

Decision Maker: DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 9 July 2014

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL GYPSY AND TRAVELLER
PLAN SITE OPTIONS CONSULTATION

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Chief Officer: Chief Planner

Ward: Darwin, Chelsfield and Pratts Bottom, Cray Valley East

1. Reason for report

The Council response to the Sevenoaks District Council consultation on the first stage of the preparation of its Gypsy and Traveller Plan. Specifically the consultation asks neighbouring local authorities whether they are able to assist SDC in meeting the identified need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches in Sevenoaks District.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

That the consultation and the proposed site options close to the Bromley boundary (Maps in Appendix 1) are noted and the responses to the consultation questions as set out in Appendix 2 be endorsed.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Not Applicable:
 2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council:
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Not Applicable:
 2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
 3. Budget head/performance centre:
 4. Total current budget for this head: £
 5. Source of funding:
-

Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional):
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
-

Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement
 2. Call-in: Not Applicable:
-

Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected):
-

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments?
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1. Sevenoaks District Council is consulting on the first stage of the preparation of its Gypsy and Traveller Plan responding to its Council Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (March 2012) with a Site Options Consultation Document.
- 3.2. Sevenoaks District is washed over by the Metropolitan Green Belt, which is drawn tightly around the towns and largest villages, covering 93% of the District, with AONB also covering over 60%. The Government's Planning Policy for Traveller Sites statement confirms that Gypsy and Traveller sites in the Green Belt are inappropriate development and that exceptional circumstances need to be demonstrated to justify a Green Belt boundary review.
- 3.3. In order to justify any review of the Green Belt for Gypsy and Traveller pitches, it is likely that it will be necessary to demonstrate that there is no ability or willingness from neighbouring authorities to help the Council meet the needs arising in the District in less constrained areas, through the Duty to Cooperate. Sevenoaks Council advised that in addition to contacts on their consultation portal properties in the immediate vicinity have been consulted.
- 3.1. The Sevenoaks District Council Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (March 2012) was undertaken by Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) at the University of Salford and suggests that 72 permanent pitches across the District are required in the period 2012 to 2026 and it is consulting on the first stage of the preparation of its Gypsy and Traveller Plan.
- 3.2. The Sevenoaks Gypsy and Traveller Plan acknowledges that it is important to plan to meet this need, as without the identification of suitable sites, Councils will find it hard to resist new proposals for sites, regardless of their location, as strategic provision will not have been identified.
- 3.3. The current consultation involves a range of questions about the needs assessment and methodology and with regard to other local authorities includes a specific "Duty to Co-operate" question asking whether the Council would be willing and able to assist Sevenoaks District Council in meeting the identified need in Sevenoaks District. In order to justify the review of the Green Belt for Gypsy and Traveller pitches, it will be important to demonstrate that there is no ability or willingness from neighbouring authorities to help the Council meet the needs arising in the District in less constrained areas, through the Duty to Cooperate.
- 3.4. The overarching aim of the Sevenoaks Gypsy and Traveller Plan is to
"increase the number of authorised Gypsy and Traveller pitches in the most appropriate locations across Sevenoaks District, reducing the number of unauthorised sites, and to enable Gypsy and Travellers to access services and facilities to meet their needs, whilst respecting the needs of the settled community in these locations. "
- 3.5. In order to achieve this aim, the Sevenoaks Plan proposes 5 objectives
 - To identify sites that are available, suitable and deliverable to meet the identified need in Sevenoaks District;
 - To allocate sites and grant permission for such sites that are sustainably located so as to improve access to local services and facilities such as education, healthcare provision, and convenience goods, whilst having minimal impact upon the surrounding landscape;
 - To provide clear development management guidance for the assessment of planning applications regarding Gypsy and Traveller sites; and

- To ensure sites are designed to a high quality, providing a safe and pleasant living environment for residents.
 - To protect the Green belt from inappropriate development, whilst recognising the difficulties of securing Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in the urban areas across the District.
- 3.6. Bromley is developing its Local Plan, which will incorporate the required Traveller provision, rather than producing a separate plan as Sevenoaks propose. Bromley has assessed the need for provision in the “Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople” evidence Base document prepared to support Councils proposals to address Bromley’s need through two documents “Options and Preferred Strategy” (2013) and the “Draft Policies and Designations” (2014). Additionally there have also been meetings with neighbouring Local Authorities on Gypsy and Traveller provision.
- 3.7. In common with Bromley’s approach set out in Bromley’s “consultation documents Sevenoaks are looking to address part of their requirement through existing sites with temporary permissions or unauthorised use, and increasing capacity at existing sites (public and private) and a “Call for Sites”.
- 3.8. Sevenoaks initially undertook a “Call for Sites” for gypsy and traveller sites, through the Allocations (Options) consultation in 2010 and subsequently through the Development Management: Draft Policies for Consultation in 2011 at which stage it was formally decided to allocate sites for Gypsies and Travellers through a Gypsy and Traveller Site Provision Plan rather than in the Allocations and Development Management Plan. A third Call for Sites was undertaken in August 2012.
- 3.9. Bromley’s draft responses to the 16 consultation questions are set out in Appendix 2

