

Affordable Housing Development and Regeneration Programme

Cabinet

Date: 4th December 2019

Author: Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety
Corporate Director for Communities and Housing

Wards: Walcot and Park North, Lydiard and Freshbrook

Parishes Affected: Central Swindon South, West

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The report seeks approval from Cabinet to allocate the proposed housing site at Bromley Close in order for the Council, through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), to continue developing social housing for the residents of Swindon. The identified site has been selected following Member engagement and the initial undertaking of due diligence by the Council's Planning Department in terms of constraints.
- 1.2 This report also serves to inform Cabinet of the intended development of the site at Windmill Hill and how this will be brought forward, as well as an update for Members on the intention of developing an options appraisal regarding a High-Rise strategy within the Walcot and Park North Wards.
- 1.3 The details of this report will continue to deliver towards the Council's Priority 1: 'To improve infrastructure and housing to support a growing, low carbon economy' and contribute to delivering Pledge 6: 'Ensure there is a range of good quality housing options in Swindon, including affordable opportunities to buy and rent' and: 'Through the Local Plan review, identify brown field and green field sites for housing to deliver homes...'

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the allocation of the land at Bromley Close, detailed on the plan attached at Appendix 1, as a future housing development site to be delivered through the HRA.
- 2.2 Delegate the Head of Property Assets in consultation with the Chief Legal Officer to take all necessary steps to appropriate the land at Windmill Hill, detailed on the plan attached as Appendix 2, from the General Fund to the HRA at a value to be determined, to enable it to be developed through the HRA with potential collaboration with the Swindon Housing Company.
- 2.3 Approve a budget of £50K, to be allocated from the HRA, to progress the detailed feasibility and design for the sites at Bromley Close and Windmill Hill, as well as the work to progress the development of Milverton and Torrington Courts.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Michael Ash, Director of Housing - mash@swindon.gov.uk.

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3. Detail

Bromley Close

- 3.1 The site known as Bromley Close is a Council owned site that has been assessed for its development potential through the HRA. The site is located in the Ward of Walcot and Park North. Ward Members have been consulted and are supportive of a consultation with residents on future options. Ward Members have asked to be kept informed as scheme layouts and design emerge.
- 3.2 The site has been allocated within the SHELAA as a housing development site and accords with the principles of planning policy as an acceptable housing site in terms of strategic location.
- 3.3 The Head of Property Assets has undertaken a desk top study of the land title and has not identified any constraints that would preclude development, although further due diligence will be undertaken, should Cabinet approve this proposal.
- 3.4 A business case detailing the design and costings of a residential development at the site will be brought back to Cabinet for approval.

Windmill Hill

- 3.5 This site is located within the Lydiard and Freshbrook Ward and is a site that has previously been considered by the Council's owned Housing Company. Following extensive appraisals it is now considered to be more suited to a development of affordable housing.
- 3.6 The site is held within the General Fund and will therefore need to be appropriated to the HRA. The Head of Property Assets will determine the value of the site to establish an appropriate consideration.
- 3.7 The feasibility for this site has already been undertaken and an indicative scheme produced. The scheme comprises of 71 units, which is made up of 7 two bed bungalows, 10 two bed houses, 24 three bed houses and a block of 30 flats of both one and two bed units. A business case detailing the design and costings of the residential development at the site will be brought back to Cabinet for approval.

Milverton and Torrington Courts

- 3.8 The Council, through the HRA, owns high-rise blocks called Milverton and Torrington Courts which are located in the Walcot and Park North Wards. These are 2 of 7 high rise blocks that the Council, through the HRA, owns. Milverton and Torrington Courts are regarded as being in most need of action due in particular to the deterioration of the external fabric of the buildings. They are now

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suffering problems of water ingress through the mortar of the building during prolonged periods of wet weather.

- 3.9 The two blocks were built in the mid 1960's and now require significant investment in terms of either modernisation or complete replacement. There are 82 units in total between the two blocks, with 9 privately owned and 73 socially rented.
- 3.10 The blocks both house telecommunications equipment on the roofs of the towers which provide network coverage for the area. This equipment will need to be removed and / or repositioned should the towers be demolished. There are license arrangements in place with the telecommunication providers and officers will continue to work with the providers on a suitable solution.
- 3.11 In the event of Torrington Court and/or Milverton Court being demolished then there are implications due to the Council requiring residents to vacate residential properties. Tenants dependent on tenancy status are entitled to compensation for the loss of their homes, which would be included in the Council's costs for the project. There are 7 leaseholders in Torrington Court and 1 in Milverton Court, which, if a sale price cannot be agreed would need to be compulsorily purchased. This work would be done by the Council's Legal team and all relevant legislation will be complied with.
- 3.12 Ward Members have been consulted and are supportive of a consultation with residents on future options. Ward Members have asked to be kept informed as scheme layouts and design as they emerge. Prior to the formalisation of a preferred option, Housing Services held a local community engagement event on Wednesday 16th October 2019 to discuss the current options for the blocks. These include:
 - 3.12.1 A full refurbishment of the entire blocks. Refurbishing the flats interiors and communal areas and cladding the outside of the building, whilst the tenants remain in situ.
 - 3.12.2 Regeneration. Demolishing the existing high-rise buildings and replacing them with new build properties.
- 3.13 146 households were invited to comment, with 27 (16.4%) responses in total being received, 22 of those by way of attendance to the event and 5 by way of email or telephone.
- 3.14 The 27 respondents were asked what refurbishment works they would like to see if the buildings were to be renovated. 11 agreed that a full refurbishment of the towers internal and external fabric was required, with specific mention of the need to replace the bathrooms, kitchens, windows and heating systems. Improvements to the communal areas was also considered necessary and 4

