

Report to:	Cabinet	14 November 2022
Lead Cabinet Member:	Councillor John Batchelor, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing	
Lead Officer:	Peter Campbell, Head of Housing	

Future Use of HRA Land

Executive Summary

1. Following a renewed focus in the New Build Acquisitions and Development team on the delivery of Council-owned affordable rent properties, the team are seeking Cabinet input on the best use for plots of HRA-owned land deemed unsuitable for that purpose.
2. The 8no. plots detailed below are deemed unsuitable for Council-owned new build as standalone plots as they are generally too small to deliver a sufficient number of homes to make a scheme financially viable.

Key Decision

3. No

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Cabinet note the history of the self-build project and approves the below actions on a site-by-site basis:
 - i) Blakeland Hill, Duxford: seek market valuation and sell without self-build restrictions;
 - ii) Coploe Road, Ickleton: offer on license to the neighbour as garden land;
 - iii) Falkner Road, Sawston: retain as garages and explore clustering development opportunity in future;
 - iv) Church Street, Harston: explore opportunities to support Doubling Nature Strategy;
 - v) Horseshoes Lane, Weston Colville: seek market valuation and sell without self-build restrictions;

- vi) Orchard Close, Cottenham: explore opportunity for “clustering” with other Council projects in the village. If viability cannot be established at tender, seek valuation and sell without self-build restrictions;
- vii) Primrose Walk, Little Gransden: instruct architects to establish whether 2no. affordable bungalows could be delivered on the site. If not possible, or if financial viability cannot be established explore options to support Doubling Nature Strategy;
- viii) Balsham Road, Linton: offer land on license to adjoining council tenant

Reasons for Recommendations

- 5. Reasons for individual recommendations are laid-out in paragraphs 14 - 21.
- 6. Where market sale is proposed, removing any caveats associated with the historical self and custom build project from the conditions of sale would ensure that SCDC achieve a full market value for the sale a public asset, and remove the risk of incurring further costs associated with legal actions to enforce any such conditions.

Details

- 7. The plots of land detailed below were previously associated with a project intended to provide plots of land for self and custom build for sale to South Cambridgeshire District Council’s Self and Custom Build Register.
- 8. That project has since been closed-down in line with the New Build Acquisition and Development Team’s renewed focus on increasing the delivery of New Build Council-owned homes for affordable rent.
- 9. It was also the case that the original project business plan of delivering 13-15 serviced plots for sale annually was not a sustainable model.
- 10. Where possible, the New Build Acquisitions and Developments Team have reassessed sites and incorporated them into the New Build Council Housing Development Programme.
- 11. Working with Architects and the Self Build Development Officer, a site earmarked for sale as two plots at Meadowcroft Way, Orwell, was reassessed as an opportunity to directly deliver new build affordable rent council housing. The resultant planning application for 4NO. 1bed maisonette apartments with air-source heat pumps, solar panels, and green roofs was approved by SCDC Planning Committee on 10 November 2021 (REF: 21/03068/FUL). A construction contract has been awarded for this site and work will begin on site (subject to discharges of conditions) in January 2023.
- 12. Eight sites previously within the self-build project have been reassessed by the New Build team but deemed unsuitable for the delivery of Council housing on

account of their size. As standalone plots they are not large enough to build a sufficient number of homes to make a scheme viable.

13. The below 8no. sites have been split into two categories,

- i) Sites with existing or expired outline planning consents
- ii) Other sites which have been subject to pre-apps, and identified for potential single dwellings

Sites with existing or expired outline planning consents

14. Blakeland Hill, Duxford RE: S/1639/19/OL (AppendixA)

Planning expired 11 July 2022

Although expired there is a compelling argument that planning can be achieved. Previous planning consent was for a single, 2 storey, 3B dwelling with car parking. Currently fenced-off.

Old garage site (underused – dilapidated). Garages have been demolished (Asbestos removed).

Options:

- a) Instruct architect to explore whether we could get 2NO. semi-detached properties on site (likely to be tight) - for Council delivery (viability also stretched – unlikely to be viable for delivery as standalone site – clustering required.)
- b) Sell on open market without restrictions.

Officer recommendation: Option (b) Seek valuation for sale on open market without restrictions.

Reason for recommendation: No viable clustering options for co-delivery with other SCDC-owned sites within the village. Likely to be of significant interest to a self-builder or small-scale developer if sold without restrictions. Option to sell and capital receipts to be used within the Housing Service.

15. Coploe Road, Ickleton REF: S/0312/18/OL (Appendix B)

Planning consent expired 30 April 2021

Although expired there is a compelling argument that planning can be achieved. Previous planning consent was for a single storey, 2B dwelling with car parking. Currently fenced-off.

Site was previously garden land.

Was advertised for sale and buyer found. Price achieved in December 2019 was £127,300.

Sale failed to reach completion as “self-builder” wished for the self-build restrictions to be removed.

