

POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

23 SEPTEMBER 2021

TARGET HARDENING OF KEY LOCATIONS TO MITIGATE THE RISK OF UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 Following sustained unauthorised encampments by gypsy and traveller groups on several areas of NSDC owned and managed land in the district, an assessment of multiple 'at risk' sites has been conducted, together with proposals to mitigate the future risk of unauthorised encampments.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Historically like most other Council/Land Owners in the UK, NSDC have struggled to protect land from unauthorised encampments. When they have encamped on Open Space Land this gives NSDC both a social issue and a financial cost to solve the issue. This summer, in 2021, Travellers have occupied several sites within the District. They have been occupying land at Cleveland Square/Thorpe Oaks and Newbury Road Estate. This covers ownership of NSDC and HRA. The Land at Newbury Road also has a land ownership responsibility alongside us and Newark Town Council. A separate group camped on Parfitt Drive Open Space in Farnsfield. We assisted the Parish in consultation and guided them through the process of eviction. We have a contract to provide Grounds Maintenance services to the Parish.

2.2 In 2020 the first group of travellers spent six months moving around Bassetlaw. They then moved to Newark in October 2020 and stayed until April 2021 occupying at various times Cedar Avenue, land behind TK Maxx, Yorke Drive and then land at the Happy Farmer. Although they moved from individual sites, they stayed within Newark for a considerable period of time (seven months). When they left in April 2021, they returned to sites in Bassetlaw before returning again to Newark on Friday 18 June 2021.

2.3 Insight gained from this particular group showed that while they would leave specific sites when faced with eviction, they did not leave Newark altogether, instead preferring to find another local site and relocate there. The estimated cost of the encampment at Cleveland Square alone was around £7,000, comprising legal costs, officer time and clean up.

2.4 Following these incidents, which were at significant cost to the public purse to resolve, the Council was criticised for not taking action to secure sites against repeat occupation. This 'Target Hardening' report has been compiled as a result.

2.5 It should be noted that there is a recognised need for gypsy and traveller sites within the district to address the requirements of resident travellers as identified in our Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and our planning policy team will continue to work with our partners to ensure that suitable sites are available. The purpose of 'target hardening' is to assist with efforts to divert non-resident groups travelling through the District to suitable sites.

3.0 Proposed Sites and Measures

Identified Sites

3.1 21 'at risk' sites have been identified across the district. 15 of these are owned or managed by NSDC or NSDC Housing teams. In identifying and prioritising sites officers considered:

- Site History
- The proximity of main roads,
- Ease of access onto the site; and the
- Size of the green space area.

5 Sites have been identified as 'High Risk', 8 as 'Medium Risk' and 8 as 'Low Risk'.

Securing Sites

3.2 A range of modifications have been considered for each site, this includes:

- Bollards – Both Fixed and lockable
- Tree Planting
- Meadow Creation
- Height Barriers
- Boulders &
- Bund construction
- Access Gates

3.3 Bunds are earth mounds created to provide a natural looking barrier, they add security and create a varied landscape vista. Developed correctly, they can further improve our works carried out in 2020 and 2021 for Meadow Management which have attracted local praise and will support our Carbon Strategy. Meadow land can act as a great carbon holder and Bunds would be a greater impact than Tree Planting Alone.

3.4 Bunds can be allowed to mature on their own from soil or we can make wildflower and meadow areas to them through two process:

- Wild Flower Turf
- Hydro Seeding

3.5 Wildflower turf is similar to Grass Turf. It is a pre grown roll that can be laid to give an instant look providing a quicker finish than seeding, but it is harder to lay on banked areas.

3.6 Hydroseeding (otherwise known as Hydraulic Mulch Seeding) is the process of applying a specially mixed slurry comprising seed, water, hydro-mulch, fertiliser and tackifier (binder) in just one operation. It is applied by spraying, either directly from the hydroseeder or using extension hoses, allowing difficult areas to be reached. Individual mixtures, using grass, wildflower, tree and shrub seed and sedum, can be applied with a variety of different hydro-mulches (manufactured mainly from either wood fibre or paper) together with an eco-friendly tackifier and fertilisers to establish new vegetation. Soil amendments such as microbial bacteria can also be added to aid germination and enhance establishment by creating the ideal growing environment that increases moisture retention, aids soil stabilisation, provides valuable nutrients and helps fight disease. Although the optimum times to hydroseed are traditionally spring and autumn, with the right weather conditions hydroseeding can be undertaken throughout the year.

- 3.7 On slopes requiring extra protection, installing Turf Reinforcement Matting (TRM) prior to hydroseeding provides an effective alternative to Hard-Armour (concrete or other manmade materials) erosion control methods. Soft engineering offers an aesthetically pleasing, more environmentally friendly and cost efficient way of protecting steep slopes and areas with high discharge waterways.

