

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: New Communities Portfolio Holder 26 January 2009
AUTHOR/S: Executive Director / Corporate Manager (Planning and Sustainable Communities)

REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY SINGLE ISSUE REVIEW - PLANNING FOR GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND. EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC - REPORT OF THE PANEL

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the outcome of the Examination in Public into the Regional Spatial Strategy Single Issue Review regarding provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites.

Background

2. The East of England Plan single issue review aims to provide a policy within the RSS which requires provision of a number of Gypsy and Traveller pitches across the region, with a specific level of provision for each Local Authority. The policy was submitted by EERA in February 2008, and subject to Examination in Public in October 2008. The Panel Report was published in December 2008.

Summary of Key Conclusions from the Panel Report

3. The following is a summary of the main issues addressed in the report and the Panel's key recommendations. It is not a comprehensive list of all recommendations or issues raised.
 - ***New Pitches required between 2006 and 2011***
4. The Panel consider that EERA's estimate of 1,187 pitches in draft Policy H4 is likely to be a bare minimum or even an underestimate of regional needs. They recommend an increase of 50 based on evidence of local needs.
5. Two key approaches were tested by EERA -
 - A Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment based approach to distribution, where additional numbers of pitches were required where there was existing provision.
 - A wider distribution, redistributing some new pitch requirements away from the districts with the highest levels of provision, with all districts required to make some provision.
6. EERA selected the wider distribution approach in its draft policy. The Panel conclude that the main principles of the wider distribution strategy are sound. The Panel accept the minimum level of 15 per district as appropriate to provide the opportunity for a wider range of locational choice for Gypsy and Traveller communities than currently exists at the moment. The Panel recommend increases in pitch provision closer to areas of greatest locally-arising needs, reflecting the desirability of enabling Gypsies and Travellers with strong local connections to be accommodated close to their existing base. The Panel recommend a change to clarify intent of the Policy to signify that the total pitch requirement figures do not indicate ceilings.

7. The Cambridgeshire Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment was deemed to be robust (unlike a number of the others that required benchmarking).
8. The Panel noted with regard to South Cambridgeshire that:
 - There are a number of temporary consents in the district, reflecting circular 01/2006. The current position is that the number of permanent pitches since 2006 and existing temporary consented pitches, exceeded the draft policy requirement of 59.
 - Those seeking permanent sites will have different degrees of connection with the locality but regional policy is setting overall numbers. Noted that the Needs Assessment recorded that a third of those occupying unauthorised caravans who were surveyed had been at that location for less than a year.
 - One reason for these pressures is that Circular 01/2006 is seeking to move towards a planned approach to provision when there is a backlog of need. These difficulties will only be resolved when the timing of policy and implementation is looking forward rather than making up for past omissions.
9. The Panel recommend increasing the requirement in South Cambridgeshire by 10 to 69 pitches 2006 to 2011.
10. The Panel also recommended an increase in the figures in a number of other local Districts:
 - East Hertfordshire up by 5 to 20
 - Huntingdonshire up by 5 to 25
 - Peterborough up by 15 to 30
 - Uttlesford up by 10 to 25
 - St Edmundsbury up by 5 to 20.
 - ***Provision Post 2011***
11. The panel accepted that a 3% per annum figure to allow for household growth was appropriate, and that distribution should reflect 2006 to 2011 planned distribution across the region. The Panel support the intention to take into account new evidence in reviewing post 2011 figures, but this should be done on a regional basis, rather than at a local level. The panel acknowledged that it will not be possible to review the figures as part of the current East of England Plan review.
 - ***Transit Pitch Provision***
12. The Panel recommend that provision requirements for Transit pitches should be included in the East of England Plan, but at the County rather than District level, due to:
 - substantial evidence from across the region both confirming that there is a need for some transit provision and indicating where this should be provided.
 - Unauthorised encampment is extremely undesirable and the benefits of providing an alternative should be given considerable weight.
 - There is an understandable concern about the pressure there may be for transit sites to become used to make up the shortfall of residential provision. However

they do not believe these are insurmountable difficulties, as is indicated by the continued operation of two transit sites in the region.

13. The Panel note that in Cambridgeshire a site is already proposed in Fenland, and there is evidence supporting a site in three further locations, including one site accessible to Cambridge. There is likely to be a need for joint working to progress County figures to specific local provision in most areas.

County	Existing Transit Provision (pitches)	Additional Transit Pitches Required 2006-11	Further Locational Guidance
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough	Nil	40	Cambridge area, Fenland, Huntingdonshire and Peterborough

• ***Travelling Showpeople***

14. The Panel recommend a new policy on the accommodation requirements of Travelling Showpeople, to require County groupings of local authorities to work with their local communities and The Showmen's Guild of GB to identify land sufficient for the interim estimate of plot requirements given in the table below.

County	Existing Provision (families)	Additional Plots Required 2006-11	Further Locational Guidance
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough	54	18	East Cambs and elsewhere

• ***Delivery / Major Developments***

15. The Panel consider that there are locational advantages in linking some new site provision with major developments. This will help to mainstream Gypsy and Travellers site provision, seeing it as part of the affordable housing element of new residential and mixed developments.
16. The report states that in so far as some Gypsies and Travellers have a preference for some detachment and rural locations, the Panel do not agree that this precludes suitably designed provision as part of major developments. There would be little impact on density of development achieved if a development was genuinely major, and to fail to make necessary provision because of the effect this would have on density would be perverse and contrary to the overall aims of policy in relation to meeting the housing need of all households.
17. The Panel consider that it would be helpful for CLG to take any opportunities that arise to encourage developers to consider including Gypsy and Traveller accommodation as part of their affordable housing offer particularly in major new developments.

What Happens Next?

18. The report, including the Panel's recommendations, will now be considered by the Government, who will then publish the Secretary of State's decisions on the Panel's recommendations, along with any Proposed Changes to the draft policy. The proposed changes will undergo a further 12 week consultation to allow for views to be heard before the finalised plan is published in Summer 2009.

Implications

19. Financial	The outcome of the RSS could have implications for service delivery.
Legal	The RSS will provide planning policies that apply to the District.
Staffing	Staffing will be required to prepare a report on the next consultation in Spring 2009.
Risk Management	
Equal Opportunities	Our Traveller population is our largest ethnic group

Effect on Corporate Objectives and Service Priorities

20.	Work in partnership to manage growth to benefit everyone in South Cambridgeshire now and in the future
	The East of England Plan will guide development in the District.
	Deliver high quality services that represent best value and are accessible to all our community
	Nothing specific
	Enhance quality of life and build a sustainable South Cambridgeshire where everyone is proud to live and work
	Nothing specific

Recommendations

21. It is recommended that the report is noted.

Background Papers:

The Panel Report can be viewed here:

http://www.gos.gov.uk/goeast/planning/regional_planning/687221/

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