

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Working Group

REPORT NUMBER: **J224**

TO: STRATEGY COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 8 April 2010

GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION NEEDS IN BABERGH

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide a full response to the issues, set by Strategy Committee on 30 July 2009, for the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Working Group to progress. [Paper J65](#) sets out the full information on the background to this paper.
- 1.2 To seek approval to commence the process of site identification and delivery.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the establishment of a set of criteria for identifying suitable and sustainable sites for Gypsy and Traveller pitches, as set out in Task 1 below, be approved.
- 2.2 That the establishment of a procedure for delivering Gypsy and Traveller pitches, on sites that meet the site identification procedure in Task 1 below and as detailed in Tasks 2 and 3 below, be approved.
- 2.3 That the delivery plan and timetable for pitch delivery detailed at Task 4 below, be approved.
- 2.4 That the Communications Strategy detailed at Task 5 below, be approved.

The Committee is able to resolve these matters.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Secretary of State's report recommends that Babergh delivers 15 permanent pitches by 2011, through development control decisions and Local Development Documents. This requirement is now adopted within Policy H3 of the East of England Plan. This policy also requires delivery of a further 13 pitches from 2011 to 2021. The government, through the Homes and Communities Agency, has made grant funding available for the delivery of these pitches for the years 2008 to 2011. At present no grant funding has been confirmed for the period beyond 2011. This means, if the Council developed pitches after 2011, that government grant funding may not be available; potentially leaving the Council liable to fund such developments without grant aid.
- 3.2 Furthermore, if the Council does not deliver a total of 15 pitches by 2011, the Secretary of State could direct the Council to produce a document allocating sites for the provision of these pitches as set out in the East of England Plan. This may have an impact on the Council's resources.

3.3 The financial implications of providing Gypsy and Traveller pitches depends upon the number and tenure of pitches delivered. Many Gypsy and Traveller families want to own their pitches, which will mean minimal cost to the Council. If Council or Registered Social Landlord owned and managed pitches are needed this could have significant capital and revenue cost implications for the Council, particularly if no government grant funding is available. The actual costs are difficult to estimate and will depend on a number of variables such as the cost of land, the number of pitches required, the design and construction costs of the site and the day to day management and maintenance of the site. There is also likely to be a requirement for a significant staff input and the possible appointment of a Communications consultant at a potential cost of about £5,000, as detailed in Task 5 below.

4 **RISK MANAGEMENT**

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
<p>Babergh fails to provide 15 pitches by 2011 and the Secretary of State directs the Council to produce a document allocating sites for the provision of fifteen Gypsy and Traveller pitches.</p>	<p>Significant</p>	<p>Critical</p>	<p>The Council has created a Member led Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Working Group to action agreed terms of reference. These include a site identification and delivery criteria and procedure, for delivering 15 pitches within the Babergh District.</p> <p>The Council must take appropriate action to show the Secretary of State that the delivery of pitches is being achieved within a timescale appropriate to local circumstances and site availability. A proposed timescale for pitch delivery is provided in Task 4 at paragraph 5.27 below.</p>
<p>No partner Registered Social Landlord can be identified to bring forward, own and manage Gypsy and Traveller pitches/sites</p>	<p>Significant</p>	<p>Critical</p>	<p>The Council is working to identify potential Registered Social Landlord partners.</p> <p>If no partners can be identified the Council may need to bring forward pitches/sites within its own ownership and management.</p>

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
No grant funding is available from the Homes and Communities Agency beyond 2011 for the delivery of Council or Registered Social Landlord owned and managed Gypsy and Traveller pitches.	Significant	Critical	The Council agrees to the delivery of pitches so that these are more likely to be brought forward in time to claim Homes and Communities Agency grant funding.

