

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL25<sup>th</sup> January 2024Report by Director of EnvironmentDISPOSAL OF LAND (BLACKBURN SQUARE, BARRHEAD)**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To advise members of a proposed disposal of long-term vacant land at Blackburn Square, Barrhead, held on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). This proposed redevelopment of the site will support an innovative partnership between the Council and Barrhead Housing Association to develop an exemplar for sustainable social housing.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. It is recommended that Cabinet approve:
- a. The disposal of a small long-term vacant plot (approx. 798 sq.m or 0.2 acres) held on the HRA and located between 8 and 18 Blackburn Square, Barrhead, G78 2NF as indicated on the plan (Appendix 1); and
  - b. The proposal to dispose of this site at nil value to Barrhead Housing Association to support the proposed affordable housing partnership project for the site. This project will deliver a sustainable housing demonstrator scheme to inform future local affordable housing projects.

**BACKGROUND**

3. The land at Blackburn Square, Barrhead which is the subject of this report, is a Council owned site held under title for residential use and considered an asset within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

4. This is a brownfield site and is a long-term vacant site cleared and levelled over 10 years ago. The former Arthurlie Community Centre was located here.

5. The site is a small plot and is located on a residential street located between 6 & 8 Blackburn Square (4-in a block flats) and 18 Blackburn Square (semi-detached house) in the Auchenback area of Barrhead. The homes in this street were developed originally as local authority owned homes for rent in the 1950's and 60's, with some subsequently sold through Right to Buy.

6. It is estimated that the site can reasonably accommodate 4 - 6 units of affordable (social rented) housing, delivered as flatted units designed to meet enhanced wheelchair or accessible housing standards, comprising lift access.

7. This site is identified for development for social rented housing as "Sustainable Housing Demonstrator Project" in the published Strategic Housing Investment Plan (2024-2029) as approved by cabinet on 12th October 2023.

## REPORT

### Critical Need for Affordable Homes

8. Members will be aware of the long-term pressure for affordable homes to meet local needs. This has been amplified since 2019 by significant increases in homelessness and waiting list numbers.

9. In 2022, Housing Services and the East Renfrewshire Health and Care Partnership (HSCP) commissioned research to quantify the scale of need for accessible and wheelchair housing across all housing tenures, in particular affordable housing. The unmet need noted reflects the large and growing population who are ageing, physically disabled or living with long-term limiting health conditions – all of which impacts the physical suitability of their home.

10. The proposed development is led by Barrhead Housing Association in partnership with East Renfrewshire Council and HSCP. It aims to pilot new technology that will reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty for social housing tenants. The pilot will also test new design elements that can be adaptable to the changing physical needs of those with limiting health conditions.

11. As a “Sustainable Housing Demonstrator Project” the pilot aims to develop homes that are modern, affordable to run and reduce overall carbon impact. They will also be designed with sustainable materials and be adaptable to the changing physical needs of those with limiting health conditions.

12. The aim of the pilot is to establish effective long-term design mechanisms to support both future net zero and accessible housing needs. The outcomes will be used to inform the long-term delivery of social housing in East Renfrewshire.

13. East Renfrewshire Council & the HSCP will provide strategic advice and support to meet these aims. In addition, the Council will support with the provision of land to BHA by way of a land transfer from the HRA.

14. The plan at Appendix 1 outlines the proposed site, comprising the shaded grey area outlined in blue.

### Legal Requirements

15. To proceed with land transfer, the Council must adhere to guidelines as set out by "The Disposal of Land by Local Authorities (Scotland) Regulations 2010". This allows the majority of disposals to be handled by way of a General Consent, “self-certified” by the Council to reduce bureaucratic burden. This includes Section 12(5) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 which relates to land part of common or open space. Where General Consent is given, separate consent from Ministers would not be necessary.

