

## **Report to the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee**



**Report reference:** CHB-005-2020/21  
**Date of meeting:** 08 September 2020

**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio:** Housing and Community Services – Councillor H Whitbread

**Subject:** Council Housebuilding Programme Phase 5 – New Approach

**Responsible Officer:** Deborah Fenton (01992 564221)  
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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) To adopt a new approach that involves early engagement with local community representatives.**
- (2) To agree a new process for future CHBP site assessments based on a collaborative and incremental approach.**
- (3) To design all future developments going forward in line with the ‘Passivhaus’ standard – ‘Fabric First’ approach as a minimum and to accommodate future retrospective installation of Low Carbon Heat Generation and Heat Recovery System as and when suitable systems are identified.**

### **Executive Summary:**

The Council House Building Programme (CHBP) has mostly been developed on former garage sites to date. A number of potential sites have been refused planning permission or been withdrawn, partly due to added limited neighbourhood improvement and adding to some degree to local existing parking stress problems.

Many of the previous garage sites that have been developed were of poor quality, unlit and attracted anti-social behaviour. Although the loss of the garage sites has been perceived by local residents as adding to parking stress in the local area, many of the garages are no longer suitable for parking cars because they are too small and mostly used for storage.

A consultation and community planning process has been proposed to engage with local community representatives to openly discuss where potential development opportunities may exist and to better understand and potentially address local issues that may be required to possibly achieve positive support for further Council Housing development in an area.

Some CHBP developments provide more additional parking than is required and have been left unallocated to date. However, being mainly small enclosed developments, it is believed that they would be better managed through EFDC licences to local residents allowing

improved security and improved community cohesion. This is proposed in a separate report and draft new policy – Allocation of Surplus Car Parking Spaces Delivered through CHBP.

As a positive response to the Council's Climate Emergency resolution it is proposed to design all future developments adopting the 'Passivhaus' standard – 'Fabric First' as a minimum. This would further improve the thermal standard of the properties reducing the future heating requirements for residents. Given the external wall thickness significantly increases from c300mm to c500mm this would establish the base approach and thereby simplify the design process and avoid the need for redesign and potentially resubmitting for planning consent and assist the subsequent contractor to deliver the Design & Build contracts. This is anticipated to add c.3-5% to the current specification build cost.

The adoption of a heat generation and recovery system i.e. an Air Source Heat Pump and Heat Recovery System (ASHP-HRS) would add a further c.6-8% to the current specification build cost. The technology to achieve this is available but there are varying views of its reliability and ease of user operation.

It is therefore beneficial to design all future properties going forward to accommodate 'Passivhaus' standard – 'Fabric First' and to also plan within the design for future retrospective installation of an ASHP-HRS as and when a suitable system is identified.

A new process is proposed for selecting and developing sites for Council Housebuilding based on a collaborative approach involving EFDC colleagues, Essex County Council and community representatives. The purpose is to assess and develop the potential sites using an incremental approach to ensure successful planning applications, developments that improve local neighbourhoods and limiting resource input into sites which are not feasible or supportable for development.

#### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

To reduce time delay and cost to improve speed and effectiveness of bringing forward supportable development in CHBP.

To recognise and support the Council's Climate Emergency resolution by improving the thermal efficiency of the new properties and future proofing the design to accommodate evolving low carbon heat generation and recovery systems.

#### **Other Options for Action:**

Not to set up a new process and continue with the current approach. This would not address the current issues that have been identified with identifying and developing new sites, leading to delays and increased costs and abortive costs.

Not to introduce the introducing the 'Passivhaus' standard – 'Fabric First' as a minimum on all developments and not to design the new properties to accommodate future retrospective installation of low carbon heat generation and heat recovery systems. This would not provide thermal efficiency improvements on the new properties and make future retrofitting of technology to improve carbon emissions more problematic and costly.

#### **Report:**

##### Background

1. Looking back over the duration of the Council House Building Programme (CHBP) it would appear there may have been some disconnect between the aims of the EFDC Officers and the wider Council Members in that following a period of granting a number of Planning consents in c2016/2017 there were a number of refusals and subsequently withdrawals despite being recommended by Planning officers for approval.

