
GYPSY AND TRAVELLER SITE PROVISION – FEASIBILITY

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Chris McEwan,
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**

Responsible Directors – Richard Alty, Director of Place

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek the approval of Members to release feasibility funding of £50,000 to examine options and undertake site investigation works, to increase Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision at Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road.
2. To seek Member approval to formally tender for the feasibility works and seek delegated authority for the Director of Place to award a contract for the feasibility works following the completion and evaluation of the formal tender process.

Summary

3. On 3 July 2011, the Authority applied for funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to support the delivery of 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches in Darlington as part of the 4 year, 2011-2015, Affordable Homes Development Programme (AHDP). On 5 January 2012, the Authority was formally advised of the success of the bid which confirmed £1.5M of HCA grant funding to deliver 20 new pitches in the period 2013-2015 assuming an element of match funding from the Authority.
4. It is proposed that a minimum (subject to feasibility works, community consultation, and, site investigation) of 20 of the 35 new pitches likely to be required to meet LDF Gypsy and Traveller pitch requirements will be delivered on the two existing Gypsy and Traveller sites at Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that:-
 - (a) Members approve the release of £50,000 of feasibility funding.
 - (b) Members approve delegated authority to the Director of Place to award the feasibility contract on completion of a formal tender process.

Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
- (a) There is likely to be a requirement to deliver 35 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches by 2026 as part of the Local Development Framework. This scheme will contribute at least 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches towards that target.
 - (b) To meet the identified needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community as confirmed by the Gypsy and Traveller Area Assessment (GTAA) 2008.

Richard Alty
Director of Place

Background Papers

- (i) Tees Valley Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (2009)
- (ii) Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document (May 2011)
- (iii) Accommodating Growth Development Plan Document Issues and Options Report (November 2010)
- (iv) Consultation on Potential Sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show people (March 2012)

Alan Glew Tel. No. 01325 388202

S17 Crime and Disorder	The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is considered that some of the improvement works identified in this report will be beneficial in reducing crime.
Health and Well Being	The feasibility work will examine options to increase and improve facilities on site for the Gypsy and Traveller community increasing health and well being.
Carbon Impact	The feasibility work will seek to minimise any carbon impact on the existing sites and examine modern methods of construction to reduce carbon waste.
Diversity	The scheme will provide additional pitches and improved facilities for a minority community group.
Wards Affected	Faverdale and Eastbourne
Groups Affected	Gypsies and Travellers
Budget and Policy Framework	There will be an impact of £50,000 in the 2012/13 MTFP. This report does not recommend any changes to the policy framework.
Key Decision	Yes.
Urgent Decision	No.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The conclusion of the feasibility work will provide the basis of new increased supply and improved site facilities for a minority group in Darlington.
Efficiency	All works will be procured through a competitive tender process which will deliver value for money.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. In response to the Tees Valley Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTAA) undertaken by the Tees Valley sub-region in 2009, the Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD), adopted in May 2011, included a commitment to provide for identified needs through the Making Places and Accommodating Growth Development Plan Document (DPD) and includes a criteria based policy to guide the allocation of sites, and to use in decision making for any windfall sites that arise through the plan period. Further sub-regional work is being sought to agree on the apportionment of the needs recommended through the GTAA, and as an interim position, Darlington has committed to providing 35 pitches over the plan period. A number of sites are under consideration across the Borough, and, the subject of public consultation contributing towards the target of 35 new pitches by 2026. A number of sites are under consideration across the Borough. A further report on this is due to be considered by Cabinet on 10 July 2012.
8. In the intervening period, the opportunity to access HCA grant funding to support the delivery of 20 new additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches in Darlington through the 4 year Affordable Homes Development Programme (AHDP) was made available in July 2011. The application for grant funding was limited to 20 new pitches as this was seen as being most deliverable within the prescribed grant timeframe. Given the current difficulties in accessing grant funding to support new development, the opportunity to bid and be subsequently successful provides a valuable contribution towards our Borough-wide target of 35 additional new Gypsy and Traveller pitches by 2026.
9. The fundamental element of the scheme will be to provide 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches, with the feasibility study exploring how this target can be best achieved at the two existing Gypsy and Traveller sites at Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road. Initial indications have suggested that the two existing sites can accommodate the 20 new additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches through a process of converting some existing transit pitches, 10-12 at Honeypot Lane and providing 8 new pitches at Neasham Road in addition to existing pitch numbers. The feasibility study will explore the potential on both sites for expansion / conversion, and the scope and extent of any potential expansion / conversion to provide the 20 new additional pitches on these existing sites. The details of the grant funding conditions and the grant offer are covered in more detail in the Financial Implications part of this report.
10. In addition to the provision of 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches, the feasibility study will examine the need for communal facilities, increasing the size of some of the pitches, providing mains gas, provision of suitable need for appropriate play space for Gypsy and Traveller children within the site boundary, and, review the management arrangements to ensure that local identified need is best being met and the quality of the site is maintained.
11. A further Cabinet report outlining the conclusions of the feasibility works and seeking the release of funding to support the delivery of the 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches will be presented in the future. Any proposed expansion of the existing Gypsy and Traveller site boundaries to accommodate any new pitches, will be subject to the normal planning approval process and active community engagement will be undertaken during the feasibility stage of the works.

