

# The Accommodation Situation of Showmen in the Northwest



**A report commissioned by**

**The Showmen's Guild, Lancashire Section**

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the Showmen's Guild, Lancashire Section

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## **Contents**

**Introduction – page 3**

**Background to Showmen’s Accommodation Needs – page 4**

**The Planning Context – page 6**

**Data Collection for Tables – page 10**

**Key to Tables – page 11**

**Accommodation Tables & Analysis – page 12**

**Discussion of Collected Data – page 19**

**Summary – page 24**

**Key Recommendations – page 25**

**Bibliography – page 27**

## **Introduction**

This report is based on data collection carried out by the Showmen's Guild, Lancashire Section. A semi-structured questionnaire was used as a guide by the Showmen's Guild to gain essential information about the accommodation situation of Showmen and their families in the North West of England. The data was collected using face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews across the geographical region of the Northwest. Lancashire, Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Cumbria were assayed. Data was also collected from North Wales – there were no Showmen's sites reported in Merseyside. Twenty-five in-depth unstructured interviews were also carried out with Showmen from across the Northwest region in 2006 and 2007 that add depth, breath and qualitative community knowledge to the statistical material on accommodation. The data was collated and analysed by Dr Colm Power and Louise Dawson from research consultancy AVT-interventions with advice and help from the Showmen's Guild, Lancashire Section.

This piece of research will contribute to understanding the distinct needs of Showmen in relation to accommodation in the Northwest of England. Showmen have been documented as a unique cultural entity in Britain for centuries. The National Fairground Archive hosted by the University of Sheffield is a detailed collection that documents Showmen's history, including many aspects of their work, social practices and culture and is '*an important part of the cultural heritage of the nation*' (see Archive website). Also the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain is over a century old and has contributed in many positive and enhancing ways to the lives of ordinary people and the social fabric of the population generally over the decades since its inception in 1889 (see Showmen's Guild website).

The report by Dr Colm Power had research input from Louise Dawson and the proactive assistance of The Showmen's Guild, Lancashire Section who were crucial in the collection of primary data for this exploratory piece of research. The research was commissioned by The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, Lancashire Section and all primary data in this report belongs to them.

## **Background to Showmen's Accommodation Needs**

Accommodation provision for Showmen and their families has to date failed to account adequately for their needs as a distinct social and occupational group. Showmen have traditionally required a pitch on winter quarters for residence and storage of their equipment that should be large enough to carry out vital maintenance work and statutory safety checks on fairground equipment and should be within reach of key basic services. It is the wish of all working Showmen to own at least their own permanent pitch on which to winter - and eventually retire. The increasing importance of formal educational needs for the children of Showmen has meant that children and carers now spend much more time on what were once regarded as winter quarters in relation to school attendance and related issues. Also, retired Showmen and spouses, and family members with disability and illness who need specialist support can live all year round on what were once regarded as winter quarters. Many have become permanently occupied all-year-round pitches (Interviews with Showmen; Showmen's Guild Website).

When in working season (mainly from March through to November) Showmen stay on legal fairground sites when working, but require secure places to stay whilst travelling with large fairground equipment for up to three or four days between one fairs' end and the next fair's start date. The only other option is the multi-dimensioned expense of having to return to the Showman's own permanent base that may be many miles away. The logistics related to travelling long distances to and from permanent bases every few days and the cost and inconvenience in terms of time, money, stress, fuel and pollution make a short stay near the next fairground much more attractive to Showmen.

Traditionally Showmen used lay-bys and sympathetic farmers *et cetera* (see Diagram A below), but tighter and more strictly enforced planning and trespass laws combined with the commodification and enclosure of a great deal of wasteland have much diminished the opportunities for short stops on roadside or unauthorised spaces. Showmen do 'share' winter pitches when

travelling where feasible, but the Northwest region is particularly prone to the logistical problems (and related economic strains) outlined above as most Showmen's permanent 'wintering' pitches are concentrated in a few areas (see Figs. 1.1 - 1.5 below), while the fairgrounds they service are spread geographically over every local authority area in every county of the Northwest region (Interviews with Showmen, 2006/7; Circular 22/91; 'Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople' Circular, January 2007; Showmen's Guild Website).

Since the Housing Act 2004 local authorities have been required by law to investigate the accommodation needs of significant nomadic and semi-nomadic groups and to act positively and implement change where need has been identified. In order to do this effectively it is imperative to understand the socio-economic dynamics of tightly knit groups such as Showmen so that policy can reflect their complex life experiences and support them accordingly.

Many Showmen feel that for the most part local authorities usually categorises Showmen as similar or identical to pariah groups such as Irish Travellers and Gypsies (perhaps reflecting societal prejudices), and hence the paucity of their accommodation policy and provision for Showmen. However, the reality is that Showmen's economy and culture is vastly different to that of Traveller groups and consequently their accommodation and related needs are also very different (Interviews with Showmen).