2. This may in some part be due to the CHBP predominately developing existing garage sites that in the main suffered from high vacancy rates but which added little if anything to the wider neighbourhood and in a number of instances added to some degree to the existing local parking stress problems as an example.

3. This may be caused by many factors, but it is apparent that many of these Council housing estates/ex. Greater London Authority estates, where these garage/development sites are located were designed in the late 1940s through to the late 1960s when car use was considerably less than it is today.

4. Indeed, many existing garages constructed also date back to the same period when cars were far smaller in size than today's. Therefore, many garages are used for informal storage purposes which in turn raises issues around inspection and compliance to licence terms. Of note, the Essex County Council's Parking Standards document states that 78% of garages are not used for the storage/ parking of vehicles. Many of the garage sites were/are of poor quality, garages are coming to the end of their natural lives and attract high maintenance costs, sites are unlit and attract anti-social behaviour but nonetheless the loss of which was/is perceived to have added to the local parking stress in areas.

5. Some CHBP developments do provide more additional parking than is required for the new properties being built. It was envisaged these would be left unallocated however having reconsidered this and following further internal discussion, it is believed these sites, being mainly small enclosed private developments (not public highways) would be better managed by EFDC under licence for the better security and being in the best interest of local residents. This is now the subject of a proposed new Policy relating the provision of additional parking spaces delivered via the CHBP together with a new Policy relating to the associated Rights of Way/Access of pedestrian and vehicular accesses to these areas.

6. This combined with the Right to Buy being exercised has added to the complexity of the issues, in that many Council properties became privately owned at a value that reflected the lack of parking, yet many properties have multi car ownership. This therefore raises the issues as to 'who pays what and who benefits' from the cost/improvement of providing further 'Off Street Parking'.

7. This conundrum was considered last November 2019 when the Council resolved to suspend its programme of carrying out further 'Off Street Parking' unless it was cost effective to do so, as previously it was considered expense and had not delivered the anticipated returns.

#### Going Forward – A New Approach

8. Being mindful of these issues, benefits may be derived from earlier engagement with local community representatives to openly discuss where potential development opportunities may exist to better understand and potentially address local issues that may be required to possibly achieve positive support of further Council Housing development in an area.

9. By way of a practical example, the CHBP has entered into contract to develop 4 x 1 bed properties at a site off Queensway, Shelly, Ongar. The area is served by two roadways, both

Queensway and St Peter's Avenue already suffer from severe parking stress and road congestion to such a degree the carriageways and verges are in poor condition and there is concern regarding the accessibility for emergency vehicles.

10. In the centre of the Estate there is a Park/Play Area and Local Shops. Nearby a Feasibility Scheme had previously been produced to develop an existing garage site and community orchard accessed off St Peter's Avenue, to deliver potentially 7 properties. The area was formally 'Appropriated' however the scheme was not submitted for Planning consent.

11. As part of the recent review of potential sites it is considered that this wider area could form the basis for the next Phase of the CHBP - Phase 5.

12. It would appear there is potential for an additional 30+ properties in the area. In considering this opportunity it is necessary to review the possible implications relating traffic access and potential community needs as possible response.

13. Given the potential increase in housing numbers and being cognisant of the possible local needs there is now an opportunity to potentially address in some part the existing parking stress by providing a mixture of both 'Off Street Parking' and 'Direct Driveway Access' (together with associated landscape improvements) to a significant number of properties, together with the possible improvement to the Local Park, Shops off street parking, landscaping and the provision of a Local Community Hall.

14. Given the experience gained from dealing with the 'Appropriation' compensation process of the current CHBP relating to existing 'Rights of Way/Access' it would appear apparent that there may be some potential for increased property values generated by parking improvements made to individual rental and private properties which may in some way off set/justify capital investment made as 'Enabling Works' to facilitate the further new development.

