

Unauthorised Encampments

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on Unauthorised Encampments Policy and site activity in 2020 and the associated financial and service impact
- 1.2 For the Area Committees to review the sites in their area that have been used in the past 3 years and decide on whether they wish to consider any mitigation measures on sites in their area from Area Committee budgets.

2.0 Background on the Unauthorised Encampment Policy

- 2.1 The Council aims to meet the needs of all of its residents and to ensure fair and equal treatment for Gypsies and Travellers, in a way that facilitates the traditional and nomadic way of life of travellers, while respecting the interests of the settled community. This is in line with Government guidance and legislation.
- 2.2 The Council has an Unauthorised Encampment Policy with accompanying guidance and procedures to ensure a consistent approach to unauthorised encampments within its administrative boundary. In line with Government guidance the Policy encourages an acceptance approach to unauthorised encampments.
- 2.3 For the purpose of this Policy, an acceptance approach is one that allows those of a nomadic lifestyle, including small groups of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, to stay on a site for a short period of time, providing that the location is safe and specified criteria relating to conduct is met.
- 2.4 To manage the policy and all associated response activity the Encampment Review Group (ERG) has been established. The ERG meets regularly to review and deliver all activity required within the Policy and respond to residents and Member queries and complaints. The ERG has a designated email address of encampmentreviewgroup@sunderland.gov.uk.
- 2.5 If an encampment is on Council land and following site inspection there are no concerns regarding the encampment, then the encampment can be accepted for a length of agreed time (Council officer's discretion on circumstances).
- 2.6 This should be a maximum of 5 days, unless in exceptional circumstances, when a longer period of time can be agreed by the visiting officer. The cumulative stay of encampments within the administrative City boundary should be no more than 21 days within any three-month period.
- 2.7 Where the Council agrees to accept an encampment for a period of time, the campers will be provided with a Code of Conduct and Information as to what they can expect from the Council and what will be expected of the encampment. Evidence of failure to follow the code of conduct can result in eviction action.
- 2.8 All encampments will be visited, and a welfare assessment will be undertaken. Any requirements from the Welfare Assessment will be acted upon as soon as possible.

3.0 COVID impact on Unauthorised Encampment Policy

- 3.1 This year has been an abnormal year compared to other years in the way which the Council could implement its Policy. Government issued guidance which highlighted travellers as a vulnerable group and that they could not be evicted from the encampment in the normal arrangements within our policy.
- 3.2 Therefore, encampments when they arrived stayed longer than they would have done previously due to the Council being unable to take legal action as it normally would do to remove the encampment within the Policy timescales.
- 3.3 Officers did attempt to negotiate with all encampments a period of stay but this was successful in some instances but not always as some travellers refused to engage in these negotiations.
- 3.4 Through the Council's allocated COVID budget provision was made this year to cover with the additional potential impact and cost of this year's encampments, such as welfare provision. Other costs, such as cleansing were picked up by normal day to day operational budgets as they have been previously.

4.0 Site activity in 2020

- 4.1 This year there has been 21 encampments as at 4th August 2020. The breakdown is:

Site	Number of encampments
JSP, Washington	7
Wormhill Terrace	1
Albany Park	2
Grangetown	1
Hetton Lyons Country Park	3
Houghton (former colliery)	1
Mulberry Way	1
Northumbria Centre	1
Rainton Bridge	2
Rickleton Park	1
Spout Lane	1
TOTAL	21

- Every site has been visited and 21 welfare visits have been carried out.
- The ERG up to 4th August has met 26 times and its membership is:
 - X2 Housing Officers
 - X1 Legal representative
 - X1 Security representative
 - X1 Police representative

5.0 Site financial implications

- 5.1 Under Government guidance and emphasised by issued COVID guidance, it is required that the Council supports the traveller's and encampments with welfare provision. This year the Council has provided water and toilets on various sites. The items and costs are shown below:

Item	Costs to date
Water bowsers	£522
Toilets	£306.20
TOTAL	£828.20

- 5.2 There have been several incidents where water bowsers have gone missing/stolen and there has been fire damage to toilet units. The costs of this are:

Item	Costs to date
Water bowsers – missing/stolen	£1,499
Toilets – fire damaged	£920
TOTAL	£2419

- 5.3 Following regular visits or when a site is vacated the Council, if needed, undertakes any clearance and works to tidy up the site. The details of these works up to 4th August 2020 are:

Location	Number of Clearance activities	Total Costs
Coalfields		
Hetton Lyons Park	1	£201
TOTAL	1	£201
Washington		
James Steel Park	17	£2274
Rickleton Park	1	£153
Stephenson Ind. Estate	2	£117
TOTAL	20	£2544
East		
Grangetown	1	£107
TOTAL	1	£107
GRAND TOTAL	22	£2852

