

Item

## **Report on proposal to deliver pod housing – Hills Avenue, Queen Edith Ward**

**To:**

**Councillor Gerri Bird, Executive Councillor for Housing**

**Report by:** Claire Flowers, Head of Housing Development Agency

Tel: 01223 – 457928 Email: [claire.flowers@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:claire.flowers@cambridge.gov.uk)

**Wards affected:**

Queen Edith

### **Key Decision**

#### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This proposal follows on from a prior delivery of modular (pod) homes to serve as rough sleeper housing, approved by this committee in January 2020.
- 1.2 Through this prior approval the council has successfully delivered 16 pod homes to date and has continued to consider potential further delivery opportunities.
- 1.3 This report now seeks approval for delivery of a further 4 pod homes at an identified site on Hills Avenue, Queen Edith Ward, to be delivered by the Council in partnership with It Takes A City (“ITAC”).

- 1.4 The delivery of pod homes presents an opportunity to meet the needs of people with a background of rough sleeping, and also provide net new housing within the City.
- 1.5 This paper seeks budgetary approval from the Housing Scrutiny Committee in the sum of £25,000 for the delivery of the Hills Avenue POD housing scheme.

## **2. Recommendations**

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the use of the land at the corner of Hills Avenue and Baldock Way as a site for delivery of modular (pod) housing to serve former rough sleepers.
- 2.2 Approve that a budget of £25,000 be allocated out of the approved new build housing budget to support the delivery of the Hills Avenue Pod housing scheme.
- 2.3 Delegate authority to the Head of Property Services in consultation with the Assistant Head of Finance to approve the terms of lease to a third-party charitable organisation.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 Following a report Approved by this Committee in January 2020, The Council has to date successfully delivered 16 modular pod homes through Hills Foundation200 programme.
- 3.2 Building on the success met to date in accommodating former rough sleepers in these as well as similar pod housing in Cambridge and nationwide, It Takes a City have approached the Council to work collaboratively toward delivering additional homes on Council owned land.

3.2 ITAC is a charity established “to end rough sleeping in Cambridge due to homelessness, making sure everyone has somewhere to call home, with the support they need”. They have experience in delivering schemes tackling homelessness in the City and wider areas, working with a wide range of partners.

3.3 These pod development opportunities address two of the Council’s Key Corporate Objectives:

**3.5 Priority 2 - Tackling poverty and inequality and helping people in the greatest need**

Rough sleeping continues to be an issue in the city. In the calendar year 2022, 231 individuals were counted sleeping out on at least one occasion. Pods provide good, fully equipped homes for people leaving the streets and those ready to move on from hostel accommodation.

**3.6 Priority 3 - Building a new generation of council and affordable homes and reducing homelessness**

There is a recognised need for more council housing across the city. As of September 2022, there were 2,256 households on the housing needs register.

**4. Letting and Tenancy**

4.1 The details of the programme are currently being formalised with ITAC’s housing delivery partner, It Takes a City Community Land Trust (the CLT), a charitable community benefit society. CLT will be providing the modular homes and site infrastructure, with the land being provided and let from the Council. The CLT will be responsible for the management and maintenance of these homes.

4.2 The Heads of Terms have yet to be agreed, however it is expected that the land will be let to the CLT on similar terms to that of the previous pod schemes delivered with Jimmy’s. The site will be let on a Contracted-Out Lease basis and the tenancy will be excluded from the 1954 Landlord & Tenant act.

- 4.3 The leasehold value will be substantiated by a Red Book Valuation and approved by the Head of Property Services.
- 4.4 Decisions on tenant allocations would jointly sit with the Council, as part of our wider lettings policy. Homes would be used as move-on accommodation for single people who have experience of homelessness, i.e. people who want to move on from hostel accommodation, and who have low to medium support needs.
- 4.5 Previous experience from schemes developed with Hill and ITAC's experience suggest the small home sizes coupled with the support provided to residents promote successful adaption to a change in living situations.
- 4.6 The University of Cambridge's Cambridge Centre for Housing & Planning Research published a report in October 2021, highlighting the benefits of these schemes to individuals and the local community; beyond the immediate relief from homelessness, including:  
*“recovery from drug and alcohol misuse, better financial management, improved social relationships, fostering a sense of community, feeling a sense of safety and security, as well as a new enthusiasm and readiness for work.”*
- 4.7 Following discussions with ITAC, it has been confirmed that the sites will be managed and maintained “in-house” (by ITAC) to ensure the residents have the appropriate level of support.

