

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

20 February 2007

Joint Report of the Director of Health and Housing and Cabinet Member for Housing and Director of Planning Transportation and Leisure and Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION SURVEY AND STRATEGY REVIEW IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the results of a study into the needs of Gypsies and Travellers which has been carried out by consultants on behalf of Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone, Ashford and Tunbridge Wells councils, and to set this within the context of the review of the Housing Strategy, the Local Development Framework and Regional Spatial Strategy.

This report is also being presented to the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board but Members should note that a presentation on the survey findings is being made by David Coultie Associates to the Strategic Housing Advisory Board. Members of both Boards are invited to attend for the presentation if possible.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Housing Act 2004 requires local housing authorities to include gypsies and travellers in their accommodation assessments and to take a strategic approach, including drawing up a strategy demonstrating how their accommodation needs will be met, as part of the wider housing strategy.
- 1.1.2 The Planning Act 2004 places emphasis on early consultation between local authorities and the communities they serve. The aim is to ensure that plans properly reflect the needs and aspirations of all sectors of the community. In the case of gypsies and travellers, such early engagement should help in the identification of suitably located sites and a reduction in unauthorised encampments and developments.

1.1.3 Government guidance recommends studies into the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers is conducted at a sub regional level. In keeping with this guidance David Coultie Associates (DCA) were commissioned by Tonbridge and Malling, Ashford, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone council to undertake a four district study in 2005/06 of the housing needs and aspirations of gypsies and travellers, who are housed or living on authorised or unauthorised sites within the study area.

1.1.4 The survey sought to:

- identify current and projected accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers who reside in the four boroughs;
- provide evidence of housing and site needs to support an accommodation strategy for gypsies and travellers; and
- inform the housing and planning strategies for the four councils on the same basis as other sectors of the community.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 A total of 200 face-to-face interviews were achieved across the study area comprising 171 on sites and 29 in bricks and mortar (i.e. traditional housing).

1.3 Key Findings and Recommendations

1.3.1 The gypsy and traveller survey found that the majority of respondents classed themselves as Romany Gypsy or English travellers (94.1 per cent). Only 12.5 per cent of households currently living on sites and 12.5 per cent of those in permanent accommodation had travelled in the last 12 months.

1.3.2 The survey identified some key issues facing the gypsy and traveller communities in the survey area, with problems focused on those living on sites:-

- households were asked about the adequacy of their site or pitch. 50.7 per cent indicated that their site or pitch was adequate, 49.3 per cent that it was inadequate;
- of households living on sites 28 per cent of those saying their home was inadequate said there was a lack of facilities / poor facilities. This was also the main issue when considering the bad things about the site;
- there was a fairly high level of access to basic facilities, and 77.3 per cent of respondents currently living on a site were satisfied with their site;
- highest levels of satisfaction overall were found on family owned sites with planning permission. 54.6 per cent of households living on sites have sole

access to a water supply and 62.6 per cent have shared access. 84 per cent have sole access to a WC, 16.7 per cent shared access;

- there are concerns over health and safety on sites. 23.3 per cent of respondents living on sites had worries about health and safety on their site, with fire precautions being the main concern. 81.2 per cent of those with health and safety worries lived on authorised Council sites;
- there are lower levels of access to schools amongst households living on sites compared to those living in bricks and mortar accommodation. 19 households living on all sites indicated that they had school age children who were not attending local schools, this compares to just 1 household living in permanent housing;
- there are higher than expected levels of disability and illness (18 per cent), and a low level of adaptations provided across the sample as a whole, a key finding also of the '2004 survey Health Status of Gypsies & Travellers in England', published by Sheffield University'. Comparing those living in permanent accommodation to households living on sites there was little difference in the access to local doctors; and
- there are low levels of employment, 45.1 per cent amongst those living on any site and 27.7 per cent among those living in housing accommodation. There were also high levels of self-employment: 81 per cent amongst those living on sites and 37.5 per cent amongst those in permanent housing.

- 1.3.3 Respondents in the survey reported high levels of harassment both amongst those living on sites and in permanent housing, 20.5 per cent of households living on a site had experienced harassment at the current site. 48.7 per cent of those living on a site and 75.9 per cent of those in permanent housing said they would take harassment into account when they moved.
- 1.3.4 14.2 per cent (129) of households currently living on sites and 31 per cent (9) of those in permanent accommodation had plans to move home. 6 of those who want to move and are currently living on a site plan to move into permanent housing, the main reasons given were to access better facilities and to improve safety.
- 1.3.5 All those planning to move to permanent housing were currently living on public authorised sites.
- 1.3.6 There is a good supply of authorised site accommodation in parts of the study area, with Maidstone having 168 caravans legally accommodated at the July 2005 Caravan Count and Ashford having 86. Tonbridge and Malling (41) and Tunbridge Wells (27) have a smaller supply of authorised sites. In July 2005 unauthorised, tolerated sites were found predominantly in Tonbridge and Malling (21 caravans), and illegal encampments in Maidstone (44 caravans).

1.3.7 In T&M the tolerated sites are Hoath Wood (19) and East Peckham (2). These figures are based on the half yearly surveys of July 2005 and in the case of Hoath Wood this itself is based on a much earlier count as staff do not normally go onto this site at present. An aerial photograph taken in the week of 01 January shows about 10 vans of various types on site. It is important to realise that in addition to being tolerated these two sites are “lawful” by virtue of the effluxion of time and cannot be removed under planning enforcement powers.

1.4 Accommodation Needs

1.4.1 The study identified a need for 64 additional authorised permanent site pitches across the study area over the next 5 years, in addition to a continued supply of 6 per year from pitch turnover. This will meet both the backlog of existing need expressed through unauthorised encampments and developments, and new family formation.

