

<b>MAYOR AND CABINET</b>		
<b>Report Title</b>	Relocation of Travellers' Site – Results of Consultation	
<b>Key Decision</b>	Yes	Item No. 2
<b>Ward</b>		
<b>Contributors</b>	Executive Directors for Regeneration, Resources & Head of Law	
<b>Class</b>	Part 1	Date: 28 June 2007

## 1. Summary

This report sets out the outcome of the consultation process undertaken in May 2007 on the proposed relocation of the Travellers' Site. It sets out the key concerns associated with two alternative proposed sites and seeks a decision from the Mayor on which option to pursue..

## 2. Purpose

The current Travellers' site in Thurston Rd is required as part of the Lewisham Gateway redevelopment and is not fit for purpose. The purpose of this report is to set out the results of the consultation conducted on two alternative sites and to seek a decision from the Mayor on which option to pursue.

## 3. Policy Context

- 3.1 The Council has a duty under the Housing Act 2004 to assess the need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in its areas when it assesses housing requirements. On 8 June 2007 Communities and Local Government wrote to local housing authorities about the timetable for carrying out needs assessments requesting a response by 2 July 2007, the Council will respond to this request.
- 3.2 The changes proposed for Lewisham Town Centre as part of the Urban Renaissance in Lewisham Partnership include improving the transport interchange, creating opportunities for local people and promoting business success. The changes proposed will support the achievement of the Council's policy objective to strengthen the local economy.

## 4 Recommendations

That the Mayor:

- 4.1 notes the outcome of the consultation process on the proposed relocation of the Travellers' Site;
- 4.2 having considered the outcome of the consultation process and the other matters set out in this report, agrees to select the former Watergate School site in Church Grove as the preferred site for the relocation of the current Travellers;
- 4.3 agrees to instruct officers to proceed with further work on the design, planning and procurement to enable the site to be constructed at the selected site;
- 4.4 instructs officers to work with the Travellers and local residents in developing the proposals for the preferred site and to take the necessary steps to promote community cohesion.
- 4.5 notes that following completion of the further work on the design, planning and procurement for the preferred site, a further report will be brought back to Mayor and Cabinet to update the Mayor on progress and to agree any outstanding issues.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1 On 9<sup>th</sup> June 2004 the Mayor agreed the selection of a developer and agreed the heads of terms for the disposal of the Council's landholdings, including the Travellers' Site, within the Lewisham Gateway scheme to Lewisham Gateway Developments Limited (LGDL). The Council has joined the London Development Agency (LDA), Transport for London (TfL) and London Bus Services Ltd (LBSL) to form a public sector land owning consortium with the LDA taking the lead role. The Development Agreement between the consortium parties and AMEC and Taylor Woodrow was completed on 19 December 2006. The LDA are purchasing all other land interests required for the scheme using their compulsory purchase powers if necessary.
- 5.2 The purpose of the Lewisham Gateway scheme is the redevelopment of a site around Lewisham Station including a new transport interchange, an extension to the existing shopping centre and additional residential and commercial developments. The redevelopment area is collectively known as Lewisham Gateway.
- 5.3 The Travellers' site forms part of the redevelopment area and therefore needs to be relocated to facilitate the scheme. Prior to December 2006, two site searches were undertaken with a view to identifying a suitable replacement site. Neither of these two searches identified a suitable location that was both available and could be delivered within the required timescale. In 2006, officers identified the potential of using land, including a sports hall, adjacent to Ladywell Day Centre. This was explored by officers and was the subject of a planning application that was withdrawn in November 2006. The consultation with users of the

Day Centre revealed a high level of use of the gymnasium by service users including many of disabled people. Although it was possible to relocate users the alternatives presented significant difficulties to them and would be costly. It was decided not to pursue this option.

- 5.4 A condition survey of the Thurston Rd site was undertaken in November 2006. The report is highly critical of its present condition and supports the view of the Council and the Travellers that the existing site is no longer fit for purpose and should be relocated.
- 5.5 In December 2006 a site search was commissioned from CB Richard Ellis of suitable sites within the borough. On 18 April 2007 the Mayor considered a report that set out the results of this search and agreed that consultation with Travellers and local residents should be carried out on the use of the Laurence House Lorry Park site or the Church Grove site as being the preferred replacement site for Thurston Rd.. This report sets out the results of the consultation process.

