

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY  
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Date: 28 November 2007

Subject: **Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Partial Review  
of the South East Plan: Arrangements for Public Engagement**

Report of: Director of Planning

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Support the Assembly's approach to public consultation for the Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Partial Review of the South East Plan.
2. Commend the consultation approach to the region's member authorities, and request that they work with the Assembly to help implement it.

**Purpose of the Report:**

To provide Regional Planning Committee with the opportunity to note and support the public consultation approach for the Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Partial Review of the South East Plan, including the role for member authorities.

**Key Issues:**

- The Assembly will lead public consultations on the Partial Review and will employ a range of engagement techniques described in the report. However it is considered critical to the robustness of the consultation process that the public have accessible, local consultation opportunities. The Assembly will need assistance from member authorities who are best placed to deliver such events.
- The Assembly has set aside £70,000 to support the delivery of local consultation events by member authorities.

## **I. Background**

- I.1 Public consultation for the 'Issues and Options' stage of the Partial Review is scheduled to run for 12 weeks commencing 6 May 2008 (after the local government elections) and closing 29 July 2008.
- I.2 The consultation will address:
- The number of permanent pitches required - i.e. is the total identified broadly correct?
  - Distribution options, specified by number of pitches per district / unitary authority.
  - A more general statement of need for transit site provision.
  - Supporting policies including implementation.
- I.3 The distribution options and policies for public consultation purposes are being finalised. They will be presented for endorsement to Regional Planning Committee on 30 January 2008 and to Plenary on 5 March 2008 for agreement.
- I.4 Consultation responses will inform refinement of draft policies, including selection of a single, preferred pitch distribution, for agreement by Plenary to submit to Government Office (at the end of 2008). Further public consultation on the preferred option (organised by GOSE) and Examination in Public will follow, provisionally in the first half of 2009 (a more detailed timeline is provided for information at Annex A).
- I.5 Key aspects of the background context include:
- Need for the Partial Review of the South East Plan arose due to new government legislation<sup>1</sup> intended to increase the number of legal Gypsy and Traveller pitches. Government's primary objective is to address historic under-provision, to improve conditions and opportunities for Gypsies and Travellers, and reduce illegal camping and the associated problems and costs for local authorities, settled and travelling communities alike.
  - Government has placed a requirement on Regional Assemblies to identify the number of pitches needed in their region, and how many each council should provide - but not where they should be located. Guidance<sup>2</sup> has been published to assist Assemblies in doing so.
  - The Assembly's role fits within a wider local government process. Local authorities are responsible for undertaking a technical assessment of the need for additional pitches in their area - the evidence base for the Partial Review distribution - and for specific site identification to deliver it. In essence the Assembly's role is to collate the evidence provided on the number and distribution of pitches, ensure the resulting picture is regionally consistent, and establish district-level provision targets accordingly.

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<sup>1</sup> Circular 01/2006 *Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites*, ODPM February 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *Preparing Regional Spatial Strategy Reviews on Gypsies and Travellers by regional planning bodies*, CLG March 2007

## **2. Consultation and Engagement Approach**

2.1 The Assembly will lead the consultation process across the region, but it is important that the overall approach recognises and reflects the essential and significant contribution local authorities make to both the Partial Review process, and to delivering Government's objectives for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

2.2 In terms of the Assembly's consultation role, a range of engagement techniques will be employed in parallel, as below. A dedicated section of the South East Plan website will provide access to the Partial Review documentation and consultation resources, and hardcopies will be made available and distributed as appropriate.

2.3 Regional press releases and media relations

2.3.1 At the start of the consultation period it is proposed to issue regional press releases to promote a more positive understanding of the Gypsy and Traveller communities, and to increase awareness of the process. This will include awareness-raising coverage in Assembly publications such as Voice and Bulletin, and press releases to the main local papers. It will also cover specialist media - including for example dedicated magazines, newspapers, radio stations and websites targeted at the Gypsy and Traveller communities - e.g. Travellers' Times, Rokker Radio. Model editorial items will be provided to councils for use in their own publications.

2.4 Public opinion polling

2.4.1 Polling will gather public views on the Partial Review draft policies and pitch provision options. Polling will include preparation and analysis of a consultation questionnaire to help ensure feedback is constructive and consistent.

2.5 Information Pack

2.5.1 A flexible information pack will be assembled, including a DVD (see 2.6), to explain the process to the press, public and Gypsy and Traveller communities. The pack will:

- Provide a user-friendly overview of the Partial Review Process;
- Explain the diversity of Gypsy and Traveller groups and portray their cultures and ways of life in a positive light;
- Explain the reasons behind the Partial Review using fact sheets and FAQs;
- Explain how to get involved; and
- Set out the next steps in the process.

2.6 DVD

2.6.1 The DVD will inform and educate, in particular to positively address and challenge negative assumptions and stereotypes. It is envisaged the DVD will have a role in consultation events e.g. as an opening item.

The Assembly has initiated commissioning this work, which will be procured in partnership with the Regional Assemblies for the North West, East Midlands and (subject to timing issues) the East of England. In addition to addressing the points in section 2.5, the DVD will:

- Outline the Gypsy and Traveller experience of the current planning process, and the consequences for both travelling and settled communities.
- Provide positive examples of well-organised sites and successful co-existence, to help counter common stereotypes.

