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2
Conflict sites in a time of crisis

Negotiating a space and place for Gypsies and Travellers

Jo Richardson

Introduction

Within the realm of the ‘politics of home’ the debate on provision and management of sites is often conflict-ridden. The result is a shortage of sites for Gypsies and Travellers to live on, leading to poorer health, educational and employment outcomes. Also, observable in the many areas with insufficient site accommodation is an increase in unauthorised encampments and, in parallel, a decline in social cohesion. Conflict arises in social and political discourse on the subject of Gypsy and Traveller sites, for example when a proposed site is planned for an area. This conflict occurs particularly, but not exclusively, when Gypsies and Travellers stop on the roadside, or other public spaces, and create unauthorised encampments. However, there are examples where the complexity of this challenge is acknowledged by a range of organisations and people in one area, and where a more agile approach to problem solving is achieved to move from conflict to inclusion in accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers. This chapter argues that conflict is important in redressing power imbalances, but that better management through negotiation can move the situation on to one of inclusion and accommodation. This contribution will first set out a historical development of the conflict surrounding accommodation for Travellers, to explain the current context of conflict. It then examines a theoretical
framework of different perspectives on land use for ‘home’ and the relationship with various notions of home and place; this draws particularly on explanations from Lefebvre’s discussion of perceived and conceived spaces to try to understand the complex challenges and to frame the political and social struggles inherent in site delivery. Finally, the chapter will move from conflict to inclusion by examining some of the findings from a research project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) which sought to understand the different levels of and conditions for, and conflict within, Gypsy and Traveller site delivery and management in order to offer principles on negotiation that may help people and places relate to one another in a more inclusive way. Some ideas, such as negotiated stopping, could achieve lower costs for local authorities and better cohesion for communities; in some cases, improved outcomes are negotiated to improve policy, planning, design and delivery of sites.

**Historical development of accommodation conflict**

There is little accurate data for the population size of Roma, Gypsies and Travellers; they live in most member states of Europe and it is estimated that there are approximately ten million across the continent. The size of Britain’s Traveller and Gypsy population is also an estimate, with Council of Europe figures compiled by Liégeois putting it at between 150,000 and 300,000, with approximately two-thirds now living in settled housing (some through choice but many because there were insufficient sites and continuous evictions forced many to move into houses). Whilst the majority of Roma, Gypsies and Travellers are found in Europe, there are populations of Roma, Gypsies and Travellers throughout the world, but most particularly in the Middle East and the United States of America.

Gypsies were first recorded in British history in 1502 in Scotland, and in England from 1514. Roma populations across Europe are members of the same ethno-social group as British Gypsies, but their ancestors settled in other European countries (mainly in Central and Eastern Europe) earlier in the migration process which started in India and culminated in this population reaching the UK more than 500 years ago. Gypsies were welcomed by ‘commoners’ who had work that needed doing and who also wanted entertaining. The church objected to palmistry and fortune telling, and the authorities were concerned that was not easy to ‘register’ the travelling people for details such as name and date of birth. This lack of governmental control is possibly one of the
reasons for the state’s treatment of Gypsies and Travellers still today; it is one of the central tensions in the relationship between both the state and Gypsies, and between non-Gypsies (Gaujos) and Gypsies.

Appleby Fair was registered as a horse trading fair in 1685, and Gypsies from across the country continue to gather every June to trade horses and meet socially. In this aspect, Gypsy culture has been celebrated, but even in this context, to this day, there are debates on policing and crime which detract from this historic cultural event. In 1780, some of the anti-Gypsy laws, introduced in the mid-1500s by Henry VIII, started to be repealed, although not all. With the introduction of the Turnpike Act in 1822, Gypsies that camped on the roadside were fined. During the Victorian era Gypsies and Travellers were certainly ‘othered’ in discourse. The year 1908 saw the introduction of the Children’s Act in England, which made education compulsory for Gypsy children for half of the year; this was continued in the 1944 Education Act. During the Second World War the Nazis drew up a list of Gypsies for internment, and the holocaust of the Gypsies in Europe is well documented.

