



Cabinet 21 January 2009

Gypsy and Traveller site at Kelly's Meadows, Depden

1. Summary and Reasons for Recommendations

- 1.1 The Council is required to ensure that provision is made to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers within St Edmundsbury. This report proposes the approval of a scheme to extend an existing site on the boundary of Depden and Wickhambrook to help meet the assessed need.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that:-

- (1) the Council proceeds with the scheme to develop an extension to the Gypsy and Traveller site at Kelly's Meadows, Depden as detailed in Report Z481;
- (2) the appointment of a suitable planning consultant and planning mediation service to assist with the planning application process be approved;
- (3) subject to (2) above, the cost of these services should they be required, be approved up to a maximum of £25,000 and be met from the affordable housing capital budget allocation;
- (4) delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director for Community, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Community and Economy and Asset Management to:-
 - (a) enter into a contract to acquire land necessary for the development of the Kelly's Meadows site at agricultural value; and
 - (b) to enter into a lease with the occupiers in respect of this land; and
- (5) the land purchase and capital development costs be met from the Government grant for this purpose.

Contact Details

Name
Telephone
E-mail

Portfolio Holder

Sara Mildmay-White
[sara.mildmay-
white@stedsbc.gov.uk](mailto:sara.mildmay-white@stedsbc.gov.uk)

Lead Officer

Carole Herries
(01284) 757603
carole.herries@stedsbc.gov.uk

3. Corporate Objectives

3.1 The recommendations meet the following objectives, as contained within the Corporate Plan:-

- (a) Corporate Priorities:
 - (i) *'To improve the safety and well-being of the community';*
 - (ii) *'To secure a sustainable and attractive environment';*
- (b) Cabinet Commitments:
'Managing the future development of the Borough; and
- (c) Vision 2025: St Edmundsbury will be a place:-
V:H1: which has an affordable range of housing to meet the needs and demographic profile of the community.

4. Key Issues

4.1 Background

4.1.1 Members will be aware that the Government requires councils to make provision for the needs of Gypsies and Travellers in their areas, and that the requirement for St Edmundsbury is to provide between 15 and 20 pitches from a regional needs assessment undertaken.

4.1.2 Cabinet approved the setting up of a sub-group, chaired by Councillor Mrs Mildmay-White, to ascertain where these pitches could be provided within the Borough, and to access available Central Government funding to meet the development costs of providing these pitches.

4.2 The Proposed Scheme

4.2.1 The group identified the site at Kelly's Meadows, Depden as suitable, and would facilitate a small extension to an existing Gypsy and Traveller site. The proposal to extend the site to accommodate 6 pitches in total will improve the facilities on the site for the existing residents and provide good facilities for the small number of additional family members who will use the site. There will be a total of six families who will reside on the site, which will be a permanent, residential site, and **not** a 'transit' site for other travelling families to use.

4.2.2 The proposed scheme includes the construction of hardstandings for the caravans, amenity blocks for bathroom and washing facilities, landscaping, fencing and a new road onto the site. As the land is a greenfield site, and the only service onto the site at present is electricity, it is necessary to install services to the site, including water and sewage. An indicative proposal of how the site might look is attached as Appendix A to the Report, but the final boundaries and layout will not be decided until after the planning issues are resolved.

4.2.3 The Government has made funding available for councils to bid to develop new sites. To access this funding, there are criteria that councils have to meet and the facilities as described in paragraph 4.2.2 above are required to be constructed.

4.2.4 On 18 December 2008, the officers received telephone confirmation that the bid for £737,000 to develop this new site had been successful. Written confirmation of the exact conditions of the grant is still awaited from the Government Office.

4.2.5 The funding is a capital grant to fund 100% of the cost of the site's development, thereby not incurring capital costs to Council Tax payers of St Edmundsbury. Once developed, the running costs of the site will be met by the tenants, and no on-going revenue costs will be incurred by the Borough Council for its management or maintenance. The funding and the scheme itself are subject to planning permission being granted for the development. If approved, it will be a small, family-run site which nationally is recognised as being good practice.

4.2.6 The officers are still awaiting guidance on how the grant will be paid, but understand it is likely to be in a lump sum once planning permission is granted, with a requirement for regular monitoring of progress of the scheme, and spending of the funding. No funding will be available until planning permission has been granted.

4.3 Planning issues

4.3.1 It is hoped that a planning application can be submitted as soon as possible. The work to deal with the planning issues associated with the site is extensive and will include surveys and the preparation of applications and other documents. It is proposed that a suitable planning consultant be engaged to carry out this work.