## **5. Design and Quality**

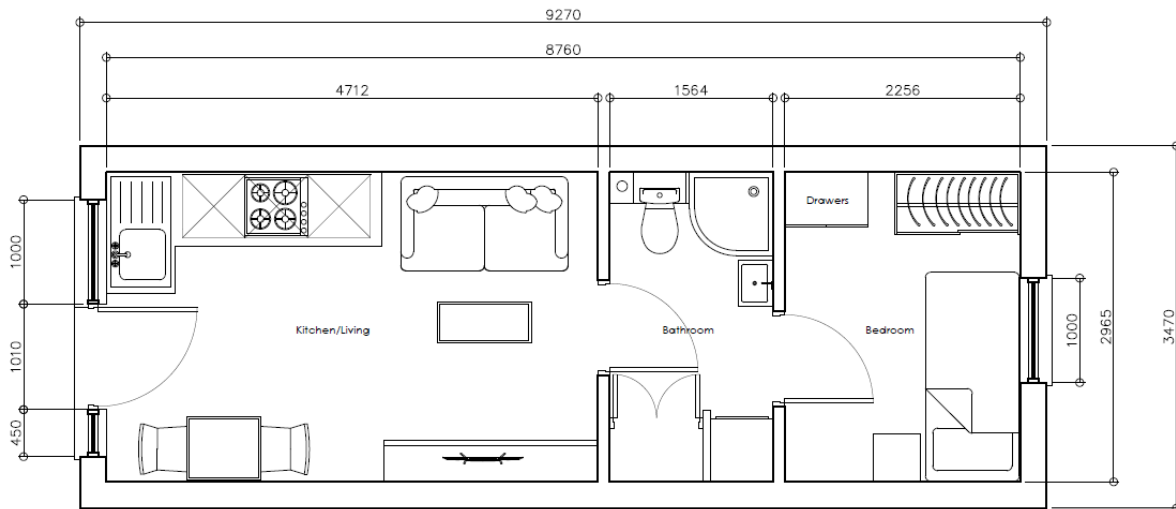
### **5.1 The modular homes:**

- Will be supplied by New Meaning Foundation and are branded SPACE© Microhomes.
- Are designed with a 60-year lifespan

- Are single self-contained properties. The plan at Figure 2 shows the layout of the homes.
- Are 25 sq. metres internal size (a 1-bedroom flat would normally be 50 sq. metres in size.)
- Will be Building Regulations compliant
- A Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery system will be provided for each of the homes. These MVHR systems provide fresh filtered air into a building whilst retaining most of the energy that has already been used in heating the space.
- No specific further heating system is installed but electrical connections are provided for infra-red or similar heaters in living room and bedroom area.
- Connections to electricity and water will be provided.
- Will not be fully wheelchair accessible, however where possible ramps can be provided for level access to meet M4(2) access standard for ground floor. Internal dimensions and layouts will not be compliant due to space limitations.
- A planning permission will be required for the use of land to provide POD housing for homeless accommodation.



Figure 1: Example of delivered ITAC Modular homes



**Figure 2: Plan of self-contained home**

## 6. Site Details

- 6.1 The site was identified based on the pre-established criteria and considering its suitability for POD housing. The agreed criteria were that the sites must meet at least one of the following:
1. Evidence site cannot be developed in the next 5 years or more.
  2. The size of the site would prohibit a development of more than one home on the site.
  3. The site is constrained for traditional development. This would need to be demonstrated have restricted uses that would allow pod but not permanent homes
- 6.4 The Hills Avenue site is located in Queen Edith ward at the corner of Hills Avenue and Baldock Way. It is locally known as Joy's Garden and is currently being used as a community garden.
- 6.8 This small site of 0.03 ha previously formed the garden of the adjacent Council property and was parcelled off for redevelopment prior to 2017. This site has previously progressed to Housing Scrutiny Committee in June 2017, (Item 17/33/HSC Development options for Land at Hills Avenue).

- 6.9 The Approvals at the time within this report to committee were as below;  
Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing:
- i. Approved the site to continue to be investigated to be developed for housing.
  - ii. Allocated the capital budget of £249,216 from existing new build budget.
  - iii. Approved that delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director to enable the site to be developed through Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP)
- 6.10 This approved further investigation indicated that only a single traditional home might be accommodated, and work on a detailed redevelopment proposal was put on hold.
- 6.11 The council was subsequently approached by the community and in Summer 2019 gave a temporary approval for the use of the site as a community garden while the future redevelopment opportunities remained under review.
- 6.12 Ward Councillor consultation has been undertaken for Hills Avenue. They have voiced their support for the scheme subject to the necessary approvals being in place.
- 6.13 Current Design indicated that the site may accommodate 4 pod homes, subject to planning approval.
- 6.14 Public consultation for the site to be developed and used for single homeless people has been undertaken. A summary of the consultation responses is presented in section 10.3.

