

**CABINET**  
**30 OCTOBER 2007**

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**PARTIAL REVIEW OF REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY**  
**PITCH REQUIREMENTS FOR GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS IN THE SOUTH WEST**

**Executive Summary**

The South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) has published for consultation and submitted to Government a Revision to the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006-2026 (RSS) relating to pitch provision for Gypsies and Travellers. The RSS Revision when finally approved will set the number of additional pitches that local planning authorities (District Councils) must provide through the identification of sites within their Development Plan Documents. The County Council has a right, as statutory consultee, to give its response at this formal consultation stage. **Appendix A** sets out the Revision to the RSS.

In July 2007, the County Council formally provided advice to the SWRA on the number of new pitches for Wiltshire based on the draft recommendations of a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) and operational needs of this authority in managing unauthorised encampments. The GTAA has been prepared by independent consultants and commissioned in partnership with the District Councils.

The level of provision for the Wiltshire Districts set out in the Revision reflects the advice previously submitted and should be generally supported with clarification sought for the West Wiltshire District figure. The Panel should also be informed that further work is being undertaken to determine whether the figures are reasonable in light of overcrowding assumptions.

**Proposal**

That:

- (i) The comments made at Paragraphs 12 to 17 of the Report be approved and form the County Council's response to the RSS Revision consultation and be submitted to the Examination in Public (EIP) Panel.
- (ii) The Director of Environmental Services be authorised to take these comments forward and represent the interests of the County Council through the EIP process.

**Reasons for Proposal**

To ensure an appropriate level of provision for Gypsies and Travellers is made for Wiltshire within the RSS to ensure that the need for new pitches is met and to reduce the potential for unauthorised encampments.

**GEORGE BATTEN**  
Director of Environmental Services

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To consider, and agree, the formal response of the County Council to the partial review of the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006-2026 (RSS) pitch requirements for Gypsies and Travellers in the South West for submission to the Examination in Public (EIP) Panel.

**Background**

2. Government Circular 01/2006 requires RSS to identify the number of pitches required for each local planning authority based on Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA) and a strategic view of needs across the region (paragraph 23). The Circular requires Development Plan Documents that form part of the Local Development Frameworks (new style Local Plans) produced by the District Councils, to identify specific sites to match pitch numbers from the RSS (paragraph 30).
3. At the time of publication of the Draft RSS, insufficient information existed to set out district level figures. In line with the Circular, an indicative regional figure was set out in Policy GT1. This figure was based on the combined advice of Strategic Planning Authorities (SPAs) in the form of First Detailed Proposals (FDPs) or Caravan Count Data for those areas where FDPs were not submitted. Wiltshire County Council's FDPs were approved by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Waste on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2006 (Reference PW-002-06) and comprised interim figures pending the outcome of a GTAA for Wiltshire that was in the early stages of preparation.
4. The Draft RSS committed to undertaking a single issue review (paragraph 6.1.15) that would take into account the GTAAs due to be completed across the Region in 2007. The SWRA has since undertaken a review of the Gypsy and Traveller policy in the Draft RSS, as discussed below.

**RSS - Single Issue Review**

5. The South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) requested the County Council's advice on the provision of additional pitches for Gypsies and Travellers in Wiltshire to inform this single issue review of RSS. An initial response was submitted to the SWRA (in the form of First Detailed Proposals) with the approval of the Cabinet Member for Planning and Waste (Reference PW-002-007). These are summarised in **Table 1**. However, these were draft figures pending the outcome of consultation with the Gypsy and Traveller Community and the conclusion of the technical work to support the final GTAA.

**Table 1:** First Detailed Proposals - New Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Provision for Wiltshire 2006 to 2011

District	No. of New Pitches 2006-2011	
	Residential	Transit
Kennet	0	0
North Wiltshire	24 <sup>1</sup>	12
Salisbury	9	0
West Wiltshire	7 <sup>2</sup>	0
Wiltshire Total	40	12

<sup>1</sup> Includes 16 pitches to meet need arising from expiry of temporary permission (January 2007) at Minety.

<sup>2</sup> Includes replacement site (see paragraph 13 below)

6. The SWRA has incorporated the County Council's draft figures into a revision to the Draft RSS. This sets out revised pitch requirements for Gypsies and Travellers in the South West and amends the wording of Policy GT1 and its supporting text. The revised **Policy GT1** and **Table 4.3** as included in the consultation document are set out in **Appendix A**.
7. Following consultation with the Gypsy and Traveller Community the GTAA has now been finalised. As a result, no changes have been made to the number of pitches for the Wiltshire Districts as set out in **Table 1**.

### **Process and Next Steps**

8. The consultation period ends on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2007. Following the formal consultation period, an EIP (scheduled to start on 4 March 2008) will be held before an independent panel appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. All consultation responses will be taken into account by the Panel in determining the matters to be discussed at the EIP and a list of participants will be identified. The EIP will discuss and test the soundness of the proposals in public.
9. Following the EIP, the Panel will prepare a report and submit this to the Secretary of State who will then issue any proposed changes to the partial review including a reasoned statement of the changes made. There will be the opportunity to comment on any proposed changes before the Secretary of State approves and issues the revised Gypsy and Traveller provisions for the RSS.

