

Present: Councillor Paul Goodale (Chairman), Councillor Colin Woodcock (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Alison Austin, Alan Bell, Anton Dani, Anne Dorrian, Martin Griggs, Neill Hastie, Martin Howard MSc. PCGM, Cert Ed, Brian Rush, Yvonne Stevens and Stephen Woodliffe

Officers –
Assistant Director - Support Services & Partnership, Community Safety Manager, Operations Manager and Senior Democratic Services Officer

67 APOLOGIES

There were apologies for absence from Councillors Viven Edge and Deborah Evans.

68 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting, held on 5th August 2020, were agreed as a correct record to be signed by the Chairman.

69 UPDATE ON ACTIONS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

With respect to Minute 63, the Chairman advised the meeting that he attended the Cabinet meeting on 9th September and Cabinet had approved the Committee's recommendations for expenditure from its Events budget for this year and next year. In addition, Cabinet had decided to remove the requirement for the Committee to seek Cabinet approval of expenditure over £10,000, for which he thanked the Cabinet.

70 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

71 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None.

72 WOODVILLE ROAD ILLEGAL ENCAMPMENT - JULY/AUGUST 2020

The Community Safety Manager and the Operations Manager presented a report, which highlighted a timeline schedule of the Council's dealings with an illegal encampment of the green open space site on Woodville Road by travellers from Friday 31st July to Wednesday 5th August 2020.

The report included details of reports made to the Police and Council; actions of Council officers; costs in relation to dealing with the incident and quotations received in order to target harden the Woodville Road green open space area to prevent reoccurrence of this issue again in the future.

The Woodville Road open space had seen illegal encampments set up four times in the last three years. On each occasion, but especially on this last one, there had been

numerous reports made to both the Police and the Council and incursion had had a detrimental effect on residents and businesses in the local area.

Increased target hardening of this site would discourage and prevent further illegal encampments from occurring and protect the asset giving confidence to residents that this type of occurrence would not be happening again in the future on this site.

Appended to the report were full details of reports and action taken; a copy of the High Court Civil Injunction Order, Section 77 Direction to Leave Land and Remove Vehicles notice served and Section 78 Summons served on the travellers; photographs taken of the site each time it was visited during the encampment and the condition it was left in afterwards; quotations for target hardening; legal advice provided by Legal Services Lincolnshire; and an update from Lincolnshire Police.

The Community Safety Manager added that the Legal Services Lincolnshire representative would be happy to answer any questions at a future meeting.

The Ward Member read out a letter from a member of the public who lived opposite the site, which described the effect it had on his family. He reported that this had been the worst incursion yet; travellers had broken into property, ridden quad bikes over the site and spread fear. Residents had even been afraid for the safety of their dogs. In addition, there had been several vehicles with no MOT or tax. When they left, the site was a complete mess, with human waste and litter on the play area. He believed the site needed a fence, bollards or a trench. He urged the committee to make the site safe describing the episode as terrifying.

Members were unanimous in their gratitude to the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer for his bravery during the process of dealing with this incident and the street cleaning staff for their hard work putting the site back to how it was.

Action: PH

Report back to all staff involved in dealing with the incident and the clear up afterwards to thank them on behalf of BTAC for all their efforts, which were very much appreciated by the Committee.

The Community Safety Manager then responded to questions as follows.

The travellers had told officers they had not left the site on the Sunday as they had said previously because they were visiting a relative in Pilgrim Hospital who had not been discharged as expected.

The ASB Officer had tried to contact the NAVCIS on the first day of the incident, the Friday, but did not manage to make contact until the Monday. He advised the travellers that he was alerting the NAVCIS as a tactic officers used in the hope that it would make travellers move on more quickly. However, this time it had the opposite effect.

Officers had found no evidence of fire damage to the vans or vehicles on the site after the petrol bomb claim of the travellers; the only fire damage found was to the roundabout in the play area.

The cost of the ASB Officer's time did not include overtime, but had to be calculated for the court. They did not yet know the cost of the advice from Legal Services Lincolnshire.