## 2.7 Specialist Gypsy and Traveller consultation arrangements

2.7.1 The Assembly is in discussion with the 'South East' division of the *National Confederation of Gypsy Liaison Groups*, a registered charity. We hope this group will agree to undertake targeted consultation with Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities on the Partial Review draft policies and pitch distribution options, on the Assembly's behalf (the group has expressed strong interest in principle pending a meeting). It is also proposed to engage them as an advisory group.

## 2.8 Regional key stakeholder workshops

2.8.1 A number of Stakeholder workshops will be organised across the region during the consultation period (provisionally 2-3 subject to demand).

## 2.9 Local Consultation

2.10 In addition to activities at the regional level, it is considered critical to the robustness of the consultation process that the public have accessible, local opportunities to gain a better understanding of the process, ask questions, and express their views on the consultation options in an informed context.

2.11 Principal and district authorities provide a range of services to Gypsies and Travellers, and have, through the GTAA process, already engaged with their local communities on Partial Review issues. They are accordingly well placed to give local people the opportunity to respond to the Issues and Options consultation.

2.12 On 19 October 2007 the Leadership Group endorsed the view that member authorities should assist the Assembly, by organising and running approximately 20-25 Partial Review local public consultation events across the region. The most appropriate form of event would be agreed between the Assembly and organising local authorities - e.g. public meetings or exhibitions could be considered.

2.13 The Leadership Group agreed that up to £70,000 be made available to support the delivery of these events, in addition to the resource material described above.

## Annex A: Overview of the Partial Review Process

The table below provides an overview of the main stages of the Review process and the broad consultation, engagement and publicity opportunities and mechanisms at each stage.

Date	Stage	Description	Publicity & engagement
September 2006 - April 2007	Preparation	Preparation and agreement of a project work plan, timetable and guidelines for collecting evidence (by the Assembly).	Assembly-led Stakeholder consultation on the work plan and timetable.
Various 2006 - August 2007	Evidence Stage 1: Need Assessment	Undertaking Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments ( <b>GTAA</b> s) to assess need for pitches (by local council groupings).	Consultation by local council groupings with stakeholders and Gypsy and Traveller communities to help establish need.
June - September 2007	Evidence Stage 2: Benchmarking	Checking by consultants of GTAA's to identify any assessment variations or gaps and to establish overall need across the region	Assembly engagement with Officer Task Group on the results of the benchmarking process.
August - October 2007	Evidence Stage 3: Advice	Council groupings submit advice to the Assembly as to how pitch numbers established by assessment and benchmarking should be allocated to individual councils, using two allocation options, and identifying any other implementation issues.	Consultation by local council groupings with their local stakeholders including Gypsy and Traveller communities, to help establish the appropriate distribution.
October - December 2007	Evidence Stage 4: Audit	Audit of Advice by consultants to help develop a consistent picture of regional needs and distribution options taking into account delivery issues.	Assembly engagement with Officer Task Group and RPC Subgroup on the results of the Audit process.
November 2007 - January 2008	Preparation of the Issues and Options consultation document.	Assembly officers pull together the evidence and advice to prepare draft Gypsy and Travellers planning policy and options for pitch number allocation at district level. Informed by Sustainability Appraisal.	Assembly engagement with RPC Subgroup, Officer Task Group and (if convened in time) Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Group on the results of the Audit process. Joint RPC and RHB workshop.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Stage</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Publicity &amp; engagement</b>
January - March 2008	Assembly committee stages	Assembly (Plenary) considers the Issues and Options document for public consultation, taking into account recommendations from the Regional Planning Committee.	Formal agreement in public by the Assembly of the public consultation document including total pitch numbers and distribution options.
6 May - 29 July 2008	Issues and Options public consultation	12 weeks statutory public consultation. Publication and distribution of materials,	<p>Assembly publishes and distributes the Issues and Options consultation document, plus supporting material including DVD.</p> <p>Opinion polling, publicity and awareness-raising early in the consultation period, including press releases and interviews.</p> <p>Region-wide public, stakeholder and Gypsy and Traveller consultation events and workshops (including local events arranged by member authorities and any special-purpose events for Gypsies and Travellers).</p>
August - October 2008	Preparation of the Preferred Option document for submission to Government.	Review of consultation feedback to select the preferred policy approach and pitch distribution.	Assembly engagement with RPC Subgroup, Officer Task Group and Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Group on the results of the consultation process.
November - December 2008	Assembly committee stages	Assembly (Plenary) considers the Preferred Option document submission to government, taking into account recommendations from the Regional Planning Committee. Once agreed the document is formally submitted to government.	Formal agreement in public by the Assembly of the Preferred Option document including preferred pitch numbers distribution.

Date	Stage	Description	Publicity & engagement
Following submission of the Preferred Option document to Government Office for the South East, GOSE set the remainder of the timetable. Indicative onward dates are:			
First quarter 2009	Formal public consultation.	8 weeks statutory public consultation on the preferred option document.	GOSE publish and distribute the Preferred Option consultation document and supporting material.
Second quarter 2009	Examination in Public	The preferred option document, consultation responses and representation by any interested parties are considered by independent planning inspector(s), to determine whether the preferred option is soundly based.	The public, local authorities, gypsies and travellers and other interested parties can submit evidence to the Examination inspectors (in objection or support, or suggested amendments).
Third - fourth quarter 2009	Panel Report	The Panel Report is published. GOSE produce the final Partial Review document taking account of its recommendations.	N/A
Fourth quarter 2009 - first quarter 2010	Publication	The Partial Review formally becomes part of the South East Plan.	N/A