



Doncaster Council

REPORT

Date: 22 September 2021

To the Chair and Members of the
Cabinet

Gypsy & Traveller sites – Investment Strategy

Relevant Member(s)	Cabinet	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Cllr Glyn Jones			

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The council currently owns three Gypsy & Traveller (G&T) sites:
 - White Towers, Armthorpe, 23 plots;
 - i. 12 tenanted
 - ii. 7 voids
 - iii. 4 not available for re-letting
 - Lands End, Thorne, 22 plots;
 - i. 22 tenanted
 - ii. 0 voids
 - Little Lane, Kirk Sandall, 10 plots;
 - i. 7 tenanted
 - ii. 3 voids
2. St Leger Homes have managed all three sites since 2014.
3. For each G&T sites residents each rent a pitch and an individual utility block, with the average rent across the sites is £81.
4. Historically investment in improving facilities has been limited, although £2.64m was invested during 2011/12 - 2018/19, of which £1.98m related to new provision, creating 16 new pitches (12 No. at Lands End site and 4 No. at White Towers site) and during 2012/13 – 2014/15 and a further £0.66m was invested into new meter blocks and general site improvements across the three G&T sites. The investment was funded through a combination of housing capital receipts and Homes England grant funding. There has been very limited investment in the

individual pitches, which has resulted in a number becoming unlettable due to their condition.

5. It is proposed to reconfigure the White Towers site, reducing the level of provision from 23 to 16 and improve the remaining pitches on the Lands End and Little Lane sites to bring them up to modern standards in line with the new provision that was created in 2013/14.

EXEMPT REPORT

6. Not exempt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. It is recommended that:
 - A two year investment strategy is put in place from 2022/23 to carry out improvements across all three G&T sites, starting with White Towers in 2022/23 and following on with Little Lane & Lands End sites in subsequent years.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

8. Improving the facilities to modern standards will ensure that all residents have safe, secure & modern accommodation provision, ensuring that the council complies with its duties.

BACKGROUND

9. The council currently owns three G&T sites.
10. Across the sites there are a total of 55 plots:
 - White Towers, Armthorpe, 23 plots;
 - i. 12 tenanted
 - ii. 7 voids
 - iii. 4 not available for re-letting
 - Lands End, Thorne, 22 plots;
 - i. 22 tenanted
 - ii. 0 voids
 - Little Lane, Kirk Sandall, 10 plots;
 - i. 7 tenanted
 - ii. 3 voids
11. In 2013/14 16 new G&T pitches were provided, four on White Towers site and 12 on Lands End site.
12. Historically management of the sites proved to be difficult, with resistance from residents to staff enforcing site conditions, although this has been done where supporting evidence is available. Significant levels of fly tipping happens on and around the sites, particularly on the void pitches. Limited CCTV is available at White Towers site from the adjacent Waste Recycling Centre; however, images from this have proven inconclusive and have therefore not been able to be used to take action associated with the fly tipping. All residents when asked deny fly

tipping on the site and any knowledge of who is responsible.

13. Of the G&T sites, White Towers provides the biggest management challenge and has the worst site conditions and highest number of voids. Pitch layout adds to some of the management challenges including the ability to comply with the 6m separation distance requirements between caravans.
14. The council provide the pitch and amenity block which includes living, kitchen, toilet and bathing facilities. The current utility blocks have been in place for many years with very little investment and are in poor condition.
15. In June 2018 Faithful & Gould were commissioned to undertake an assessment of the sites, to provide budget cost estimates for improvement works required at each individual site, review the fire safety separation distances required by the DCLG guidance/standards, and provide potential site layout alterations.
16. When considering the condition of the amenity blocks, the inspection report noted that the amenity blocks accessed during the survey are dated and in poor condition. The cladding material to the blocks is torn and the inner structure of the blocks is exposed in places. On White Towers four utility blocks have had to be demolished for safety because of their condition and vandalism. The sanitary fittings internally are aged and in poor condition. Given the lack of investment in the existing provision 4 pitches are unlettable and the individual amenity blocks have had to be demolished for safety reasons.
17. When considering the level of need for G&T pitches within the borough, consideration needs to be given to the Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA) that forms part of the supporting documentation for the local plan. The formal assessment (standard methodology) identified an overall surplus of 55 pitches.
18. With regards to the local plan, assuming there has been no significant changes since 2018, a loss of 7 would still leave a surplus of 48, which should also increase over time in the same way the identified surplus in 2018 of 55 increases to a surplus of 274 by 2032. However, we would not know an up to date position until a new GTANA is done.
19. For planning purposes we have to show a 5 year supply of sites, which as per the GTANA was +184 given the surplus of 55 and expected additional sites, it is not anticipated that this would impact to a point that we would fail to demonstrate this, based on the 2018 figures.
20. The Local Plan notes the authorised site capacities and surplus by 2032 based on the GTANA but also acknowledges that the GTANA will be periodically updated and we will react to the findings of it if necessary, so as long as we still have a surplus of sites and can demonstrate a 5 year supply of sites then there should be no significant impact on the Local Plan.

