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Dear Sarah Thomas

GYPSY AND TRAVELLER SITE PROVISION – THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

I am responding to the questions raised at the end of the letter from Ian Wright MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Details of the current position with regard to ensuring the Core Strategy reflects the guidance in paras 31-32 of Circular 1/2006 (and paras 25-26 of Circular 4/2007)

The Borough Council adopted its Core Strategy in September 2007. The Core Strategy includes Policy CP20 which deals with Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. This policy sets out criteria for the consideration of proposals for accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. Furthermore, In April 2008 the Council adopted a Development Land Allocations DPD which includes Policy S3 which safeguards an existing Travelling Showpeople site from prejudicial development.

The authority's work programme for preparing a DPD that identifies an appropriate number of realistically deliverable sites to meet identified need for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

Consultants, David Couttie Associates have prepared a joint GTAA for Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone, Ashford and Tunbridge Wells. It was adopted by the Borough Council in October last year as a material consideration for development control and to inform the Regional Planning process. It identifies a need for 10 additional pitches in Tonbridge and Malling up to 2011. An up-to-date current caravan count would identify only six caravans on three unauthorised (and untolerated) sites. In addition, four caravans are on sites now with temporary permission pending provision of a permanent solution. Caravans should not, of course, be considered as synonymous with pitches.



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

In accordance with the requirements of Circular 01/2006 and the protocol adopted by SEERA the Borough Council, working with all other authorities in Kent, has provided advice to SEERA on alternative options for pitch distribution between the districts in Kent having regard to the results of the GTAA. This is intended to inform the partial review of the South East Plan which, as I am sure you are aware, is currently under way.

The Council's approved Local Development Scheme (LDS) (April 2007) acknowledges that there may be a need to prepare a Development Allocation DPD dealing specifically with Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation once a district-wide requirement is included in the South East Plan. A firm intention to include such a document will be made in a future review of the LDS once the final regional requirements are known which will not be until about 2010. The Council has adopted this approach because the results of the GTAA and the caravan count, as outlined above, do not indicate that the needs are so pressing that a dedicated Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation DPD needs to be produced at an early stage, particularly if those needs can be met in another way (see below).

The authority's transitional arrangements, pending preparation of a DPD, for dealing with any existing need.

In line with the Core Strategy, the Borough Council has been investigating with the County Council the possibility of replacing and enlarging the existing publicly owned caravan site at Coldharbour, Aylesford which would be aimed at meeting the currently identified need. In addition, the Borough Council, as Housing Authority, will continue to assist Gypsy and Traveller families in housing need to access social "bricks and mortar" housing (in accordance with its allocations scheme) if this is the applicant's preference. This approach could either meet need directly or indirectly by freeing up an existing authorised site.

I trust this adequately answers your questions.

Yours sincerely

Brian Gates
Chief Planner (Policy)