

COMT
O&S
CABINET

3 November 2009
10 November 2009
18 November 2009

TRAVELLERS' TRANSIT SITE PROVISION

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

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To advise Cabinet of the implications of the approved East of England Plan policy on Gypsies and Travellers and in particular with regard to the requirement for councils to make provision for transit sites.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The single issue review of the East of England Plan (the Regional Spatial Strategy or RSS) for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation was completed with the publication of the final policy by the Secretary of State in July 2009.
- 2.2 For Huntingdonshire the final requirements are:
- To make provision for 25 additional permanent residential pitches by 2011 (and a further 21 for the period 2011-2021).
 - To potentially make provision for part of the requirement for 40 transit pitches in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
 - To potentially make provision for part of the requirement for 18 additional plots for Travelling Showpeople in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, with provision beyond 2011 being made on the basis of an annual 1.5% compound increase in plots.
- 2.3 The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Councils are required to work together to decide how to apportion the requirement for transit pitches and Travelling Showpeople plots between the five District Councils and Peterborough City Council. Officers of all the Councils have met to consider how this might be achieved given the concerns that the lack of District figures in the RSS could lead to delays in the production of Development Plan Documents.
- 2.4 Given the lack of available resources and the urgency required to meet DPD timescales, Officers have concluded that it would not be appropriate to use consultants to undertake the additional work but rather to make use

of existing joint working arrangements, information and expertise. This will include liaison with the "Sites Group" of the Cambridgeshire Strategic Travellers Co-ordinating Group.

3 TRANSIT PROVISION

- 3.1 It is likely that Huntingdonshire will be required to make some transit provision given the evidence from Cambridgeshire Police that there is pressure along the A1/A1(M) corridor and the basis of the locational guidance in the RSS policy which indicates 'Cambridge area, Fenland, Huntingdonshire and Peterborough'. The policy states that local authorities should work together to establish the network of transit pitches.
- 3.2 Responses to the Issues consultation on the Huntingdonshire Gypsy and Traveller DPD also indicated a general acceptance that there is a need for a transit site in the District.
- 3.3 Fenland has now granted planning permission for 9 transit pitches, but implementation is awaiting funding. It is understood that Peterborough City Council may also be seeking a site for transit provision. South Cambridgeshire is proposing 10 pitches at Milton by the A14 in its Site Options consultation. Through an Executive Member decision, Huntingdonshire has advised South Cambridgeshire that it considers that it would be a better use of the site, which is currently used for permanent pitches, if it were to remain as 15 pitches rather than being reduced to 10.
- 3.4 As well as being a requirement of the RSS policy, there are advantages in there being a formal and well managed Transit site within the District. The Government recognises that unauthorised encampments cause local problems. It therefore encourages bids for funding to provide a full grant covering the cost of the provision of a new transit site. Once a transit site is provided, guidance and powers are in place to enable the police to direct Travellers who park on local authority land without authorisation to move immediately to the transit site. A transit site within the District would therefore provide a facility for the Gypsies and Travellers who pass through Huntingdonshire and help to reduce or even eliminate the number of unauthorised encampments which take place each year.
- 3.5 The matter was considered by the Steering Group for the Gypsy and Travelling DPD on 17th September. The Group agreed that Cabinet should be requested to authorise a search for a site on which to establish a transit site subject to government funding support being forthcoming.
- 3.6 If this Council were to agree in principle that there should be a transit site within its boundaries, this would assist and inform the DPD process which is currently seeking sites for Gypsy and Traveller sites. Given the contribution being made by other Councils, support in principle for the

identification and creation of a transit site of 8-10 pitches would appear appropriate. The Council will also need to consider the way in which the transit site, once identified, could be brought forward. Such a site could be owned by the Council or a Registered Social Landlord. It would be preferable, regardless of ownership, for the management, which is critical to its success, being undertaken by a RSL which has expertise in this field and will be able to work with the Council to set parameters for occupancy, behaviour and management. In order to submit a successful bid to the Government for grant support to provide a transit site, it may be necessary to obtain the services of an experienced specialist support company.

4 TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE

4.1 The locational guidance in the RSS policy for 18 additional Travelling Showpeople plots by 2011 is 'East Cambridgeshire and elsewhere'. The policy states that local authorities should work in county groupings with local Travelling Showpeople and the Showmen's Guild to identify the plots required. Officers, through joint working, have agreed that as a first step it will be necessary to consult the Showmen's Guild to ascertain whether their evidence given to the RSS Examination in September 2008 is still valid and if there is any evidence relating to provision across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough for longer term needs. The September 2008 Showmen's Guild evidence suggested a need for 9 more plots in East Cambridgeshire, 2 in Fenland, 3 in South Cambridgeshire and 4 in Peterborough. There was no suggestion of need in Huntingdonshire, and this has been confirmed so far by the responses to the Issues consultation on the Huntingdonshire DPD.

4.2 Therefore, unlike Transit provision, it appears unlikely that Huntingdonshire will be required to make provision for Travelling Showpeople plots.

5 RECOMMENDATION

5.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Notes the recommendation from the Gypsy and Traveller DPD Steering Group of 17th September 2009 and agrees in principle that a transit site for Gypsies and Travellers should be sought
2. Instructs Officers to consider further where and how this might be provided and to prepare a bid for a Government grant at the appropriate time.

CONTACT OFFICER - enquiries about this report to Steve Ingram (Head of Planning Services), on 01480 388400 or Steve Plant (Head of Housing Services) on 01480 388240.