

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

18 May 2009

### Report of the Director of Health and Housing

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

### 1 GYPSY & TRAVELLERS – COLDHARBOUR SITE

#### Summary

This report updates Members on the progress of the Coldharbour Project Board which is investigating various proposals for refurbishing and enhancing the current site in Aylesford.

#### 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. The aim is to ensure that plans properly reflect the needs and aspirations of all sectors of the community.
- 1.1.2 Members will recall that David Couttie Associates (DCA) were commissioned by Tonbridge and Malling, Ashford, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone council's 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. This led to the completion in 2007 of the Gypsy & Traveller Area Assessment (GTAA).
- 1.1.3 The survey identified some key issues facing the Gypsy and Traveller communities in the survey area, as many households felt their homes were inadequate and lacked basic facilities. The survey highlighted a need for between ten and thirteen additional pitches in Tonbridge and Malling over a five year period (2006-2011).
- 1.1.4 Members will recall in the Medium Term Financial Strategy the provision of £28K being made available to work in partnership with Kent County Council (KCC) to explore the options for enhancing the existing Gypsy and Traveller site at Coldharbour, Aylesford. This provision has also been supplemented by the £18k "Second Homes" funding received from KCC in 2008/09. 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.

- 1.1.5 In 2007 Communities & Local Government (CLG) announced their "Site Refurbishment Grant" for Gypsy & Traveller schemes. Subsequently a Project Board was established comprising senior officers from KCC and the Council's Housing and Planning teams with a mind to exploring the submission of a bid to access this funding.
- 1.1.6 The Project Board has considered a wide range of options in an effort to both improve the current site and meet the identified shortfall arising from the GTAA. A briefing and site meeting was also held recently for local Members. The principle aim was to see firsthand the deficiencies of the current pitch provision and to inform the Project Board's preparation of a preferred option upon which a grant funding bid to HCA would be based.
- 1.1.7 In the longer term once a suitable option is finalised (and agreed in consultation with Members), it is the Project Board's intention to submit a bid to Government for capital funding during the summer of 2009.
- 1.1.8 To date this Council has contributed £14k towards the scheme design and development costs. The Council has agreed with KCC to share equally a further funding commitment within the limits of the provision available for that purpose in year 2009/10 of the Capital Plan.
- 1.1.9 Part of the bidding process will involve the submission of a planning application for the site, which will be prepared in the next few months. It is worth remembering that it is KCC, and not the Council, who are the determining planning authority in this instance for this site.
- 1.1.10 The Project Board has undertaken to formulate a robust communication strategy, linked to the submission of the both the planning application and bid to the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA).
- 1.1.11 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.
- 1.1.12 It is anticipated that any increased pitch provision on an improved Coldharbour site may 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.
- 1.1.13 Future reports will be presented to the Board keeping Members abreast of progress with this project.

**1.2 Legal Implications**

1.2.1 None arising from this report.

**1.3 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.3.1 None arising from this report.

**1.4 Risk Assessment**

1.4.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

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Nil

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