Some recognition of Showmen as a distinct group was obtained when the Guild was provided exemption from the licensing provisions of the 1960 Caravan Site Act in recognition of the unique position of Showmen in relation to accommodation and business – as well as Circular 22/91 and the new planning Circular 'Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople' (January 2007). The latest planning advice for local

authorities issued by central government (ODPM Circular 01/2006: 6) defines who Gypsies and Travellers are but specifically excludes:

*'...members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people travelling together as such [original italics].'*

For the purposes of the 'Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople' (January 2007: 8) Circular, "travelling showpeople" are defined as:

*'Members of an organised group of travelling showpeople or circus people (whether or not travelling together as such). They include such persons who on the grounds of their own or their family's or dependants' more localised pattern of trading, educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excluding gypsies and travellers.'*

However, many established winter quarters have been lost in recent years because of redevelopment schemes. The Showmen's Guild (Guild's website) recognises that no adequate plans have been made for the replacement of these lost winter quarters (in reality often permanent sites) and that displaced Showman have often been treated with indifference and insensitivity:

*'A home is of vital importance to everyone - including the Showman. He seeks neither charity nor favouritism - he asks only that he be accorded the same consideration as any other member of the community.'*

### **The Planning Context**

In 1991 'Circular 22/91: Travelling Showpeople' gave advice to local authorities on planning applications and considerations relating to Travelling Showmen. However, in 2007 the number of pitches (and sites) for Showmen and their families have diminished with many Showmen having had to leave traditional sites due to the compulsory purchase of the land for other forms of development (as recognised in Ibid). Replacement sites were not offered or are located in inappropriate locations under the wrong tenure conditions.

Personal planning applications by individual Showmen for the development of sites have proved to be very difficult to obtain and are almost invariably accompanied by strenuous objections from sections of the settled population. There are currently very few realistic accommodation choices for Showmen that adequately recognise their occupational and cultural needs in the fifteen years since Circular 22/91 was published and most local authorities in the Northwest have made no provision whatsoever for Showmen. Indeed progress has been so poor that central government's Department for Communities and Local Government have released a new planning circular for England called the 'Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople' (January 2007: 6) because:

'...evidence shows that the advice set out in Circular 22/91 has failed to deliver adequate sites for travelling showpeople.'

The new planning Circular for Showmen applies to England only, while Circular 22/91 still applies in Wales.

The government's Department for Communities and Local Government (website) places an emphasis on '*prosperous and cohesive communities, offering a safe, healthy and sustainable environment for all [author's italics]*.' Therefore local authorities have a duty to respond positively to the guidance given in the 'Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople' (January 2007) Circular particularly in relation to the provisions of the Housing Act 2004. A flavour of the more positively proactive government approach to planning for Showmen's sites and some of the salient provisions of the government's latest 'Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople' (January 2007) are outlined in the bullet points below:

- 'The Government recognises that many travelling showpeople wish to find and buy their own sites. As redevelopment in inner city areas leads to more travelling showpeople being obliged to find new sites, planning guidance is needed to assist Local Authorities and travelling

showpeople to identify and agree on planning permission for suitable sites (2007: 28).'

- 'This Circular should be seen in the context of the Government's key objective for planning for housing – to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of living in a decent home (Ibid: 6).'
- 'Sites for travelling showpeople are normally for mixed residential and business use, to enable the effective storage and repair of significant amounts of equipment. Land which may be deemed unsuitable for a Gypsy and Traveller site because of poor land quality, may be suitable for business use within a travelling showpeople site (Ibid).'

- 'The Circular comes into effect immediately. Its main intentions are;

a) to increase the number of travelling showpeople's sites in appropriate locations with planning permission in order to address current underprovision over the next 3–5 years;

b) to recognise, protect and facilitate the traditional way of life of travelling showpeople, creating sustainable, respectful and inclusive communities where travelling showpeople have fair access to suitable accommodation and to services;

c) to underline the importance of assessing needs at regional and sub-regional level and for local authorities to develop strategies to ensure that needs are dealt with fairly and effectively;

d) To ensure that DPDs [Development Plan Documents] include fair, realistic and inclusive policies and to ensure that identified need is dealt with fairly and effectively;

e) to identify and make provision for the resultant land and accommodation requirements;

f) to help to avoid travelling showpeople becoming homeless through eviction from unauthorised sites without an alternative to move to (Ibid: 7).'

