

REPORT TO: Cabinet
Planning Committee
Cabinet Member Communities
Cabinet Member Regeneration

DATES: 15th April 2010 (Cabinet)
7th April 2010 (Planning Committee)
31st March 2010 (CM Communities)
17th March 2010 (CM Regeneration)

SUBJECT: Additional Pitch Provision for Gypsies and Travellers in Sefton

WARDS AFFECTED: All

REPORT OF: Alan Lunt – Neighbourhoods and Investment Programmes Director
Andy Wallis – Planning and Economic Development Director

CONTACT OFFICER: Jim Ohren, Principal Manager, ☎ 934 3619
Ingrid Berry, Principal Planner ☎ 934 3551

**EXEMPT/
CONFIDENTIAL:** No

PURPOSE/SUMMARY:

This report explains the requirement on the local authority to secure additional pitch provision for gypsies and travellers; seeks approval to the methodology for site appraisal and selection; explains the process and likely timescale for site appraisal and submission of an application for gypsy and traveller site grant; and seeks delegated authority for the relevant Directors to make and submit an application for site grant should a suitable site (or sites) be identified, subject to subsequent endorsement by Cabinet.

REASON WHY DECISION REQUIRED:

A decision is required in order to ensure that the relevant Directors have authority to submit an application for site grant in time for the deadline of 30th April 2010.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Planning Committee and Cabinet Members note the report and recommend that Cabinet:

- 1) Note the report and the need to secure additional pitch provision (transit and permanent) for Gypsies and Travellers.
- 2) Approve the methodology for site appraisal and selection
- 3) Authorise the Neighbourhoods and Investment Programmes Director, in consultation with the Planning and Economic Regeneration Director, to make minor changes to the scoring framework if early consultations with key partners/stakeholders show that this is necessary.
- 4) Agree that a further report be submitted to a subsequent Cabinet meeting regarding potential sites.

KEY DECISION: Yes

FORWARD PLAN: Yes

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: Immediately, following the call in period after the Cabinet meeting on 15th April 2010.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS: None

IMPLICATIONS:

Budget/Policy Framework: None

Financial: Exact costs are unknown at this time. Purchase of new site(s) is likely to be covered by a 100% Government grant, although availability is not guaranteed. (Site running costs are not met by the Government grant, but are defrayed by rents and service charges).

<u>CAPITAL EXPENDITURE</u>	2009/ 2010 £	2010/ 2011 £	2011/ 2012 £	2012/ 2013 £
Gross Increase in Capital Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton Capital Resources				
Specific Capital Resources				
<u>REVENUE IMPLICATIONS</u>				
Gross Increase in Revenue Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton funded Resources				
Funded from External Resources				
Does the External Funding have an expiry date? Y/N	When?			
How will the service be funded post expiry?				

Legal: N/A

Risk Assessment: N/A

Asset Management: N/A

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN/VIEWS

FD 347 - The Acting Finance and Information Services Director has been consulted and has no comments on this report.
 Environmental Protection Director; Neighbourhoods and Investment Programmes Director;
 Planning and Economic Regeneration Director

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE MONITORING:

<u>Corporate Objective</u>		<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community		✓	
2	Creating Safe Communities	✓		
3	Jobs and Prosperity	✓		
4	Improving Health and Well-Being	✓		
5	Environmental Sustainability	✓		
6	Creating Inclusive Communities	✓		
7	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening local Democracy		✓	
8	Children and Young People	✓		

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS RELIED UPON IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Merseyside Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment – University of Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit - 2008
 Partial Review of the RSS - Interim Draft Policy for Gypsies and Travellers – 4NW - 2009
 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments Guidance – DCLG, Oct 2007
 Gypsy and Traveller Site Grant Guidance, HCA 2010