6.0 Site assessments

- 6.1 It has been suggested that over the past few years some sites have proved difficult and may not be suitable as a site for an encampment. Following residents and Member complaints it was agreed that the Council would review all sites across the City that have been used as sites over the past 3 years and to develop, where necessary, measures that could prevent future encampments without breaching the aims of the tolerance policy in place. Each Area Committee would need to take this into account when making their decisions of any measures on sites in their area.
- 6.2 The full list of potential site mitigation measures and costs are shown within Appendix 1 for consideration by the Area Committee.
- 6.3 It is up to the Area Committee if they wish to take forward any measures highlighted in the report against any of the sites in their area and all associated capital costs would be met from Area Committee budgets.
- 6.4 Any future maintenance and revenue costs associated with these works would also fall onto the Area Committee budgets. It would be prudent if the Area Committee do

decide to deliver some of these works to set aside a future “maintenance” fund. It is unclear what level this fund should be but £1000 per annum would be prudent.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 Members are requested to:

- a. Note the contents of the report

Appendix 1

Location	Area Committee	Suitability of Site	Regularity of Use	Potential actions	Indicative costs
James Steel Park	Washington	Low – site is used regularly by local community and is highly visible to all passers-by. Safe as not near busy roads	High	X 7 Barriers to car parks	£32,775
Bonemill Roundabout (*see Rickleton / Harraton Park below)	Washington	Not suitable, encampment on grass verge alongside road, roundabout and visible to passers-by.	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape scheme • formation of mounds • introduction of trees and spring bulbs, wildflowers • 'birds mouth' fencing 	£11,500
Rickleton / Harraton Park	Washington	Low – site is used regularly by local community and is highly visible to all passers-by. Safe as not near busy roads	High	Proposal as above for Bonemill Lane. Option for birds mouth fence and vehicular barrier to manage access via Village Centre	£1,725
Elemore, Easington Lane	Coalfields	Low – site is used regularly by local community and is highly visible to all passers-by. Safe as not near busy roads	Low	Gate already on car park at golf course	n/a
Hetton Lyons Country Park	Coalfields	Low – site is used regularly by local community and is highly visible to all passers-by. Safe as not near busy roads	High	Barrier already in place on equestrian field. Provide barrier to car park at Ind Est entrance.	£5,175
Princess Anne Park, Washington	Washington	Low – site is used regularly by local community and is highly visible to all passers-by. Safe as not near busy roads	High	Barrier to View point car park	£5,750
Staites Road Car Park, Washington	Washington	Low – site is used regularly by local community and is highly visible to all passers-by. Safe as not near busy roads	High	Barrier to car park / trench and bund to adj highway verge	£4,600
Saint Nazaire Way, Grangetown	East	Low – site is used regularly by local community and is highly visible to all passers-by. Safe as not near busy roads	Low	Private land – cannot do anything	n/a
Shepherds Way Washington	Washington	Low – site is used regularly by local community and is highly visible to all passers-by. May be	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier to car park entrance • Post and wire fence to car park 	£5,750

		unsafe depending on exact location used due to road		perimeter	
Albany Park Washington	Washington	Low – site is used regularly by local community and is highly visible to all passers-by. Safe as not near busy roads	Medium	Bollards at Willowbrook, Collapsible Bollard at F-Pit, Bollard at Blue House Lane footpath, 2 Bollards at foot path next to zebra crossing, Soil bunding near F Pit NB. This has already been approved by Area Committee and works are being arranged to be delivered	£4,432
Northern Area Playing Fields (Northumbria Centre) but leads to larger site	Washington	Low – site is used regularly by local community and is highly visible to all passers-by. Safe as not near busy roads	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post and wire fence • Vehicular barrier at entrance to field. 	£6,900
Dykelands Road, Seaburn	North	Not suitable if encampment is situated on grass verge, alongside road, roundabout and visible to passers-by's	Low	Already fenced.	n/a
Rainton Meadows	Coalfields	Not suitable if encampment is situated on grass verge, alongside road, roundabout and visible to passers-by.	Medium	Ind Est South consider introduction of feature fencing. Ind Est Nth has barrier in place. Highway verge (adjacent to A690) could potentially bund this area but would need to maintain access to private field adjacent.	£9,200
Grasswell, Houghton, / Hetton	Coalfields	Low – site is used regularly by local community and is highly visible to all passers-by. Safe as not near busy roads	Medium	Already boulders in place – provide larger boulder adj Ruby St. Lockable barrier to be provided on access road rather than boulder	£2,300