STATUTORY GUIDANCE

21. Two main government guides from the then Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) have been used to assess the current layout and proposed improvements:

Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites – Good Practice Guide

22. This good practice guide is applicable to the three gypsy and traveller sites. The guide is intended to help local authorities who wish to develop a new site or refurbish the whole or part of an existing site. It is recognised within the guidance that it is not possible to meet all aspects of this guidance in every respect on every site and that local authorities will need to make decisions on a case by case basis based on the size, geographical nature and needs of residents.
23. Key areas of this guidance document used in the feasibility options include:
- Every trailer, caravan or park home must be not less than 6 metres from any other trailer, caravan or park home that is occupied separately to ensure fire safety. Other structures are allowed in this zone if they are made of non-combustible materials, such as an amenity block.
 - Soft landscaping can be used to ensure spatial separation which prevents movement of trailers to positions which would breach fire safety distances from the adjoining pitch.
 - Resident parking should largely be provided for on individual pitches, to avoid on-street parking impeding access of fire and other emergency services. Parking spaces should be a minimum of 2.4 x 4.8 metres.
 - Amenity buildings must be provided on each plot, although this can be provided across two pitches as two separate and entirely self-contained semi-detached units. Amenity blocks must include, hot and cold-water supply, electricity supply, separate toilet and hand wash basin, a bath/shower room, a kitchen and dining area.

Model Standards 2008 for Caravan Site in England.

24. The model standards within this document only apply to those sites which contain caravans that are used as permanent residential units.
25. Key areas of this standards document used in the feasibility options include:
- No caravan or combustible structure shall be positioned within 3 metres of the boundary of the site.
 - Every caravan must, where practicable, be spaced at no less than 6 metres (the separation distance) from any other caravan which is occupied as a separate residence.
 - Private cars may be parked within the separation distance provided they do not obstruct entrances to caravans or access around them and they are a minimum of 3 metres from an adjacent caravan.
 - New two-way roads shall not be less than 3.7 metres wide, or 3 metres for one-way traffic. Where existing two-way roads are not 3.7 metres wide, passing places shall be provided where practical.
 - Every unit must stand on a concrete base or hard-standing.
 - There shall be satisfactory provision for foul and waste water drainage either by connection to a public sewer or sewage treatment works or by discharge to a properly constructed septic tank or cesspool approved by the local authority.
 - Where communal refuse bins are provided these shall be non-combustible and housed within a properly constructed bin store.

- Fire points shall be located so that no caravan or site building is more than 30 metres away. A suitable means of raising the alarm in the event of a fire shall be provided at each fire point.

G&T PROVISION / NEED MOVING FORWARD.

26. Given the surplus provision highlighted through the formal assessment, combined with the management challenges at White Towers site, it is proposed that the number of pitches is reduced by 7 from 23 to 16. This will remove void pitches and therefore the opportunity to fly tip on them, whilst at the same time providing the opportunity to increase pitch size enabling more space to be provided to facilitate the provision of the required separation distances.
27. It is proposed to keep the same number of pitches on Little Lane and Lands End sites.
28. When considering the cost associated with improving standards to modern day provision, Faithfull & Gould were asked to provide budget estimates [2018] for each site.
29. Proposed works for White Towers site is:
 - reconfiguration the site to reduce the provision by 7 pitches,
 - alteration works to the electrical, water and waste services to each plot,
 - provision of new amenity blocks, construction of new plot boundaries,
 - landscaping and hardstanding works to individual plots
 - construction of new pedestrian pavement and resurfacing of the access road in-keeping with normal highways standards.
30. The budget estimate including professional fees (Aug 2018) was £1.80m. Given the time gap between the budget estimate and potential delivery on site it is anticipated that this estimate will increase and the final figures will be known following a full procurement process.
31. Proposed works for Lands End site is:
 - replace old amenity blocks,
 - renew existing boundary fencing to the site,
 - new surfacing treatment to each existing plot and
 - access road re-surfacing in-keeping with normal highways standards.
32. The budget estimate including professional fees for works to the long term pitches (not the 12 new pitches provided in 2013/14) (Aug 2018) was £1.21m. Given the time gap between the budget estimate and potential delivery on site it is anticipated that this estimate will increase and the final figures will be known following a full procurement exercise.
33. Proposed works for Little Lane site is:
 - replace amenity blocks,
 - renew existing boundary fencing to the site,
 - new surfacing treatment to each existing plot, and
 - access road re-surfacing in-keeping with normal highways standards.

