

By: Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Kent Adult Social Services
To: Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Board – 25 July 2007
Subject: GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON GYPSY AND TRAVELLER SITE DESIGN GUIDANCE
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: Report on a consultation document on Gypsy Site and Traveller Design Guidance for Local Authorities, produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG)

Background

1. This draft guidance*, the first of its kind since 1979, contains proposals for the suitable location of sites (and the types of locations, like contaminated land, to avoid), the size, layout and design of pitches on sites, and the facilities which sites should essentially or desirably (depending on what is being described) have on them.
2. The document is far more comprehensive than the 1979 document, and reflects a much more sophisticated approach to the design and quality of sites than existed under the old grant system from 1979-1994, under which a number of Kent sites were built or improved. This is a draft for consultation, which could have serious cost ramifications if accepted as currently written.

General Approach

3. The Draft Guidance has been drawn up by the Housing Corporation in association with Tribal Consulting, and draws on extensive discussions with Gypsy and Traveller site residents, and contributions from a number of local authorities.
4. The standards and quality expectations within the draft guidance are therefore reflective of the aspirations of members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities, and there does not seem to be much consideration of the costs involved in implementing a site programme based on this guidance, if finalised in this form.
5. However, this draft guidance is the first place in which it is clearly stated that:

“sites situated near refuse sites, industrial processes or other hazards, will obviously have a detrimental effect on the general health and well-being of the residents and pose particular safety risks for young children.”

6. And the guidance has benefited from:
- The experience of social housing design
 - Up to date guidance on sustainability and access to services, schools and employment
 - The influence of the model standards for residential caravan sites (even though they do not legally apply to this type of site) and of the Standards for Park Home Sites (which, again, do not apply to such sites, but are a good reference point for the standards needed for them).

Issues

7. There are a number of issues within and from the guidance, which deserve special attention:
- a) Size of pitches – the draft guidance makes reference to the fact that a public site “should allow the largest type of caravan to be manoeuvred onto the site”.
 - b) The largest caravan is 60 feet by 20 feet in size. Designing site pitches which would accommodate such a large caravan would increase the land take and the costs of sites considerably, and produce sites far larger than almost all the current sites that KCC manages, apart from Barnfield Park in Sevenoaks.
 - c) If the guidance is adopted in its current form, it will not only have an impact on new sites and refurbishments that may be planned in Kent (and elsewhere) but it will also impact on existing sites and expectations of residents on them. Those expectations of bigger and higher quality sites will produce a pressure especially from residents of smaller and less high quality sites.
 - d) As part of the Partial Review of the South East Plan, the South Eastern Regional Assembly is asking for details of the costs of the new sites which Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments across Kent (and the rest of the South East) are showing will be needed over the next 5 - 10 years. Those costs of new public sites will be directly influenced by the final version of this Site Design Guidance, but it will not be ready by the 15 October 2007 deadline for the submission of planning advice by Kent’s local planning authorities.
 - e) These are just a few of the points arising from the current draft guidance and what may follow if it becomes the final version.

Conclusions and Recommendations

8. In conclusion, this draft guidance is an important step forward in ensuring that future sites are built to a high standard and in suitable locations. In doing so, it is in keeping with the recommendation of the KCC Select Committee about the facilities to be provided on all sites.

Recommendation

9. Members are asked to consider and comment on this consultation and to note that a final response will be sent on behalf of the County Council by the Managing Director of Kent Adult Social Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Services, in time to reach the Communities and Local Government Department by 22 August 2007.

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Background Papers: The CLG Draft Site Design Guidance

* A copy of the CLG Draft Site Design Guidance is attached for Members of the Board. Further copies are available electronically via the following link:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1510554>