4.3.2 There will be a cost associated with employing the consultant, estimated at about £10,000. The officers are exploring with the Government Office whether this cost can be met from the grant funding. As the capital grant will not be available until planning permission has been granted, the Borough Council would, in any event, need to cover these costs initially, and this could be met from the capital allocation for affordable housing.

4.4 Planning mediation

4.4.1 Members will be aware that there has been opposition to the proposal from local residents and, in some cases, residents of surrounding villages. There is also some local support for the scheme.

4.4.2 Investigations have been made by the officers into using a planning mediation service, which would offer an independent service to work with the community and the Council to deal with issues raised as the planning application is developed. The maximum costs of the service are estimated at £15,000.

4.4.3 The officers are also exploring whether the costs of this service can be met from the grant funding, or whether additional government grant funding may be available for this service as a 'pilot'. In the event this is not possible the cost can be met from the capital allocation for affordable housing.

4.5 Lease with the Gypsy family

4.5.1 The Council will enter into a lease with the resident Gypsy family who currently own the site. They have confirmed that they will sign the Heads of Terms and officers will be contacting the family's solicitor to progress this. The Council will need to purchase the land to be developed from the family at agricultural value and the family will repay this cost on a monthly basis as part of the conditions of the lease. The purchase cost will be met from the Government capital grant.

5.	Other Options considered
5.1	In considering potential sites, letters were sent to over 80 Parish Councils, landowners, estate agents, housing providers, and others, to see if there was potentially suitable land that they were aware of. If suggestions were received they would have been subject to formal public consultation. If no suggestions were forthcoming, the sub-group would have to identify potential sites.
5.2	There were no suggestions for potential sites, and the only feedback received was from a couple of Parish Councils who advised they would prefer smaller sites.
5.3	The sub-group also considered the option of extending existing sites within the Borough. The sub-group concluded that only the Kelly's Meadows site located at Depden would potentially be suitable and discussions with the family who owned the site were undertaken.
5.4	Nationally it is recognised that small family-run sites are the preferred option, rather than larger sites. The sub-group therefore, preferred to seek smaller family run sites to accommodate the 15 to 20 pitches required, rather than develop one large site.
5.5	Further sites will still have to be identified in the Borough to meet the requirements and the Local Development Framework will be one way of identifying further sites.
6.	Community impact <i>(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and diversity issues)</i>
6.1	Gypsies and Travellers are recognised ethnic groups under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, and local authorities are required to take their needs into account when carrying out housing needs assessments, and to make provision for their needs
7.	Consultation
7.1	In June 2008, an initial meeting was held with representatives of Depden and Wickhambrook Parish Councils where they were advised of the proposals.
7.2	On 21 July 2008, a drop-in session was held for residents of Depden and Wickhambrook between 2.30pm and 7.30pm, which was to inform residents about the plans to enlarge the family site at Kelly's Meadows. The drop-in session included briefing sheets for residents, picture displays, a box for written comments, and staff and councillors were available to advise and answer questions. Approximately 140 residents attended the drop-in session.
7.3	The main issues from the drop-in session were recorded and a 'Frequently Asked Questions' leaflet was developed from these issues, which has been sent to some residents and the Parish Councils. A meeting was also held with the Parish Councils representing some of the surrounding parishes to Depden and Wickhambrook. Dialogue between the Council, the Parish Councils and residents has continued through letter and email.
7.4	A Steering Group of residents in Wickhambrook opposed to the development has been established. The Chief Executive and the Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services have met with representatives of the group and Richard Spring MP.
7.5	It is proposed that future consultation will be led by the planning mediation service.

- 8. Resource implications** *(including asset management implications)*
- 8.1 There will be no capital cost to the Council arising from the development of this site, as this is being met fully by the Government grant.
- 8.2 There will be no cost to the Council in the future management and maintenance of the site, as this will be the full responsibility of the family and tenants who will live on the site. This is clearly outlined in the lease.
- 8.3 Costs incurred for the employment of a planning consultant and planning mediators will not exceed £25,000. If this cannot be met by the Government grant, it is proposed that this be met from the capital allocation for affordable housing.

