

Decision maker: Cabinet Member for Housing

Subject: REFURBISHMENT AND RECONFIGURATION OF CONNORS KEEP

Date of decision:

Report by: OWEN BUCKWELL – HEAD OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT

Wards affected: Hart Plain

Key decision: Yes – Over £250,000

Budget & policy framework decision: No

1. Summary & Purpose of report

- 1.1 To seek permission for the modernisation of sheltered housing facilities/accommodation at Connors Keep, Wecock Farm.
- 1.2 To seek permission to spend £1,437,500 for the undertaking of refurbishment works to 1-45 Connors Keep. 44 properties will be reconfigured into 29 self contained modern properties within the overall building.
- 1.3 The works will benefit individual residents of the scheme as it will enhance their standard of living by providing improved, increased-sized living space with up-to-date individual facilities.
- 1.4 The scheme will hopefully become more attractive to future residents due to enhanced accommodation, more appropriate to today's expectation, and therefore more attractive to a person considering entering a sheltered scheme.
- 1.5 If approved, it is anticipated that the works could commence in winter 2012 and would continue on a phased basis. This would be in line with the moving of existing residents to completed flats and would cause minimum disruption.
- 1.6 An initial conversion of 2 void bed-sits into 1 property has taken place. This has been used as a flagship property to fully gauge the way forward with the whole scheme in line with resident's demands and needs.
- 1.7 We will ensure that each resident has a support person to help manage their move to allay any concerns and ensure that their individual needs are met.
- 1.8 Following the initial success of the flagship property and the feedback from tenants, it is also planned to bring forward the modernisation of other Category 2 sheltered scheme buildings such as Tweed Court and St Clares Court in Leigh Park.

2. Background

- 2.1 Connors Keep is a category two sheltered scheme outside of the city limits in the area of Wecock Farm. This is a scheme that provides on-site housing related support Monday to Friday to our residents, working with Adult Social Care, Health and other agencies. The level of the support varies to meet the needs and demands of the residents, and is flexible in its provision.
- 2.2 There are 44 properties, comprising of 31 bed-sits, 11 one-bedroom flats and 2 two-bedroom flats. There are also six sets of communal bathroom facilities consisting of two wet rooms/bathrooms on each floor. There are two large community rooms, a laundry/drying room. The warden's office and guest room which has the same size footprint as a bed sit, with a bathroom next door, providing a further 2 one-bed flat.
- 2.3 The bed-sits are around 28m². This is 38% smaller than the 45m² required for a one bedroom flat for new affordable housing in the council's space standards.
- 2.4 Some of the bed-sits have very basic washing facilities and residents have to use the communal wet room/bathroom facilities.
- 2.5 We have experienced a high level of voids at this scheme over the past 10 years and currently have a 22% under occupancy equating to 10 empty properties. We have collated evidence to suggest that the type of accommodation does not suit the demands and needs of the prospective tenants.
- 2.6 On average there have been 10 void properties per year for the last 10 years.
- 2.7 Without remedial works, it is expected that the under occupancy will increase exponentially over the next 30 years at a rate of 10% every 3 years, leaving this block less popular with potential residents due to the age, condition and unsuitability of the less attractive accommodation on offer to them.
- 2.8 The works to Connors Keep are designed to improve the desirability of the scheme, and will ensure that the properties are attractive and fully occupied by future residents and allow local people to stay in this area.

3. Recommendations:

- i That approval is given to proceed with the scheme within the approved sum of £1,437,500.**

4. Reasons for recommendations

- 4.1 The works will ensure that Connors Keep sheltered housing properties are up to the market standard for this product, thus maintaining lettable assets for the council.
- 4.2 The works will improve the living environment for residents and ensure that the scheme is in line with the requirements for the future.
- 4.3 The works will help to contribute to the council's Corporate Priority 6 – "Increase availability, affordability, and quality of housing"

- 4.4 The works will help to contribute to the council's Corporate Priority 7 – "Protect and support our most vulnerable residents".

5. Options considered and rejected

- 5.1 *Do Nothing-*
Properties are currently empty because they do not offer the right accommodation to suit people's needs. This is an unacceptable situation and will only worsen.
- 5.2 *Decategorise*
The council would lose the facility of sheltered accommodation in the Wecock area which would make it impossible for future tenants requiring this facility to stay in the area.
- 5.3 *Change to mixed block, general needs and sheltered.*
This will only address short term take-up and does not deal with the required updating/modernisation of the accommodation.

6. Duty to involve

- 6.1 Some of the residents were spoken to in person during initial consultation to gather their opinions and thoughts on Connors Keep. Further consultation will take place to maintain a level of transparency on what is happening and how individuals will be affected.
- 6.2 Residents will be consulted on any changes to communal areas prior to any works affecting them. They will also be given the opportunity to vote on the colour scheme used on any areas.

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.
- 7.2 The works should have positive implications by ensuring that the council 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 noise and dust etc. Measures will be undertaken to reduce these occurrences to a minimum.
- 7.4 There is the potential for negative implications due to possible loss of existing facilities however this will be outweighed and balanced by the increased accommodation and facilities individual properties will be able to provide to their residents within their own homes.
- 7.5 We do not have any leaseholders who will be affected by the scheme.

8. Corporate priorities

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

- Increase availability and quality of housing
- Protect and support our most vulnerable residents

9. Equality impact assessment (EIA)

A preliminary EIA has been done regarding this project. The project will impact positively on age and disability strands. There is no adverse impact on people who belong to the remaining equality strands. A full EIA is **not** required.

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 the council's tenants by saving money in the long term

10. Legal implications

- 10.1 It is not stated what form of tenure these properties are let on. From the description of them it would seem that the bedsits must be let on licences or non-secure tenancies. The flats would be let on secure tenancies. As a result there is flexibility in managing the units while there is very little security of tenure for the tenants.
- 10.2 The proposal to create 29 self contained units would mean that in the future all of the units will be let on secure tenancies. This will have the effect of making management less flexible while giving the tenants greater security of tenure.
- 10.3 Therefore although the units will be more attractive to tenants greater care will have to be taken in allocating the properties as removing tenants will be more difficult because all of the appropriate processes will have to be followed including making decisions compatible with the Human Rights Act about the individual homes.
- 10.4 This change in tenure may also result in these properties becoming subject to the right to buy once the appropriate period of residence in Council property has been completed. However, this may be avoided if the properties are specially adapted for the mentally or physically disabled or otherwise come within the relevant exceptions contained in the legislation.
- 10.5 These risks should be taken into account as low to medium and assessed against the Council's overall housing strategy and policy to ensure that the changes will not lead to the loss of valuable sheltered accommodation from the housing stock.

11. Head of Financial Services comments

- 11.1 This capital scheme aims to reconfigure and modernise the existing sheltered housing facilities/accommodation at Connors Keep, in Wecock Farm. Whilst the proposal seeks to spend £1.4M to reduce the number of individual units from 44 to 29, the increased rental income generated over the life of the asset exceeds the anticipated cost that an increase in voids would result in, if the dwellings were to remain configured as they currently are.

11.2 The scheme forms part of the Housing Investment Programme which is included within Council's overall Capital Programme 2011/12 to 2016/17 which was approved by Full Council on 14th February 2012, funded by Housing Revenue Account contributions.

.....

Signed by: **Owen Buckwell – Head of Housing Management**

Appendices:

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

.....

Signed by: **[Councillor Steven Wylie]**