Waverley Borough Council

Surrey Heath Borough Council

Guildford Borough

Mr Mark Williams
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By Post and by Email

19 November 2008

Dear Mr Williams

CONSULTATION RESPONSE: SOUTH EAST PLAN PARTIAL REVIEW, GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS AND TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE

Please find enclosed the consultation response of Guildford Borough Council, Surrey Heath Borough Council and Waverley Borough Council (the 'West Surrey Group').

This comprises the completed response form (attached) and the following explanatory points:

- We wish to emphasise the point made under Q8: the methodology in the government guidance reinforces the current distribution of pitches and places with no requirement on those areas currently not providing pitches. This approach denies Gypsies and Travellers the freedom of choice in where to live that is accorded to the rest of society and continues to place the responsibility of provision on those areas that are already providing the most accommodation. The result is to effectively exclude the Travelling Community from some areas by virtue of ethnic origin.

- A related point (previously raised by the West Surrey Stakeholder Group) was that, if too many Gypsies and Travellers are located in a single area, the consequence may be that their traditional sources of employment may reach saturation point. Whilst acknowledging that some Gypsies and Travellers do wish to remain distinct and separate from the settled community, it is also harder for larger groups of Gypsies and Travellers to integrate into the settled community (e.g. at local schools).

- The West Surrey Group wishes to raise significant concerns about both the methodology and recommendations of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA). By taking Option A as a base-line for GTTS provision it ignores the historical distortions and inconsistencies within this provision. By this method it then assigns all environmental benefits to Option A and all detriments to Options C and D. By

seeking to avoid distortions to local assessments of need it in fact entrenches these distortions in the pattern of GTTS accommodation within the South East.

- In addition, the Sustainability Appraisal fails in its basic task of relating demand to the environmental capacity to satisfy development. We repeat our response to Q9, that the best and most sustainable way to allocate pitches to LPAs is by factoring demand against environmental constraints; precisely the method used in the redistribution of sites under options C and D.

Therefore, of the options put forward in the consultation, the West Surrey Group favours Option C, namely that 50% of total estimated demand for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople's accommodation is distributed evenly across the South East region. This will help to address historical discrepancies in provision and also reduce the impact of any inconsistencies in methodology which may have affected the preparation of GTAAs.

If you have any queries or require clarification of any aspect please do not hesitate to contact any of the contacts listed below.

Yours sincerely

T Haskins

Tracey Haskins
Planning Policy Manager

Enclosed – Joint consultation response

On behalf of:
Guildford Borough Council
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Surrey Heath Borough Council
(Contact: Jenny Rickard, 01276 707213, jenny.rickard@surreyheath.gov.uk)

Waverley Borough Council
(Contact: Graham Parrott, 01483 523472, graham.parrott@waverley.gov.uk)

Final draft joint response to Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople SEERA consultation (21 Oct 08)

ABOUT YOU

The Housing Act 2004 imposes a duty on local authorities to carry out an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers residing in or resorting to their district, and to have a strategy in place which sets out how any identified needs will be met as part of their wider housing strategies.

Q. Are you aware that a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation (Needs) Assessment has been carried out for your area?

Yes

Q. In what capacity are you responding to this questionnaire?

Local Planning Authority (District/Borough)

Q. Please provide your name and address. We cannot accept anonymous consultation responses or confidential submissions.

Tracey Haskins on behalf of West Surrey Group – Guildford, Surrey Heath and Waverley Borough Councils

c/o Guildford Borough Council

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Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

1.1) The responsibility for providing new authorised Gypsy and Traveller accommodation that helps reduce unauthorised sites should be shared by all parts of the South East region, including areas where there are currently none or very few spaces.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree	Don't know/ no opinion	

Comment – We recognise the need for planned accommodation for the GTTS community. The West Surrey GTAA identified a preference for smaller private sites among the GTTS community. It is unclear if this response was based on realistic expectations.

1.2) The provision of new accommodation should only be in locations where there is access to jobs and services such as doctors and schools.

Strongly agree | **Tend to agree** | Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree | Don't know/ no opinion

Comment – It is essential that, both regional and local planning for additional Gypsy and Traveller (and Travelling Showpeoples') accommodation is founded on a robust understanding of infrastructure capacity across the region (e.g. health care capacity, school places etc.).

