

New permanent site for Gypsy and Traveller pitches

Summary

The most recent GTAA for Surrey Heath shows a need for 47 additional Traveller pitches over the next 18 years. Work on the Local Plan has identified Watchmoor Reserve as a possible site that should be investigated. Officers are seeking authority to undertake an initial feasibility study.

Portfolio - The Leader

Date Portfolio Holder signed off report: 27 August 2020

Wards Affected - Watchetts

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to RESOLVE the Executive Head of Regulatory be authorised to undertake an initial feasibility study for provision of a new Traveller site on land at Watchmoor Reserve.

1. Resource Implications

- 1.1 The initial feasibility work will be undertaken in-house within the agreed budget for 2020/21.
- 1.2 Following the reporting of the outcomes of the initial feasibility work, should further work be supported by the Executive a bid for funding of work will be made to the government. It is believed that funding for capital works may be available from Homes England from the Affordable Housing fund. There may also be a need for the Council to fund further feasibility work at that time.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The GTAA undertaken in 2019 identified a need for 35 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches and 12 new Travelling Showpeople plots in the Borough over the next 18 years. With 24 plots needed in the next 5 years for Gypsies and Traveller and 8 plots needed for Travelling Showpeople, there is an urgent need for action.
- 2.2 Work on the Local Plan to identify sites that could meet this need. One possible site is the land at Watchmoor Reserve which it is thought may be able to accommodate 15 pitches and 8 plots. In addition, there are some current planning applications that may contribute toward the requirement. To date, however, it has not been possible to identify sufficient sites to meet the entire requirement.

2.3 In addition to the need for additional Traveller pitches, the current publicly owned Gypsy and Traveller sites at Swift Lane and Kalima are overcrowded and pitch sizes are substandard. Work to improve conditions there will be needed in the longer term. That work may result in some additional pitches to address longer term needs but the costs will be substantial and the works will not occur within the next 5 years

3. Options

3.1 The options before the Executive are to:

- (i) Agree to undertake the initial feasibility work for use of land at Watchmoor Reserve as a Traveller site, or
- (ii) To not agree to undertake the initial feasibility work for use of land at Watchmoor Reserve as a Traveller site

3.2 The Executive is asked to agree to undertake this work.

4. Proposals

4.1 The proposal is needed to meet the growing need for Traveller pitches and plots in the Borough.

4.2 The land at Watchmoor Reserve is currently used as a local nature reserve and green space. It suffers from anti-social behaviour and vandalism which has made managing the site difficult. The nature conservation interests on the site are of local interest. The site area including the lakes is some 3ha in area.

4.3 It is suggested that this work should report to Property and Investment Working Group and that the initial feasibility work be completed by March 2021.

4.4 It is suggested that the initial feasibility work should address the following issues.

- Desk survey of nature conservation issues on site to understand impacts
- Check site for constraints such as possible contamination from previous uses, legal issues, risks from proximity to water etc
- Preliminary sketch layouts for the site to assess capacity
- Preliminary discussions with SCC around highway access issues
- Preliminary discussions with SCC over management of the site.
- Checks on noise and air quality
- Approach Homes England to better understand likely funding streams available.

4.5 It is anticipated that this initial feasibility work should report back to Executive in March 2021.

5. Supporting Information

- 5.1 In 2008, the government produced best practice guidance for designing Gypsy and Traveller sites. This has subsequently been withdrawn but remains a useful guide to what is needed. Other local authorities have produced some useful guidance on pitch sizes. The Travelling Showmen's Guild produced some advice in 2008 on designing plots for Travelling Showpeople.
- 5.2 The above documents are helpful but as vehicle sizes have increased in recent years the suggested plot and pitch sizes now required will be larger which reduces site capacity.
- 5.3 The current government guidance 'Planning for Traveller Sites' (August 2015) advises as follows.

13. Local planning authorities should ensure that traveller sites are sustainable economically, socially and environmentally. Local planning authorities should, therefore, ensure that their policies:

- a) promote peaceful and integrated co-existence between the site and the local community*
- b) promote, in collaboration with commissioners of health services, access to appropriate health services*
- c) ensure that children can attend school on a regular basis*
- d) provide a settled base that reduces both the need for long-distance travelling and possible environmental damage caused by unauthorised encampment*
- e) provide for proper consideration of the effect of local environmental quality (such as noise and air quality) on the health and well-being of any travellers that may locate there or on others as a result of new development*
- f) avoid placing undue pressure on local infrastructure and services*
- g) do not locate sites in areas at high risk of flooding, including functional floodplains, given the particular vulnerability of caravans*
- h) reflect the extent to which traditional lifestyles (whereby some travellers live and work from the same location thereby omitting many travel to work journeys) can contribute to sustainability.*

6. Corporate Objectives And Key Priorities

- 6.1 This project supports the objective to build and encourage communities where people can live happily and healthily. In particular, it addresses housing needs within the community.

7. Legal Issues

- 7.1 Checks will be undertaken on any legal issues arising from the use of the land for this purpose.

8. Governance Issues

8.1 SLA with SCC for management of the site will be needed if the project proceeds.

9. Sustainability

9.1 The site is located on the edge of the Camberley / Frimley settlement area with good access to local services and close to rail and bus routes.

10. Risk Management

10.1 Risks around delivery will be explored as part of the work.

11. Equalities Impact

11.1 The Travelling Community includes recognised ethnic minority groups that suffer significant discrimination and whose educational and health outcomes are severely impacted by an inability to access such services due to the lack of permanent sites across the UK as a whole.

11.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the work.

12. Human Rights

12.1 This issue will be addressed as part of the feasibility work.

13. Community Safety

13.1 This issue will be addressed as part of the feasibility work.

14. Consultation

14.1 Not applicable at this time.

15. PR And Marketing

15.1 Not applicable at this time.

Annexes	Annex 1 Site map
Background Papers	None
Author/Contact Details	Jenny Rickard – Executive Head of Regulatory
Head Of Service	Jenny Rickard – Executive Head of Regulatory

