

CHURCHILL COURT, GORE ROAD, NEW MILTON**1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 At the Cabinet meeting of 4th March 2004 members considered a report on the future of Churchill Court. The decision was as follows:-

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That further details of Options 2 and 4 together with residents' views be brought back to a future meeting for a decision to be taken on the preferred option; and
- c) That the detail for option 4 should include the opportunity for single occupancy flats for the existing tenants.

1.2 A copy of the original report is attached at Appendix 1 for information.

2 THE OPTIONS

2.1 As requested by Cabinet this report concentrates on two options. These are:-

- a) To remodel the existing scheme to provide modern self-contained sheltered housing flats.
- b) To demolish the existing buildings and to redevelop the site for general needs affordable housing.

2.2 Option a) Refurbishment

It has been recognised that the existing accommodation provided for residents at Churchill Court is unsatisfactory since the accommodation is primarily bedsits with shared facilities. Because of the nature of the scheme it has become increasingly difficult to let these units of accommodation as and when they become vacant. In addition of the 26 sheltered properties that the Council own, Churchill Court is one of only two schemes that have been unimproved to meet the high standards that residents now expect. The other remaining unimproved property, Cranleigh Paddock in Lyndhurst comprises some 16 units of accommodation with shared facilities. Many of these units are also difficult to let and currently there are two vacancies within this scheme that have been vacant for three months or more.

2.3 Officers have carried out a feasibility study into the costs of refurbishing the existing structure to provide self-contained flats. It has been estimated that this would cost £900,000 and would result in a total of 19 new units of accommodation. Work would be undertaken with existing residents remaining in occupation similar to the way that the refurbishment of Barfields Court in Lymington has been carried out over the past 6 years. Whilst this does cause a substantial element of disruption to residents it has proved to be a successful way of proceeding and ensures that some residents can remain in the scheme whilst works are carried out. It is, however, more costly than working in a vacant property and will mean that work will take a number of years to

complete. A further issue that must be considered is that no matter how successful any refurbishment is one is still adapting an older building and can therefore never achieve a level of quality of design that can match that achieved with any new building.

- 2.4 If the Council were to take a decision to fully decant the property prior to carrying out the refurbishment there would be substantial savings in the time needed to complete the refurbishment and in addition an element of cost savings perhaps as great as 15%, (i.e. the estimated final cost would be in the region of £765,000). However, such an action would mean an initial longer lead in time before work could start to allow time for the existing residents to be found suitable alternative accommodation. It would be possible if this course of action were followed to allow and encourage up to 19 of the existing residents to move back into Churchill Court once the refurbishment work was completed.
- 2.5 As part of the refurbishment proposals both existing residents and some Members had asked if an element of new development could be investigated to ensure a better use of the existing site. Officers have looked at the opportunities in this respect and consider that dependent upon whether an existing large tree could be removed an extension of either 2 or 4 additional self-contained units could be provided. The costs of such an extension would be either £75,000 or £150,000 dependant upon the number of units provided. At this early stage no discussions have taken place with Planning Officers to ensure the feasibility of constructing an extension to the existing building on this site.
- 2.6 One further option examined by officers is to demolish the existing buildings and provide a new purpose built sheltered scheme on the site. Officers are of the view that such a scheme could provide 25 new units of accommodation at a cost of around £1,000,000. Such a proposal would require all existing residents to be decanted although there may be the opportunity for the residents to return once the scheme was completed. If this option were selected it is likely that the work would be undertaken in partnership with a Registered Social Landlord and that the new scheme would be owned and managed by that landlord.
- 2.7 Any of the options detailed above, (except that described in 2.6) would need to be funded from the Housing Revenue Account and would clearly have an impact upon any current proposals for expenditure upon the existing stock. A re-prioritisation of other maintenance and improvement schemes would need to be carried out in conjunction with the Tenants Consultative Group and this could dictate when works were undertaken. Expenditure of this magnitude (£1m) could, in the long term, seriously affect the Council's ability to achieve the Decent Homes Standard by 2010. This position cannot be clarified until later this year once the stock condition survey has been completed and the results of this are built into the HRA business plan projections.
- 2.8 Option b) Redevelopment**
Officers have indicated that the need for sheltered accommodation within the New Forest is declining and therefore an alternative use for Churchill Court should be considered.
- 2.9 There has been low demand for sheltered bedsits in the district for many years, as this form of accommodation, often with shared facilities, does not meet the aspirations of many elderly people. Low demand has been evidenced by difficult to let vacancies, and has, at times, caused extended void periods. Difficult to let vacancies are often allocated to applicants from outside of the district. Of the last 10 vacancies at Churchill Court, half of them were allocated to applicants with an address outside of the district although some of this group may have been moving to be closer to relatives within the

district. It is also worth pointing out that although we do manage to let the majority of our sheltered accommodation units many of the hard to let properties are now being let to relatively younger people (i.e. those below the age of 60) and that often these individuals do not need the services provided by the sheltered housing manager.

