



Cabinet

4 March 2020

Item

Public

GYPSY AND TRAVELLER TRANSIT SITE PROVISION IN SHROPSHIRE – IDENTIFICATION OF TEMPORARY SITE

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1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Cabinet with a proposal to develop transit accommodation for Gypsy and Travellers within the county of Shropshire mainly to provide temporary pitches for non -resident gypsies and travellers and assist in the management of unauthorised encampments. The site would however also provide the flexibility to provide temporary pitches where urgently required.
- 1.2 The site evaluation process undertaken identified an area of 3.6 ha of Council land in freehold ownership. The site which lies abutting the Ellesmere Road Roundabout between the A5124 Battlefield Link Road and the A528 Shrewsbury Road, on the North-West edge of Shrewsbury, is shown on the plan attached as appendix 1.
- 1.3 The land is currently used for grazing purposes but this area would be affected by the northerly junction of the proposed North West Relief Road, and longer term proposals for land uses in this vicinity therefore remain 'fluid' at present.
- 1.4 As an interim measure, an area of the site is being considered for the provision of a temporary transit site for gypsies and travellers. It is understood that the development can be constructed without impact on or interference with the delivery of the North West Relief Road at this principal road junction along the northern part of the route and construction of the two schemes will be sequenced to avoid any concurrent working.
- 1.5 It is considered that the delivery of this site will ease the burden of unauthorised encampments experienced by the Council over the last five years, particularly in Shrewsbury on high profile sites/locations such as the Park & Ride sites and Battlefield Enterprise Park. The

proposed temporary provision will allow the Council time to assess the effectiveness of transit provision in managing unauthorised activity and further time to identify the most suitable site for longer term permanent provision in a strategic location within the county.

- 1.6 In planning policy terms, as set out in the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy for Shropshire (2011), there is a longstanding requirement to allocate sites to meet identified Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs and to facilitate Gypsy and Traveller Transit Provision. This commitment was reaffirmed as part of the Examination of the subsequently adopted SAMDev Plan 2015, which also forms part of the adopted Local Plan. Current national policy also requires that sites are identified to meet transit accommodation requirements.

The emerging Local Plan Review work includes the requirement to consider and address current transit needs. It is expected that the approach to transit provision will be rigorously tested at the future Examination Stage by an independent Inspector as a pre-requisite to the Plan being found sound. Updated evidence has therefore been commissioned to support the review. This evidence highlights that Shropshire Council have now granted planning permission for 3 private transit pitches which may address the planning requirement but that additional Council provision could complement the private site and support transit capacity.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to:

- A. Agree to consult on the location identified on land identified at Battlefield, Shrewsbury for use as a temporary gypsy and traveller transit site.

REPORT

3.0 Opportunities Appraisal and Risk Assessment

- 3.1 A number of issues related to the proposed development of a Transit Site have been identified.
- 3.2 A new facility could present significant future cost savings as a result of fewer unauthorised encampments and a reduction in the known and increasing costs of court costs and site clear up costs.
- 3.3 It is considered that the project provides the potential to secure necessary 'fit for purpose' and affordable gypsy and traveller transit provision within local authority control for the county of Shropshire, albeit on a temporary basis. This could, within a reasonably short timescale, deal with the ongoing and costly issues of unauthorised

encampments and the associated impact on local communities and businesses whilst longer term site provision is considered.

3.4 Conversely, there is the potential impact of not progressing with the project, and the risk of ongoing disruption to local businesses:

- Risk of ongoing disruption to local businesses and facilities by unauthorised use.
- Examination of the Local Plan for Shropshire determines that the Plan is not 'sound' or otherwise forces delays in Plan adoption.
- Ongoing significant costs to the Council associated with Court costs and clearing up following unauthorised encampments.

3.5 A number of risks associated with the delivery of this project have been identified and these are summarised below together with mitigating actions:

Risk	Mitigation actions
Failure to get temporary planning permission results in development of transit site being impeded.	Commence consultation post Cabinet approval and progress planning application.
Failure to communicate and engage effectively and positively with local businesses results in inability to obtain their support for the scheme.	Appropriate consultation to be undertaken.
Failure to communicate and engage effectively and positively with Historic England due to the adjacency to the historic battlefield results in the inability to obtain their support for the scheme.	Liaison with Shropshire Council Historic Environment and Development Management officers to discuss the detail of the proposals.
Failure to consider the impact of the NWRR construction could result in the site being unavailable for use.	Liaison with NWRR project lead will ensure that ongoing use of the Transit site is not impeded by use of peripheral areas for works associated with the NWRR project.
Ecological survey to be completed for impact on the environment the outcomes of which could result in failing to obtain required planning permission and damage to biodiversity.	Initial desktop survey work undertaken to inform on potential presence of protected species has not identified the potential presence of any protected species. A survey of the site will be commissioned in spring 2020 and the report would form a supporting document within any future planning application