5 **KEY POINTS**

Background Information

- 5.1 At its meeting on 30 July 2009 Strategy Committee recommended two Members to sit on the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Working Group. Councillors Sue Wigglesworth and John Hinton were appointed to join the group. Other members include Rory Coxhill, who is a member of the local Gypsy and Traveller community, Keren Wright the Suffolk County Council Gypsy and Traveller Officer and officers of the Council.
- 5.2 The Council has committed to this work in its one-year Delivery Plan and in the work plan of its Fairness and Equal Access Group.
- 5.3 The working group has now met and sets out below its response to the terms of reference set by Strategy Committee:

Terms of Reference and Recommendations:

- 5.4 The terms of reference set by Strategy Committee are highlighted in bold underlined type and are dealt with separately:

Task 1 - Establish a set of criteria for identifying suitable and sustainable sites for Gypsy and Traveller pitches:

Use existing unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller pitches:

- 5.5 Assess, through the existing planning development control process, any unauthorised sites that have been identified, to establish their suitability as permanent sites. This should be done in liaison with local Ward Members and existing Gypsy and Traveller residents. Once an unauthorised site is assessed and approved as a permanent site, it will count towards the Council's target of 15 pitches to be delivered by 2011.

- 5.6 Where an unauthorised site is assessed, through the development control process, as being unsuitable as a permanent site, officers of the Council will work with the existing Gypsy and Traveller residents, using the site identification and delivery process, to identify an appropriate location for a new site. During this process any appropriate enforcement action will be taken to run alongside the identification and delivery of a replacement pitch. In order to ensure a robust and consistent approach an officer guidance note has been developed and adopted by the Council's Planning Policy and Development Control Teams.

Negotiate pitches within large allocations:

- 5.7 Implement the East of England Plan policy for delivering Gypsy and Traveller pitches on allocated sites. This can be negotiated as part of the housing mix on a development. Where Council or Registered Social Landlord owned pitches are required these can be part of the 'up to 35%' affordable housing delivery for the development. Affordable pitches will be recorded in the Affordable Housing Programme for approval as part of the Council's affordable housing delivery process.

Bring forward Rural Exceptions Sites and other small sites:

- 5.8 Officers of the Council will identify suitable rural exceptions and other small sites across the District, where a local need for pitches or sites is identified. This will include the identification of Babergh and Suffolk County Council owned land suitable for this purpose, together with privately owned land.
- 5.9 Officers of the Council will work with local Ward Members, Parish Councils, local landowners and the local community to deliver Gypsy and Traveller pitches on rural exceptions sites, subject to planning and sustainability considerations.

Task 2 - Develop a procedure for delivering Gypsy and Traveller pitches on sites that meet the site identification criteria, as detailed in Task 1 above:

- 5.10 The following criteria, to be implemented by Officers of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Working Group, is recommended for the delivery of Gypsy and Traveller pitches and sites in conjunction with the site identification criteria detailed above.
- 5.11 Consult with local Gypsy and Traveller communities and confirm their accommodation needs. This will include the type of accommodation and tenure required, the appropriate location for pitches/sites, the tenure of each site, the number of pitches required on each site, and the facilities required for each site
- 5.12 Search for appropriate sites in the areas identified through consultation with Gypsy and Traveller communities, using the site identification criteria adopted by the Council, as detailed above
- 5.13 Draw up a list of potential sites, in priority order, according to planning policy guidelines and the approved sites identification criteria, as detailed at Task 1 above, Circular 01/2006 and the Regional Spatial Strategy; ensuring that all the identified sites are sustainable in terms of the delivery of Gypsy and Traveller pitches.

- 5.14 The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Working Group then consider the prioritised sites for recommendation to Strategy Committee. Local Ward members will be invited to attend those working group meetings where sites within their particular Wards are being considered.
- 5.15 Potential sites are presented to the Housing Panel for their comments, which will be considered by the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Working Group.
- 5.16 The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Working Group will report to Strategy Committee seeking approval of the potential sites and their delivery.
- 5.17 Once approved negotiations will be opened with land owners, together with appropriate consultation with the public and stakeholders.
- 5.18 Registered Social Landlord partners will be invited to work with the Council and the Gypsy and Traveller community to deliver sites that are for affordable housing tenures.

