

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE - 20th AUGUST, 2008

REPORT OF THE HOUSING ENABLING MANAGER.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT IS TO GIVE MEMBERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS AND TO CONSIDER THE CONCEPT OF REDEVELOPING AND REGENERATING AN AREA OF HOUSING LAND AT HOLYOAKE STREET, WELLINGTON. THERE ARE CURRENTLY ELEVEN SMALL ONE BEDROOM BUNGALOWS AND FOUR ONE BEDROOM FLATS ON THE SITE WITH NO MEETING HALL. SOME OF THE EXISTING BUNGALOWS SUFFER FROM SUBSIDENCE.

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Prior-Sankey.)

SUMMARY

There are currently fifteen dwellings on the area under consideration. These properties are all small one bedroom bungalows and flats built 50 years ago. They provide sheltered accommodation and some are suffering from subsidence. They are not very easy to let and there is no meeting hall. Costly remedial work has been carried out on some of the bungalows and extensive work is required on the remainder. The area of land required to make the scheme successful includes the 10 garages at the rear.

Working together with Magna West Somerset Housing Association (MWS) it is possible to regenerate the area and replace the existing housing stock with 36 x two bedroom apartments and a meeting hall for the elderly residents. These new apartments will be much bigger than the existing stock. The block of flats will be a maximum of 2.5 storeys high.

Fifteen of the apartments will be sheltered homes and will be contained in a block with an exclusive entrance and secured lift. The remainder of the apartments will be for general need.

All the apartments will be owned by Magna West Somerset Housing Association and available for social rent. Taunton Deane Borough Council will receive nomination rights to the lettings.

Background

As explained in the Summary these bungalows and flats are in poor condition due to being built on unstable ground. Set out below is information given to me by the Housing Property Manager on the history of the subsidence affecting these fifteen properties.

“The fifteen bungalows and flats together with ten garages were constructed in 1959 by Wellington Urban District Council

Works undertaken

During 1993, a borehole was drilled adjacent to No.38 which identified fill to a depth of almost 3m and based on this information, this property was underpinned in 1994.

During 1995 evidence of movement started showing in the four 2 storey flats. These were underpinned in 1996 following trial holes being excavated.

Further visual inspections were carried out on the remaining properties in 1997, but as with movement in any building, these were not conclusive and further monitoring was scheduled.

No costs are available going back to this period.

In 2004 reports of movement affecting the internal wall surfaces at No.46 were investigated. Ground conditions were examined by the drilling of boreholes and it was discovered that around this particular property the ground was particularly bad, with fill to a depth of between 4 and 5 metres. However, further boreholes showed that the ground conditions improved as they moved away from No.46.

Based upon this information it was decided to stabilize the ground around Nos. 44, 46 and 48.

In order to undertake this work it was necessary to temporarily re-house the tenants from Nos 44 and 48. At the time, No 46 had been held as a void pending the repair works.

As part of the works it was also agreed that the internal decorations would be made good following the disturbance and the properties would have upgraded facilities in order to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

It was also agreed that whilst undertaking this work it would be beneficial to repair some defective drains which it was considered were having a detrimental affect on the existing ground conditions.

Identified costs associated with this work amount to £78,000.00.

Conclusion

Investigations over more than fifteen years have shown that the majority of properties on this site have been constructed on poor quality ground. Although eight of the fifteen properties have already been underpinned, problems are now evident with the remaining three bungalow terrace and it seems certain that underpinning will be required for that block. It is also possible that further underpinning works may be required to the remaining properties”.

In order to address the subsidence problem and the need for apartments in Wellington a group of Architects was asked to carry out a desk top feasibility study of this site. This came about as a result of a meeting and discussions with the Ward Councillors. It was originally thought that if this Council disposed of the land at nominal cost it would be possible for a mixed tenure scheme to be achieved on the site. This was to include open market housing, Housing Association social rented housing and the Council would receive 15 x 2 bed new apartments back into their housing stock.

Six different scenarios were drawn up and put forward but after many meetings, financial appraisals and the implications of the current housing market situation it was agreed that the scheme would not ‘stackup’ financially. In view of this the idea of including open market housing to cross subsidise the scheme was dropped. The most efficient way forward is to develop the site with all affordable housing including a meeting hall for the elderly.

Early in March 2008 two public consultations were held on site. Letters were sent to each tenant in the 15 bungalows and flats inviting them to an afternoon meeting. Further letters were sent to other residents in Holyoake Street, Seymour Street, Brendon Road and Bovet Street. Letters were posted out to residents living close to the area under proposal inviting them to attend the consultation

The first consultation in the afternoon was designed to involve, only, the tenants of the fifteen bungalows and flats and the second meeting in the evening was for a wider group of residents. The Ward Councillors attended both consultations and have given unstinting support to the redevelopment of this brown field site.

Taking into account the highly sensitive nature of this scheme, officers of the Council and members of Magna West Somerset Housing Association met separately with the tenants of the bungalows and flats. We were able to discuss the initial proposals of the scheme and the forms of compensation available in the case of home loss. Early indications are that the Statutory Homes Loss Payment will be in excess of £4,000 and tenants will, also, be able to benefit from a claim for compensation for removals, connections of utilities, carpets and curtains etc. All this will be agreed with the Asset Holdings Manager, TDBC. As the scheme progresses we will be able to inform tenants of the exact Statutory Home Loss Payment they can expect to receive. The Statutory

Home Loss payment level is reviewed each September. This will be a one off payment to each household.

