

# **Taunton Deane Borough Council**

**Executive – 16 September 2009**

## **Redevelopment of four sites in Taunton to provide Affordable Housing in perpetuity**

### **Report of the Housing Enabling Manager**

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

**The purpose of this report is to bring to the attention of the Executive the endless possibilities of council owned potential sites in Taunton that are ‘land hungry’ and in need of updating or replacement. These could, with careful planning, provide up to 270 new affordable homes. I seek your support to progress these sites through the recognised process.**

All of these sites are in the ownership of the Council. There is a separate piece of ‘no mans’ land adjacent to Victoria Gate flats. I seek your permission to instigate Compulsory Purchase action on this land and to then sell on to Knightstone Housing Association at NIL cost to this Council.

Detailed below are my proposals for each site and I would urge you to carefully consider these proposals, to recognise the potential and to support the progression of these schemes, which in turn supports the Council’s agreed priority of providing affordable housing.

I believe these proposals reflect the Core Council’s Review, the Council’s commitment to providing Affordable Housing, compliment Project Taunton and are the first steps in providing a better Taunton Deane for our residents.

### **Scheme One – Garage site behind Priorswood Shops.**

This scheme will entail the demolition of 20 garages and the redevelopment of an area of Council owned land with six family homes including plenty of parking on site for these new homes. It will also replace at least six garages.

## **Background**

There are currently two blocks of garages. Block one has 12 garages and 6 of these are contained within the leases of some of the shops. The remaining six are let through our normal garage lettings policy. Block 2 has 8 garages and one is leased to a shop holder. Six are let through the normal garage lettings policy. The remaining garage has no known identity as yet.

In order to achieve the new development it will be necessary to

- Replace, at least, the leased garages.
- To take account of and not impede any rights of way into or across the rear of the shops.
- To consider the movements of delivery vehicles.

It is envisaged that the leased garages will be replaced as well as the existing 5 parking spaces. It may be possible to include some additional garages for rent.

The space is very tight and Highways have confirmed that they would not object to an access onto Lyngford Lane. This will provide greater flexibility of the area.

There is no community space on this site but Lyngford Park is only meters away.

A Public Consultation was held on the afternoon of 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2009, Invitation letters were sent to all the shop owners, garage holders, tenants above the shops, and Residents in all adjoining properties, including the Public House, residents in part of Dorchester Road, some of Eastwick Road and Selworthy Road. The radius covered everyone who it was considered might be affected by the proposed development.

### **An analysis of the consultation responses:**

68 letter sent out, posters in shops, library etc

#### **Attendance:**

8 households who had received a letter including 3 shop owners.

7 who had seen the posters but not received a letter.

2 Councillors.

#### **General comments:**

Do not want to lose garage

Disabled need garage

Vandalism of cars if not in garage

Tenant of garage for 40 years

Concerns about future access and turning area for lorries, deliver daily.  
Not happy about replacing leaseholders garages only  
Too much extra parking for new houses  
Request 4/5 more garages for tenants above shops.

Three tenants from the maisonettes stayed most of the time and expressed concerns over the loss of garages and the delivery vehicles. One shop keeper had organised a petition, through the shops, which he handed to Housing Enabling Manager.

### **Current Position**

The scheme proposals have now be discussed with Development Control. Taking on board any comments the scheme is now ready to progress through the preliminary stages.

**Scheme Two - Redevelopment of Ruskin Close including the relocation and provision of a new Play area. To include a small piece of land currently leased to Thales. To include, in the scheme, a development of 16 flats, on an adjacent piece of land, which is under negotiation between Knightstone Housing Association and Gadds.**

**At least 90 homes will be achieved by the redevelopment of this area. These will include 1 and 2 bed flats, 2, 3 and 4 bedroom family homes as well as homes for the Disabled and Move on accommodation. This redevelopment will result in a sustainable mixed community**

### **Background**

This former sheltered housing scheme is a development of 36 one bed, two storey flats of traditional construction built in 1957. There is also 1 two bed house which was originally the warden's house. The flats were all decommissioned in January 1995 and are now let on a general needs basis. One flat is sold under the right to buy.

Some 12/15 years ago TDBC entered into a weekly agreement with Stonham Housing Association to let the eight flats, numbered 5a – 8b these are sublet to their tenants who are in need of supported housing.

