

REPORT TITLE: Report on Outcome of Rooftop Feasibility Study

To:

Councillor Gerri Bird, Executive Councillor for Housing

Housing Scrutiny Committee 17 September 2024

Report by:

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Wards affected:

Cherry Hinton, Coleridge

1. Recommendations

1.1 It is recommended that the Executive Councillor for Housing:

1. Note the outcome of the Feasibility Study conducted, confirming the officer recommendation that no deliverable scheme proceed.
2. Approve that 243 - 313 Odds Lichfield Road, 1-12 Bracondale, 1-18 Fernwood, and 1-18 Heatherfield be removed from short term redevelopment consideration, and that any further long-term review remain aligned with business-as usual-maintenance and management consideration of these properties, as it does with all council housing stock.

2. Purpose and reason for the report

- 2.1
- 2.1.1. This report sets out the outcomes of the feasibility study conducted since its approval in September 2023, considering both upward extension of existing housing blocks and deep-retrofit of existing properties as a parallel approach to regeneration.
 - 2.1.2. The Council is aware of a growing discrepancy between the condition of ageing stock against new build housing being delivered to high sustainability levels. This Study aimed to provide detailed evidence of stock condition across two areas of

sheltered housing, to understand both the current condition, and the possible level to which improvements could be enacted in future. Key priorities for this work were energy efficiency, security and level access.

3. Alternative options considered

3.1 The only alternative considered is option 1: do nothing.

These properties are and remain in the Councils rolling programme of maintenance and improvement works across all council stock. While leaving them as such would mean no disturbance to tenants, it would however also not have allowed an improvement in the understanding of the current property conditions. This proposal to conduct the feasibility study has provided significant evidence of both condition, maintenance related costs and indication of the cost of enacting significant improvements which can inform decision on both the flat blocks considered as well as council housing stock more broadly across the city.

These properties as noted in September 2023 do require ongoing maintenance expenditure, and works will continue to come forward. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Wall insulation – limited to existing cavity wall insulation extraction and refill.
2. Replacement heating systems, as a number of the flats have old electric storage heaters and there is an ambition to upgrade to a more energy efficient alternative. Officers will review whether there is possibility to develop ground source heat pump proposals further as an outcome of this feasibility work.
3. Most flats have old doors which require replacing.
4. New roof coverings are required, which will include new roof insulation
5. Resident responses in regard to Condensation, damp and mould are being provided to the responsible team for follow-up investigation.

4. Background and key issues

4.1 4. Background

4.1.1. Upward (rooftop) development of housing above existing flat blocks has been

under consideration since late 2020 and has the potential to combine the provision of additional homes on HRA-held land with significant improvements to existing housing stock.

4.2. Background review had culminated in a report to this committee in September 2021 (21/48/HSC), delegating authority for selection of a pilot scheme and approving a selected delivery route subject to further investigation.

4.3. In September 2023, a further report (23/44/HSC) set out the rationale for the selection of 243 - 313 Odds Lichfield Road, 1-12 Bracondale, 1-18 Fernwood, and 1-18 Heatherfield as priority sites for in-depth feasibility investigation, ensuring that refurbishment improves the living conditions of sheltered tenants while at the same time mitigating risk associated with high numbers of leasehold properties on other estates. Approval was granted with a budget to support feasibility work, and to date such work has focussed on structural investigations and early-stage design and capacity studies.

4.4. Ambition and need for this feasibility study

Broader Scope:

4.4.1. Rooftop development in its current form has had significant press coverage over the last few years, with numerous schemes making headway specifically in London, while some have progressed, Council/Borough-led schemes have to date been largely unsuccessful, given:

- Leasehold ownership and inability to enact works – This is similarly reflected in access issues flagged through standard cyclical maintenance on various council properties.
- Lack of parallel improvement to existing properties/lack of buy in from existing tenants

4.4.2. This feasibility study aimed to address both these shortfalls, by a) identifying flat blocks with unrestricted Council ownership, and b) targeting deep-retrofit and associated improvements to housing stock where these improvements will be of most benefit.

4.4.3. Land availability in Cambridge is heavily restricted, and the ability to utilise and

upgrade existing properties while providing additional housing would unlock significant opportunities. The archetype of property selected on the study site is echoed significantly across the city, across hundreds of council homes, and a successful proof of concept is key in unlocking these and promoting future buy-in from leaseholders which would otherwise block these opportunities from proceeding

Housing Sector

4.4.4. The Council has shown since 2017 that it can be a leading example to others in the sector in how to successfully lead housing delivery. This ambition to be a true pioneer remains enshrined in both the Councils commitment to continued housing delivery and the sustainability targets set as standard in new build homes.