## **7. Programme**

### **7.1 Hills Avenue Programme**

- HSC Decision: 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023

- Submission of planning application: immediately after and subject to the HSC Decision.
- Agreement on lease: immediately after and subject to the HSC Decision.
- First start on site target: Q3 2023

## **8. Financial Implications**

### **8.1 Budget / Funding**

- 8.1.1 The CLT will cover all the costs associated with the pod construction, site preparation and securing planning permission.
- 8.1.2 There will be some cost implications for the Council in fees and officer time. Some project management will be needed by the Council to ensure the project is successful for the Council, including legal set up and oversight of the scheme's delivery to handover.
- 8.1.3 Some of the small sites developed historically have revealed issues with access ways and acquired rights therefore The City Council has commissioned a Legal Report on Title to confirm any potential constraints.
- 8.1.4 A budget of **£25,000** is therefore proposed to bring forward the Hills Avenue for development. Any initial work during 2023/24 could be funded through HDA budgets.
- 8.1.5 The lease of the site for housing use will provide a net positive cashflow to the council.

## **9. Implications**

### **(a) Staffing Implications**

The delivery of this scheme will be jointly coordinated by existing Housing Development Agency and Housing Services officers.

### **(b) Equality and Poverty Implications**

A scheme specific EQIA will be completed.



### **(c) Environmental Implications**

The pod homes will meet modern standards and be well insulated. Developing modular homes in a factory is quicker, allows for increased quality assurance, and reduces carbon impact during the development process.

### **(d) Procurement Implications**

Legal advice will be obtained in relation to any procurement risks of this proposal.

### **(e) Community Safety Implications**

Careful consideration is made on the location of these homes to ensure they can be integrated into existing communities.

## **10. Consultation and communication considerations**

- 10.1 The HDA consider those affected in the area by the potential development of pod homes and work with those officers in the Council active in these communities to ensure that consultation is appropriate.
- 10.2 Consultation with the Ward Councillors about the Hills Avenue proposals has taken place prior to a planning application being submitted.
- 10.3 A public consultation was undertaken for the proposed Hills Avenue scheme, with flyers being distributed to local residents on Saturday 19th November 2022. 4no. comments were received from residents with regards to the proposed use of the site.

These are summarised below:

Comments Received	Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The site would be better used for the construction of one or two family homes.</li> <li>The area that is unsuited to the proposal due to the lack facilities and the proximity to a school.</li> <li>The loss of the garden as play area for local children is a negative.</li> <li>One respondent fully supports the scheme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The site could potentially house one family home however the costs involved to deliver this would mean that this could not be viable as an affordable property.</li> <li>The scheme is intended to support individuals with a history of homelessness into employment and housing. ITAC have experience in aiding individuals achieving that transition and careful consideration has been given to the scheme design to promote a positive outcome.</li> <li>The community garden was always intended as a “meanwhile garden” whilst a suitable redevelopment proposal could be drawn up.</li> </ul>

## 11. Risks

11.1 Below is a table setting out key risks associated with the project:

Description of risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Costs: A budget cost is to be approved by the Housing Scrutiny Committee to bring this site forward, however unforeseen costs may be incurred	Low – Significant cost certainty together with limited budget requirement	Med-. Delays to start on site	A small low risk vacant site is being proposed with no initial obvious constraints.  Will need to ensure this is recovered to the HRA through income.
Legal: Legal constraints may need to be resolved prior to entering into any agreements with 3 <sup>rd</sup> parties (i.e., access, covenants, etc.)	Low – Site identified in council ownership with no obvious hindrances	High- Potential impact on scheme design, negotiations with adjacent owners or insurances may be required, delays to start on site.	A report on title has been undertaken to identify any potential constraints
Planning: The planning applications will be subject to the observations of consultees, the assessment of planning officers, and ultimately the decision of the Planning Committee.	Med- There is a need to balance planning policy and views of the local people and ward members.	Med- Potential change in proposals	Indicative schemes will be developed in response to the comments received from the pre-application discussions with the LPA prior to an application. Review and selection of this through experienced inputs

## **12. Background papers**

17/33/HSC Development options for Land at Hills Avenue  
20/12/HSC – Housing Development – Options for Homeless People.

## **13. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Location Plan.

## **14. Inspection of papers**

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Claire Flowers, Housing Development Agency, tel: 01223 457928, email: [claire.flowers@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:claire.flowers@cambridge.gov.uk)

# Appendix1 : Location Plan

