

To Chief Executives of County, Unitary and District Authorities

3 July 2006

Dear Colleague

**SOUTH EAST PLAN PARTIAL REVIEW: GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS -
PROVISION OF ADVICE FROM LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

The draft South East Plan commits the Assembly to undertaking an early partial review in relation to the provision of gypsy and traveller caravan accommodation, in the light of a full assessment of regional and district level accommodation requirements. This will be a sensitive process and throws up a number of issues which require early agreement to ensure effective partnership working between the Assembly, county, unitary and district authorities.

The first of these is the relationship between the RSS process and the Housing Authorities duties in relation to Gypsies and Travellers. As you will be aware, the Housing Act 2004 requires local housing authorities to include gypsies and travellers in their accommodation assessments and to take a strategic approach including drawing up a strategy demonstrating how the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers will be met, as part of their wider housing strategies. This has already commenced with a number of gypsy and traveller accommodation assessments (GTAAAs) underway across the South East. A schedule of ongoing and forthcoming GTAAAs is attached as an annex to this letter. Circular 1/2006 sets out the process by which the data collected through the GTAA process will inform the preparation of the Regional Spatial Strategy which should include pitch numbers for each local planning authority.

To utilise and build upon local authority expertise we are in the process of establishing an officer task group comprising representatives from each of the existing groupings of county, unitary and district authorities currently undertaking GTAAAs. A letter has been sent from the Assembly's Planning Strategy Director to each of the lead officers chairing these groupings inviting nominations to the task group. Barry Deller, Chair of the ACTVaR GTAA study, has agreed to chair the Task Group. The first meeting of the group will take place on Wednesday 5 July. A member steering group has also been established to inform the review process.

The second key issue is the geographical basis for the advice provided to the Assembly by the local authorities. Circular 1/2006 is clear that the RSS provision is based on district / unitary boundaries unless there is an agreement by small groupings of adjacent authorities to prepare a joint Development Plan Document on Gypsies and Travellers accommodation provision.

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The third issue is who will provide the advice to the Assembly. As the provision of gypsy and traveller caravan accommodation will require different provision for different parts of the region it is subject to Section 5(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, which states that the detailed proposals must be made by a Section 4(4) (i.e. county or unitary) authority unless that body and the RPB agree otherwise. However, it is clear that all local authorities have an important role in this process and this need for partnership working between the different tiers was emphasised by Regional Planning Committee at its meeting on 26 May. We are therefore proposing that the advice is submitted jointly by district and county authorities in two tier areas. I would be grateful if you would alert me as soon as possible if this is not an acceptable approach in your area.

A draft project plan for the Partial Review (including a statement of public participation) will be presented to the next meeting of RPC on 26 July, after which I propose a short informal consultation with local authority Chief Executives prior to wider formal public consultation.

Later this year, following consultation on the project plan, we expect to issue a brief to all local authorities setting out the scope of the advice requested (including any requirements in relation to the statutory SA/SEA process), the form it should take and the reporting deadlines. Advice will be required by June 2007 following which the Assembly, in partnership with the local authorities, would consult on a proposed distribution of caravan pitches.

This is likely to be a difficult process for all of us but I'm sure you will agree the onus is on us to work together to ensure that we have a robust position across the region. If you are unable to support any aspects of the approach as outlined I would be grateful if you would let me know as soon as possible. I am, as always, happy to meet with any authorities who wish to discuss the process further.

Yours sincerely



Paul Bevan
Chief Executive

c.c. Lead officers chairing the GTAA groups