

 Executive 11th December 2013		Agenda Item No. 11
Title	Review of Security of Open Spaces Within Warwick District Council to Prevent Illegal Encampments	
For further information about this report please contact	Ian Coker	
Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	NA	
Background Papers	NA	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	Yes
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes Ref 529
Equality & Sustainability Impact Assessment Undertaken	No
No additional action recommended at this time.	

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	18 th Nov	Chris Elliott
Head of Service	18 th Nov	Ian Coker
CMT		
Section 151 Officer	18 th Nov	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer		
Finance	18 th Nov	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	18 th Nov	Cllr Shilton
Consultation & Community Engagement		
Final Decision		Yes
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Councillors have asked officers to look at measures to increase security at a number of our open spaces across the District following comments they have received from members of the public about illegal encampments which took place on these sites earlier in the year. The report sets out the current position and options open to the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That current arrangements for securing sites are maintained, and the Council together with its contractors continue to assist in minimising the impact of illegal encampments that take place on our open spaces.

3. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Increasing security measures on some of our open spaces is likely to displace the problem to other sites in the district, and as a result will not resolve the problem of illegal encampments for the Council.
- 3.2 Securing every open space from illegal encampment is impractical, and is contrary to the reason they are provided, which is to be attractive and accessible to the public.
- 3.2 The direct financial cost to the Council of dealing with issues resulting from illegal encampments is relatively small, and covered by resources already funded within the Council's Street Cleansing Contract.
- 3.3 The impact illegal encampments have on local residents is more difficult to resolve, however making some sites more secure is likely to increase the issue at the other sites where encampments have taken place. In addition to try and secure all the sites where encampments have taken place will only increase the threat to other potentially vulnerable sites which have not as yet been subject to illegal encampment.

4. POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 4.1 WDC works within a joint policy between Warwickshire County Council, all District Councils and Warwickshire Police for dealing with unauthorised encampments within Warwickshire.
- 4.2 As part of the Local Plan Warwick District Council is looking to identify potential sites for Gypsies & Travellers. The Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment commissioned in 2012 identified a need for 31 pitches over the next 15 years, 25 within five years, as well as 6-8 transit pitches. WCC are looking at providing the transit position for the whole County with one site in the north and another in the South.
- 4.3 Once in place the Council will be able to direct Gypsies and Travellers onto these sites making illegal encampment on the current sites being used across the District by Gypsies and Travellers easier to deal with.

5. BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 In most cases there is little additional cost to the Council resultant from illegal encampment as cleanup costs are included in the street cleaning contract.

- 5.2 There has been a loss sport pitch income as a result of illegal encampment at Harbury Lane and from car parking income at Myton Fields. A number of illegal encampments had taken place at Harbury Lane over many years. After each encampment additional measures were introduced. In the autumn of 2012 an investment of £12k was made at Harbury Lane to prevent encampment. That investment included security gates, fencing, height restriction barrier and heavy duty lock.
- 5.3 That investment has been successful in that there have been no encampments for 12 months. However there has been an increase in the number of encampments at other nearby sites. There are therefore no plans to invest funding to try to secure any other open spaces across the District.
- 5.4 If members were mindful to undertake that work identified in 7.8 then funding of £17.5k would be required. No budget is currently available to fund this work and as a result the funding would need to be met from the contingency budget.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S) CONSIDERED

