

CABINET

23 May 2023

This report is submitted as an addendum to Agenda Item 4. The Chair will be asked to decide if it can be considered at the meeting under the provisions of Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 as a matter of urgency in order to consider issues raised by the local MP prior to the Cabinet making a decision on the matter.

Title: Addendum to LBBB Draft Local Plan: Provision of Gypsy and Traveller Sites in Barking and Dagenham	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Development	
Open Report	For Decision
Wards Affected: All wards	Key Decision: Yes
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Summary: A letter dated 19 May 2023 (Appendix 1) and accompanying documents (Appendices 2 and 3) have been received from Jon Cruddas, MP for Dagenham and Rainham constituency, relating to the report at agenda item 4 (LBBB Draft Local Plan: Provision of Gypsy and Traveller Sites in Barking and Dagenham). The letter raises several concerns relating to Gypsy and Traveller site provision in the Borough and the allocation within the Local Plan of a site that would extend the existing Gypsy and Traveller site further into Eastbrookend Country Park. The concerns raised include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The lack of an identified, alternative brownfield site and the conclusion that 47 Thames Road is not suitable;• The appropriateness of the extension of the Eastbrookend Country Park Gypsy and Traveller site when compared to other sites in the attached topic paper;• The lack of reference to the proposed extension of the Eastbrookend Country Park Gypsy and Traveller site within Appendix A;• The future implications for the Green Belt should the Traveller site be extended further into Eastbrookend Country Park;• The state of repair of the current Gypsy and Traveller site.	

It should be noted that the Cabinet paper is not proposing anything new with regards to the in-principle extension of the existing Eastbrookend site. This site is already allocated in the draft Local Plan which, following approval by Cabinet in October 2020, was submitted to the Secretary of State in December 2021. The Plan underwent public consultation prior to its submission. It received limited responses relating to Gypsy and Traveller site provision, and no representations opposing the in-principle extension of the Eastbrookend Country Park Gypsy and Traveller site as part of the Reg 19(1) and Reg 19(2) consultations. There is no option available to remove this site as an allocation from the Plan unless this is recommended by the Planning Inspectors.

It is acknowledged that there are concerns surrounding the extension of the existing Traveller site, not least due to its location in the Green Belt which will also be a consideration for the Inspectors during the Local Plan examination hearings. However, as set out in the Cabinet paper and Gypsy and Traveller Topic Paper, after undertaking a thorough assessment of 60 sites, planning officers have unfortunately not been able to identify any further suitable sites. Alongside the now apparent lack of deliverability of the two other sites previously put forward in the draft Local Plan, the report therefore must conclude that the only remaining option, at this time, is the in-principle use of land at Eastbrookend Country Park for an extended facility should a future need arise.

It should be re-iterated that nothing within this paper authorises the physical extension of the existing site or the delivery of any alternative sites. The decision to be made by Cabinet on 23rd May centres solely around how we as a Borough are able to meet the site allocation requirements for the remainder of our anticipated need. Should Cabinet agree to the recommendations currently presented and the need for new Traveller pitches subsequently arises, any proposed site would be subject to the normal planning application process including rigorous public consultation. In addition to the statutory planning requirements, Cabinet approval would be required for the committal of council finances to deliver the pitches and associated infrastructure. A full options appraisal would be presented to Cabinet at this stage.

The Cabinet paper sets out the reasons 47 Thames Road is not considered to be deliverable as a Gypsy and Traveller site at this time. This is due to the social and financial implications attached to it. It should be noted that even if this site were to be included in the Local Plan, the current extension at Eastbrookend Country Park cannot be removed from the Local Plan Examination at this stage given the submitted status of the Plan. Including 47 Thames Road would therefore need to be in addition to the Eastbrookend site and not as a replacement.

Officers understand the complex issues surrounding the proposed extension and have worked hard to meet the need across the Borough, however, as the report sets out it has not been possible to identify sites that can accommodate the identified need. The recommendation put to Cabinet is therefore focused on a longer-term allocation for a state-of-the-art Gypsy and Traveller site in the Castle Green area, where we can aspire to meet the Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs of the Borough in full.

Appendix A of the Cabinet paper sets out the sites that have been assessed more recently as part of our continued efforts to locate a suitable site since the submission of the draft Local Plan. It should also be noted that no sites came forward during our additional dedicated Gypsy and Traveller Site Call for Sites (6 March until 17 April).

Officers are aware of concerns raised by residents regarding antisocial behaviour associated with the existing site. In its role as landlord of the site, the Council is working to address these concerns through enforcement. There are also ongoing concerns in relation to the quality of the infrastructure provided to the Traveller population in occupation. Again, in its role as landlord the Council is working to address this. Whilst these are clearly live issues that need to be managed, we cannot conflate issues with current site management and our legal obligations with regards to the delivery of a Local Plan.

Recommendation(s)

The Cabinet is recommended to consider the issues raised in this report and accompanying documents prior to reaching its decision on the recommendations set out under agenda item 4.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report: None

List of Appendices:

- Appendix 1: Letter from J Cruddas MP dated 19 May 2023
- Appendix 2: Be First's Gypsy and Traveller Topic Paper
- Appendix 3: Barking and Dagenham Gypsy and Traveller Site Funding Bid