9. Risk Assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

9.1

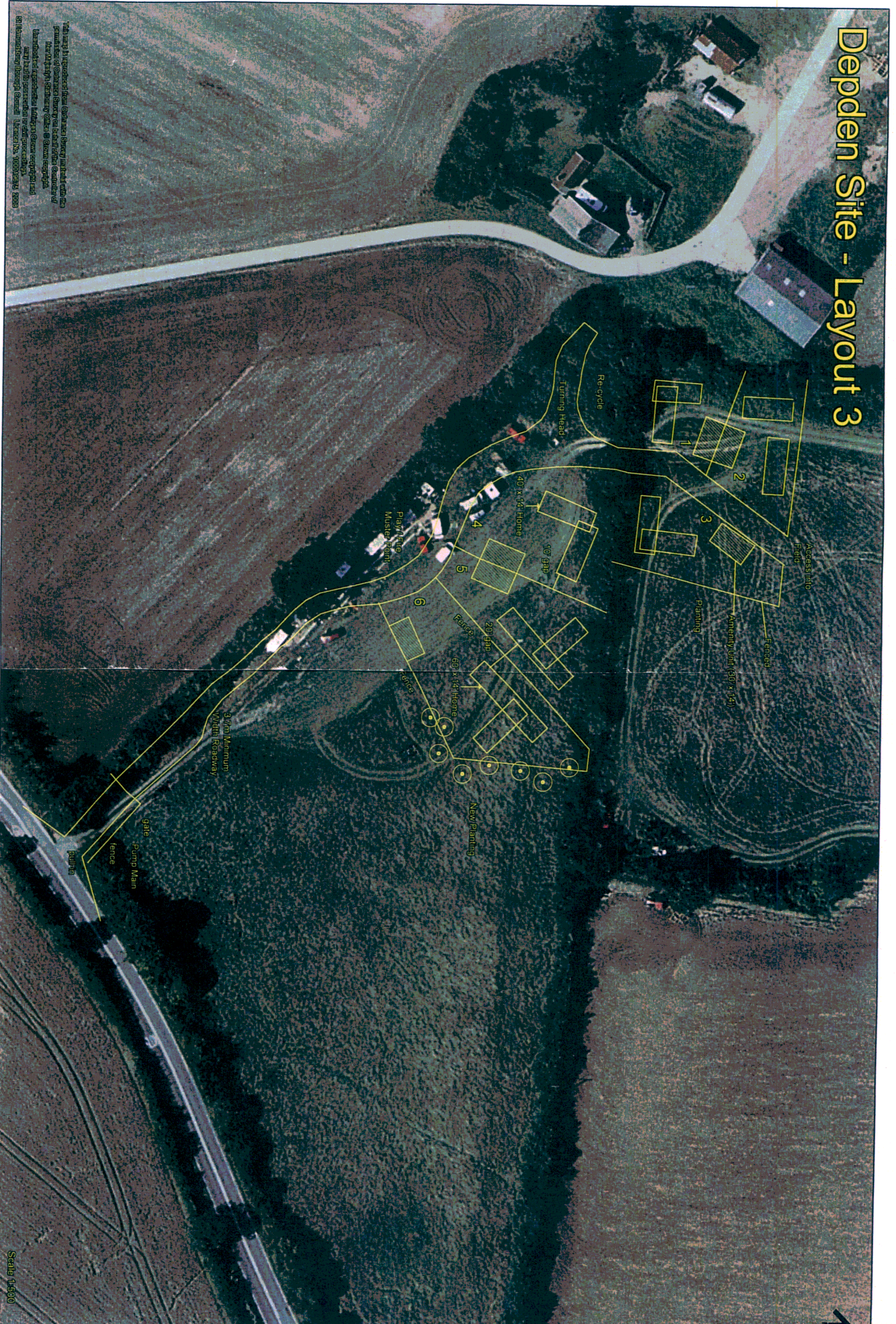
Risk area	Inherent level of Risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual Risk (after controls)
Failure to meet Gypsies and Travellers needs assessment site provision requirements	High	i) identifying sites through Local Development Framework; ii) working with Gypsies and Travellers community to identify sites; iii) consulting with communities; and iv) accessing government funding to develop sites.	High
Failure to deliver the site at Kelly's Meadows would result in the loss of government funding and the loss of the contribution to the assessed need	High	i) planning mediators and planning consultant engaged; and ii) project management system to be implemented.	Medium

- 10. Legal or policy implications**
- 10.1 Local authorities are required to consider the needs of Gypsies and Travellers as part of their housing needs assessments and to make provision for them. The Traveller Needs Assessment has identified the requirement to provide 15 to 20 pitches within the Borough.

Wards affected	Wickhambrook	Portfolio Holders	Community, Economy and Asset Management
Background Papers		Subject Area	Housing

W:\Democratic WP Services\Committee\Reports\Cabinet\2009\09.01.21\Z481 Gypsy & Traveller Site at Kellys Meadows Depden.doc

Depden Site - Layout 3



This drawing is a conceptual layout only and does not represent a final design. It is intended to provide a general overview of the proposed development and is not to be used for any other purpose without the written consent of the relevant authorities. The drawing is not to scale and is not a contract. It is intended to provide a general overview of the proposed development and is not to be used for any other purpose without the written consent of the relevant authorities.

Scale: 1:500