The post-war period witnessed major and often centrally driven programmes to create social housing, but these approaches were not applied to Traveller sites. In 1960, the Caravan Sites (Control of Development) Act caused the closure of many stopping-places used by Gypsies and Travellers as they moved around the country. The 1968 Caravan Sites Act required local authorities to provide sites for Gypsies in England. However, the Act was never fully enforced and the envisaged post-war network of sites did not come to fruition. Nevertheless, the Act later created the statutory duty of local authorities to provide accommodation on caravan sites for Gypsies residing in or resorting to their areas; this effectively created a duty for councils to design, build and manage sites. There was also recognition at this time that it might be necessary to accept the establishment of sites in protected areas, such as the green belt.

In 1993, the Conservative government announced its intention to introduce legislation to reform the Caravan Sites Act (1968) and it is from this period in recent history that the shortcomings in legislation and policies contribute particularly to the lack of suitable accommodation today. In 1994, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act repealed many of the legal duties to provide sites. The shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites in England increased following the abolition of the duty on local authorities to provide sites contained within the Act and the replacement of this duty with Planning Circular 1/94, which sought to privatise Traveller site provision; but the absence of a duty meant many local authorities chose to ignore this guidance.
The subsequent Labour government, which came to power in 1997, placed a statutory duty on local authorities to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers in the Housing Act 2004. The assessment of need fed into regional spatial strategies and determined how many pitches were needed within each authority in the region. Planning Circular 1/06 obliged local authorities to identify land in their Development Plans appropriate for Traveller sites; but there was very little oversight of the implementation of strategic planning for sites and, although there were some successes in delivering Traveller site accommodation, to this day there are very many local authorities without sites located in their plans.

The turn to localism under the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government from 2010 saw the abolition of regional planning bodies, and there were further changes in planning legislation and guidance under the National Planning Policy Guidance and more specifically the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites. The limited successes in site delivery starting to emerge from previous policies were slowed considerably by changes made by government policy in 2010 and again more recently in 2015 and 2016. Revised planning guidance published in 2015 made drastic amendments to the very definition of Gypsies and Travellers in planning law: not recognising those who had ‘settled’ in one place because of old age or of other reasons, even though they were recognised under equalities legislation as ethnic groups. The Housing and Planning Act in 2016 removed the duty to undertake separate Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs assessments, and there has been concern registered subsequently that accommodation needs assessment figures are being revised downwards to reflect a reduction in the numbers of Gypsies and Travellers recognised under planning law, albeit not an actual reduction in real people needing site accommodation.

Today, Gypsies and Travellers live in bricks and mortar housing, on private sites, on local authority/housing association sites or on the roadside. Some Travellers are settled well in housing and prefer this mode of accommodation, but there are Travellers who tell researchers that they would move back onto a site if sufficient appropriate sites were available. The legislation related to planning defines Gypsies and Travellers now according to nomadic habit for work; but equalities legislation recognises the ethnic definition that means a Gypsy is still a Gypsy when living in a house. The conflict over accommodation and site is inextricably linked to conflict over definitions and identity.
Conflict, space and identity

Different aspects of space are the source for conflict in the planning system on any planning applications whether for new homes, wind farms or indeed Gypsy and Traveller sites. Fragmented societies create challenges for planning and there is a need to recognise difference, understand past trauma and engage in participatory planning processes so that communities get to know each other better.9 Indeed, Forester makes the point that planning education and training have traditionally neglected skills to tackle conflict and tension in the planning process.10 Space is contested and it is represented and perceived in different ways – the construction of ‘green belt’ in the mind’s eye of people objecting to plans for new sites, for example, is particularly interesting in the examination and consideration of planning inspectors’ language in their decision making.