## **6 Consultation Process**

- 6.1 Leaflets inviting comments in writing by 31<sup>st</sup> May 2007 and attendance at local public “drop in” meetings were delivered between 4-8 May 2007 to locations immediately adjacent to the two sites as follows:

Former Watergate School site: all the properties in Church Grove, 28/38 (even) Wearside Road and 29 - 57 Ladywell Road,

Laurence House Lorry Park: 7/15 Canadian Avenue plus British Telecom and the Power League, 187/199 (odd) Rushey Green, Stannard Court, 1/13 (odd) and 6/12 (even) Bromley Road and the

- 6.2 Local amenity societies: the Ladywell Society, the Ladywell Fields User Group and the Culverley Green Residents Association received letters enclosing a leaflet and inviting them to attend the consultation meetings and/or respond to the consultation. Two public “drop in” meetings were held at locations adjacent to the proposed sites. For the former Watergate site 54 people attended a meeting at St. Mary’s Church Crypt on 15 May 2007 and, on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2007 a further 65 people attended a similar event at the Power League Sports Hall to discuss the proposed use of Laurence House Lorry Park Site. Officers and planning and design consultants were available to answer questions from residents and to take feedback. Residents were requested to respond to the Leaflet (which included a space for this purpose) or could respond to an e-mail address set up for the purpose.
- 6.3 The Council received 63 separate written representations concerning the proposal to use the former Watergate Site, and one from the Ladywell Society and another from the Ladywell Fields User Group. It also received a letter from a firm of planning consultants on behalf of certain residents in Church Grove. This detailed why, in their opinion,

the Watergate School site was not suitable and that the Travellers Site should be located on the Laurence House Lorry Park Site. A summary of all the principle comments are included below. Of all of these, only one person was in favour of the proposal and this was on the basis that access was via Wearside Depot, not Church Grove.

- 6.4 The Council received 129 separate written representations concerning the proposal to use the Laurence House Lorry Park Site, including one from the Culverley Green Residents Association. In addition there were two petitions with a total of 503 signatures who were against the proposals and two letters from agents responsible for managing commercial properties in the Catford area. The following sets out a summary of all the principle comments with responses to the issues raised. Of the responses four were in favour of the proposal the rest were against.
- 6.5 In view of the large number of responses received copies of the responses have not been appended to this report but copies have been made available in the Members Rooms.

### ***General Concerns***

- 6.6 Many of the respondents in respect of both sites raised the same concerns. The key general concerns can be summarised as:
1. Complaints about the consultation process including only a limited number of people contacted, the short period of time for responses, inadequate available information regarding the proposals,
  2. Unequal size in number of residents consulted in respect of both sites,
  3. The Council has not complied with Central Government requirements regarding planning for Traveller sites (Circular 01/06),
  4. Why this issue was not addressed at the time the proposals for Lewisham Gateway were first considered which could have meant that land could have been set aside for them elsewhere in the Lewisham Town Centre area,
  5. The decision of the Mayor & Cabinet at its meeting on 18 April to consult on these two sites was at odds with the recommendations set out in the CB Richard Ellis report,
  6. Proposals will significantly depress value of properties in the vicinity,
  7. Fear of increased dumping of rubbish, increased crime and general anti social behaviour,
  8. Undermining of existing social cohesion and contravention of the human rights of members of the public,
  9. A suspicion that the site will be used for pseudo commercial purposes, and that Travellers will occupy any site completely free of charge.