The new Circular instructs Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) should maintain current knowledge of Showmen's strategic accommodation requirements in their areas during RSSs (Regional Spatial Strategies). This knowledge base should be prepared in co-operation with the Showmen's Guild and other

interested parties to inform the RHS (Regional Housing Strategy), RSS, and other relevant regional and local strategies like Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). Planning authorities should discuss preparation of RSSs and DPDs (Development Plan Documents) concerning Showmen's accommodation needs with Showmen themselves and the Guild. Local planning authorities are instructed to develop lines of engagement with Showmen and the Guild. Planning Inspectors will examine Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs) to ascertain that valid consultation and involvement has been arranged with Showmen. The Circular states that Showmen should be proactive when engaging with local planning authorities to ensure that their needs are accounted for (Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople, 2007: 9).

Local authorities must allocate sufficient sites for Showmen related to number of plots required in regional strategies. If a local planning authority has not allocated sufficient sites for Showmen as identified by the relevant accommodation assessment process, the Planning Inspector can advocate that the DPD is changed to include more sites (Ibid: 10). Local planning authorities will also be expected to show that they have considered accommodation needs data from a wide range of sources including the local Showmen's Guild and GTAA research etc., before any refusal of a planning application for a Showmen's site, and to provide this material for any appeal (Ibid: 12).

Green Belt land can now be considered to meet a specific, identified need for a Showmen's site in the same way that an exceptional limited alteration could be used for any other type of development. Local landscape and local nature conservation designations cannot be used exclusively as a basis to refuse planning permission for sites either. Likewise travelling Showmen's sites on the periphery of towns and cities (including brownfield sites) could be appropriate, while rural areas, if not subject to special planning constraints, can also be considered. Local authorities should also be realistic about the

possible availability of alternatives to the car for accessing local services when assessing Showmen's planning applications (Ibid: 13-14).

### **Data Collection for Tables**

This research was commissioned by the Showmen's Guild Northwest because its member and others were concerned that Showmen were not being adequately consulted or represented in some of the GTAAs (see below) being carried out. The 'Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople' (January 2007: 8) Circular:

'The assessment of travelling showpeople's accommodation needs is an important part of the assessment of general accommodation needs. These needs should be assessed as part of Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAs). The planning process will begin by local authorities assessing travelling showpeople accommodation needs. The appropriate local office of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and other travelling showpeople may be able to provide local authorities with relevant information. ... The data collected through the GTAA process will inform the preparation of Development Plan Documents (DPDs).'

The primary statistical data used below was collected in Cheshire, Lancashire, North Wales, Greater Manchester and Cumbria by the Showman's Guild, Lancashire Region. Essential statistical information was obtained to gain a clearer picture of the accommodation situation of Showmen in the North West. The table key below explains the most important descriptors used in tables 1.1 – 1.6 and further specific analysis and discussion can be found before each table that analyse and explain the content - and also in the discussion section that follows on from the tables.

## Key to Tables

- **Authorised pitches** – this refers to pitches that have full planning permission on any site area.
- **Children 0-16 years old** – refers to the number of minors on pitches in a site area.
- **Doubled up pitches** – this refers to the maintenance of two caravans and/or chalets on a pitch that is meant for only one.
- **Illegal (roadside or lay-by)** – this refers to Showmen permanently residing on the side of the road or in a lay-by.
- **No. of pitches** – number of spaces on a site allocated to accommodate a caravan or chalet.
- **Site location** – any bounded space where one or more Showmen’s families congregate on individual pitches.
- **Temporary or permanent pitches** – all pitches in the tables are permanent (occupied to some degree all-year-round by people and/or caravans/chalets), unless sites have both when they are listed as **Temp** or **Perm**. The temporary pitches are granted planning permission for Showmen working the area or passing through between fairs during the travelling season, The reality, however, is that all temporary pitches listed are permanently occupied by Showmen’s families.
- **Unauthorised pitches** – this refers to pitches that do not have any planning permission whether extant on an authorised or unauthorised site.
- **Vacant pitches** – refers to the amount of pitches with planning permission not being used.
- **Vehicle overcrowding** – refers to inadequate space for the safe and secure storage and maintenance or convenient logistical movement of fairground equipment and associated vehicles.

## Accommodation Tables & Analysis

Table 1.1 below displays the data collected in the county of Cheshire. There are 5 site locations listed in the left hand column, with 3 of the locations having authorised pitches, and the remaining 2 having unauthorised pitches. Warrington (Gt. Sankey site) has 3 pitches allowed and all of these are occupied. Congleton (Breerton site) has 6 allowed pitches and only 2 of these are taken. However, the vehicle over-crowding is a problem which indicates that storage space on this site is a difficulty and is preventing prospective occupants from residing there. Vale Royal (Winsford site) has 13 pitches allowed and 11 of these are being used, and again vehicle over-crowding is an issue indicating that 13 pitches is not a true reflection of the actual accommodation available. There are also 4 doubled-up pitches in Vale Royal (Winsford site) which could take the total pitches actually required to at least 15 pitches. Warrington (central site) has no pitches allowed as the site is not authorised for any accommodation purposes - but the table indicates that there are 6 unauthorised pitches being used and 8 children under the age of 16 are living in conditions not covered by planning law or regulations. Congleton (Sandbach site) has 2 unauthorised sites at present and 1 of these is a doubled-up pitch. There are 3 children under the age of 16 living there and as with all the sites in Cheshire vehicle over-crowding is a salient problem (except Warrington Gt. Sankey site which is classed as full to capacity).

