
Meeting: Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 4 January 2010

Subject: Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document for Central Bedfordshire North

Report of: Planning and Development Strategy

Summary: The report seeks the support of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the site recommendations of the Development Strategy Task Force for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.

Contact Officer: Richard Fox, 0300 300 8000

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: The Wards in the former Mid Bedfordshire Council area

Function of: Executive

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Local Development Framework is a fundamental part of the Council's key aim to manage growth effectively.

Financial:

None.

Legal:

The Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document, when adopted, will be part of the statutory development plan for the area.

Risk Management:

None

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

None

Equalities/Human Rights:

None

Community Development/Safety:

The Gypsy and Traveller DPD is intended to reduce the incidences of unauthorised encampments which can create community development issues.

Sustainability:

The Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document when adopted will form part of the Local Development Framework. The report identifies the location of Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites in accordance with the accommodation needs expressed in the East of England Plan. The Local Development Framework embraces sustainable development as its overarching aim and has and will continue to be subject to a sustainability appraisal.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider and support the recommendations agreed by the Development Strategy Task Force on 14 December 2009 as detailed in the body of the report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Local authorities are required by Government, through the Housing Act 2004, to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers alongside the settled population. Local authorities are also required by the Act to develop a strategy that addresses any unmet need that is identified. That strategy is the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document (DPD). The Council's progress on meeting this statutory duty is regularly and rigorously monitored by Central Government.
- 1.2 Aside from this statutory duty, there are practical reasons for making provision. If insufficient authorised sites are provided, unauthorised camping is likely to continue. The problems associated with unauthorised sites, such as the costs of taking enforcement action, the tension that exists between Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community and the social exclusion experienced by Gypsies and Travellers will also continue. The aim of this process is to reduce the occurrence of unauthorised sites by making sufficient new provision for Gypsies and Travellers in the District. This will also make it easier to take robust enforcement action against unauthorised sites. Not making sufficient allocations would also lead to applications being granted permission on appeal to meet the identified need.

2. Background

- 2.1 Following the former Mid Bedfordshire LDF Task Force on 12 February 2009 and former Mid Bedfordshire Executive on 18 March 2009, Officers were instructed to undertake a further site search for the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document (DPD). Members wanted existing sites that had been considered through the DPD process to be reviewed together with a further site search.
- 2.2 The purpose of this new site search and review is to fulfil our increased requirement to accommodate Gypsy and Traveller pitches in accordance with Policy H3 of the East of England Plan to 2016. In the former Mid Bedfordshire area, this equates to 40 Gypsy and Traveller pitches, a transit site and a Travelling Showpeople site.
- 2.3 It should be noted that if the Council does not allocate sufficient sites for Gypsy and Traveller need, the Planning Inspector, at the Public Examination of the Gypsy and Traveller DPD is likely to find the document “unsound”. This could result in either the Inspector requiring the Council to begin the site search process again or the Inspector allocating sites from those previously considered by the Council. The Inspector’s Report is binding, so there will be no further opportunities for Members to influence the outcome of the DPD following receipt of this Report.

3. The Process So Far

- 3.1 On 4 December 2009, following the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 September 2009 at which Members agreed a set of criteria and scoring system against which new and previously considered sites would be considered, Members attended a bus tour of Central Bedfordshire North. On this tour, Members visited a selection of sites to consider their potential for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation, including those sites that scored the highest following the application of the site criteria and scoring system.
- 3.2 Following the Bus Tour, the Development Strategy Task Force met on 7 December 2009 to shortlist a set of sites to accommodate 40 Gypsy and Traveller pitches and 2 transit pitches.
- 3.3 At a subsequent Development Strategy Task Force meeting on 14 December 2009 Members met with representatives from Town and Parish Councils. These Town and Parish Councils were invited to meet with Members as they had had sites in their area shortlisted by the Task Force on 7 December. The representatives were given 5 minutes to present to Members their evidence on the suitability of each of the shortlisted sites in their area.
- 3.4 Following the presentation of evidence by Town and Parish Councils, Members of the Development Strategy Task Force then reviewed the sites in order to recommend a shortlist to OSC. OSC will now need to consider the list of sites and make their recommendation to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable

Development. This shortlist can then be taken forward in the Preferred Sites consultation document, which will be published for a 6 week period for public comment.

4. The Shortlisted Sites

- 4.1 The Development Strategy Task Force agreed to recommend to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following shortlist of sites:-

| Site Name | Parish |
|--|------------------------|
| Permanent Pitches (on sites with temporary planning permission) | |
| Woodside Caravan Park, Hatch, Sandy | Northill |
| Land rear of 197 Hitchin Road, Arlesey | Arlesey |
| 1 Old Acres, Barton Road, Pulloxhill | Pulloxhill |
| Permanent Pitches (on unauthorised, tolerated sites) | |
| Long Lake Meadow, Seddington | Sandy |
| Hermitage Lane, Hillside Farm off Westoning Road, Greenfield | Flitton and Greenfield |
| Permanent Pitches (as extensions of existing sites) | |
| Oak Tree Nursery & Magpie Farm, Upper Caldecote | Northill |
| Land between Common Road and Myers Road, South of Gypsy and Traveller site, Potton | Potton |
| Permanent Pitches (on new sites) | |
| Land south of Dunton Lane, Biggleswade | Biggleswade |
| Land south of Clifton and east of New Road, Clifton | Clifton |
| Land between the A421 and Woburn Road junction, Marston Moretaine | Marston Moretaine |
| Transit Pitches (on a new site) | |
| Sutton Storage Compound, south of Sutton | Sutton |

Site plans and the scores for these sites are enclosed in Appendix 1.

5. Conclusion and Next Steps

- 5.1 Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider and support the recommendations agreed by the Development Strategy Task Force on 14 December 2009.
- 5.2 Following consideration of these sites by OSC, and their recommendation to the Portfolio Holder, consultation will be undertaken on the site options at the end of January. The table below sets out the estimated timescales for the DPD.

| STAGE IN DPD PROCESS | ESTIMATED DATE |
|--|-------------------------|
| Period of consultation, following short listing of sites by Task Force and Overview and Scrutiny Committee | January - March 2010 |
| Preparation of the Draft Submission Development Plan Document. | March - July 2010 |
| Task Force consideration of the Draft Submission Development Plan Document. | August 2010 |
| Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee consideration of the Draft Submission Development Plan Document. | End August 2010 |
| Executive & Council approval of the Draft Submission Development Plan Document. | September 2010 |
| A statutory period of six weeks of public consultation will take place offering members of the public an opportunity to comment on the Draft Submission Development Plan Document. | October – November 2010 |
| The Council submit the Draft Submission DPD to the Secretary of State. | February 2011 |
| The Gypsy and Traveller DPD will be subject to an Examination in Public in front of an independent Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State. | Spring 2011* |
| The Planning Inspector publishes the binding report making final recommendations. | Summer 2011* |
| Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document Formally Adopted | Autumn 2011* |

* Subject to the Planning Inspectorate's timescales.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Site Plans and Site Scores