
Report to: Place Committee

Date: 18 March 2021

Subject: Westhaugh Travelling Persons Site - Engagement Update

Report by: Strategic Director (Place)

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1. This report follows on from Council agreement on 10th December (2020) for the financial transfer of the Travelling Persons Site (Westhaugh) from the General Fund (GF) to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- 1.2. This report is to update the Committee in terms of recent engagement with residents, practice learning from a fellow local authority, and discussions with CoSLA and SG representatives on improving site standards.
- 1.3. This then covers the work the Service has been able to achieve since December Council, in terms of bringing forward a project plan and scope of works to this committee.

2.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that Committee agree to:

- 2.1 note the progress with residents in allocation of the £70k from SG for site improvements,
- 2.2 note the feedback from a council who embarked upon a similar project to improve site standards,
- 2.3 note possible future Scottish Government (SG) improvement grants,
- 2.4 note progression from SG in terms of consultation on new design standards for Gypsy traveller sites to meet now and in the future,
- 2.5 note the indicative financial commitment required to take this project forward using the approach set out in this paper, as outlined in section 4.22; and that financial governance for this will be sought via the HRA budget process for financial year 2021/22,
- 2.6 note the suggested working timeline of engagement for improvements, once conclusions have been reached on whether ground conditions will allow for the site to be extended,

2.7 Otherwise note the remainder of the report.

3.0 Background

3.1. As reported to Council, the Westhaugh site has reached the end of its useful life and requires investment for refurbishment and/or replacement. This report captures learning from another local authority and sets out the steps to be taken on our journey to ensure satisfaction from residents and stakeholders, and to meet COSLA leaders' commitment for meaningful participation of the traveller community on improvements.

4.0 Site Improvement Works (£70k SG Allocation)

4.1. A virtual engagement session was held with residents at the end of October to discuss site improvements. This follows the allocation of a £70k grant by the Scottish Government (from a total fund of £2m) to be used in conjunction for site specific improvements. This could include, but is not limited to, works such as divisional fencing, community broadband/Wi-Fi, CCTV, shared community facility and/or new replacement play park equipment.

4.2. The residents requested that work is progressed to address boundary and divisional fencing and pitch security gates. A further video call was held with residents on 15th December to update them on the Council decision (10/12/2020) and to discuss further engagement on the fencing. On the 18th January a site visit was held with residents at Westhaugh to agree an outline specification for the fencing and gates and agree positioning and materials that could be used. The residents have been supported by the Women's Voices Development Worker for the Gypsy/Traveller project at MECOPP¹.

4.3. Based on the above, Officers were then able to present residents with some options for consideration on Friday 12th February. Residents who attended the meeting were happy that progress and action was being taken by the Council. This has resulted in the Council exploring with residents improvements to the CCTV system and the potential to install fixed wireless broadband at the site (meeting SG minimum speed requirements of 30mb) with the remaining budget.

4.4. Progression of the above goes some way to demonstrating the Council's commitment making improvements at the site, and also demonstrates meaningful and active participation in line with CoSLA commitments.

Feedback from a Neighbouring Local Authority to Influence Progression

4.5. As suggested by CoSLA colleagues and MECOPP, council officers took the time recently to understand the experience from another local authority which is in the progress of refurbishing their travelling person's site. This was to ensure that lessons learnt could be captured and a full appreciation of the work involved could be understood.