Porter says:

the structures of meaning and authorities of truth that give planning agency in the world are drenched in the colonial historiographies, and so the colonial relations of domination and oppression are ever present. … If planning is a producer of place, what does it claim is worth producing and how is this particular view of the world continually mediated and reconstituted?11

Additional consideration may be needed in planning, particularly in rural areas, because of romantic notions in discourse of the ‘green belt’ and the subsequent effect that this has on those who build homes in rural areas. Sturzaker and Shucksmith also examine planning for housing in rural areas and they argue that vested powers and interests can have an effect which increases exclusion:

[A]n ‘unholy alliance’ of rural elites and urban interests have wielded discursive power to define ‘sustainability’ on their own terms, which exacerbates the unaffordability of rural housing, leading to social injustice and spatial exclusion.12

Planning for ‘affordable’ housing is challenging enough in rural areas. When one considers Sturzaker and Shucksmith’s comments in light of the difficulties in planning for Gypsy and Traveller sites in areas particularly where the only available land is in the green belt, it could be
considered that Gypsies and Travellers are spatially segregated in liminal spaces on the edge of communities.

Conflict occurs in spaces where there isn’t a common ‘language’. Places where there is no shared understanding of different histories, cultures and races living within, or on the outskirts of such spaces, can exacerbate the feeling of strangeness and difference and lead to a lack of empathy which can in turn lead to further conflict. Zygmunt Bauman recognised how, when neighbours were made to seem ‘other’ and different, it was easier to acquiesce to discrimination and subsequent horror. Miles Hewstone also demonstrates the need for proximity in his study of ‘contact theory’ as a method to explore better relations between different ethnic groups in a school that was in an area where racial tension had been high.

In the context of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation the problems of ‘othering’ and construction of strangeness are at their most stark where land, such as the green belt, is held by the wider community as ‘sacred’ and is seen as being under threat when it is used for stopping places or even for permanent sites. A particular ‘them and us’ scenario can take hold when there is a wider shortage of affordable housing and where general housing development particularly in urban areas is increasing in density. It can then feel like there is seen to be a fight over dwindling resources, which is exacerbated by the current financial crisis. Where communities are struggling to provide sufficient housing that can be accessed by people generally, anything that is seen to be different or provided in a special case can fuel feelings of resentment and further fuel latent conflict. Local authority councillors can feel trapped in these spaces of conflict, and are also, in some cases, concerned about the impact of residents’ opinions on their ability to retain political power. Understanding the motivation behind ‘no’ to allowing an informal stopping arrangement, or ‘no’ to supporting a planning application for a new permanent site where it is needed, is important to unlocking a less conflicting approach to local planning debates for Gypsy/Traveller sites. ‘No’ may be explained through a lack of understanding of different groups’ claims and aspirations for space and place; tensions in differing perceptions of place and links with cultural histories create an incoherent conversation in future planning.

Lefebvre examines perceived realms in space. He discusses the need for interconnectedness between ‘lived, real and perceived realms’ and makes it very clear that this concept should not be viewed in the abstract, if its importance is to be retained:
That the lived, conceived and perceived realms should be interconnected, so that the ‘subject’, the individual member of a given social group may move from one to another without confusion – so much is a logical necessity. Whether they constitute a coherent whole is another matter. They probably do in favourable circumstances, when a common language, a consensus and a code can be established.  

Favourable circumstances for interconnectedness between these realms certainly do not exist in the process and debate surrounding planning policy for Gypsy and Traveller sites. One cannot see evidence of a common language, code or consensus between different groups and individuals living in a particular geographical area, and therefore it is unlikely that Lefebvre’s conceptual triad can be anything but abstract in the realm of planning policy and decision making for the use of space in relation to Gypsy and Traveller site provision. Indeed, the language surrounding debate on providing sites is divided and divisive, as previous research on the use of discourse to control Gypsy and Traveller issues has shown.

These different aspects of space are the source for conflict in the planning system on many planning applications whether for new homes, wind farms or indeed Gypsy and Traveller sites. Lefebvre’s analysis of ‘contradictory space’ touches on the emotional connectedness with space as lived experience, rather than abstract planning policy. He says:

‘Human beings’ do not stand before, or amidst, social space; they do not relate to the space of society as they might to a picture, a show, or a mirror. They know that they have a space and that they are in this space. They do not merely enjoy a vision, a contemplation, a spectacle – for they act and situate themselves in space as active participants.