Table 1 Current Backlog of need	
Households on unauthorised encampments	46
Households on unauthorised developments for which planning permission is not expected in year 1	
Households currently overcrowded on authorised sites	18
Backlog of concealed/new family formation within existing households	6
Total current residential backlog of need?	70
Less number of unused local authority pitches, and vacancies on privately owned sites available in the local authority/partnership area that could be brought back into use	0
Current shortfall	70
Family formation 2006-2011	24

Total additional authorised site pitches needed:

30 Pitches are available over the 5 year period (6 per year).
Back log of 70 pitches needed plus 24 new households likely to form in the next 5 years.
Total supply over 5 years = 30
Total need over 5 years = 94

The data suggest there will be a need for 64 (ie 94- 30) additional new pitches between 2006 – 2011 (13 per year)

Council Area	Total implied households in the survey	Existing location	Distribution of 64 proposed additional pitches based on existing location	Preferences expressed through the survey: ideal location	Distribution of 64 proposed additional pitches based on ideal location
	Numbers	Percent	Numbers	Percent	Numbers
Ashford	43	19.6	12	21.4	14
Maidstone	108	49.4	32	50	32
Tonbridge and Malling	44	20.1	13	16.1	10
Tunbridge Wells	24	10.9	7	12.5	8

1.5 Conclusions

1.5.1 The findings from the survey have implications for a number of the Council's service areas. These can be summarised as follows:

Survey finding	Service
Meeting the demand for extra site provision	Planning and Housing
Need to ensure site health and safety	Environmental Health
Meeting the demand for permanent housing and housing advice	Housing
Tackling harassment	CDRP
Addressing employment and training	Corporate Services

1.5.2 The study also found children living on sites are more likely to be missing school or having problems accessing education. Kent County Council will therefore have a responsibility to ensure the educational needs of children on sites are met.

1.6 Policy Implications

1.6.1 The survey highlights a need for between 10 and 13 additional pitches in Tonbridge and Malling over a five year period, an average of approximately 2 pitches per annum. In due course the findings of the study will give rise to some policy choices to be made about future provision and will have implications for the Council's Housing Strategy and planning decisions. Such decisions will need to be considered in the light of consultation and the further process associated with SEERA's work on the partial review of South East Plan.

- 1.6.2 The clear conclusion of DCA is that in line with general housing needs assessments, new gypsy and traveller site allocations are made on the basis of preference, as expressed through the question on ideal site location within the survey. On that basis the target shortfall is a need for an additional 10 pitches in T&M over the 5-year period. (Table 1 refers). This will be a useful part of the advice, to supplement the GTAA survey findings that will be provided to SEERA who will be statutorily responsible for formally allocating the number of sites and pitches that district Councils should provide for to meet local needs.
- 1.6.3 On the basis of the advice received, SEERA will take a regional view on the distribution and bring forward proposals in the form of a draft revision to the South East Plan by the early part of next year followed by full public consultation on the options. The following process is likely to include a public examination before final approval by the Secretary of State. It will not be until after that process that the Borough Council will actually be required to make any specific allocations for new pitches and even then it will depend upon the number of pitches required, the supply of pitches at the time and the Council's ability to meet that need by other means (e.g. access into alternative forms of housing)
- 1.6.4 In the meantime, the results of the GTAA will be a material consideration for development control but only if adopted following consultation.

1.7 Community Strategy considerations

- 1.7.1 The Community Strategy for Tonbridge and Malling identifies a sustainable community as "one where everyone, young and old, rich and poor, regardless of their race and beliefs, has access to the services they need". The Strategy has specific actions to ensure vulnerable groups (which would include minority groups such as Gypsies and Travellers) can access the services they need, increasing the amount of affordable housing, and preventing homelessness locally and across West Kent.

1.8 Crime and Disorder Reduction partnership considerations

- 1.8.1 Harassment involving the gypsy/traveller community is very difficult for the agencies to deal with as in the majority of cases it will not be reported and even when it is, there is a reluctance of the parties involved to assist or provide evidence/information.

1.9 Next Steps

- 1.9.1 As part of conducting the assessment the councils involved are obliged to share the findings with the Gypsy and Traveller community and carry out appropriate levels of targeted consultation. This follows best practice and will help ensure the validity and robustness of the findings. A consultation event with stakeholders will be scheduled to include all council areas in the spring, by Maidstone BC who are the lead authority. Other arrangements for consultation will also be developed.
- 1.9.2 Following consultation a final survey report will be presented to Members along with some possible ways forward to address the accommodation requirements arising in this borough. One such option could be to consider the extent to which existing sites may yield additional pitches. At that time it may be appropriate for the Council to have regard to the GTAA as a material consideration for Development Control, to inform the review of the Housing Strategy; and to consider the Council's position with regard to the review of the RSS.

1.10 Legal Implications

- 1.10.1 The Housing Act 2004 requires local housing authorities to include gypsies and travellers in their accommodation assessments and to take a strategic approach, including drawing up a strategy demonstrating how their accommodation needs will be met, as part of the wider housing strategy.

1.11 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.11.1 None arising from this report.

1.12 Risk Assessment

- 1.12.1 None arising from this report.

1.13 Recommendations

- 1.13.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that following the presentation by David Couttie Associates and the opportunity for Members to raise any questions, Cabinet is **REQUESTED** to **NOTE** and **ENDORSE** the draft survey findings for the purposes of consultation including the planned event with the Gypsy and Traveller community; and
- 1.13.2 A further report on the study findings, including the outcome of the consultation exercise together with options for addressing the shortfall in pitch provision, be presented to the future meeting of the Strategic Housing and Planning and Transportation Advisory Boards Advisory Boards.

The Director of Health and Housing confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

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