1.3) Authorised temporary spaces should be provided in areas where Gypsies and Travellers often stop while travelling

Strongly agree | Tend to agree | Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree | Don't know/ no opinion

Q2. To what extent do you support or oppose Government policy to provide new authorised Gypsy and Traveller accommodation to help reduce unauthorised encampments?

Strongly support | **Tend to support** | Tend to oppose
Strongly oppose | Don't know/ no opinion

Q3. By 2016, the current plan is to provide an additional 1,064 spaces for Gypsies and Travellers across the South East region. Do you think this is:

Much too low | A bit too low | **About right** | A bit too high
Much too high | Don't know

Why do you think this?

This figure appears fair as a regional total provided that it is based on robust GTAAs across the whole South East Region

Q4. By 2016, the current plan is to provide the following additional spaces in your county for Gypsies and Travellers:

Berkshire	*78 spaces*
Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes	*113 spaces*
East Sussex	*47 spaces*
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	*100 spaces*
Kent	*320 spaces*
Oxfordshire	*42 spaces*
Surrey	*163 spaces*
West Sussex	*201 spaces*

For your county, do you think this is:

Much too low | A bit too low | About right | A bit too high
Much too high | Don't know

Why do you think this?

Surrey did not conduct its GTAA as a single county, making it difficult for the West Surrey Group to comment on a figure which comprises the totals of the three regional groupings.

However, Surrey has historically made provision for GTTS accommodation where some authorities across the South East have not. Demographic growth is therefore disproportionately concentrated in the county.

The GTAA methodology took a broad definition of Gypsy and Traveller households. Interviews were conducted with families who consider themselves to be settled or who now live in permanent homes. Whilst the demands arising from the latter were not included in the GTAA model (refer to para. 7.5.5 on p93), demand inevitably occurs in areas which already have the greatest concentration of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. It is not clear that the same methodology was used in other areas.

Earlier advice to SEERA submitted by the West Surrey Group questioned the generous provision for concealed households. The GTAA study identified a significant proportion of need arising from concealed /new family formation from existing households. Whilst acknowledging over-crowding tends to be more common amongst Gypsy and Traveller households than within the wider community, the historic pattern of provision will also have concentrated growth, including that from concealed households.

Q5. By 2016, the current plan is to provide an additional 274 spaces for Travelling Showpeople across the South East region. Do you think this is:

Much too low | A bit too low | About right | A bit too high
Much too high | **Don't Know**

Why do you think this?

Not all GTAAs studied the need for accommodation for Travelling Showpeople. It is therefore difficult to reach a conclusion as the fairness of this figure.

Q6. By 2016, the current plan is to provide the following additional spaces in your county for Travelling Showpeople:

Berkshire	*4 spaces*
Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes	*21 spaces*
East Sussex	*0 spaces*
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	*129 spaces*
Kent	*10 spaces*
Oxfordshire	*7 spaces*
Surrey	*58 spaces*
West Sussex	*201 spaces*

For your county, do you think this is:

Much too low A bit too low About right Much too high
Don't Know

Surrey did not conduct its GTAA as a single county, making it difficult for the West Surrey Group to comment on a figure which comprises the totals of the three regional groupings.

We would simply reiterate that the same standard and methods must apply to all GTAAs if they are to be robust and the partial review an equitable process.

Q7. Are you aware of any Gypsy and Traveller sites in your local authority area?

Yes

Q8. Which option do you think is most appropriate for allocating new Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation across the REGION?

Option A: New spaces should ALL be provided within the council areas where Gypsies and Travellers currently live. This may mean some council areas have no spaces.

Option B: New spaces should ALL be in the same general areas where Gypsies and Travellers currently live. Neighbouring councils would share responsibility for providing new spaces but some council areas would have none.

Option C: HALF the new spaces should be in the same general areas where Gypsies and Travellers currently live. The other half would be spread across the region to make sure that all areas provide some spaces

Option D: MOST new spaces should be in the same general areas where Gypsies and Travellers currently live. A quarter would be spread across the region to make sure that all areas provide some spaces.

Why do you think this is?

The past history of provision has led to an inconsistent approach within the South East. This denies Gypsies and Travellers the freedom of choice in where to live that is accorded to the rest of society, and increases pressure on those areas which already provide the most accommodation. The result is to exclude the GTTS community from some areas by virtue of ethnic origin.

Allowing a more natural pattern of settlement should be a significant priority of the partial review.

