

Decision maker: Cabinet Member for Housing

Subject: PHASE ONE REFURBISHMENT OF GROSVENOR HOUSE
2013/14

Date of decision:

Report by: OWEN BUCKWELL – HEAD OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT

Wards affected: St Thomas

Key decision: Yes – Over £250,000

Budget & policy framework decision: No

1. Summary & Purpose of report

- 1.1 To seek permission for phase one of a two phase refurbishment of Grosvenor House. Phase one will provide internal and external refurbishment of the block. Phase two will comprise new lifts and link balconies for the block.
- 1.2 To seek permission for phase one, to spend £771,391 for the undertaking of refurbishment works to 1-54 Grosvenor House, 2-20 Warwick Crescent and 22-40 Warwick Crescent. The works to 1-54 Grosvenor House include: Internal communal and external decorations, replacement stairwell screens, installation of emergency lighting, carrying out electrical tests on the properties and communal electrics, upgrading of some communal doors to be fire resisting and the rebuilding of a roof level brick parapet wall. The works to 2-20 & 22-40 Warwick Crescent include external decoration and repair together with installation of emergency lighting.
- 1.3 The works will benefit all residents of the blocks as it will reduce the risk of injury or harm in the event of a fire, the decorations will improve the visual appearance of the blocks both externally and internally, helping to improve the living environment for residents.
- 1.4 The works will also be of benefit to the day to day management of the properties as the improved flooring and decorations in the stairwells will be easier to clean and maintain, and the replacement screens and doors will reduce day to day repair expenditure.
- 1.5 If approved it is anticipated that the works could commence in spring 2013.
- 1.6 It is anticipated that after the completion of phase one refurbishment works, the mechanical and electrical team based in Chaucer House will commence phase two to address the issue of the inadequate provision of lifts to Grosvenor House. A subsequent report will be brought forward requesting permission for these works in September.

2. Background

- 2.1 Grosvenor House and Warwick Crescent are located in the St Thomas ward. Grosvenor House contains 54no. properties of which 50no. are Portsmouth City Council tenants and 4no. are leaseholders. Whilst the 2no. blocks in Warwick Crescent contain 10no. properties each which are all Portsmouth City Council tenants with no leaseholders.
- 2.2 The main focus of the scheme will be to Grosvenor House. The block is comprised of two wings, one 5 storeys, and the other 7 storeys. Access to the upper floors is via a number of stairwells, two of which have lift shafts. Both these lifts are undersized, and cause particular problems for families with pushchairs.
- 2.3 The block has not had external decorations carried out since 2002, and a number of areas are in a poor condition. The block feels generally run down, with graffiti in the stairwells and vandalism to the screens. The decorations that are not flaking are faded, and require redecoration.
- 2.4 Grosvenor House forms part of site 14 in the Area Action Plan (AAP) for Somerstown regeneration. The site is proposed as a park. The AAP is a document which is designed to allow the regeneration of the area over a long period of time and accordingly the demolition of this block and the creation of the park will not be removed from the AAP. The decision to commence with the refurbishment of the block has come about through consideration of the sites within the AAP and an understanding that the local authority housing stock would be adversely affected by the demolition of this block at this time. Grosvenor House has 32 three bedroom, 14 two bedroom and 8 one bedroom properties. Three bedroom properties are in the most demand within our stock and to remove this block before the completion of alternative family properties in the area would adversely impact the community.
- 2.5 The works to Grosvenor House are designed to extend the life of the block and to ensure the provision of quality accommodation for families whilst the remaining sites within Somerstown are developed. The life and quality of this accommodation will be greatly improved by these works taking place and will ensure that the properties are able to remain occupied for the next thirty year to forty years with ongoing maintenance.
- 2.6 As part of the survey process, a Fire Risk Assessment was carried out. This identified that although the majority of the property entrance doors had been upgraded, there were still a number of areas of risk that could be mitigated by carrying out further planned works.
- 2.7 The project is required to satisfy the requirements of the fire risk assessment, ensure PCCs duty of care to the residents is upheld, and to generally improve the appearance of the block, and thus helping to improve the local area.
- 2.8 In addition to the proposed planned works, a number of structural issues identified during the survey, and by a structural engineers report, will be rectified. These include the rebuilding of a short section of parapet wall in poor condition, replacement of corroded lintels over windows, and various concrete repairs.

- 2.9 These additional works will require additional access scaffold over and above that usually expected for decorations works, and so will incur higher costs.
- 2.10 The issues with the lifts are to be rectified during an additional project that will be put out to tender. A separate report will be submitted to the members for consideration in September.

3. Recommendations:

- i **That approval is given to proceed with the scheme within the estimated sum of £771,391.**

4. Reasons for recommendations

- 4.1 The works will ensure the structural integrity of the block, thus maintaining lettable assets for PCC.
- 4.2 The works will improve the living environment for residents whilst also reducing ongoing repair costs.
- 4.3 The project will improve the visual appearance of the block, in turn improving the external environment for residents.
- 4.4 The works will reduce the risk to the residents in the event of a fire.
- 4.5 The works will help to contribute to PCC Corporate Priority 6 – “Increase availability, affordability, and quality of housing”.

