

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: THURSDAY, 16 JUNE 2011  
title: PLANNING FOR TRAVELLER SITES - CONSULTATION  
submitted by CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
principal author PHIL DAGNALL

## 1 PURPOSE

1.1 To inform the Council regarding this Government consultation on a revision to national planning guidance relating to traveller accommodation.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions – The document that is the subject of this report, will, following the results of this consultation, become national guidance on the location of traveller sites within the Borough and therefore assist in delivering the Council ambitions of making people's lives safer and healthier and also helping to protect and enhance the local environment.
- Community Objectives – The matters covered in this report will contribute to the objectives of building safer communities, and ensuring that there is a suitable supply of sites for housing
- Corporate Priorities – The report seeks to contribute to the current priorities of improving housing in the borough.
- Other Considerations – RVBC has the opportunity through this process to make its views known on an important planning policy document.

## 2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Government intends to replace current planning policy guidance relating to both "Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites" and "Travelling Showpeople", which are currently dealt with in two separate planning circulars, with one streamlined and amended document. The current position regarding provision for these two groups within the Borough is briefly outlined in 2.3 to 2.5 below. The Government considers that some of the current policies have been ineffective and also wishes to return decision making on the accommodation of these groups to a local level. It also considers that this matter needs urgent attention and has therefore moved to consultation ahead of developing a more general and simplified National Planning Policy Framework covering the whole planning system. This new consultation document now collectively refers to both Gypsy and Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople, as Travellers.

2.2 The full consultation document, which contains the Government's views on the matter together with the proposed new policies and the questions it wishes responses to focus on, is available in the members room for reference. A copy has also been e-mailed to members of the Planning and Development committee. In addition the document can be viewed online at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/travellersitesconsultation?view=Standard>

The deadline for a response to the Communities and Local Government Department is 6 July.

- 2.3 While this report concerns a response to a consultation on a new government policy it should be borne in mind that the Council already has in place a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA, see 3.2 below) within its LDF evidence base, which it considers to remain robust evidence and which underpins relevant Core Strategy draft policies that have recently been consulted on by the Council. Also this Core Strategy consultation revealed no significant comment in relation to these policies nor has wider LDF consultation revealed the traveller accommodation issue to be a significant issue within the Borough.
- 2.4 The current position with regard to Travelling Showpeople accommodation is that there is currently no provision in the borough for this group. The Borough has no formal evidence as to need and the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) did not place any accommodation target on the Borough. The most recent consideration of this issue, within the now abandoned Partial Review of the RSS (which was reported to members in October 2009), did not indicate that the Borough needed to make any further provision for this group.
- 2.5 As regards Gypsy and Traveller accommodation the current level of provision in the Borough (as of 2007) is a private site with permission for 4 pitches. The GTANA states that the Authority should make provision for 6 additional residential pitches from 2007 to 2016. It also states that there is a need for 6 transit pitches in the form of designated stopping places rather than purpose built transit sites.
- 2.6 To return to the new government proposals, the stated aims of the new policy are to:
- enable local planning authorities to make their own assessment of the needs of travellers for planning purposes and thereby set their own targets for provision;
  - facilitate planning authorities in planning for sites over a reasonable timescale;
  - ensure that planning authorities develop fair and effective strategies, promoting more private provision, while recognising that there will always be those travellers who cannot provide their own sites;
  - increase the number of traveller sites, in appropriate locations with planning permission, to address under provision and maintain an appropriate level of supply;
  - reduce the number of unauthorised encampments and make enforcement more effective;
  - protect the green belt from inappropriate development;
  - reduce tensions between settled and traveller communities;

- streamline current advice and align it more closely with planning for housing policy; and
- enable provision of suitable accommodation from which travellers can access education, health, welfare and employment opportunities.

2.7 Some of these aims are contained within existing policies but the following the Government consider to be either different to current policy or objectives that the Government believes will be achieved better through this proposed new, shorter and updated guidance and it is these new elements that this report concentrates on.

### 3. NEW ELEMENTS TO POLICY

#### 3.1 **Enable local planning authorities (LPAs) to make their own assessment of need and use this evidence to set their own targets for pitch/plot provision.**

Currently the Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS), which are soon to be abolished, contain targets for the provision of traveller accommodation. These targets are currently informed by evidence gathered through Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments (GTANAs), the form of which are also laid out in current guidance. The government wishes to emphasise that local authorities should continue to plan for traveller accommodation but that now it will be up to them to set their own targets, provided that they can justify them with robust evidence that will be examined by the Planning Inspectorate. How they gather that evidence will now be up to them as they will not be bound to use the GTANA model but use any other methods that they feel are appropriate providing that they deliver robust results.

