

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE

18 SEPTEMBER 2007

REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY PROPOSALS FOR GYPSY AND TRAVELLER PITCH PROVISION

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to agree a response to a consultation by the Regional Assembly on proposed levels of gypsy and traveller pitch provision for Exeter to be included in a partial review of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). A copy of a leaflet setting out the draft RSS revision and details of how to respond has been circulated to Planning Member Working Group and Executive Members and is in the Members' Room. A poster and a pack of consultation documents has been provided to the Customer Services Centre. The closing date for comments is 31 October 2007.
- 1.2 The City Council will ultimately have to identify sites for the required number of pitches through its Local Development Framework documents.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The framework for addressing the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers is set out in ODPM Circular 1/2006 '*Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites*' (see PMWG report on draft 8/2/2005). This identifies a three stage process:
- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) should assess needs and identify pitch requirements for each local authority area. Government has also separately published draft guidance on making such assessments, the methodology aligns well with that already developed for use in Devon.
 - Regional Spatial Strategies should check/modify pitch numbers provided by GTAAAs from a regional perspective and specify pitch numbers for each local planning authority.
 - Local Development Framework documents should identify specific sites to match pitch numbers from the RSS. Government has also published '*Draft Guidance on the design of sites for Gypsies and Travellers*' that will provide advice on site location, selection and design.

GTAAAs

- 2.2 GTAAAs are similar to 'bottom-up' general housing needs surveys, which have been undertaken by local authorities for many years. Devon local authorities co-operated on the production of a GTAA that was prepared by the Social Research & Regeneration Unit of Plymouth University and published at the end of 2006. A copy is on the City Council web site at:

<http://www.exeter.gov.uk/media/pdf/t/g/28.pdf>

- 2.3 The GTAA identified a need for 226 pitches in Devon between 2006 and 2011, of which 12 were in Exeter. The main elements of the requirement are:

	<u>All Devon</u>	<u>Exeter</u>
Unauthorised encampment pitches	155	4
Overcrowded pitches	26	6
Household growth at 3% pa	45	2
Total	226	12

- 2.4 Data are not available on the location of the unauthorised encampments. Much of the need generated from overcrowded pitches and household growth will originate from the existing authorised DCC site for 11 pitches at Avocet Road, Sowton.
- 2.5 Devon County Council, which is the strategic planning authority for the Exeter area, is responsible for making 'first detailed proposals' to the Regional Assembly. The County Council Strategic Planning, Regional and International Affairs Committee agreed advice for submission to the Regional assembly on 1 March 2007. The report, which reflected the figures in the GTAA, is at:
http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/democracymunities/decision_making/cma/cma_report.htm?cmadoc=report_eec0747hq.html
- 2.6 The results of the GTAA will also feed into the City Council's Housing Strategy 2007-9 that is due to be considered by Community Scrutiny in September.

RSS

- 2.7 When the draft RSS was submitted to Government in April 2006 a 'stop-gap' policy on provision of pitches for gypsies and travellers was included in the knowledge that it would need to be revised when more information on needs became available. Sufficient information has now become available for the Regional Assembly to be able to proceed with a partial review of the RSS. The Regional Assembly meeting of 13 July agreed a new proposed draft policy and pitch distribution. The report is at:
<http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/media/SWRA/Assembly%20Papers/13th%20July%202007/PaperJ.pdf>
- 2.8 The draft policy GT1 requires local authorities to identify realistically deliverable sites in their LDFs to provide for about 1,500 additional pitches for Gypsies and Travellers in the region, over the period 2006-2011, distinguishing between residential and transit pitches. The proposed distribution attached to the policy requires 12 new pitches in Exeter based upon DCC's 'first detailed proposal' plus an estimate of 5 transit pitches. The need for transit pitches, by its nature is more difficult to quantify. It is anticipated that more, larger permanent pitches may reduce the need for transit sites. The proposed accompanying text states that in some locations, transit provision will be phased in once significant progress has been made in meeting the need for residential pitches.
- 2.9 The proposed level of provision in surrounding districts is:
- | | | |
|-------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| East Devon | 9 residential pitches | 5 transit pitches |
| Mid Devon | 14 residential pitches | 5 transit pitches |
| Teignbridge | 65 residential pitches | 5 transit pitches |

- 2.10 The high level of requirement in Teignbridge largely reflects the large number of existing unauthorised pitches. Devon authorities have recognised there will be a need to work together to look at cross boundary issues.
- 2.11 The proposed programme for the partial review of the RSS is a consultation until xx October, an Examination in Public of the proposals early in 2008 with the amended policy keying in to the production of the finalised RSS in mid 2008.