Q9. Is there a better way to decide how many spaces each planning authority should identify land for? (Please explain how and note any available evidence).

The West Surrey area is subject to significant environmental constraints and nationally important designations; Green Belt, Natura 2000 sites, Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLV). Due to the high development pressure on existing urban areas in all three boroughs there will inevitably be pressure on these important designations. Consideration should be given to placing greater weight on the value of these protected areas when allocating GTTS pitch numbers in this and future exercises.

Q10. Some councils have not provided advice about the number of transit stopping spaces required. Is there a better way to identify what is needed in each council area than Government records showing the pattern of unauthorised encampments in their area?

No.
The West Surrey GTAA identified no requirement for transit stopping spaces within the area.

Please give reasons for your choice and any evidence to support your view

As is the case for the other figures, this should be based on robust GTAA evidence within the context of an equitable distribution across the South East.

Q11. Are there any additional traveller groups whose needs are not met by the consultation proposals?
If so, what other forms of provision are required and what is the extent and location of need?
Please clearly indicate any evidence available to support your view

A group of Travelling Showpeople, known as the 'Fairhaven Group' were referred to in the West Surrey GTAA. None of the members of this group live within the three Boroughs covered by this study (Guildford, Surrey Heath and Waverley). Michelle Banks, the Head of the Gypsy and Traveller Unit at CLG, confirmed that it was not the responsibility of this study to identify this group or include its needs and future requirements in the study. Rather the needs of this group should be included in the GTAAs in the areas where the individual group members presently reside. It is not clear from the consultation documents whether or not this has been done. It is important that the needs and future requirements of this group are addressed at the regional level.

Q12. Please add any comments on the draft Sustainability Appraisal or the Habitats Directive 'Appropriate Assessment' scoping report.

The methodology of the Sustainability Appraisal is structurally flawed. By taking Option A as a base-line for GTTS provision it ignores the historical distortions and inconsistencies within this provision. By this method it then assigns all environmental benefits to Option A and all detriments to Options C and D. By seeking to avoid distortions to local assessments of need it in fact entrenches these distortions in the pattern of GTTS accommodation within the South East. Its partial methodology invalidates this document as an objective consideration in the partial review.

The West Surrey Group is, therefore, concerned that the "benefits" of Option A have been overstated in the SA. For example, in relation to the following SA objectives:

- To improve accessibility to all services and facilities;
- To improve efficiency in land use through the re-use of previously developed land and existing buildings, including re-use of materials from buildings and encourage urban renaissance;
- To conserve and enhance the region's biodiversity;
- To protect, enhance and make accessible for enjoyment, the region's countryside and historic environment; and
- To ensure high and stable levels of employment so everyone can benefit from the economic growth in the region.

In each case Option A is identified as having a 'significant positive impact', while Options B and C are identified as having neutral impacts. It is not clear why in these (and other) cases Option A is seen as having significant benefits when the other options have only a neutral or negligible effect.

Under Option A new sites will have to be found to accommodate the future needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople wherever the allocations are made. It is not the case that these will be easier to find or will have less environmental impact under Option A than would be the case in finding sites in other areas as a result of the redistribution option. In fact it could be argued that it may be more difficult to find extra sites under Option A in areas like West Surrey. There are significant constraints that apply in this area, including the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Beauty and a number of significant nature conservation designations. Moreover, in the rural parts of the area access to services such as education, health and employment opportunities is relatively poor.

These criticisms also apply to the Habitat Regulations Appropriate Assessment (HRAA) which adopts the same methodological approach in favour of Option A. The HRAA also initially fails to recognise that the effect of the First Partial Review must be considered in combination with the rest of the South East Plan. There are also erroneous references to a '500m buffer' around SPAs. This buffer is in fact only 400m.

Q13. Is there anything else you want to comment on, especially in relation to proposed pitch numbers and distribution options?

It is important to emphasise that existing sites must be improved and brought up to an acceptable standard as well as providing new sites, and the funding level should be 100% rather than 25% of the costs for such upgrading.

Regional Assembly guidance for Local Development Frameworks would be welcomed on the subject of good practice in planning for Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation, encompassing the provision of both small public and private sites.

Additionally it will be important that, in planning for additional Gypsy and Traveller (and Travelling Showpeoples') accommodation, regard is given to community relations both between Gypsies / Travellers and the non-Gypsy settled community, but also within the Gypsy and Traveller community.