**Table 1.1** details the data collection for the county of Cheshire

Local Authority (Site location)	no. of pitches allowed	extant authorised pitches	extant unauthorised pitches	doubled -up pitches	Illegal (roadside & lay-by)	vehicle over- crowding	children 0-16 yrs	vacant pitches
Warrington (Central site)	0	0	6	0	0	YES	8	0
Warrington (Gt. Sankey site)	3	3	0	0	0	FULL	0	0
Congleton (Breerton site)	6	2	0	0	0	YES	0	0
Congleton (Sandbach site)	0	0	2	1	0	YES	3	0
Vale Royal (Winsford site)	13	11	0	4	0	YES	0	0

Table 1.2 details the data collected within Lancashire. There were only 4 local authority locations throughout Lancashire where positive data were identified with the largest number of allowed pitches being in Hyndburn (Altham site). Only 2 pitches are currently occupied there, leaving 16 vacant. The reason for this situation is that the site is unsuitably located in relation to the pattern of fun fairs operated by Showmen in the region. Also, in a culture where most Showmen aspire to owning their own pitch, the site owner is only prepared to rent on a short term basis (with very little security of tenure) as opposed to selling pitches. Fylde (Staining site) has 2 authorised pitches both of which are being used and West Lancashire (Burscough site) has 8 authorised pitches, with 6 being used and 2 of these are doubled-up pitches. Vehicle over-crowding on this site may explain the anomaly between allowed, extant and doubled-up pitches. In Wyre (Garstang site) there are 3 unauthorised pitches although this site is currently awaiting a planning application decision.

**Table 1.2** details the data collection for the county of Lancashire

<b>Local Authority (Site location)</b>	<b>no. of pitches allowed</b>	<b>extant authorised pitches</b>	<b>extant unauthorised pitches</b>	<b>doubled -up pitches</b>	<b>Illegal (roadside &amp; lay-by)</b>	<b>vehicle over-crowding</b>	<b>children 0-16 yrs</b>	<b>vacant pitches</b>
<b>Hyndburn (Altham site)</b>	18	2	0	0	0	0	2	16
<b>Fylde (Staining site)</b>	2	2	0	0	0	Full	0	0
<b>West Lancs. (Burscough site)</b>	8	6	0	2	0	Yes	2	0
<b>Wyre (Garstang site)</b>	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	0

Table 1.3 shows that in Wrexham although there are no authorised pitches there are 6 unauthorised pitches with 3 doubled-up pitches. There is a problem with vehicle over-crowding and 5 children under the age of 16 and

other adults live on these unauthorised pitches. North Wales is included as it is traditionally considered by the Showmen’s Guild as part of its Lancashire Section and the North Wales coast is worked extensively by Showmen from this Section during the travelling season.

**Table 1.3** details the data collection for North Wales

Local Authority (Site location)	no. of pitches allowed	extant authorised pitches	extant unauthorised pitches	doubled -up pitches	Illegal (roadside & lay-by)	vehicle over-crowding	children 0-16 yrs	vacant pitches
Wrexham	0	0	6	3	0	Yes	5	0

Table 1.4 shows the 5 locations of data collection in Cumbria. There are vacant pitches at both the Carlisle sites totalling all 13 pitch vacancies in Cumbria. In South Lakes (Foulshaw site) there are both permanent and temporary pitches all of which are taken with 2 doubled-up pitches. The vehicle capacity is full. Both the Allerdale locations have pitches with the Maryport site holding 2 unauthorised pitches with vehicle over-crowding. The Wigton site has 24 authorised pitches all of which are taken and a further 5 doubled-up pitches indicating some over-population on this site. Between Maryport and Wigton there are 15 children living there in these conditions.