If the lived, real and perceived realms of local residents, councillors and Gypsy/Travellers in an area could find a connected discourse, a shared language, then there is a greater possibility of sharing understandings of the history and culture of places and the people who live there or travel through on a habitual basis. Debates on location in space for Gypsy/Traveller sites can range from the blatantly hostile ‘we don’t want them anywhere – ever’ to more reasoned arguments in ‘fairness’ of having a site in a particular area. However, ‘fairness’ of location rarely includes the preferences of Gypsies and Travellers, but rather focuses
on discussion of locations that might cause least impact on the wider community. As a result, sites have typically been built in liminal spaces of least resistance, next to railway sidings and rubbish dumps, near sewage works and under fly-overs – often on the edge of towns, reflecting the perceived otherness in the physical separation.

The perception of space itself is also an emotional consideration. Lefebvre’s work shows the connection between human beings and space which prohibits the view of space in an abstract form, because it is lived experience. So, as important as it is to consider reasoning and objective criteria in conflict resolution approaches, as suggested by Fisher and Ury, it is also necessary to consider emotions such as fear, in the debate on planning for sites. Forester challenges, ‘When interests clash, we bargain and negotiate. But when our values conflict, then what?’

Deep conflict goes beyond a single issue such as planning accommodation in an area and starts to delve into strongly held values. Such values may be linked to, for example, the belief that the green belt is sacrosanct, or to perceptions of what other people (those for whom the accommodation is planned) represent. So, for Gypsies and Travellers, there are perceptions that they represent ‘cost and mess’ when in fact, this is not universally true. There can also be perceptions based on erroneous media representations of the character of Gypsy and Traveller people that fuels fears. There is a vicious circle at work here: because Gypsies and Travellers are seen to be different and strange they are at best afforded sites on the edge of communities and at worst moved on from place to place. Then, because of the exclusion and lack of contact, there is little opportunity for them to be seen as ‘neighbours’ and when new sites are proposed to meet need there is objection because ‘they’re not like us’, and so the distance in space and perceived values grows.

Forester suggests that ‘as we differ on basic beliefs … we might still come to agree upon specific practical actions’. Healey adds that through mediation and discursive practices people come to understand different points of view, reflect on their own view, and that ‘a store of mutual understanding is built up’. This mutual understanding has yet to manifest in many Gypsy/Traveller planning decisions, though, either at strategic or individual planning application level. Kaufman and Smith propose that, in conflict over land use, issues are framed and reframed as part of the reconciliation of differences. Reframing the debate, recognising differences in emotional attachment to place and identity, is vital if conflict is to be negotiated and site accommodation provided in the future where necessary.
From conflict to negotiation

A research project, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, was undertaken by Richardson and Codona from 2014 to 2016 to look at site management and delivery and the negotiation of conflict inherent in this. The project included visits to 54 Traveller sites across the UK, and interviews with 122 Gypsies and Travellers and with 95 professionals including staff involved with housing, planning, health, education and the police. The project found that planning for and managing Gypsy and Traveller sites in the UK certainly constitute a complex challenge, as there are numerous interconnecting strands and multiple places of resistance. There were a number of examples of internal conflict – between different departments of the same council, or between agencies that would normally work together – and this impeded sound management and delivery of Gypsy and Traveller sites. In addition to this there was evidence in some areas of external conflict and objection to plans for new sites from wider community members, neighbours and politicians. The multiple layers of conflict needed identifying first before plans were put in place to communicate, negotiate and resolve management and delivery issues.

The need for communication and negotiation differs according to the type of conflict issue. The word ‘conflict’ was used in the research to encompass a range of actions and emotions – mostly low-level, everyday disagreement. During the course of the 18 months of data collection, the research team came to use the term ‘everyday grind’ for this low-level conflict, and indeed when this was reflected back to interviewees as part of the sense-making process there were nods and grumbles that this encapsulated the feeling very well. The research found a number of areas where conflict was evident, and the report includes examples related to management of social sites, but the key moments in terms of understanding the relationship between people and place, and the perceptions of identity and place discussed by Lefebvre, were planning for new sites and managing unauthorised encampments.