Similarly a verbal agreement with Carr Gomm enabled the eight flats, numbered 1a – 4b and three other properties in the close to be sublet to their tenants in need of supported housing.

Ruskin Close itself is in a very quite area in a fantastic location close to all amenities and there is a huge demand for housing in this area, vacancies rarely occur. There has

been one vacancy in several years. There is a wide age range of tenants occupying these flats providing an effective mixed use community.

Consideration must be given to the actual buildings and the effect on the residents who live there. Although fifty one years is not long in building terms these flats are no longer fit for purpose.

- The buildings have been described as very dated, tired and dull. Not at all suitable for some people who are in need of supported living. The environment inside the blocks of flats is described as depressing. Noise emits from adjoining flats in the form of door banging, walking around overhead, and footsteps on the concrete stairs. All this indicates limited sound deadening insulation in the walls.
- Each flat has outdated storage heaters which are expensive to run. One of the major sources of complaint was the long, open walkways across the front of the flats. These walkways are served by a concrete stairwell which is very dark and cold where vagrants are sometimes found sleeping.
- Some improvement work has been carried out on these flats

In addition to redeveloping Ruskin Close there is a children's play area close by that needs urgent attention. Reports show this area to be totally unsuitable and dangerous for children to use. It is approached by a 'closed in' footpath off Wordsworth Drive with two meter fencing on each side with high gates at each end. The play area, itself, is surrounded by two meter fencing and can only be viewed by a few of the first floor adjacent flats with only one access/exit.

Two half day surveys were carried out at the play area. The first morning no children came to play on the equipment. During the afternoon of the second half day two children came to play at different times. A written survey was handed out to the parents of the children who attend the YMCA play school. Assessing all the comments regarding the play area it was clear that the current play area was not required and a new one not welcome. It has recently been reported that mature young men have been found using the area at night.

Information regarding unsuitability has been provided by the Ward Councillor, the Community Police and local residents and the Housing Estates Officer.

### **Proposals and moving forward.**

Working together with Knightstone Housing Association an indicative scheme has been designed which will greatly enhance the area, make better use of the land available, and provide new modern cost effective homes for the residents in addition to increasing

the number of homes which in turn will make more homes available for letting in this area.

Adjacent to Ruskin Close, in Wordsworth Drive, is land owned by Gadds Developers with planning permission for 11 apartments. The site has been offered to Knightstone Housing Association for Affordable Housing. In fact the flats are too big for normal lettings and Knightstone would have difficulty in attracting subsidy from the Homes and Community Agency. In view of this, Knightstone have redesigned the block with 16 one and two bedroom flats for Affordable Housing, they will be built to at least Code 4 standard. By the date of the Executive meeting a new planning application will have been submitted.

With your support and an approved planning permission for the site in Wordsworth Drive these 16 flats could launch the redevelopment of the area. These new apartments will represent the first phase of an exciting new Ruskin Close.

On completion of the 16 new apartments residents of Ruskin Close will have the opportunity to choose which of these new flats they would like to move into, should they wish to stay in the Close.

The Statutory Home Loss payment with associated displacement compensation will be available to those residents of Ruskin Close who qualify.

Ruskin Close could be redeveloped in three phases which will mean existing tenants can stay where they are until they move directly into their new home, unless they wish to move elsewhere in the Deane. This option would be offered.

A public consultation was held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2009 at the Peacock Club, Lisieux Way. Over 100 letters were sent out to those who might be affected by the redevelopment inviting them to attend. Fifty one people came along to see the proposals on offer.

Visitors were asked to complete a comment sheet. Some were taken away and sent in. I have detailed below a list of those comments.

The tenants of Ruskin Close were asked where they would like to be rehoused in the event of the redevelopment taking place. They were encouraged to complete a relocation preference chart giving priority to their choices e.g staying in the new Ruskin, moving elsewhere in Taunton Deane, moving out of the area.

One 86 year old lady 'jumped' at this opportunity to move near her disabled sister in Curry Rivel. With the financial payment and Homefinder Somerset we should be able to help her to achieve this.

There was much discussion about the existing play area. It was, overwhelmingly expressed that no one wanted the new play area. It was also agreed that no one wanted the play area in the centre of the development. The architect is looking at alternative uses for this area.