Failure to identify required services connection costs could result in not delivering the project within the allocated budget.	Appropriate surveys to be undertaken and further mitigation to be taken following survey results.
Inadequate site management arrangements in place when finalised, results in the management of the site being compromised.	Proper project management processes to be adopted.
Failure to identify future budget requirements of the site results in the site not being maintained following completion.	Basic construction to reflect the temporary nature of the transit site. Budget within Capital Programme to be retained.
Insufficient contractors available to undertake the works required results in programme and delivery delays.	Monitor availability of contractors ahead of any tender process.
Inability to predict additional travellers arriving when the site is full results in insufficient capacity.	The project will have met the requirements of the local plan in terms of demand but will be subject to ongoing review
Insufficient collection of rents and revenue from transient travellers results in inability to offset costs of delivery of site.	Robust processes and procedures to be set out in the management of the Transit site

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 An indicative scheme drawn up for provision of a basic facility to the standard required for temporary provision has provided guidance on expected capital and revenue costs.
- 4.2 The likely costs of construction for this form of basic transit facility are estimated to be in the region of £150,000. Further work to confirm the cost of the construction work and to establish how this will be funded will be undertaken following public consultation. The land is within the freehold ownership of the Council, and there is therefore no additional cost burden for land acquisition.
- 4.3 Regarding revenue implications, the income generated through rent charges is estimated at £7,000 pa, with employee, maintenance and running costs of £4,000 pa, thus generating a potential net surplus of £3,000 pa. Management of the site would be undertaken by the

Council's Gypsy and Traveller Service, thus keeping such management costs to a minimum.

- 4.4 The Business Case for the project has been established and approved at a previous Shropshire Council Investment Board, and this business case has been reviewed to ensure it remains current and applicable.

5.0 Climate Change Appraisal

- 5.1 Making planned provision for a transit site will limit the environmental impact of unregalated visits and stays on other sites. Including limiting pollution and damage to the natural environment.
- 5.2 Landscaping of any new site could provide some carbon capture and storage potential through appropriate screening and planting. This will be considered accordingly should plans progress.
- 5.3 The design of any future site will ensure it is a safe environment for its temporary occupants and will mitigate any exposure to impacts from external environmental factors both human and physical.

6.0 Background

- 6.0.1 The Council has freehold ownership of an area of land extending to 3.60ha which lies abutting the Ellesmere Road Roundabout between the A5124 Battlefield Link Road and the A528 Shrewsbury Road on the North-West edge of Shrewsbury.
- 6.0.2 The land is currently used for grazing purposes but this area would be directly affected by the northerly junction of the proposed North West Relief Road, and longer term proposals for land uses in this vicinity therefore remain 'fluid' at present.
- 6.0.3 Heritage considerations have been identified, and work is currently in progress, drawing on information provided by the Council's Historic Environment and Planning Policy teams, to consider assessments of landholdings in this area of the town and potential impact on the setting of the Registered Battlefield. Formal pre-application consultation with Historic England is planned to review any potential heritage constraints to development. This risk has been identified within the Risk Register with appropriate mitigation in place.
Other potential issues identified from the site assessment used to inform the Local Plan Review which will require due consideration will include:
- 6.0.4 As an interim measure, the site has been identified as potentially suitable for the provision of a temporary transit site for gypsies and travellers. The transit proposal would aim to provide a site to

accommodate up to 8 families for periods of no longer than 3 weeks at any one time.

- 6.0.5 The site would accommodate those families temporarily staying in the county who may otherwise occupy unauthorised sites, or those waiting for a permanent pitch on one of the Council's owned and managed caravan sites.