Planning for new sites: a political and media battle zone

There is negative media representation of Gypsies and Travellers, apparent not only in programmes like Big Fat Gypsy Weddings and articles in the popular press, but also in soft media hostility and marginalisation through ‘under-the-line’ comments on web-based news articles and social media web pages; viral vilification is rife. This exclusion and
vilification has been compounded by poor access to services, a lack of political power and the exclusion of Gypsies and Travellers from decision-making processes. Alongside this is wider confusion in media and political debate on who Gypsies and Travellers are. This has not been helped by changes to definitions under the 2015 Planning Policy for Traveller Sites, which does not recognise Gypsies and Travellers who have ceased their nomadic life for health or educational reasons but who still define as Gypsy or Traveller as their ethnic status under equalities legislation. This confusion on definition is seen in planning debates amongst professionals, but is also reflected in wider media and public discourse on the issue, which can feed conflict and objection to new site proposals.

It takes determined political will to support site delivery in the face of hegemonic negative discourse, but there are strong leaders willing to show the way. In research interviews for the project, in an area in the south-west of England, Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors, who helped to deliver a new site in their area, said of their councillor colleagues in the planning decision-making process, ‘Members did what was right rather than what was easy.’ The evidence of need was there, the imperative to provide for the residents on the long-standing unauthorised site was there, and the local politicians realised this was the right thing to do. There was a need though for a conflict to exist – in this area there was an unauthorised encampment which caused complaints from local people to councillors, so there was a ‘problem’ and a conflict that needed resolving and the provision of a new site, although the process itself was full of conflict and complaint, was a way of resolving the tension. It is harder to argue for a new site to be delivered when there is not a visible or tangible problem to resolve.

Planning for sites anywhere is challenging, but the objection to plans can be amplified when ‘green belt’ is mentioned, taking on mythical proportions. Communities see this as in need of ‘protection’, adding perceived moral weight to arguments. However, there is a need to untangle the emotional discussions of what green belt means to different parts of communities and to recognise that before abstract and structured designations of land in plans, Travellers have for centuries stopped on common land and green space as part of their nomadic culture. There are emotional connections to historic stopping places that if Gypsies and Travellers were able to safely share their ideas and memories of their conceived and lived space this would allow a more meaningful debate for the purposes of perceiving space and planning places for the future.28
Policy-designed conflict: unauthorised encampments

One of the most evident spaces of designed-in conflict is in policies on unauthorised encampments, and this was found in the JRF study. An insufficient number of sites, combined with a policy of walling off common land and deep verges that were traditional stopping places, leads to unauthorised encampments. Government policy puts a squeeze on more informal transitory stopping on traditional cultural or trade routes and there is an expectation to ‘settle’ whether on authorised sites or in houses. The objection to encampments in green belt areas takes on the feel of a battle for a mythical space which must be protected from settlement, even where this is on an informal and temporary basis, and where this may have been a traditional pattern of travel in an area of centuries.

The traditional model of dealing with unauthorised encampments sees enforcement, eviction and move-on as the norm, and this can create conflict between Gypsies, Travellers, police, local authorities and settled residents in a community.

There are different methods of responding to unauthorised encampments (UEs). One is an approach of ‘toleration’ or, better, ‘negotiation’ – where encampments are in appropriate places and where they are only going to remain for a short period of time. Police guidance on unauthorised encampments sets out how powers should be used, and in her Preface to the guidance, in an echo of the idea that provision is the best way to reduce UEs, the lead author of the ACPO Gypsy and Traveller Portfolio wrote:

> The purpose of the police is to protect people from harm. To this end, this Portfolio will encourage the provision of sufficient accommodation on small, properly managed sites, with access to health, education and all services, which we will police according to need.29

Much government guidance has made clear that the best way of preventing UEs and keeping costs down is by being proactive and providing accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers to reside in or stop on for a period of time; however, other polices on planning, for example on protecting the green belt, conflict with this and create a divisive context for decision making on delivery. Providing an appropriate mix of permanent and transit sites in an area is by far the most expedient method of preventing unauthorised encampments, and negotiation is a more agile and flexible approach to dealing with encampments that do arise in order to ease conflicts.
Where there is not sufficient site accommodation, there will undoubtedly be higher costs associated with UEs – either in cost of clearing after a site if rubbish collection has not been made available, or in legal costs of bringing a case. In areas which engage with residents in UEs and where a period of ‘toleration’ is given, costs can be further reduced to the council if rubbish collection and toilet facilities can be arranged, with a fee payable by the UE residents by negotiation.