Engagement with the gypsy and traveller community in this area was through Nick Willey at Lincolnshire County Council who was in regular contact with the community groups with Teams meetings held with a number of agencies quarterly.

Action: PH

1. Forward an update to Members on the engagement work carried out by Mr Willey.
2. Ask the police for information regarding action taken with respect to thefts from local businesses during the illegal encampment and circulate the response to Members.

Members expressed strong disappointment at the police decision. The force did not have the resources in Boston but they could call upon four other counties in order to help, which they had done in the past. This warranted a response from the Chief Constable.

The Community Safety Manager reported his own frustration at the police decision, but pointed out that the support by the local police team had been faultless. Police officers had accompanied Council officers every time they had entered the site.

Action: JC

Invite the Chief Constable of Lincolnshire Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the MP for Boston & Skegness to a meeting of BTAC to discuss the role of the Police in dealing with illegal encampments and the regional response to this incident in particular.

Members agreed that it was imperative that the site be protected, but there were discussions as to whether galvanised steel fencing or reinforced bollards would provide the best protection, or whether both should be installed. A vehicle had knocked down the galvanised fence at Sheldon's field and travellers had gained access before the Council had time to repair it. They could use cutting tools on fences, though they could use vehicles to ram bollards too.

It was then suggested that CCTV should also be seriously reconsidered at this site, perhaps asking at the care home if it would be possible to install a mast there. The Community Safety Manager agreed that it might be possible, as there were now more options in terms of broadband and wireless operation and the siting had been an issue.

Action: PH

Contact the care home to ask if the Council could site a CCTV mast there and investigate the possibility of camera operation at this location.

Members also considered it essential to protect BTAC's other play areas, some of which were quite accessible, and particularly as securing the Woodville Road site would make them more attractive.

The Chairman reported that officers were looking at all the play areas and would come back with options as soon as possible and had closed the gates of Central Park to make

it inaccessible. However, the location of the Woodville Road site and its access ability put it to the top of the priority list.

The Ward Member reported that he was on-site at an early stage. He recognised that there was a need to make provision for travellers and felt that the site provided at the Redstone Industrial Estate was limited. Provision of stopover sites would avoid the use of open spaces.

The Ward Member had considered the Woodville Road Park's security with the ASB Officer and residents to find the best solution. The park was the first on entry to the town; it was a lovely facility, a gateway to Boston and he was proud of it. It was essential to fence it, as close to the road as possible, and provide CCTV provided. They had a duty to keep it safe and keep the park beautiful. A fence would also prevent children from running out into the road. Anything could be forced open, but it could be made as difficult as possible. They had to prevent this happening again.

The Ward Member added that he and residents had phoned the Council on the morning, but there had been a delay getting the information through to the ASB Officer. The receptionists had not known how to get hold of officers and there was only one on duty, which was disappointing, as it warranted quick action.

In response, the Community Safety Manager explained that he had been on leave the day the travellers arrived, that Boston only had one ASB Officer and one part-time officer who did not work on Fridays. The customer services team did have mobile contact numbers for them, but the ASB Officer had been on his lunch. Immediately on his return, the ASB Officer began proceedings, pulling together 29 legal notices and securing police support in order to serve them, taking just over an hour, which was commendable.

A Member noted that the court process had been relatively quick and pointed out that there was provision for travellers; it was set out in the Local Plan for Boston and South Holland. The majority of sites were in South Holland, but some were on the border with Boston. Therefore, the Council had provided what was required and, in fact, the Local Plan would not have gained approval if it had not.

Other suggestions made by Members were to consider the provision of an ASB Officer for BTAC and a process for reacting immediately if someone broke through an open space's fence.

RESOLVED: That BTAC provides £19,470 to fund the protection of Woodville Road recreation ground with a galvanised steel fence, similar to that already in place around the play area.

73 WORK PROGRAMME - STANDING ITEM

Members agreed to the Chairman's suggestions for increasing the frequency of meetings to six-weekly in order to give more time to agenda items. It was noted that the report on Play Area Improvements would include security.

The Meeting ended at 8.30 pm