

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 15th October 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director - Environment

SUBJECT: Regional Spatial Strategy Partial Review
Consultation Response

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The draft submitted North West Plan Partial Review (NWPPR) is a partial revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the North West published in September 2008.
- 1.2 The draft submission document contains two new policies (L6 and L7) proposed for inclusion in the RSS that deal with the accommodation needs for Gypsy & Traveller, and Travelling Showpeople communities. There is also a revision to an existing RSS policy (Policy RT2) covering specific matters on Regional Car Parking Standards.
- 1.3 4NW, who have prepared the NWPPR, have placed the draft on consultation until 19th October 2009. This report outlines the proposed formal response to the consultation.
- 1.4 The Executive Board, 19th March 2009, previously approved a response to an earlier consultation on pitch provision for Gypsies and Travellers. At this earlier stage 60 additional pitches by 2016 was proposed as the Halton target. This has now been reduced to 45 additional pitches.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) The content of this report be agreed as the formal response from this Council to the consultation being run by 4NW on the North West Plan Partial Review.
- (2) The Council continues to strongly object to the proposals in draft policy L6 for Halton to provide 45 additional pitches for Gypsies and Travellers by 2016, rising to 58 by 2021.
- (3) The Council supports draft policy L7 detailing the Scale and Distribution of Travelling Showpeople Plot Provision.
- (4) The Council generally supports the principles of the proposed revisions to Regional Parking Standards (Policy RT2) and suggests some minor amendments to the draft text in the interests of policy clarity.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 4NW, formerly the North West Regional Assembly (NWRA), is the designated regional planning body for North West of England. They have been tasked by the government to prepare, monitor and review the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) in partnership with others. The RSS is a regional plan that has to be taken into account when decisions are being made about planning applications. It provides a spatial framework for development in the region and for other regional strategies, and it promotes the sustainable development of the North West.
- 3.2 Currently a Partial Review of the RSS is underway due to the need to complete unfinished policy work within the RSS in response to recommendations of the RSS Examination in Public Panel. This Partial Review covers three key subject areas:
- New Draft Policy L6 - Gypsies and Travellers;
 - New Draft Policy L7 - Travelling Show People; and
 - Revised Policy RT2 - Car Parking Standards.
- 3.3 This consultation is open until 19th October 2009.
- 3.4 This document is accompanied by a Technical Appendix (Appendix A) that provides the specific details to be raised with 4NW in responding to their consultation. This report should be read in conjunction with the Submitted Draft North West Plan Partial Review document (see Appendix B) and the consultation response form, provided to allow stakeholders to respond in a consistent format.
- 3.5 Following this consultation, an independent panel will conduct an Examination in Public (expected March 2010) into key issues arising from the consultation. The Panel will report to the Secretary of State, who may consult on suggested amendments for further comment before finally publishing the policies within a revised Regional Spatial Strategy in winter 2010.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 **Draft Policy L6 –Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Provision**
- 4.2 A key Government objective is providing decent homes for all. For Gypsies and Travellers this means ensuring that sufficient, suitable pitch provision is made throughout the region to meet the needs of these communities. Draft Policy L6 specifically deals with the scale and distribution of Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision across the North West Region. Table 7.2 in Policy L6 shows the pitch provision to be achieved by each individual North West authority by 2016. Halton is grouped with the Cheshire Sub-regional Partnership. The policy makes a distinction between permanent and transit pitches.
- 4.3 Draft Policy L6 indicates that Halton should provide by 2016 an **additional** minimum of 45 permanent pitches. The policy also indicates

that a further 3% compound increase on an annual basis should be achieved to 2021 and for Halton this would be a further 13 permanent pitches. The policy therefore suggests that by 2021 Halton should provide a **total** of 98 permanent pitches (existing provision plus additional requirement).

- 4.4 The policy indicates that 5 additional transit pitches should be provided by Halton by 2016. However, as Halton's new site at Warrington Road provided 10 transit pitches, Halton will already have met and exceeded its allocated apportionment for transit pitches under the draft policy.

4.3 **Existing Provision in Halton**

- 4.4 The Council currently provides 23 pitches at Riverview Residential Caravan Site in Widnes. A new local authority run site was opened in January 2009 in Warrington Road, Runcorn, next to the existing private site. This new site provides 4 permanent pitches and 10 transit pitches. There are two private sites in Runcorn at Windmill Street and Warrington Road; these two sites provide 13 pitches. In total there are 40 permanent pitches and 10 transit pitches currently provided in Halton.

4.3 **The Grounds for Objection**

- 4.4 The Council has previously objected to draft Policy L6 on the grounds that the policy does not follow the evidence produced in support of the policy. It is recommended that the Council continues to object to draft Policy L6 on the same grounds as were approved in the Executive Board report of 19th March 2009 and these are reproduced in Appendix A.

- 4.5 In Policy L6 the Halton apportionment figure has been given as 45 pitches. This represents 24% of the sub-regional apportionment (190 pitches for the Cheshire Sub-regional Partnership). This represents nearly one quarter of the requirement, yet Halton is the smallest of these partners in terms of geographical area and has little land available to accommodate further provision. There are practical considerations in terms of trying to find appropriate sites upon which to locate such high numbers of pitches. The Council has just completed a site search exercise in relation to the new Runcorn site in Warrington Road. There were no alternative sites identified that would provide acceptable locations.

