



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP – 29TH OCTOBER 2015

SUBJECT: HOUSING LAND ASSET REVIEW

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report has been prepared in response to a member of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group having made a request for information in respect of the progress of the Authority's Housing land asset review.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Significant land and property assets sit within the Housing Revenue Account, distributed throughout the County Borough. A review is being undertaken to provide base information about these assets to ensure that land and property meet objectives allied to the achievement of WHQS or longer term aims of developing new social housing. The review will also inform the delivery of the WHQS environmental programme, and provide a basis for the potential rationalisation of land holdings.
- 2.2 To date, 1008 individual sites across seven estates have been surveyed, investigated and have received a recommendation under one of nine agreed categories, however, no final decisions have yet been taken in relation to the future of these sites, pending consultation with local residents and Members.
- 2.3 An interactive database with online functionality has been developed to support the review which is used to store and display the individual reports produced for each site.
- 2.4 Surveys are on going in two further estates, however, nine large estates remain to be surveyed, together with smaller estates with significantly less land ownership.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The contents of this report link to the following key strategic objectives:-
- "To provide good quality, well-managed homes in communities where people want to live, and offer people housing choices which meet their needs and aspirations." (*Aim 6: Housing Management - Local Housing Strategy*).
 - "To promote sustainable and mixed communities that are located in safe and attractive environments." (*Aim 11: Community Regeneration - Local Housing Strategy*).
 - "To improve standards of housing and communities, giving appropriate access to services across the County Borough." (*Priority - Single Integrated Plan 2013-2017*).

- The National Housing Strategy for Wales – ‘*Improving Lives and Communities*’ (Welsh Government, 2010).

4. THE REPORT

Purpose of the Land Asset Review

- 4.1 Significant land and property assets sit within the Housing Revenue Account. In addition to the Authority’s 10865 residential properties, comprising of both general needs and sheltered accommodation and 417 leasehold flats, the Authority also owns 34 shops and 976 garages. In addition, located within housing estates there are also areas of open space, together with various community buildings, play facilities, footpaths, highways, rights of way, sub stations, potential development sites, and residual pockets of land of limited value. These assets generate both income and liabilities and are distributed across the County Borough.
- 4.2 During the pre ballot period work commenced on the preparation of an asset inventory, based on a series of asset categories that would have been used for negotiations in the event of transfer. However this exercise was not fully completed at the time.
- 4.3 Following the ballot it was determined that the land asset review should continue with the purposes of ensuring maximum benefit to the HRA and that land and property be utilised to meet specific objectives allied to the achievement of WHQS or a longer term aim of developing new social housing.
- 4.4 As part of the WHQS programme there is a commitment to spend circa £10m on environmental improvements. The land asset review is intended to provide base information about the land holdings to inform the delivery of the WHQS environmental programme. It will be utilised during the consultation process with residents to determine those assets which are valued by them and where resources can be targeted to improve the quality of estates and communities, and also provide the basis for rationalisation of the land holdings.
- 4.5 The following aims were established:
- To identify land and property that is of long term benefit to the HRA, including sites with development potential.
 - To identify land and property that could be sold to generate a capital receipt.
 - To identify land and property where there are ongoing maintenance liabilities but where there is a benefit to the estate’s environmental quality.
 - Ensure value for money in respect of recharges to the HRA for land and property maintenance (excluding repairs and improvements to the Council’s housing stock).
 - To identify residual land with limited or no value where maintenance liabilities need to be minimised. Some of these sites may have potential to be sold or gifted.
- 4.6 The specific tasks were:
- GIS mapping of asset categories to be completed, including cleansing of historical data.
 - All land and property records related to the HRA to be incorporated within the GIS including current paper based systems such as grounds maintenance.
 - A rolling programme of estate reviews comprising both desk based research and on site surveys.

- Design a review methodology to ensure those staff assigned to the task apply a consistent approach.
- Review HRA costs for land and property maintenance excluding housing improvements and repairs.
- Preparation of report that would be a combination of estate specific and asset category recommendations, supported by GIS mapping and referencing system.