There are clearly costs associated with UEs – these are social costs (to the Gypsy and Traveller families themselves and to cohesion with the ‘settled’ community) and financial costs. Morris and Clements said:

It is probably safe to assume that the actual figure of £6 million derived from this research could be multiplied a number of times before the real annual cost of managing unauthorised encampments is reached.30

The JRF research project examined a policy of ‘negotiated stopping’ in one city, which – through using negotiation rather than eviction, where appropriate, on unauthorised encampments – means there are better social outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers and economic savings made for the public purse. This approach required a great deal of political will and engagement of council staff and Gypsy/Traveller advocates; however, more recently this will appears to have diminished due to a harsher political and ideological standpoint, which has interrupted the amplification of this approach both within and beyond the city. Negotiated stopping is basically an approach taken by police and the council that where an encampment arises there will be an assessment of whether, if it is in an area that is not hazardous or doing undue harm, there will be a short period of ‘toleration’ rather than eviction straight away. In adopting an approach that allows real listening and two-way communication there are social and economic benefits. The study team looked at this initiative further and asked for costs from the Traveller team and police; it found a clear business case for a negotiated approach. More importantly, there is a clear social benefit to providing a negotiated approach, offering accommodation in the broadest sense of the term to Travellers and stepping back from conflict to show the possibility of allowing informal use of spaces where it causes no harm. In not moving on and evicting, there is then opportunity for living alongside one another, hearing each other’s connection with places in the locality, and accepting and accommodating difference. The potential for this approach to save local authorities money and improve community cohesion could go a long
way to redressing some of the resulting conflict from the shortcomings in government policy.

Necessary conditions, and tools for negotiation

The identity of Gypsies and Travellers is wrapped up in the place where they live; accommodation on a site, rather than in a house, is inextricably linked to Traveller identity and this has been tested in planning decisions and in the courts. As Lawrence Susskind remarks on value conflicts, ‘Compromise … means abandoning deeply held beliefs, values or ideals. To negotiate away values is to risk giving up one’s identity.’\(^{31}\) So, if Gypsies and Travellers are no longer allowed to travel and use traditional informal stopping places along the way, and if developing an authorised site is blocked by public objection and planning constraints, conflict between travelling and settled people seems inevitable.

John Forester suggested not mystifying value differences: ‘even in the face of deep value differences, many practical resolutions may be possible, even if – or indeed because – asking parties to change their fundamental beliefs is often *neither* necessary nor relevant to settling the dispute at hand’.\(^ {32} \) Indeed, in previous research Richardson found that practical cases could be made to gain political support for site delivery through economic and legal arguments, rather than moral/social (more value-laden) arguments.\(^ {33} \) Nevertheless, experience since that research, a better understanding of the literature and a reading of theorists like Lefebvre suggest that both practical issues and emotional values are important. Whilst many negotiation approaches suggest separating the issues and values to make practical progress, it is vital first to understand and listen to emotions and values that connect people, identity and place, before we can move on to working through the issues.

The research found a number of conditions present in areas where there was particularly noticeable conflict, two key amongst these were:

1. a crisis or ‘tipping point’
2. residents collectively voicing and demonstrating dissatisfaction.

