

## CONFIDENTIALITY

The contents of the appendix to this report qualifies as exempt information under section 100(A)(4) and paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as it is *“information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)”*

and

2) In relation to the “exempt” information, it has been determined that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information because disclosure would adversely affect the authority’s ability to manage its commercial financial and business affairs.

Accordingly, it is proposed that the appendix shall remain exempt.

**URN: 21-081**

**Subject: Council Homes Programme – Progression of infill sites**

**Report to: ELT 23 June 2021**  
**Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee 15 July 2021**

**Report by: Claire Wilkins, Housing Delivery Manager**  
**Nicola Turner, Housing Director**

## SUBJECT MATTER

This report sets out the Council’s approach to the development of infill sites through the Council Homes Programme. It seeks approval of the drawdown of expenditure to be incurred in the delivery of the new Council Home schemes detailed in the report.

## RECOMMENDATION

**That Committee:**

- 1. Note the report, progress to date and the forthcoming workshop on infill sites.**
- 2. Approve the development of the sites at Charter Close and The Close and the expenditure as set out in the Confidential Appendix.**

## 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In June 2021 an update on the Council Homes Programme was provided to Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee, this reported identified a further report would be presented to committee in relation to infill opportunities as well as setting out the wider approach to the delivery of infill sites reflecting the recent withdrawal of planning applications for Crab Lane and Great Northern Close.

1.2 A number of infill sites held within the Housing Revenue Account were identified as part of the initial assessment works undertaken to scope the potential size of the Council Home

Programme. Infill sites vary in size with some able to accommodate only one home but their development can allow specific needs to be met as part of a wider development programme.

## **2 INFILL SITES – THE WIDER APPROACH**

- 2.1 The development of infill sites (sites which may have an existing use or which were left vacant following historic development of a larger site) will form an integral part of the delivery of the Council Homes Programme, particularly where such sites sit within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). HRA sites are more viable to deliver as there is no land cost associated with the development of HRA sites. Infill sites vary in size with some only being able to accommodate a single home which can result in higher development costs – these sites can, however, be useful in meeting particular needs such as the need for wheelchair accessible homes or larger homes.
- 2.2 Many infill sites will be parking areas, garage sites or areas of land which whilst not officially designated as open space form part of the green areas within council estates. These sites may therefore be vacant and unused or in current use to some extent. Other infill sites will become available by subdividing large gardens of council homes when they become vacant allowing one or more homes to be developed either by directly building onto the side of the existing home or building elsewhere within the garden. Where a garden is subdivided the new tenant is made clear the infill plot is not part of their tenancy and where required temporary fencing will be provided to separate the infill plot from the tenant's garden. The Council's staff actively seek to identify such infill sites as well as to identify areas of land which are not or under used which could more productively become an infill housing site. A workshop for members will be held to discuss infill sites identified for the Council Homes Programme.
- 2.3 All development requires planning consent and approval of the scheme by this committee, the process for seeking such consents is set out below. This process will only start where an initial assessment shows the site in principle could be developed:
- Local member(s) are advised that potential site for the Council Home Programme has been identified along with details of how the site may be developed. Member's feedback will be sought on the site and the proposed scheme.
  - An initial proposal for how the site could be developed will be prepared and pre-application planning advice sought. Initial appraisal of scheme viability will be completed. At this stage some further site surveys and investigations will be required. The proposed scheme will be considered by the project team (including representatives from Tenancy Services, Property and conversation and design as well as the architects).
  - Pre-planning formal public consultation will take place. Local members will be advised prior to the public consultation starting. Feedback from the consultation will inform the finalisation of the design by the project team. The scheme appraisal will be refreshed.
  - Planning Application Submission
  - Report to this committee to seek approval of required spend.
- 2.4 Throughout the preplanning consultation and planning application process residents and the community have the opportunity to raise concerns and objections to proposed schemes. Objections made during the formal planning process will be form part of the consideration by planning officers and members of the Development Committee of the formal planning applications. In some cases, there may be a significant number of objections, such as in relation

