

**Cabinet**

**5 November 2013**

**Report of the Cabinet Member for Health, Housing & Adult Social Services**

**Travellers site provision – Extension of Osbaldwick Site.**

**Summary**

1. To request approval and part funding, which combined with the Homes & Communities Agency funding will support the extension of the Osbaldwick Travellers site. The development will incorporate 6 additional pitches, grazing land for horses and amenity space.

**Background**

2. City of York Council owns and manages 3 Travellers sites, with support and management being provided by Support Workers based at Ordnance Lane Hostel. The sites are geographically located across the City and total 56 pitches. The Osbaldwick Site is the smallest of the three sites with 12 pitches. Each pitch has a hard standing with amenity block and includes modern amenities i.e. electricity, running water, toilet and bathing facilities, kitchen and living space. These expectations are based on the Governments good practice guidelines.
3. Overcrowding on the pitches is an issue with many of the pitches having at least two caravans/ mobile homes to accommodate extended families including both young children and elderly relatives who are living longer in the community due to increased access to health services and due to the shortfall of provision across the City.
4. Within the site there is no amenity space for children, limited space for turning and parking large vehicles, no site office/ community facility or space for grazing horses. The site is compact, yet surrounded on two sides by farmers fields. The site has existed since

the mid 1980s and was transferred from Ryedale DC in 1996 when York became a unitary authority.

5. The 2011 census records that 269 people identify as Gypsy or Irish Traveller in York Unitary Authority. This is 0.1% of York's population. Regionally and nationally Gypsy and Irish Travellers account for 0.1% of the population.
6. In 2008/9 the North Yorkshire Strategic Housing Board commissioned a Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment (GTNA). The report concluded by 2015, a projected shortfall of 36 pitches across the City. A refresh of this research is currently being commissioned and a report is expected later this year, to inform the Council's Local Plan. The Area Assessment will take into account the North Yorkshire context and is being undertaken by the same consultants.
7. The Council currently holds a waiting list of approximately 24 households seeking a York Travellers site pitch. Information directly from Travellers has also highlighted that there are some families who have moved into traditional housing, due to a shortfall in pitches, who would like to move back onto sites.
8. York Travellers Trust is a support charity, set up to work with the Gypsy & Traveller community in York, to provide support and advice, empowering individuals and the community to make the most of their opportunities. They estimate that they support approximately 350 gypsy and traveller families in York and predict that there is a future need for 50 pitches in the next five years. Part of this estimation is taken from their own impression of concealed households, members of the family, mostly grown up children, needing independent accommodation.
9. **Population Growth** - Communities and Local Government (CLG) estimate that the Gypsy & Traveller population will grow by 3-4% per annum. These are the children of Gypsy & Travellers who are predicted to need pitches in the future. Calculations based on 3% growth rate which places population growth for:

Years 1 to 5 – 2 families

Years 6 to 10 – 4 families

Years 11 to 15 – 5 families

This results in a population growth over the Local Plan period (2015-2030) of 11 families. Each of these families will require a pitch.

10. All of this evidence and assumptions will be tested as part of the GTNA refresh during Autumn 2013. The Council is committed to working towards addressing this identified shortfall in pitch and site numbers.
11. In 2011 the government announced, through the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), a programme of 'Traveller Pitch Funding' of £60M. Initially the HCA accepted schemes valued at £47m in January 2012 and subsequently announced a further round during July 2012.
12. Following officer discussions with the Cabinet Member for Health, Housing & Adult Social Services during September 2012 the Council submitted a bid for HCA funding to support the development. The bid was for match funding totalling £342k of the anticipated scheme costs of £628k, based on indicative costs from our framework Quantity Surveyor. This was on the basis of the Council funding the remaining balance. The HCA advised the council that the bid had been successful in December 2012.

### **Why extend the Osbaldwick site?**

13. When determining how to meet the shortfall in the number of pitches required across the city, consideration was given to a number of sites identified by the planning service. The sites identified were all assessed using agreed criteria and found, in planning terms to be unsuitable for development as a travellers site. Further consideration has been given to the possibility of extending the other two sites the council owns.
14. When considering the size and location of the current sites, it was clear that the extension of the Osbaldwick site provides the best option, the other sites are landlocked and their size prohibits further development. In addition to this the number of pitches on the Clifton & James Street sites are already at a level where, when considering best practice you would not increase the number of pitches on these sites, whereas the Osbaldwick site has the least number of pitches and is surrounding by undeveloped land. The identified land has now been designated in the draft Local Plan for the provision of Gypsy and Traveller pitches.

