

Housing Scrutiny Briefing Report

Commission Meeting : 17th December 2015

Management of Gypsy and Travellers Sites (Update)

Asst Mayor Councillor Connelly
Lead director: Ann Branson



City Mayor

Useful information

- Wards affected: Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields, Abbey and Beaumont Leys
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1. The Council opened 2 new Gypsy and Travelers' Sites, Redhill Nook on 13/04/2015 & Greengate Nook on 20/04/2015 and opened the newly refurbished Meynells Gorse site on 15/06/2015
2. The Housing Scrutiny commission asked for a progress report six months after the sites opened.
3. The Gypsy & Traveller (G&T) team consists of the Manager and two site management officers. They report to Marie Murray - Area Manager, Housing Division. The Gypsy & Traveller Site Management Officers (G&T SMO) continue to build the trust the residents have with LCC and they are working with other agencies to help support the Gypsy and Traveller community.
4. The 3 members of the G&T team deal with all management issues for all three sites;
 - Meynells Gorse = 21 plots
 - Redhill Nook = 10 plots
 - Greengate Nook = 6 plots
5. The majority of residents on all three sites abide by the terms of their plot license and maintain their plots and surrounding areas. A very good professional relationship has been developed between the G&T SMO and the families on site.

6. Allocation Of Plots

- 6.1 All Sites are fully occupied. There have been two terminations of plots since the sites opened. Allocation of plots is carried out in accordance with LCC's Allocations Policy for Gypsy and Travellers. There is a waiting list for Gypsy and Travellers, that meet the criteria, wishing to apply for plots on the three sites :-
 - When new application forms are received they are registered, dated and banded and further information/proofs requested as necessary – including checks with Multi Agency and Travellers Unit (MATU)
 - Monthly manual checks of register made (G&TSMO) and applications will be reviewed annually in line with LCC's allocation's policy
 - None of those currently registered are roadside in Leicester

7. Site Management

- The G&T SMO are based on site in the Meynells Gorse office adjoining the small community hub.
- The G&T SMO carryout daily visits to all three sites. The visits will include inspection of sites, home visits, reporting repairs etc.
- They advise residents of contractor visits to the sites and they also escort any contractors or visitors to the site.
- Site officers are available daily to meet with residents in the Meynells Gorse community hub to offer advice and guidance, for example in relation to welfare support. This support from the G&T SMO is also offered on an outreach basis to those residents on other sites that cannot come to the Meynells Gorse community hub.
- G&T SMO will take appropriate action if there are breaches of license agreement.
- Local residents can request meetings with the G&T SMO.
- Newsheets are hand delivered to residents of each site. The frequency of newsheets will depend on what issues/information residents need to be made aware of, for example details of contractor visits to site, bulk collection information
- Ward Councillors have visited the sites within their ward.
- There have been incidents of ASB and CCTV damage at Redhill Nook and Meynells Gorse and we are working closely with the police and residents on sites to address this and options for the reinstatement of CCTV are being considered.
- Cllr Connelly continues to receive weekly updates on the issues arising at each site and how they are being dealt with. It is very positive to see that the numbers of reported issues have reduced significantly in recent weeks.

8. Site Specific Issues

Meynells Gorse

Defects/Repairs

- Water Temperature Compression Valves - Identified as defect works and carried out under defect process.
- Fencing – Defect works now completed fencing replaced
- Wall Heaters –defective and/or poor installation, contractors have replaced
- Low water pressure throughout the site - Severn Trent identified a water leak on the mains supply pipe as the likely cause. The water leak has been repaired. Feedback to be obtained from residents regarding the water pressure.

Redhill Nook

Defects

- Drainage issues- septic tank was only running on one pump. A replacement pump has been installed.
- Landscaping on plots (Gravel) - A site meeting has taken place with Highways and the General Building Works Team to ascertain what solution and materials can be used to assist with the draining of the plots. A schedule of remedial works is to be carried out to the plots within the Redhill Nook Site and Greengate Nook Site.*

Greengate Nook

Defects

- Drainage issues - BIO disc was only running on one pump, a replacement pump has been installed.
- Landscaping (Gravel) - there have been issues with poor drainage/ flooding at certain plots. see above*

The G&T SMO have been working very closely with contractors and LCC General Building Works section, plus liaising daily with licensees regarding any defects/repairs they may have had at their plot.

9. CCTV

9.1 Greengate Nook.

There has only been one minor incident where the camera was pointed upwards. There has been no repeat and CCTV does not appear to be an issue with the residents.

9.2 Red Hill Nook.

Currently there is no CCTV coverage of the Redhill Nook site. Initial installation of CCTV was vandalized. However, until recently there were two cameras in operation, one covering the entrance to the site and the other monitoring this camera. Both were cut down in October. Police were not able to identify the perpetrators.

9.3 Meynells Gorse.

CCTV cameras had been installed on the Meynells Gorse site; however these were vandalized and are inoperable. Currently there is one camera located on the Park and Ride site next to Meynells Gorse; this covers the whole of the site.

9.4 A proposal to reduce the overall numbers of cameras on all sites has been agreed and, in consultation with residents, cameras will be sited to cover the entrances and main road through the sites. Cameras retrieved from the sites will be utilized elsewhere in the city. Our CCTV Service and Change Manager is currently working with contractors to take this forward.

10. Anti-Social Behaviour

Meynells Gorse

There have been issues of fly tipping. All residents have all been made aware of bulk collection services and city cleansing wardens visit weekly. We have seen a marked reduction in fly tipping in recent weeks.

