

## GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION ASSESSMENTS

1. The Department of Communities and Local Government has produced guidance requiring Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA) to be carried out. Circular 01/2006 *Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites* was published in February 2006 and replaced Circular 1/94, *Gypsy Sites and Planning*. One of the main intentions of Circular 01/06 is to increase significantly the number of gypsy and traveller sites in appropriate locations with planning permission in order to address under-provision over the next 3 – 5 years. The guidance advocates “constructive and positive engagement on all sides” and states:

“The assessment of gypsy and traveller accommodation needs is integral to assessment of general accommodation needs”.

2. In response the Tees Valley authorities set up a steering group with planning and housing representatives from each authority as well as representatives from the Gypsy and Traveller community and the police. Fay McKenzie at the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit is the coordinator on behalf of the authorities. The steering group appointed Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit in August 2007 to undertake the study. At a local level the GTAA will inform:

- The preparation of the Gypsy and Traveller component of the local authority's housing strategy, which will itself inform investment decisions.
- The preparation of Local Development Frameworks, which must set out policies to address the particular accommodation needs of specific groups such as Gypsies and Travellers and allocate land to meet those needs.

3. At a regional level the GTAA will feed into the Regional Housing Strategy and will also be a component in the overall assessment of need that informs the housing policies in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).

4. The GTAA will focus on the identification of existing and required numbers/types/location characteristics of site pitches by local authority. The timetable for the study is as follows:

- December 2007 : Interim Report
- January 2008: Seminar to disseminate key findings of the interim Report
- March 2008: Final Report

5. The Core Strategy Preferred Options paper (published for public consultation on 28 September 2007) sets out the criteria for the location of gypsy and traveller sites. Circular 01/2006 states:

“One of the tests of soundness of a submission DPD at its examination will be whether it is founded on robust and credible evidence”.

This means that unless the Tees Valley GTAA is assessed at the public examination into the Council's Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) as being robust and credible then that document may be found unsound.

6. It is also important from the LDF perspective that the findings of the GTAA are taken into account in the preparation of the Regeneration DPD (the Council's site allocations DPD). This means that if the GTAA identifies a need within the Borough for more pitches than are currently provided then the Regeneration DPD will have to identify a suitable site and this will have to be consistent with the criteria set out in Draft Core Strategy Policy 9 (CS9) – Provision for Gypsies and Travellers. These include the need for the site to be accessible to schools, shops, health care and other local facilities.
7. Draft Core Strategy Policy 9 (CS9) replaces Policy HO7 Gypsies in the adopted Stockton-on-Tees Local Plan. Policy HO7 has not been included in the schedule of Local Plan policies to be saved and therefore, ceased to have effect after 27<sup>th</sup> September 2007. Draft Policy CS9 is fully consistent with the latest national guidance, which Policy HO7 was not. Although Draft Policy CS9 is not yet adopted it is considered that a combination of direct reference to the latest national guidance and the consistency of CS9 with the latest national guidance means that there is no policy vacuum.