

From Councillor Hazel Smith to the New Communities Portfolio Holder:

"I was concerned to read in the Cambridge News that Dr Bard had decided to slow down even further the preparation of the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan document (GTDPD). Policies on provision for this sizeable minority of the residents of South Cambs are referred to in our main LDF documents which were adopted many years ago now. We have looked into the needs of local Gypsies and Travellers at local and regional level to justify with evidence the numbers of pitches we were going to have to provide, just on the basis of families growing up and getting independent plots of their own. We know that the trajectory of new plots required was 69 from 2006 to 2011, another 27 up to 2016 and a further 31 to 2021 under the slimmed-down figures. As the RSS has now been abolished and neighbouring authorities in the East of England are now not having to make provision the need will be greater, perhaps up to half as much again.

"We have given permanent consent to 40 I know of, or perhaps a few more, up to now. There is also temporary consent to around 60 plots, many of them in Milton ward, and the GTDPD is now unlikely to be adopted in time for the end of the temporary permissions which have been given.

"Travellers have a justified expectation that this authority should have a proper policy, and tell them once and for all whether they can expect to be able to stay on their own land. Planning applications are increasingly likely to succeed on appeal, the longer we are without a credible strategy for providing for this community's needs. What is the administration's plan for the policy in this area?"

I am well aware of the importance of planning for the needs of our Gypsies and Travellers, who account for 1% of South Cambs population. The Council has been working for some time on the preparation of a Gypsy and Traveller DPD in view of the level of need for new pitches in the district, and two rounds of public consultation have already been undertaken.

Unfortunately, just as we were making progress towards a further round of consultation leading to the preparation of a draft DPD, the significant changes being made by the new Government have meant that we have had to slow down that work. It is unfortunate, but there are good reasons for it.

Members will recall that the Gypsy and Traveller DPD was aiming to meet the targets for pitch numbers set out in the East of England Plan. Members will also know that on 6th July, regional spatial strategies were revoked by the Secretary of State, meaning that they no longer form part of the development plan. As a consequence, we do not currently have an agreed target to provide for and it will be for the District Council through its plan making to identify a local target.

However, it is important to realise that the impact of the loss of the East of England Plan could be particularly significant on South Cambridgeshire, as the high levels of need identified for the district in the 2006 Needs Assessment (the Cambridge Sub Region Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment 2006) was to be spread across the region, to aid choice, and speed up delivery. This gave us a lower target in the RSS than could have been the case simply using our local Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs assessment.

Also relevant is that the new Government proposes to introduce changes to the planning system in the UK. This will include a change to the LDF system, which we

anticipate will be introduced in draft in the Decentralisation and Localism Bill in November.

The Government has said it intends to give local communities greater say in planning decisions that will affect their local areas. They say that targets for numbers of pitches will now be set locally. They also say that local authorities should reflect local need and historic demand.

Recent guidance from the CLG advises that needs assessments will continue to provide a good starting point. At the same time they say that local authorities are not bound by them.

My judgement is that we need to proceed with caution during this period of uncertainty to make sure that any plan we prepare is likely to be found sound by independent Inspectors. CLG says that regulations and guidance for Gypsy and Traveller provision will be reviewed in due course.

The Council will therefore now need to consider what is an appropriate target, that is transparent and can be defended, taking account of local need and historic demand, and any other relevant factors. This is likely to include the practicalities of delivering the number of new sites identified. This will need to be considered in the context of wider changes to the planning making system which will affect how we make plans in the future.

For all these reasons, we consider the appropriate way forward is for the work on the Gypsy and Traveller DPD to now progress more slowly whilst we wait for the new government to produce the much needed guidance on how we should plan for the needs of our Gypsies and Travellers. Members should however be reassured that work is continuing to explore how needs can be met, and how sites can be delivered.