

INCREASED SECURITY MEASURES ON COUNCIL OWNED GREENSPACES

Summary

In light of the recent incidents of unauthorised encampments across the borough, and acknowledging the impact this can have on local communities, council officers have undertaken a review of existing security measures currently in place across its Greenspace estate and Car Parks. This review has highlighted areas where investment into enhancing security arrangements, along with a strategy proposing a delivery programme can be considered. Proposed improvements will be shared with local residents for feedback before they are implemented.

Portfolio – Places & Strategy

Date Portfolio Holder signed off report: 30 July 2020

Wards Affected

All

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to resolve;

- (i) A programme of investment into enhancing Greenspace security measures to be implemented at the locations listed in priority order shown in Annex A (subject to consultation with the local communities and planning where required);
- (ii) The implementation of the individual schemes be delegated to the Executive head of Business after consultation with the Places and Strategy Portfolio Holder.
- (iii) The Executive is advised to recommend to Council that the Capital Programme from 2020/21 be increased by £192,000

1. Resource Implications

- 1.1 Since 2015 there has been 9 unauthorised encampments on borough land. The associated legal and repair costs is circa £25,000, however this does not take into account the officer hours required to deal with each encampment which although not specifically recorded is estimated to be in the region of £12,000. This equates to an approximate average annual cost of £7400 pa over the 5 year period.
- 1.2 Currently the council allocates an annual revenue budget of £40,000 specifically to cover legal, clean-up and repair costs incurred as a result of unlawful encampments.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 An unauthorised encampment is when a group of people move on to a piece of land that they do not own and without consent from the landowner. This is a form of trespassing under civil law.
- 2.2 Many of the unauthorised encampments in our borough are by groups of people, such as Gypsies or Travellers, who follow a nomadic way of life, travelling the country, stopping off for a time, then moving on.

- 2.3 Gypsies and Travellers, together with all groups who have a particular culture, language or values, are protected from discrimination by the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Human Rights Act 1998. It is not illegal to roam, and people cannot be prevented from roaming.
- 2.4 Although, we do not, by law, have to remove individuals or groups who illegally camp on our land, we do try to move all those who have set up an unauthorised encampment as quickly as possible using the various powers at the councils' disposal. Typically this action can take a number of days to process until final notice is served and those unlawfully camping are evicted.
- 2.5 Some of the council's more urban greenspace sites already have in place measures to deter unlawful encampments such as entrance height barriers and perimeter bollards. However, even with these measures in place, encampments continue to occur as a result of bollards being removed and barriers/locks being tampered with.
- 2.6 In light of the most recent unlawful encampments the Council's Greenspace Team has carried out a review of Borough land where it is felt that consideration of further investment would provide benefit to local communities as it would further deter unlawful encampments on those specific locations.(Annex A).
- 2.7 The sites were "RAG" (Red, Amber, Green) rated and the top three "red" sites that are deemed highly susceptible are those that have been impacted most recently and are greens next to the roadside (Heatherside Recreation Ground, Frimley Green Village Green, The Grove). After research carried out and communication with other councils, it is considered that the installation of raised earth bunds around the perimeter of these sites is likely to be the most effective (and cost effective) protection method. This method also has the least aesthetic impact on the site as once sown with grass (and even wild flowers) can blend in quite naturally whilst maintaining a barrier to unauthorised vehicles.
- 2.8 Other sites identified as "red" have not been impacted by unlawful encampments in recent years (or at all) but are deemed as potentially susceptible due to their location, their current lack of security measures or both.
- 2.9 Each of the projects identified in Annex A will require an individual project plan as each site is unique and will have varying requirements. This work will also necessitate consultation with stakeholders and the local community prior to commencement. Some of the projects may also require planning consent. It is estimated that this work will take up to three years to complete.
- 2.10 It is envisaged that the new measures will reduce the occurrences of unauthorised encampments on council land and so over time will lead to a reduction in revenue costs (outlined in 1.1).
- 2.11 This work should be considered in line with local discussions regarding the provision of a new permanent Traveller site in Surrey Heath and the provision of a Transit Site somewhere in Surrey which would allow the police to use the "power to direct" under section 62 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

3. Options

3.1 The options before the Executive are as follows:

- (i) To AGREE a programme of investment into enhancing Greenspace security measures to be implemented at the locations listed in priority order shown in Annex A (subject to consultation with the local communities and planning where required);
- (ii) To AGREE The implementation of the individual schemes be delegated to the Executive head of Business after consultation with the Business and Finance Portfolio Holders.
- (iii) To PROPOSE an amendment to the recommendations shown in Annex A
- (iv) To NOT AGREE the programme of additional protection measures to be implemented at the locations listed in priority order shown in Annex A
- (v) To RECOMMEND to Council to increase the capital programme by £192,000 to allow for sites identified in Annex A be completed over the next three years.

3.2 The Executive is advised to agree options (i), (ii) and (v).

4. Corporate Objectives And Key Priorities

4.1 The proposals contained in this report support the Council's key objectives:

Place – continued focus on our vision to make Surrey Heath an even better place to live. Clean, green and safe. Where people enjoy and contribute to a high quality of life and a sustainable future.

People – to build and encourage communities where people can live happily and healthily in an environment that the Community is proud to be part of.

5. Legal Issues

5.1 The local authority's procedure for dealing with unauthorised encampments must reflect the need to balance the rights of the settled community, land owners and the travelling community.

5.2 The Council has continued to review the legal powers available to ensure that we are dealing with encampments on our land as effectively as possible within the current legislative framework.

6. Sustainability

It is envisaged that capital work on the identified sites will reduce the likelihood of unauthorised encampments thus reducing associated revenue costs.

7. Risk Management

- 7.1.1 The key risk identified is that as additional protection measures are implemented on the site identified most at risk it will displace the unauthorised encampments to other sites further down the list.

8. Equalities Impact

- 8.1.1 An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken and takes into account other work by the council to establish new permanent and transit sites in the borough and elsewhere in Surrey.

9. Consultation

- 9.1.1 Any investment into enhanced security measures that may be implemented at the locations listed in priority order shown in Annex A will be in full consultation with the local communities and user groups of those facilities.
- 9.1.2 Consultation should also be carried out with representatives of the GRT community to ensure their view are also taken into account in relation to further permanent and transit sites being made available

10. PR And Marketing

- 10.1 This is a sensitive issue that will require careful communications with local residents.

11. Officer Comments

- 11.1 Compared to other neighbouring boroughs Surrey Heath has relatively low levels of unauthorised encampments. As already highlighted, there has been 9 in five years compared to neighbouring Elmbridge which had 25 unauthorised encampments in 2018 alone. However, it is acknowledged that an unauthorised encampment can be disruptive for the local community and often incurs associated costs which, via increased protection, could be avoided. It is also important to acknowledge that no measure is 100% effective and we need to balance the need to deter unauthorised encampments with the need to ensure our parks and greenspace remain welcoming and accessible to the communities that use them.

Background Papers	Annex A
Author/Contact Details	Sue McCubbin, Recreation & Business Manager
Head of Service	Daniel Harrison, Executive Head of Business

Consultations, Implications and Issues Addressed

Resources	Required	Consulted
Revenue	✓	
Capital	✓	
Human Resources	✓	
Asset Management		
IT		
Other Issues	Required	Consulted
Corporate Objectives & Key Priorities	✓	
Policy Framework		
Legal		
Governance		
Sustainability		
Risk Management		
Equalities Impact Assessment		
Community Safety		
Human Rights		
Consultation		
P R & Marketing	✓	

Review Date:

Version: