

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 20 September 2022

Portfolio: Property & Housing (Councillor Holly Whitbread)

Subject: Report showing the impact of minor estate improvements carried out at Harveyfields, Waltham Abbey – creating great places where people want to live

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Stronger Communities Select Committee note the work undertaken at Harveyfields, Waltham Abbey and the positive impact that minor estate improvements play in creating great places where people want to live.

Report:

1. Built in the 1970s, the Harveyfields Council housing estate is located in the District's Waltham Abbey South West Ward, and comprises ten blocks of 75 mixed tenure flats, positioned around a main central green space. A layout plan is found at Appendix One.
2. For many years the estate has suffered with a serious fly-tipping problem, waste contamination and large accumulations of household side waste. Despite engaging with residents in various ways to encourage responsible waste management, the accumulations of fly tip and side waste became such a problem, that in around 2018, Housing Management were forced to arrange for operatives to attend the estate every week to remove bulky waste from the estate, with Cleaners & Caretakers sorting rubbish to remove contamination and side waste. This practice however led to apathy amongst residents, who came to see this as an extension of our Service.
3. Photographs illustrating typical accumulations of rubbish and fly tips routinely deposited on the estate prior to the project are shown in pictures below.



4. In 2020, using Harveyfields as a pilot, Officers set out to find a way to eradicate fly tipping and tackle inappropriate waste management. In doing so, we looked at the reasons why fly tipping might be particularly prevalent on the estate.
5. Prior to the project, communal bins were dotted around the periphery of the estate in designated bin areas. These bin areas comprised low brick walls with a concrete handstand, upon which was sited several free-standing household and recycling waste

bins. Whilst being in close proximity to the road made it easy for the Council's Waste Contractor to empty the bins, when combined with a lack of natural surveillance, the bin stores became a beacon for opportunistic fly tipping from passers-by and residents from surrounding roads seeking to offload their rubbish.

6. In consultation with residents, it was agreed that the old bins areas would be removed in favour of six new enclosed bin rooms, positioned within the centre of the estate. Each bin store was given a unique key code, with bin stores allocated to specific flat blocks to make enforcement easier. To compensate for the loss of green space, the old bin store areas were laid back to grass and a number of fences were removed to give the estate a feeling of openness. Planting was undertaken around the new bin stores to soften their appearance and as they continue to grow will contribute to a greener feel for the estate.
7. Officers engaged with residents throughout the project by way of paper and online surveys, as well as informal online chatterbox meetings and site visits. A sense of place survey was also conducted, prior to and after the works, with feedback actively sought. Whilst the sample of survey returns was not statistically significant to provide analysis, the outcome of all of our interactions with residents translated into a number of additional works including - the conversion of one of the old bin areas to a secure cycle storage, the removal of 1970s post and line style washing lines and their replacement with modern rotary lines. We also worked with residents to install new pathways which better reflect the users experience, greened up redundant pathways and hardstanding's, installed a new litter / dog bin and opened up the estate by removing redundant fencing.
8. The following photographs serve to illustrate the improvements brought about under the project:

Photograph showing new bin stores, with planting:



Photographs showing new pathways to better reflect the user experience and greening up of disused pathways:



Photographs of old post and line washing lines (before work):



Photographs showing new rotary lines (after work):



Photograph showing secure cycle storage on site of old bin store:



Photograph showing the installation of new litter / dog waste bins to reduce loose waste from passersby:



Photographs showing old fencing (before work):



Photographs showing how the removal of old fences contributes to a feeling of space and freshness (after work).



9. The impact of this project is multifaceted and is summarised as follows:

Reduction in Fly tip and associated costs and benefits:

Prior to installation of the new bin stores and during the period 28th September 2020 – 30th June 2021, the Council spent nearly £5k on removing bulk rubbish from the estate. Since the new bin stores were erected, between 1st July 2021 – 30th June 2022, expenditure on fly tip has reduced to just £607.20. Managing the new bin areas is much easier and when there is contamination or a disposal problem, enforcement action can be specifically targeted. This can be demonstrated by the increase in the number of enforcement actions since completion of the works, increasing from zero to four Fixed Penalty Notices pending for fly tipping offences.

