

Cabinet (Resources) Panel

13 September 2016

Report title	Improving security at vulnerable, 'unauthorised encampment' sites across Wolverhampton.	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Steve Evans City Environment	
Key decision	No	
In forward plan	No	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Ross Cook, City Environment	
Originating service	Public Protection	
Accountable employee(s)	Andy Jervis Tel: Email:	Head of Public Protection 01902 551261 andy.jervis@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Places Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board	15 August 2016 23 August 2016

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is recommended to:

1. Approve the start of a process to determine detailed costs of works to prevent unauthorised encampments on Steelpark Way, Wednesfield and Murdoch Road, Bilston.
2. Authorise the Service Director; City Environment, to approve the preferred contractor to carry out the works.
3. Approval is sought for a contribution not exceeding £5,000 from the Budget Contingency Reserve to fund the cost of security improvement works at Bentley Bridge Swimming and Fitness Centre, Ashmore Park and the Bilston Urban Village development site.
4. Approval is sought to a total virement of £165,000, in accordance with the Councils financial procedure rules, from the Corporate Contingency provision, to fund the cost of security improvement works at the remaining sites as detailed in this report.

Recommendations for noting:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is asked to note:

1. That approval was granted by SEB on 23 August 2016 to begin the site security works at the locations listed in Table 1 of section 3.1.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 During 2016 work has been undertaken by staff within City Environment to identify the Council owned sites and highway locations that have been the most vulnerable to unauthorised encampment by the Gypsy and Traveller community in recent years. Integral to the evaluation was to give particular emphasis to the sites where the impact on both residents and business is thought to be the greatest.
- 1.2 This preliminary work has been completed and approval to progress the minor works at a number of sites has been granted. These are shown in section 3.1.
- 1.3 Two locations described in section 3.2 and 3.3 require more complex measures and therefore fall outside of this approval and this report seeks to obtain endorsement for the proposed way forward at these two sites, including authorisation to commit funds to deliver the identified site security works.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 In common with the other local authorities in the Black Country, Wolverhampton has experienced regular unauthorised encampments by the Gypsy and Traveller community over recent years.
- 2.2 In response to this, a new joint protocol between City of Wolverhampton Council and West Midlands Police was developed during 2015/16 with the aim of improving our overall response to incursions. The revised protocol has proven to be operationally successful and there is now an on-going workstream to develop a similar protocol encompassing the whole of the Black Country.
- 2.3 Following on from this initiative, in April 2016 a presentation was made to SEB describing the sites within Wolverhampton that are regarded as the most vulnerable to unauthorised encampments. SEB have subsequently agreed and approved measures to improve security at sites Ref 1 to Ref 6 in Table 1 of section 3.1. This report seeks authorisation to start the process of securing Murdoch Road, Bilston and Steelpark Way, Wednesfield from future incursions.
- 2.4 The focus of this report is on land and highways under Council ownership and therefore two locations: Pendeford Business Park and Park Dale East / West that appeared in the previous SEB report have been omitted. Furthermore, security measures at the Lunt

Road cycle path site in Bilston are much improved and future incursions are regarding as unlikely.

2.5 A potential unintended consequence of these proposals is the possible displacement of illegal incursions to other sensitive sites within or beyond the city boundary. The monitoring of future incursions will identify whether and where this risk is realised. For example, Faulkland St Coach Park, which was one of the originally identified potentially vulnerable sites, could suffer from incursions displaced from the newly protected sites and the situation will be kept under review.

2.6 Wolverhampton Homes will also monitor sites potentially vulnerable to displaced incursions and if any other City of Wolverhampton land is deemed at risk further reports will be considered by SEB and Councillors to determine appropriate actions, including further protective measures.

3.0 Progress and Proposals

3.1 It was agreed by SEB on 23 August 2016 that the relatively low cost improvement works shown below in Table 1 should begin, without delay, for a total cost not likely to exceed £20,000.

Table 1

Reference	Location	Remedy	Total cost of works £
1	Swimming and Fitness Centre, Bentley Bridge	New bollards to be installed by the site entrance	3,000
2	Ashmore Park	New wooden bollards following further site assessment	1,000
3	Fowlers Park	New double opening height barrier	5,000
4	Bee Lane Playing Fields	New double opening height barrier	5,000
5	Science Park (Park and Ride)	New double opening height barrier	5,000
6	Bilston Urban Village development site	Additional heavy concrete blocks	1,000
Total			20,000

3.2 Steelpark Way and Bearings Drive, Wednesfield

3.2.1 Access to these vulnerable sites is along a public highway without restrictions and the encampments have also occurred on a public highway which prevents the Police using

their powers to evict. Therefore, depending upon court availability, an incursion may last up to 14 days.

3.2.2 Companies affected by recent incursions include:

- Tatar Steel
- Arnold Clark Car & Van Rental
- GTG Training - providers of training services to many of the UK's largest companies, including Arnold Clark Automobiles Ltd, major banks, public utilities, emergency services, the NHS, the M.O.D. and many local authorities. They also offer a range of modern apprenticeship programmes and offer locations for meetings, conferences and events.
- Architectural Aluminium Coatings Ltd (AAC Ltd)

3.2.3 Two incursions in 2016 caused severe reputational damage to these companies with a loss of customer orders to AAC Ltd who felt the need to take their own costly measures to deter future incursions. There was also deep concern over the safety of the Traveller children playing in the highway with a high volume of HGVs trying to pass through. Such was the impact of the most recent incursion in May 2016 that AAC Ltd considered moving from Bearings Drive if a solution to prevent further incursions cannot be found. The Council has already contributed in the region of £6,000 towards the costs incurred by AAC Ltd in relation to site protection measures taken at Steelpark Way.