**Table 1.4** below details the data collection for Cumbria

Local Authority (Site location)	no. of pitches allowed	extant authorised pitches	Extant unauthorised pitches	doubled -up pitches	Illegal (roadside & lay-by)	vehicle over-crowding	children 0-16 yrs	vacant pitches
Carlisle (Willowholme - site A)	15	5	0	1	0	0	0	10
Carlisle (Willowholme - site B)	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
South Lakes (Foulshaw site)	1 Perm 4 Temp	1 Perm 3 Temp	1 Perm	2	0	Full	0	0
Allerdale (Maryport site)	0	0	2	0	0	Yes	6	0
Allerdale (Wigton site)	24	24	0	5	0	Full	9	0

Table 1.5 details the data collection for Greater Manchester which covers a vast area and holds the largest concentration of Showmen in the Northwest. In the Bolton area there are 6 authorised sites and one unauthorised site and all the authorised pitches on legal sites over-populated due to extensive doubling-up of pitches. The Bolton Lodge View site appears to have 2 vacancies although with 6 doubled up pitches it is actually over-crowded. All of the sites have vehicle over-crowding (many of the sites are in close proximity to each other so compounding vehicle over-crowding) and most of them have children living in over-populated and over-crowded conditions who are under the age of 16. Bolton Fylde Street site is 'in breach of licence' not only for doubling-up pitches as with most other sites, but also uniquely because it was granted planning as a caravan site only with no provision included for vehicle parking and equipment storage – though the site is listed as over-crowded with both the latter.

The Bury site (School St. site) has 10 permanent and 10 temporary allowed pitches on an authorised site. All temporary pitches are actually permanently occupied. The table shows that there are a couple of vacant pitches although there are 5 doubled-up pitches and it suffers from vehicle over-crowding which indicates that there is little room for more occupants on this site.

The 4 Manchester sites all suffer from vehicle over-crowding. The vacant pitches on Crumpsall site are due to vehicle over-crowding also. Collingham Street site B has 10 doubled-up pitches out of a total of 50 authorised pitches making it a very densely packed site for the 21 children who live there. This site is presently being extensively refurbished. Manchester also has 2 unauthorised pitches – one on a recognised site Collingham A and the other on wasteland (Collingham C).

In the Salford area there are 3 authorised sites with no current vacancies. Most of the authorised pitches are taken and there are doubled-up pitches that push the sites into the over-populated category. Again the sites are

either full or over-crowded with vehicles and all 3 sites have children under the age of 16 and adults living in these poor conditions.

Tameside has 3 authorised sites with no vacant pitches. There are doubled-up pitches which make them over-populated and they are either full or over-crowded with vehicles. There are children under the age of 16 and adults living in these poor conditions also.

Similarly, the 2 Wigan sites are both full to capacity (1 pitch is lost to vehicle overcrowding) and have doubled-up pitches and some vehicle over-crowding making them overpopulated and a difficult situation for the children and other residents who live there.

**Table 1.5** details the data collection for Greater Manchester

Local Authority (Site location)	no. of pitches allowed	extant authorised pitches	extant unauthorised pitches	doubled -up pitches	Illegal (roadside & lay-by)	vehicle over- crowding	children 0-16 yrs	vacant pitches
<b>Bolton (Mill St. site)</b>	0	0	3	0	0	YES	0	0
<b>Bolton (Mill Hill St. site)</b>	8	8	0	2	0	YES	8	0
<b>Bolton (Mill Hill Park site)</b>	18	15	0	8	0	YES	3	0
<b>Bolton (Lodge View site)</b>	22	15	0	6	0	YES	4	2
<b>Bolton (Fylde St. site)</b>	6	6	0	3	0	YES (in breach of licence)	6	0
<b>Bolton (Riverside site)</b>	22	22	4	10	0	FULL	6	0
<b>Bolton (Hart Common site)</b>	12	9	0	8	0	YES	6	0
<b>Bury (School St. site)</b>	10 Perm 10 Temp	9 Perm 8 Temp	0	5	0	Full	11	1 Perm 2 Temp

**Table 1.5 (continued)**

<b>Local Authority (Site location)</b>	<b>no. of pitches allowed</b>	<b>extant authorised pitches</b>	<b>extant unauthorised pitches</b>	<b>doubled -up pitches</b>	<b>Illegal (roadside &amp; lay-by)</b>	<b>vehicle over- crowding</b>	<b>children 0-16 yrs</b>	<b>vacant pitches</b>
<b>Manchester (Crumpsall site)</b>	18	6	0	0	0	Yes	2	6
<b>Manchester (Collingham St. - site A)</b>	7	7	1	0	0	Yes	2	0
<b>Manchester (Collingham St. - site B)</b>	50	50	3	10	0	Yes	21	0
<b>(Manchester Collingham St. - site C)</b>	0	0	1	0	0	Yes	0	0
<b>Salford (Little Hulton site)</b>	25	25	0	4	0	Full	8	0
<b>Salford (Duchy Rd. site)</b>	24	23	0	5	0	Yes	17	0
<b>Salford (Clarence St. site)</b>	50	50	0	11	0	Yes	27	0
<b>Tameside (Hyde site)</b>	28	28	0	4	0	FULL	12	0
<b>Tameside (Catherine St. site)</b>	2	2	0	1	0	FULL	0	0
<b>Tameside (Milton St. site)</b>	8	5	0	2	0	YES	8	0
<b>Wigan (Hindley site)</b>	10	9	0	3	0	YES	2	0
<b>Wigan (Atherton site)</b>	20 perm 6 temp	20 perm 6 temp	0	6 perm 2 temp	0	FULL	8	0