During the consultation with the wider group of residents, objections were expressed.

over the increased traffic on an already busy road, loss of amenity land at the front, lack of parking, concerns over the elderly tenants living on the ground floor with younger people living above and the possible devaluation of their own properties.

All those attending both consultations were asked to complete a comments sheet and asked to return to the Council. Out of the fifteen tenants, seven returned their form and out of a number of other residents who attended seven letters have been received containing comments and concerns about the scheme. There have also been several phone calls from tenants of the bungalows.

Comments from the tenants of the bungalows and flats who returned their comments sheet include – good idea, wasted ground. I am settled here spent a lot on money on my bungalow, (this tenant has since telephoned to say hat he would like to move), would prefer to stay here but would like a George St. bungalow, meeting helpful but not enough written information to take away, would like to be relocated in a bungalow in this area, will move to another bungalow but don't want a flat, no issues with moving for development to take place, would like a ground floor property, tenure to stay the same, please confirm there is choice to return or move elsewhere, confirmation needed all cost will be covered.

Comments from the seven letters subsequently received from residents in the wider area include – you don't have green land so turn out the elderly and build, where are residents going to park, don't want parking in Brendon Road, busy traffic from Relyon and Aerosoles, build on the south side of wellington, not in my back yard, some bungalows have already been under pinned so why not the remaining, we object to this proposal, lived here for 25 years huge increase in traffic, this street is a rat run, object to number of flats proposed, use of meeting room will generate more traffic, I suggest a multi storey car park instead of a meeting room, meeting room will attract drug addicts and alcoholics and youths at night, will elderly be rehoused into the new two bedroom flats in nearly all cases elderly are housed in one bed properties, 3 storeys will not blend in will not blend in, consultation was restricted, dropped kerbs and hardstands are little more than a bribe, breaking up a close community, object to the proposal, build family homes, I rent a garage and would be devastated at losing it and would want a hardstand in my garden, increase in traffic will be dangerous for children, dynamic community of people, heavy traffic from Fox's Mill, Contractors traffic, keep building in character with existing, pets killed, child could be injured, site was a refuse tip, noisy for elderly to be on the ground floor.

Current Situation

Taking on board as many of the above concerns as possible, the architect's plans were amended to include sufficient on site parking for the residents of all the apartments. The position of the parking will be reassessed after further consultation and amenity land will be retained either at the front or back. The apartments for the elderly residents will be contained in a block to one side next to the meeting hall. There will be a separate secure entrance and lift for use by the elderly residents and their visitors only. The possibility of some hardstands in adjacent gardens will be considered in the costing. Highways will respond to the traffic issues if and when a planning application is submitted.

Provisional costing for the development is set out below

£1.281m Social Housing Grant from the Housing Corporation. (Across the 21 new units)

£2.268m borrowing from Magna West Somerset.

£450,000, over two years, from Taunton Deane

The transfer of the land from Taunton Deane at nominal cost.

Total scheme cost £3,999m

Please note that these costs are estimates only that need to be confirmed. The construction costs are the most significant and currently estimated at £1400/£1450 per m2 to include communal areas

Magna West Somerset Housing Association will own the new stock including the meeting hall. This Council will benefit from nominations to the lettings of the new two bedroom stock.

Investigations will need to be carried out to assess the Ecological and Topographical value of the land and whether there will be a need for piling in view of the subsidence. This development will be built to comply with the Housing Corporation standards and the Code for Sustainable Development to at least level 3.

The estimate of £450,000 is the Council's contribution and should be considered alongside the impending costs of remedial work on the subsidence. This figure will be reviewed as the scheme progresses. The Housing Corporation will not give grant for the replacement of the 15 units to be demolished, as it is considered to be the responsibility of the Local Authority under our Decent Homes Standard commitment.

Each resident of the existing small one bedroom bungalows and flats will be given the option of moving into temporary accommodation elsewhere in Wellington and then, subsequently, moving back to one of the brand new two bedroom apartments in the new block. Alternatively they could move to

permanent elderly accommodation elsewhere in Wellington. To assist the tenants with this decision the Housing Enabling Team have sent out a comprehensive list of elderly accommodation in all areas of the town that falls within the Councils housing stock.

Our Allocations Policy allows for sensitive lettings without reference to the points scheme in circumstances like this. With the introduction of the new CBL scheme tenants affected by home loss can be allocated a suitable property via a direct match.

The way forward is to set up further, separate, consultations with the tenants and the wider residents group to discuss the updated plans in advance of a planning application.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive is requested to:

1. Approve the principle of progressing the Redevelopment and Regeneration of this site.
2. Approve the disposal of the land to Magna Housing Association for £1.
3. Approve the Councils contribution to the funding to assist the development.
4. Ensure that the Council uses every means at its disposal to reach agreement with the tenants in their relocation to a suitable property.
5. Ensure that the Council works closely with residents in Holyoake Street and surrounding area to keep them informed.

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