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**PROPOSED DELIVERY OF NEW IMPROVED GYPSY  
AND TRAVELLER SITE – ROWAN WEST, NEASHAM ROAD**

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

**Responsible Director – Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To inform Members of an award of grant to the value of £1.87 million from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to rebuild with improvements and two additional pitches the Gypsy and Traveller site known as Rowan West, (formerly Neasham Road Caravan Site), Levisham Lane, Darlington.
2. To seek release of £150,000 of capital funding to demolish the existing site, this work being excluded from the HCA grant.

**Summary**

3. Rowan West is an existing Gypsy and Traveller site, managed directly by the Council since the surrender of the lease by the lessor in March 2015. The site comprises of 20 pitches, each provided with a basic amenity block consisting of a shower, toilet and sink. These blocks were built around 40 years ago and are outdated and poorly maintained and in some cases unusable because they are electrically unsafe.
4. A grant from the HCA of £1.87 million was awarded by their National Project Board on 16 November 2015 to rebuild the site including the provision of two additional pitches. This will serve to both secure the long term future of the site and provide a modest increase in the overall provision of pitches.
5. This site is a very significant contribution to the number of pitches identified as being required within the Council's Local Plan Core Strategy and the Tees Valley sub-regional Gypsy and Traveller Area Assessment (GTAA).
6. The rebuild of the site, which will include new amenity blocks incorporating a shower, toilet, hand basin and kitchen / dining area, requires the complete demolition of the existing site. The cost of this has been estimated to be £150,000 and this sum is excluded (because of the nature of the work) from the HCA grant.

7. The site currently has only five families living on it (no new residents have been accepted pending a decision on the site's long term future) and is being managed directly by the Council on a temporary basis. It is proposed that the new site when built will be leased to the private sector under a new lease that is HCA compliant.

### **Recommendation**

8. It is recommended that :-
  - (a) Members approve the release of up to £150,000 of capital funding to demolish the Rowan West Gypsy and Traveller site.
  - (b) Members agree to the delivery of a new site on the same land providing 22 pitches, funded by HCA grant.
  - (c) Members approve the introduction of a new HCA compliant lease for the new site and approve delegated authority for the Director of Economic Growth to award a new lease (appointing a lease holder) following a procurement process compliant with the Council's procurement policy.

### **Delegations**

9. Members agree that delegated authority is given to the Director of Economic Growth to procure and agree a new leaseholder who will be an able and proper person to meet the terms of the new lease for the 22 pitch site in accordance with the Council's procurement policy.

### **Reasons**

10. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
  - (a) The recommendations provide the most cost effective way of securing the long term future of the Rowan West site to provide 22 Gypsy and Traveller pitches to meet the housing needs of this community and the HCA grant conditions.
  - (b) Securing the long term future of the site and the addition of two further pitches makes a significant contribution to the pitches identified as being required within the Local Plan Core Strategy and the Tees Valley sub-regional Gypsy and Traveller Area Assessment (GTAA).

**Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth**

### **Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report **OR detail of background papers.**

Bill Westland : Extension 6306  
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S17 Crime and Disorder	Adopting the Homes and Communities Agency's (HCA's) site management good practices and meeting the HCA's grant funding obligations will provide robust management arrangements to manage out crime and anti-social behaviour.
Health and Well Being	The project will provide essential and modern infrastructure, and facilities on site which will contribute towards improved public health, reduced energy costs, a reduction in the likelihood of site flooding, and warm and dry amenity blocks free of damp.
Carbon Impact	The project will deliver modern energy efficient amenity blocks and is in addition examining opportunities to further reduce the carbon footprint of the site through energy efficient measures.
Diversity	The redevelopment of the site and the increased number of pitches will provide improved accommodation choices for the community. The Council offer and promote safeguarding policies to allow any members of the community anonymous reporting of any incidents of discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited. Through the implementation of this project the Council will be training the new Leaseholder with the skills and knowledge to provide support and advice in respect of any reported incidents.
Wards Affected	Eastbourne ward.
Groups Affected	The Gypsy and Traveller community both on existing Gypsy and Traveller sites and currently residing in "bricks and mortar" in the Borough. The community immediately adjacent to the existing Gypsy and Traveller site at Neasham Road because of existing cultural differences.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report requests the release of up to £150,000 of capital resource to support the delivery of 22 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches. This request is outside of the current scope of MTFP spending approvals.
Key Decision	This is a key decision as the level of capital and revenue funding sought from the Council is significant, to deliver the Gypsy and Traveller project.  This is a key decision as it has significant implications for the planning and approval of any future Gypsy and Traveller sites across the Borough as part of the Local Plan.
Urgent Decision	Yes
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The project is intended to both provide improved accommodation conditions for the Gypsy and Traveller Community and to address inequalities in accommodation choices.
Efficiency	The procurement of a contractor through a competitive process will ensure economic efficiency.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