to the recent withdrawn planning application for Crab Lane. Some concerns and objections raised will relate to the nature of infill sites and that they increase the number of homes in the immediate area. Where parking areas or garage areas are proposed for development this is likely to result in objections in relation to loss of parking and in relation to vacant sites which are grassed the loss of open space and areas for recreation and play even though the spaces are not designated open space. In designing schemes, the project team will consider how and to what extent any potential wider impact on any area can be mitigated within the design of the scheme, particularly where parking sites are being proposed to be developed. As part of this surveys will be used to identify usage of parking/garage sites and to identify the wider local parking provision for the area in which a site is located. It should be noted no development by the Council of new homes can be required to address an existing deficit in parking provision. However, where viability and site constraints allow the Council will seek to deliver wider benefits which could address existing issues within the immediate area.

- 2.5 Whilst there are benefits of free land for sites held within the HRA, the Council Home Programme will also include infill sites which are owned within the General Fund (and for which the land will need to be bought by the HRA) and by purchasing private sites. The process through which non HRA infill sites will be brought forward will be the same as set out above. To increase the viability of infill sites as a whole, the Council will look to parcel up sites, particularly sites of one or two homes to increase the value for money of delivering small sites. The two sites detailed below will be brought forward using this approach.

### **3 THE CLOSE, BRADWELL**

- 3.1 The Close is an area of former and existing Council owned housing consisting of a mix of family and sheltered homes. An infill site of surplus Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land has been identified as suitable to accommodate a two-bedroom wheelchair property, dedicated parking and garden. The bungalow would be designed to meet as a minimum the National Space Standards. The area of infill land is not identified as designated open space and offers very little amenity value to the area. As part of the proposal to use this site, pre-planning advice has been sought with regard both to the style and finish of the property as well as the impact on the surrounding housing. To ensure existing tenants are not disadvantaged by the proposal to infill in this location, additional parking would need to be provided and is proposed to be provided opposite the site to account for the loss of available on street parking as a result of the development of this site.
- 3.2 In the past, traditional build has been the main area of focus around these opportunities. With the drive for increased energy efficiency, standardisation of design to reduce costs and speed of delivery, consideration has been given to modular build for this development. Following receipt of price estimates, as shown within the confidential appendix it was found that the costs for a modular build were too high for the scheme to be viable therefore the dwelling will be traditionally built.
- 3.3 The proposed scheme does not have planning permission and any development of this site will therefore be subject to planning. Public consultation would be held prior to submission of an application. The costs of delivering this bungalow are set out in the Confidential Appendix.

### **4 CHARTER CLOSE, GORLESTON**

- 4.1 14 Charter Close was identified by Tenancy Services when it became void as being a larger bungalow which could be reconfigured to provide better accessible accommodation. Alongside the bungalow is a redundant boiler house. Plans were drawn up which provided 2 x one bedroom fully wheelchair accessible (Part M(4)3) bungalows using the redundant boiler house

to provide an additional home. These plans keep the laundry room albeit moved to a new location. The intention would be to move the laundry room to the communal area during construction, so as not to interrupt usage.

