

9 December 2020		ITEM: 14
Cabinet		
Sheltered Housing Decommissioning – Alexandra Road/Dunlop Road		
Wards and communities affected: Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park	Key Decision: No	
Report of: Councillor Barry Johnson – Portfolio Holder for Housing		
Accountable Assistant Director: Carol Hinvest – Assistant Director of Housing		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris – Corporate Director, Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report sets out the proposals for the future of the Alexandra Court Sheltered Housing complex in Tilbury, comprised of 36 properties at Alexandra Road and four properties at Dunlop Road.

The report outlines the options which were considered relating to accessibility to the communal blocks at this complex, as well as the opportunities which are available through one of the Council's current new build schemes at Calcutta Road, Tilbury.

1. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 1.1. Approve the proposal to decommission the Sheltered Housing properties at Alexandra Road and Dunlop Road in Tilbury; and**
- 1.2. Notes and comments on the proposal to implement a local lettings plan for the new housing development for older people at Calcutta Road which gives priority to tenants affected by the above proposed decommissioning.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1** In March 2019 a report was produced which considered the condition of communal entrance points in the Sheltered Housing complexes across the council's housing stock. This review included the 36 properties at Alexandra Road and the four properties at Dunlop Road, which collectively form the 'Alexandra Court' Sheltered Housing complex in the Tilbury Riverside and

Thurrock Park ward.

Residents are being supported to live independently in Sheltered Housing properties for longer and later in life than they may have been able to historically. Whilst this is positive, as people age and their mobility reduces they may face additional challenges due to the condition of the communal access points for their homes, which subsequently impacts upon their quality of life and independence.

- 2.2 The reviews which were carried out assessed the level of accessibility for each block and communal entrance point in the context of the *Equality Act 2010* as well as against the ideal standards as set out in the *Building Regulations 2010 Part M: Access to and use of Buildings; Volume 1: Dwellings; M4(2) Category 2: Accessible and adaptable dwellings*.

In some cases, where dwelling or communal area accessibility is identified as being below the standard which the council is aiming to achieve across all its Sheltered Housing complexes, the work to rectify the issue is relatively straight-forward. In other instances there are significant constraints which hamper the identified remedial work, and this is the case at Alexandra Court.

- 2.3 Approximately 400 metres from the Alexandra Court Sheltered Housing complex, construction is currently underway for a new development of 35 council-owned flats for older residents at Calcutta Road. The development, which will be called Beaconsfield Place, will have 31 one-bedroom flats and 4 two-bedroom duplex flats, and these are due to be completed in Summer 2021.

This development will have indoors communal spaces, private communal gardens for residents, ample parking and mobility scooter storage. The support of a sheltered housing officer will be provided at this new development.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The assessment of the access to the blocks at the Alexandra Court Sheltered Housing complex indicated that they do not currently meet the accessibility standards which the council is aiming to achieve. The options which have been considered include:

- A. Undertaking the identified work to bring the blocks in line with the standard.
- B. Maintaining the current level of block accessibility below the required standard and retain the complex as a Sheltered Housing scheme.
- C. Decommissioning this Sheltered Housing complex as it is unfit for the future.

The scale of the suggested work which would be needed to meet the required standards for access to the blocks at Alexandra Road and Dunlop Road would be extremely disruptive to residents by affecting the only entrances to each block, meaning that it would be highly likely that temporary decants would be required. With this in mind, and due to the space constraints at this site which significantly limit the viable options for the identified work to be carried out, it has been determined that it would not be feasible to undertake these external alterations.

- 3.2 It should be noted that even if the work to improve the external access to blocks were to be carried out, a number of other internal accessibility issues would still remain. The only way to access the first-floor flats at this complex is by stairs as there is no lift access. In addition to this, the age of construction combined with the internal layout of each block means that whilst access to the flats could be improved, each individual flat would be no more suitable for residents with limited mobility.
- 3.3 In light of the above assessment of the available options, it can be seen that option A is not feasible and that option B does not provide an appropriate solution for the future for this complex.

It is recommended that the Alexandra Court Sheltered Housing complex should be decommissioned in line with option C. Whilst this would cause a level of disruption to residents currently living within this Sheltered Housing complex as all residents living in these blocks would be required to move, there would be a comprehensive package of support available to help them to move to alternative accommodation suitable for their needs.

As part of the decommissioning process, the Council will no longer advertise or make permanent offers of accommodation for these properties as they become void. The Sheltered Housing service will also be withdrawn, however this will not happen whilst any Sheltered Housing tenant remains at the complex.

4 Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The nearby construction of Beaconsfield Place, a development using HAPPI principles for older people's housing, provides an opportunity for residents at the Alexandra Court Sheltered Housing complex to move to a new home within their current community which is designed with accessibility requirements in mind.