Installation of the secure cycle storage:

Under its Fire Safety Policy, the Council operates a strict policy which prohibits the keeping of personal belongings in internal communal areas, or within 2m of the envelope of the building. Prior to the installation of our secure cycle storage, Officers would often find bikes chained to external gas pipes and internal stair railings. Asking residents to remove bikes was often met with resistance as their only alternative would be to keep their bikes inside their flats or locked to an external cycle hoop system with no protection to the elements. Providing residents with the option to let a secure, enclosed, cycle hoop

provides a more suitable alternative.

Appearance of the Estate:

The project has contributed a much cleaner, greener and safer estate, where residents can be proud to call home. Prior to the project, a selection of residents were using the communal grounds as an extension of their homes, with an abundance of toys and broken furniture consistently stored or abandoned. Since the project completed, there appears to be a greater sense of ownership by residents. The grounds look tidier and are free from personal belongings and the estate is no longer blighted by accumulations of fly tip.

Wider Benefits:

Work undertaken within this project contributes to the Council's commitment towards the climate agenda and its drive to increase recycling rates across the District. It also contributes to our obligations under the Homes Fit for Human Habitation Act 2018 (as amended). Under the Act and as landlord, we are required to make sure that our homes are 'fit for human habitation', which means that they are safe, healthy and free from things that could cause serious harm. The provision of adequate and closed storage for refuse awaiting collection or disposal outside of a dwelling is specifically mentioned in the guidance as a requirement (appendix two, refers). Moving the bins away from the building also makes our buildings safety in terms of fire safety, having been erected at a safe distance away from the buildings in line with CFPA-E Guidance.

10. Members are asked to note the positive impact of the minor estate improvements carried out at Harveyfields, Waltham Abbey as part of our vision to create great places where people want to live.

Reason for decision:

N/A

Options considered and rejected:

N/A

Consultation undertaken:

Residents were consulted and our involved residents helped to shape the project.

Resource implications:

Total project amounted to approx. £114K, which was met from existing budgets.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Social Housing Regulator will be looking for examples of how we, as a Landlord, are making residents part of decision making, how we are engaging our residents meaningfully, and how we are contribute to the neighbourhood. This project exemplifies how these expectations are being met. Furthermore, it builds up a picture around our dedication to compliance with various pieces of legislation and guidance around fire safety, homes fit for human habitation and recycling.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

The project contributes to Corporate and Housing wide objectives to create safer, cleaner and green housing estates.

Background Papers:

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

Equality:

Appendix One : Layout Plan



Appendix Two: Homes Fit for Human Habitation Act 2018 (as amended)

On 20 March 2019 a new law came into force to make sure that rented houses and flats are 'fit for human habitation', which means that they are safe, healthy and free from things that could cause serious harm.

Most landlords make sure that the houses and flats they rent out are safe and secure, warm and dry. But some landlords do not, and this means that some tenants live in dangerous or unhealthy conditions. This law, the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018, seeks to help those tenants and make sure irresponsible landlords improve their properties or leave the business.

If rented houses and flats are not 'fit for human habitation', tenants can take their landlords to court. The court can make the landlord carry out repairs or put right health and safety problems. The court can also make the landlord pay compensation to the tenant.

The courts will decide whether a property is fit for human habitation by considering the matters set out in section 10 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985. These are whether:

- the building has been neglected and is in a bad condition
- the building is unstable
- there's a serious problem with damp
- it has an unsafe layout
- there's not enough natural light
- there's not enough ventilation
- there is a problem with the supply of hot and cold water
- there are problems with the drainage or the lavatories
- it's difficult to prepare and cook food or wash up
- **or any of the 29 hazards set out in the Housing Health and Safety (England) Regulations 2005 (HSSR)**

The HSSR system was set up to assist Local Authorities tackle poor housing conditions. The system works on a basis of risk of harm to an actual or potential occupier of a dwelling which results from a deficiency that can give rise to a hazard.

It is the landlords responsibility to look after a) The exterior of the dwelling and structural elements of the dwelling, and b) The inside facilities which are part of the dwelling. Hazards arise from faults or deficiencies in the dwelling which could cause harm.

Under the HSSR, a landlord is required to provide adequate and hygienic provision for waste storage, which protects against infection and other health effects and minimises pests.

The HSSR specifically states that the landlord should provide:

- Adequate and closed storage for refuse awaiting collection or disposal outside dwelling;
- Suitable storage for refuse within the dwelling;
- Storage to be accessible to occupants but not be a danger to children; and
- Refuse facilities should not cause hygiene problems.