6.7 The responses to these general concerns, using the same numbering, are as follows:

1. The leaflets were delivered to homes considered to be immediately affected by the two sites. The process also included two public drop in meetings and ran from the date of the delivery of the leaflets (the first week in May) until the end of the month. This is considered an adequate period for such a consultation.
2. Property adjacent to the two sites (as set out above) received a copy of the consultation leaflet. For the former Watergate School this totaled 40 properties plus the Ladywell Society, the Ladywell Fields User Group and St Mary's Church. For the Laurence House site this totaled 66 properties.
3. The concerns tend to focus on whether flood risk and impact assessments had been properly undertaken. Flood risk discussions have started with the Environment Agency and Impact Assessments on Health and Race are included in this report. Further draft guidance on the design and management of Travellers sites was published by the Department of Communities and Local Government in May 2007 and these requirements will also be addressed. The Council has employed a Planning Consultant for this project to ensure that the relevant requirements are met.
4. In terms of the Gateway development, the relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance (upon which the Lewisham Gateway Masterplan was required to be based) does not provide for the replacement of the current site as part of the Lewisham Gateway scheme. A site elsewhere within Lewisham Town Centre was being considered by the Council at the time of considering the proposals for the Gateway development. However, this site is privately owned and the owner is unwilling to sell and relocate his business. Following this experience the focus of the site searches has been on Council owned sites. As demonstrated by the CBRE site search, there is no suitable Council owned site elsewhere in Lewisham Town Centre.
5. The decision by Mayor & Cabinet on 18 April 2007 was not at odds with the recommendations set out in the CBRE report. The Mayor & Cabinet report addressed the shortlist of potential sites identified in the CBRE report and set out clear reasons for selecting the Laurence House Lorry Park and the former Watergate School site from that shortlist.
6. The Council acknowledges the fear that property values will be depressed in the vicinity of a traveller site. However, the development of a good design and sound management of the new site should avoid any impact on property values.
7. The Crime and Disorder implications set out the information available from the Police on concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour.

8. The Council acknowledges the concerns that relocation of the Travellers will affect the existing social cohesion in either of the areas consulted. The Council has a responsibility to promote social cohesion and would work with local residents and Travellers in the preferred location in order to address these matters.
9. As is the case with the existing site, the Travellers will not be allowed to use the site for commercial purposes and will be liable to pay rent for their pitches.

***Former Watergate School site***

6.8 The following is a summary of the key concerns regarding the former Watergate School Site:

1. The width of access to site via Church Grove is insufficient to allow movement of caravans and emergency vehicles when current problems with parking are taken into account,
2. The proposed development is on the flood plain of the River Ravensbourne which will have health and safety implications for the Travellers,
3. Proposals will affect the River Ravensbourne re-naturalisation process plus concerns over loss of trees and effects on the local eco system,
4. Proposals are detrimental to the adjacent Conservation Area,
5. Cost implications since proposed development would need to comply with the design guidelines of Central Government on the design of pitches and the enhanced design requirements since site adjoins conservation area,
6. Concerns over suitability of site on Health & Safety grounds (children in close proximity to river and railway) and noise (from the adjacent railway lines),
7. High cost and other practical difficulties of demolishing Watergate School (alleged presence of asbestos),
8. Adverse effect on properties in Church Grove caused by heavy lorries driving on soil of poor load bearing capacity, and
9. Proposals are not the most beneficial use of the site in economic terms and the land should be sold for redevelopment to provide “mainstream “ residential accommodation.

6.9 The responses to the key concerns concerning the former Watergate School site, using the same numbering, are as follows:

1. Church Grove is generally 4.6m wide with car parking only permitted along the eastern side of the road. Cars closely parked against the eastern footway leave a residual 2.5m of available carriageway width for passing vehicles. The former school was attended by the Council's Passenger Services bus fleet. The width is considered adequate to enable the movement of caravans and emergency vehicles. These are matters that will need to be addressed in any planning application.