16. General Consent can be considered when certain criteria have been met, in this case:

- The disposal price is proposed at 75% or less than “best consideration” based on a valuation performed by accredited Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the end use is for development of social housing; and
- A proportionate level of consultation with tenants has taken place, and we can demonstrate taking account of the outcomes in the decision made.

17. It is recommended that General Consent is given for disposal of this site to the Association for the provision of social housing, for nil value. In making this recommendation, the Council must consider any disposal as best meeting local needs and priorities and ensure a focus on enhancing the service provided to current and future council tenants. This can be demonstrated as follows:

- The use of the site would bring key community and social benefits, and support delivery of several of the Council's strategic housing priorities. In particular, the critical need for more affordable housing and to develop sustainable communities and support people to live well at home; and
- Using the limited assets, the Council has available, this disposal would be focused on best value for the site. The value associated with physical delivery of new social rented homes, and the wider benefits associated with the project would outweigh the likely receipt for sale of the site; and

18. As part of the benefits associated with this decision, joint consideration will also be given by the Council, BHA and HSCP to re-housing households in most need as "first occupants", who will benefit significantly from the housing model on offer. Future tenants will be identified through a clearly defined nominations agreement between partners.

## **FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY**

19. If sold on the open market the site may attract a receipt of around £60k. However, if developed for affordable housing, the DV valuation of the site is at nil value. This assumes that future use of the site will be restricted in perpetuity to that of social rented housing.

## **CONSULTATION**

20. Consultation with tenants of the HRA has taken place, on the proposal for transfer and the plan to develop sustainably designed social housing at this site. The consultation has been carried out in line with the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 (Section 8), as well as the guidance on disposals from the HRA, as noted earlier.

21. Tenants in the surrounding area, as well as local tenant representatives were directly consulted by the Council on this proposal via individually issued surveys. Consultation respondents were fully supportive of the disposal to allow development of this site for social housing, and for sustainable design.

22. The consultation was also extended to the wider local community via face-to-face consultation with the Auchenback Active community group, and interested residents living in the area, with Barrhead Housing Association showcasing the potential project. Again, the community feedback was in support of the development of this site for sustainably designed social housing.

## **PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

23. Planning, Get to Zero, Estates, and Legal colleagues have been consulted on the proposed way forward for development of this vacant site.

24. The emerging plans for the site, subject to transfer, are based on a wider strategic partnership between ERC, Barrhead Housing Association, HSCP and experts from several Scottish universities.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS**

25. There are no legal, financial or HR implications associated with this report, other than that noted in paragraphs 12-14.

26. Conveyancing of the site for disposal will be completed by the Councils' Legal and Estates Teams, and costs associated with this work will be charged to the Association as part of this process.

27. The Council has agreed to provide officer time from Housing, Climate Change and HSCP Occupational Therapy services in support of the ongoing development and implementation of the project.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

28. As the strategic housing authority, the Council wishes to support this project to test and learn about sustainable design, and how we can futureproof the homes being built locally for our residents. Tenants and the local community are also supportive of the proposals.

29. The vital learning from this pilot project will be used to inform future social housing developments, aids and adaptations provision and carbon reduction projects. It will also provide much needed social housing. With that in mind, this is considered best value to dispose of and re-use this vacant site for the project outlined.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

30. It is recommended that Cabinet approve:

- a) The disposal of a small long-term vacant plot (approx. 798 sq.m or 0.2 acres) held on the housing revenue account and located between 8 and 18 Blackburn Square, Barrhead, G78 2NF as indicated on the plan (Appendix 1); and
- b) The proposal to dispose of this site at nil value to Barrhead Housing Association to support the proposed affordable housing partnership project for the site. This project will deliver a sustainable housing demonstrator scheme to inform future local affordable housing projects.

### **Director of Environment**

Further information can be obtained from – Phil Daws, Head of Housing, Property & Climate Change

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Appendix 1 – Site at Blackburn Square, Barrhead, East Renfrewshire. G78 2NF.



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