

By: Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Adult Social Services  
To: Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Board – 26 November 2009  
Subject: **NEW GYPSY AND TRAVELLER SITE PROJECTS**  
Classification: Unrestricted.

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Summary: A progress report on new site projects with which KCC is involved.

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## **Background**

1. (1) Since 2007, officers from Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council and from the Adult Social Services Directorate of KCC have been working closely on a project to replace the Coldharbour Traveller Caravan site in Aylesford.

(2) KCC Officers have also been working closely with officers from Swale Borough Council and Swale (now Amicus) Housing Association to replace the Three Lakes site at Murston in Sittingbourne.

## **The Coldharbour Site Project**

2. (1) This is a project to replace the existing site, built in 1981 with planning consent for twenty-two pitches and a maximum of twenty-six caravans.

(2) Since the early 1990's, when major problems on the old site resulted in a substantial number of evictions and departures, only eight pitches on the site have been used, and the remaining amenity blocks, many unfit for use, were demolished.

(3) The new site will be established on land acquired to the north of the current site, and to the west of the Coldharbour police premises. The plan attached as annex 1 shows the location and surroundings.

(4) It will consist of eighteen pitches, including one single pitch (which caters for just one caravan or mobile home) and the remainder are double pitches (each catering for up to two caravans or mobile homes). Each pitch will accommodate one household.

(5) The site was recommended for grant aid by the South East Region's Housing and Regeneration Board and a decision from the Minister is expected any day and, if received, will be reported orally to the Board.

(6) The project will go out to tender late in 2009, for construction commencing Spring 2010 and completion by autumn 2010.

(7) Eight of the pitches will be allocated to existing households on the current site, while the additional ten will be allocated on a basis that has been agreed between the Borough Council and KCC, and which gives priority to meeting local accommodation need of people from Gypsy and Traveller communities in Tonbridge & Malling Borough.

## Swale Site Needs

3. (1) Swale Borough Council is currently compiling a list of possible sites which it will consider in January 2010. These are sites to meet the overall needs in the Borough up to 2016.

(2) KCC is keen that, as soon as possible, there will be no need for people to live on the fourteen-pitch Three Lakes site in Sittingbourne, built in 1990, and not only no longer fit for purpose, but which would also be enormously costly to refurbish in its present location. The site, when opened, was half a mile from other development, but it is now bordered by the Eurolink Business Park, with land raised ten feet higher than the site, there is a greater risk now of the site being flooded in heavy rain, which has happened again within the last fortnight and, ironically, no adequate mains water pressure to fight any fire on site.

(3) KCC has also established, by agreement with Tesco Stores, the Borough Council and other stakeholders, a temporary managed encampment at the former Sittingbourne Industrial Park.

(4) The combination of the sixteen households at Three Lakes site, the seven households on the temporary managed encampment and further public site needs in Swale means that a number of public sites appear to be required.

(5) Discussions between KCC and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) have taken place to seek the best way of meeting and funding the remaining accommodation needs. Contacts have been maintained with the Borough Council and Amicus Horizon Housing Association, as interested parties working with members of the same Gypsy and Traveller communities.

(6) From recent discussions with the HCA, it is clear that they want to see any new site as also being a new community, and not just a replacement for an existing site. As with any new housing development, it is critical that any new site is set up on a sustainable footing, with firm and fair management from the outset, and excellent joint working between site residents, and all public and third sector agencies involved. The priority for the HCA and the Region is the provision of additional pitches towards the 550 additional pitch target they have for England over the three years to 2011. 2010 grant bids are clearly going to be prioritised according to how many new pitches they produce.

(7) The Three Lakes site and other sites and unauthorised encampments in Swale have presented enormous challenges to public agencies over the years, and the ambition is to create new sites in Swale which meet needs, support the independence of individuals, and promote the necessary education, training and employment opportunities which enable much better quality of life than many in Gypsy and Traveller communities have enjoyed.

(8) A further report will be prepared in due course for the Board on the work in Swale Borough.

## **Recommendation**

4. (1) Members of the Board are asked to NOTE the report and ENDORSE the actions taken to secure the necessary additional site provision, to meet requirements likely to be specified in the South East Plan from 2010, following completion of the current Partial Review on the subject.

Bill Forrester  
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*Background papers: none*