Task 3 - Examine any related sustainability and social cohesion issues relating to the wider community, along with the Council's Section 17 Crime and Disorder responsibilities

- 5.19 As part of the site identification and site delivery process the Working Group will consider, in liaison with all appropriate partners and agencies, a range of sustainability issues to include:
- Health care
 - Education
 - Community facilities
 - Flood risk
 - Landscape value
 - Employment and business issues
 - Site management
- 5.20 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places an obligation on all Local Authorities to consider the crime and disorder implications in all its functions. Gypsies and Travellers are a recognised racial group and much is known about the negative perceptions of the Gypsy and Traveller community.
- 5.21 The development process for any sites must therefore consider very carefully the potential sensitivities between the Gypsy and Traveller and settled communities. Particular attention is needed to ensure an appropriate process for consultation or the distribution of information to local residents and to recognise the potential for prejudice.
- 5.22 Within that context though, it is important that any legitimate concerns are not ignored. Whatever site or sites are developed it is important that every effort is made to develop a cohesive relationship between the Gypsy and Traveller community and settled residents in the area, thereby minimising the potential for tensions and disorder.

5.23 It is therefore essential that a robust Communications Strategy is in place, to ensure this important area of work is implemented in a highly professional manner. Areas to focus upon are:

- Distribution of 'myth-busting' information about the Gypsy and Traveller Community
- Ensuring that existing local facilities have sufficient capacity and the ability to cope with the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community
- Events (Social/Educational) in the local areas bringing the two communities together
- Clear understandings about land use and boundaries
- Early engagement with the settled community to ensure that any issues are identified and tackled as quickly as possible

For full details of the proposed Communications Strategy please see Task 5 below.

Task 4 - Create a plan and a timetable that meets the level of need that exists and which can respond to government requirements for pitch delivery.

5.24 The delivery timescale for Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision is likely to be a lengthy process. This is because appropriate sites must be identified and then formally adopted by the Council. Following this, negotiations will need to take place with land owners. Again, this can be a time consuming process. It is also anticipated that the consultation and planning process for identified sites will be time consuming. Although a general indication of timescales can be provided each identified site will require its own project plan and delivery timeline. These will reflect the individual circumstances of each site. It is recommended that the general timescales for delivery are as detailed below. These will be subject to continual review:

- Mar-2010 Member awareness event – 16 March 2010
- Mar-2010 Officer awareness event – 16 March 2010
- Apr-2010 Report to Strategy Committee – 8 April 2010
- April-Jul-2010 Consultation with Gypsy and Traveller community regarding sites and tenures is formalised and progressed
- Jun/Jul-2010 Confirm tenure of sites – the tenures identified will affect the timescales on the rest of the process for each individual site
- Jun-2010 Parish Council awareness event
- Jul-2010 Site identification process commences
- Jul -2010 Potential Registered Social Landlord partners are identified
- Aug -10 First phase of site identification process concludes
- Sep-10 2nd Member awareness event – emphasis on sites, design, best practice and communications

- Sep-10 Confirm partnership arrangements with Registered Social Landlords and neighbouring local authorities on potential schemes
- Sep-10 Discuss potential funding requirements with Registered Social Landlords and the Homes and Communities Agency. This can only be done once potential sites are identified and tenure is known
- Oct-2010 Report to Housing Panel 29 October 2010 – sites/progress with consultation
- Nov-2010 Report to Strategy Committee 4 November 2010 – sites/progress with consultation
- Jan-2011 Negotiate formally with landowners and commence planning pre-application work and delivery timescale mapping – this will be an ongoing process
- Mar-2011 Commence design and costing work for any affordable rented pitches proposals
- May-2011 Confirm grant requirements and funding availability with Registered Social Landlord partners and Homes and Communities Agency
- Jun-2011 Commence communication and consultation on sites
- Oct-2011 Commence planning application process
- Late 2011 Report progress on delivery to Strategy Committee

Task 5 - Develop a Communications Strategy to encourage improved links with the local Gypsy and Traveller community and the wider community, with particular attention to communications with those communities where pitches may be delivered:

- 5.25 To achieve the successful delivery of Gypsy and Traveller pitches, it is essential that Members and Officers of the Council, parish Councillors and local people have a clear understanding of the Gypsy and Traveller community. In order to achieve this it is recommended that a sensitive and robust Communications Strategy is adopted by the Council.
- 5.26 The Council's Communications Team has worked closely with the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Working Group to develop what is considered to be a robust and effective Communications Strategy, which will enable people to better understand the Gypsy and Traveller community and enable the delivery of Gypsy and Traveller pitches within the District. See Appendix 1 attached.

