

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

21 July 2008

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Housing & Community Safety - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Steve Nelson

TRAVELLERS SITE SELECTION - UPDATE

1. Summary

This report presents Cabinet with an update on the actions arising from the Review of Traveller Transit Site Selection undertaken by the Housing and Community Safety Committee on 14 February 2008.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet agree to submit an application for building refurbishment works at the Council's existing site and to receive a further report into the provision of an additional traveller site in the autumn following receipt of a needs assessment report and further site considerations.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

In order to make best use of the opportunity to bid for the current round of Gypsy and Traveller Grant.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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TRAVELLER SITE SELECTION – UPDATE

SUMMARY

This report presents Cabinet with an update on the actions arising from the Review of Traveller Transit Site Selection undertaken by the Housing and Community Safety Committee on 14 February 2008.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet agree to submit an application for building refurbishment works at the Council's existing site and to receive a further report into the provision of an additional traveller site in the autumn following receipt of a needs assessment report and further site considerations.

DETAIL

Background

1. Members will recall that Cabinet agreed to establish a Travellers Transit Site subject to the availability of 100% Government grant funding. This was made following a marked increase in Traveller activity within the Borough and the continued cost of dealing with unauthorised encampments.
2. Cabinet received a report from the Housing and Community Safety Committee in February 2008 which concluded that there was no suitable location for a travellers site within Council ownership and resolved that further work was required to identify alternative sites, including any not in Council ownership, which meet the criteria for the funding.
3. The report also outlined that a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) had been commissioned jointly with the other four Tees Valley Authorities, and was due to report in March 2008. The draft report received in March included a number of assumptions and ongoing discussions are being held between Local Authorities and the consultants to clarify. Revised assumptions have been agreed and the consultants are subsequently remodelling the need for existing and future provision. This provision is being overseen by the Tees Valley Heads of Housing Group.

Current Position

4. The timescales for the current round of Gypsy & Travellers Site Grant requires submission of an application by the end of July. Applications will be considered against a range of criteria:
 - Clearly assessed need
 - Sustainability of the site
 - i. Location
 - ii. Management of the site
 - iii. Operational budget
 - Value For Money
 - Deliverability
 - Land in Council ownership
 - Planning permission
5. The identification of suitable sites has, and continues to be proving difficult. Land and Property staff have reviewed and considered a number of sites outside of Council ownership, however, consideration of these sites against criteria in paragraph 4, particularly in relation to being in Council ownership would mean they would be unlikely to be appropriate.
6. Whilst a number of potential sites have been identified none satisfy all of the criteria. The main difficulty is in actually finding a suitable site that is available for the Council to purchase. To date only one potentially suitable site where the current owners are willing to discuss disposing of their interest for this purpose has been found. However, this is in the same geographical area as the site deemed unsuitable by the Scrutiny Review (eg Bowesfield Lane).
7. Work is currently ongoing investigating alternatives. This includes consultation with all Members on potential sites in their Ward and also commissioning Lamb & Edge to undertake a further search.
8. Work is also underway to draw up proposals for refurbishment of the Council's existing travellers' site at Mount Pleasant Grange. At the time of writing firm figures have not been completed, but it is anticipated that the total value of the proposal will be of the order of £250,000 to £300,000, based on works to bring all pitches up to the 'decent standard' for Council housing, improved perimeter security for the site and an additional pitch.

Conclusion

9. Given the current position with the difficulties in identifying sites and the delay in the needs assessment, it is suggested that unless Members wish to proceed with the option of the Bowesfield Lane, further work is undertaken in establishing a suitable site and a report prepared for Cabinet in the autumn, with the Council concentrating on a bid for refurbishment work as part of this funding round. Further allocations of £1m per round have been profiled for the North East Region for 2009/10 and 2010/11.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs will be met by up to 75% grant funding, the remainder being funded from the Housing Capital Programme.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None directly associated with this report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

This is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Regeneration and Transport – inward investment arising from a successful bid would have a beneficial impact on the local economy.

Safer Communities – the scheme includes improvements to perimeter security.

Children and Young People – children and young people resident at the Mount Pleasant Grange site would benefit from refurbishment.

Health & Wellbeing – the proposed refurbishment scheme includes improvements to showers.

Environment & Housing – the proposed scheme would incorporate improvements to housing standards consistent with the 'decent standard' work in mainstream housing.

Stronger Communities – The redevelopment of the existing site and potential for future development helps the Council in meeting its requirement to promote equality of opportunity and community cohesion.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This report has not been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment at this stage as it refers to refurbishment of the current provision. Future reports making recommendations for any potential new sites would require an EIA, if the refurbishment bid was successful.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

Extensive consultation with gypsies and travellers has been undertaken as part of the GTAA process (see paragraph 3).

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Background Papers (**guidance**)

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: (**details**)

Property (<http://sbcintranet/library/64521/RES/Capital.doc?view=Display>)