will benefit from the new infrastructure and services

Policy 2.14 Areas for Regeneration

We object to the change introduced in paragraph 2.63A, which sets the overriding objective of Areas for Regeneration as driving and shaping growth. We are concerned that this approach would not benefit the most deprived Londoners living in these areas, because the growth driver is not sensitive to particular needs and it is likely that it will actually displace these communities through unaffordable housing and unsuitable employment and social infrastructure.

We have a recent example from the Bromley Local Plan, which identifies an Area for Regeneration where a large part of the population consists of Gypsies and Travellers and other minority ethnic communities. The policy approach is to 'create a successful economic "growth area"' and fails to consider the impacts this might have on the existing population or to plan positively to meet their needs. We are concerned that a growth objective set in the London Plan would encourage replicating situations such as this one in the detriment of vulnerable groups like Gypsies and Travellers.

Chapter 3 London's people London's housing requirements

The 2013 Strategic Housing Market Assessment

We support the criticism made by the London Tenants Federation that the SHMA is not fit for purpose and we do not consider it to be an adequate evidence base for policy making.

Paragraph 8.35 of the SHMA states there is little value in conducting a London wide Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs assessment due to the uneven distribution of the population. We would strongly disagree with this, in our view there is very much value in including a figure of need for Gypsy and Traveller provision in the London SHMA, to ensure this issue is considered equally alongside other housing requirements.

The SHMA assessment of need is based on the GLA population projections, using the 2011 Census as a starting point. We would note that this was the first time the Gypsy and Traveller category was introduced in the Census and in our view this is an indication of the importance of monitoring the Gypsy and Traveller population. We are concerned that this data might not be used in an appropriate manner. For example, the GLA Ethnic Group Projections available on the London Datastore aggregate the number of Gypsies and Travellers under the White category, while keeping separate numbers for other ethnic minorities. Since race is a protected characteristic shared by Gypsies and Travellers under the Equalities Act, we do not consider this to be a sound practice. The model used by the GLA does not provide a separate analysis for Gypsy and Traveller population growth and the evidence to inform the policy changes which we think are necessary.

However, we consider the Census figures to be a severe underestimation of the total Gypsy and Traveller population. Even the 2008 London GTANA provides a 'conservative' estimate of population, around 13,500, with the caveat that it is very likely an underestimate. While there are gaps and shortcomings in this data, these could be overcome by using multiple sources of information, including the 2008 London GTANA, local accommodation needs assessments and other estimates from Local Authorities.

The SHMA gives estimate figures for other groups of the population with specific housing needs such as students and older people, despite recognising in other cases that there might gaps in the data. We consider that a fair and inclusive approach would be to provide at least an estimate figure for London's Gypsy and Traveller population as well as an estimate of their accommodation needs. The SHMA might not acknowledge the importance of such evidence given it considers the Gypsy and Traveller population proportionally insignificant, but for families who have been waiting over 10-15 years for a pitch this recognition is vital.

Policy 3.3 Increasing Housing Supply

We do not consider that the approach to increasing minimum housing supply targets in Policy 3.3 is consistent with the objectives in Policy 3.1 Ensuring Equal Life Chances for All. This blanket approach to meeting housing need, which disregards the particular needs of some minority groups like Gypsies and Travellers has a disproportionate negative impact on these communities. The results of Policy 3.3 would be a significant decrease in land capacity for other housing uses. Gypsy and Traveller site provision will probably be the most affected, because it requires a delivery mechanism different to general housing. With so much emphasis placed on viability and development intensification, a land use that brings little financial profit will obviously be the last priority of Local Authorities to plan for. This has been the case for over two decades, but the affordable housing crisis, the accelerated increase in property prices and the impacts of other government policies such as the welfare reforms are all contributing disproportionately to the further exclusion of Gypsies and Travellers from the housing market, placing them in even more vulnerable positions.

Evidence from Local Plan consultations and Examinations over the last two years shows that boroughs have difficulties in identifying land for Gypsy and Traveller sites and very often the priority for delivering more housing preempts any sites to be earmarked for Gypsy and Traveller provision from early stages of plan making. The Mayor's view has been that boroughs are best equipped to deal with Gypsy and Traveller needs, but at the same time the London Plan presses them to build only one type of housing and to dedicate most of their resources to delivering higher targets. The fact that the London wide SHMA and SHLAA clearly set the priorities for boroughs leaves very little possibility for them to make decisions that go against maximising profit and density.

The FALP should recognise that Gypsy and Traveller site provision is only possible alongside general housing provision. The Mayor's Housing Strategy published this year failed to even mention Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs, and we are extremely concerned of what message this sends to Local Authorities. The Mayor includes funding for Gypsy and Traveller provision in the Housing funding programme, however this is not ringfenced and can therefore be easily lost. Two recent examples from Camden and Kensington and Chelsea provide evidence of how money was handed back to the GLA due to difficulties in identifying land. In both cases, members of the local Traveller community were intensely involved in proposing suitable sites or developing design solutions.

The SHLAA makes an attempt in paragraph 2.83 to 'encourage' boroughs to identify land that could be suitable for Gypsy and Traveller provision and other specialist housing as part of the SHLAA process. This is welcomed, but insufficient, given that no sites were identified through this route. In addition, even in the specialist housing provision sector, the FALP creates competition between different groups' needs for land, as it doesn't set targets for each of them. There are targets for older people's accommodation, and naturally the boroughs will find it easier to identify capacity within their housing delivery to meet these needs.

Policy 3.1A Ensuring Equal Life Chances for All states that addressing the barriers to meeting the needs of particular groups and communities is one of the key factors in reducing inequalities. At the moment, all of the land capacity identified in the SHLAA is dedicated to meeting general housing targets. The FALP should recognise that land availability constraints constitute a barrier to meeting specialist housing needs and should promote the use of the SHLAA to overcome this. In order to support meeting the objectives of Policy 3.1, we recommend the following paragraph is introduced after FALP paragraph 3.17a:

3.17b The land capacity identified in the SHLAA will also contribute to meeting the needs for all types of specialist housing, including Gypsy and Traveller sites, accommodation for older people, for people with disabilities, self build and other groups with a specific housing need.