4.4.5. A pilot study of the nature envisioned offered a further opportunity for the Council to successfully lead on a development typology which has largely been met by stumbling blocks to date.

4.4.6. Furthermore, this allows setting of a true and accurate benchmark as to the cost and implications of retrofitting ageing housing stock to a level in line with new build quality standards.

4.4.7. While uncertainty and concern have been understandably raised from existing residents, the Council first and foremost has a duty of care, and needs to take the necessary steps to ensure that the housing offered to its tenants, especially those at risk, is improved and kept to a high standard. This feasibility study offered a strong opportunity for the council to trial a new development route with longer term consideration for implementation across further housing stock, while at the same time delivering significant quality of life improvements for tenants.

4.5. Sheltered housing – Council Stock

4.5.1. The below figures from Orchard note Council-held sheltered housing stock distribution across the City. As can be seen, roughly half of the Councils sheltered housing stock lies with Coleridge and Cherry Hinton. These figures exclude The Haven in Queen Ediths, purchased into stock in 2023. The Haven is currently undergoing final works and is expected to be occupied in Q3 of 2024.

| Sheltered housing per ward | No. Properties |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Abbey | |
| Sheltered | 53 |

| | |
|------------------------|------------|
| Cherry Hinton | |
| Sheltered | 93 |
| Coleridge | |
| Sheltered | 176 |
| East Chesterton | |
| Sheltered | 20 |
| Kings Hedges | |
| Sheltered | 25 |
| Market | |
| Sheltered | 63 |
| Petersfield | |
| Sheltered | 53 |
| Supported | 17 |
| Romsey | |
| Sheltered | 29 |
| Grand Total | 529 |

4.5.2. The study site selected for this feasibility work covers 36 properties at Lichfield Road and a further 48 on Walpole Road. This amounts to 31% of the sheltered housing stock across Cherry Hinton and Coleridge, and 16% of the overall sheltered stock across the city.

4.5.3. It is important to note that the feasibility study was designed around an assumption of only a single portion of these properties being potentially progressed as a Pilot development. This was envisioned as circa 36-40 existing properties.

4.6. Lettings and void rates

4.6.1. Tenancy terminations per year are included below since 2013, but records are held back to 1987, with an average of 27 per year becoming void across council Stock in Coleridge and Cherry Hinton. This excludes sheltered housing stock across the remaining wards of the city.

| Year | Tenancy completions/yr Coleridge/ Cherry Hinton | of which within Study area | | | |
|------|---|----------------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|
| | | Bracondale | Fernwood | Heatherfield | Lichfield |
| 2013 | 31 | 3 | 3 | | 2 |
| 2014 | 24 | | | 5 | 1 |
| 2015 | 27 | 2 | | | 5 |
| 2016 | 30 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 6 |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------------|---|---|---|---|
| 2017 | 23 | | 2 | | 2 |
| 2018 | 25 | | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 2019 | 26 | 1 | 1 | | 2 |
| 2020 | 14 | | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| 2021 | 36 | 1 | | | 3 |
| 2023 | 34 | | 4 | 2 | 4 |
| 2024 to June | 7 | | | | 1 |
| Grand Total | 1011 | | | | |

Average since 1987(/yr) 27

4.6.2. Lettings for all of these properties are favourable, but this is seen as an indication of location and housing demand as opposed to overall suitability for the eligible tenant group. These properties perform well below the quality levels of newer sheltered housing schemes.

4.7. Existing tenants and support needs

4.7.1. The below sets out the support needs of existing tenants per flat location as at June 2024. As can be seen, the majority of these residents are largely self-sufficient.

| Block | Low Support (15 mins pw) | Medium Support (30 mins pw) | High Support (45 mins pw) | No Support |
|--------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Lichfield Rd | 10 | 7 | 0 | 21 |
| Heatherfield | 3 | 0 | 1 | 14 |
| Fernwood | 2 | 1 | 1 | 14 |
| Bracondale | 0 | 0 | 2 | 14 |

4.7.2. Additional to the above, there are specific cases which have been noted by Independent Living Facilitators where high support individuals might preferably be rehoused into extra care facilities directly.