Table 1.6 below details the regional round up of Showmen's accommodation for the four Northwest counties Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Cheshire (Merseyside has no Showmen's sites) and North Wales (also part of the Showmen's Guild Lancashire Region for administrative purposes). Table 1.6 highlights the regional distribution of pitches with the largest concentration being in Greater Manchester. Despite this Gt. Manchester has significant doubling-up and unauthorised pitch numbers indicating a need for more pitch provision. The next largest concentration of pitches is in the Lancashire area, but 16 out of 18 are empty at the Hyndburn site as they are deemed unsuitable for a number of reasons by Showmen (see details above), which leaves the county with only 12 operational pitches effectively. Cumbria is next in terms of pitch numbers, but has 13 empty pitches at Carlisle for very similar reasons to Hyndburn related to having few fairs locally, and to its relative geographical isolation regionally. Cheshire has the least pitches in the Northwest but has significant doubling-up and unauthorised pitch numbers indicating a need for more authorised pitch provision.

The total number of pitches allowed for all five regions was 455 (all situated in the Northwest) with 384 of these currently being used for Showmen's accommodation, while 40 were vacant (2 of these are temporary pitches at the Bury School St. site). Six of the pitches at Crumpsall site in Manchester are lost through vehicle-overcrowding, while 6 are vacant. Overall 31 pitches are accounted for by vehicle over-crowding, resulting in a major loss of accommodation pitches across the Region through the lack of adequate storage and parking space on authorised sites. Vehicle over-crowding is a major issue with the Showman's Guild, Lancashire Section confirming this as an ongoing problem with negative implications for pitch allocations and the efficiency and economy of Showmen. Significantly there are 105 doubled-up pitches on authorised sites that are technically in breach of site licences, which indicates that there is significant over-population with potential attendant social pressures and health concerns on most of the authorised sites. This is compounded by 26 unauthorised pitches across the Region (and

another 6 in North Wales) that have no statutory service provision and no form of health and safety regulation.

**Table 1.6** details a regional round up of current accommodation for Showmen (unauthorised pitches and sites are not included in this table)

County	no. of pitches allowed	extant authorised pitches	extant unauthorised pitches	Doubled - up pitches	Illegal (roadside or lay-by)	Children 0-16 yrs	Vacant pitches
Cheshire	22	16	8	5	0	11	0
Lancashire	28	12	3	2	0	5	16
Gt. Manchester	356	323	12	90	0	141	11
Cumbria	49	35	3	8	0	15	13
<b>Regional round-up</b>	455	386	26	105	0	177	40

### Discussion of Collected Data

The data collection displayed in the tables above highlight that the majority of authorised showmen’s sites are located in Greater Manchester, Salford & Bolton. Table 1.6 which gives a regional roundup indicates that the county of Greater Manchester has 356 allowed pitches plus other Showmen living there in 102 unauthorised and/or doubled-up pitches. There are particular historic reasons for this concentration of Showmen in the Northwest and as the quotation below explains, the work of Showmen requires regional travel throughout the long fairground season. Greater Manchester is a difficult place to travel to and from with large trucks and fairground equipment sometimes up to twice a week and where parking and storage facilities are severely overcrowded on nearly all the conurbation’s existing Showmen’s sites. This can cause major logistical problems for Showmen in the travelling season that impact adversely on their time, income and quality of life:

‘The fairgrounds we attend throughout the travelling season are much more evenly spread throughout the whole [Northwest] region. This is not reflected in the provision of permanent accommodation sites across the region.’ (Interview with Kirk Mulhearn, Education Officer, Showman’s Guild, Lancashire Section, 2007)

Here Kirk Mulhearn is emphasising a lack of knowledge about, and sensitivity to, the accommodation and related occupational needs of Showmen and their families by many local authorities. This lack of provision, or the inappropriateness nature and locations of much of the provision, results in Showmen being based in areas that are unsuitable in relation to the dispersed spatial distribution of fairs during the travelling season (every local authority area in the Northwest holds at least one fairground per year). These adverse occupational logistics force Showmen on numerous occasions throughout the travelling season to park on unauthorised sites (for example locally negotiated farmland, industrial, and other available spaces) or illegally on lay-bys and quiet or disused roadways. Currently there are 17 unauthorised stopping places for Showman to use whilst they are travelling in the Northwest (these are links that the Showmen have made over time – see Diagram A below). This is mainly land that is used for temporary unauthorised parking whilst travelling between official fairs during the fairground season. All of these sites have no mains electricity, water or sewerage. Diagram A below displays the regional breakdown of these accommodation types.