LDF

- 2.12 The GTAA recommended that sites should be relatively small with no more than a maximum of 20 pitches and preferably between 6 and 15 pitches. The Government consultation on the design of sites suggests between 6 and 12 pitches with a maximum of 20. It is likely that the City Council will need to find two sites, one for permanent pitches and one for transit. The proposed requirement does need to be treated as indicative and tested through the LDF process.
- 2.13 The City Council's proposed Core Strategy includes a criteria based policy as a guide to the allocation of sites in accordance with Circular1/2006. It is proposed that the Core Strategy be submitted to the Secretary of State in early 2008 for intended adoption by the end of that year. When PMWG considered the Core Strategy Members expressed a strong desire to make additional provision for gypsies and travellers.
- 2.14 The allocation of sites will be through the East of Exeter Area Action Plan (EEAAP) if they are east of the bypass or the Generic Development Control Policies if they are elsewhere in the City. A site search exercise will need to be undertaken by officers this Autumn. Proposed sites in the EEAAP would be subject to an Issues and Options consultation at the end of 2007, Preferred Option consultation in Autumn 2008, Submission to Secretary of State in summer 2009 and adoption in late Summer 2010. Any resulting planning application might 'twin track' later stages of the process but it is unlikely that a site can be open before 2011. The gypsy and traveller community and registered social landlords will be consulted in the process. The Council will continue to look for any opportunities to provide sites earlier outside of the LDF process, however, it seems unlikely that any could be delivered.
- 2.15 The recent draft guidance on design of sites states:

As a rule of thumb, no sites should be identified for Gypsy and Traveller use that would not be appropriate for ordinary residential dwellings. Where possible, sites should be developed near to housing for the settled community as part of mainstream residential developments. To help achieve this local authorities and registered social landlords should consider the need and scope to provide a site for Gypsies and Travellers as part of all significant new build developments.

- 2.16 The reference to sites as parts of large new build developments may provide an opportunity to identify the two sites required in Exeter. Co-development may provide an opportunity to achieve greater integration as a new community develops. It may be possible to make generalised allocations as part of larger developments through the core strategy rather than awaiting the EEAAP.

- 2.17 Proposed sites can be in public or private ownership. Many gypsies and travellers would prefer to own their own site, however, private sites are likely to be small making little contribution to meeting the requirement. The Government is making funding available for the development of sites through the Housing Corporation. Gypsies and Travellers site grant is part of the Regional Housing Pot managed by the South West Regional Assembly, grant is available to local authorities and registered social landlords.
- 2.18 The RSS reflects Circular 1/2006 in looking ahead five years. However, it is important to try and estimate requirements and to make provision for the longer term. Sites identified through the LDF process are unlikely to be delivered to about 2011. The Council's LDF will cover the period to 2026. After immediate needs are satisfied in the period to 2011, the best estimate for future needs may be based upon continued household formation at national rates of 3% per annum. This might suggest that Exeter would need to find a further 6 pitches over the latter part of the period of the LDF. Potential for expansion from 12 to 18 pitches might be provided in the proposed permanent site.

3 ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That PMWG notes and Executive resolves that:

Officers respond to the consultation accepting the proposed requirement for pitches in Exeter, recommend that the RSS propose indicative figures for the longer term and refer to the Council's strong commitment to deliver pitches through the LDF process.

RICHARD SHORT
HEAD OF PLANNING SERVICES

ECONOMY & DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended):
Background Papers used in compiling this report:
None