

Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 1/14

Date: 8 January 2014

Briefing paper to: All Members of Business Support Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: To brief members on outstanding matters following the report presented to the Committee on 19th September 2013 regarding the councils Housing revenue Account development programme

HEADING Housing Revenue Account Development Programme

Members requested further information on a number of issues which is provided as follows:

- **Resident Communication**

The Council issued a press release about the new homes on 18th October 2013. This appeared in the media the following week. (Appendix 2). This gave details of the information sessions being held across Medway. Members were also informed of these times and locations in advance.

At the same time, all the Council tenants near the development sites were written to ensure that the information reached them (Appendix 3).

The residents of Westerham close were contacted separately (Appendix 4).

The general information session at Twydall was the most visited. Those attending were most concerned about availability of alternative garage facilities and how they may apply for any new homes.

The information session for the residents of Westerham Close attracted 50% of the tenants. Generally they were very supportive of the proposals but did have some concerns about the parking on the road and alternative garaging. Many of the residents are disabled and parking has always been an issue as it is very limited at the end of the close and parking from Beechings Way often restricts the available space along the road.

Concerns were also raised about the anti-social behaviour on the grass to the rear of the bungalows. This was something about which the Council was already aware and it has been decided that it makes sense for these issues to be addressed during the development.

The following is being progressed:

- Improvements to the parking arrangements and turning head at the top of Westerham Close
- Closing off the access to the shared amenity space to the rear of 1-18 Westerham Close.
- Improving the lighting on the footpath to the alternative garages that will be available to the residents.

Once a design is available then we will be going back to the residents again to inform them of progress.

- **Continued liaison with Ward Councillors**

Ward Members have been kept up to date with issues. All were given the opportunity to come and discuss the plans as they developed. A follow up meeting has also been held to discuss issues at Davenport Avenue. The Development Team is committed to maintaining open links with local representatives and welcomes any contact if there are questions on anything we are doing.

- **Data on garage usage**

A survey was carried out for all the garage sites that the Council was seeking to develop. The full results of this are attached at Appendix 1.

These results were reported at the Asset Management Group meeting.

The survey information tells us that

- On average, only 27% of the **total** garages are used for parking
- On average, only 46% of the **rented** garages are used for parking

Further desktop analysis of the garage occupancies would indicate that only about 24 occupants of the 184 garages which the Council is intending to demolish would have difficulty in finding alternative places for parking any vehicle they currently park in the garages.

The Council is not intending to ask any occupant to vacate their garage until planning permission has been granted. A protocol for managing the requests for alternative garages is being developed.

- **Remodelling of homes for independent living**

The Consultants that have been commissioned to carry out an option appraisal are expected to report in Jan/Feb 2014.

- **Winchester Avenue**

Development opportunities in Winchester Avenue are limited due to its proximity to the railway but these are currently being explored.

Details of the legal title to the land have been requested to ensure there are no legal barriers to development.

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Survey Results

We have now had the survey results back for the garage usage on the sites that the council is considering developing.

Of the 116 letters sent out we received 55 responses. A return rate of 47%.

Address	No. Garages	No. Void	No rented	% Void	Survey Response rate %	Usage			
						Parking	% Of total garages	% Of rented garages	Storage
Westerham Close	19	6	13	32	54	7	37	54	
Charing Close	15	4	11	27	36	4	27	36	
Eastcourt Lane	14	4	10	29	50	5	36	50	
Begonia Ave	27	6	21	22	38	6	22	29	2
Romany Rd	55	15	40	27	35	14	25	35	4
Tangmere Close	14	8	6	57	83	5	36	83	
Buttermere Close	24	17	7	71	57	3	13	43	1
Hazlemere Drive	16	8	8	50	50	3	19	38	1
Totals	184	68	116	37		47			8

The survey information tells us that

- On average, only 27% of the **total** garages are used for parking
- On average, only 46% of the **rented** garages are used for parking

Having carried out some analysis with other data, we have discovered some anomalies on the returns such as:

- Someone with 2 garages claiming to use them both for their means of transport.
- Some occupants who live a considerable distance (over 1 mile) away saying they use them for parking their means of transport
- Some occupants whose garages appear, from inspection, to be quite overgrown, also use the garage for parking their means of transport.

We will be better able to gauge the actual usage of all the garages later in the development programme.

Once planning permission is granted on each site officers will be liaising with the occupants in order to make alternative offers of a garage. In most cases an offer of an alternative garage within 200m of their current site is possible if they have a car. Some who have a garage just for storage should find it acceptable if an alternative is provided closer to their home. Each garage occupant on an individual basis.

Press Release

Affordable homes for Medway as new build starts

Medway Council has given the go-ahead for its first ever new build council housing.

The council aims to build more than 60 quality, affordable homes over the next three years under the £5.5million housing development programme agreed at last night's full council meeting. (17 October)

Family homes and flats will be provided where they are needed, as well as much sought after bungalows and larger homes.

