

Decision maker: Cabinet Member for Housing

Subject: REFURBISHMENT OF St. CLARES COURT

Date of decision: 9th July 2013

Report by: OWEN BUCKWELL – HEAD OF HOUSING AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Wards affected: Havant

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 St Clare's Court, Leigh Park.
- 1.2 To seek permission, to spend £1,437,500 for the undertaking of refurbishment works to 1-45 St Clare's Court. 44 properties will be reconfigured into 32 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 autumn 2013 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 This scheme does not require residents to move unless they wish to do so; there are significant vacant units within this building allowing us to commence large scale works without the scheme being closed. This method of refurbishment has proved very popular with residents as they have been very concerned to be able to remain within the scheme in which they are currently living. Any residents wishing to move from the scheme will be offered alternative category 2 accommodation.
- 1.7 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.
- 1.8 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.

2. Background

- 2.1 St Clare's Court is a category two sheltered scheme outside of the city limits in the area of Leigh Park. 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 33 bed-sits, 9 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, also has the possibility of providing a further 1 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 12 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 St Clare's Court 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 St Clare's Court 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 Leigh Park 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 St Clare's Court. 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 The refurbishment works proposed will need to be procured through a process which is compliant with the City Council's Contract Procedure Rules in Part 3A of the Constitution.
- 10.2 Under Part 2, Section 3 of the City Council's constitution (responsibilities of the Cabinet) and further in accordance with the Scheme of Delegations at Appendix A to the Executive Procedure Rules in Part 3 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Member for Housing has the authority to approve the recommendations set out in this report.

11. Head of Financial Services comments

“The works involved in updating Tweed/St Clare’s Court reduces the number of available dwellings in this sheltered accommodation, but it increases the desirability of the block as a place to live. This is expected to have a marked effect on occupancy levels in years to come, with a substantial improvement on current void losses. Without this modernisation, there will be fewer and fewer tenants who are prepared to live in Tweed Court, which would reduce the financial viability of this block over a period of time and escalate the existing issues relating to voids further.

Funding for this scheme is from the ‘Major Repairs – Dwellings’ section of the Housing Investment Programme, which was approved by full council on 12th February 2013”

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

Appendices:

