

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR PLANNING AND COMMUNITY STRATEGY
TO EXECUTIVE
5 OCTOBER 2007

Partial Review of the South East Plan - Provision of Caravan Sites for Gypsies and Travellers

1.0 Introduction and Report Summary

- 1.1 SEERA is undertaking a partial review of the South East Plan relating to the provision of sites for gypsies and travellers in the south east. The first stage of the review is an opportunity for councils to submit their advice on the expected numbers and distribution of sites in their areas. In Oxfordshire a steering group of Councillors representing the County Council and the five District Councils has worked with the support of an officer working group to provide a response.
- 1.2 This work has involved consultation with stakeholders, a recalculation of the expected need as set out in the Association of Councils of the Thames Valley Regions (ACTVaR) Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) and an alternative disaggregation of the County figure down to District level. The recalculated need for the County to 2016 is 42 pitches in comparison to the original GTAA figure of 98 to 2016.
- 1.3 Advice on travelling showpeople was also requested but it was not considered that it was advisable to carry out a survey in the summer so the intention is that a survey will be carried out this winter. In line with other areas it was considered that advice could not be submitted to SEERA on transit provision and detailed costings.
- 1.4 Following submission of the advice to SEERA there will be public consultation on draft preferred option document and Sustainability Appraisal by SEERA May to July 2008, followed by submission of a draft Partial Review document and Sustainability Appraisal to Government in December 2008 and then an Examination in May 2009.
- 1.5 The Contact Officer for this report is Peter Williams, Principal Planning Officer, (01235 520202)

2.0 Recommendations

- (a) *that the Executive, in accordance with the agreed process approves the suggested overall provision of 42 pitches in Oxfordshire and provision for the Vale of either 1 pitch under option A or 8 pitches under option B and that a preference for option A be recorded by Executive for reference in future consultations;*
- (b) *that the participation in a joint study on travelling showpeople in winter 07/08 is approved by Executive, and*
- (c) *that the Executive approves no response being made to the request for transit site provision, as this should be considered by SEERA, or to the request for detailed implementation costs.*

3.0 **Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies**

- (a) The report relates to the provision of high quality public services which are effective, efficient and responsive to the needs of people within the Vale, opposing all prejudice and discrimination, protecting and improving our environment and improving the quality of life for all members of the community.
- (b) this report principally relates to the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

4.0 **Background and Supporting Information**

- 4.1 ODPM Circular 1/2006 was published two months before the submission of the South East Plan (SEP) requiring such plans to include a strategic review of needs and provision for gypsies and travellers. A partial review of the SEP was therefore needed to meet this new Government requirement. SEERA subsequently published a brief setting out the work required. This involved councils acting in partnership, either sub-regionally or within counties, to develop two options for the distribution of the new pitches arising from a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA). A pitch can accommodate between two to five caravans. Option A would utilise the distribution arising from the GTAA and option B would develop an alternative distribution which would seek to protect and enhance the natural environment, including its biodiversity and landscape character, make best use of previously developed land and existing or planned infrastructure and facilitate access to employment/services. An officer working group under a Member steering group was then set up to carry out this work for Oxfordshire.
- 4.2 The SEERA brief was published in December 2006 and as well as the two options for distributing the required number of pitches the brief also required councils to: assess the need for transit provision for gypsies and travellers, supply information on existing provision for gypsies and travellers, assess the need for accommodation for travelling showpeople, advise on additional implementation and delivery issues and explain the involvement of stakeholders in the GTAA and subsequent work. The deadline for responses was originally June 1st 2007 but this was revised to October 15th 2007.
- 4.3 Once SEERA has considered and audited the submissions it will carry out a public consultation on a draft Preferred Option document and a Sustainability Appraisal from May to July 2008. The results of this consultation will then be considered by SEERA before producing a draft Partial Review document and Sustainability Appraisal which will be submitted to Government in December 2008. Formal objections can then be made. This will then be followed by an Examination in May 2009 to consider objections. There will therefore be a number of other opportunities to make inputs to the process. At the same time it should be noted that this Council will have to consider the issue of gypsy and traveller accommodation as part of its Local Development Framework.
- 4.4 The partial review has to be based on a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) as required by the 2004 Housing Act. Many areas of the country had still to complete their GTAAs when the SEERA brief was published but one had already been completed in the ACTVaR area, including the Vale, in September 2006. The ACTVaR GTAA concluded that the overall need for Oxfordshire was 58 pitches

for the period 2006-2011. A distribution based on current provision led to a suggested provision of just 2 pitches for the period 2006 to 2011 in the Vale. South Oxfordshire by contrast had a suggested provision of 28 pitches. Work to extend the GTAA figure to 2016 led to an overall suggested provision of 98 pitches in Oxfordshire for the period 2006 to 2016.