15. The proposal to extend the Osbaldwick site was considered at Planning Committee on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2013. After a full debate the application to extend the site was approved.

## **The Proposal**

16. To develop 6 additional pitches to expand the site from 12 to 18 pitches and enhance facilities on the Osbaldwick site for the benefit of the Gypsy and Traveller community.
17. There have been detailed negotiations with the owners of the adjacent fields and we have agreed in principle to the purchase of one area of land and legal agreement has been reached with one of the adjacent land owners to purchase the required land subject to agreement for the funding and planning approval.
18. Architects have been appointed and have developed a scheme (see Annex 1) which meets with Governments best practice standards. As outlined above this incorporates the 6 additional pitches, grazing land for horses, for which we will charge a fee and amenity space for play away from the vehicular access. Through working up this more developed scheme, it has been identified that the potential cost of the overall development will be higher than originally anticipated by our Quantity Surveyor framework contractor. Work is ongoing to review the scheme in light of this increase in costs. All costs will, over the lifetime of the scheme be funded from HCA grant and borrowing secured against the rental income.
19. A specification is being developed and will, subject to Cabinet agreement, be submitted for tender. Contractors will be encouraged to not only consider traditional methods of construction but also pre fabricated options to ensure that the development costs are kept to ensure value for money.
20. The new pitches when built will be to a higher specification than the existing amenity blocks, with improved space standards including being wheelchair accessible and adaptable in order to enable a household to remain living independently for longer. Furthermore, the size of the plots will also be larger to reflect the Governments best practice standards Designing Gypsy and Travellers sites: Good practice guide (2008). The rents charged for the new pitches and existing pitches on the sites in future will reflect the enhanced space standards on the new pitches and levels of amenities across the site.

## Consultation

21. During summer 2012 initial discussions took place with residents of the Osbaldwick site to gauge their views on the prospect of extending the site. The response was mainly positive due to issues of overcrowding on the existing pitches which are smaller in size than current good practice recommendations. Amenity blocks will be increasing in size from 18m sq to 30m sq and the overall pitch size from approximately 260sqm to 400sqm.
22. A number of discussions have taken place on the site since then, including a planning for real exercise with an architect, to engage the travelling community in the location of the pitches, grazing land and amenity space and take account of any current issues they have with the site and future needs and aspirations. This gave all residents the opportunity to feed into the process more broadly. In addition the Support Workers have provided regular updates as to progress with the scheme and a specific newsletter/ briefing paper has also been provided to the residents. The travelling community have also been notified that the planning application has been made and encouraged to respond accordingly.
23. The redevelopment of the site has also been discussed with the York Travellers Trust who are in support of the scheme, due to the shortfall in provision across the city.
24. There have also been a number of meetings with the wider community, Chief Officers of the Council have attended meetings with Ward, Parish Councils and the MP for Outer York in relation to concerns and objections raised in connection with the redevelopment of the site.
25. It is fair to say that the proposal to extend the existing site has not met with universal agreement. Concerns have been raised with regards to the management of the existing site and the need for additional pitches.
26. In response to the concerns council officers have provided details of management actions that have been taken where breaches of the licence agreement have taken place and details of how the council manages not only Osbaldwick but also Clifton & James Street sites.
27. Site visits have also taken place with the HCA as a result of the concerns raised by the MP through the formal channels within

government. The most recent visit by the HCA was on the 1<sup>st</sup> October when they confirmed that they are happy with the site management in place and the opportunities that the extension will bring for closer interaction with the travellers.

### **Options**

28. Option 1- To agree the release of funding to support the extension of the Osbaldwick Travellers Site.
29. Option 2- To not agree the release of funding.