Reasonable expectation that if remarketed without restriction, significantly higher price could be achieved.

Options:

- a) Offer on license to adjoining tenant as garden land – remains within SCDC control and could be developed in future if desirable/viable.
- b) Likely to be of significant interest to a self-builder or small-scale developer if sold without restrictions. Option to sell with overage provision
- c) Explore options for future use in line with our Doubling Nature Strategy.

Officer recommendation:

Option (a) offer on license as garden land to adjoining plot.

Reason for Recommendation:

Current/retained garden for adjoining council property is relatively modest for a family home. If license option is accepted it ensures management and maintenance carried out by licensee. License rather than tenancy protects the site from being purchased as part of a Right to Buy application thereby protecting it as a Council asset.

16. Falkner Road, Sawston REF: S/0375/19/FUL (Appendix C)

Planning permission expired 16 August 2022

Although expired there is a compelling argument that planning can be achieved. Previous planning consent was for demolition of existing garage block and erection of a single storey, 2B dwelling with car parking.

Garage blocks have not been demolished.

Plot with outline consent backs on to battery of garages to be retained. Unlikely to be a desirable plot for private sale.

Not viable for delivery as a single council-owned dwelling – clustering possibility with other sites in Sawston.

Options:

a) Seek valuation and sell without restriction – to include buyer demolition of garages (sold as seen)

b) Retain as garages (status quo)

c) Retain as-is for now and look to deliver as part of a “cluster” in future

Officer recommendation

Option (c) Retain as is for now with a long-term to look at potential clustering of delivery with other sites within the village.

Reason for Recommendation

Not viable as standalone council delivery site, but viability could potentially be achieved in the future as part of a wider programme.

17. Church Street, Harston 21/01024/OUT (Appendix D)

Outline planning consent valid until 14 January 2025.

Current plan for a 2 storey, 2bed dwelling with car parking.

Site is adjacent to Green Belt. SCDC owners of green belt land currently used as allotments, although not formally designated.

Site likely to command a high price if marketed without restrictions. Parish Council are not supportive of the application.

This site is not suitable for Council delivery as it would require rerouting of a mains sewer which renders the scheme unviable for more than one property.

Options

a) Sell on the open market without restriction

b) Retain within SCDC ownership and explore options for use to meet objectives of Doubling Nature Strategy.

c) Adjacent parcel of land currently used as allotments, this parcel could also be returned to this use.

Officer Recommendation:

Option (b) explore options re: Doubling nature.

Reason for Recommendation:

This site's location adjacent to the Green Belt and land currently used as allotments makes it a good candidate for assessment in line with DN Strategy. Potential for offsite contribution to biodiversity net-gain mitigating against council delivery of affordable housing elsewhere. It would set a bold example for the Council to "rewild" such a valuable land parcel.

18. Horseshoes Lane, Weston Colville REF: 20/02593/OUT (Appendix E)

Expires 25 June 2024.

Current plan is for a 2 storey, 3B dwelling with car parking.

Unused former garage site.

Garages removed.

There is an existing public right of way that traverses the site.

Site has previously been marketed with self-build restrictions. 1 bid previously received, but price achieved was not deemed to represent best value by independent RICS valuer (Carter Jonas). It is thought that the PRW affected the bids (this would cost c.£6k to reroute by way of an application to Cambridgeshire County Council). Officers have made enquiries to CCC, and in principle they saw no issues with this proposal.

This site is unlikely to be suitable for Council new build owing to both its size and the remoteness of the location.

SCDC have been approached about selling this site post-marketing.

Given the location of this site, it is likely that if this site was sold without restrictions it would achieve a substantial return.

Options

a) Seek re-valuation and sell on open market without restrictions (need for footpath diversion and indicative cost to be included in marketing materials)

b) Retain as is (parking area) with management and maintenance costs retained within HRA.

c) Retain within SCDC ownership and explore options for use to meet objectives of Doubling Nature Strategy. Note that there would be considerable cost to this option as the concrete base would be required to be removed.

Officer Recommendation:

Option (a) seek re-valuation and sell without restrictions.

Reason for Recommendation:

This would likely achieve a considerable return to support delivery of council new build or similar in more viable locations.

19. Orchard Close, Cottenham REF: 21/01023/OUT (APPENDIX F)

Expires 15 October 2024

Current consent is for single storey, 3b dwelling with car parking.

Previously garden land for adjacent council-owned dwelling.

Options

a) Sell on open market without restrictions.

b) Offer on license to adjoining tenant as garden land – remains within SCDC control and could be developed in future if desirable/viable.

c) Explore option of delivering as part of a "cluster" of council new build development within the village envelope

Officer Recommendation:

Option (c) explore option of delivering as a cluster. However, if at point of tender it is evident that this option is not financially viable for the Council, revert to option (a) sale without restriction.

Reason for Recommendation:

Officers are exploring the option of delivering new council homes on two disused garage plots within the Coolidge Gardens development, Cottenham. It seems prudent given the proximity to “test” the clustering proposal on this site.