6.1 The need for Gypsy and Traveller Transit Provision in Shropshire

- 6.1.1 The transit site is proposed to be located in North Shrewsbury which has been a particular focus for unauthorised encampment activity. The delivery of this site will ease the burden of unauthorised encampments experienced by the Council over the last five years on high profile sites/locations such as the Park & Ride sites and Battlefield Enterprise Park.
- 6.1.2 This will enable the Police enforcing their powers to evict groups who refuse to use the facility from the County for three months. There has been a reluctance by the Police to use these powers. It will also resolve a short term problem for Gypsy & Traveller families who are due to move onto the Council's owned and managed sites, or those fleeing domestic abuse or in need of health and medical care.
- 6.1.3 Subject to obtaining planning permission for this proposal, the land at Battlefield would provide opportunity for development of this much needed facility until a more permanent location can be confirmed.

6.2 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) and Planning Policy Considerations

- 6.2.1 National planning policy for gypsy and traveller sites requires local authorities to identify and seek to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers, including transit provision.
- 6.2.2 There is a longstanding commitment to identify a site for transit provision in Shropshire as set out in the Core Strategy Policy CS12 (March 2011) which forms part of the adopted Local Plan for Shropshire. This commitment was reconsidered and reaffirmed as part of the examination of the subsequently adopted SAMDev Plan which also forms part of the adopted Local Plan for Shropshire. The SAMDev Plan Inspector required an early Plan review to include an update of housing including gypsy and traveller requirements.
- 6.2.3 The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2017 (GTAA) which was published to underpin the ongoing Local Plan Review process identified a need for a transit site for around 8/10 pitches. The update to this evidence to consider and address current transit needs highlights that Shropshire Council have now granted planning permission for 3 private transit pitches which may address the planning

requirement but that additional Council provision could complement the private site and support transit capacity. The report also identifies the need for the monitoring of the impact of the private provision.

6.3 Proposed Development

- 6.3.1 The transit proposal for provision within Shropshire aims to provide a site to accommodate up to 8 families for periods of no longer than 3 weeks at any one time.
- 6.3.2 The site will accommodate those families temporarily staying in the county on unauthorised sites or those waiting for a permanent pitch on one of the Council's owned and managed caravan sites.
- 6.3.3 The proposed site would be of basic construction, with a stone or grasscrete base, a single toilet/shower block unit, CCTV, Perimeter Fencing and Height Restriction barriers on the entrance to the site. In this respect, it will remain relatively 'temporary' in its form and provision, and will respect the setting of the land adjacent to the Registered Battlefield. Construction details will reflect guidance contained within the Battlefield Design Guidance draft document.

7.0 Review of options for future transit provision in Shrewsbury

- 7.1. An assessment of available sites, mainly in Council ownership but also giving consideration to any suitable land or premises available for purchase or to lease within the county, has been undertaken. The range of sites were considered against key requirements and criteria and recommendations were brought forward for further investigation. The sites review has been an ongoing process as new sites have been added and considered.
- 7.2 In carrying out the evaluation, the following key considerations were assessed:
 - Locality of site and ability of users to physically access the site and its facilities
 - Land ownership, potential difficulties with acquisition, title issues and timescales.
 - Site size, condition and remediation costs.
 - Amenity and other planning issues.
 - Local infrastructure and services.
 - Potential delivery complications.
 - Policy framework
 - Site infrastructure requirements including utilities
 - Constraints such as ecological, heritage, flooding and highway considerations.
- 7.3 A consultation exercise is now planned as the next stage in the process, including formal consultation with local residents, businesses

and other interested parties. This consultation would be in addition to the opportunity for interested parties to submit comments in response to any planning application subsequently submitted.

7.4 The formal consultation is planned to run from mid-March 2020 to mid-April 2020. Following analysis of comments and feedback received, a report back to Cabinet is programmed for 29 April 2020.

7.5 Upon completion of the consultation, an ESIA will be undertaken.

8.0 Next steps

8.1 Subject to Cabinet approval to carry out a formal consultation on this proposal with local residents, businesses and other interested parties, the outcome of the consultation will be analysed and reported back to Cabinet. Should the recommendation be to approve progressing this site, further work would be undertaken to prepare a planning application seeking approval for the transit provision for a temporary period of up to 5 years.

8.2 It is anticipated that the timescale for submission of a full planning application for this temporary provision and subsequent stages for construction of the facility will be up to 12 months.

<p>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</p> <p>Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2017 Battlefield Design Guidance – Draft – Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (not dated)</p>
<p>Cabinet Members: Cllr Steve Charmley, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Assets, Economic Growth and Regeneration Cllr Robert Macey, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Strategic Planning</p>
<p>Local Members: Cllr Ioan Jones</p>
<p>Appendices:</p> <p>Appendix 1: Location Plan</p>