4.8. Ambitions informing the study:

4.8.1. New homes benchmarked against Passivhaus standards

4.8.2. Existing properties to EPC High B/A

4.8.3. Air- or ground source heating, with Solar Panels and Mechanical ventilation with Heat recovery

4.8.4. Full gas removal where connections remain

4.8.5. Floor, wall (cavity and external) and roof insulation throughout

- 4.8.6. Wastewater heat recovery to be considered
- 4.8.7. Low flow taps
- 4.8.8. Triple glazing where not yet installed
- 4.8.9. Low energy lighting
- 4.8.10. Access in line with Secure by Design
- 4.8.11. Lift Installation/level access to all properties.

4.9. Architectural/design outcomes

- 4.9.1. Concluded that we can provide new homes which meet modern space standards on the existing roof level, to an additional floor.
- 4.9.2. Security/access control can be accommodated.
- 4.9.3. Lift installation to new and existing properties could be installed.
- 4.9.4. High insulation and EPC target values could be met through use of external wall Insulation and enclosing of current communal access, aligning with lift and security improvements.
- 4.9.5. Ability to deliver heating solutions through Air source heat pump (individual or communal) or alternatively Ground source heat pump installation, with associated cost and planning implications for each requiring further detailed consideration.
- 4.9.6. Some ground floor levels, adjoining walls and fire compartmentation works at specific points would pose risk of not being deliverable to a greater standard and would require further detailed review but overall target ambitions could be achieved.

4.10. Structural viability:

- 4.10.1. Looked at existing structure as well as surrounding ground/geology through
 - Brick sampling and core drilling/digging through foundations and concrete floors
 - Trial Pits as well as boreholes to establish ground water levels and soil makeup
 - Strength and compression testing of samples
 - CCTV review of current drainage systems following issues encountered during investigations
- 4.10.2. Report concluded that:
 - Strength of existing brick sufficient to carry new loads.
 - Ground compaction/pressure tests of the ground/soil indicated expected 5mm movement which is “a relatively low figure” and considered acceptable.

- Works to damage in drainage system needs to be undertaken to ensure no damage to foundations due to leaks/water and waste – this have been passed to Assets for inclusion in rolling works programmes.
- Overall load increase on the existing on existing foundations would be c25%, high but considered feasible.
- Structural interventions would be required to accommodate new lift or where stairways might need to be altered.
- Based on the results of the testing, reinforced concrete padstones (to carry the vertical load from the steelwork above) could be formed at the top of the existing walls, by mobilizing both leaves of the external (and internal, if required) cavity walls. The compressive strength of the existing bricks was found to be sufficient to provide robust bearing to these padstones.
- Some items would pose some remaining risk and would require additional investigation if a project was brought forward, including: Horizontal restraint of the top of the existing walls in the period the roof structure was dismantled; Additional investigations to the existing cavity walls to establish the density, spacing, and condition of the existing wall ties connecting the two leaves. Investigation into potential wall ties have corrosion.

4.11. Need for vacant possession and decanting

- 4.11.1. Feasibility work has confirmed that to enact a deep retrofit programme and concurrent development would require full decanting of the properties. This would pose significant disruption to existing tenants.
- 4.11.2. Would any decanting proceed, this would be conducted in line with our current policies, with priority given to tenant housing allocations, and opportunity to return to refurbished properties on completion
- 4.11.3. Our working assumption would be that decanted tenants should be offered alternative housing within the immediate vicinity of their current properties, and as per the numbers in 4.6 above, there is sufficient evidence indicating that this could be accommodated, subject to programming of sufficient time to account for this. Our experience to date, however, backed by discussion with some existing tenants, do also indicate that there is flexibility in this, and when provided opportunities some residents do relocate to different wards in the City, based on family/community

connections. There is no reason to assume that the affected tenants in this case would not similarly diffuse across Council stock more broadly, which would lessen further any pressures on required voids in the specific area.

4.11.4. Since the approval of this feasibility study however, there has been a need for priority decanting of the Sheltered Housing Scheme at Stanton House (32 tenants). This has added significant pressure onto housing supply and has required due consideration by Officers.

4.12. Financial implications.

4.12.1. Design work and review of existing properties has sufficiently informed assumptions to allow drafting of high level cost for consideration by the Council.

4.12.2. Such cost is significant; While rooftop delivery holds the direct benefit of not requiring land acquisitions, the cost to construct is higher than traditional development, and together with refurbishment and lift installation includes significant financial implications

4.12.3. As part of this committee the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy is being considered, including the implications for the councils development programme.

