



SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Partial Review of the South East Plan – Provision of Caravan Sites for Gypsies and Travellers

District Level Pitch Requirement Distribution and Options

Purpose of Report:

To facilitate the dissemination of CLG research that assists the preparation of Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) in relation to the provision of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers.

It is intended that this report together with the CLG research will assist local authorities in preparing their advice to the Assembly.

To outline the methodology and approach the Assembly will take in preparing the preferred options Partial Review document; including the appointment of independent consultants to benchmark the regions GTAAs and audit the local authority advice submitted to the Assembly by 15 October 2007.

I. Introduction

- I.1 On 1 December 2006 the Assembly wrote to all local authorities in the South East formally requesting advice on the required provision for permanent and transit caravan pitches, in order to meet estimated current need, future provision and the associated means of delivery. The brief to local authorities¹ (the Brief) sets out the broad approach and the required outputs of the advice to the Assembly.
- I.2 To ensure local authorities have sufficient time to prepare comprehensive and robust advice to the Assembly following completion of their Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAs) the Assembly has revised the timetable for the Partial Review as set out within the Project Plan published in December 2006. Advice should now be submitted to the Assembly by **15 October 2007**.
- I.3 The brief confirms that it is important that where possible the advice provided is underpinned by robust evidence in the form of a GTAA. Although a GTAA should form a robust and reliable evidence base to underpin policy development, it is recognised that authorities will need to interpret the findings of the GTAA and translate these into pitch requirements at the district level.

¹ http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/consultation/gt_update.html

- 1.4 The Brief refers to a piece of research that the Assembly jointly commissioned with CLG, the East of England, South West Regional Assemblies and corresponding Government Offices² (CLG research) which seeks to assist Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs) in the preparation of reviews of Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) in relation to the provision of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers. This research was being undertaken as the brief was issued to local authorities. The CLG research has now been completed and was published on the CLG website on 1 March 2007³.
- 1.5 The research report sets out the methodology and approach that the Assembly will use in developing the preferred options Partial Review document. CLG are disseminating the research nationally for use by all Regional Assemblies to ensure there is a nationally consistent approach.
- 1.6 The Assembly's Gypsy and Traveller Officer Task Group noted that the methodology and approach set out within the CLG research assumes a level playing field for all local authorities and does not take into consideration or allow for consideration of local implications of a GTAA. Local authority advice to the Assembly should therefore identify and provide details of any considered local implications not covered within a GTAA.
- 1.7 It is intended that the CLG research will also assist local authorities in preparing their advice to the Assembly. This briefing note seeks to identify the key sections of the research that are particularly relevant to local authorities. The brief should therefore be read in conjunction with the CLG research report. The briefing paper focuses on four key areas:
- Translating GTAA's into advice
 - Transit need
 - Developing Options
 - Approach

2. Translating GTAA's into advice

Pitch Requirements

- 2.1 Circular 01/2006 requires the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) to 'identify the number of pitches required (but not their location) for each local planning authority'. It is anticipated that the regions GTAA's will provide an individual pitch requirement figure for each local authority. In accordance with the Circular the brief to local authorities requires district based figures. However, should a GTAA provide only an aggregated GTAA pitch requirement figure the CLG research provides a methodology for developing individual local authority pitch figures⁴.

² Preparing Regional Spatial Strategy reviews on Gypsies and Travellers by regional planning bodies (March 2007)

³ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1508208>

⁴ Sub-section 4.2: Filling Gaps at the LPA Level

- 2.2 The CLG research acknowledges that GTAAAs generally have an assessment period of five years. However, the draft South East Plan covers a 20 year period 2006-2026. The Brief confirms that the partial review will cover the ten year period 2006-2016, and seeks advice on phased pitch requirement figures for the two periods 2006-2011 and 2011-2016. The CLG research provides a methodology for achieving longer-term assessments beyond five years⁵.

Filling Gaps

- 2.3 The CLG research provides a methodology for filling gaps in local authority pitch requirement figures, should information be currently unavailable or considered too inaccurate⁶.

3. Transit Needs

- 3.1 The brief to local authorities seeks advice on the nature of the demand for transit provision. The CLG research acknowledges that some GTAAAs make an estimate of the requirements for transit or stopping place provision. However, where GTAAAs do not provide relevant information or where there is no GTAA at present, Caravan Count data can be used to make an estimate of the required transit site or stopping place provision. The research outlines a number of ways in which Caravan Count data can be used in this respect⁷.
- 3.2 The research outlines the advantage of adopting a flexible approach to transit accommodation and considers it appropriate to broadly allocate a number of transit pitches where need is clearly established. Based on local authority advice submitted to the Assembly a regional assessment of transit need will be undertaken which will feed into the development of the partial review document.

4. Developing Options

- 4.1 Sustainability Appraisal regulations require the appraisal of reasonable alternative strategy policy approaches in the development of a RSS. The Brief requires the provision of two spatial distributions for a single proposed level of pitch provision.
- 4.2 The Brief outlines two possible options, the first being an option based on a distribution which seeks to meet identified needs where they arise through the GTAA and existence of unauthorised encampments. The second being a distribution which considers the wider context so as to achieve a sustainable outcome which balances the needs of all communities within general planning principles.

⁵ Sub-section 3.3 Longer-Term Assessments

⁶ Step 3: Filling Gaps and Assessing Regional Pitch Requirements

⁷ Chapter Five: Transit Needs

- 4.3 The CLG report outlines that at this stage of the process there is no 'technical' answer on how the wider context options should be achieved. However, as a starting point the research outlines a number of basic planning issues and provides a methodology for their consideration⁸.
- 4.4 It is important to note that developing options is NOT site specific. Site specific consideration is a matter for respective Local Development Frameworks and not RSS.

5. Approach

- 5.1 Local authorities are requested to prepare their advice in line with the methodology and approach set out within the CLG research, particularly as it is the methodology and approach that the Assembly will use to develop the preferred options document.
- 5.2 The Assembly is currently in the process of appointing independent consultants to undertake a benchmarking exercise of the regions GTAAs once completed. This benchmarking exercise will use the CLG research benchmarking methodology as set out within the research report.
- 5.3 To assist in developing advice to the Assembly local authorities are encouraged to benchmark their own GTAA using the CLG methodology to ensure any gaps or inconsistencies are appropriately filled or corrected. The Assembly will confirm the findings of its own independent benchmarking exercise at the end of July 2007, subject to completion and publication of all GTAAs.
- 5.4 The same independent consultants will also undertake an audit of the local authority advice once submitted to the Assembly by 15 October 2007. This audit will seek to assess local authority advice against the outcomes of the benchmarking exercise and the requested outputs set out in the brief to local authorities. This audit will also provide a regional appraisal of transit accommodation need. Further details of this audit process will be provided in due course.

The web link to the CLG research report is:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1508208>

Dominick Veasey
Regional Planner

9 March 2007

T: 01483 555201

E: dominickveasey@southeast-ra.gov.uk

⁸ Sub-section 4.3 Step 6: Considering a 'strategic view of needs across the region'