2. The Environment Agency has been informed of the potential development in order to understand their likely requirements and the flood plain and health and safety issues which would need to be addressed in any site design and planning application. These discussions indicate the likely need for an 8 metre “buffer” zone on the part of the site nearest to the river and the feasibility work undertaken indicates such a layout is deliverable.
3. Concerns about the impact on the River Ravensbourne naturalisation are subject to discussion with the Environment Agency and would need to be covered in any planning application.
4. The site is adjacent to the St Mary’s Conservation Area and any planning application must address the relationship of the site to the Church Grove.
5. Any cost implications related to adjacency to the Conservation Area would need to be addressed as part of the design and would be provided for in the budget for the work.
6. The concerns about health and safety are covered in the Health Impact Assessment referred to below.
7. The cost of the demolition of the school is an additional cost to the scheme (estimated to be £0.35m), however, it is likely to be a cost to any alternative development of the site
8. Accidents apart, an increase in heavy vehicle movements along Church Grove is more likely to cause damage to the structure of the carriageway and footways than to the adjoining properties. Ground and airborne vibrations within properties flanking a road can increase when there are surface irregularities in the carriageway and any soft ground immediately thereunder. However, the Transport and Road Research Laboratory has [Research Report 246, 1990] undertaken extensive research into traffic induced vibrations in buildings of various types, ages, and locations. Comparing similar structures close to and remote from busy roads but on similar ground, the research concluded that non-structural damage [typically plaster cracking] might be expected, but only in vacant premises subjected to high levels of traffic-induced vibration. No discernable damage would be recognised in a normally decorated occupied house
9. The site was previously identified for potential disposal. The option to now relocate the Travellers to this site requires the loss of a capital receipt to be balanced against the need to relocate the Travellers as well as the overall benefits to the community which the Lewisham Town Centre development proposals will bring.

### ***Laurence House Lorry Park***

- 6.10 The following is a summary of the key concerns relating to the proposed use of the Laurence House Lorry Park:
  1. Site not suitable for proposed use because of its close proximity to main roads, Council offices, hostels and nursing homes,

2. Concerns about adverse effect on Travellers from noise, pollution, overlooking and night time light pollution,
3. Concerns over safety of children because heavy traffic in area plus difficult journey for them to School,
4. Concerns were raised about placing Travellers, including a number of women and children, close to a bail hostel.
5. Inappropriate use of a highly visible “gateway” site in the heart of Catford Town Centre and could also prejudice the proposed re-alignment of the South Circular,
6. A view that Catford is already doing its fair share on assisting disadvantaged groups and these proposals will have adverse effect on proposals to regenerate Catford Town Centre, including negative social effect and an adverse effect on local economy,
7. Concerns about what will happen to the lorries, the vans belonging to the market traders and loss of parking for the theatre etc.,
8. Concerns over loss of pedestrian short cut to station and adverse effect on current provision of accommodation for students in the area (lorry park is used as a dropping/collection point for students travelling by coaches), and
9. The view that this is a waste of public money given that this proposed use is only temporary and in fact, given these circumstances, that the Travellers could, potentially, not wish to move there in the first place.

6.11 The responses to the key concerns concerning the Laurence House Lorry Park, using the same numbering, are as follows:

1. The site is adjacent to main roads etc and the site layout would aim to shield the site from traffic and surrounding properties. It should be noted that the current site is also in an area of high traffic flow.
2. The potential impact from pollution is referred to in the Health Impact Assessment below.
3. Assuming Traveller children continued to attend Lewisham Bridge school, this would mean a longer journey albeit with good bus access. Heavy traffic could affect children attending school on either of the sites but there would be a substantially longer journey from Catford.
4. The proximity of a bail hostel, given the vulnerability of some of the Travellers, is a concern. The Council would need to work closely with the Police and Travellers to ensure that the risks were understood and managed.
5. In the longer term the site is important to the emerging Catford Town Centre Area Action Plan and the possible changes to the alignment of the A205. The site is likely to be required as part of any comprehensive plan for the regeneration of Catford. This is the reason the site is proposed as an interim solution only.
6. The proposal is for a small number of pitches involving less than 20 people, it is therefore not considered that it will have a significantly adverse impact on the Town Centre or local economy.

7. The Lorry Park would need to be re-located, potentially, in Forest Hill at the Perry Vale Car Park. Alternative parking solutions would be required for lorries and vans belonging to market traders and theatre users.
8. There would be no public access across the site and pedestrians would have a marginally longer walk to the station. The need for local coach parking would need to be addressed.
9. The temporary provision for, say, up to 4 years means that the Council would subsequently need to re-provide the site at an alternative location and provide the necessary funding.