### **Main Considerations for the Council**

10. The consultation presents three questions seeking comments on:
  - (i) Policy GT1 and its supporting text.
  - (ii) Additional pitch numbers in Table 4.3.
  - (iii) The Sustainability Assessment.

A copy of the Sustainability Assessment is available in the **Members' Room** for inspection.

11. The pitch numbers set out in Table 4.3 of the consultation document reflect the new pitch provision initially proposed in the County Council's FDPs (as set out in **Table 1**) and confirmed in the final GTAA.
12. The levels of provision for the Wiltshire districts as set out in **Table 4.3** of **Appendix A** reflect the recommendations of the GTAA and as such should generally be supported. However, clarification is sought for the figure for West Wiltshire. This is discussed below.
13. While the pitch requirements for Wiltshire set out in **Table 4.3 (Appendix A)** reflect the level of district provision for new pitches as set out in the GTAA they have been inaccurately presented. The figure for West Wiltshire District reflects the potential need to find a replacement site in the period to 2011. The proposed provision for this District does not therefore, contrary to the wording of Policy GT1, represent a net or 'additional' increase in the number of pitches. The site concerned is Bonnie Park. The lease for this local authority managed site of 6 pitches will expire on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2011 and will not be renewed. A replacement site may therefore be required before 2011 to meet the need arising from the potential closure of this site if the existing landowner does not wish to allow the site to continue for its current use.
14. An objection should therefore be made to the figure for West Wiltshire as it currently appears in **Table 4.3** to ensure that the findings of the GTAA are accurately represented in the context of Policy GT1 and clarification provided to indicate that part of the requirement for West Wiltshire is for replacement pitches should they be required. Consequential changes may also need to be made to Policy GT1.
15. It should also be recognised that the recommendations of the GTAA include the need to undertake further research on the issue of overcrowding. The GTAA calculates overcrowding on the basis of bed spaces rather than the ability of existing pitches to take larger accommodation units. As such, it assumes that overcrowding would be addressed through the provision of new pitches. This work, when undertaken, may have implications for the findings of the GTAA in terms of new pitches required. At this stage, therefore, the RSS figures should be supported subject to the above comments (paragraphs 13 and 14) but the EIP Panel be informed that additional work is being undertaken that may have implications for the Wiltshire figures. The results of this work should be available to inform the EIP.
16. In addition, it is considered that an objection should be raised to paragraph 6.1.13. It is unclear whether this is referring to the need for additional transit pitch provision not yet identified in **Table 4.3** or whether it is referring to prioritising the development of residential pitches over transit pitches. If it is the latter, an objection should be raised. For Wiltshire, it is considered appropriate that both transit and residential pitches are delivered and no one type of provision takes priority over the other. The proposed transit pitch in particular will enable unauthorised encampments to be effectively managed across the County by providing a better geographical spread of sites in the north and south of the County. Currently there is only one site in Salisbury District. Clarification of the final sentence of Paragraph 6.1.13 should therefore be sought.
17. Finally, it is noted that the Strategic Sustainability Appraisal (SSA) at Table 7.1 includes incorrect data about the level of existing residential pitches at 2006 for Gypsy and Travellers within Wiltshire. This shows the level of existing pitches to be 73 rather than the 137 currently provided. This data could be used by others to indicate that a more limited supply of sites exists in Wiltshire than is the case. Accordingly, an objection should be raised to the SSA to ensure that accurate data is included.

## **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

18. Government Circular 01/2006 'Planning for Gypsies and Traveller Caravan Sites' recognises that Gypsies and Travellers have the same rights as other citizens and should have fair access to suitable accommodation. There is the need therefore to provide sites, including transit sites, in locations that meet the needs of the community to address under provision.

## **Environmental Impact of the Proposal**

19. The partial review of the Draft RSS sets out additional Gypsy and Traveller pitch requirements for Wiltshire which could be incorporated into the RSS for the South West when published. This could mean that new sites will need to be developed. The development of any land will have environmental implications. In addition, the provision of new sites should help reduce the level of unauthorised encampments across the County and their associated environmental implications.

## **Risk Assessment and Options Considered**

20. The County Council is a statutory consultee in the RSS process.

## **Financial Implications**

21. No direct implications. However, the identification of new Gypsy and Travellers site provision within the RSS may better enable funding to be attracted to Wiltshire to ensure their delivery.

## **Conclusion**

22. The comments set out in paragraphs 12 to 17 be formally submitted to the Panel as the County Council's response to the consultation by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2007. In addition, efforts should be made to ensure that the interests of the County Council continue to be appropriately represented through the EIP process.

## **GEORGE BATTEN**

Director of Environmental Services

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## **The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:**

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment Draft Final Report 2006 (David Coutie Associates)

Cabinet 5<sup>th</sup> September 2006 Formal Response to Draft Regional Spatial Strategy

Provision of Sites for Gypsies and Travellers - First Detailed Proposals Reference PW-002-07.