- 5.27 However, it is recognised that the Council has little experience of dealing with Gypsy and Traveller issues and that the delivery of Gypsy and Traveller pitches across the District will be an extremely sensitive and time consuming issue. The Communications Team confirms that involvement with this work will stretch their limited resources if additional to their existing responsibilities.
- 5.28 With this in mind the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Working Group is considering ways of providing the necessary communications support for this area of work on a County wide basis. Discussions are underway with the Suffolk Gypsy and Traveller Steering Group to explore and progress partnership working with the County Council and other District and Borough Councils. Consideration will also be given to the joint appointment of a specialist Communications consultant, to undertake part or all of this work and especially that relating to the liaison between the Council and the settled community.
- 5.29 It is estimated that an expert consultant will cost about £300.00 per day. VAT and expenses are in addition to this figure. A 10 to 15 day consultancy is estimated to cost about £5,000. The Council has no budget set aside for this and if it is considered necessary to appoint a consultant to do all or part of this work on behalf of Babergh and its partners, the Council's contribution will be met from savings achieved within the existing Affordable Housing budget. If no budget can be identified this work will have to be achieved using existing resources.
- 5.30 The issues that need to be covered include; advice and support on delivery of cultural awareness training for officers and Members; production of local myth-busting information to be included in Council communications; holding a Babergh Gypsy and Traveller event during the Gypsy Roma and Traveller History Month in June 2010, as a mechanism to promote community cohesion as part of the Council's race equality duty; direct engagement with local Gypsy and Traveller families, to identify key local representatives prepared to be involved in communications work and help identify sites; production of a press pack and briefing papers for the Council's Communications Team; to actively combat local hostility with facts drawn from national research; direct representation to local and regional media about the need for a site. The Suffolk Gypsy and Traveller Steering Group is currently assessing what expertise exists within its membership and what areas a consultant would need to be employed to undertake. Once this work is completed it is envisaged that only a small, but important element of this work will need to be done by a consultant.
- 5.31 A Communications strategy has been developed for the Committee's approval - please see Appendix 1 attached.

Task 6 - Work in partnership with Suffolk County Council and the other Suffolk District and Borough Councils on Gypsy and Traveller issues

- 5.32 It is confirmed that partnership working is in place between and neighbouring authorities and that the Council is:
- A member of the Suffolk Gypsy and Traveller Steering Group and Accommodation sub-group
 - Continued funding contribution for the employment costs of the Suffolk Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officer post
 - Working in partnership with neighbouring Councils to identify areas where joint working and sites can be progressed

- Detailed discussions are underway between officers of the Council and those of Ipswich Borough Council with a view to considering the joint provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites along the boundary of the two authorities.

5.33 Following consideration of this report and approval of the proposed procedures for site identification and delivery, Strategy Committee is asked to approve the next phase of action by the Working Group. This will be to:

- implement the site identification and delivery process
- implement the agreed timetable for delivery
- further develop and implement a Gypsy and Traveller Communications strategy
- Report back to Strategy Committee once potential sites have been identified in order to seek approval to take these forward
- Consult with the Housing Panel and Ward Members prior to reporting back to Strategy Committee.

5.34 The Tasks detailed above will be subject to a risk assessment and an Equality Impact Assessment to test the Council's approach to meeting Gypsy and Traveller accommodations needs and the site selection criteria.

6 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Communications Strategy.

The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Working Group comprises:

Councillors Sue Wigglesworth and John Hinton, Rory Coxhill, Keren Wright, Malcolm Firth, Ian Tippett, Tracey Brinkley, Graham Chamberlain, Tom Ost and Robert Paddison.

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BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL GYPSY AND TRAVELLER COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Where are we now?