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Under Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985 local authorities are required to consider the various accommodation needs of the local population and to carry out periodic reviews in order to provide relevant and appropriate provision to meet these needs. Section 225 of the Housing Act 2004 introduced a specific duty for local authorities to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers within their localities. All authorities across the country are expected to respond to accommodation need where a need has been identified.
- 1.2 In relation to the future housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers, a report on this matter was considered by Sefton's Cabinet on 26th February 2009. This report summarised the findings of the Merseyside Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment together with the emerging requirements of the Partial Review of Regional Spatial Strategy. The report examined the likely implications for Sefton in relation to future additional permanent and transit pitch provision and meeting the housing and support needs of Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. It also sought delegated authority for the relevant Directors to make representations on behalf of Sefton Council to the Regional Spatial Strategy Partial review consultations and subsequent Examination in Public
- 1.3 The regional dimension is intended to ensure that all local authorities contribute to resolving the current shortage of authorised site accommodation in a strategic manner, which helps redress current imbalances in the pattern of provision, and enhances the sustainability of the Gypsy and Traveller site network.
- 1.4 At the time of the Cabinet report in February 2009 the interim draft Partial Review of the Regional Spatial Strategy was subject to a consultation period, running until early March 2009. It indicated a minimum additional permanent residential pitch requirement for Sefton for the period 2007 to 2016 of 30 pitches, (i.e. 30 over and above the existing 16 pitches provided at present = 46 pitches in total) plus 5 transit pitches and 5 pitches for Travelling Showpeople
- 1.5 In line with the delegated authority granted by Cabinet representations were made on behalf of Sefton Council to the interim draft Partial Review consultation to the effect that the additional requirements were unjustified. The final version of the draft North West Plan Partial Review of the Regional Spatial Strategy was published in July 2009. In this version the figures for Sefton were revised downwards. Instead of 30 additional residential permanent pitches, it said 15 are required, plus 5 transit pitches, and there is no requirement to provide any Travelling Showpeople pitches. A statutory 12-week consultation period on the plan ended on 19th October 2009. The Examination in Public took place in early March and the Secretary of State's decision is expected later this year.
- 1.6 The revised figures vindicate Sefton Council's stance. They are much more acceptable, being very close to the figures arising from the Merseyside assessment commissioned by Sefton jointly with Knowsley, Wirral and Liverpool
- 1.7 The current position, therefore, is that Sefton should have a total of 31 permanent pitches and 5 transit pitches for the period to 2016, with a similar number required over the next 10 years. As of 2010 there are currently 16 permanent pitches in Sefton, (at Broad Lane, Formby). Therefore provision for an additional 15 permanent pitches and 5 transit pitches needs to be made by to ensure adequate provision is made for the period to 2016.
- 1.8 Sefton has an existing policy in its Unitary Development Plan (UDP) for Gypsy and Traveller pitches (policy MD4). This is criteria based, and doesn't identify sites, but could provide the basis for permitting pitches in the absence of identified sites. The Local Development Framework, which Sefton are currently bringing forward, offers an opportunity to allocate sites for Gypsy and Traveller pitches. This will provide greater certainty for bringing sites forward and will help to enable funding bids to be successful.
- 1.9 The main document in Sefton's Local Development Framework is the Core Strategy. Work is

in progress on this document and it anticipated this will be adopted in 2012. This document is likely to provide the broad policy framework for the provision of housing to meet all needs, including gypsy and travellers. However, it will not allocate land for gypsy and traveller pitches. Therefore, following on from the Core Strategy a Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) will be produced. This will allocate land for uses such as housing and employment and include sites allocated for gypsy and traveller pitches.

- 1.10 Meanwhile, in advance of the adoption of the Core Strategy and the Site Allocations DPD the short term strategy for meeting the housing requirements of Gypsies and Travellers will be to identify suitable sites. As a starting point, it is proposed that we will examine sites over 0.5 hectares identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), as this is the minimum size of site that could meet our needs for a transit site. Ideally a site of about 2 hectares should be identified, but sites of this size are few and far between, so by setting the threshold higher we would be ruling out a number of sites which might be able to meet our needs in combination.
- 1.11 However, the SHLAA is a housing land study. Its purpose is to assess how much new housing land could potentially be available in Sefton over the next 15 years. Therefore it is proposed that these sites will be re-assessed using a bespoke scoring framework (albeit heavily informed by the scoring used in the SHLAA) as there will be different aspects, such as a suitable road access and different flood zone locational requirements, which need to be considered in relation to the identification of sites suitable for gypsies and traveller accommodation. This re-assessment will be used to identify a short-list of sites that will form the basis of consultation on the location of gypsy and traveller sites in Sefton.
- 1.12 Unlike the SHLAA, it is proposed that sites in the Green Belt be included if (and only if) no non-Green Belt sites are found to be suitable. This is because there is a potential that small, non-strategic Green Belt sites may be identified on the edge of the urban area and could be developed without a wider sub-regional Green Belt study having to have been completed.
- 1.13 The proposed site appraisal and selection criteria, in the form of a scoring framework, are attached at Appendix A. The scoring framework covers a range of issues that need to be considered when choosing a suitable gypsy and traveller site. The issues to be considered have been chosen as they have been identified in national policy guidance. These issues include obvious considerations such size and location, flood risk, accessibility and availability but also whether the land is likely to suitable and whether the location would promote – or hinder - social inclusion. In this latter respect it is important that the site or sites will prove to be safe and secure for gypsies and travellers, will not present a barrier to integration with the wider local community, and also be broadly acceptable to existing local residents. Clearly, sensitivity to these considerations is required in appraising potential sites. Officers are mindful of this and aware of the importance that consultation with all stakeholders will play in arriving at judgments.
- 1.14 The Government has made available, through an annual bidding round, 100% grant aid for providing additional pitches/new sites once they are identified. The closing date for submissions in the current round is 30th April 2010. At the time of writing this report detailed appraisal work using the scoring framework has not been completed. However, it is envisaged that it may be possible to identify a site (or sites) that will prove suitable to submit for site grant funding, either before 30th April 2010 or reasonably soon thereafter. Should this be the case consultation with ward councillors and the local gypsy and traveller community as a minimum will take place as part of the submission, and subsequent Cabinet endorsement will be sought. Any site proposal would, of course, be subject to consultation with local residents as a separate exercise to inform the preparation of the Core Strategy, and ultimately the submission of a planning application.

2.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 2.1 Sefton are required to identify appropriate sites for Gypsy and Travellers in accordance with the requirements of the North West Regional Spatial Strategy. This report seeks to ensure that potential sites are identified on the basis of an agreed methodology and to allow

application to be made to cover the cost of provision of the site, prior to the bid deadline of April 30th 2010. However, this will not prevent the identified sites from being subsequently approved (or otherwise) by Cabinet for the intended purpose.