

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD**

**7 January 2008**

**Report of the Director of Health and Housing**

**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 HOUSING STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS**

**Summary**

**This report confirms the findings from Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) reported to Members in February 2007. It highlights the housing strategy implications arising from the identified levels of need and on going plans to address this.**

**1.1 Background**

- 1.1.1 Government Guidance on the preparation of GTAAs recommends that they be carried out on a sub-regional basis. On the basis of this advice a GTAA has been carried out by David Coultie Associates (DCA) jointly for Ashford, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge and Malling. I reported jointly with the Director of Planning, Transportation and Leisure in February 2007 on the draft results of that Study (copy of report attached at **[Annex 1]**). The draft Study concluded that there was a need for between 10 and 13 new pitches to be located in the Borough over the period up until 2011. In picking up on the recommendations I can report that the study findings remained unchanged following the consultation event in June 2007 with gypsy and traveller community representatives.
- 1.1.2 The report was refined in the light of the stakeholder meeting and certain other minor technical matters and was finally published at the end of August. The overall conclusions for Tonbridge and Malling are no different.
- 1.1.3 It is, therefore, now appropriate for the results of the Study to be formally endorsed by the Council as a material consideration for housing strategy and development control purposes. The Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure is reporting separately to the meeting of the Planning and Transport Advisory Board in January 2008 on the planning policy implications and the partial review of the South East Plan which will provide strategic planning advice on the level and distribution of gypsy and traveller accommodation across the South East. This is important because ultimately it will prescribe how many new pitches this Council

will need to provide for in its Local Development Framework (LDF) which may be at odds with the Study findings.

## 1.2 Housing strategy implications

- 1.2.1 Our approach to meeting the identified level of need in the Survey is in two strands. Firstly, Members endorsed in the Medium Term Financial Strategy provision of £28K being made available to work in partnership with Kent County Council to explore the options for enhancing the existing gypsy and traveller site at Coldharbour, Aylesford. The site is currently owned and managed by KCC and in need of improvement and reconfiguration. Over the years the site's capacity has been reduced to 8 double pitches and a maximum of 16 caravans. A project team has been established comprising senior officers from KCC and this Council's Housing and Planning teams. The team are currently considering a range of options in an effort to improve the current site and meet the identified shortfall arising from the survey. Concentrating any new provision in the first instance at existing sites would be inline with Policy CP20 of the Council's recently adopted Core Strategy.
- 1.2.2 In the longer term once a suitable option is worked up (and agreed in consultation with Members), it is KCC's intention to submit a bid to Government for capital funding during 2008/09.
- 1.2.3 Secondly, in addition to Coldharbour, the housing needs of gypsies and travellers will continue to be addressed through permanent housing options where, for example, an application for assistance is made to the Council in accordance with its Allocations Scheme.

## 1.3 Conclusions

- 1.3.1 It is anticipated that increased pitch provision on an improved Coldharbour site will create sufficient capacity such that a combination of normal pitch turnover, coupled with qualifying nominations to permanent housing will keep pace with future needs beyond 2011. However, it may be necessary to review this position once the partial review of the South East Plan is complete and SEERA have set out the level and distribution of pitches across the South East.
- 1.3.2 Future reports will be presented to the Board keeping Members abreast of developments in this area.

## 1.4 Recommendations

- 1.4.1 The **CABINET** is requested to **ENDORSE** the findings of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment for housing strategy purposes; and
- 1.4.2 to **NOTE** the housing strategy implications and progress in taking forward options for the Coldharbour site.

## **1.5 Legal Implications**

- 1.5.1 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.
- 1.5.2 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.

## **1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.6.1 None arising from this report.

## **1.7 Risk Assessment**

- 1.7.1 None arising from this report.

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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Held with Housing Services

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