4.12.4. The MTFFS executive summary highlights the challenges faced by the council as it remains committed to delivery of its new build pipeline. Cognisance of these financial pressures has been taken into account through the review of this report.

4.13. Additionally, Part 6 highlights a significant portion of current tenants who are against any requirement to vacate their properties. While in this regard, the Council must exercise its duty of care and consider the short term implications versus long term benefits, this is linked to a heightened pressure on existing stock in the face of ongoing decanting at Stanton House, Fanshawe Road, Hanover and Princess Court, and Ekin Road, together with the further Redevelopment at Davy Road being brought to this Committee for consideration.

4.14. Conclusion

4.14.1. Given the Significant cost Implications, current pressure on housing supply and lack of new build sheltered housing sock coming forward, it is the Officer recommendations that no full refurbishment and development proceed at this

time.

- 4.14.2. Uncertainty has been the greatest stress-inducer for residents through this investigation processes, and officers have aimed to provide clarity and communication on the work and outcomes throughout the process. Given that the officer recommendation at this time is that a full scheme not proceed, it is recommended that the Exec Cllr approve full closure of this project to provide surety to tenants that this will not be revisited in the short term.
- 4.14.3. Going forward, any long term reconsideration would remain in line within the cyclical maintenance and management consideration of these properties, as it does as standard with all council housing stock.
- 4.14.4. The Officers do wish to thank all affected residents for their patience and involvement over this period of work, and it is hoped that all parties are understanding of the needs for such review.
- 4.14.5. All findings from this work will be passed to relevant Council operative teams for consideration.
- 4.14.6. The outputs in terms of costs, timing and implications for residents remain significantly beneficial to the councils understanding of its housing stock, and future requirements for investment. These inputs will continue to be considered and will inform future redevelopment and retrofit work as the Council continues to progress towards its net zero targets.

5. Corporate plan

- 5.1 The Councils Housing delivery programme directly addresses Priority 3: Building a new generation of council and affordable homes and reducing homelessness

Additionally, the programme also serves to address the following:

Priority 1: Leading Cambridge's response to the climate change and biodiversity emergencies

- Target of 20% net biodiversity gain across redevelopment sites
- Housing delivery well exceeding Local Plan requirements in terms of efficiency, with a target for all new affordable homes to be delivered in line with the Councils Sustainable Housing design guide

Priority 2: Tackling poverty and inequality and helping people in the greatest need

- Provision of housing for refugee families
- Inclusion of modular move-on accommodation for former rough sleepers in the delivery programme
- All new homes to be M(4)2 Adaptable and 5% to be M(4)3 adapted dwellings for families with accessibility needs.
- Improved level access to all existing properties

Priority 4: Modernising the council to lead a greener city that is fair for all

- Number of developments implemented in line with (or exceeding) adopted policy requirements
- annual income generated by council services and investments

6. Consultation, engagement and communication

6.1 6.1. Autumn 2023 Consultation feedback

6.1.1. Questionnaires were distributed across October and November 2023 requesting inputs from tenants. From the 84 tenants within the study area, 38 responses were received. These largely indicate tenant satisfaction with their properties, and this reflects in-person discussions with residents to date. These properties are in favourable locations and residents are largely well settled.

6.1.2. This does not however mean that these properties are up to standard to serve what is an at-risk tenant group. While tenants have been largely in favour of remaining in place, there is broad recognition that these properties do have key issues and room for improvement. While there is a very vocal minority to date (3 key residents) actively noting their disfavour with the feasibility study, the majority of residents have acknowledged that the need for this feasibility study is well founded.

6.1.3. What has been mentioned much more as a key points, as opposed to stress involved with potential decanting, is the stress involved with uncertainty; In discussion the vast majority of residents have expressed clearly that key to them is a prompt completion of this study, open communication and clear feedback on decisions and way forward. To this end, work to date has targeted a rapid turnaround, aiming to give residents this certainty and communicate outcomes as rapidly as possible.

6.1.4. From the questionnaire some key considerations were:

- 36% of respondees require or use mobility aids

- 63% of respondents indicated their flats have Damp, Condensation, mould, or all three (10%), with 15% rating the severity above 5 on a 1-10 scale.
- 39% believe their utility bills are expensive
- Cold walls and issues with heating systems noted as key concerns
- Security concerns and lack of access control noted, specifically at the flat blocks along Walpole Road.

6.1.5. The above aspects are all items which have noticeable effects on health and wellbeing. Additionally, these are all aspects which are noted to be addressed as aspects of the refurbishment feasibility works considered.