- 34. The budget estimate including professional fees (Aug 2018) was £1.16m. Given the time gap between the budget estimate and potential delivery on site it is anticipated that this estimate will increase and the final figures will be known following a full procurement exercise.
- 35. The combined estimated cost (subject to inflationary increases) to improve the G&T sites to modern standards is £4.17m.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL’S KEY OUTCOMES

	Outcomes	Implications
	<p>Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to good fulfilling work • Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish • Inward Investment 	
	<p>Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster’s people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster • More people can live in a good quality, affordable home • Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport • Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean • Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage 	<p>Ensuring appropriate steps are taken to bring the sites and amenity block up to decent standards will ensure individuals can live safely in their homes.</p>
	<p>Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better • Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work 	

	<p>Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes 	
	<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

36. The current estimates are based on 2018 prices, it is likely that these cost will have increased since that point in time.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...HMP... .. Date 02/07/21

37. Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides the Council with a general power of competence, allowing the Council to do anything that individuals generally may do. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives the Council the power to purchase goods and services.
38. The appointment of a provider to carry out the improvement works must be procured in accordance with the Councils contract procedure rules.
39. Legal Services should be consulted at the earliest opportunity to provide the contractual documentation.
40. Legal advice should be sought on the existing security of tenure contained in occupation agreements and the provisions to terminate the agreement or relocate the occupiers. Consideration of the right to a private and family life contained within article 8 within the Human Rights Act 1998 must be considered.

41. Consideration should be given to the consultation necessary on those impacted by the decision. Where consultation takes place the consultation responses must be taken into account in finalising the decision and the process should comply with the established consultation principles: consultation should occur when proposals are at a formative stage; consultations should give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit intelligent consideration; and consultations should allow adequate time for consideration and response; The decision maker must demonstrate that it has considered the consultation responses or a summary of them, before taking its decision.
42. The decision maker must also comply with the Public Sector Equality duty to consider the need to promote equality for persons with “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and have due regard to:
 - i) eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation;
 - ii) advance equality of opportunity
 - iii) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.
43. In order to do this the decision maker will need to have sufficient information about the effects of the proposed changes on the aims of the Equality Duty. The Equalities implication section below is designed to assist with compliance with this duty and so the decision maker must take that into consideration and the public sector equality duty before taking the decision.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials DH Date 09/09/21]

44. The costs associated with the upgrading of the three Gypsy & Travellers caravan sites to modern standards were estimated in 2018 to be £4.17m. The estimate is expected to increase once any inflationary rises have been reflected and the revised cost will be clearer when the full tender exercise is undertaken. The tender exercise will be undertaken in line with contract procedure rules.

The investment is proposed to span a two year period commencing in 2022/23.

Location	Investment £m
White Towers	1.80
Lands End	1.21
Little Lane	1.16
Total	4.17

45. The Council approved a four year Housing Capital Programme on 1st March 2021. Included in this was funding earmarked for costs associated with both park homes and gypsy and traveller sites. The total funding across the four year period (2021/22-2024/25) is £2.84m.

Approved Funding	Investment £m
2021/22	0.64
2022/23	0.40
2023/24	1.40
2024/25	0.40
Total	2.84

46. £0.34m of this funding has been earmarked for improvements to the park homes sites, leaving unallocated funding of £2.5m. It is proposed that the unallocated Housing Investment budget of £2.06m is vired to this budget to fund this investment. This would give a total budget of £4.56m against estimated costs based on 2018 prices of £4.17m.
47. Any additional funding and virements will need to be approved in accordance with the financial procedure rules. The profiled spend of the available resources are uncertain at this stage. Any changes will be reported as part of the Finance and Performance report.
48. Also included in the revenue budget is £50k, earmarked for any repairs and maintenance costs across all the G&T / Residential sites. Any future capital investment into the sites should result in a reduction of revenue repairs at the G&T sites being required, especially in the subsequent few years. These savings are not quantifiable at this time.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials AC.... Date ...01/07/21]

49. There are no HR implications in relation to this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...PW... Date...29/06/21..]

50. There are no technology implications in relation to this report.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials... CT.....Date29/06/21.....]

51. Public Health supports the proposals to improve the standards of the 3 sites. Poor conditions and sanitation on Traveller sites contribute to the poor health of Gypsy and Traveller families, including many children.
- The health status of Gypsies and Travellers is much poorer than that of the general population, even when controlling for other factors such as variable socio-economic status and/or ethnicity
 - Life expectancy is 10 to 12 years less than that of the non-Traveller population
 - 42 per cent of English Gypsies are affected by a long term condition, as opposed to 18 per cent of the general population
52. Therefore site conditions need to be of a standard to create an environment that promotes good health and wellbeing.

A safe place that the residents feel they can call home.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials.....SW... Date.....02/06/21..]

53. The Gypsy and Traveller community are one of the most excluded groups within our communities. It is critical that the accommodation that the council provides is modern and to decent standards.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS

Chris Margrave

Director of Property Services
St Leger Homes of Doncaster.

01302 862709

chris.margrave@stlegerhomes.co.uk