

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Paul Claussen, Executive Member Place and Rob Walker, Executive Director Place

To: Overview & Scrutiny 6 July 2017
Cabinet 11 July 2017

(Author: Steve James, Community & Environmental Services Manager)

Subject: Unsightly and derelict sites and land

Purpose: To update Members and consider further and ongoing actions concerning unsightly and derelict sites and land.

Recommendation(s):

- 1) That Members note the content of the report and the actions taken to date;
- 2) That Members consider the sites (Appendix A); agree to a prioritised list and agree future actions where appropriate
- 3) That Members agree the proposed Performance Framework

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Ensuring our District is clean, safe and well-kept is one of the Council's highest priorities. It is important that we do all we can to ensure this priority is met. As a Council we have limited direct control over privately owned land. However, we take seriously our role as custodian of standards and we have a range of measures at our disposal to enforce such standards when the need arises.
- 1.2 As a result of a decision taken by Cabinet, Members nominated a number of sites throughout the District that were, in their view, significantly and adversely impacting upon the character and appearance of their immediate and wider environment or the general well-being of the communities within which they were located. Officers from a range of professional disciplines considered the detail and background of each site. Some are already subject to positive actions such as planning applications; some had no previous action taken or action taken had failed to secure improvement and all are presented on the attached appendices.
- 1.3 The properties detailed at Appendix A have been assessed by Officers. In the absence of an established method of prioritising such sites a scoring system has been developed and applied (Appendix B). This has enabled a prioritisation of sites for action but does not mean that those sites which are not prioritised are disregarded.
- 1.4 The sites thus far selected are not seen as an exhaustive list of sites that, District-wide, adversely affect the amenities of the communities within which they are set. They represent an initial attempt to identify those sites that are the subject of known local concern. All sites will require active positive or coercive engagement with individual owners in order to achieve a successful outcome. A letter has been drafted (Appendix C),

based on that used successfully by South Holland District Council, that firstly encourages owners to engage ahead of the need for enforcement action.

- 1.5 Members are also invited, either through their own local knowledge or as a consequence of engagement with their Wards, to put forward other sites for consideration and future actions. In doing so, Members are reminded that the over-riding objective of this exercise is to take concerted actions against sites that, as a consequence of a variety of factors, have a significant deleterious impact on the locations, or places, within which they are set.
- 1.6 Members are advised that as a matter of operational routine, a wide variety of other generally smaller sites are monitored through, for example, the planning process or are dealt with regularly by, in combination, environmental health, environmental services and/or building control. The parameters for the inclusion of sites within the Unsightly and Derelict Sites and Land initiative need, therefore, to be based on an agreed understanding that individual sites are in such a state of unsightliness or dereliction, generally through long-term neglect, that they are adversely impacting on their surroundings by reasons of either their overall appearance or unmaintained status and are likely to become, or have become, unsafe or are attracting anti-social behaviour.
- 1.7 It is proposed that in order to satisfy the need for a Performance Framework and ensure that the benefits of the initiative are realised it is proposed that the unsightly sites list (Appendix A) is used as an action plan. This would capture progress, record the outcomes of intervention (e.g. stimulating development) and allow ongoing Member engagement through Overview & Scrutiny.

2.0 **OPTIONS**

- 2.1 Do nothing - This option would result in no, or limited and uncoordinated, action being taken on the sites so far identified, and perhaps others, with these sites therefore potentially remaining in a state that continues to significantly and adversely impact on the communities within which they are set.
- 2.2 Endorse the recommendations – This option would enable officers to focus their efforts in securing, through a variety of negotiated and punitive measures, significant improvements to sites that currently adversely affect the communities within which they are set.
- 2.3 In endorsing the recommendation set out at 2.2 members are advised that each site is different and that the actions required have differing consequences, both financially and in terms of the timescales within which results are likely to be achieved. Nevertheless, this is an on-going initiative aimed at addressing the adverse impacts arising from the continued presence of unsightly and derelict sites and land within the District.

3.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 To promote a co-ordinated approach to positive intervention on those sites which have a major detrimental effect upon the character, appearance and well-being of the communities within which they are set.

4.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

- 4.1 A number of tangible benefits are expected and these will be captured through the Performance Framework. These will range from significant environmental improvements to the immediate and wider area to reducing the likelihood of continuing and ongoing anti-social behaviour. In some circumstances the benefits will range across this spectrum and

in others there may be an opportunity to actively promote redevelopment in the medium or longer-term to the overall benefit of those communities currently adversely impacted upon.

5.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues; Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Transformation Programme; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

5.1 **Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues**

5.1.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no direct implications on Carbon Footprint but that there are likely to be wide-ranging benefits to the environment of both the communities within which these sites are located and the wider District.

5.2 **Constitution & Legal**

5.2.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no Constitutional implications arising from these actions other than a possible extension to officer delegations but that, on an individual case-by-case basis, the Legal Implications will need to be understood and regularly reviewed and reported upon.

5.3 **Corporate Priorities**

5.3.1 This initiative meets the following Corporate Priority:

- Supporting Breckland to develop and thrive

5.4 **Crime and Disorder**

5.4.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that, in some instances, positive intervention is likely to reduce the likelihood of Crime and Disorder.

5.5 **Equality and Diversity / Human Rights**

5.5.1 It is the opinion of the Report Author that there are no direct implications on either Equality and Diversity or Human Rights. However, equality and human rights issues will be considered on an individual case-by-case basis before any action is taken.

5.6 **Financial**

5.6.1 In some instances there are likely to be financial implications as a consequence of the actions taken by the Council. These will be reported on a site-by-site basis as and when necessary with a cost benefit assessment undertaken.

5.7 **Health & Wellbeing**

5.7.1 There are likely to be benefits arising from this initiative which will have a positive effect upon the health and well-being of affected communities. These will be reported on a site by site basis.

5.8 **Reputation**

5.8.1 Taking action to address sites and land across the District that is having a detrimental effect on the local community will have a positive effect on the Councils reputation.

5.9 **Risk Management**

5.9.1 In order to mitigate risk, each site will be fully evaluated prior to any action being instigated.

5.10 Staffing

5.10.1 There are no immediate staffing implications but there are likely to be future resource implications arising from continued actions. These will be reported when they arise.

5.11 Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales

5.11.1 Stakeholder Engagement is key to this initiative and consultation will be undertaken, on a site-by-site basis, when either necessary or statutorily required. This will include positive engagement with both site owners and, where necessary, affected Ward Members.

6.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

6.1 All Wards

7.0 ACRONYMS

7.1 None

Background papers:-

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Key Decision: No

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Discretionary Service

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A Unsightly sites and derelict land
Appendix B Scoring System
Appendix C Owner Letter