

<b>10 January 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Beaconsfield Place/Calcutta Road – Lessons Learnt</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> None	
<b>Report of:</b> Ryan Farmer – Housing Strategy and Quality Manager		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> n/a		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Ewelina Sorbjan – Interim Director of Housing		
<b>This report is</b> Public		

## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to share the background of the HRA development at Calcutta Road, known as Beaconsfield Place and share the lessons learnt

Following the completion and handover of the scheme and the subsequent first round of lettings at Beaconsfield Place, the Housing service and other appropriate stakeholders undertook a review to identify areas of learning which could inform future new build developments to avoid potential pitfalls and strengthen the likelihood of positive resident experiences of moving to and living in their new homes.

This report presents the findings of this review activity and will help to steer future work.

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

**1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to review this report and provide feedback on its contents to inform future new build developments delivered by the council.**

### **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1. In June 2017, an application for planning permission was approved for a 100% affordable development of 35 homes for people aged over 55 at Calcutta Road, Tilbury, designed with HAPPI (Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation) principles.

2.2. This application was the product of a collaborative design process involving both technical professionals and input from council staff from a range of services including Housing Assets and Maintenance, Sheltered Housing,

Property, Planning, Occupational Therapy and other colleagues in Adult Social Care.

- 2.3. Work officially started on site in October 2019; however, the overall construction and development project faced significant levels of disruption due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2.4. The development, now called Beaconsfield Place, comprises 31 one-bedroom flats and four two-bedroom duplex flats, indoor communal spaces, private communal gardens for residents, ample parking and mobility scooter storage.
- 2.5. Once the development was handed over to Thurrock Council, the first lettings were completed on 7 March 2022.
- 2.6. The scheme was nominated for a number of regional and national awards. It was shortlisted in the *Best older people's housing development - rural/suburban* category at the Inside Housing Development Awards 2022 and the *Meeting Housing Need* category at the Essex Housing Awards 2022. The scheme won the *Excellence in Development Medium Schemes (26-50 Homes)* award at the Essex Housing Awards 2022.
- 2.7. Following the completion and handover of the scheme and the subsequent first round of lettings at Beaconsfield Place, the Housing service and other appropriate stakeholder undertook a review to identify areas of learning which could inform future new build developments to avoiding potential pitfalls and strengthen the likelihood of positive resident experiences of moving to and living in their new homes. These findings are set out in distinct sections below.

### **3. Designation of New Build Scheme**

- 3.1. As previously outlined, the Calcutta Road development was initially planned to be delivered as a scheme designed for people aged over 55, but not a Sheltered Housing scheme specifically. This development was always intended to provide more specialised accommodation for an identified need in the borough, as adopting HAPPI principles would allow tenants to remain in these homes for longer. The provision of shared communal areas and gardens was intended to provide older residents with a community and support network, allowing them to remain independent and benefit from the supported living the scheme would provide.
- 3.2. In May 2021, a decision was made by Interim Assistant Director of Housing in post at the time to designate the development as Sheltered Housing, partly to support the decommissioning of the nearby Alexandra Court Sheltered Housing complex. The decommissioning of this complex followed an assessment of the access to blocks at the site. This study indicated that the blocks at Alexandra Court did not meet the accessibility standards the council aims to achieve. The nearby construction of Beaconsfield Place, developed using HAPPI principles for older people's housing, provided an opportunity for residents at Alexandra Court to move to a new home within their current community designed with accessibility requirements in mind.

- 3.3. It is expected that there will be overlaps in the cohorts of potential residents of a Sheltered Housing scheme and a housing scheme developed for people over 55. However, the experience from this development project has shown some of the difficulties which can arise when making a change in designation at such a late stage, given that the project was already under construction and substantial amendments to design could not be made.
- 3.4. The design of a new build scheme is decided at a very early stage in the project, setting a clear direction to meet the housing needs of intended future residents. It, therefore, makes it difficult to react effectively when the designation changes towards the end of the development project, potentially resulting in the delivery of a building which is no longer 'purpose built' for its intended residents, which may also risk further complications.
- 3.5. Resident feedback from the new tenant survey for Beaconsfield Place indicates that 75% of those who answered the question about the overall quality of home reported that they were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied.
- 3.6. The learning from this experience is to remain committed to initially agreed project outcomes wherever it is possible and appropriate. Whilst all projects are designed with a degree of future proofing, those projects intended for particular groups of residents should consider an exit strategy at an early stage in design so that they can be easily adapted for alternative needs if the requirement to do so arises in the future.
- 3.7. With regard to the Beaconsfield Place project, the use of a light gauge steel system to reduce the construction period and achieve spend of Right to Buy receipts within their permitted timescale mitigated against this objective. This learning will ensure that the proposed development will be suitable for the needs of the cohorts of residents who would be anticipated to live there in the future.