### **Analysis of Consultation**

109 letters sent out, posters displayed in Surgery and shops.

49 people attended

17 from Ruskin Close

6 from Wordsworth Drive

5 from Parmin Close

1 Burns Road

Others

Ward Councillor

PCSO

LAT

Carr Gomm support workers

More than one person attended from some households.

### **General comments:**

Concerns the new development may increase the chance of anti-social behaviour.

Do not want the play area

Prefer more parking and landscaped area

Agree Ruskin Close needs updating.

Would like new development to be dog friendly

In agreement with Wordsworth Drive play area being closed

Good idea to redevelop Ruskin as it is very old and in need of upgrading.

Children are damaging the trees in the play area.

Problems with people going into the park late at night. We shall be very pleased to see it go.

I agree with the alterations as long as they are dog friendly.

There is a need for a sitting area and space for my dog.

Little children are no problem.

### **Verbal comments.**

Access road through Burns Road.

Remove or close the existing play area.

Who is going to live here?

Don't want to live overlooking the play area.

It's been on the cards for many years that this will happen.

Would like to move out of Somerset.

Would like to move to Devon.

Can I have a ground floor flat for my two guinea Pigs?

Will I be able to take my two Budgies?

## **Breakdown of areas of choice for re housing by sixteen residents.**

Holway. Duke Street. Priorswood. New Ruskin Close.  
Somewhere green. Downstairs flat with area for buggy. Disabled bungalow.  
West Dorset. Devon/Dorset. North Curry. Curry Rivel.

## **Moving forward**

Knightstone are working with Gadds to progress the planning application for the land in Wordsworth Drive.

Discussions are underway with the Open Space and Leisure Manager over the existing play area.

A further consultation just for the residents of Ruskin Close is planned soon after the Executive meeting.

## **Scheme Three – The redevelopment of Victoria Gate and associated area. There are 30 elderly person’s flats in two separate locations; both locations are remote from one another.**

**The current scheme is in a very pleasant location being only a half a mile from the town centre. It is proposed to include in this development the ‘no mans land’ nearby. This development will enable up to 60 homes to be achieved on these sites.**

The Redevelopment of Victoria Gate sheltered housing scheme should be considered as three locations, described below.

**Location one** consists of 20 flats in three, two storey blocks.

The ex warden’s house at no. six.

**Location two** consists of 10 flats in two, two storey blocks.

**Location three** is a piece of ‘No Mans’ land adjacent to location one above and behind the car park to the White Hart Inn. Currently known as allotment land.

## **Comment from the Supported Housing Manager**

“Victoria Gate is an ideal location to provide a mix of general need and accommodation for older people with easy access to local services. The existing accommodation would benefit from refurbishment/replacement”.

## **History.**

A health check was carried out on this Elderly Persons scheme in 1999 when it was reported that there were a number of younger, active tenants living in the flats as well as elderly tenants. There were various recommendations put forward to bring the scheme up to date to encourage older residents to accept these properties.

These flats are quite 'land hungry' and the area lends itself to a much larger up to date mixed development. Both sites lend themselves to redevelopment.

Adjacent to location one is an area of '**no mans land**'. This land is behind the car park to the White Hart Inn. It is 'landlocked', this council owns an access road leading to it. Future access could be achieved as part of this scheme over TDBC land. The land is unregistered with no known owner. Extensive work has been carried out, by another party, to identify the owner but to no avail. It is proposed to Compulsory Purchase this land and sell on to Knightstone Housing Association at NIL cost to this Council. If this land can be secured it would be used for the development of affordable housing in conjunction with the redevelopment of Victoria Gate flats.

Again the development of this site would launch the redevelopment of the area without causing too much disruption to the present nearby Taunton Deane tenants.

You will note on the site location plan this land is denoted as allotment gardens. These allotments have not been cultivated for many years, probably decades. There is no water on the site. There are currently Environmental issues with fly tipping and the presence of rodents, needles etc.

### **Proposals:**

The Council to secure the 'no mans' land (location three) through the Compulsory Purchase process, with no cost to this Council. Then to sell on to Knightstone Housing Association. The proceeds of the sale would be invested with Trustees appointed. This area of land would be developed first to allow a smooth decant operation. Tenants would be carefully consulted and given the option of moving to the new flats in the area or to other appropriate accommodation in the Borough.

