

**To the Chair and Members of Regeneration and Environment O/S Panel**

**Gypsy & Travellers Review**

<b>Relevant Cabinet Member(s)</b>	<b>Wards Affected</b>	<b>Key Decision</b>
Cllr Barbara Hoyle	All	Yes

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. This report details the unmet need of site provision for Gypsy and Travellers (G&T) within the Borough. It considers options on how to address the unmet need across the Borough following the completion of an updated G&T needs assessment.

**2. EXEMPT REPORT**

This report is not exempt.

**3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That O/S panel consider the following recommendations that will be considered by Mayor and Cabinet on 4<sup>th</sup> July

- a) Mayor and Cabinet to agree the findings of the G&T accommodation needs assessment and the strategy to meet those needs.
- b) Mayor and Cabinet to note the progress of the refurbishment scheme at the Gibbons Lane site and the extension scheme at Land's End site to help address unmet G/T accommodation needs following a successful bid to the HCA for £1.44m external funding (subject to specific scheme approval once HCA contract is received)

**4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 Doncaster's Gypsies and Travellers make up a relatively large proportion of the population with estimates in the region of 4000 – 6000, around 2% of the population depending on the time of year (SY GTAA).
- 4.2 Current provision in Doncaster comprises 4 council run Gypsy & Traveller sites (49 pitches) and 61 private sites (272 pitches) and 11 showmen's sites.
- 4.3 Doncaster has an agreed strategy for meeting the needs of the Gypsy & Traveller communities in Doncaster, as agreed in March 2010.

This can be summarised as:

- Increasing site provision and refurbishment of existing local authority provision
- Development of new local authority sites to meet identified need
- Development of supported stopping places
- Develop proposals for additional support costs / arrangements to ensure effective co-ordination and further development of services
- Work to support the development of and increase provision of privately owned sites.

### The 2012 South Yorkshire Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment

4.4 The 2012 South Yorkshire Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment updates the current evidence base for meeting G&T and Travelling Show people needs.

4.5 The refresh of the assessment was carried out using a similar methodology to the DCLG assessment guidance published in 2007, which was the methodology used for the 2006/07 assessment. However, the refreshed 2011 assessment addresses methodological issues with the previous guidance such as double counting and exclusion of certain groups. It also provides for more local analysis at the South Yorkshire and individual local authority levels by allowing local authorities to include information recorded locally rather than just relying on bi-annual caravan counts i.e. trend based data recorded during the year.

4.6 Travelling Showpeople have different needs than the wider G/T communities. As such this assessment has split the calculations to assess requirements separately.

4.7 To help assess need, a new survey was developed to provide some insight into the changing demand levels and to assess if any new issues have arisen since the last assessment.

4.8 Over a 100 surveys were completed and the respondents included G/T population from both public and private sites and where possible those living in bricks and mortar housing.

4.9 Consultation was also carried out with Travelling Showpeople. This included a focus group and consultation exercise, in Doncaster, conducted by the Showmen's Guild representative.

4.10 A number of secondary data sources were used for the assessment and these are set out in the table below –

<b>Pitch Information</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
Number of local authority pitches (current)	LA's hold upto date information on pitch numbers through site management and planning permission applications
Number of private pitches (current)	
Unused pitches and vacant plots (current)	This is collected from the July caravan count and council tax data on private

	caravan pitches
Number of pitches expected to become vacant (over a year)	The number of terminations on the local authority sites turnover of pitches in year, averaged over past three years The turnover rate for the public sector sites and the turnover rate for the settled population in housing has been used to assess vacancies on private sites
New LA pitches planned or due to be completed (in next 12 months)	Collected through planning permissions and local authority plans. From March 2011 to March 2012.
New private pitches likely to gain permission or be completed (in next 12 months)	
Household (current numbers)	Population data from the 2006/07 assessment has been used
Seeking permanent site accommodation in the area	The number of households on the local authority site waiting lists and information from the survey. Survey data and the waiting lists for private sites
The number of households on unauthorised sites not on own land	The average number of unauthorised sites recorded in the January and July caravan counts. It is assumed that 1 household occupies 1.5 caravans as an average
On unauthorised sites on own land	
Households new expected to arrive from elsewhere	The number of households on the local authority waiting lists who live outside the area and survey data

4.11 The assessment identifies that for the period 2011-2016 there is a total unmet need of minus 15 pitches for G&T population at the current time and over the next five years a requirement to provide an additional 34 G/T pitches and 113 yards for Travelling Show people population.

#### Meeting the Unmet Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Needs

4.12 The following measures are proposed to address the unmet need identified at Para 4.11:

#### Additional Public Sector G/T Pitch Provision

4.12.1 The Council will provide a further 16 Council pitches. 10 at Gibbon Lane, Thorne (conversion of the former Council-run transit site) and 6 at Lands End Lane, Thorne (extension to the existing Council run site), which is in line with the current strategy to extend and refurbish existing sites.

4.12.2 Doncaster MBC submitted a bid to the Homes and Communities Agency Gypsy and Traveller Site Grant Programme during 2011/12 in anticipation of an unmet need arising from the 2012 G/T assessment. The bid requested 100% grant funding to:

- Undertake site expansion works (increasing the existing provision from 10 to 16 pitches) at the Lands End Site, Lands End Road, Thorne.