### ***Traveller Consultation***

- 6.12 The Travellers were requested to provide their views on the options. The Travellers visited both sites and have been consulted both as individuals and as a group in order to determine the suitability of the proposed site and what they see as the strengths and weaknesses of each site and to give them an opportunity to make any comments they wanted to make about the proposals.
- 6.13 The key problem they identified for the Laurence House site is that it provides only an interim solution. The other key weaknesses are seen as:
- Site is too close to major traffic.
  - Too much noise to live with, mobile homes are very thin and there is no noise reduction
  - Too much pollution in the air - many of the travellers are asthmatic and under medical supervision. They move between caravan and utility block and are exposed to the elements
  - More or less on a traffic island , a feeling of being very exposed
  - Not a nice plot to live on
  - Unsafe to cross roads for the elderly and young
  - Too far to travel to school, children would be less likely to attend and also the cost of taking the children to school would be too expensive
  - Would not be able to access local and health services, there is a need to maintain the current links
  - Taking the travellers too far from their familiar surroundings
  - Site is too exposed - would not be safe from attack and passing abuse
  - Right next door to a car park that is in use daily
  - A five storey building that will look into travellers homes
- 6.14 Their key concern about the former Watergate School site is the need to make the river safe. The key strengths of the site are seen as:
- Quiet area, very acceptable

- No pollution, a very nice environment for the elderly and children to live on
- Children can still walk to their current school
- All health services can be maintained
- Local shops on the same pavement and only one small road to cross for anything else
- Still within familiar surroundings
- A site that is safe and quiet
- A decent place to live with trees and peace
- Residential with neighbours

6.15 The Travellers did not favour a move onto a temporary site. They consider they have been patiently waiting for the Council to find them somewhere decent to live on a permanent basis. This is particularly the case since the conditions of Thurston site have been getting worse over recent years, as evidenced by the railway embankment slippage that has resulted in two plots being demolished so that the railway siding could be re-enforced.

### ***Health Impact Assessment***

6.16 The Council commissioned a Health impact Assessment from Ben Cave Associates, a leading UK consultancy working across public health, sustainability and planning. This is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. The report sets out an appraisal of both sites and the health and well being aspects of each.

6.17 The key issues identified for the former Watergate School site were, continuity of existing community links (positive), single point of access to the site (negative), proximity to the river leading to flood concerns (negative), low levels of traffic pollution (positive), low levels of traffic in vicinity (positive), secluded location of the site (positive) and potential hostility of local people (negative).

6.18 The key issues for the Laurence House site were, distance from the services currently accessed by the Travellers, including a local school, and church (negative), traffic and child safety (negative), personal security and safety (negative), temporary nature of the site (negative).

6.19 The report concludes:

“The Church Grove option suggests greater potential for overall beneficial impact on health and well being, compared with the Laurence House Lorry Park option.

The Church Grove site however is not, as it stands, ideal. The single means of access to the site via Church Grove is problematic. Issues include the ability to move caravans/trailers and day-to-day access to the site. The Travellers are also concerned about acceptance by (and animosity from) neighbours and the risk of flooding from the bordering river.

- We recommend that further work is undertaken to establish a second point of access to the site and that the river management activities be conveyed to the Travellers.
- Our site visit and subsequent examination of maps of the area suggest that access could be achieved by obtaining disused (boarded up) houses (two) on Wearside Road and clearing the houses. This would both provide alternative more suitable access, and give increased privacy for both Traveller and other local residents. We recommend the council investigates the feasibility of this. This option would also enable continued access to the Traveller site by the highly valued Play Bus service.

Difficulties in maintaining continued access to well established current resources including school, church, shops and primary care facilities make the Laurence House Lorry Park option a poor choice from a health and well being perspective. This, is compounded by a lack of privacy, potential air and noise pollution resulting from close proximity to major roads, and security and safety concerns (both day to day risks of intimidation / vandalism / crime, and the short term nature of the tenure) suggest that the Lorry park is likely to impact negatively on the health and well being of the Travellers.”

- 6.20 Officers have examined the issues raised by the Health Impact Assessment regarding access from Wearside Rd and the most feasible way to achieve this would be via one of the homes at the far northern end of Wearside Road. However, these are all privately owned residences. An alternative route would be through the depot and across the river. However, this would have safety implications and a potential conflict between the circulation of vehicles in an operational depot and residential access.

***Other issues***

- 6.21 Officers have been supported in the process by a consultant team of planning advisers and designers. The Consultant Team have had pre-application discussions with Planning Officers in respect of both potential sites. Whilst this identified a number of issues in respect of both locations which will need to be addressed as part of a planning application, neither site was considered unsuitable, in principle, in planning terms.

