

## Briefing Note Traveller issues

### Report to Place Scrutiny 13<sup>th</sup> September 2018

The City is visited by significant numbers of travellers from May to September each year.

There were 18 incursions on Council owned land in the last two year period involving over 100 caravans.

The attached table gives details and the duration of stay.

The Estates Team manage the City Council's traveller protocol which has been used successfully over the last 20 years or so. The protocol was based on one originally developed by Devon County Council. It is compliant with legal and other guidance and there is a process for an initial check of health and educational welfare requirements and notifying relevant County Council Officers giving them the opportunity to make their own onsite enquiries. The protocol is published on the City website: <https://exeter.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-information/strategies-policies-and-plans/environment-and-planning/> and reviewed annually. A copy is attached. It gives certainty and consistency to all parties concerned and has not yet been challenged. We could consider future discussion with our County Council colleagues and other Devon authorities on the adoption of a County wide protocol.

Operation of the protocol by professional property staff within the Estates Team is time consuming and detracts from potential income producing core property management activity. The protocol could be operated by service teams as it does not require special expertise. As the encampments aren't currently dealt with by the service teams this may act as disincentive to them giving priority to their site security measures.

A robust package of security measures at Riverside Valley Park which were put in place some years ago have proved very successful. Similar measures would be appropriate for the access points to Exhibition Fields. Principally the work involved excavations and obstacles which retained access for maintenance and Emergency vehicles but proved a barrier to long wheelbase towed caravans.

At King George V Playing Fields a system of staggered bollards along the entrance drive has been suggested, again the dimensions would exclude long wheelbase towed vehicles from entering.

Haven Road is generally the only car park to suffer regular incursions and normally the Coach parking areas are used for these. The Car parks Manager has indicated that with the closure of the bus station and therefore increased numbers of coaches using this coach parking area it is becoming increasingly difficult to manage the site when travellers arrive. The site is very close to residential and business occupiers. There are height barriers but they are locked back to permit the coach access.

The Government consulted in April this year on powers for dealing with unauthorised development and encampments. In our response (copy attached) we highlighted the difference between encampments which are on operational property, where the rights of the wider public are immediately compromised, from those on unoccupied or open land. We suggested that a Court Order once granted should protect an operational site for a number of months to prevent multiple reoccupation such as we have experienced at Haven Road and King George V Playing Fields. We also suggested that unauthorised encampments should be criminalised where there was "deemed aggravated trespass" in order to gain access e.g. where travellers cut through barriers, uprooted posts etc.