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comments considered that the tower blocks were beyond refurbishment. Other comments received referred to the environment giving rise to anti-social behaviour and not being suitable for children. Only 1 resident suggested that no works to the towers blocks were necessary.

- 3.15 Of the 27 responses received, 19 (70.3%) of those were in favour of demolishing the tower blocks and redeveloping.
- 3.16 Further resident consultation will be carried out in November 2019 to build on the comments already received. It is also intended to assess other Council owned sites for development in order to provide potential adequate housing provision for the tenants of the high-rises to be re-housed should a re-development take place.
- 3.17 In order to undertake and develop the work stipulated within Section 3 of this report, a budget of £50K is requested from the Housing Revenue Account.

4. Alternative Options

Do not pursue this specific project (Do nothing):

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to develop the sites for housing purposes. This would retain the areas of land which could be used for alternative uses or development for the future. Alternative sites for development are available but are yet to be fully explored and brought forward through the current analysis process. The decision not to agree the future development of these sites would therefore result in a delay whilst other sites are brought forward for consideration and scrutiny.

Sell the land as development sites:

- 4.2 The identified sites could be advertised on the open market and sold for residential development, following receipt of a planning permission, to a prospective developer. Whilst the sites would likely be built upon, there is no guarantee of this nor of when the site will be developed or the nature or use of any such development.
- 4.3 If the land was sold with the benefit of planning permission by the Council, it would result in an additional capital financial receipt to the Council.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 The HRA will fund the cost of the appropriation of land at Windmill Hill from the General Fund to the HRA. The detailed design at Windmill Hill and the remaining feasibility work for Bromley Close and the high rise buildings will cost an

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estimated £50,000. This will be funded from current in year HRA revenue savings. Approval of any further work following feasibility will be the subject of a further approval.

- 5.2 Works for the projects will be tendered out in line with Council contract standing orders.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.3 The Council is able to dispose of land. However, the Council cannot dispose of the land for less than the best consideration without the approval of the Secretary of State. The Council must be satisfied at the time of the transfer of the land that it has obtained the best consideration reasonably attainable for the disposal.
- 5.4 The Council's title to the land will need to be investigated prior to any agreement to transfer to ensure that there are no impediments to the proposed transfer. If any of the land is public open space, the Council will need to advertise the proposed disposal of it and consider any objections received in accordance with the requirement of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 5.5 The Chief Legal Officer is currently instructed by the Head of Property in negotiating a new 10 year lease in regards to the telecommunication equipment on Milverton Court. The draft for this lease contains a provision for a break, on 18 months' notice, where there is a genuine plan for redevelopment. The negotiation of this break clause is key to ensuring the timely delivery of any proposed redevelopment.
- 5.6 It is considered that the proposal within this report is compatible with Convention Rights.

Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA)

- 5.7 A Diversity Impact Assessment has been carried out on the Housing Development Programme, and there are no adverse implications for consideration.
- 5.8 The site at Windmill Hill will see the development of 7 assisted living bungalows which will help support independent living for the elderly and disabled.
- 5.9 A copy of the DIA is available from the report author.

Risk Management

- 5.10 A Risk Assessment has been completed. No significant risks or issues were found. A copy of the Risk Assessment is available from the report author.

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6. Consultees

- 6.1 Ward Members and Cabinet (through the Cabinet Member portfolio holder) have provisionally reviewed the list of sites forming this report.
- 6.2 The Corporate Director of Finance and Assets (Section 151 Officer) and Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.
- 6.3 The Head of Property Assets has undertaken a desk top study of the land title and has not identified any constraints that would preclude development, although further due diligence will be undertaken, should Cabinet approve this proposal.
- 6.4 The Council's Planning Department has confirmed that the sites are contained within the SHELAA and allocated through the Local Plan review.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices

Appendix One

- 8.1 Location plan of Bromley Close.

Appendix Two

- 8.2 Location plan of Windmill Hill.

Appendix Three

- 8.3 Location plan of Milverton and Torrington Courts.

9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme

- 9.1 This is a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme for December 2019.