- Undertake full site refurbishment works (to include 10 pitches) to the Gibbons Lane Site, Thorne.

- 4.5.3 The bid was largely successful, with the authority being awarded £1.44m to provide the additional 16 pitches, as above. The Council's full bid totalled £1,687,000, based on an estimated cost of £154,000 per pitch. However, the maximum amount that the HCA will fund per pitch is £90,000.
- 4.5.4 Officers from the Council's housing service and technical service are working jointly to review the original cost estimates and specifications for works to meet the allocated budget of £1.44m and aim to drive down costs through a competitive procurement exercise, and failing this to revise the specification the 1.44m budget available.
- 4.5.5 The Gibbons Lane and Land's End refurbishment schemes have been added into the capital programme as part of the Q1 outturn report and specific scheme approval will be obtained via the SARR process once an acceptable HCA contract has been received and can be entered into by the Council. The schemes will be progressed from this point.

#### Disposal of Suitable Council Sites for private G/T pitch provision

- 4.6.1 Surplus Council land will be kept under review, via joint working between the Council's housing and assets and property teams, with a view to selling or leasing suitable surplus parcels of surplus assets to the travelling community.
- 4.7.1 The Council's surplus land holdings have been assessed, however it has been determined that no suitable and surplus land is currently available. Any decisions to dispose of surplus council assets to the G & T or Travelling Show people communities would be subject to a future and separate cabinet decision.

#### Disposal of Suitable Council Sites for private Traveller Showpeople pitch provision

- 4.8 Council Officers have met and consulted with representatives for the Yorkshire Region for the Showman's Guild. We have met to discuss how we can work with the guild on facilitating access to the remainder of the Traveller Pitch Grant from the HCA (for them to bid on) or how we can identify DMBC land to apply for further grant funding from the HCA to deliver a site that is big enough for accommodating show people and their equipment.

#### Allocation of sites via the planning system to meet G/T pitch provision

- 4.9 The Council has and will continue to work closely with the travelling community to identify suitable private land that could be the subject of planning applications. The travelling community have so far struggled to find land that is available and affordable and suitable but Policy 13 of the Council's Core Strategy (which has now been adopted) identifies broad locations where new and / or extended sites could be acceptable in principle

- 4.9.1 The national planning policy document, “Planning for traveller sites”, requires Local Planning Authorities to identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of sites set against locally set targets. The Council’s Planning Officers are currently preparing an Allocations Development Plan Document that identifies land for a range of uses. This will include identifying the sites and approaches for meeting unmet need. It will be for Full Council to decide after due process what sites should be allocated to help meet this need.
- 4.9.2 A separate report to Mayor and Cabinet seeking approval of the Council’s Allocation Development Plan Document will outline how any additional shortfall in unmet G&T and Travelling Show people needs will be met via the planning system in the medium term.

## **5. OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1 **Option 1** - To invest in creating any new pitches on council sites and to identify additional provision via the planning process / site allocation development plan document – Plans have been identified and grant successfully bid for to invest into Gibbon Lane and Lands End sites. Not to do so would mean that that money could not be drawn down to benefit the borough and additional pitches will not be forthcoming unless the Council allocates resources from its own budgets. Identification of new sites within site allocation development plan document will enable the remaining shortfall to be met via the planning system – Recommended Option
- 5.2 **Option 2** - To dispose of Gibbon’s Lane site for private redevelopment for a Gypsy and Traveller site – There is interest from the private sector to purchase Gibbon Lane for a private G&T site, however there is a will to deliver the sites for new G&T provision as quickly as possible and Option 1 is considered to be the quickest and most reliable route to redevelopment of the sites. It may be that the Council wishes to explore the opportunity of disposal of existing Council sites as at a future point in time, as which point further work can be undertaken.
- 5.3 **Option 3** - Not to allocate any new sites for private development via the planning system. This will put greater pressure on the council needing to grant planning permission for G&T sites that are in more inappropriate locations.

## **6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION**

### **Gibbons Lane Site:**

- 6.1 The site has previously been used as a transit site for gypsy and travellers but has been badly vandalised and is not currently in use. The project would see 10 new pitches developed as permanent accommodation. The site is currently owned by DMBC and although currently unusable for G&T purposes it has planning permission for G&T use in principle although a new permission will be needed for new utility blocks etc. By doing the work the Council will retain a control over the site’s occupation. If it does decide to sell the site on with or without

covenants over site occupation the receipt can be reinvested by the Council.

### Lands End Site:

6.2 This is an existing site with 10 permanent pitches. All pitches were tenanted as at 12/03/12. The extension to the site (providing an additional 6 pitches) would be facilitated via access to an adjoining piece of Council owned land, adjacent to the existing pitches. The site is currently owned by DMBC and a planning application for the additional pitches will be made.