**Diagram A** displays the land type used for unauthorised parking

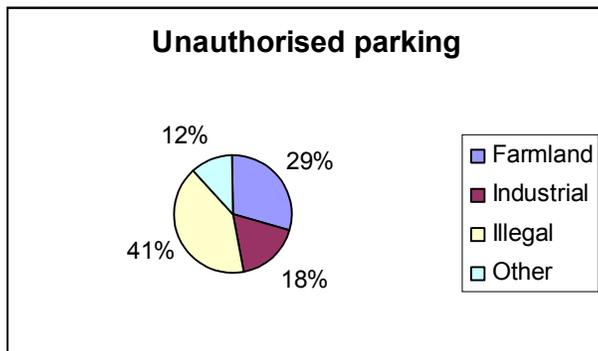


Diagram A highlights that 41% of temporary stopping places for the Showmen are illegal. Illegal parking is a last resort for showmen and generally not regarded as good practise as it usually takes the form of a roadside lay-by and can have adverse security implications (as well as legal) in that expensive equipment is prone to theft and damage. Personal safety is

also compromised as well as the security of expensive fairground equipment (Interviews with Showmen, 2007).

One major anomaly in provision that needs to be addressed here is the situation indicated by Table 1.2. This table shows that in Lancashire at the Hyndburn site there are 16 vacancies for pitches. However, Showmen (Interviews with Lancashire Section Planning Sub-committee members, 2007) explain that:

'the reality is, there just isn't 16 showmen in the Region to whom Hyndburn represents a suitable base, either by location towards their travelling season - or by the lack security of tenure.'

Accrington, the major urban centre in Hyndburn has only one fair per year, and this extensive site's location near the Pennines and at the periphery of the major regional fairs during the Showmen's travelling season makes it unattractive as an accommodation or storage base. Also, the short tenure and pitch rental nature of the site makes it unattractive to Showmen whose cultural aspirations would be to buy and own their own family pitch.

There are many repercussions for Showmen because of the lack of practical accommodation provision. For example, education for children becomes problematic particularly if there are no safe and consistent places to stay throughout the travelling season. Health care may suffer dramatically as a result as it is difficult to stick to regular doctor or hospital appointments in the same area if it is travelling season. The Showmen's Guild, Lancashire section stated that many showmen have painful and even fatal experiences of delayed diagnosis of illness.

The Showman's Guild, emphasise the real life difficulties and struggles of Showmen that occur in relation to poor accommodation and planning provision for Showmen (Interviews with Lancashire Section Planning Sub-committee members, 2007; see also Showmen's Guild website; Circular

22/91; Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople, January 2007). Tables 1.1 - 1.6 highlighted that almost all current sites are full or over-populated residentially and full or over-crowded with vehicles and fairground equipment. It was remarked by some Showmen that during the travelling season if Showmen wanted to return to their base rather than struggle to find somewhere to stay in the typical 3 to 4 day hiatus period between fairs, it would be very likely that the base site would be over-crowded and they would have great difficulty in accessing the site for parking and storage. Also the repetitive transportation of equipment back and forth from fair to base throughout the travelling season is not environmentally friendly. As Kirk Mulhearn (Interview with Kirk Mulhearn, Education Officer, Showman's Guild, Lancashire Section, 2007) asked:

'What effect on the environment in relation to CO2 emissions and carbon footprints do these wasted journeys have?'

The data collection showed that none of the Showmen and their families were regularly parked illegally (roadside or lay-by) on a full-time basis (see tables 1.1 - 1.6). Generally the Showman's lifestyle trajectory is to have a permanent, winter base (self-owned where possible) and travel throughout the fairground season for economic (and cultural) reasons.

The Showmen feel it is important to reflect their lifestyles as being culturally different to Gypsy and Traveller lifestyles. The 'Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople' (January 2007: 6) Circular states that:

'Travelling showpeople do not in general share the same culture or traditions as Gypsies and Travellers;'

Although there are nomadic similarities between the Showmen and other Traveller groups, the Showmen are keen to outline their different experiences in terms of socio-economic and cultural engagement with the settled

community. For example, a significant difference between Showmen and other Traveller groups is their complex relationship with local authorities in both their professional capacity and as residents who have or may require local authority services such as planning permissions and access to local accommodation. Showmen rely upon, and work closely with, all local authorities for venues on which to operate their traditional legally constituted funfairs. Funfairs take place on municipal parks, recreation grounds, public open spaces, leisure centres and with the knowledge, consent and support of many local authorities. Showmen and the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain have spent generations cultivating positive relationships with local authorities along these lines (Interviews with Showmen, 2007; see also Showmen's Guild website).

