

Report To: Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting: 4th July 2013
Lead Member / Officer: Head of Planning and Public Protection
Report Author: Planning Policy Manager
Title: Control of Caravan Sites

1. What is the report about?

1.1 The report is a follow up to the one presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee in July 2011 and provides an update on work which is on-going within the County on the Control of Caravan Sites.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 To provide information regarding the progress of the project to monitor and enforce legislative controls on caravan sites in the County and to control the emergence of new ones.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1 That Committee considers and provides observations on the direction of the project and for Officers to report back on the production of the Caravan Sites Strategy document for Denbighshire as well as action taken to date.

4. Report details.

4.1 There are a large number of caravan sites in the County, comprising a mix of static, touring and residential sites, which contribute to Denbighshire's tourist accommodation offer. The Council's Caravan Site License records indicate that there are approximately 6000 static caravan pitches, 900 touring caravan pitches and 70 residential caravan pitches. Proposals for new caravan sites are subject to planning controls and a requirement for a site license. However, historically there has been little co-ordinated work across the Council to cross reference planning and licensing information, carry out systematic monitoring of sites and to take appropriate action against any breaches of legislation.

4.2 Elected Members and others have expressed concerns about the proliferation of caravan sites in the County and how they may be being used. This issue has also been flagged up at National level by the Assembly Member, Darren Millar. He is seeking to introduce a Holiday Caravan Park Bill for Wales which may provide greater controls for Local Authorities to protect the "holiday" character of sites. It has been

identified that a proportion of people using caravans do so as their main or sole residence, avoiding Council tax and using local services. Some of the accommodation can be sub-standard and is possibly being used by vulnerable people in the community. The Police have also raised concerns about the increasing numbers of crimes being reported on caravan sites. As such, Officers acknowledge that this is a major issue for the County which will not only require cross-service co-operation but should also involve partner organisations such as the Police and Fire Service.

- 4.3 A review of caravan parks in the County and the development of a future strategy for the monitoring and enforcement of the parks have been initiated as a project within the Planning & Public Protection Service. This is being led by a steering group of senior officers from across the service, including public protection, planning policy and development control.
- 4.4 The project involves developing a robust evidence base, including planning and licensing information on all caravan sites in the County. This is being captured in a database which will be updated whenever new information becomes available, with a major update on an annual basis. This information will form the basis for the development of a Caravan Sites Strategy for Denbighshire. The proposal is that this would establish a monitoring framework for existing sites, establish a corporate cross-service working group with a single point of contact at officer level, and develop a clear strategy for the Council's future approach to caravan sites – both existing and new sites.
- 4.5 In addition it is suggested that the new Strategy document should involve the roles of the Police and Fire Service as well as the caravan park owners themselves. The Community Safety Partnership is running a linked project around "Safer Caravans" which is focussing on people protecting their belongings in caravans and the parks themselves. It is clear that the park owners are keen to ensure that sites are policed better. Discussions between the Council and park owners have shown that many owners are willing to actively participate in developing a clear strategy for the future management of their sites.
- 4.6 Council Officers are now inspecting caravan sites across the County and establishing the relevant information on these sites. This information is being used to establish exactly how they may be being used throughout the year. In many cases Caravan Parks are operating in accordance with planning permission and licensing requirements. They operate to provide holiday accommodation for tourists who have residential properties elsewhere. These people visit their caravans for holidays and return home after a short to medium stay.
- 4.7 However, it is clear that other sites are not being used in accordance with relevant consents. They contain people with no alternative

addresses who are clearly residing in the caravan. It is these sites which are being targeted by the Council Officers for appropriate action.

- 4.8 The “appropriate action” will involve working with partner organisations, caravan park owners and, where necessary, serving relevant enforcement notices. Officers are, however, also conscious of the wider implications of taking enforcement action. In some instances this may involve a person possibly losing their existing home. The involvement of colleagues in Social Services and Housing has also been noted.
- 4.9 Finally, it is important to mention that the Council has recently adopted the Local Development Plan. This provides an up to date policy context for dealing with new proposals for static, touring or chalet developments in the County. The new policies set more restrictive criteria for such developments in the County whilst recognising the need to enhance the tourist accommodation and outdoor activities offer in the County. Supplementary Guidance will also be produced which will provide further commentary on the control of caravan sites in the County.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 Controlling the way caravan parks are used contributes towards Council priorities:-
- Developing the local economy
 - Vulnerable people are protected and are able to live as independently as possible
 - Ensuring access to good quality housing

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1 The project and the development of the working group to take it forward are not considered to require any additional staffing or financial resources.

7. What are the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

- 7.1 An EqIA will be undertaken for the development of the Strategy document.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1 None.

9 Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 N/A

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1 There are no perceived risks associated with the recommendations in this report.

11. Power to make the Decision

11.1 Not applicable at this stage.

11.2 Article 6.3.3(a) of the Council's Constitution

Contact Officer:

Planning Policy Manager

Tel: 01824 706912