Meynells Gorse and Redhill Nook

Site residents had complained of visitors to the site speeding. Speed Humps have been installed on both sites and this has significantly reduced incidents of speeding.

Greengate Nook

Local residents have raised concerns about horses, chickens and dogs being kept on the on the land either side of the Greengate Nook site by residents of the site. There have also been complaints regarding fencing panels being taken out by residents of the Greengate Nook site. Our General Building works section are currently developing a device to prevent the fencing panels being removed. Local residents also met with the Assistant Mayor for Housing, Director of Housing, Local Councilor and Local Police Inspector to put forward their concerns.

Over all the sites where breaches of license have been proven the G&T SMO will and have served warnings on residents. In the main residents are abiding by the license agreements.

11. Multi agency work

- The police set up a joint working group with housing and LCC to look at tactical options relating to criminal damage to the CCTV at the permanent Gypsy and traveller sites. The police and Housing are able to share information on a regular basis to ensure that appropriate action is taken, to disrupt the activities of those involved in criminality and anti-social behaviour preventing peaceful and harmonious living for those around them.
- Close working relations with the Multi-Agency Travellers Unit (MATU) exist for ' across the board' issues in relation to the Gypsy and Traveller Community
- The Travellers' Health Team have commenced monthly surgeries at the Meynells Gorse Community room (October 2015)
- A referral pathway specifically for travellers and gypsies has been developed with the Community Advice and Law Centre, a debt support group, giving them a single point of contact for debt support
- G&TSMO are in monthly contact with the School Liaison Officer and Education Welfare Team to support children on all sites into education. The Education Welfare Officer (EWO) and the Exclusion Officer (EO) liaise with

families who have made the choice for elective home education for children.

- The G&T SMO successfully applied for funding from the Braunstone & Rowley field ward community meeting for £1800 towards getting a youth bus activity started. Funding was agreed November 2016.
- Site officers have also begun the initial stages of applying for lottery funding for additional funds for the youth bus activity and also for play equipment for the Meynells' Gorse play area. They are working together with the Gypsy and Traveller Equality unit (GATE).
- Once we have established those aged 14 -19 and not in education, employment or training (NEET), we can arrange for Connexions to supply an outreach worker, one morning per week based at the Meynells Gorse community room, to work with the young people. They are aware that building trust will be key to any progress.
- The Drug and Alcohol Team are linked in with the Criminal Justice system and are keen to create a service on the sites to pass on drug and alcohol information. but also use the Hub if possible for national standard appointments. These are Probation appointments or court bail appointments for those in the Criminal Justice system. The advantage being that the Drug and Alcohol Team can access a hard to reach client group, and those in the C.J system do not have to travel far to attend mandatory appointments
- G&T SMO have been liaising with Leicester College re opportunities for residents on the Gypsy and Traveller sites to potentially apply for apprenticeships. The project that will hopefully come on to the sites is called Launch Pad, they specialise in working with those furthest away from the job market. They would offer vocational work experience to start with over a period of 6 weeks with maths and English running alongside to increase employability skills. Minimal literacy skills were discussed and it was highlighted that the Launch Pad scheme works mainly from a practical ethos but there does have to be some class room time to gain Maths and English experience. The work experience would be with a Leicester based company and once completed an apprenticeship could hopefully be applied for.

12. Current Policy in operation on all 3 sites - Education Welfare Officer

- Pupil referral meetings held at schools with the lead officers at the schools and with the Education welfare officer (EWO)
- Constant feedback and liaising with agencies to find the whereabouts of families and to chase up attendance, behaviour and welfare, this currently includes liaising with the Gypsy & Traveller Manager and Site Management officers on all three sites
- Liaising with postal services – to ensure parents are giving correct addresses and receiving regular post from schools and agencies
- For children not receiving education there is a monitoring policy in place and if they are not in school the EWO will work with schools and agencies
- The Traveller policy and practice implemented by Education Welfare has become blueprint for all the schools in Leicester. The idea is to catch all families in the net and parents have a better understanding of the need for education
- There is provision of training to schools and agencies on the New Traveller policy and how it operates
- At the next level Education Welfare hold tenants panel meetings – these are the first step to a legal prosecution meeting for non-attendance at meetings
- Then they issue penalty notices and where required issue police and criminal evidence interviews and take parents to court if necessary where they will be fined for non-attendance
- Close monitoring of attendance in schools with dedicated officers, those schools that run the policy have individual officers, or the Education and Welfare Officer, EWO, for the schools
- EWO cover three or four schools – anywhere there is a traveller child they will oversee this work
- Also work with county team and traveller lodge (unit for traveller families)
- Currently going through the information of all those that have moved off site to find out where they are now
- “Regarding Elective Home Education (EHE) – if a family chooses to home educate on legal grounds – the local authority do not have legal grounds to prevent them. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) make contact with the family and inform them of their rights, responsibilities and the role of the Local Authority (LA) in such cases. Cases are then referred to the Elective Home Education Advisor to make an assessment on appropriateness according to age, aptitude and ability and make a recommendation to Education Welfare Service of the suitability of EHE. If found unsuitable, the EWS will follow up the case by issuing a School Attendance Order (SAO)”.
- There are various issues which hinder online applications, particularly for first time admissions and year 7 transfers - the timing element of this is key and lack of e-mail address and Wi-Fi are among the issues faced.

- Gypsy and Roma Traveller Adviser is planning to hold sessions in the Meynells Gorse Hub for families to register first time admissions; this is being supported by the Choice Advisor.
- One primary school head and home school worker have visited sites and families have asked for homework support and help with reading letters sent home from school