Therefore, the Showmen feel that unlike other Traveller groups they have a great deal more to lose, by forcing a planning issue or vociferously agitating to establish a need for accommodation by establishing unauthorised encampments public or private spaces or by regular illegal parking. There are numerous instances where Showmen have pulled on to an unauthorised site (albeit with the permission of the land owner), but to the displeasure of local residents, who in turn contact their local council. The showmen in question receive a visit from a group of council officials, who leave them in no doubt, that if they do not vacate immediately, the venues where they have operated their fairgrounds for generations will be in jeopardy (Ibid). The Showmen's Guild, Lancashire Section, confirms that the current accommodation situation for Showmen is very frustrating particularly as they fall between the twin pillars of planning legislation – business and domestic – both of which are usually treated as mutually exclusive in legislation and consequently in policy and provision. This prejudice around combining business activity and domestic life in the same spaces also infects public perspectives and by extension colours the views of many public representatives as to its acceptability as a legitimate mode of living (Power, 2004). The quote below from Kirk Mulhearn, Education Officer for The Showman's Guild, Lancashire

Section (Interview, 2007) encapsulates the tensions for Showmen around their family's needs, the maintenance and success of their business, and their complex accommodation needs:

'It is every Travellers aspiration regardless of background, is to own and develop a small piece of land to accommodate their own immediate family. To secure their own future. To be in charge of their own destiny. To have something to show for a lifetimes paying. You can rent for ever, and at the end of the day still have nothing to show for it. No security for your children or business. With renting, tenure is on a weekly or monthly basis. You can be thrown off at any time.'

### **Summary**

Currently Showmen's needs are not being met by local or national government in relation to accommodation. One main problem for the Showmen is the regional nature of their work during the travelling season when they may have to be in several geographically diverse places in as many weeks. Of the 41 Northwest local authorities covered in the report, all of them sanction any number of funfairs that operate throughout the fairground season and have done for generations. But strikingly 26 of these local authorities have no accommodation provision whatsoever for Showmen. As stated earlier, the distribution of Showmen's combined accommodation and parking sites is disproportionately concentrated in a few centres in stark contrast to the broad regional spread of Showmen's fairs throughout the Northwest. The combined-use nature of Showmen's sites also means vehicle over-crowding has a detrimental effect on pitch availability, and actual pitch numbers.

A better approach would be for more small family oriented sites, more evenly spread across the Region, than fewer large sites unsuitably located in areas that are often difficult to negotiate with heavy equipment. In simple terms, an acre of land can accommodate an extended family of 10 Showmen's homes including room for associated vehicles and equipment. If each of the 41 local authorities in the Region identified 1 acre of land for Showmen's use, in

fairness starting with the 26 local authorities who currently have no provision whatsoever, this would ultimately equate to 410 pitches including equipment and storage. This simple expedient would adequately address Showmen's accommodation needs in the Northwest for the next 15-20 years (Interviews with Showmen, 2006/7).

### **Key Recommendations**

- That local authorities and planning departments be aware of and implement in a positive manner the guidance outlined in the government's recently released 'Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople' (January 2007) where necessary.
- That local authorities meaningfully include Showmen in the accommodation needs assessments being carried out in relation to Housing Act 2004, and that these local authorities then respond positively to the findings in the spirit of the government's latest advisory planning document 'Consultation on revised planning guidance in relation to Travelling Showpeople (January 2007).
- That local authorities in the Northwest begin to take a regional perspective on the accommodation and travelling needs of the Showmen and their communities in order to develop a spatial strategy that appreciates the human and logistical tensions between the historical concentrations of pitches and the regionally dispersed nature of the funfairs they service. Local authorities should thus move towards a rationalisation of these issues to that benefit of everyone in the Region.
- That more detailed local and regional research be commissioned and carried out into the accommodation, welfare, health and education needs of Showmen's families – particularly in the Northwest.

- That local authorities begin to work closely in consultation with the Showmen's families and the Guild to find workable local solutions to move forward with planning policy and implementation (including improved site design and layout) in the Northwest Region.
- That local authorities pro-actively promote positive images of Showmen, their culture, their work and highlight their constructive contribution to communities in order to counteract prevalent negative stereotypes and misconceptions.
- That the emotional, spiritual and physical well-being of children, older people and other Showmen on sites be taken into account in planning policy and practice, and that other relevant service providers engage with the needs of showmen.

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This report is the property of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, Lancashire Section, who collected the regional statistical data. The report was written by Dr Colm Power with research input from Louise Dawson, both from the research consultancy AVT-interventions.