Looking at the first condition – the need for a tipping point – the widely reported story of local residents blocking access to a new temporary site for Travellers who had recently lost many members of their family in a fire on their site, is one particularly stark example which the research team followed up with a visit to the area and discussed with an advocacy
group working with Travellers. The objection of neighbours to the proposed temporary site to house survivors of the Carrickmines site in Ireland horrified many observers. In addition to the human tragedy, this action seemed at odds with good neighbourliness and understanding from settled residents. It is suggested by those working in the area that part of the hostility stemmed from the fact that Carrickmines itself was supposed to be a temporary site to house the family following a previous tragedy, but that it had been in place for seven years. Therefore, when the council, following the fire, told neighbouring residents that the proposed site to house families would be a temporary measure, there was a sense of disbelief. Following the blockade of the first proposed temporary site, instead of forcing residents to move their vehicles and let the Travellers move there, the council found an alternative location, away from residential areas, ‘near a dump, of course’ as one person told the research team. The permanent site which will house the families is, according to the local Traveller Forum, due for completion towards the end of 2017.

In relation to the second condition – voiced dissatisfaction – residents demonstrating dissatisfaction, through anti-social behaviour or escalated disagreements manifesting in violence, were particularly prevalent in areas where lines of communication were not open between site managers and residents on existing sites. The ‘everyday grind’ can build up and dissatisfaction with a site can cause residents to argue with one another over scarce resources which may result in anti-social behaviour, or there can be disagreements and breakdown in working relationships between residents and site managers. In relation to the ‘everyday grind’ conflict resulting from poor design and process opacity, the tool of ‘truth and reconciliation’ resonated particularly with one senior officer in one of the case studies when it was mentioned as a conflict resolution method during an interview (perhaps because of the respondent’s experience of working in South Africa previously) and he could see how it might be important in this research context of Gypsy and Traveller issues. This would require acknowledgement at least of previous grievances and issues. Where the second condition was particularly effective was in areas of collectively voiced dissatisfaction either through a constituted representative group, or through the sheer number of complaints on a single issue.

The research team also noted conditions then necessary to engage in negotiation to move out of conflict. Key amongst these, were:

1. Evidence that adversarial processes cost more than negotiation on unauthorised encampments, such as with the example of
negotiated stopping where large annual savings are made. This must also be matched with elected members demonstrating political leadership and being open to evidence along with a willingness to resolve problems, as was seen in Leeds.

2. Strong resident voice, not only through advocacy organisations in an area, but residents on a site taking positive and co-operative action to voice dissatisfaction. But this must also be matched with site residents’ willingness to work with councils and housing associations, talk with neighbours and offer to be part of a solution.

Conflict resolution and negotiation approaches are useful methods to make headway in the management of existing sites and the delivery of new sites. The methods employ real listening techniques, with an open mind, to all parties, based on issues rather than historic positions; this links to understanding people’s perception of space and notions of their own identity. This process is not typical currently, with many debates, particularly on new site delivery, being position-based and with patchy consultation and communication.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted some of the key conflicts inherent in the public and political debate on land use, particularly problematic for ‘outsider’ groups such as Gypsies and Travellers. Through reflection on a theoretical framework focusing on key thinkers such as Lefebvre, it is argued that in order to move on from conflict, the emotional attachment to identity and place must be acknowledged: rational, criteria-based planning debates alone will not work. The key to approaching this is through listening and use of conflict resolution tools which could acknowledge the impact of existing planning policy shortcomings and set the stage for a more negotiated approach to relating people and places to one another in a more cohesive way. Challenges and conflicts tend to occur at all stages of Gypsy/Traveller-related policy, planning for sites, and site delivery and management. The study found that conflict can be ‘designed in’ through ill-conceived policy and legislation. There are particular conditions, found in the research, that need to be present for successful negotiation of conflict, and the chapter makes some recommendations for policy, planning, design and delivery of Gypsy/Traveller sites; but it can be done. The example of ‘negotiated stopping’ is an approach ripe for adaptation across Britain; such new principles
of listening and liaising should be integrated into existing policies and actions by local authorities in order to achieve lower costs, better negotiation procedures for talking with Gypsies and Travellers, and more cohesive communities. The theoretical framework suggests that before it can be successful and sustainable there must be local debates which recognise the emotional attachments to place and share the histories of people who have travelled through and settled in locations for better shared understanding which will accommodate different attachments to and uses of space.