- 6.1 To implement increased security measures at sites currently subject to illegal encampments, which has been discounted as evidence points to the fact that this merely moves the problem to other sites in the district.
- 6.2 To secure all open spaces in the district, this has been discounted due to the significant cost to carry out this work, and the impact on the aesthetics and accessibility of open spaces.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 There are approximately 180 open spaces owned by Warwick District Council, varying in size, usage and accessibility. These areas include parks, woodlands, wildlife areas, car parks, playing fields, children's play areas, burial grounds and amenity green space.
- 7.2 The report gives an update on the number of illegal encampments that have taken place on WDC land over the last 5 years, and the issues that result from such incursions.
- 7.3 Sites have been assessed with regards to their current level of security/accessibility, and further steps that could be taken to restrict use by unauthorised encampments
- 7.4 Indicative costs have been compiled to give an estimate of the cost associated with making open spaces secure, and an outline of issues that would result from carrying out such works. Open spaces are by their nature designed to be as accessible as possible to the public, normally offering more than one entrance point, and in some cases allowing access to car parks on the site.
- 7.5 These sites are therefore prone to use for unauthorised encampments, even where existing restrictions such as gates and bollards are present.
- 7.6 Over the past 5 years there have been 22 illegal encampments on 8 WDC sites, totalling 140 days, which include:-

Location	Number of encampments
Abbey Fields, Kenilworth	3
Warwick Racecourse / Hampton Road	4
Harbury Lane, Bishops Tachbrook	6
Myton Fields, Warwick	4
Newbold Comyn, Leamington Spa	1
Redland Park, Whitnash	1
Shrubland Park, Leamington Spa	1
The Holt, Cubbington	2

As a comparison there have been 60 illegal encampments on Warwickshire County Council land/adopted highway within Warwick District over the same period.

- 7.7 As an example Harbury Lane Sports Field near Bishops Tachbrook was subject to 6 unauthorised encampments between 2010 and 2012, until increased security measures were put in place at a cost of £12k, which included security gates, fencing, height restriction barrier and heavy duty lock.

This has reduced the number of encampments at Harbury Lane but during the last year there have been encampments at Redland and Shrubland Park's which had not had encampments in the previous year.

- 7.8 Using the costs for the types of works carried out at Harbury Lane as a basis, an estimate has been made of the cost to secure the other open spaces that have been subject to illegal encampments, which are shown below:-

Abbey Fields, Kenilworth / New gates with heavy duty locks	£6k
Hampton Road, Warwick / Open car park too expensive to secure	£NA
Myton Fields, Warwick / Open car park too expensive to secure	£NA
Newbold Comyn, L. Spa / Open car park too expensive to secure	£NA
Redland Park, Whitnash / New gate, heavy duty lock	£3k
Shrubland Park, L. Spa / New gate, heavy duty lock	£3k
The Holt, Cubbington / New field gate, heavy duty lock	£3k
Bunding	£2.5k

- 7.9 From experience increased security measures will not always guarantee the prevention of illegal encampments, as cutting of locks and barriers has taken place prior to illegal encampments taking place.
- 7.10 Some sites have access via roads and car parks on sites which cannot be secured all the time, as they are used by residents, visitors and contractors carrying out maintenance operations.

7.11 A desk top evaluation has been carried out of the security of all WDC sites in the district, which have been categorised as follows:-

Sites with no access/secure	56 sites
Unlikely to be used for illegal encampments	89 sites
Open site/possible access	35 sites

7.12 Increasing security of sites historically used for illegal encampments will potentially concentrate the problem on the areas that cannot be secured easily such as car parks. If these sites are then secured, the problem will move to other sites, eventually requiring all sites to be made secure.

7.13 Apart from the cost to implement improved security measures, there would be a significant impact on the aesthetics of the districts open spaces and the ease with which genuine users of these spaces would be able to access them.

7.14 The Council does offer waste receptacles to illegal encampments to try to minimise the impact on the cleanliness of the site. The cost of providing this service and any subsequent tidying of the site are included within the Street Cleansing Contract through the provision of Community Cleansing Teams.

7.15 The provision of temporary sites for travellers is being investigated alongside the Local Plan. This would reduce the likelihood of illegal encampment taking place and would assist the Council with the support of the Police to move travellers off open green space sites thus reducing the need to invest further in preventative measures.

7.16 By next year the County Council should have available two stop over sites in the county. Although this will not prevent travellers arriving it should provide a much quicker method to move them than we currently have, thereby limiting the disruption/cost they cause.