15. It is also worth noting the recent Government announcement to introduce 'Self Driving Cars' next year, the Council's Climate Emergency resolution to become carbon neutral by 2030 and EFDC's ongoing evolution of its Sustainability and Green Energy Policies the provision of additional car parking will need to be carefully considered. However, certainly for the foreseeable future there is clearly a real need to consider and possibly address parking stress in a number of locations though out the District.

16. There is also the opportunity to liaise with our colleagues in Asset Management, Land and Estates etc to explore and co-ordinate further potential estate/property improvements along with Essex County Council, to assist and facilitate this and the progressing of other general highway and lighting improvements.

17. Importantly, as a positive response to the Council's Climate Emergency resolution it is proposed to design all future developments adopting the 'Passivhaus' standard – 'Fabric First' as a minimum. This would further improve the thermal standard of the properties reducing the future heating requirements for residents. Given the external wall thickness significantly increases from c300mm to c500mm this would establish the base approach and thereby simplify the design process and avoid the need for redesign and potentially resubmitting for planning consent and assist the subsequent contractor delivered Design & Build process. This is anticipated to add c3-5% to the current specification build cost.

18. It should be noted that the bulk of Carbon generation is through the lifetime consumption of Gas/ Electric (mainly from Gas Boiler heating system) equating to c70 tonnes of Carbon.

The adoption of a heat generation and recovery system i.e. an Air Source Heat Pump and Heat Recovery System (ASHP-HRS) would add a further c6-8% to the current specification build cost. The technology to achieve this is available but there are varying views of its reliability and ease of user operation.

19. It is therefore beneficial to design all future properties going forward to accommodate Passivhaus Fabric First Standard and to also plan within the design for the future retrospective installation of an ASHP-HRS as and when a suitable system is identified.

20. With this in mind and given EFDC currently has c6,500 Council properties and as it is yet to be confirmed what cost effective alternative system option will be adopted to replace the mainly 'Gas Boiler' heating systems, it is therefore also proposed to carry out various field trials of Heat generation/Recovery systems to provide practical experience and reliable data.

### **The Process**

21. On this basis it would seem sensible to adopt an incremental approach to site assessment.

- a) Potential New Site assessment
- b) Carry out early local engagement,
- c) Consider initial evident technical constraints i.e. Flood Zones, Trees, etc
- d) Procure an initial sketch scheme to demonstrate an areas potential scope.
- e) Carry out provisional feasibility study of individual elements of the scheme
- f) Maintain Local engagement to develop proposal and support
- g) Carry out initial Planning Pre-Application Consultations
- h) Carry out/ progress further required technical investigations i.e.
  - i. Services/Utility enquiries
  - ii. Drainage
  - iii. Environmental and Ecology Report.
  - iv. Topographical
  - v. Geotechnical Stage 1 / 2 / Contamination
  - vi. Geotechnical and Contamination Surveys
- i) Amend and Continually progress the various designs elements as required.
- j) Update Feasibility Study for submission to the CHBCC to confirm approval.
- k) Carry wider Neighbourhood Engagement with Local display/presentation
- l) Hold detailed Planning Pre-Application Consultation prior to Planning Submission.

### **Resource Implications:**

The proposed new process will have a positive impact on the costs of assessing the suitability and feasibility of potential development sites for CHBP through an incremental and collaborative approach. This will minimise the level of abortive costs that will be expended on unsuitable sites. There will be an increase in cost for implementing the 'Passivhaus' standard – 'Fabric First' on all new developments by c.3-5% above the current specification build cost.

### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

None.

### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

This report recommends a new process for site identification and development which will emphasise community engagement and collaboration which will improve local neighbourhoods, reduce anti-social behaviour and promote community cohesion, thus leading to a secure and safer environment. By building all new developments to 'Passivhaus' standard – 'Fabric First' it will significantly improve the thermal efficiency and designing new buildings to facilitate future technological upgrading of homes to reduce carbon emissions, this proposed new approach to Phase 5 will have a positive impact on supporting the Council's Climate Emergency resolution.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

None.

**Background Papers:**

None.

**Risk Management:**

None.

**Equality Analysis:**

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. This means that the equality information provided to accompany this report is essential reading for all members involved in the consideration of this report. The equality information is provided as an Appendix to this report.