

TITLE OF REPORT: **Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment**

REPORT OF: **Kevin Scarlett, Interim Strategic Director, Housing,
Environment and Healthy Communities**

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Cabinet on the results of the recent Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment, and to seek approval to:
 - a. discontinue the provision of facilities for the travelling community at the existing site at Baltic Road.
 - b. demolish the buildings on site so that the land can be appropriated and managed accordingly.

Background

2. Councils are required to periodically review the need for permanent or temporary sites for use by members of the travelling community.
3. For several decades Gateshead has met those needs by providing a permanent site on East Gateshead Industrial Estate. The Baltic Road site has 18 pitches, each with an amenity block, and is managed by a warden. There is also a warden's bungalow on site.
4. Demand for traveller sites such as this has dramatically declined over the last decade and as a result many of our neighbouring councils have closed their sites.
5. Despite the significant reduction in the availability of council traveller sites in the region, demand for our own site has fallen to nil, with the last occupied pitch being vacated at the end of 2022.
6. Given there has been no demand from travellers wishing to occupy pitches for at least 2 years, the amenity blocks and warden's bungalow have been extensively vandalised. They are no longer repairable and need to be demolished.
7. As part of the new evidence base for the local plan a review of the need for traveller sites has been undertaken.

Findings of the Review of Traveller Needs

8. Consultants have carried out a gypsy and travellers needs assessment in accordance with guidance, carrying out their investigations and interviews in the spring of 2023. The assessment found that there was no longer sufficient demand to justify providing a large, fixed site in Gateshead, nor to provide more informal transit pitches in either Gateshead or Newcastle.

9. Additional contact was made with representative national, regional and local representative bodies during the Autumn, but with no response.
10. The summary of the review is here. [The Gateshead Plan - Gateshead Council](#)
11. As part of the Council's 2024/25 budget consultation exercise, the proposal to discontinue the provision at Baltic Road was put forward for public feedback, together with the potential redundancy of 1 employee. The results of the consultation were presented to Cabinet on the 20th February 2024 and confirmed:
 - 72% of respondents either strongly agreed or tend to agree with the proposal.
 - Following publication of the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIP) 80% of respondents supported the proposal.

Proposal

12. It is proposed that the site be closed, the proposal for the redundancy is progressed, and that vandalised buildings be demolished prior to the site being transferred into the Council's land portfolio for disposal or alternative use.
13. The site will however be retained for a period to enable a flexible response to any unforeseen need for a basic site provision for travellers.

Recommendations

14. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (i) Support the permanent closure, subject to Cabinet approval, of our travellers site at Baltic Road, Gateshead, conclude the proposed redundancy and subsequent cessation of service.
 - (ii) Request that the Service Director, Property and Assets take back the management of the land associated with the site.

for the following reasons:

- (i) There is no longer demand for the provision of temporary and permanent stopping facilities for travellers.

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1. Policy Context

- 1.1. The proposals referred to in this report support Gateshead's key strategies including Health and Wellbeing, Housing Strategy, Economic Strategy, and ultimately delivery of the Council's Thrive vision.

2. Background

2.1. Legal and National Policy Framework

- 2.2. The National Planning Policy Framework and its subordinate document Planning Policy for Traveller Sites set out planning requirements for traveller sites. This states that government's aims in respect of traveller sites include:

- (a) that local planning authorities should make their own assessment of need for the purposes of planning
- (b) that local planning authorities, working collaboratively, develop fair and effective strategies to meet need through the identification of land for sites

- 2.3 The methodology used by Opinion Research Services has been developed to meet the requirements of the Planning Policy Framework, and has been used in over 150 local authority areas since the policies were revised in 2015.

3 Consultation

- 3.1 Consultation on the content of this report has been carried out with the Housing Portfolio Holder, and with the Leader. Those consulted have been supportive of the proposal.

- 3.2 This report has been informed by consultation undertaken as part of;

- a) the underlying Accommodation Needs Assessment that has included contact with representative national, regional and local representative bodies, other local authorities, officers and members of the community by way of telephone, written contact and interview.
- b) The Council's 2024/2025 budget consultation.

4 Alternative Options

- 3.1 No alternative options are proposed in this report. Occupancy of the site has diminished significantly over the last decade, and the site had one occupant in 2022, dropping to zero in 2023. No applications for pitches have been submitted for over 2 years.

4 Implications of Recommended Option

- 4.1 Resources:

4.2 **Financial Implications**

4.3 The vacant site is currently operating at a cost to the council of approximately £32,000/year.

4.4 Closing the site and removing the Warden post will create an annual saving of £32,000.

4.5 **Human Resources Implications**

4.6 One full time post will be made redundant as a result of these proposals. This was consulted on and supported as part of the budget savings for 2024/2025.

4.7 **Property Implications**

4.8 The vacant site will become an asset for the council to manage in the most effective manner.

4.9 Risk Management Implication

4.10 At present the vacant site is attracting fly tipping and vandalism, and continuous efforts are needed to keep it safe. Managing the site for an alternative use will remove the risk of injury to trespassers.

4.11 Equality and Diversity Implications

4.12 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed.

4.13 Crime and Disorder Implications.

4.14 No crime and disorder implications are created by this proposal.

4.15 Health Implications

4.16 There are no health implications.

4.17 Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications

4.18 There are no climate and sustainability implications.

4.19 Human Rights Implications

4.20 There are no direct human rights implications.

4.21 Ward Implications

4.22 There are no direct ward implications arising from this report.