Progress to Date

- 4.7 When the land asset review was first initiated it was accepted that a dedicated temporary staff resource would be required to review all land assets in more than 40 communities and it was anticipated that the whole exercise would be completed within a 12 to 24 month timeframe. Unfortunately it proved difficult to recruit experienced land surveyors with suitable skills related to GIS and the exercise has now been ongoing for approximately three years with just one individual surveyor.
- 4.8 The exercise of review involves the surveyor undertaking detailed site surveys and researching property information available within the Authority in respect of each individual site. As an indication of the scale of the review 241 parcels of land were identified in the Lansbury Park area alone.
- 4.9 Information from relevant Housing staff, in addition to those in Parks Services, Legal and Property Services is collated in respect of site history, current use, maintenance costs, lease arrangements and encroachments. Any discrepancies identified between the Capita Housing database, HM Land registry and CCBC Terrier bases are investigated as they are identified and anomalies rectified through a data cleansing exercise.
- 4.10 Following consideration of all available information each separate parcel of land is allocated a recommendation by the surveyor under one of the following nine categories:
- Develop – Land that has the potential for development for social housing. Joint ventures and disposal are also options.
 - Dispose – For smaller parcels of land that are generally not suitable for development but may be desirable for adjoining owner occupiers to extend the curtilage of their property.
 - Resurface – Recommended for a small number of grassed areas that do not contribute to the area and may be better converted to hard landscaping.
 - Retain – Recommended where land is being utilised for best purpose and consideration of an alternative use is not required.
 - Transfer – Land that would be better suited to control by another Council department.
 - WHQS – For parcels of land that are not suitable for transfer to another department but have potential for WHQS improvement works.
 - WHQS (Community) – For areas of land that are large enough for development but are not considered suitable for residential development, an alternative community friendly use may be acceptable, for example, a community facility or additional parking provision.
 - WHQS (Parking) – Predominantly small areas of land adjoining small car parks that can easily be extended to increase the parking provision.

- WHQS (Transfer) – This option is recommended where, in the short term, the community may benefit from the land being improved or enhanced under a WHQS scheme, but as part of a longer term strategy an alternative Council department would be better suited to take ownership.

4.11 To date 1008 individual sites have been surveyed, investigated and have received a recommendation, across the areas of Lansbury Park, Gilfach, Rhymney North, Risca, Crosskeys, Abercarn and Pantside, with work on sites in Blackwood and Cefn Fforest well advanced.

4.12 Across these estates the proportion of initial recommendations that have been made are as follows:

- Develop - 61
- Dispose – 112
- Resurface – 71
- Retain – 493
- Transfer – 40
- WHQS – 160
- WHQS (Community) – 14
- WHQS (Parking) – 51
- WHQS (Transfer) – 6

However, no final decisions have yet been taken in relation to the future of these sites. It is not envisaged that any decisions will be taken on the rationalisation of these land assets until there has been consultation with residents on the respective estates. It is anticipated that much of this consultation will be linked to the ongoing development of the WHQS environmental programme.

4.13 A significant amount of time has been spent in building an interactive database and maps to support the review. This technology is being continuously updated and developed and there is now online functionality for the latest maps. It is intended that all earlier land asset review maps will be incorporated into this latest system of web maps. This system will be used to store and display the individual reports produced for each site. The reports include the site plans, photographs and site specific details, such as topography, site access, calculated area, flood risk, condition, maintenance and encroachments . This will be an excellent tool when it comes to engagement with residents to discuss proposals for the WHQS environmental programme.

Future Progress

4.14 The following large estates also have significant land ownership and are yet to be surveyed: Rhymney South, Pontlloyn, Fochriw, Graig Y Rhacca, Springfield, Penyrheol, Penllwyn, Bedwas and Trethomas. In future, consideration will also need to be given to whether smaller housing estates, with significantly less land ownership, should also be surveyed following completion of the larger estates.

4.15 The individual site reports that have been completed will continue to be transferred on to the interactive database and mapping system to provide a comprehensive and readily accessible record of the land asset review, that is capable of being updated.

4.16 All land asset review data and reports will be made available to the WHQS Team. This will ensure accurate up to date information on Housing land and property assets is used to inform the engagement process with residents. This process will establish the assets that are most valued by residents in order to better inform where resources should be targeted to improve the quality of estates and to assist in transforming communities.

4.17 The land asset review will also be available to be used as an evaluation tool when officers and Members consider future rationalisation of land holdings.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report is for information purposes, so the Council's Eqla process does not need to be applied.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no current financial implications. There will, however, be financial implications in relation to the implementation of the WHQS environmental programme and any land and property asset rationalisation which will be the subject of future reports, if required.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel issues. This report is for information purposes only.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 The views of the consultees listed below have been incorporated into the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That Members note the contents of the report.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To keep members of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group updated on the progress of the Housing land asset review.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 There are no statutory powers associated with this report.

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