- 2.10 The Homesearch lettings scheme allows us to measure the specific demand for individual vacancies as applicants apply for the individual properties they want to be considered for.
- 2.11 The table below shows the average number of applications for each property type in New Milton since October 2001. The demand for sheltered bedsits is significantly lower than for all other types of accommodation. At an average of only 3 voucher submissions per vacancy, the properties can safely be described as being difficult to let.

New Milton Vacancies and Average Number of Applicants

Property Type	Average No of Applicants
Bedsit (General)	11
1 Bed Bungalow	29
1 Bed Ground Floor Flat	29
1 Bed House	31
1 Bed Upper Flat	27
2 Bed Bungalow	50
2 Bed Ground Floor Flat	22
2 Bed House	56
2 Bed Upper Flat	21
2 Bed Maisonette	28
3 Bed House	38
4 Bed House	No vacancies
Sheltered Housing (Link ins)	11
Sheltered Bedsit	3

- 2.12 Demand for other sheltered vacancies in New Milton is considerably higher than for sheltered bedsits, but lower than for all other property types other than general needs bedsits.
- 2.13 The Homesearch (Choice based letting) scheme has only been operational for 2 years, so long term trends in demand are not yet evident. The Housing Needs Survey identified that there will be a growth in the percentage of the population above retirement age and a significant growth in the very elderly population (those above 80.) This suggests the possibility of an increased demand for sheltered housing.
- 2.14 However, the survey also identified that the elderly population within the district is generally a settled community with a low percentage of people intending to move. The demand for support will often be to help people remain in their own homes. It is not clear, therefore, that there will be an increase in demand for sheltered housing despite the changing age profile of the population. Indeed our studies suggest that supply and demand are close to being in balance.
- 2.15 What is clear, both from the Homesearch demand statistics and from the findings of the Housing Needs Survey, is that there is a significant need for additional affordable general needs housing and that this need will continue to

grow due to household formation. An interim update of the Housing Needs Survey has just been completed. This has identified the need to provide over 900 new affordable dwellings a year in order to remove the existing backlog of need and to meet newly arising need. Most of this need is for general needs housing.

- 2.16 At the last meeting of Cabinet, Members asked that any redevelopment proposals include the opportunity for single occupancy flats for the existing residents of Churchill Court. A scheme can be designed to include some 1 bedroom flats. For a number of reasons, however, it is not recommended that a scheme be designed that could accommodate all existing residents. To do this would mean any benefit in terms of redevelopment was marginal. Furthermore, it is unlikely that all existing residents would wish to transfer from sheltered housing to independent housing. Finally, there is a pressing housing need for accommodation for singles, couples and families of all ages. There is, therefore, benefit in providing a range of dwelling types and, given relative housing needs and the need to retain the ability to let housing to highest need groups, it is desirable there are as few constraints as possible on letting.
- 2.17 Notwithstanding this, a scheme can include 1 bed flats with priority being given, at first letting, to existing residents for a proportion of these.
- 2.18 Redevelopment of the site is constrained by environmental factors, particularly trees. A detailed feasibility study has not yet been undertaken, although the principle of redevelopment is acceptable in planning terms.
- 2.19 A redevelopment for general needs affordable housing would be carried out by a Registered Social Landlord (RSL). The scheme would be funded by a combination of private finance raised by the RSL and grant funding which would come from either the Housing Corporation or the Council.
- 2.20 Based on broad assumptions made about density and costs and with the aim of providing a mix of rented houses and flats grant requirements may be in the region of £1.5m. On the basis of similar density the site would be valued at around £1m. This value could be recycled to help fund the scheme. Alternatively the land could be disposed of to a RSL at a discount in order to reduce costs. Both approaches would reduce grant requirements.
- 2.21 Developing the scheme as a RSL led mixed tenure redevelopment would reduce grant requirements further and would be worthy of investigation should redevelopment be identified as the preferred option.
- 2.22 Should members decide to pursue the option of redevelopment a detailed feasibility study would be carried out and this would include consideration of development density, grant requirements and site value. Grant requirements would be discussed with the Housing Corporation with the aim of securing funding through this route, however in the absence of funding being made available through this route consideration would need to be given to the Council providing grant assistance.

3 VIEWS OF EXISTING RESIDENTS

- 3.1 To follow.

