

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**LOCAL DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENT ADVISORY GROUP**

**22<sup>nd</sup> SEPTEMBER 2009**

**REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND  
COMMUNITY STRATEGY**

**Report prepared by Sarah Anderton**

**1. GYPSY & TRAVELLER PITCH ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN  
DOCUMENT: PROJECT SCOPING REPORT**

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To recommend to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration that the Project Scoping Report for the Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Allocations Development Plan Document be approved.

1.2 Recommendation of Assistant Director of Development and  
Community Strategy

1.2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Regeneration is recommended to approve the Project Scoping Report to guide the preparation of the Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Allocations Development Plan Document

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

**Background**

1.3.1 At its meeting on 29 June 2009, Cabinet approved the Council's Local Development Scheme which sets out the timetable for the preparation of the constituent elements of the Local Development Framework. One of the documents to be prepared is the Gypsy & Traveller Pitch Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) which will have the specific purpose of allocating sites for use by gypsies and Travellers. Work on this DPD has commenced.

1.3.2 The Council has appointed a firm of planning consultants, Baker Associates, to help with the first stages of the DPD's preparation. An important, early task has been to prepare a Project Scoping Report which is attached in Appendix A.

- 1.3.3 The Project Scoping Report is a starting point for the preparation of the DPD. It provides a useful guiding document for the DPD's preparation, setting out the policy context for the DPD, the key issues that it will need to address, the process for site selection and the approach to consultation. The Report will be public but will not itself be subject to public consultation.

### **Key issues raised in the Project Scoping Report**

- 1.3.4 Members' attention is brought in particular to the following points made in the Report:
- 1.3.5 **Maidstone Borough-wide Local Plan:** Whilst the Local Plan's Gypsy policy was not saved, the remaining saved policies of the Local Plan will remain extant whilst the DPD is being prepared. The weight that can be afforded to these policies during the DPD's preparation must take account of the policies in the much more recent South East Plan and national policy guidance published since the Local Plan was adopted.
- 1.3.6 **Evidence base for the DPD:** The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) assesses need for the period 2006 to 2011. The timeframe for the DPD will be to 2016 therefore it is important that the evidence base is extended to cover the later period. The Report proposes that this be done through a review and update of the latest data available on both needs and supply.
- 1.3.7 **Flexibility in site provision:** The DPD is being prepared at the same time as the Partial Review of the South East Plan is being undertaken which will confirm the Borough's numerical requirement for pitches. It is likely that the DPD will be submitted before the partial review process has concluded. Furthermore it is unlikely that this requirement will ever be expressed as a maximum. The DPD will therefore need to allow for some flexibility in the number of pitches identified to ensure that the DPD Inspector can be convinced that the requisite requirement will be met.
- 1.3.8 **Spatial Options:** The process of preparing the DPD will need to test options for the spatial distribution of pitches. The most appropriate and achievable distribution can only be confirmed when the potential sites have been identified and assessed. The Report highlights the issues that could underpin the spatial approach:
- Meeting needs where they arise
  - Dispersing pitches more widely

- Balancing provision in urban and rural locations
- Seeking balanced, integrated communities
- Reflecting the emerging Core Strategy spatial options
- Reflecting areas of national policy restraint (AONB, Green Belt)

1.3.9 Further issues that will need to be tested include:

- Affordability of pitches
- Balance between public and private provision
- Providing a range of site sizes
- Providing for the different Gypsy and Traveller communities

1.3.10 **Site Assessment Criteria:** In line with the approach for conventional housing, the Report proposes that the three key factors of suitability, availability and achievability underpin the assessment of potential sites. Together these factors should determine whether a site is truly deliverable. The deliverability of sites is crucial. It is only by actual provision on the ground that the need for pitches will be addressed.

1.3.11 A number of workshops have been held with Parish Council representatives to help identify the key site assessment criteria. A similar event with Members is scheduled for 15<sup>th</sup> September and LDDAG will be updated on the outcomes of this discussion at the meeting. Subject to this, the Report proposes that the suitability of sites be assessed with reference to the following overall issues:

- Overall location
- Policy designations
- Access to services
- Relationship to surrounding land uses
- Site conditions
- Essential on-site services

1.3.12 The availability of sites will need to be confirmed through contact with landowners. Achievability relates to the economic viability of each site, having regard to the costs of developing it and its potential value for alternative uses.

1.3.13 **DPD timetable:**

Stakeholder engagement	August/December 2009
Informal public consultation	Jan/Feb 2010
Publication (formal public consultation)	July/August 2010
Submission to the Secretary of State	October 2010
Pre-examination meeting	December 2010
Independent examination	February 2011
Adoption	July 2011

1.3.14 The LDS programmes the first stage of informal public consultation to start in December 2009 but this has been slightly amended (above) to avoid the Christmas period. This change is not expected to have repercussions for the subsequent timetable.

#### 1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The Project Scoping Report is not a statutory requirement and therefore need not have been prepared. However it is considered that it will provide a useful guide throughout the DPD preparation process.

#### 1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The content of the report impacts on the key objectives of the Strategic Plan, particularly those relating to homes and communities. It is relevant to the Sustainable Community Strategy objectives of building stronger and safer communities and reducing inequalities in the borough.

#### 1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 There are no substantive risks associated with responding to this consultation.

1.7 Other Implications [Insert an 'X' in the boxes below to indicate if the recommendations will have any implications in the specified area]

#### 1.7.1

1. Financial

2. Staffing	
3. Legal	
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development	x
6. Community Safety	
7. Human Rights Act	
8. Procurement	
9. Asset Management	

1.7.2 Environmental/Sustainable Development: Such considerations are important in determining the allocation for sites for Gypsies and Travellers.

1.8 Background Documents

**NO REPORT WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT THIS BOX BEING COMPLETED**

Is this a Key Decision?    Yes        No   

If yes, when did it appear in the Forward Plan?

Is this an Urgent Key Decision?    Yes        No