- 4.5 During the preparation of the response to the SEERA brief revised Government guidance on the conduct of GTAAs was produced in March 2007. This led to a need to benchmark any studies which had already been undertaken to ensure overall uniformity between studies. The outcome of a benchmarking process led to concerns being expressed by officers regarding some of the assumptions used in the ACTVaR GTAA and some of the approaches used in relation to Oxfordshire in comparison to those suggested in national guidance. This related to assumptions about concealed households, unauthorised encampments and developments, housing to site migration, population growth and migration and supply from annual turnover. Following detailed consideration of the GTAA it was apparent that a re-examination of these assumptions led to a significantly revised figure for Oxfordshire of 42 pitches for 2006 to 2016 and this is the basis for the Oxfordshire submission to SEERA.
- 4.6 As set out above SEERA required two options to be suggested for the distribution of the overall figure between the city and the four districts. Option A was to be on the basis of the distribution in the ACTVaR GTAA and option B was to be on the basis of a sustainable distribution utilising a range of criteria as described in paragraph 4.1. Distribution of the 42 pitches according to option A would result in the Vale needing one new pitch but would lead to a requirement for 17 pitches in South Oxfordshire. However, given the small size of the predicted need and the requirement in Government guidance that each district should make some provision, it was recommended by officers that the total should be divided up as evenly as possible between the districts for option B on a basis of shared responsibility instead of the approach suggested in the SEERA brief and this was accepted by the majority of the Member Steering Group. The brief makes provision for councils to suggest alternatives to the option B distribution. This leaves the Vale with a suggested requirement of 8 pitches to 2016 amounting to one new site. Expanding the one site in the Vale by this amount would lead to an unmanageable site as advised by Oxfordshire Gypsy and Traveller Services.
- 4.7 The Member Steering Group further considered that should SEERA not accept the revised overall requirement of 42 pitches, then a criteria based approach would need to be developed to distribute a higher number of pitches between the districts. The relative distribution of pitches is set out in the following table. At this stage SEERA have advised no preference is to be expressed about the distributions in responses.

<i>District</i>	<i>Option A level of pitches 2006 to 2016</i>	<i>Option B level of pitches 2006 to 2016</i>
<i>Cherwell</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Oxford City</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>South Oxfordshire</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Vale of White Horse</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>West Oxfordshire</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Oxfordshire Total</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>42</i>

- 4.8 The SEERA brief for the review also required the response to be prepared in consultation with stakeholders and the gypsy and traveller community. A consultation exercise was therefore undertaken about where new sites should be provided in July 2007 involving the distribution of a questionnaire. The results did not inform the distribution under option B but the information is to be submitted to SEERA for them to consider and could be used if a higher figure needs to be distributed. The information will also be useful for the districts in determining locations for allocations in their Local Development Frameworks.
- 4.9 The ACTVaR GTAA did not include any examination of the requirements of travelling show people. The SEERA brief however required there to be a figure based on a consultation of travelling showpeople. Given the difficulty of carrying out such a consultation in the summer SEERA initially removed this requirement, but later requested that some form of response should be made on the topic. Given the low number of sites in Oxfordshire, the lack of evidence for any demand and the probability that most site occupants would be away anyway, it was considered that a study would be better undertaken during the coming winter and this is the response that the Member Steering Group has agreed.
- 4.10 The SEERA brief also requested joint responses on the need for transit provision and detailed implementation costs. However, in common with most other councils in the south east, it was not considered that the transit question can be answered at a sub regional level and this was regarded as a regional matter which SEERA must consider. As a result it is considered by the Member Steering Group that no response should be made on this matter. In relation to implementation costs it is considered that this is a matter which cannot be properly addressed until specific sites are being examined. It is therefore considered by the Member Steering Group that this aspect should be left for councils to consider during the preparation of their Local Development Frameworks.

RODGER HOOD
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TIM SADLER
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR

Background Papers:

The South East Plan

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment for the Thames Valley Region
(September 2005)

ODPM Circular 1/2006 Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites (February 2006)

Preparing Regional Spatial Strategy Reviews on Gypsies and Travellers by Regional
Planning Bodies (March 2007)