

**CABINET – 16 JANUARY 2007**

**APPLICATION FOR GRANT FOR TRANSIT AND STOPPING  
PLACE PROVISION FOR GYPSIES AND OTHER TRAVELLERS**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES**

**PART A**

**Purpose of report**

1. To propose that the County Council applies for grant to develop up to two transit sites for Gypsies and other Travellers in Leicestershire.

**Recommendation**

2.
  - i) That an application be made to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) via the Regional Housing Group of the East Midlands Regional Assembly for grant to develop a transit site in North West Leicestershire for Gypsies and other Travellers.
  - ii) Delegated authority be given to the Director of Resources following the completion of technical studies of the proposed sites at Hemington and Lockington to determine the site for which a bid is to be made.
  - iii) The County Council's intention to work jointly with Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council to submit a further bid for a transit site within the Borough, be included in the application form.

**Reason for Recommendation**

3. It is necessary to provide suitable pitches on a local authority managed site before new Police powers to direct trespassers to leave land which they are not authorised to use, can be used.

**Timetable for Decisions**

4. The Government timetable to submit bids for the Gypsy and Traveller Sites Grant is the end of February 2007, but at least one month of officer time is required prior to that to prepare for the bid.
5. The report will be submitted to Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2007, inviting them to comment on the proposals. Any

views of the Scrutiny Commission will be reported back to Cabinet prior to a bid being submitted.

### **Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

6. There have been no previous Cabinet decisions to provide transit sites in the County

### **Resources Implications**

7. Capital costs for the development, providing the bid is successful, will be 100% funded from grant, except for the existing pitch on the Hemington site where 75% is provided as refurbishment grant. The remaining 25% of the development of this single plot (estimated to be around £20,000) can be provided for from the underspend on repairs on the Travellers budget.
8. The estimated costs of running a 15 pitch site are circa £16,000 per annum, net of income from pitch fees. The revenue costs will be apportioned between the County Council and the relevant District Council(s), based upon the number of unauthorised encampments, which has been agreed in principle. The County Council's contribution will be around £8,000. This arrangement would need to be re-negotiated if the City Council is able to benefit from the provision and the cost would reduce accordingly.
9. If approved, the revenue implications would need to be included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
10. The Government envisages that the provision of transit sites will reduce the cost of cleaning up unauthorised encampments. Based on recent local experience, clean up costs can vary from £500 to £28,000 in the worst case.

### **Circulation under Sensitive Issues Procedure**

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## **PART B**

### **Background**

11. Section 62A-E of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 provides the Police with powers to direct trespassers to leave land and to remove any vehicles and property from the land. The ability to exercise these enhanced powers is dependent on a suitable pitch being available on a local authority managed caravan site, elsewhere in the same local authority area in which the trespass occurred. In two-tier authority areas the caravan site can be anywhere within a County Council's boundary. The Government is advocating the provision of transit and stopping place sites, by all local authorities which experience unauthorised encampments, in order that the new powers can be used to reduce the impact of such encampments.
12. A Joint Officer Working Party comprising representatives from the County Council, all District Councils, Leicester City Council and Rutland Council was formed in 2004. Its task was to develop proposals for the development of suitable sites.
13. Councils were asked to identify land within their ownership for development of suitable sites. Sites have only been identified by the County Council and the City Council.
14. Sites have been measured against essential criteria such as having an adequate area, proximity of water, electricity and mains drainage, security of site, proximity of local amenities, and located on an identified Traveller route. Planning and highways consultations were then undertaken.
15. Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, at a full Council meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006, resolved inter alia "that an expression of interest be submitted to DCLG regarding funding of a new Gypsy and Traveller transit site on the basis of a full bid being worked up and submitted in 2007/08". The minutes also state that "any proposals would be for one site only and as yet no suitable location had been identified".

### **Funding**

16. The Regional Housing Group of the East Midlands Regional Assembly has been allocated by DCLG, funds of £4.218m under the Gypsy and Traveller Sites Grant for the development of sites in the East Midlands in 2007/8. Bids must be made by 28 February 2007. Applications can be made subject to the submission of a planning application. Decisions will be made in June 2007.

## **Numbers**

17. The draft East Midlands Regional Plan (The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)) recognises there is a serious shortage of authorised pitches which can only be addressed by the provision of more authorised public and private sites. The RSS contains numbers from the annual Gypsy count, but this is recognised by all parties as being inaccurate and understated. The research currently being jointly undertaken on behalf of the nine Local Authorities (para. 12) on Traveller Needs assessments will assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and other Travellers and it is expected this will be published in Spring 2007. This will identify the number and type of accommodation required. Some of the need will be met through the identification of sites in the Local Development Frameworks, some from housing allocation, and the remainder will be the more transient need, some of which can be met by private sector investment. Until this information is available, records, including recent experience in several local areas, provide evidence to justify the sites proposed.

## **Sites**

18. The sites identified by the County Council are an extension of the County Council's existing site at Station Road, Hemington and land owned by the Highways Agency at Sawley Roundabout, Lockington.
19. As mentioned in para. 15, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council has now indicated that it is submitting an expression of interest in a bid for Government funding of a transit site.

## **Site development costs**

20. Site development costs are estimated to be at least £500,000 for any 15 pitch site. In the case of the Hemington site, additional costs would be incurred to remediate land, which is currently contaminated, and provide highway access improvements. Development costs for the provision of 15 pitch sites include tarmac surfacing, amenity blocks, access and landscape works, services, boundary security, and facilities for an on-site warden.

## **Joint Arrangement**

21. The County and City Councils have come to an agreement in principle for the City to utilise the provision of suitable transit sites in the County in the operation of Section 62A-E, on the assumption that Government is prepared to change the legislation and approve cross boundary working between County and Unitary Authorities. The County Council and City Council Leaders anticipate meeting the Government Minister shortly, following an exchange of correspondence. The same issue of co-operation between the County and Unitary Authorities has arisen elsewhere in the country and other similar representations are being made by local authorities to Government.

## **Planning**

22. Both sites will need planning consent, and investigatory work at Hemington or Lockington is well advanced. A full planning application can be prepared for either of these sites, coincident with the bid application.

## **Consultation**

23. Consultation with the Travelling community and stakeholders will need to take place prior to the bid for grant. Public consultation will also take place at the pre-planning and during the planning application stages.

## **Conclusion**

24. Provision of Traveller Transit Sites should reduce the problems created by unauthorised encampments owing to the powers of the Police to direct trespassers to where a suitable local authority caravan site exists.
25. It is proposed that the County Council make a bid for the use of the Gypsy and Traveller Sites Grant in order to develop a transit site for Travellers in North West Leicestershire. A decision between the two identified sites, Hemington and Lockington, will be made following the outcome of technical studies.
26. In the light of the decision of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council to make an expression of interest to DCLG on the basis of a full bid being worked up and being submitted in 2007/8, it is proposed that the County Council work with the Borough Council on a joint bid for funding for a Transit Site within the Borough. The application form to be completed in respect of a site in North West Leicestershire allows for an indication to be given of a further bid for funding to be made, as part of a strategic approach, which can be revised and strengthened following the publication of the research findings (para 17).

## **Equal Opportunities Implications**

27. This development will provide services for an under-privileged sector of society.

## **Crime and Disorder Implications**

28. The Police have been consulted on the contents of this report.

## **Background Papers**

Assessments of sites at Hemington and Lockington

## **Appendices**

Plans