Sevenoaks Site Criteria

- 3.10. Expanding on the criteria for site allocation set out in the Sevenoaks Core Strategy (2011) Policy SP6 the consultation document sets out criteria for site allocation, relating to “Location & Key Constraints”, “Impact and Design”, “Deliverability”. Although, the consultation notes that due to planning and landscape constraints, it may not be possible for all criteria to be satisfied. It may be necessary to prioritise some criteria over others to ensure that the most suitable sites are put forward as potential options to meet the requirements. Therefore, a site will not necessarily be ruled out if it fails to meet one of the criteria if sufficient justification can be put forward to satisfy other criteria considerations.

Sevenoaks Site Options

- 3.11. Having assessed the sites the consultation document considers 10 sites as unsuitable for allocation, including the Fort Halstead Major Developed Site. The assessment indicates 13 potential site options offering up to 71 pitches, 1 short of their assessed need.
- 3.12. Of the 13 sites proposed in the Sevenoaks consultation document 4 are noteworthy for Bromley. Maps for these sites, outlined below, are set out in Appendix 1
- 3.13. Two sites are relevant due to their proximity to Bromley. One lies on the borough boundary and a second within sight of the boundary with Bromley
- Land east of Knockholt Station, lies adjacent to the borough boundary, which runs along the rail tracks southwest of Knockholt station. There is currently temporary permission

for 6 pitches, additionally a further 6 pitches have been promoted through the “Call for Sites”. The consultation document indicates that there is potential for 12 pitches, (the 6 temporary to be made permanent and 6 additional pitches).

- Holly Mobile Park, Hockenden Lane. The site lies approximately 200m beyond the borough boundary along Hockenden Lane to the east of the Swanley By Pass (A20). The consultation document suggests that the site could provide 3 pitches, reflecting the current temporary permissions.

3.14. Sevenoaks are also consulting on options for two new 15 pitch sites, which are noteworthy by virtue of their size, although lying a significant distance from the Borough boundary

- Halstead - On land at Fort Halstead (but outside the Major Developed Site boundary) lying approximately 2km from the borough boundary
- Shoreham – on land south of Mesne Way lying over 3km from the borough boundary

3.15. The remaining sites lie further from the borough boundary or involve existing single temporary pitches. The other proposed sites are located at:

- Robertsons Nursery, Goldsel Road, Swanley
- Malt House Farm, Lower Road, Hextable
- Hilltop Farm, London Road, Farningham
- Eagles Farm, Crowhurst Lane, West Kingsdown
- Hollywood Gardens, School Lane, West Kingsdown
- Early Autumn, East Hill Road, Knatts Valley
- Fordwood Farm, New Street Road, Hodsoll Street
- Seven Acres Farm, Hever Road, Edenbridge

Conclusions

3.16. The Sevenoaks District Council Gypsy and Traveller Site Options Consultation Document is a thorough and robust approach to meeting the need for 72 permanent pitches and suggests potential options for 71 pitches.

3.17. In terms of the impact on Bromley, only the proposal for an additional 6 pitches at Land east of Knockholt Station is of particular significance for the Borough. The site lies within Flood zones 2 and 3 and is therefore contrary to the Sevenoaks draft criteria. Even after three Call for Sites processes Sevenoaks district Council is still 1 pitch short, even with the additional 6 pitches at Knockholt Station. In light of the above pressures, whilst the intensification of pitches on this site within Flood zones 2 and 3 should not be promoted, other than to meet the direct needs of traveller families already residing on the site.

3.18. Bromley Council is producing its local plan and is developing site allocations to meet its current need and the need going forward. The Sevenoaks consultation makes a specific request to other authorities asking about their potential to contribute to meeting Sevenoaks need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches. The pitches currently under consideration through Bromley’s Local Plan process will meet the need highlighted through Bromley’s evidence base and this involves the allocation of sites in the Green Belt for which exceptional circumstances need to be demonstrated. Bromley Council does not have sufficient capacity to additionally meet the needs of adjacent Boroughs.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. Councils are required by the Housing Act 2004 and the National Planning Policy for Travellers to meet the accommodation needs of the population within their areas, including the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community and Travelling Showpeople, unless they are able to agree that other authorities will meet this need through the Duty to Co-operate.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Financial, Legal and Personnel
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Sevenoaks District Council Gypsy and Traveller Site Options Consultation Document Sevenoaks District Council Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (March 2012)