#### 3.2 **Facilitating local authorities in planning for sites over a reasonable timescale**

The Government considers that nationally the current system has not delivered the appropriate number of traveller sites to address an identified national under supply. To do this it is proposing to ask local authorities to plan for a five year supply of traveller pitches/plots. This places the provision in line with the current housing policies that stipulate a five year supply position for more conventional housing. This five year supply will be based on the evidence gathered above and local authorities will be given a reasonable time to put this in place. After this time, if there is not a five year supply, then applications for traveller sites should be treated favourably.

#### 3.3 **Deliver fairness in relation to protection of the Green Belt from development.**

The Government considers that a phrase within current policy that states that new traveller sites within the Green Belt are “normally inappropriate development” has led to a perception that it has become easier to place a traveller site in the green belt than a conventional dwelling. To address that perception of unfairness the Government propose to remove the word “normally” from guidance and therefore harmonise the position with the national Planning Policy Guidance (PPG2) Green Belts.

#### 3.4 **Reduce tensions between settled and traveller communities in relation to the planning system.**

As mentioned above, the Government considers that there is a perception that travellers are treated more favourably within the current system than members of the settled community, with the Green belt issue mentioned above being an example of this. Also,

again mentioned above, it proposes to harmonise the position in relation to unmet traveller need with the housing policies within Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 3 on Housing. In addition it proposes a requirement on local authorities to “pay particular attention to early and effective community engagement with settled and traveller communities when formulating their plans and determining planning applications”. This addresses a Government concern that nationally there has been a lack of meaningful engagement.

3.5 In general the government considers that the new streamlined guidance will be more effective and reduce costs and describes these savings within the consultation document.

3.6 Members are invited to consider the consultation questions set out at appendix 1 to this report and to consider any issues that they wish to raise a response to.

#### 4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – No immediate implications.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – None.
- Political – No direct political implications.
- Reputation – The Council would wish to be seen to take note of this consultation to this important planning document and contribute relevant comment as a part of influencing national planning legislation..

#### 5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

5.1 Authorise the Chief Executive to make as appropriate, the relevant response on behalf of the Council to the questions posed within the Consultation document.

#### CHIEF EXECUTIVE

For further information please ask for Phil Dagnall, extension 4570.

Background papers: Planning for Traveller Sites – Consultation Document. CLG2011

## APPENDIX 1

### THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that the current definitions of “gypsies and travellers” and “travelling showpeople” should be retained in the new policy?
2. Do you support the proposal to remove specific reference to *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments* in the new policy and instead refer to a “robust evidence base”?
3. do you agree that where need has been indentified, local planning authorities should set targets for the provision of sites in their local planning policies.
4. Do you think that local planning authorities should plan for “local need in the context of historical demand”?
5. Do you agree with the proposal to require local planning authority to plan for a five-year supply of traveller pitches/plots?
6. Do you agree that the proposed wording of Policy E (in the draft policy) should be included to ensure consistency with Planning Policy Guidance 2: *Green Belts*?
7. Do you agree with the general principle of aligning planning policy on traveller sites more closely with that on other forms of housing?
8. Do you agree with the new emphasis on local planning authorities consulting with settled communities as well as traveller communities when formulating their plans and determining individual planning applications to help improve relations between the communities?
9. Do you agree with the proposal in the transitional arrangements policy (paragraph 26 in the draft policy) for local planning authorities to “consider favourably” planning applications for the grant of temporary permission if they cannot demonstrate an up-to-date five-year supply of deliverable traveller sites, to ensure consistency with Planning Policy Statement 3: *Housing*?
10. Under the transitional arrangements, do you think that six months is the right time local planning authorities should be given to put in place their five-year land supply before the consequences of not having done so come into force?
11. do you have any other comments on the transitional arrangements?
12. Are there any other ways in which the policy can be made clearer, shorter or more accessible?
13. Do you think that the proposals in this draft statement will have a differential impact, either positive or negative, on people because of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation? If so, how in your view should be respond? We are particularly interested in any impacts on (Romany) Gypsies and (Irish) Travellers and welcome the view of organisations and individuals with specific relevant expertise. (A draft Equalities Impact Assessment can be found at Annex C).