4 PORFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING'S COMMENTS

4.1 To Follow

5 VIEWS OF THE TENANTS' CONSULTATIVE GROUP

5.1 To follow

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The financial implications depend upon the option adopted. Broad financial implications are presented within the main body of this report but these will be expanded upon once a decision on the way forward is agreed.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The environmental implications will depend upon the option adopted. These will be detailed if and when a decision is taken and detailed proposals are presented to Cabinet.

8 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The crime and disorder implications will depend upon the option adopted. These will be detailed if and when a decision is taken and detailed proposals are presented to Cabinet.

9 RECOMMENDATION

9.1 That Members decide which option to proceed with in respect of the future proposals for Churchill Court, New Milton.

For further information please contact:

Dave Brown
Assistant Director of Housing
Tel: 023 8028 5141
dave.brown@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers

Development Scheme File and
Sheltered Housing Scheme File
(Contains some exempt information.)
Cabinet Report - 4th March 2004
Minutes of Cabinet Meeting – 4th
March 2004

CABINET – 3 MARCH 2004

PORTFOLIO: HOUSING

CHURCHILL COURT, GORE ROAD NEW MILTON

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 NFDC has 26 sheltered housing schemes and linked bungalows / flats offering 755 units of accommodation, specifically designed for independent living. The schemes offer different levels of assistance and support. The schemes offering bedsit accommodation have undertaken a planned programme of refurbishment. In spite of this refurbishment some of the schemes remain hard to let. One such scheme is Churchill Court which was built in 1965 and comprises of 31 bedsits with shared facilities.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to inform members of the options that are available for Churchill Court.

2. CURRENT USE AND FUTURE DEMAND FOR SHELTERED HOUSING

- 2.1 It has been identified that there is an over provision of sheltered housing in the District. Evidence for this comes from the number of hard to let dwellings and the time it takes to relet the properties after they become vacant. In 2001 it was identified that 5% of sheltered schemes were hard to let. In addition to 5 voids at Churchill Court, at the end of Dec 2003, 9 sheltered properties were waiting re allocation, with a void period of 1 – 6 weeks. (This figure does not include the 10 properties awaiting refurbishment / 4 new flats at Barfields Court).
- 2.2 Where refurbishment has been carried out, some of the schemes still remain hard to let. The lifestyle expectations of older people now mean they expect accommodation with their own facilities. Hard to let schemes can also be due to prospective tenants preferring to remain in their own home, with the services being brought to them e.g. community alarm, home care etc.
- 2.3 Churchill Court is classed as a hard to let property and requires extensive work to bring it to the standard of other accommodation within the area. Approximately 8 years ago the tenants were consulted regarding refurbishment and based on their views it was decided to leave it as it was.
- 2.4 During the last five years some of the void properties at Churchill Court have been allocated to households with a low level of need and to households from outside the area.

3. THE DISTRICT'S HOUSING NEEDS

- 3.1 The need for affordable housing in the District is increasing. Recent years have seen an upward trend in the size of the Homesearch Register. Currently there are 2911 households registered as being in housing need.
- 3.2 The Council's *Housing Needs and Market Assessment* undertaken in 2001 indicated an annual need for 879 new affordable dwellings a year until 2006 in order to remove the backlog and meet newly arising need.
- 3.3 The vast majority of the need is for general needs affordable housing to house single people, couples and families, with only 9% of the households on the Homesearch Register requiring sheltered housing. Of these, very few would accept bedsit accommodation.

4. OPTIONS

- 4.1 There are a number of options for the future of Churchill Court

Option	Comment
1. Do nothing.	The existing bedsits are proving unpopular and they will not provide suitable accommodation in the longer term.
2. Re-model scheme as self contained flats.	This would result in the reduction of the number of dwellings to 15. While this would provide better quality accommodation there is still a question mark over future demand and, importantly, there is strong evidence that indicates the needs for other forms of affordable accommodation are more pressing. Furthermore the cost of remodelling is likely to be between £750,000 and £1m.
3. Re-model the scheme as general needs affordable housing.	Again 15 single bed flats could be provided, however the approach does not maximise the site's capacity for providing housing.
4. Demolish the existing building and redevelop the site for general needs affordable housing	This offers the opportunity to maximise the number of dwellings that could be provided on the site. An initial appraisal suggest around 20 dwellings (mixture of houses and flats) could be accommodated. Such an approach would also allow the dwellings to be targeted at applicants to the Homesearch Register who are greatest in number.

5. CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 Considering the future of a sheltered housing scheme raises a number of sensitive issues, not least the health and welfare of existing residents.
- 5.2 These issues must, however, be balanced with current and future demand for sheltered accommodation on this site, and in the District, and the District's other housing needs.