- 4.2 A consultation with residents was carried out in June 2020, in advance of a planning application being submitted. The intention was to carry out a consultation in the communal room at Charter Close, however the timing of this was as during Lockdown 1, so a written consultation took place with the Tenancy Support Officer following up with phone calls to each resident to capture their thoughts where a response had not been returned by post. Following the consultation, plans were formalised and a planning application submitted. Planning was approved in September 2020 for both the reconfiguration of the existing bungalow and the boiler house conversion.
- 4.3 Subsequent permission to proceed with the extension of the Boiler House was required from Anglian Water as the new section of building fell within 3 metres of a sewer pipe. This permission has been declined therefore plans are currently being amended to decrease the size of the dwelling slightly to ensure the appropriate legal distance from the pipe but the new home will remain well in excess of Nationally Described Space Standards.
- 4.4 Updated cost estimates have been obtained (June 2021) and changes in the market and price of materials have significantly affected viability of the scheme as a whole. When separating the costs between dwellings, making the changes to number 14 to allow for it to become fully wheelchair accessible bungalow is not cost effective. The scheme does not repay over 40 years and the Council considers that the benefits do not outweigh the significant costs. The property has been returned to the Asset and Tenancy Teams for re-let and subject to void turn around works will provide a spacious, level access home to a single person or couple over 55.
- 4.5 The costs of the boiler house conversion (which includes costs to re-provide the laundry room which would form part of the new dwelling) are set out in the Confidential Appendix. The next step is to procure the delivery of the home which offers an opportunity for the Council to test the market costs and achieve best value for development.

## **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 As agreed at the November 2019 Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee, the reduction of the Repairs & Maintenance spend by £500k for the years 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 will support the additional borrowing to support the Council Homes Programme. The level of expenditure for The Close and Charter Close set out within the Confidential Appendix will be funded from a mixture of borrowing and Retained Right to Buy receipts or Homes England grant funding.
- 5.3 An allowance for cost increases has been allowed for within the budgets for which approval is sought. Procurement processes will seek to ensure an optimum tender price, maximising quality alongside value for money. Costs will be closely monitored during the procurement and development periods to ensure any cost overruns and potential abortive costs can be managed appropriately. The Council will consider whether tendering the two sites as a package will offer cost benefits.
- 5.4 Changes to the use of Right to Buy Receipts in April 2021 will enable the use to fund up to 40% of new development costs, an increase from 30% where this supports scheme viability.
- 5.5 Abortive costs for schemes for where external and internal fees and charges have been incurred will be met from a specific revenue reserve. The project team will use appropriate procurement

to ensure all costs in relation to both abortive schemes and schemes which are built are value for money and costs are only incurred when required to progress a development scheme.

## **6 Risk Implications**

- 6.1 The delivery of any new housing scheme is dependent upon the scheme being viable and securing planning permission. As discussed above there is a risk of abortive work and costs, but these will be managed to minimise as much as possible abortive costs.
- 6.2 The requirement for adequate staffing remains an ongoing risk and the need for additional staff will be closely monitored to ensure there is appropriate staff resources to deliver the Council Home Programme.

## **7 Legal Implications**

- 7.1 The Council is able to provide homes through acquisition, conversion or new build in accordance with Section 9 of the Housing Act 1985.

## **8 Conclusion**

- 8.1 This report sets out the approach to the development of infill sites and seeks approval to drawdown the expenditure required to deliver the dwellings proposed on the two sites at The Close and Charter Close.

## **9 Background Papers**

Council Homes Programme Update Report – Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee June 2021

Council Homes Programme Update Report – Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee October 2021

HRA Borrowing report approved at November 2019 Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee.

*Areas of consideration: e.g. does this report raise any of the following issues and if so how have these been considered/mitigated against?*

<b>Area for consideration</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Monitoring Officer Consultation:	Through ELT
Section 151 Officer Consultation:	Through ELT
Existing Council Policies:	N/A
Financial Implications (including VAT and tax):	At section 5 and in the Confidential Appendix
Legal Implications (including human rights):	Included in section 7
Risk Implications:	Included in section 6 and the confidential appendix
Equality Issues/EQIA assessment:	The new homes provided will be designed to meet housing need and address particular shortages in supply which may currently have a negative impact on the likelihood of some households with protected characteristics from being able to have their needs

	met in a timely way. This recognises that households in higher levels of need will have more opportunity to be accommodated in the Council's housing stock (and that of Registered Providers) than those with low needs.
Crime & Disorder:	New housing schemes will be designed and built to minimise properties vulnerability to crime.
Every Child Matters:	The Council's Development Standard for new housing will take into the account the needs of children.