- 4.6 4NW should redistribute pitch provision to ensure a more even provision between Councils, particularly to those areas with little or no existing provision (Ellesmere Port and Neston - now part of Cheshire West and Chester -, Knowsley, Liverpool and Wirral), and should also focus on those Councils with no Council owned sites.

4.7 **Draft Policy L7 –Accommodation for Travelling Showpeople**

- 4.8 Draft Policy L7 deals with accommodation for Travelling Showpeople. A key Government objective is providing decent homes for all. For Travelling Showpeople this means ensuring that sufficient, suitable

provision is made throughout the region to meet the needs of the community.

4.9 It is recommended that the Council supports the principles of Draft Policy L7, Scale and Distribution of Travelling Showpeople Plot Provision on the basis that a network of sites is required across the region.

4.10 At the present time there is no provision for Travelling Showpeople made in Halton. The available evidence indicates that there is no demand from these communities and that Warrington is the favoured location for the Travelling Showpeople communities due to the proximity to the strategic road network.

4.11 Draft Policy L7 gives a target figure for Halton of 0 additional plots required in Halton.

4.12 **Revised Policy RT2 – Managing Travel Demand**

4.13 This section of the consultation deals with the revision of an existing RSS Policy. As such there is only an opportunity to comment on the specific minor revisions rather than the whole policy.

4.14 It is recommended that support is generally given for the principles of the proposed Regional Parking Standards (RPS) and the amendments reflecting previous comments made by this authority during earlier stages of consultation are welcomed. The document is concise and quite easy to understand. However, in the interests of policy clarity, the Council ought to raise several issues on the draft and these issues are covered in Appendix A.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The main implication here is the future scenario should Draft Policy L6 and the figure of 45 additional permanent pitches becomes a Regional Spatial Strategy policy. If this happens, Halton will be expected to make provision to deliver this figure through the Halton Core Strategy and Site Allocation DPD (Development Plan Document) Local Development Framework documents. 4NW have indicated that they will challenge any authority that fails to deliver the figures contained in the final policy at the public examination of their development plan documents (DPDs). This could lead to the Inspector deciding that the plans were unsound, leaving that authority without an up-to-date development plan.

5.2 There would be financial implications if the increased figure became policy as sites would have to be found to provide the pitches. There are practical considerations in terms of trying to find appropriate sites upon which to locate such high numbers of pitches. The Council has just completed a site search exercise in relation to the new Runcorn site in

Warrington Road. There were no alternative sites identified that would provide acceptable locations.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The overarching aim of the consultation is to ensure that the Gypsy and Traveller / Travelling Showpeople communities in each area have access to decent accommodation and the families can reach school and health care services.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

There are no direct implications for this priority.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Ensuring that the Gypsy and Traveller / Travelling Showpeople communities have access to decent accommodation will contribute to the good health and welfare of these groups.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Addressing accommodation issues for the Gypsy and Traveller community / Travelling Showpeople communities and making proper provision will reduce the nuisance that arises from unauthorised encampments and development. Car parking standards will ensure that vehicular parking is properly dealt with in new development, leading to less risk posed by unsuitable parking.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

There are no direct implications for this priority.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

The key risk may be that 4NW do not accept the Council's representation and interpretation of the evidence. This may lead to the 45 additional pitches figure becoming a Regional Spatial Strategy policy (58 additional permanent pitches to 2021). If this happens, Halton will be expected to make provision to deliver this figure through the Halton Core Strategy and Site Allocation DPD (Development Plan Document) Local Development Framework documents. 4NW have indicated that they will challenge any authority that fails to deliver the figures contained in the final policy at the public examination of their development plan documents (DPDs). This could lead to the Inspector deciding that the plans were unsound, leaving that authority without an up-to-date development plan.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

Since 1999 Gypsies and Irish Travellers have been recognised in English Law as ethnic groups and protected under the Race Relations Act. Recent legislation and guidance from the government has indicated a commitment to taking steps to resolve some of the long standing accommodation issues for members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities. This legislation has an overarching aim of ensuring that members of Gypsy and Traveller communities have equal access to decent and appropriate accommodation options akin to each and every other member of society. Following the Housing Act 2004, local authorities have been preparing to develop and implement strategies to respond to the accommodation needs of the Gypsy and Traveller communities.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Submitted Draft North West Plan Partial Review Document July 2009	Rutland House	Tim Gibbs
Cheshire Partnership Area Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation and Related Services Assessment	Rutland House	Tim Gibbs
North West Regional Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation and Related Services Assessment Executive Summary	Rutland House	Tim Gibbs
4NW Consultation Forum on draft Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople policies. A consultation report by CAG Consultants January 2009 incorporating the Notes of meeting held on Friday 19 th December 2008	Rutland House	Tim Gibbs
4NW Technical Note on how the Interim Draft Policy Figures for Gypsy and Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople (North West Regional Spatial Strategy Partial Review) were derived (February 2009)	Rutland House	Tim Gibbs