

GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS – ACCOMMODATION ASSESSMENT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report considers the arrangements for providing information to the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) on the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers in the district to feed into a policy review of the East of England plan.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The East of England Regional Assembly has given a commitment to carry out a single issue review (see related report on this agenda) of the needs of gypsies and travellers leading to district by district site allocations.
- 2.2 Under the provisions of the Housing Act 2004, EERA has asked Local Authorities to provide information about the need for accommodation to feed into the review.
- 2.3 On 11 July 2006, the Planning Policy & Transportation Committee considered a proposal by the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership to prepare a joint Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) on behalf of the South Essex districts.
- 2.4 The Committee concluded that the Council should not participate in a joint study and at Full Council on 25 July 2006 (Minute 258/06), it was resolved that funds should be allocated to enable a Rochford only study to be prepared.

3 CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The Thames Gateway districts have now decided to drop the preparation of a joint sub-regional assessment of Gypsy and Traveller needs; other districts shared Rochford's concerns regarding a joint study.
- 3.2 In 2005 the Essex Planning Officers Association commissioned Salford University to prepare a report on the housing needs of gypsies and travellers in Essex. 'Looking Back, Moving Forward' was published in 2006 and reported to the Environmental Services Committee on 5 April 2006.
- 3.3 Whilst the study was Essex wide, clarification has now been sought from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on its status.
- 3.4 DCLG has confirmed that 'Looking Back, Moving Forward' will cover Local Authorities as to their statutory duty to carry out a Gypsy and Traveller housing needs assessment and that the document will be used to inform the single issue review of the East of England Plan.

3.5 That being the case it is necessary to consider the implications of this statement and the requirements for Rochford to commission further work on Gypsy and Traveller needs.

4 FINDINGS OF LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

4.1 The study identified 442 unauthorised encampments in Essex with 14 of these being located in Rochford District.

4.2 The latest Gypsy and Caravan Count completed in August indicates there are 20 unauthorised caravans in the district on 6 sites. Of the total, 15 caravans are located on 1 site on the old A130. The difference in numbers between the study and the latest count relates to an increase in the number of caravans on the old A130 site.

4.3 The Gypsy and Caravan Count forms the basis of the methodology used by Salford University to project future household formation. In fact, Salford estimate that the count is likely to demonstrate an under-estimate of the expected growth rate for Gypsy and Traveller communities.

4.4 The formula for estimating the levels of household formation is:-

- current number of Gypsy and Traveller households and estimated rate of local future household increase = estimated number of Gypsy and Traveller households
- projected increase in Gypsy and Traveller households x average household size – estimated population increase
- estimated population increase ÷ average caravan occupancy level = projected number of additional caravans
- projected number of additional caravans ÷ 2 = projected number of additional pitches.

4.5 The rate of future household increases is estimated by Salford to be around 5% based on the rate applied to the settled community in Essex by ODPM (now DCLG).

4.6 Applying this methodology to the count of caravans in Essex (1150 caravans of which 442 were unauthorised), Salford University concluded that there would be an increase in Gypsy and Traveller households of 59 by 2016, equating to 118 caravans or 59 pitches.

4.7 The East of England Plan runs until 2021, but it is estimated that this 5 year period would generate between 30-40 further households, giving a total of 90-100 additional households between 2006-2021.

- 4.8 The starting point for assessing the requirement for pitch numbers in Rochford District is likely to be the total of 14 caravans included in the Salford count, though the latest count in July 2006 indicates a total of 23 caravans of which 3 are authorised.
- 4.9 Whatever figure is used, the projected increase in Gypsy and Traveller household numbers in Rochford using the Salford methodology is very small. That having been said, the calculation is still based on a starting point of there being 20 unauthorised caravans and Members will need to consider the implications of this situation.
- 4.10 If it is accepted that the starting point for provision in the District is the total number of caravans present at the moment, then Members will need to consider the options for providing sites for this number through the preparation of the LDF Core Strategy and Allocations Development Plan documents.
- 4.11 Work is in progress to assess the situation and consider a way forward with regard to the unauthorised sites in the District and a report is being prepared for the Planning Policy & Transportation Committee on 10 October. In the meantime, Members are asked to consider their views on the requirements for a further GTAA study. Given the acceptance by DCLG of the Looking Back, Moving Forward Study as fulfilling the requirements for a GTAA, it would seem prudent to at the very least put on hold a further study.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That consultants should not be commissioned to carry out a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment for Rochford.

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Background Papers:-

Looking Back, Moving Forward, Salford University 2006

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