- At present there are no council-owned permanent Gypsy and Traveller sites in the Babergh district.
- Government guidelines suggest each District and Borough Council needs to provide for this part of our community. An independent Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) was carried out - the results published in May 2007.
- At the time of the GTAA, Babergh and Suffolk Coastal were the only two District Councils not to have any dedicated sites for Gypsy and Travellers.
- The assessment looked at five districts in Suffolk - Babergh, Ipswich, Suffolk Coastal, Mid Suffolk and Waveney - and concluded the requirement for Babergh was for less than one pitch, which was rounded up to one pitch.
- But, a report by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) has now concluded that Babergh must provide 15 permanent pitches, which can hold up to two caravans each, in the district and these must have been identified, have gained planning permission and be ready for use by 2011.
- Babergh is still at an early stage in this process but is now planning its strategy for delivering this requirement within the timetable.

Who are we trying to reach?

- Members of Gypsy and Traveller communities.
- Landowners who are willing to make land available in Babergh for the siting of permanent pitches.
- Members of the public.
- Babergh Councillors.
- Babergh Officers
- Parish and Town Councillors throughout the district.
- Regional media.
- Community media.

What, if any, are the communications issues?

- Because of the sometimes transient and private nature of Gypsy and Travellers – and the fact that, historically, Babergh has not had any prolonged communication with this community – there is a real disadvantage in knowing just how to engage with them.
- The sheer multitude of audiences – and the number of different messages for each – means there is a danger of confusion and inconsistency if a communications plan isn't implemented.
- Probable negative publicity surrounding locations of possible pitches from Babergh residents because of stereotyping surrounding the Gypsy and Traveller community.

What are we trying to achieve?

- Two-way communication between Babergh and the Gypsy and Traveller community to start consultations on the siting of pitches - and the tenure mix required.
- Proactive, early communication with Babergh residents in order to avoid negative, knee-jerk reactions and, possibly, NIMBY-led campaigns in the local media.
- Reaching landowners who potentially might want to volunteer land for pitches.
- Fully-briefed Members who have been kept up-to-date with the progress on this so they can answer questions from constituents.



What are the key messages?

- There are several key messages to this strategy and each with its own audience. We want to convey that:
 - Babergh wants to be able to meet the housing need of the local Gypsy and Traveller community.
 - Babergh wishes to set up a meaningful dialogue with the local Gypsy and Traveller community to understand their housing needs and help deliver them.
 - Babergh will start a meaningful dialogue with local landowners who are willing to make land available for the housing Gypsy and Traveller communities.
 - Babergh will enter a meaningful dialogue on Gypsy & Traveller housing needs with the local community.
 - Babergh wishes to aid the integration of the local Gypsy & Traveller community with the local community.

Which media outlets will be targeted?

- Digital media – Blogs, social networking sites.
- Regional free and paid-for newspapers.
- Regional television and radio.
- Community newsletter editors.
- Parish newsletters and websites and particularly Babergh's website.
- Babergh Matters (Summer edition).

Strategy

- Target and control – to keep the flow of information relative to each specific time period in the process.
- Consistency – to make sure the core message is the same throughout.
- Communication frequency – to ensure members of the Gypsy and Traveller community, members of the public, Babergh Members and other interested parties are kept informed of the project's progression.
- Multi-media usage – using Blogs and social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter - which have been identified as being used by this community i.e. Facebook group: Surrey and the South Romany, Gypsy, Traveller Forum.

Spokespeople

- Ian Tippet, Strategic Housing Manager.
- Tracey Brinkley, Housing Enabling Manager.
- Sue Wigglesworth, Chairman of Housing Panel.

Proposed timetable of media releases and information

- To link with target dates in the Gypsy & Traveller action plan
- To respond to particular issues emanating from the Gypsy and Traveller action plan i.e. promotion and consultation events.
- Releases in the near future:
- Media release explaining overall situation and further actions – around the time of a report going to committee.
- Media release surrounding consultation with Gypsies and Travellers – appealing for consultees to contact Babergh.
- Media release asking for landowners to come forward.

Emma Morton
Communications and PR Officer
January 2009