3.2.4 Following consultation with Transportation and Highways, the most practical solution to prevent further incursions is considered to be the installation of two electric rising kerb barriers directly in to the road surface. These barriers could be controlled by the companies listed in 3.2.2 and a variety of access control options are available including proximity card, radio, token, keypad and intercom. Remote control of the barriers is also possible. The supplying company would need to survey the location and advise on the type and location of the barriers.

3.3 Murdoch Road, Bilston

3.3.1 As with Steelpark Way, access is along a public highway without restrictions and the encampments have been along a road which can significantly slow the eviction process for the reason given in in section 3.2.1

3.3.2 Companies affected by recent incursions include:

- D.S.Willetts (Stainless) Ltd – A company profiling stainless steel since 1986 and which carries a large stainless steel stock range
- MF Hawkins & Sons Ltd – a company specialising in expert metal finishing services
- Parker Precision - A manufacturer of precision components for over 60 years and having a customer base supplying a range of industries including: aerospace, oil, defence, electronics & medical

3.3.3 The current metal swing gate across the highway is impractical and ineffective at preventing Travellers as evidenced by at least nine recorded incursions since 2014. D.S.Willetts (Stainless) Ltd has repeatedly reported severe disruption to their business

owing to obstruction of delivery vehicles and they feel that regular incursions are harming the area's reputation. There are concerns over the safety of the children who have been known to ride on the back of HGVs and reports that recent groups have used threatening behaviour and general intimidation towards employees who feel vulnerable in such a remote location.

- 3.3.4 Following consultation with Transportation and Highways, a single electric rising kerb barrier is thought to be the most practical solution to prevent further incursions. This would be controlled by the companies listed in 3.3.2 and, as above, a variety of access control options are available. Again, as above, the supplying company would need to advise on the type and precise location of the barrier to try and avoid any incursion displacement.
- 3.4 Quotes range from £15,000 to £50,000 for a single road blocker depending on the type and specification. The price includes installation, routine service and breakdown call - out cover and a range of access solutions. Consultation with all affected parties and compliance with statutory requirements would be required before placing an order. This cost does not include possible Statutory Undertakers costs: service diversions for example. A delivery time of 8 weeks from the time the order is placed is thought to be a realistic period.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The current estimated average revenue cost to the Council of forcefully clearing an unauthorised encampment exceeds £3,000 per incursion which includes legal fees, private bailiff costs and waste removal costs. During 2015/16 there were 20 unauthorised encampments at a cost to the Council in the region of £60,000. To date in this financial year there have been seven unauthorised encampments at a cost of £21,000. It is anticipated that the investment proposed in this report will significantly reduce the revenue costs going forward.
- 4.2 Investment in security improvements works at sites detailed in table 1 are estimated to cost in the region of £20,000 and will benefit both residents and businesses within the City. It is anticipated that the works at Bentley Bridge Swimming and Fitness Centre, Ashmore Park and Bilston Urban Village development site for an estimated cost of £5,000 will be met primarily by budget underspends elsewhere across City Environment. In the event that underspends are insufficient Cabinet approval is sought for a contribution not exceeding £5,000 from the Budget Contingency Reserve.
- 4.3 Works at the remaining sites; Fowlers Park, Bee Lane playing fields and the Science Park are eligible for capitalisation and require capital resources of £15,000. Approval is sought to a total virement of £15,000, in accordance with the Councils financial procedure rules, from the Corporate Contingency provision across these three individual capital projects as detailed in table 1. This adjustment in the capital programme will be included in the next update of the capital programme presented to Cabinet and Full Council.
- 4.4 It is anticipated that the improvement works proposed at Steelpark Way and Murdoch Road have an estimated minimum cost of £45,000 not exceeding £150,000. This will

require further capital resources therefore Cabinet endorsement is sought at this meeting to progress with works at these sites. Approval is sought to a total virement of £150,000 to fund the maximum anticipated expenditure, in accordance with the Councils financial procedure rules, from the Corporate Contingency provision to the two individual capital projects listed above. This adjustment in the capital programme will be included in the next update of the capital programme presented to Cabinet and Full Council. Statutory Undertaker costs for possible service diversions are not included within these cost estimates. [TK/020916/Z]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 The primary legal implications that emerge from this report involve the closure of highways at Steelpark Way and Murdoch Road.
- 5.2 The appropriate legal process would need to be followed in order to properly complete the road closures and associated site security works.[RB/01092016/J]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are protected against race discrimination because of their ethnic group under the Equality Act 2010 and a welfare needs assessment is always carried out before deciding to proceed with an eviction. Furthermore RRR Consultancy Ltd has been commissioned to undertake the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) element of the joint SHMA for Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton and South Staffordshire councils.

7.0 Environmental implications

- 7.1 Unauthorised encampments can cause damage to the local environment during the period of their stay and clean - up costs following voluntary or forced eviction can be considerable. It is important to note that this programme of works will not mean a permanent end to unauthorised encampments within Wolverhampton with some displacement likely. However addressing these initial targets should help to make Wolverhampton become a less attractive destination for groups of Gypsy's and Travellers wishing to set up an encampment on Council owned land and highways.

8.0 Human resources implications

- 8.1 Dealing with unauthorised encampments is a significant drain on human resources during the busiest time of year for both the City of Wolverhampton and the Police. The measures outlined above would help alleviate those pressures. Additional resource may be required to deliver the schemes at Murdoch Road and Steelpark Way.

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 9.1 None

10.0 Schedule of background papers

- 10.1 Report titled: Improving security at vulnerable unauthorised encampment sites across Wolverhampton to Place Leadership Team 15 August 2016 and SEB 23 August 2016.