### **Analysis**

30. **Option 1-** Will allow us to deliver a partly grant funded scheme, supported by the HCA, to contribute towards the shortfall in pitches across the city; reduce overcrowding on existing pitches and sites across the city; offer, albeit limited grazing land for horses owned by the Gypsies and Travellers on the site Approval and successful delivery of the scheme will further strengthen our partnership with the travelling community.
31. Cabinet will recall that it approved the Gypsy Roma Traveller Strategy in July 2013 which set out our clear commitment to work in partnership with the travelling community:  
  
*“improve equalities and lifelong outcomes and opportunities for York’s Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community”*
32. The delivery of additional pitches is a key element of meeting this vision.
33. **Option 2-** Failure to agree to part fund the scheme will result in; a lack of new provision in the city and failure to, in part, address the identified shortfall of 36 pitches and provision will not be made for horses to graze.
34. The council will also miss the opportunity to play a leadership role in meeting one of the key priorities within the recently adopted strategy to ‘improve accommodation supply and standard.

### **Council Plan**

35. This strategy links in with the following themes in the Council Plan:

- Build Strong Communities – The development of the additional pitches will alleviate some of the tensions caused by the overcrowding of existing sites. The improvements in the environment will enable all agencies to work closer with the travelling community to deliver on the priorities set out within the Gypsy, Roma & Travellers Strategy.
- Protect vulnerable people – Gypsies and Travellers are one of the largest distinct ethnic groups in York and their traditions and history can be traced across hundreds of years. Yet, significant evidence points to the fact that they are the most marginalised and disadvantaged of all minority groups, across a range of indicators. Reducing the level of overcrowding within the site will have a positive impact on the individual residents health & wellbeing and help agencies to more actively work with individuals to address some of the problems this community encounters.

### **Implications:**

36. The implications arising from this report are:

- **Financial:**
- The estimated cost of the proposal is £763.5k of which £423.5k is anticipated to be funded by grant with the remainder funded from prudential borrowing.
- The new 6 pitches will provide a net surplus of between £20k and £38k over the 20 year period which will be sufficient for the council to borrow £340k over a 20 year period. The terms of borrowing and repayments will be agreed by the Director of Customer and Business Support Services.
- In reaching the net revenue income, consideration has been given to additional costs associated with managing a larger site and provision for bad debts.
- Indicative scheme costs were sought from our Quantity Surveyor Framework Partner prior to the submission of the bid to the HCA for funding. Following working up of a detailed scheme, and negotiation with the land owner, the anticipated cost of the scheme has increased by £135k (the actual scheme cost will be determined via competitive tender). Given the

projected increase in costs from the indicative costs following the working up of a detailed scheme, discussion is ongoing with the HCA to consider opportunities for a greater level of match funding to reflect the anticipated scheme costs.

- **Human Resources (HR):** None
- **Equalities** – Community Impact Assessment completed
- **Legal-** The Authority has a general power, under s120 Local Government Act 1972, to acquire land by agreement for the benefit, improvement, or development of its area. There is also a specific power, under s24 Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960, to acquire land to provide a site for caravans.
- **Crime and Disorder** – None
- **Information Technology (IT)** – None
- **Property** –Planning permission- ref: 13/02704/GRG3
- **Other-** None

### **Risk Management**

37. The direct risks associated with this report are minimal. However, there are clearly community concerns with regards to this proposal. To alleviate these concerns it is critical the ongoing dialog with both the travelling community and the wider community is facilitated.

### **Recommendations**

38. Cabinet are recommended to approve:
- Option 1- To approve financial support for the extension of the Osbaldwick Travellers Site.
  - That Cabinet recommend to Council a capital budget of £763.5k to be funded from external grant of £423.5k and prudential borrowing of £340k.



- That Cabinet/Council note the prudential borrowing will be repayable from additional rental income and that the terms of the borrowing and repayments will be agreed by the Director of Customer & Business Support Services.

**Reason:** To ensure that the council plays an active role in meeting the long term accommodation needs of the travelling community.

### Contact Details

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	<b>Report Approved</b>	√	<b>Date</b> 11 October 2013
<b>Specialist Implications Officer(s)</b> None			
<b>Wards Affected:</b> Osbaldwick			
For further information please contact the authors of the report			

### Annexes:

Annex 1: Proposed scheme plan