#### **4. Communal Fixtures and Fittings**

- 4.1. In the design of Beaconsfield Place, specific attention was made to ensure that communal areas did not feel sterile and without character or features whilst maintaining a clear and safe environment. Particular attention was paid to providing attractive light fittings in specific communal locations.
- 4.2. From a general caretaking and maintenance perspective, it was identified that whilst there should be an aspiration to design spaces which residents can enjoy as they pass through them, it is also crucial that consideration is paid to the ease and ability to clean such spaces, including any lighting installations.

#### **5. Waste and Waste Collection**

- 5.1. Stakeholder engagement highlighted some areas relating to waste and waste collection as particular concerns following the handover of Beaconsfield Place. However, resident feedback from the new tenant survey indicates that two-thirds of those who answered the question about waste disposal and

recycling facilities reported that they were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied.

- 5.2. After residents had moved into the Beaconsfield Place development, there was a delay in waste collection commencing, resulting in a growing backlog. However, this was swiftly dealt with once collections started. Definitive arrangements and early commitments between Housing and Waste Services for when collections will begin for future new build developments would be a positive step and improve the experience for residents moving into new homes.
- 5.3. Building on the detailed engagement already undertaken with colleagues in Waste Services, the general feedback from colleagues involved in the handover of this development has highlighted other benefits this can bring.
- 5.4. New build development can take extended periods to progress from design through to handover, so continued engagement with and from Waste Services is crucial to ensure that the bins which are ultimately provided at a scheme remain fit for purpose and meet the operational requirements at that point in time.
- 5.5. Finally, as a general point for consideration (especially in schemes designed with older people in mind), it should always be ensured that there is good access to bin stores for residents with mobility issues.

## **6. Caretaking**

- 6.1. The reported satisfaction from residents regarding how communal areas are maintained is high, with 80% of those who answered this question on the new tenant survey reporting that they were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with this.
- 6.2. The element to be considered in future developments, and one which has been actively considered in other recent new build developments such as Alma Court, is the planning for and provision of a suitable space for site-based caretakers, where that provision is specifically required or shown to be necessary. In such cases the original brief should specifically require and evidence the need for on-site office provision.

## **7. Anti-social Behaviour**

- 7.1. New tenant feedback for Beaconsfield Place indicates that 75% of those who answered the question about feeling safe in their home reported that they did.
- 7.2. There were significant concerns from officers relating to anti-social behaviour around the Beaconsfield Place development, particularly during and after handover and the first rounds of property lettings.
- 7.3. Reflecting on this period, several suggestions and lessons have been identified for future new build developments. It is important to note that this is not a reflection of activity which did or did not happen for the Beaconsfield

Place development, but instead what has been identified as good practice and reasonable approaches in the future.

- 7.4. The council should consider anti-social behaviour, resident safety, and how people can access a development from the early stages of planning. It should remain an item on the agenda throughout the project. This focus would make perpetrating anti-social behaviour as difficult as possible and would aim to support future residents to feel safe once they are in their new homes. Beaconsfield Place did secure a Gold Standard Secured by Design certification which is a police-accredited approach to designing out crime.
- 7.5. Although the handover of Beaconsfield Place was delayed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, for future developments, consideration should be given to the timing of handover, especially if located in an area which is particularly vulnerable to anti-social behaviour. Consideration should also be given to any additional resources required to effectively manage handovers at certain times of the year when anti-social behaviour has been observed to be more prevalent, such as during school holidays and exam times.
- 7.6. A further step the council should consider in all new build developments is ensuring planned engagement with the local community during the build and before handover. Such an approach would provide the platform and opportunity to stress the importance of protecting new community assets and keeping communities looking nice and feeling safe. The council and delivery partners should work to encourage and promote positive public opinion for new developments and the benefits they bring to local communities, seeking to minimise the risk to developments during their construction and to residents and their homes after handover.