¹ MECOPP – Minority Ethnic Carers of Older People Project

- 4.6. The local authority adopted a co-designed process, which has run from 2017 to date. This was driven by low satisfaction results on the site, with investment being ad-hoc in nature over the years. The residents felt their site was not a good or comfortable place to live.
- 4.7. The local authority started an open and honest dialogue and conversation with residents on what would make the site a good place to live, and started to map out exactly how residents wanted to live now and in the future.
- 4.8. When the local authority officers had captured the basics, an architect was commissioned to work specifically with residents on what they wanted to achieve. This was a 5 month process of consultation and engagement sessions, including visits to other travelling person's sites, to capture ideas and suggestions. The residents favoured a chalet type model with greater defensible space for each unit. This was achieved by reworking the site layout and, with residents' agreement, removal of the playpark. The residents wanted the units to be energy efficient so that their fuel poverty concerns were addressed. Moreover the residents wanted privacy aspects taken more into account, so the architect had to be mindful of the site elevations, the individual position of units in pitches, and placement of windows and doors. The local fire service commander worked closely with them, scrutinising the plans and ensuring that relevant compliance would also be achieved. The local authority also sought and received approval to move the site from the General Fund to the HRA.
- 4.9. At the end of this process building warrant and planning submissions were made, and on conclusion of that process tender documentation was published. The tender, which closed in February 2020, had initially anticipated a build of 16 weeks during summer 2021, so an overall 4 year process from engagement to completion. Covid-19 restrictions has unfortunately meant that work will now not commence on site until 2022.
- 4.10. The above experience from this local authority is very useful as we start to map our own journey of engagement with residents to lead to site standard improvements. Some of the aspects, such as moving the site to the HRA, we have recently completed. In addition, we now have a working relationship with tenants to quickly build upon. We are also in the process of answering the technical question of whether the site can be extended to allow for greater land area to be taken into account in the design stage. This will be answered by pile-driven land testing beyond the boundary fence and at the playpark area. The answer to this question is seen as crucial to enable discussions to proceed on a shared understanding of what is possible.

New Design Standards for Gypsy Traveller Sites to Meet Now and in the Future

- 4.11. As we start our journey of engagement with residents on improvements to the site it is important to note that currently the Scottish Government are working on developing a design guide for Gypsy/Traveller sites that will be used for new sites or major refurbishments of existing sites, which Council will need to demonstrably meet. A working group has been established, which includes CoSLA, Local Authority reps and members of the Gypsy/Traveller community and third sector. Clackmannanshire Council is represented on this group by

the Senior Manager for Housing. The latest meeting was held on Monday the 8th of March.

- 4.12. The SG team are in the process of pulling together a first draft of the design guide, taking on board input from community members already gathered as part of the development of the action plan on what good quality, culturally appropriate accommodation should look like. Residents on Westhaugh have been supported to complete and contribute to this design guide. In addition to the above, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has been revising its guidance on Gypsy/Traveller sites. Based on feedback from local authorities, SG is engaging with SFRS as to whether this guidance will be sufficient and whether alternative approaches will also be required.
- 4.13. When drafts of the above design guidance are available, details will be circulated to Place Committee Members.

Future Scottish Governments (SG) Improvement Grants

- 4.14. The Scottish Government have been working on proposals for a new capital fund to run for five years from 2021-22. Work is ongoing with CoSLA and the above working group on the criteria and evidence base to access this fund.
- 4.15. In December, Scottish Government sought views on likely funding requirements over the next five years. Part of the funding requirement could be the necessity to ensure there is robust needs and demands assessment data supporting the development of provision. The Scottish Government have indicated that they are keen to create a number of demonstration projects that can establish examples of model sites, as a trial for the new design guide. This would help develop and refine model specifications for amenity blocks, community engagement processes etc. COSLA would work with councils to share the experiences and expertise gathered to inform developments later in any established programme.
- 4.16. SG is working on criteria for the fund, including how residents and community members will be involved, together with a process for project selection. It is very likely that the key requirements will be on Councils to utilise both the Place Standard tool and Participatory Budgeting techniques in the delivery of improvements to sites, to enable qualification for the fund and or demonstrator projects.

Place Standard Improvement Project with the Residents

- 4.17. As detailed above, to ensure that improvements to the site meet the needs of residents and potentially to ensure access to future grant funding, the chosen approach to improvements to Westhaugh will be via formalising current engagement under the Place Standard Tool, with participatory budgeting at its core. The key aspect for the PB approach is having an outline budget agreed, which the group can work within. This might mean that decisions are made between a different set of options and will put the residents in the driving seat for deciding how to improve their site for their own benefit.
- 4.18. Westhaugh has a lot of current infrastructure you would associate with a housing development, such as water & waste connections and road access. A budget allowance of £120,000 per pitch is assumed as being reasonable for

a redevelopment. This is based on typical costs for new build affordable housing by way of a comparator. If the site could hold 14 pitches, taking into consideration new fire regulations and SG future design standards, this would mean a budget of £1.680m. The service had £240k in the capital plan for financial year 2020/21 and the service proposes rolling this forward as part of the 2021/22 budget approval process, together with creating an earmarked HRA reserve of £1.440m for the remaining amount. This reserve would be drawn down following discussions and agreement with residents on spend and investment priorities to be delivered within the budget allocation.