6. EXISTING TENANTS

- 6.1 Should members agree to options 3 or 4 careful consideration will need to be given to how existing tenants are re-housed. A suggested course of action is set out below.
- 6.2 Current tenants at Churchill Court will be given a choice as to whether or not to be placed on the list for rehousing. Tenants will not be forced to move, but it is expected that a majority of residents will decide to move and, as the number of residents declines, it is likely that all of the residents will, at some stage, elect to be transferred.
- 6.3 Those tenants who decide to be placed on the list will be given an urgent priority for a transfer and will be given choice over which vacancy they move to. Assistance in applying for vacancies will be provided by a Lettings Officer. The existing Sheltered Housing Manager will remain on site throughout the process to ensure maximum support and assistance is given to all the existing residents. Removal costs, up to a reasonable amount, will be paid by the Council.
- 6.4 In terms of timescale, it is expected that a process of re-housing residents could take as long as 5 years. Redevelopment could not commence until re-housing has been completed

7. PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING'S COMMENTS

- 7.1 "Having met with the residents I am concerned that they need to fully understand the options regarding Churchill Court. I am well aware that we are dealing with vulnerable persons and discussing their homes, consequently I am well aware of the anxiety and uncertainty that this issue is having on them.
- 7.2 I accept that the districts housing needs are pressing, however, I am also aware of the personal needs of the present occupants. At present I do not have a preferred option, and as far as I am concerned all options are open.
- 7.3 My preliminary view of the options subject to further consultation is to progress outline details of options 2 and 4. I do not consider that option 3 producing 15 units for affordable housing is maximising the use. If the site is subsequently earmarked for general housing needs option 4 produces more units. I would like to see further work on options 2 & 4, in respect of costings and design. I would like the residents to be consulted again once these options are explored further. Although officers have had meetings with the residents from my contact with them, I am not currently satisfied that the residents fully understand the proposed options. I have no

criticism of officers but I consider that the residents having a broad outline of the options as detailed in this paper is insufficient. I would wish to hear the residents views once they have studied all the options herewith along with detail of option 2 & 4.”

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 To avoid the issue of the future of Churchill Court causing undue worry to the existing residents a number of meetings have been held at the Scheme to broach the subject of the possible future uses of the Scheme. The Portfolio Holder for Housing was present at two of these meetings. As a result of these meetings a draft of this report has been given to tenants and they have subsequently made written comments. These are attached at Appendix 1 together with a petition at Appendix 2 signed by residents and their families. Residents have particularly asked that these documents be made available to the Cabinet.
- 8.2 Ward members have been informed of the proposals.
- 8.3 The broad issues surrounding each option have been discussed with the existing residents and they have been advised of the implications of each option on their future residency. There is naturally concern amongst the residents and some of them are clearly worried and uncertain as to their future. All residents have been assured that if the closure were to be planned they may remain in the Scheme as long as they wish but they have also been advised that they will be given priority should they decide that they wish to move as a result of the current uncertainties.
- 8.4 If and when a decision on the future of Churchill Court is taken then further detailed consultation will need to be undertaken with the residents and support given to ensure the process is sympathetically dealt with.
- 8.5 Should closure be planned consultation would be undertaken with Unison in relation to the future role of the existing Sheltered Housing Manager if and when the Scheme is finally vacated. At this stage, in view of the likely timescale of any closure it is expected that the Sheltered Housing Manager would be able to relocate to another of the Council's Sheltered Schemes.
- 8.6 The Tenant's Consultative Group have also been consulted on these proposals and agree that the options contained within this report should be further investigated to ensure that any decision takes full account of all factors including the well being of the existing residents.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The financial implications depend on the option adopted. Details will be presented to Cabinet when they are asked for a decision.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The environmental implications depend on the option adopted. Details will be presented to Cabinet when they are asked for a decision.

11. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The crime and disorder implications depend on the option adopted. Details will be presented to Cabinet when they are asked for a decision.

12. CONCLUSIONS

12.1 The quality of accommodation at Churchill Court is not up to current standards, where self-contained flats rather than bedsits are demanded. There are a range of pressing housing needs in the District, however it is also necessary to consider the needs of current residents. It is important that there are further discussions with residents and that a more detailed option appraisal is carried out before a final decision is made.

13. RECOMMENDATION

13.1 That members note this report and that further details of options and residents' views are brought back to a future meeting for a decision to be taken on the preferred option.

Further Information:

Dave Brown
Assistant Director
Services)
Tel (023) 8028 5141
Email dave.brown@nfdc.gov.uk

Simon Maggs
Housing Development Manager
Tel (023) 8028 5122
Email simon.maggs@nfdc.gov.uk

Sue Reynolds
Sheltered Housing Manager
Tel (023) 8087 1432
Email sue.reynolds@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Development Scheme File & Sheltered Housing
Scheme File: contains some (Housing Landlord
exempt information.