A local lettings plan is proposed which will ensure that those tenants being decanted from the Alexandra Court Sheltered Housing complex are prioritised for the Beaconsfield Place development, should they wish to move there. A formal expression of interest period will be conducted in January 2021, however initial consultation with residents has already been carried out. Details of this appear in the consultation section of the report.

All residents will also be awarded the highest priority band on the council's housing register, which will allow them to consider moving to another Sheltered Housing complex or appropriate property elsewhere in Tilbury or across Thurrock.

As all residents would be required to permanently move from the Alexandra Road and Dunlop Road blocks, a 'home loss and disturbance' payment will be made to each affected household as stipulated by the *Home Loss Payments (Prescribed Amounts) (England) Regulations 2020*.

All residents will be fully supported with their future move by a dedicated officer who would provide assistance with key elements of moving home, such as:

- making a transfer application
- packing and removals
- assisting with the home loss and disturbance payment
- general moving requirements
- providing a smooth transition from one property to another

- 4.2 Once the recommendation to decommission the Alexandra Court Sheltered Housing complex has been agreed and residents start to move to other properties elsewhere in the borough, the number of void properties will increase at this complex. In the short-term, once all properties in a given block become empty, consideration can be given to utilising these as temporary accommodation for homeless households.

In the longer term, decommissioning this complex allows the entire site to be considered as a redevelopment opportunity to provide new council-owned family-sized homes for the borough.

5 Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Consultation and engagement activity has already been carried out with residents at the Alexandra Court Sheltered Housing complex as well as with ward members and the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

A letter was hand-delivered to all residents on 28 September 2020 which outlined the proposals for decommissioning the complex as well as the options which would be available to each household for the future.

Included within the letter was a pre-arranged socially distanced appointment for the residents and their next of kin or carer to meet with the Sheltered Housing Officer at Alexandra Court, if they wished, in order to discuss these proposals in more detail and ask any initial questions which they may have had.

- 5.2 The below table demonstrates the engagement methods which have been chosen by tenants at this complex.

Engagement Method	Count
Attended appointment	14
Attended appointment with next of kin	5
Telephone call	13
Telephone call with next of kin	4
No appointment or telephone call	2

- 5.3 Feedback from residents has been supportive of the proposals. As part of this period of engagement and consultation, initial feedback was collected with regards to interest in moving to the Beaconsfield Place development as well as moving to any other Sheltered Housing complex in the borough. The tables below outline the feedback received in this regard.

Interest in Beaconsfield Place?	Count
Yes	27
No	8
Unsure	3

Other area preference	Count
Chadwell St Mary	3
Corringham	1
Grays	3
South Ockendon	1
Tilbury	15
Unsure	2
No preference shared	14

In addition to understanding the preferences of each resident towards a preferred location to move to, the Sheltered Housing Officer has worked with residents to collate any health or medical issues which need to be considered alongside any other comments or preferences which had been expressed.

- 5.4 These proposals were presented to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 November 2020 in order to seek members' views on the potential decommissioning of this site. The proposals were well received.

6 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The community impact of these proposals has been managed and mitigated through thorough comprehensive support and engagement with those who will be affected by the change. The specific needs of each individual household are being considered and addressed on a case-by-case basis.

The longer term redevelopment aspirations for this site supports the Council's 'Place' priority as well as the intentions to provide up to 500 new council homes.

7 Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Strategic Lead – Corporate Finance

The proposal in this report to decommission this sheltered housing complex will have financial implications due to the potential for rent loss whilst properties remain void and through the home loss and disturbance payments which will need to be made. This will be managed as part of the 2020/21 budget position.

The properties will remain part of the Council's assets, and further consideration will be given as to how best utilise them in the future

Bearing this in mind, the proposal also removes the necessity for the Council to undertake a significant amount of work to improve the external access of these blocks which may only have limited benefit.

The proposal also provides an opportunity to reduce the financial impact of temporary accommodation placements in the private rental sector by utilising decommissioned properties for this purpose, therefore also reducing the potential lost rental income at this complex.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**

Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer

This report proposes a recommendation to decommission a sheltered housing complex and seek alternative accommodation for the current tenants in order to best meet their needs. The proposals have been considered against relevant legislative and regulatory documentation as outlined within this report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

Whilst a number of residents would be impacted by the recommended proposal within this report, the consultation and engagement activity which has already been carried out and the offer of personalised support which will be provided going forward evidences that consideration has been given to the individual needs of each household, such as age and any disabilities.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked after children)

Not applicable

8 Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

9 Appendices to the report

- N/A

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