5. Options considered and rejected

- 5.1 External decorations are essential to the appearance and longevity of the buildings. There is no practical alternative that offers better value than to decorate the concrete surfaces with a proven long lasting paint coating.
- 5.2 The recommendations of the Fire Risk Assessment should not be ignored and the options for achieving the desired results are limited. The type of emergency lighting used was carefully considered for its longevity and low running costs.
- 5.3 Several different painting solutions were considered for the stairwells and the chosen solution not only complies with the required standards in terms of preventing the spread of flames, but also is resistant to graffiti and will enable PCC staff to keep the area clean.
- 5.4 It was considered that repairs could be made to the stairwell doors and screens, but it has become increasingly difficult to obtain the matching profiles for the glazing beading. The ongoing repairs that have, out of necessity been carried out over the years have only been a temporary solution. While the weather tightness of the stairwells has been mostly maintained, the repairs have not stopped the general decline of the block.

6. Duty to involve

- 6.1 A number of the residents were spoken to in person during the survey phase for their opinion and thoughts on the block as a whole.
- 6.2 Every resident has had a letter delivered explaining briefly the type of work being considered.
- 6.3 Every resident will be spoken to in person prior to the works starting to explain the scope of the works, give details of the duration of the works, provide details regarding the way the works will be done, how they will affect the buildings and to give them the opportunity to vote on the colour scheme used on the block.
- 6.4 A section 20 will be issued when the costs from the contractor are returned. The section 20 notice is required under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985. The law only affects the holders of long leaseholds and requires that the leaseholder must be consulted before the landlord carries out works above a certain value. We must state why the works are required and the reasons for selection of contractors. Consultation notices must be sent to the Leaseholder advising of this and giving them 30 days in which to make observations or comments concerning the works, however these will not delay the commencement of the project.

7. Implications

- 7.1 It is considered that the works will have positive implications by helping to maintain the properties whilst improving the living conditions of the residents and at the same time improve the appearance of the blocks.
- 7.2 The works should have positive implications by ensuring that PCC maintains good quality housing that is easily lettable.
- 7.3 There is the potential for negative implications due to potential disruption to residents during the works such as restricted access together with noise and dust etc. Measures will be undertaken to reduce these occurrences to a minimum.
- 7.4 Some residents have expressed their discontent with the intention to site welfare units on the green 'courtyard' area. This has been addressed by speaking to as many residents as possible, offering two options for the siting of the welfare units, and giving assurances that any damage to the grassed areas will be made good upon completion of the project
- 7.5 There is also potential for a negative reaction from leaseholders due to the charges that they may receive, and PCC may receive challenges to the Section 20 notice. See item 7.6.
- 7.6 Whilst the refurbishment works, and the lift renewal works to Grosvenor House are considered as two distinct projects, consideration should be given to the financial implications for individual leaseholders in this block. When the costs of the two projects are considered together, some leaseholders will be expected to pay costs up to 30% of the value of their property. Leasehold and commercial services will be in contact with

the affected leaseholders to discuss the different options for a practical and reasonable solution.

- 7.7 As is set out this proposal will affect two type of occupiers in different ways. Those who are direct tenants of Portsmouth City Council have the right to be informed of the way the works are to be done and the way in which it will affect the buildings. However they only have rights which are explicit and implicit in their tenancy agreements. Those who have acquired long leaseholds under the right to buy must be consulted on the proposals and given the details of the costs that are required by the relevant regulations. The costs which are passed on to those individuals as part of their Service Charge must be reasonable and should be passed on in arrears although there is provision for some to be taken in advance. In any event the Service charge may be challenged through the Land Valuation Tribunal which may delay collection.
- 7.8 If on starting the works additional works are found to be needed then an application may need to be made to the Tribunal dispensing with consultation for the work which may involve additional costs to the council.
- 7.9 The work is subject to the normal legal risks relating to building work, the financial and technical competence of the chosen contractor, the disruption that the work will cause to the occupiers generally. These should all be subject to existing risk control assessments and mechanisms for such work and as such minimised before work commences.

8. Corporate priorities

This report and the project it refers to contribute to the following Corporate Priorities:

- Increase availability and quality of housing
- Regenerate the city

9. Equality impact assessment (EIA)

An EIA is not needed for this project. The project will not affect any equality group unequally and there is no adverse impact on people who belong to any of the equality groups. Residents who live in the blocks affected by the project will be consulted on the work, and specific needs will be addressed so that tenants with protected characteristics can be fully involved in the consultation. The project is expected to have positive outcomes for all current and future tenants and will benefit all PCC tenants by saving money in the long term

10. Legal implications

The comments of the Head of Legal Services are incorporated within the body of this report.

11. Head of Financial Services comments

This scheme forms part of line 39, Dwellings Maintenance, within the Housing Investment Programme that was formally approved by Full Council on 14 February 2012. The scheme is funded by Housing Revenue Account Contributions and Leaseholder Contributions.

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Appendices:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by the _____ on _____.

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