- 4.19. If the residents favour an enhanced refurbishment option then this could mean quicker spend and delivery, potentially utilising in-house trades, versus a longer process for a complete redevelopment. Crucially though, it will be the residents who will drive this approach and decisions. Moreover, this means that even without securing funding from the Scottish Government the residents have an agreed funding pot to work with. Any future SG grant received could then minimise the HRA spend.

Indicative Timeline of Activity once ground conditions are known

- 4.20. The following timeline represents activity and actions proposed by the service in working with the residents to lead to significant improvements in the site. The service feels it would be best to leave this in DRAFT form until conclusions are firmed up on the ground conditions at and around the site as to whether the site can be extended in any shape or form.

- 4.21. Please see table below;

Timeline	Phase	Activity
Now	(1) Funding, resources and capacity plus demand planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete engagement and investment spend of SG £70k improvement allocation • Land engineering survey to establish ground conditions and establish site boundary • Agree PB investment budget and approach • Desktop review of demand and progress on Housing Needs and Demand Assessment (perhaps in collaboration with Forth Valley partners)

Five to Six months	(2) Participatory Budget – engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish council project staff team • Formalise PB Working Group: Council Staff/<i>Travellers’ representatives. Travellers’ Action Group / support organisations</i> • Agree PB project scope • Agree terms of reference for PB Group • Agree Schedule of PB Working Group meetings • Establish clear PB outcomes • Appoint architects for next phase • Ensure all views are taken on board
Six to Seven months	(3) Architectural designs and planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Architects to engage with residents on proposals and expectations • Architects to propose a few options based on residents feedback and budget allowance • Ensure local fire service sighted on developments and plans • Explore procurement and tendering options
Three to Four months	(4) Decision making and approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PB group reach decision on what proposal to take forward • Planning applications and building warrant applied for • Agreement on procurement/tendering route if applicable
Four to Five Months	(5) Planning decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision on planning and building warrant application
Four to Five Months	(6) Tender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place Tender • Review and score returns

4.22. Committee will be updated when ground conditions work has concluded and allow the project plan to be updated and indicative dates firmed up.

5.0 Resource Implications

5.1. The full financial implications of the recommendations are set out in the report. This includes a reference to full life cycle costs where appropriate.

5.2. HRA outline Capital Funding will be agreed as part of HRA Budget 2021/22.

5.3. Finance have been consulted and have agreed the financial implications as set out in the report. Yes

5.4. *Staffing*

5.5. The future management arrangements of the Travelling Persons Site will be detailed in the housing service organisational redesign.

6.0 Exempt Reports

6.1. Is this report exempt? Yes (please detail the reasons for exemption below) No

7.0 Declarations

The recommendations contained within this report support or implement our Corporate Priorities and Council Policies.

(1) **Our Priorities** (Please click on the check box)

Clackmannanshire will be attractive to businesses and people and ensure fair opportunities for all

Our families, children and young people will have the best possible start in life

Women and girls will be confident and aspirational, and achieve their full potential

Our communities will be resilient and empowered so that they can thrive and flourish

(2) **Council Policies** (Please detail)

8.0 Equalities Impact

8.1. Have you undertaken the required equalities impact assessment to ensure that no groups are adversely affected by the recommendations?
Yes No

9.0 Legality

9.1. It has been confirmed that in adopting the recommendations contained in this report, the Council is acting within its legal powers. Yes

10.0 Appendices

10.1. Please list any appendices attached to this report. If there are no appendices, please state "none".

None

11.0 Background Papers

11.1. Have you used other documents to compile your report? (All documents must be kept available by the author for public inspection for four years from the date of meeting at which the report is considered).
Yes No

Housing Revenue Account Budget 2020-21 and Capital Programme 2020-21
Housing Revenue Budget 19/20 HRA Capital Programme 19/20 and Mid
Market Rent Considerations
Westhaugh Travelling Persons Site, Council December 2020

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