**7 Financial Implications**

- 7.1 The costs of the Consultation process and use of consultants to advise on Health, Planning and Design matters to date are estimated to be £29,000.
- 7.2 Other financial implications are set out in Part 2 of this report.

**8 Legal Implications**

- 8.1 The existing Travellers' site at Thurston Road is provided by the Council under its powers contained in the Caravan Sites Act 1968. Occupiers of caravans stationed on sites provided under the 1968 Act occupy under licence agreements which can be terminated by four weeks' notice.
- 8.2 The Housing Act 2004 requires authorities to assess the need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in their areas when they assess their overall housing requirements. Authorities must then develop a strategy which addresses the need arising from the accommodation assessment, through public or private provision.
- 8.3 Circular 01/2006 Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites requires local planning authorities to have regard to the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers and to formulate policies to assess the suitability of new sites.
- 8.4 Paragraph 57 of the Circular envisages that a major development or redevelopment project may require the permanent relocation of a traveller site. In proposing relocation and in proposing a relocation site, the Circular states that regard will need to be paid both to the gypsy and traveller community's social, economic and environmental needs and identified social, economic, and environmental benefits that the major redevelopment project will bring to the locality and the broader area.
- 8.5 Consultation has taken place with the Travellers concerning the proposed alternative sites. Relevant officers from the housing, education and social care and health services have been involved in the process as necessary. The outcome of this consultation is summarised in the body of this report.
- 8.6 Any decision taken by the Mayor must follow proper consideration of the needs of the travellers balanced with the needs of local residents, having regard to all other relevant considerations. For this reason, consultation with local residents has also been carried out and the outcome of that consultation is summarised in the body of this report. The report also sets out other relevant considerations which the Mayor must have regard to when making a decision on the new site.
- 8.7 Local authorities have a duty to promote good race relations, equality of opportunity and community cohesion in all of their policies and practices. This duty covers all racial groups, including Gypsies and Irish Travellers who are recognised ethnic groups. Planning and site provision are highly relevant to this duty because they impact on race relations generally and on the way in which services are delivered to this group. In developing policy and making decisions, local authorities need to ensure that their actions are consistent with this general duty.
- 8.8 The Council has power under Section 115 of the Highways Act 1980 to provide lorry parking off the highway. However, there is no statutory duty to provide this parking.

## Human Rights Implications

- 8.9 Article 8(1) of the European Convention on Human Rights provides for the protection of the right to respect for a person's home from interference by public bodies, except in accordance with the law and as necessary in a democratic society, in the interest of the economic well-being of the country, protection of health and the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.
- 8.10 In determining the level of permissible interference with enjoyment of these rights, the courts have held that any interference must achieve a fair balance between the general interests of the community and the protection of the rights of individuals. There must be reasonable proportionality between the means employed and the aim pursued. The availability of an effective remedy and compensation to affected persons is relevant in assessing whether a fair balance has been struck.
- 8.11 When making the decision on the new site, the Mayor must consider the extent to which the decision may impact upon the human rights of the Travellers and to balance these against the overall benefits to the community which the Lewisham Town Centre development proposals would bring. The Mayor will need to be satisfied that interference with the rights under Article 8 would be justified in all the circumstances and that a fair balance would be struck between the protection of the rights of the Travellers and the public interest. The Mayor should also have regard to the suitability of the new site in terms of justifying the relocation of the Travellers and assessing whether or not a fair balance has been struck.
- 8.12 It is doubtful that the placing of the new site on either of the proposed sites would result in any Article 8 violation so far as local residents are concerned. The Mayor will need to be satisfied that any interference with the rights of local residents under Article 8 would need to be justified in all of the circumstances and, that a fair balance would be struck between any potential impact for local residents and the desirability of relocating the Travellers and the overall benefits to the community which the Lewisham Town Centre development proposals would bring.

## **9 Environmental Implications**

The Condition Survey of the Thurston Road site indicated the urgent need for significant investment. The replacement buildings will be more energy efficient and will reduce fuel demand and costs. Any planning application will need to address Environmental matters. In the case of the former Watergate School site, detailed consideration of the impact on the River Ravensbourne would be required.