6.2. Further consultation on the outcomes of the technical feasibility work was undertaken through August 2024, with public meetings held on the 3rd (Lichfield Rd Community Hall) and the 5th (St Phillip Howard Church, Walpole Rd).

6.2.1. Officers also undertook door knocking to each property under consideration within the week of 5-11 August, to ensure that each resident was contacted and both provided with information on the work and contact details to ensure that all queries could be answered. Follow-up calls and emails were enacted as and when requested.

6.2.2. Surveys were distributed to all affected tenants. As of 3 September 2024, 49 Surveys had been returned out of 81 tenants (60% response rate). Given the likely impact of the works considered, the surveys specifically focussed on the residents' opinions of their existing properties and impact of proposals.

6.2.3. 78% of residents indicated that their homes were fit for their accessible needs. 22% responded negatively, and raised issues regarding need for walk-in showers, issues with stairs and uneven footpaths around the estate being a concern.

6.2.4. 37% of tenants have experienced anti-social behaviour

6.2.5. 31% of respondents have experienced concerns over personal safety

6.2.6. 54% of respondents have experienced issues with the temperatures of their homes, with 30% indicating that their homes are either too hot in the summer months or too cold in the winter months. 39% perceive their energy costs to be expensive/above average.

6.2.7. There was a steep reduction in the number of residents reporting damp, condensation, and mould, with 30% indicating some issues with these. It is hoped that the recent installation of triple glazed windows on a number of these properties

has led to this alleviation. Discussion have however also brought to light an adjacent leaseholder with significant DCM issues. These will be brought to the attention of the Councils DCM group.

6.2.8. 43% of respondents indicate that they believe the housing estate would benefit from the improvements being considered. 18% of respondents responded negatively, with a further 39% being unsure.

6.2.9. 49% of residents indicated being against the delivery of new homes. 34% responded positively, with 27% Indifferent or providing no comment.

6.2.10. 84% of respondents indicate worries over personal upheaval

6.2.11. 42% of respondents indicate health concerns related to potential for moving home.

6.2.12. Out of 5, the average score provided by residents is indicated below for aspects of the housing estates:

| Quality of the building | Accessibility standards | Safety /security | Noise levels | Wheelchair or mobility scooter storage |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------------|--|
| 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 2 |

6.2.13. The survey responses reflect the in-person discussion held with residents, in that there is a clear understanding of where improvements could be made with clear benefits in relation to safety, energy efficiency, and accessibility.

6.2.14. There is however a clear indication from current residents that these are established communities and that the majority do not wish to face upheaval. This is fully understood by officers, however this does need to be considered against with the Council's duty of care to its tenants in ensuring that housing is fit for purpose for the longer term. Given the accessibility constraints of these properties, there is a significant risk of residents requiring to be moved as they age and face greater requirements for mobility aids.

7. Anticipated outcomes, benefits or impact

7.1 Ambitions outlined in 4.8.

Full ambitions will not realised due to decision not to proceed further.

Benefits remain in the form of detailed information on council housing stock, for these properties and for use in informing knowledge gaps on those of similar achetype.

8. Implications

8.1 **Relevant risks**

None. This report finalises this study.

Financial Implications

8.2 Costs to date will be accounted for as abortive expenditure in line with financial processes.

Legal Implications

8.3 *None.*

Equalities and socio-economic Implications

8.4 None. This report finalises this study.

Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental implications

8.5 None. This report finalises this study.

Procurement Implications

8.6 None. This report finalises this study.

Community Safety Implications

8.7 None. No project is to be brought forward.

Proposed outcomes aimed to directly address improvements to existing Housing stock, which fall short of current safety standards. Regeneration proposals were considered in

line with Secure by Design Guidance to achieve a noticeable improvement on any scheme which may be brought forth as an outcome.

Safety concerns have been noted at Heatherfield, Walpole Road, by tenants and these have been forwarded on to Independent Living and Communities teams. Similar blocks have had CCTV Installed and it is noted that residents have requested similar.

9. Background documents

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1
 - 21/48/HSC - Report on progress toward HRA Estate Regeneration programme Including a report on a proposed scheme at Aylesborough Close.
 - 23/44/HSC - Rooftop Development with Associated Retrofit to High Efficiency Standards
 - 24/33/HSC – Report on Stanton house

10. Appendices

- 10.1 None.

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Jaques van der Vyver, email: jaques.vandervyver@cambridge.gov.uk