

CABINET (LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK) COMMITTEE

15 JULY 2008

MEETING THE ACCOMODATION NEEDS OF GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS AND TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE

REPORT OF HEAD OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB 1523 (LDF) - "Meeting Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs" - 11th September 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This information report updates the position with regard to meeting the future accommodation needs of gypsies, travellers and travelling show people within Hampshire.

It also highlights the ongoing process of change, instigated by revised legislation and designed to dramatically improve the performance of local authorities throughout the country, in providing additional accommodation in locations where this is needed.

Within Hampshire, considerable work has now been carried out to assess where and in what general quantities further accommodation will be required. These investigations will inform a 'Partial Review' being conducted by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) and this, in turn, will inform and influence the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).

Following a Plenary Meeting of the Regional Assembly on the 16th July 2008, a formal period of public consultation will begin in September. This consultation will provide an opportunity for the City Council to submit comments to SEERA, according to the parameters set at its July 16th meeting.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the proposed consultation by SEERA be noted and that officers report on the consultation in the autumn.

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Report of Head of Strategic Planning

DETAIL:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This updating report is intended to highlight the ongoing requirement under revised housing legislation and the new planning system for the accommodation needs of gypsy and traveller groups to be met more effectively in the future. A primary aim of these legislative changes is to reverse past levels of under-provision which have led to caravan site and pitch shortages throughout the country, including Hampshire.
- 1.2 In certain parts of the country and, indeed, the south-east region, a historic and ongoing failure to make proper provision has resulted in a serious shortfall in suitable accommodation for these groups. Consequently, the planning Circular 'Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Sites' (1/2006) requires local housing and planning authorities to adopt a more pro-active stance in terms of encouraging and, where necessary, providing additional sites for permanent and/or transit accommodation in all those areas where there is a recognised and quantified need.
- 1.3 Against the background of these changes, work by consultants was carried out in 2006-2007 to produce a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) on behalf of all the Hampshire and Isle of Wight authorities. This Assessment focused on accommodation needs and current shortfalls, both by individual Hampshire Districts and by groupings of Districts. Collectively, Winchester was included within the 'South Hampshire Group' which also contains East Hampshire District, Havant Borough, Portsmouth City, Gosport Borough and Fareham Borough.
- 1.4 The results of the Assessment are intended to feed into the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA)'s early 'Partial Review' of the South East Plan. The Partial Review will then inform the policies in the Regional Spatial Strategy, with the result that individual planning authorities will be allocated specific pitch requirements to meet gypsy and traveller needs within their area; for both permanent and transit accommodation.

2 The Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Frameworks

- 2.1 It will be the responsibility of each authority (acting independently or in co-operation with others) to translate the number of pitches set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy into specific site allocations in the relevant Development Plan Document forming part of its Local Development Framework (LDF). However, different rates of progress in different parts of the south-east, together with other regional complications that have arisen, mean that final pitch requirements from the Regional Spatial Strategy are unlikely to be available before the City Council is due to publish 'preferred' policy options through its 'Core Strategy' document.
- 2.2 Nevertheless, taking that misaligned timing into account, this Committee at its meeting in September 2007 accepted the need for Winchester's Core Strategy to indicate that appropriate provision to meet locally generated gypsy and traveller needs will have to be made and that this will require more detailed expression through a Development Plan Document. In addition, it was agreed that the Core Strategy should outline local options for accommodating gypsy and traveller sites which can then be used to guide the allocation of any sites through the overall LDF process.
- 2.3 At the same meeting the Committee recommended that Cabinet should endorse a draft joint statement, setting out the position of the 'South Hampshire Group' of authorities, of which Winchester is part. That recommendation was subsequently agreed by Cabinet. The joint statement, representing the Group's initial response to the publication of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment, anticipated future co-working within the Group to meet accommodation needs and, on that basis, was forwarded to SEERA to inform its 'Partial Review' of the South East Plan.

3. The Issue of Travelling Show People

- 3.1 At the request of SEERA and the Government Office, additional work on data gathering and analysis has been carried out in 2008, in order to provide baseline information regarding the accommodation needs of the culturally distinct group of 'Travelling Show People'. This work, led by Southampton City Council, is intended to complete the overall picture as to current/projected accommodation needs within Hampshire and will help to provide a more complete survey for each of the recognised gypsy and traveller groups.
- 3.2 As a result of this work, a draft supplementary 'Accommodation Assessment for Travelling Show People' has recently been circulated for initial comment. The Assessment does not attempt to assign particular targets for meeting accommodation shortfalls to any particular District or area within the County. However, it does set out an overall projected target for the whole of Hampshire and does conclude that that

“All local authorities should accept their responsibility in ensuring that the [travelling show people] community is adequately accommodated”.

- 3.3 Nevertheless, whilst considering current needs from a county-wide perspective, the Assessment does acknowledge that the Winchester District continues to make a comparatively high provision for travelling show people, whereas a number of other authorities within Hampshire make little, if any, provision. Since being circulated, a county-wide ‘target’ of thirteen new sites for travelling show people, referred to in the Assessment, has attracted criticism from certain Hampshire authorities and, therefore, this target may well be the basis for more formal opposition as matters, including the autumn consultation, proceed.

4. Forthcoming Public Consultation by SEERA

- 4.1 Following slippage in its initial programme for the Partial Review, SEERA now intends to conduct public consultation on options for meeting the accommodation needs of gypsies, travellers and travelling show people during a twelve-week period from September to November, 2008. Although the exact format for the consultation has not yet been made clear, it is likely that Hampshire County Council will assist SEERA in running a series of public meetings across the county, as part of that consultation process.
- 4.2 These meetings will be intended to set out and explain the current position, following the completion of Accommodation Assessments and also the process by which the ‘Partial Review’ will enable the Regional Spatial Strategy to allocate targets for improved provision by all the various authorities. As part of the Partial Review stage there will be an ‘Examination in Public’, in order to give a formal opportunity for public representations in response to its findings.
- 4.3 A forthcoming Plenary Meeting of the Regional Assembly, on the 16th July, will consider the outcome of the various Accommodation Assessments from across the South East Region and will, according to the programme, agree options for action to be included as part of the September 2008 consultation. It should be noted, however, that varying pressures, together with current differences in delivering new accommodation across the region, may result in the Assembly deciding to adjust the balance between counties and this could, in turn, have an effect on those targets for provision which initially emerged through the counties’ Accommodation Assessments, including that for Hampshire.

5. Summary

- 5.1 The initial findings of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment, conducted on behalf of the Hampshire Districts, were considered to be broadly acceptable by almost all of the commissioning authorities and were submitted to SEERA as part of the process of giving ‘advice’ to inform the Partial Review and, through that, the Regional Spatial Strategy. Those findings are now in the process of

being amplified by the inclusion of further information relating specifically to travelling show people.

- 5.2 Following the July 16th meeting of the Regional Assembly, the timing, content and format of the forthcoming public consultation will be made known. As early as possible during the period set, a further report will be brought before this Committee with the aim of making formal comments to SEERA, within the terms of the consultation framework.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

This report is of relevance to the Corporate Strategy's aim of maintaining and supporting the local economy and conserving the resource base and the rural landscape, together with the Strategy's objective of sustaining and improving the natural environment and promoting a healthier, safer and more caring community.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

It is most likely that, at some point, there will be implications for this authority both in financial and staff resource terms. Adequate resources exist to undertake necessary studies and site investigations, but if these suggest the need for the development of additional sites by the Council new funding would then be required.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None.

APPENDICES:

None.