#### Background

11. In November 2015 the Homes and Communities Agency allocated Darlington Borough Council £1.87 million from their Affordable Homes Programme 2015-2018. The grant was in response to a bid from Darlington Borough Council to rebuild the Rowan West Gypsy and Traveller site to a modern standard with an additional two pitches. This followed an earlier successful bid that allowed the development of the adjacent new Rowan East site, which was completed in March 2015.
12. The bid for the Rowan West site was submitted for two key reasons. Firstly to replace the ageing existing site on which the basic amenity blocks (shower, sink and toilet) are reaching the end of their life, and secondly to contribute to the need for additional pitches identified in the Local Plan Core Strategy and the Tees Valley sub-regional Gypsy and Traveller Area Assessment (GTAA).

#### Match Funding and Demolition

13. The HCA has a clear expectation that the Council will provide some level of match funding to the project. Furthermore the grant specifically excludes demolition costs, but these costs can contribute to match funding. An estimate of demolition costs has been obtained and is in the region of £150,000. The report requests that this sum be released from capital to fund demolition.
14. This sum plus the land value, which is £100,00 is sufficient to provide match funding to release the sum of £1.87 million from the HCA to rebuild the site.

#### Lease

15. The Rowan West site is currently not open to new residents pending agreement to go forward with the rebuild. It is being managed directly by the Council on a temporary basis since the surrender of the lease by the lease-holder in March 2015. It is not intended that direct management will continue long term as it is resource intensive. If the site is rebuilt the HCA grant conditions will require a lease compliant with HCA conditions. This would also be in the Council's interest and the tenants who eventually occupy the site as the new lease will protect vulnerable tenants and support transparency and diversity.
16. The report seeks delegated authority for the Director of Economic Growth to award a new lease (appointing a lease holder) following a procurement process compliant with the Council's procurement policy.

#### The Proposed Scheme

17. The proposed scheme is illustrated on the attached plan (**Appendix One**).

18. It consists of 22 new pitches in accordance with recommended national standards and guidance and takes into account views expressed by the Gypsy and Traveller community.
19. New drainage and services will be provided to the site, including water and electricity meters to each pitch allowing residents to contract directly with utilities for these services.
20. Each pitch will be hard surfaced with space for two caravans and vehicle parking.
21. Each pitch will include an amenity block which will consist of a kitchen, shower toilet and washroom, and space for clothes washing machine and dryer.
22. The site will be physically separate (via a fence) from the recently constructed adjacent site but the two sites will share a footpath leading underneath the railway bridge to Brankin Road, and will share use of the access lane (Levisham Lane) that leads to Neasham Road.

### **Existing Residents**

23. Work will be done with the existing residents (five families) to relocate them during the works with the potential for them to return to the new site if that is their wish.

### **Procurement of Contractors**

24. It is intended that contractors will be selected for both demolition and construction on a competitive basis and a report will be considered by the Council's Asset Management Group to determine the specific process to be followed.

### **Financial Implications**

25. Should the Council proceed the HCA grant funding is available on the basis of 50% on commencement of work and 50% on completion of all elements of the work that comply with the HCA's grant funding conditions.
26. HCA funding does not include demolition and this has been estimated at £150,000.
27. Additional New Homes Bonus and Council Tax will be payable on the two additional pitches being built.

### **Risks**

28. The main risks with the recommended course of action are:

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Budget exceeded.	The estimated costs have appropriate contingency allowances.
Disruption during construction from existing site.	Arrangements will need to be put in place to secure access to the new site during construction and on implementation.

Demand pitches not realised.	Would need to revisit management arrangements, rent levels or lease arrangements to ensure attractiveness to Gypsy and Traveller Community. Would support refusal of inappropriate planning applications elsewhere.
Delay in meeting HCA timetable.	Proposed option provides most certain path to managing timetable. Project management processes in place.

**Consultation**

29. Consultation has taken place with the Gypsy and Traveller community in designing the proposed amenity blocks and the layout of the site.