Financial Implications

12. This report is seeking Members approval to release £50,000 of feasibility funding to inform the delivery of 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches by March 2015. The formal tender process and the nature and scope of the feasibility works will determine the cost of the feasibility work but will not exceed £50,000. The Homes and Communities Agency have awarded £1.5M of grant funding to support the delivery of the 20 new pitches which is available for the period 2013-2015. However, grant from the HCA is not payable until the completion of the 20 new pitches, and, is not eligible to support feasibility costs of the scheme.
13. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) have indicated as part of the grant conditions that they will be seeking some element of match funding to support the delivery of the scheme. The feasibility costs incurred by the Authority will form part of this match funding contribution alongside any associated borrowing costs to front fund the delivery of the programme post feasibility. The delivery of 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches will be eligible for New Homes Bonus equating to approximately £170,000 of additional income for the Authority over a six year period, and, it is proposed this funding source (less the initial £50,000 of feasibility funding) be utilised and ringfenced to support the Authority match funding requirement and capital costs incurred. The current site Managers will also be approached to explore opportunities of other private sector investment to match fund any existing grant contributions.
14. On completion of the feasibility works, a further Cabinet report in Autumn 2012 will be presented to inform Members of the outcome of the feasibility works, seek their approval for the release of funding to support the projected development costs, and, approve the nature of the scheme.

Risk Analysis

15. The Authority need to provide confirmation to the HCA that they are able to deliver 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches in Darlington no later than 31 March 2015 to meet their grant conditions. There is a significant risk to the Authority that the Local Development Framework will be challenged and subject to additional scrutiny if the Authority are unable to deliver against their commitment to provide 35 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches by 2026.
16. There are no other sources of funding currently available to the Authority to deliver this provision and no certainty of any grant funding being made available for additional Gypsy and Traveller provision post 2015 from the HCA. Whilst seeking to secure a further 15 new pitches of Gypsy and Traveller funding in the period 2015-2026 will be challenging, the initial funding secured for the first 20 new pitches is a welcome early investment for Darlington, and, allows the Authority to deliver an early increase in provision within the Local Development Framework time period.

Outcome of Consultation

17. Initial discussions between the existing Gypsy and Traveller site Managers and the Authority have indicated they would be willing and able to support additional Gypsy and Traveller provision on both of the existing sites at Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road. Whilst these plans are not necessarily supported by all elements of the Gypsy and Traveller community, the Authority are only undertaking feasibility work at this stage and further engagement with the Gypsy and Traveller community will take place during the feasibility work, and, when the Local Development Framework alternative site assessment work is concluded.

18. The consultation on the potential sites for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople closed on 24 April 2012. Whilst the views of residents are still being analysed, the provision of additional pitches at the existing sites at Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road has seen support from both the settled and the Gypsy and Traveller communities.