At least 40 homes could be built on the former Gillingham Community College site at Beatty Avenue, and a further 22 homes on council garage sites in Gillingham and Twydall.

The council could increase the number by developing private land that it is offered.

Local residents will be given the opportunity to view the new build proposals for the garage sites at a series of information meetings, before planning applications are submitted.

They are at:

- Sunlight Centre, Richmond Road, Gillingham, from 28 to 31 October
- Twydall Library, also 28-31 October
- Rainham Library, 1-5 November
- Riverside 1 Chatham, 1-5 November
- Rochester Library, 6-9 November
- Strood Library, 6-9 November

Medway council was formed in 1998, when it took over property previously owned by Gillingham Borough Council, but it has never built any council homes before.

The new build programme has been made possible by removal of the Government housing subsidy regime, and the resulting new borrowing freedom.

Cllr Alan Jarrett, Council Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, said: “I am pleased that our new build programme has been given the full council’s backing.

“This is a rare opportunity to build new council housing by using our borrowing capacity and we must take it. The programme will in turn provide much-needed homes and jobs for local people.”

Cllr Howard Doe, Portfolio Holder for Housing, said: “We want to offer people the chance to rent good quality, energy-efficient homes that they can afford.

“Also, residents can be assured that we will listen to what they have to say about individual sites as they come forward. We urge them to make use of the formal planning consultation process.”

The first planning applications will be submitted before Christmas, and building contractors will be appointed next spring.

General Letter to tenants

Dear

The council now has an opportunity to start building new council homes again for the first time in over 20 years.

This has been made possible by the relaxation of the rules that previously governed the way that the council manages the income it gets from its existing housing stock.

Over the last few months we have been looking at possible development sites amongst land that the council already owns and have identified garage sites at:

- Buttermere Close
- Tangmere Close
- Hazlemere Drive
- Romany Road
- Begonia Avenue
- Charing Road
- Westerham Close
- Eastcourt Lane
- Beechings Way

Additionally, some council owned land on the site of the former Gillingham Community College between Woodlands Road and Beatty Avenue has also been identified as a site with some potential for the council.

As a council tenant near to one of these sites, we are writing to you now to let you know about the consultation.

Planning applications for each of these sites will have to be made and will go through the full consultation process and we are encouraging everyone to look at the plans and make their comments in the normal way. The consultation will be open for a minimum of eight weeks and a full set of plans will be available to view on the council's website.

Meanwhile – for those who would like to get an early idea of what the council is proposing, there will be a series of small exhibitions around Medway. These are planned for:

- Twydall Library from Monday, 28 to Thursday, 31 October. There will be someone for you speak to at the following times:
 - Monday, 28 October 9.30 - 11am
 - Tuesday, 29 October 9.30 - 9 11am
 - Thursday, 31 October 9.30 - 11am

- Sunlight Centre, Richmond Road, Gillingham from Monday, 28 to Thursday, 31 October. There will be someone for you to speak to at the following times:
Monday, 28 October 9.30 - 11am
Tuesday, 29 October 9.30 - 9 11 am
Thursday, 31 October 2 - 3.30pm
- Rainham Library from Friday, 1 to Tuesday, 5 November. There will be someone there for you to speak to at the following times:
Friday, 1 November 9.30 - 11am
Tuesday, 5 November 2.30 - 4pm
- Riverside One Chatham from Friday, 1 to Tuesday, 5 November. There will be someone there for you to speak to at the following times:
Friday, 1 November 9.30 - 11am
Tuesday, 5 November 2.30 - 4pm
- Strood Library – Wednesday, 6 to Saturday, 9 November. There will be someone there for you to speak to at the following times
Wednesday, 6 November 9.30 - 11am
Friday, 8 November 2.30 - 4pm
- Rochester Library – Wednesday, 6 to Saturday, 9 November. There will be someone there for you to speak to at the following times
Wednesday, 6 November 9.30 - 11am
Friday, 8 November 2.30 - 4pm

If you rent a garage in one of these areas we will write to you separately as/when planning permission is granted, to let you know what alternatives we can offer you.

Letter to Westerham close

Dear

For some years now the council has wanted to see an increase in the number of bungalows being built as they are very popular. It has been very difficult to persuade developers to build them and so, now that the council has decided to build its own homes, it wants to include bungalows in its plans.

Westerham Close has been identified as an area where we could possibly increase the number of bungalows whilst, at the same time, increase the security of the large grassed area which we know has been of concern to some residents for a while.

We have drawn up some proposals that include building on the garage site and one bungalow on the amenity area, which we would really like to discuss with you.

The room at Holy Trinity Church, Twydall, has been booked for Wednesday 30 October at 10.30am.

If you need transport to get there, please contact Katherine Bishop on 01634*****

If you would like to bring someone with you, please do so.