

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 29 January 2009

Subject: Proposed Meeting with Iain Wright MP

Officer contact for further information: Ian Willett

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry



Recommendation:

- (1) To note the reply (attached) from the office of Iain Wright MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State; and**
 - (2) To consider options for any further action as follows:**
 - (a) To refer the letter to the Planning Services Portfolio Holder Advisory Group; or**
 - (b) To make further comments or representations to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, if necessary via the full Council; or**
 - (c) To take no further action.**
- and inform the Council accordingly**

Report

1. This report refers to item 7 on the main Overview and Scrutiny agenda.
2. This is a copy of the reply received from Iain Wright's office, declining to attend the meeting. He states it would be inappropriate whilst the Secretary of State is considering the independent Panel's recommendations on the Regional Spatial Strategy review of Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation in the East of England.
3. The letter also states that progressing the consultation on the planned Development Plan Document is a matter for the Council to take forward.
4. Members may wish to recommend that the letter be referred to the Planning Portfolio Advisory Group for their information and any further action they deem appropriate; or they may wish to comment on it and refer it and their comments to full Council for any action they consider appropriate.
5. Members also have to option to take no further action on this matter.



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Iain Wright MP
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Our Ref: WR/WR/000059/09
Your Ref: PU/IW//JES

Dear Mr Willett,

22nd January 2009

GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS

Thank you for your letter of 18 December 2008 regarding provision of additional authorised pitches for Gypsies and Travellers in Epping Forest.

I am not able to attend the next meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 January 2009. It would be inappropriate whilst the Secretary of State is considering the independent Panel's recommendations on the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) review of Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation in the East of England. In addition, progressing the consultation on the planned Development Plan Document is a matter for the Council to take forward.

There are a number of ways to facilitate the level of development proposed for Epping Forest District in the East of England Regional Assembly's (EERA) draft policy (submitted February 2008). I understand that EERA is developing a delivery plan and for information, I enclose a note prepared by Government Office for the East of England on possible delivery mechanisms.

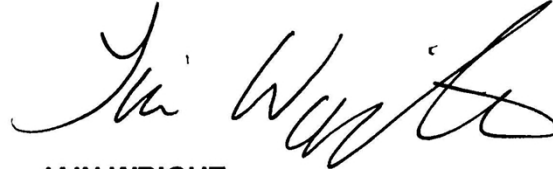
Compulsory purchase powers are entirely a matter for the Council. If the Council wished to compulsorily purchase any land, it would have to demonstrate that there is a compelling case in the public interest before a Compulsory Purchase Order can be confirmed. I would stress that the Council should only use Compulsory Purchase Order powers as a last resort.

The District's Gypsy & Traveller pitch target in the draft policy, 49 to 2011, potentially 92 to 2021, is a very small proportion - just 4% - of the RSS target of at least 2,290 additional dwellings, 2006 – 2021. The amounts of land we are talking about here are tiny while potentially making a telling contribution towards addressing the disadvantages faced by members of Gypsy and Traveller communities in terms of life expectancy, health generally and opportunities in education and employment.

As you will be aware, the number of additional pitches proposed for Epping Forest District in EERA's draft policy was discussed in detail at the Examination in Public, held 21-24 October 2008 in Letchworth, Hertfordshire. As a result, the independent Panel which conducted the Examination has recommended a reduction of 10 in the number of additional pitches to be provided in Epping Forest District by 2011.

The Panel Report, including the recommendations, will now be considered by the Government, who will then publish the Secretary of State's decisions on the recommendations, along with any proposed changes to the draft policy. The proposed changes will undergo a further public consultation to allow for the views of the Council and all other interested parties to be heard and considered before the final outcome of the single issue review is published in summer this year.

I hope you find this response helpful.

Yours sincerely,

IAIN WRIGHT

Future Provision of pitches / sites

This table summarises the range of delivery mechanisms available and some of the key advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches. They are not exclusive and there is overlap between them.

Vehicle for provision	Advantages	Disadvantages / Difficulties
<p>1 - New sites, as traditionally provided by Local Authorities (mainly Counties)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Officers with experience of provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typically takes an extended period and proposals sometimes aborted, reflecting the constraints on local authorities being proactive given frequent public opposition and political nervousness.
<p>2 - Gypsies & Travellers (G&Ts) make own provision by acquiring sites themselves.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision making through the planning system, rather than also requiring decisions about site provision, management etc. G&Ts can take responsibility for driving site provision and management themselves. It can be easier for local politicians if permission is given on appeal as they can 'blame' others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> G&Ts have sometimes acquired unsuitable sites on green belt etc. This should improve with development of LDFs G&Ts have sometimes paid premium prices for land that is not suitable. Most planning applications refused in first instance.
<p>3 - Giving consent to caravans currently tolerated: Work with those on unauthorised developments (own land) and unauthorised encampments (land not owned</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often accepted by the settled community as have lived in the area for many years A substantial source of capacity: Jan '08 count 237 caravans tolerated on land owned by Gypsies and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May cause issues for the settled community as although tolerated it is different to having permission.

<p>by G&Ts) that are not tolerated to work towards a suitable outcome.</p>	<p>Travellers, which equates to approximately 139 pitches</p>	
<p>4 - As part of major (residential) development through section 106 agreements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes provision the norm, provision for G&Ts at the same time as other communities. • May be less public opposition than where developed within an existing community. • Avoids necessity for G&Ts- focussed planning application. • Likely to reduce cost of sites/ pitches as infrastructure in place, economies of scale with rest of the development. • Potential to use skills of site development team to deliver. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developers may be reticent because of the perceived impact on site marketing.
<p>5 - Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) or RSLs and LAs working together.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes use of their skills in housing vulnerable, socially excluded people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting RSLs on board. There is a definite fear of the 'unknown' • G&T work currently 'managed' outside Housing. New Homes and Communities Agency will manage G&T Site Grant and this has potential to engage RSLs
<p>6 - Extend existing sites</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning permission on an existing site often easier, especially if site is well managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility of existing sites becoming too big and unmanageable
<p>7 - INNOVATION eg • Schemes for 'joint purchase' of land for G&Ts to develop.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reluctance among agencies to be innovative in regard to development that may be unpopular / politically risky.

<p>G/Ts purchase 100% over a period of time and money reinvested</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint development of sites. • LA sites leased to G&Ts with proven site management record. • Working with G&Ts on tolerated unauthorised encampments 		
<p>8 - LAs giving temporary permission in advance of DPDs identifying suitable land (already happened in some Local Authorities in the Region)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses the unauthorised situation in the short term. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could wrongly raise the expectation of G&Ts • Land identified in DPDs may be unaffordable for G&Ts.