## **10 Equalities Implications**

Travellers are identified as a disadvantaged group and the Council needs to pay careful attention to meeting their needs. The current licensees include a number of older people and six school aged children. The Council has carried out an Equalities Impact Assessment and this is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

The equality impact assessment identifies the following as the most significant impacts that need to be addressed:

- the requirements of two female disabled residents
- the needs of the traveller children
- the creation of positive and harmonious relations between the Travellers and any community they move into
- the specific needs of the women on-site including their roles as parents and carers
- their religious needs as Catholics

The proposed action identified within assessment includes, adaptations to homes as required, the promotion of positive community relations (including working with Race Equality Action Lewisham and the Irish Centre) and providing continued direct officer support to the Travellers. Officers will continue to work closely with Travellers and local residents to ensure that these issues are sensitively managed working with the officers across the Council.

## **11 Crime and Disorder**

Residents tend to perceive that the presence of a Travellers' site will increase crime. However, there is no evidence to support this view from the experience of the existing Travellers' Site in Thurston Road. A report on the matter from the Metropolitan Police is attached as an Appendix 3.

The report reviews the incidence of crime in the area around the current Traveller site in Thurston Rd, the former Watergate School site and Laurence House Lorry park site. The Police advise that the current site causes no concern to the Safer Neighbourhood Team and is not known to generate crime. The key concerns for the Laurence House site are, the large numbers of school children in the afternoon, the open nature of the current site leads it liable to anti-social behaviour and the proximity of a bail hostel. The concerns about the Ladywell site are the single site entrance and the proximity of the river. The Police express concerns about local public feeling about the proposal for both sites.

Any site design will be undertaken with advice from the local Crime Prevention Office with the objective of achieving a secured by design status.

## **12 Conclusion**

- 12.1 The consultation process has received a strong response from local residents. There is strong opposition from residents with little support for either site. However, the Council must relocate the Travellers as the current site is required to be available as part of the Lewisham Gateway scheme. In addition and as referred to above, the condition survey of the Thurston Rd site undertaken in November 2006 is highly critical of its present condition and supports the view of the Council and the Travellers that the existing site is no longer fit for purpose and should be relocated.
- 12.2 The Laurence House Lorry Park would provide only an interim solution until it is required as part of the proposed Catford Town Centre redevelopment. This has significant disadvantages. Financially it will require the Council to provide for a further re-location of the Travellers in 4-5 years and, from the Travellers' perspective, it means they would be faced with a further period of uncertainty. The Lorry Park site is also subject to significant traffic noise and pollution. For the Travellers, it is also further away from local services that they rely upon including the local primary school. The Health Impact Assessment summarises the concerns related to air and noise pollution, security and safety concerns would mean that the site would be likely to have a negative impact on the health and well being of the Travellers.
- 12.3 The former Watergate School site has narrow access via Church Grove and residents are concerned about ease of access for caravans, and emergency vehicles. The site also backs onto the River Ravensbourne and the safety aspects will need to be carefully considered as well as the needs of the Environment Agency. The site immediately abuts the St Mary's Conservation Area and any development would need to sympathetically address this matter. The Traveller's concerns centred upon the proximity of the river, other than this they were generally supportive.
- 12.4 Neither site is ideal and local residents oppose both. However, the former Watergate School site has advantages over the Laurence House Lorry Park site in a number of important respects. It would be a permanent site, it has lower levels of traffic pollution, is unlikely to encourage vandalism or casual intimidation and it would enable the Travellers to continue to access existing local services. The disadvantages of access and proximity to the river will be carefully addressed as part of the planning application.
- 12.5 On balance, the former Watergate School site is therefore considered to be the preferred site. The strength of feeling of local residents must be considered and it is proposed that a team officers work with local residents and Travellers on the next stage of the development of the site.

#### Background Papers

<u>Short Title of Document</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>File Location</u>	<u>Contact Officer</u>	<u>Exempt Information</u>
Case File	Current	2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor Laurence House	Alan Davis	No

If you would like further information on this report please contact Alan Davis, Property & Development, on extension 48120