## 7. IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY PRIORITIES

Priority Theme	Mayor's Priorities for 2011/12	Implications of this initiative
1. Creating a strong, connected and inclusive economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drive forward the Doncaster economy</li> <li>• Get the balance of public and private transport right</li> <li>• Promote Doncaster as a tourist destination</li> <li>• Regenerate Doncaster's town centres</li> </ul>	
2. Developing stronger communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage community harmony and cohesion. Treat people as individuals, not by reference to labels and artificial groupings</li> </ul>	<p>Meeting the accommodation shortfall for the Gypsy and Traveller Community is one of Doncaster's top priorities.</p> <p>Whilst ever Doncaster continues to not to meet the shortfall in suitable Gypsy and Traveller site provision, it forces Gypsy and Traveller adults and children, many of whom are considered to be vulnerable, to illegally encamp on unsuitable land across the borough</p> <p>Meeting the accommodation shortfall will reduce the incidence of illegal encampment.</p>
3. Increasing and improving housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise housing standards and ensure that there are enough homes to suit all requirements</li> </ul>	Enabling the provision of additional G&T pitches on a site that is decommissioned and unattractive.
4. Protecting and improving all our children's lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to improve education and skills</li> <li>• Build on a strengthening Children's Service</li> </ul>	Doncaster recognises that travelling parents have an equal obligation to that of settled parents when education issues are concerned, and traveller children have the same right to go to school as any other child. This right is facilitated by Doncaster through the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS)
5. Improving health and support for independent lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage attitudes of self-reliance, self-improvement and mutual respect within Doncaster communities</li> </ul>	Improving health and reducing inequalities experienced by the G&T community is a high priority for the Liaison Team, who work closely with health and educational services to enable access for all members of the community to address multiple deprivation issues.
6. Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce crime and all forms of anti-social behaviour</li> </ul>	The Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Team have a close working relationship with Planning Enforcement, the Police Gypsy and Traveller Officer, Neighbourhood Managers and support services.

7. Creating a cleaner and better environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to protect the environment from developers, decay and architectural vandalism</li> </ul>	
8. Internal Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure local people get value for money from council services</li> </ul>	Delivering the scheme will provide more permanent pitches for the gypsy and traveller community in Doncaster. This should reduce the reliance on illegal encampments and the resource implications these have on the Police, Council and other agencies.

## 8. RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

This report has significant implications in terms of the following:

- 8.1 The contractual arrangements with the Homes & Community Agency have not been finalized. We will need to ensure that the contractual arrangements and conditions allow the project to be delivered. To mitigate this risk officers are meeting regularly with the HCA.
- 8.2 If the scheme is approved: The risk associated with this is linked to capacity of officers. The service is project managing the work associated with the Bid and officers within Strategic Housing who have the skills and expertise are being used to assist with this project.
- 8.3 If the land is contaminated there may be a potential impact on the budget.
- 8.4 Planning permission not being approved – if required. If planning permission is not approved the shortfall in pitches will not be met resulting in a greater number of pitches to be identified.
- 8.5 The assumptions used in the methodology are subject to challenge at a planning appeal in the event of refusal of any future planning permissions for new G/T sites. It is not possible to estimate the likelihood of success at such an appeal until a specific case is submitted and considered and the Mayor and Cabinet as well as the wider Council would need to accept that this risk exists when considering the recommendations in this report.

## 9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Housing Act 2004 requires local authorities to include gypsies and travelers in their accommodation needs assessments and to take a strategic approach to show how these needs will be met as part of a wider housing strategy. The government has, in addition introduced new Planning Policy guidance “Planning for Travellers sites” which as stated within the background information aims that “local planning authorities should make their own assessment of need for the purposes of planning” and “to encourage local planning authorities to plan for sites over a reasonable timescale”.
- 9.2 The endorsement of the Needs Assessment and the approval of the measures outlined in the report will assist in addressing the provision of sites within the Borough. The unmet need of site provision has been held by planning inspectors to be a key consideration in considering

planning appeals in relation to gypsy and traveler sites within the borough.

- 9.3 In addition the Equality Act 2010 requires a public authority to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimization and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

## 10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 As stated above the Council's capital programme includes the Gibbons Lane and Land's End refurbishment schemes and £1.44m of HCA grant has been secured. The terms and conditions of the grant have not yet been agreed and there current estimated costs exceed the value of the grant. These issues need to be dealt with before the refurbishment starts.
- 10.2 To comply with Financial Procedure Rule B.10, specific scheme approval will be obtained via the SARR process once an acceptable HCA contract has been received and costs have been reduced (or additional funding identified).
- 10.3 The implementation of the additional 16 pitches would produce on-going revenue costs where budgets would be required for staffing, maintenance etc. This would be funded from the rent and service charge for each occupied plot.

## 11. CONSULTATION

11. The service has undertaken two consultation exercises:
- 11.1 Consultation has taken place with ward members in Thorne.
- 11.2 Consultation on an informal basis has taken place with residents at Lands End. A formal consultation is planned with the residents on a one to one basis commencing the first week in June.

Procurement		Crime & Disorder	
Human Resources		Human Rights & Equalities	
Buildings, Land and Occupiers		Environment & Sustainability	
ICT		Capital Programme	

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

12. Specific Scheme Approval Part A: HCA bid



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