Other Sites Identified for Potential Single Dwellings**20. Primrose Walk, Little Gransden (Appendix G)**

This site has previously been subject to a planning pre-app.

Planning officers have indicated that the site would be suitable for a single 2 storey dwelling for self-build. It is the case that more than one dwelling could be positioned on this site provided they were attached, however for the purposes of self-build sale it was necessary that properties would be detached.

Options

- a) Sell on open market without planning consent
- b) Offer to sell or lease to the parish council for community use
- c) Instruct architects to establish whether 2no. semi-detached bungalows could be accommodated on the site for delivery as council new build. Note that the financial viability of this option has not been established.
- d) Retain within SCDC ownership and explore options for use to meet objectives of Doubling Nature Strategy including potential for offsite contribution to biodiversity net-gain mitigating against council delivery of affordable housing elsewhere.

Officer Recommendation:

Option (c) Explore suitability for 2NO. council-owned bungalows. If financial viability cannot be established revert to option d – explore options to meet objectives of Doubling Nature Strategy.

Reason for Recommendation:

If viable, this would be a good location for council-owned bungalows as it would be in-keeping with the existing street scene.

21. Balsham Road, Linton (Appendix H)

This site has previously been subject to a planning pre-app.

Planning officers have indicated that the site would be suitable for a single 2 storey, 3bed dwelling. This has been achieved on a similar plot on the same street.

The site was previously the side garden of no.35 Balsham Road prior to the current tenancy.

SCDC has been approached by both adjacent neighbours who wish to have use of/acquire the land in question.

Options:

- a) Sell on open market without planning consent or restrictions
- b) Return land to the tenancy of no.35. This represents a risk of loss of developable land in the event of a Right to Buy application.

c) Offer on license to adjoining tenant as garden land.

Officer Recommendation:

Option (c) Offer on licence to adjoining tenant.

Reason for Recommendation:

This option allows that the plot remains within SCDC control and could be developed in future if desirable/viable. This arrangement would safeguard the land in the event of a Right to Buy application. Should a Right to Buy application be made, the Council would be permitted to take a view on whether to sell the licensed land directly to the tenant/owner subject to independent valuation

22. Following the success of the Orwell pilot outlined in paragraph 11 above, officers have begun work on a garage survey to establish the long-term potential of all garage sites within HRA ownership.

23. A number of other under/dis-used garage plots have been identified as potentially suitable for council new build delivery

i) Coolidge Gardens, Cottenham (2 sites)

ii) Fordham Way, Melbourn

iii) Orchard Close, Fen Drayton (this site includes the redevelopment of 4no. bungalows currently empty owing to structural issues with sub-structure).

Options

1. Members could proceed with all officer recommendations for 8NO. sites as laid out in paragraph 4.
2. Members could elect to proceed with alternative options presented in paragraphs 14 - 21.
3. Members could make alternative recommendations and instruct officers on that basis.

Implications

24. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:

Financial

25. Selling sites exclusively as Self Build opportunities is prohibiting the Council from achieving best value. Allowing sales to proceed to the wider market (while continuing to market the opportunity to self builders) will achieve best value for the sale of any public asset. Removing sales covenants etc will streamline several processes and remove the risk of incurring further, future costs associated with any legal actions associated with non-compliance.

Legal

26. The removal of covenants from the terms of sale will allow conveyances to proceed in a more efficient manner and will remove the risk of legal action against future non-compliance.

Consultation Responses

27. Ward members for affected Wards have been consulted and the following responses have been received:

Blakeland Hill, Duxford

Ward member Cllr Peter McDonald is supportive of the officer recommendation

Coploe Road, Ickleton

Ward member Cllr Peter McDonald is supportive of the officer recommendation

Falkner Road, Sawston

Ward member Cllr Brian Milnes is supportive of the officer recommendation

Horseshoes Lane, Weston Colville

Ward member Cllr Geoff Harvey is supportive of the officer recommendation and the proposal that funds generated would support future HRA projects

Balsham Road, Linton

Ward member Cllr Henry Batchellor is supportive of the officer recommendation

Primrose Walk, Little Gransden

Ward member Cllr Tumi Hawkins submitted the following response:

“I support the Parish Council's request to have the land sold or transferred to them. This piece of land has been used for years as a playground for young children and is the only piece of land available for that sort of use in the village. In addition, part of it could also support a community garden that could double up as a means of improving the nature/biodiversity in the village, that would be under the control of the community.”

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

Housing that is truly affordable for everyone to live in

28. Funds generated by the sale of HRA plots are recycled into the HRA Capital programme. Achieving best value on the sale of HRA Assets will have a direct impact on the number of new council homes we can build.
29. The reassessment of plots for Council New Build will actively support us in our target to increase the number of new build homes we deliver annually.

Being green to our core

30. A number of the above options propose repurposing SCDC-owned land to meet the objectives of the Doubling Nature Strategy.

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