

**REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY
SINGLE ISSUE REVIEW
PLANNING FOR GYPSY & TRAVELLER ACCOMODATION
DRAFT POLICY**

(Joint Report by Head of Planning Services and Head of Housing Services)

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is to determine the Council's response to the Draft Policy put forward by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) which sets out the numbers of additional Gypsy and Traveller Pitches to be accommodated by each local planning authority.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Government's Circular 01/2006 requires the RSS to identify the total number of pitches needed (but not their location) for each local planning authority area in the light of local Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) and a strategic view of needs across the region. The emerging RSS (due to be adopted in the near future) does not address this matter which is why the single issue policy review is needed.
- 2.2 In coming to a strategic view of needs across the region, EERA commissioned research to reconcile the various Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) which have been or are being prepared at a sub-regional level. The GTAA for the wider Cambridge Sub-Region of May 2006 identified that the need in Huntingdonshire for the period to 2011 is for an additional 15 to 25 pitches. In Huntingdonshire at the time of the survey (2005) there were 20 pitches (with a capacity for 36 caravans) on the County Council owned site at St. Neots, while the average number of unauthorised caravans 2002-2004 was 14 caravans.
- 2.3 The Council will be preparing a Development Plan Document (DPD) for Sites for Gypsies and Travellers and the programme for its production is set out in the Local Development Scheme. The programme reflects the need to ensure that the DPD is consistent with the both the RSS policy and the emerging Core Strategy. Consistent with Government Guidance as set out in Circular 01/2006 regarding this transitional period, this Council has recently granted temporary planning permission for a number of pitches. These are sites which could potentially be options for allocations in the Development Plan Document (DPD). If they are translated into allocations, which could then be granted permanent planning

permission, they would count towards the additional requirement. Any permanent permission for pitches granted ahead of the DPD would also count towards this requirement.

- 2.4 EERA consulted on “Issues and Options” in May 2007 which showed two options for the distribution for the period to 2011. Option A distributed pitches according to where the need was identified; Option B sought some redistribution by requiring all LPAs to provide at least 15 additional pitches. In both Options, the requirement for Huntingdonshire was 20 pitches. This was consistent with the need for 15-25 additional pitches identified in the Cambridgeshire Sub-Regional Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) of 2006.
- 2.5 Cabinet considered this matter on 19th July 2007 and agreed that the Council’s response should be that needs should be met where they arise.

3 THE DRAFT POLICY

The Number and Distribution of Pitches

- 3.1 EERA submitted the draft policy to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 25th February, with the associated consultation running for 12 weeks until 16th May.
- 3.2 The draft policy requires at least 1,187 net additional permanent residential pitches to be provided over the period 2006 to 2011. This would see the number of authorised pitches in the Region rise from 1836 (2006) to 3023 (2011). For Huntingdonshire the figures would be the existing 20 pitches as at 2006 rising to 40 pitches by 2011 i.e. an increase of 20 pitches.
- 3.3 In terms of the requirement for Huntingdonshire of 20 additional pitches, the draft policy is consistent with the level of need identified in the GTAA and is thus also consistent with the Council’s previous representation that our local need should be met where it arises. However, Members should be aware that the policy is based on the principle of redistribution across the Region based on Option B as set out in paragraph 2.4 above, requiring all Local Planning Authorities to provide at least 15 pitches as some councils, unlike Huntingdonshire, have made no provision.
- 3.4 It is considered that the response from this Council should be to support the draft policy as it affects Huntingdonshire on the basis that it is consistent with the need identified in a very thorough assessment of local needs and is therefore consistent with the evidence base. However, as the redistribution suggested by the draft policy would see a requirement for provision in some areas where need has not been identified it may well be challenged by those local authorities who wish to continue to make no or inadequate provision and they may seek to amend the draft policy to alter the distribution – and that could therefore impact on Huntingdonshire’s potential requirement. It is important therefore that this Council’s response indicates that it would oppose such a change in approach.

Provision beyond 2011

- 3.5 The Gypsy and Travellers Sites DPD for Huntingdonshire will cover the period to 2021 which is consistent with Government Guidance. However, the RSS Draft Policy only gives specific guidance to 2011 as GTAA's have difficulty in identifying need over a longer term. For the longer period, based on general research, the Draft Policy proposes that provision should be made on the basis of an annual 3% increase on the overall planned provision in 2011, with each district continuing to have the same proportion of additional provision as they were required to have between 2006 and 2011. For Huntingdonshire this would translate into a further 18 pitches being required for the period 2011 – 21 with the total additional pitches therefore being 38 pitches for the period 2006 – 2021.
- 3.6 Until there is a further GTAA undertaken for the Cambridgeshire area, there is little evidence to warrant challenging this assumption as it takes into account projected changes in household size, birth rates etc within the Gypsy and Traveller communities. However, the Policy should contain clear reasoning, which is currently lacking, as to why a 3% compound annual rate of increase is proposed.

Transit provision and Travelling Showpeople

- 3.7 The draft policy states that the figures included in the policy do not include any provision for transit sites or the needs of Travelling Showpeople. It simply states that this is the subject of "ongoing research". It would be helpful if it were to indicate that this is to be the subject of a future review of the policy.

4 Recommendation

- 4.1 It is recommended that the following representations be made on the Draft Policy:
1. The Council supports the draft policy as it affects Huntingdonshire on the basis that it is consistent with the local need identified in a very thorough assessment of need and is therefore consistent with the evidence base.
 2. The Council notes that the distribution across the Region requires all local authorities to provide at least some pitches including in areas where previously no or little provision has been made. The Council reserves its position should some local authorities seek to challenge this equality of provision by any alternative redistribution which would see unjustified increase in provision within its area.
 3. The Policy should contain clear reasoning as to why a 3% compound annual rate of increase is proposed.
 4. The Policy should include an indication that a future review of the Policy will need to take into account the need for transit sites and the needs of Travelling Showpeople.

Background Papers:

Planning for Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation in the East of England: Issues & Options Consultation Document; *East of England Regional Assembly, May 2007.*

Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites, Circular 1/2006, ODPM February 2006.

Cambridge Sub-Region Traveller Needs Assessment; Anglia Ruskin University/Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, May 2006.

Agenda & Minutes Huntingdonshire District Council Cabinet 19th July 2007.

Draft Policy RSS Single Issue Review: Planning for Gypsy & Traveller accommodation in the East of England EERA February 2008.

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