## **8. Moving to a New Home**

- 8.1. A local lettings plan was implemented for the first lettings of many of the properties at Beaconsfield Place. The local lettings plan included the 31 one-bedroom flats; however, the four two-bedroom duplex flats at this site did not form part of the plan. Properties of this type and size were identified as being able to meet the specific needs of households and applicants across the borough; thus, these were let in line with the council's Housing Allocations Policy.
- 8.2. The first lettings of 75% of the properties covered by the local lettings plan were set aside for residents moving from the Alexandra Court Sheltered Housing complex. This represented 23 properties in total. The remaining 25 % of properties covered by the local lettings plan were let through the usual allocations process (which may also include existing tenants of Thurrock Council living in properties across the borough).
- 8.3. The table below provides a breakdown of the first round of lettings by location of the resident's previous address and whether that resident was already a tenant of Thurrock Council immediately before their move to Beaconsfield Place or not.

Location of Previous Address	Number of transferring Council tenants	Number of new Council tenants	Total
Tilbury	21	3	24
Grays	2	2	4
Chadwell St Mary	2	0	2
South Ockendon	1	0	1
South Stifford	1	0	1
Purfleet	0	1	1
Outside of Thurrock	0	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>35</b>

- 8.4. The properties at Beaconsfield Place are offered at Affordable Rent levels. As such, a significant proportion of the residents who moved into this development and already tenants of the council will likely have moved from a property offered at Social Rent levels.
- 8.5. To better support and prepare transferring residents for this change in future new build developments offered at Affordable Rent levels, proactive engagement and communication around rents with prospective tenants at an earlier stage will help avoid surprise or confusion around potentially higher costs.
- 8.6. Although all properties were successfully let, there were more challenges with the lettings of the two-bed duplex flats at this development. Whilst there is a need in the borough for properties of this type built with HAPPI principles in mind, their inclusion in a development which was later designated as a Sheltered Housing scheme added a layer of complication and extended the time it took to proactively identify suitable applicants.
- 8.7. As previously outlined, the development of Beaconsfield Place was disrupted significantly by the events of the COVID-19 pandemic, including impacts on construction staff and the supply and availability of materials. As such, the handover of the development was also delayed and disrupted.
- 8.8. Many residents moved within a relatively narrow timeframe to support tenants to move into their new homes as soon as possible due to the extended wait for their respective properties to be ready.
- 8.9. Those tenants who were being supported to move from Alexandra Court due to decommissioning were offered assistance through a removals service; however, the number of residents moving at similar times meant that not all could be moved in the same week. The consequence was that some tenants had the keys to their new property at Beaconsfield Place and the property they were leaving and therefore were liable for the rent on both.

- 8.10. Although the Housing service ensured that no resident was required to pay rent on both properties simultaneously, the lesson learned here is that phasing should be considered where practically possible in comparable circumstances. Examples include future Sheltered Housing scheme decommissioning activity or in the event of a large number of residents being decanted from a single geographical area. This will allow the process to flow more smoothly, reducing complications by minimising the number of tenants moving or waiting to move between properties on any given day.

## **9. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 9.1. As a social housing developer, the council continues to learn from the experiences of every new build scheme it delivers. This will ensure that future developments can avoid potential pitfalls or complications that affected previous projects, as well as learn from the positive outcomes and successes achieved.
- 9.2. Each new build project is followed on completion by a lessons learnt review identifying not only scheme specific issues but also generic ones that determine the specification of products and design.
- 9.3. More importantly, it ensures that the housing development programme continues to provide high-quality homes and estates that meet Thurrock's residents' needs, where they enjoy living and working and can take pride.

## **10. Engagement (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 10.1. The engagement for the development of this report included stakeholders from across the range of Housing services responsible and accountable for the design, development, handover and operational management of Beaconsfield Place.
- 10.2. Additionally, a specific new tenant satisfaction survey was undertaken with the residents at Beaconsfield Place to understand their views of their new homes and the experience of moving.

11. **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):

- None

## **12. Implications**

### **12.1. Financial**

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**  
**Strategic Lead - Finance**

There are no financial implications directly arising from this reflective report.

## 12.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Deirdre Collins**  
**Principal Barrister, Prosecution, Litigation and Housing**

There are no direct legal implications as it is a report reflecting on the completion of a development project.

## 12.3 Diversity and Equality

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

There are no direct equality and diversity implications arising from this reflective report.

## 12.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder and Looked After Children

Not applicable

## 13. Appendices to the report

None

### **Report Author:**

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