

Consultation on the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to Regional Policy on
Accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

Agenda Item 6

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Background Papers: Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Draft Revision to the
Regional Spatial Strategy

Financial Implications: No

Equalities Implications: Yes

Legal Implications: No

Options: To respond to this Consultation agreeing with the proposed changes.

To respond to this Consultation objecting to the proposed changes.

Not to respond to this Consultation.

Risks: That the required provision for Braintree District will be increased.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the changes proposed by the Secretary of State to the East of England policy on accommodation for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople and the proposed response to this consultation.

DECISION

To strongly object to the changes proposed by the Secretary of State to the East of England policy on accommodation for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople, relating to the increase in 5 pitches in the allocation for this District.

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Accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

Background

The Secretary of State published proposed changes to the East of England Regional Spatial Strategy Gypsy and Traveller Review in March 2009 for eight weeks public consultation. The closing date for responses is 22nd May 2009.

Key elements of the proposed changes include:

- Increasing the numbers of additional pitches to be provided in the East of England by 2011 from 1,187 to 1,237 and treating them as a minimum.
- Including provision for transit sites, 160 pitches by 2011.
- Including provision for Travelling Showpeople, 184 pitches by 2011
- Lower pitch requirements for Basildon (reduced by 19 to 62) and Epping Forest (reduced by 15 to 34), recognising the particular delivery challenges in those districts.

The proposed changes for this District are to increase the pitch provision by 9 to 25. If these proposed changes were approved, the requirement in Policy H3 Provision for Gypsies and Travellers for this District would state;-

Local Authorities should make provision through Development Plan Documents for at least 1,237 net additional residential pitches for Gypsy and Traveller Caravans by 2011 distributed as follows:

District	Authorised Pitches in 2006	Minimum Additional Pitches 2006-11	Minimum Pitches 2011
Braintree	25	25	50

Beyond 2011 provision should be made for an annual 3% compound increase in residential pitch provision,Where Local Development Documents look beyond 2011, provision should be made for the same proportion of the regional requirement as in Policy H3 for 2006-11.

Increases in Essex are also proposed for Colchester (by 5 to 20) and Uttlesford (by 10 to 25).

The previous Panel report on the examination of the policy had recommended that the Secretary of State should increase the allocation for this District from 16 pitches to 21. The Secretary of State is proposing a further increase of 5 pitches, above that proposed by the Panel.

The reasons given for the increase in this District's provision are:-

'Reflecting the constraints to delivery in Basildon at paragraph 4.18 of the Panel Report, the suitability of Braintree to accommodate higher provision at paragraphs 4.31-4.32 of the Panel Report, and the proximity of Basildon and Braintree, relative to other districts suitable for accommodating higher provision.'

Extract from Panel Report:-

Basildon

4.18 The requirement for a minimum of 81 pitches is arbitrary and is the result of applying an equal adjustment in three districts. Our consideration of this involves assessing whether the outcome represents an appropriate balance of the various competing considerations. The scale of provision sought in Basildon remains very high, when compared with the size of the district and the amount of housing development taking place. This is despite it being a Key Centre for Development and Change. We are also mindful that there is likely to be a significant impact on the Green Belt. Unlike in Cambridgeshire, the wider distribution which is sought is more local and there is the potential for some further distribution within Essex. We therefore recommend reducing provision for 2006-2011 slightly from that proposed to 71 pitches.

Uttlesford, Braintree and Colchester

4.31-4.32

These three districts are to provide 15 or 16 pitches under the draft Policy. This is both to accommodate calculated local need and for two of the districts to contribute to wider regional needs, amounting to one pitch in the case of Uttlesford and seven from Colchester. The representation from these districts does not dispute the current allocation but resists any increase on the basis that Green Belt should not be an influence on the regional distribution, and that comparison with the number of dwellings to be built shows the requirement in any district to be insignificant, such as in terms of Green Belt impact. Each of these districts is large, with a substantial unconstrained area, and a reasonable level of opportunity indicated by total housing development, especially in Colchester which is identified as a Key Centre for Development and Change.

4.32 In our view each of these districts is well-situated in relation to needs to be met in both Essex, and in the west from Cambridgeshire, to accommodate slightly increased provision, thereby reducing the concentration on areas of highest existing provision in the current virtual county distribution, and achieving greater balance with housing potential. We therefore recommend increased provision by 10 pitches in Uttlesford and 5 in both Colchester and Braintree to contribute towards this and facilitate delivery

The Secretary of State has referred to constraints to delivery in Basildon, but has not acknowledged the demand for pitches there. In contrast, the draft Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation assessment carried out for Essex by Fordhams does not identify a particular demand for pitches in Braintree District, as it lies outside the areas in Essex that have been traditionally preferred by gypsies and travellers.

There has been a low demand for sites for gypsies and travellers in Braintree District and this is reflected in the low numbers of authorised and unauthorised sites. There is no evidence of additional need within Braintree District. Allocating sites where they are not wanted is not the appropriate response to gypsy and traveller needs, or to the problems being experienced at Basildon.

The proximity of Braintree to Basildon is also questioned, as clearly the two Districts are not adjacent and are separated by Chelmsford Borough. The Districts in Essex that are adjacent to Basildon are Brentwood, Chelmsford, Rochford, Thurrock and Castle Point. There is no explanation, given by the Secretary of State, as to why these authorities are unsuitable for accommodating higher provision.

Recommendation

To strongly object to the changes proposed by the Secretary of State to the East of England policy on accommodation for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople, relating to the increase in 5 pitches in the allocation for this District, for the reasons set out in this report.