

By: Mike Austerberry, Corporate Director, Enterprise and Environment  
To: Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Board – 19 July 2011  
Subject: **AFFORDABLE HOMES PROGRAMME AND NEW SOCIALLY RENTED SITES IN KENT**  
Classification: Unrestricted.

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Summary: Bringing Board Members up to date with the new Affordable Homes Programme and current projects and plans for additional public Traveller pitches in Kent.

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### **Affordable Homes Programme - Background**

1. (1) On 14 February of this year, the Coalition Government, through the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) published their “new offer” on Affordable Homes financing. Broadly, it invited “Registered Providers” (organisations who can and have registered with the Tenant Services Authority, and largely Housing Associations alone or in consortia, but not local authorities) to apply, by 3 May 2011, for a proportion of the funding needed for affordable housing or new Traveller pitches during the period 2011/15.

- (2) Ring-fenced funding of £60m is available, as a national pot, for Traveller pitches, with a ceiling of £99k per pitch.
- (3) Apart from any grant from the HCA, financing of the balance of the construction and land costs (for housing or Traveller pitches) will largely be from future rents repaying capital borrowed from private sector or public sources.
- (4) In all regions, the HCA has sought “package bids” from bidders covering a larger area. In the South East, that “minimum area” is a county.

### **Response from KCC, other Kent authorities and Kent Registered Providers**

#### **Swale Borough**

- 2. (1) KCC has held discussions with Amicus Horizon, a Registered Provider covering a wide area including north Kent. Amicus included a 12-pitch new socially-rented site in Swale Borough within their “package bid” for Kent.
- (2) Their overall bid has been successful at the first stage at regional level, and the result of the first stage national decisions is due to be announced very soon and perhaps by the date of the meeting.
- (3) If successful at the first stage, detailed further work will be carried out on the bid.
- (4) Any successful arrangement will involve a long-term contract between Amicus and KCC to cover the leasing and management arrangements for the new site.

### **Maidstone Borough**

3. (1) Maidstone have also submitted a bid, working with an RP as developer agent, for a new site.
- (2) If successful, probably during 2013/4, the KCC Gypsy and Traveller Unit has agreed to manage the new site as an extension to the current management agreement in place for the Stilebridge, Marden and Water Lane, Ulcombe, sites.
- (3) No location has yet been specified for the proposed new site

### **Tonbridge and Malling Borough**

4. (1) The Coldharbour 18-pitch new site, designed to replace and extend the current eight-pitch site, was unsuccessful for grant when a bid was made in 09/10 and then the previous grant programme was abandoned in 10/11.
- (2) A conditional purchase of the four acres of land required had been extended, but was due to expire on 31 March 2011. The land has now been purchased, with the grant received.
- (3) For the first time in the UK, as far as we are aware, planning consent for a public Traveller site had been granted by KCC without a single valid objection at planning stage.
- (4) On 26 March, the HCA offered KCC £930k of unused grant moneys under the previous programme, because a scheme in Cornwall had not been able to proceed.
- (5) Following discussions, the offer was accepted.
- (6) A new architect, already under contract to KCC, was assigned to redesign the new site.
- (7) As a result, a 26-pitch site has been designed to cover the land on which the current site stands, and some of the newly-acquired land.
- (8) Provisional costs suggest that this is achievable for towards a million pounds less than the original scheme, providing it is a Mobile Home park, with more basic blocks on each pitch, and all the key facilities within the Mobile Homes.
- (9) The HCA are being asked to part-fund the extra pitches, although this is more complex because the £930k grant was under the old grant regime, and the figure was simply funds available from a Cornwall project, and there is no direct link between that sum and the original or current scheme costs.
- (10) The "longstop start date" for the construction (i.e. the date by which construction must have started) is 31 March 2012, but negotiations are continuing with the HCA over further grant, and with all other interested parties.
- (11) There are concerns by current families on the old site about the impact of new families and other concerns by neighbouring landowners which are currently

being discussed. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Members are closely involved in the process, and they are keen to see a robust design developed.

- (12) A planning application is due to be submitted by late July, with tendering for construction in the autumn, to meet the longstop start date, providing funding is available.

## **Conclusion**

5. (1) These three initiatives could, between them, provide over 35 new socially-rented pitches for Travellers and Gypsies in the middle of Kent.
- (2) They not only would provide fresh and much-needed accommodation, but also assist those authorities, when coupled with appropriate Local Development Framework core strategies and, in time, Development Plan Documents, to resist new unauthorised developments in locations which are either Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and/or Green Belt and/or protected by planning policy limitations on their development.
- (3) Each site would primarily be for the accommodation of local families, to meet locally-generated need. However, they would also be a precious resource to meet the overall needs for such accommodation within the county.

## **Recommendations**

### **I recommend that the Board:**

1. Endorse and support the actions being taken to secure successful new site accommodation.
2. Consider if there are further site accommodation needs which should be given priority within the county.

Bill Forrester  
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*Background papers: none*