To transfer the land of 'location one' to Knightstone who would then demolish and redevelop the site.

To transfer the land of 'location two' to Knightstone who would then demolish and redevelop the site.

Currently there are thirty elderly persons sheltered homes on two of these three locations. With careful planning and consultation this site could be transformed into an innovative site with a mixed community providing up to 60 homes.



The present tenants in the flats at Victoria Gate would receive the Statutory Home Loss payment and compensation for displacement issues.

A public consultation was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2009. 113 letters were sent out as well as posters. A total of 45 visitors attended the consultation.

20 from Victoria Gate

18 from Mitre Court

7 from Alfred Street

Plus four others including two Community Police Officers.

**General comments:**

The market value of our homes will decrease.

Please keep White Hart going.

As long as the plans don't take over any more of the green belt.

I have no problems with building on existing land.

Pleased that you are not planning to encroach on the green park area.

Parking is already a problem.

I gather there is extra parking for people in the houses.

I don't want to move I am 84 I have a nice view.

For the sake of a few more people you could destroy the lives of others,

I was very impressed with the presentation and the advice given. I would have liked to see a model and we could have understood it a bit better.

I would like to apply, here and now, for a two bed roomed disabled ground floor flat.

As you can imagine there are some disgruntled tenants

I would like wall lights with a dimmer.

I would need help with the move, I can't move myself

I need someone to install my electrical equipment

Would we have the same postcode?

Will tenants be involved with the colours etc?

Most important a new Victoria Gate Surgery with a Pharmacy attached.

It is very difficult to get prescriptions dispensed at present.

I do not want to move but if I do I would like a ground floor flat.

Please confirm what type of people are entitled to be housed here as no one wants to 'run down' the near by neighbourhood.

How long is it planned to take from start to finish.

Can the Council guarantee that the residents of Victoria Gate will be able to move into the new accommodation if they wish to.

The re development of Victoria Gate – Welcome. Especially if it come with a new energy like gas for heating.

Can you help me to get a ground floor flat?

I am going to be honest I love living here and want to stay with all my neighbours as they rely on me and my children. I am looking in favour of the development that might go ahead as long as my needs are taken into account. I have 6 kids and need a four/fiver bed house.

Will the boiler be noisy?

Will wait to see your next presentation.

### **Moving forward**

Discussions are taking place with the Dr. Surgery over possible solutions for a new larger surgery and pharmacy.

Discussions are taking place with the Brewery regarding the White hart land to see if this is available , if so it could enhance the site greatly.

Progress the Compulsory Purchase process of the 'no mans' land at NIL cost to the Council.

Discussions are taking place with the architect for modifications to the plans as a result of the consultation.

A further consultation for just the residents/tenants of Victoria Gate is planned soon after the Executive meeting.

### **Scheme Four – Please see details of this scheme on the confidential, pink papers attached.**

### **In Conclusion**

In Taunton Deane there is a need for all types of Affordable Housing. Over recent years we have fallen behind in our delivery by at least 3,000 affordable homes and just acknowledging this demand is going some way towards addressing the need.

Working with Housing Associations to redevelop land hungry sites is a way of increasing the supply. The four sites put forward for redevelopment will increase the number of homes available by approximately 270. Will provide a good standard of living for our tenants new and old and by building to at least Code 4 it will reduce energy bills and provide a better environment.

### **Recommendations**

Members of the Executive are asked to consider the recommendations and approve:-

- 1 The principle of progressing the Redevelopment and Regeneration of these four sites; and
- 2 To dispose of the land to the appropriate Registered Social Landlord (Housing Association).
- 3 The disposal of this land, should in return, give letting priority to Taunton Deane residents through the Homefinder Somerset scheme.

- 4 On disposal of the land it should be legally agreed that the land can never be used for anything other than for the provision of Affordable Housing.
- 5 To progress the Compulsory Purchase process of the 'no mans' land at Victoria Gate at NIL cost to Taunton Deane Borough Council.
- 6 Meet the tenants' aspirations, where possible, for relocation.
- 7 The Council will work closely with all the residents in each of the above locations and keep them informed.

By agreeing to these recommendations your support will enable the progression of these sites through the recognized process.

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