Approach to Works

- 3.8 Most of the sites identified require works which won't significantly affect the appearance of the area, however, on 4 sites officers have identified the need for further planning and design work. These are:

- Sconce and Devon Park
- Thorpe Oaks Open Space/Play Area
- Thorpe Close
- Newbury Road Estate

- 3.9 We have approached 3 Landscape Designers within the district area (including VIA), with the aim of developing Artistic Visualisations to show the public the vision at Sconce and Devon, Thorpe Oaks open space, Thorpe Close and Newbury Road. The purpose of the approaching the landscape designers would be the:

- **Production of Artistic Visualizations;** to demonstrate how the proposed installations would look in relation to the site as a whole. These would be original A3 copies which could then be used digitally for the purpose of presentations or proposals. We would suggest one to indicate how the 'Wildflower Bunds' would look on the site and another schematic drawing to show the construction method.
- **Master Planning Proposals;** to show the locations, size and overall scheme at each site. These would be extrapolations from Google Earth using information recorded on site visits. The planning would take into account the requirement for a mix of obstacle types and taking into consideration the physical constraints from each site.
- **Technical Consultation and Support;** The Designer has very extensive experience in specifying and consulting on meadow and naturalistic landscape solutions both in the UK and in Europe. The introduction of these new 'wildflower bunds' and meadow areas around the boulders creates an excellent opportunity to establish not only prevent unauthorized access, but also a whole new series of sustainable and attractive habitats. By using different methods and types of 'wildflowers' across the sites we can develop something which the public would appreciate – both as beautiful new areas, but also as something which would have a positive effect on biodiversity. By using information boards for instance at certain locations giving species names and the types of wildlife they support could really appeal to the local population and interested groups.

4.0 Implementation of Plans

- 4.1 With all of the highlighted sites there is a recognised need to involve local ward members and communities with this being especially important in areas where bunds or other landscaping actions are being taken.

4.2 As many of the identified sites are not owned or managed by NSDC there is a need to raise awareness with the organisations responsible for those sites to provide them with the opportunity to partner with us in this work and provide a coordinated approach throughout the district.

4.3 The Newbury Road Estate in particular is an area where affected land is owned by both the district and Newark Town Council so a joint response will be more effective, both financially and environmentally.

5.0 **Projected Costs**

5.1 The projected costs for works so far are £197,305 for all sites. This includes a mix of hydroseeded finishes (grass seed and wildflower mixes).

5.2 For NSDC total projected costs are £151,020. This is broken down as £131,010 for the general fund and £21,010 for the HRA. For NTC projected costs are £44,325.

5.3 Other sites identified are owned by Nottinghamshire County Council and the Gilstrap trust. These projected costs equate to £560 and £400 respectively. These costs have now been met from our advice by both parties.

5.4 A spreadsheet with all of the sites and costing calculations is included as **Appendix A**.

6.0 **Equalities Implications**

6.1 As stated at the beginning of this report, there is a recognised need for gypsy and traveller sites within Nottinghamshire. The purpose of the proposed works is not to prevent groups from entering the district rather to ensure the impacts on and conflicts with residents are kept to a minimum and to ensure gypsy and traveller groups are encouraged to use more suitable areas.

7.0 **Financial Implications (FIN21-22/4886)**

7.1 The costs of the works specific to NSDC total £151,020, the breakdown of which is £21,010 for HRA sites and £131,010 for General Fund owned sites. These costs have also been split between capital and revenue and are broken as per the table below (please see Appendix A for full details).

Narrative	Projected Cost	NSDC owned sites		Non NSDC sites Externally funded		
		HRA	GF	Gilstrap	NTC	NCC
Revenue	53,605	2,385	23,760	400	26,500	560
Capital	143,700	18,625	107,250	0	17,825	0
Totals	197,305	21,010	131,010	400	44,325	560

7.2 The total projected costs above include all design, master planning and technical consultation and support costs associated with these works.

7.3 The funding for the General Fund works for both capital and revenue will come from the Community Engagement reserve, leaving a balance on the reserve post these works of £118,734. The HRA costs of £21,010 will be funded from the HRA annual budget.

8.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

8.1 This report would like to demonstrate the feelings of the local communities that have been effected by previous or encampments or feel at risk of becoming a future target. The target hardening works identified in this report have an environmental strength in their approach. Both delivering a protection to parks and open spaces through an enhanced appearance with added security and environmental benefits to the local community.

8.2 As such it is felt this project aligns with:

- Reduce crime and antisocial behaviour and increase feelings of safety in our communities
- Improve the health and wellbeing of local residents
- Enhance and protect the districts natural environment
- Continue to maintain the high standard of cleanliness and appearance of the local environment.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- (a) Members support the approach to preventing unauthorised encampments on at risks sites in Newark & Sherwood, to avoid significant eviction costs and potential disruption to local communities;**
- (b) Members approve the funding of £131,010 to undertake the works as set out to the Council's at risk sites. Works to be funded from the Community Engagement reserve, leaving a balance of £118,734;**
- (c) Members approve funding of 21,010 from the HRA to undertake the works as set out on at risk sites on HRA land, works to be funded HRA annual budget; and**
- (d) Members agree that Newark Town Council be approached with a view to funding 50% of the cost on the Newbury Road estate.**

Reason for Recommendations

To mitigate the cost and risks associated with unauthorised encampments on at risk sites in Newark and Sherwood

Background Papers

Nil

For further information please contact Ben Stacey Street Scene Manager on Ext. 5738 or Matt Adey Development Manager on Ext. 5253

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