

Individual Decision

The attached report will be taken as an Individual Portfolio Member Decision on:

Monday, 16 January, 2012

Ref:	Title	Portfolio Member(s)	Page No.
ID2404	Local Lettings Plans for Arcade Mews and Maidenhead House	Councillor Alan Law	1 - 14



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Individual Executive Member Decision

Title of Report:	Local Lettings Plans for Arcade Mews and Maidenhead House
Report to be considered by:	Individual Executive Member Decision
Date on which Decision is to be taken:	16 January 2012
Forward Plan Ref:	ID2404

Purpose of Report: To approve a Local Lettings Plan to manage the allocations at Arcade Mews, Newbury and Maidenhead House, Newbury.

Recommended Action: That the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport Policy, Housing and Economic Development approve the adoption of the Local Lettings Plans as appended to this report, for Arcade Mews, Newbury and Maidenhead House, Newbury, subject to an annual review.

Reason for decision to be taken: Arcade Mews and Maidenhead House are two town centre blocks of flats owned by Sovereign South & West. The blocks both suffer from vandalism and anti-social behaviour. The proposed Local Lettings Plans seek to introduce sensitive lettings to the blocks to try and reduce these behaviours.

Other options considered: N/A

Key background documentation:

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Alan Law - Tel (01491) 873614
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Contact Officer Details	
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Implications

Policy: The Council's Allocations Policy was adopted in December 2006. The policy states that "Local Lettings Plans will be developed on a site by site basis to address the requirements of that specific area".

The policy goes on to say "Where these policies are in place, the lettings will be carefully monitored to ensure reasonable preference is given to people in the reasonable preference categories, and that the policies do not discriminate, directly or indirectly, on racial or other equality grounds. Information about particular local letting schemes will be available from the relevant social landlord and will appear on the Choice Based Lettings advert for individual properties".

Financial: There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Personnel: N/A

Legal/Procurement: Section 167(2) of the 1996 Act requires that the Council must give 'reasonable preference' to certain groups of people through the Allocations Policy. It is permissible to implement Local Lettings Plans so long as the overall scheme ensures that reasonable preference is given to people in the reasonable preference categories, and that the policies do not discriminate, directly or indirectly, on racial or other equality grounds.

Environmental: The Local Lettings Plans are seeking to reduce anti-social behaviours and vandalism which can have a negative environmental impact.

Property: N/A

Risk Management: N/A

Equalities Impact Assessment: Attached at Appendix A

Consultation Responses

Members:

Leader of Council: Councillor Graham Jones.

Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman: Councillor Brian Bedwell - generally looks okay but concerned over car parking.

Ward Members: Councillor Roger Hunneman

Pleased to see that Sovereign acknowledge that these flats are unsuitable for families. Confirms the antisocial behaviour problem which is exacerbated by the flats

proximity to the night time economy.

Considers it is worth trying this Lettings Plan in order to reduce the problems which have occurred over the years. Would like to have feedback on its success or otherwise, following annual review.

Asks whether creating the plan with its conditions for these particular properties creates pressure elsewhere on stock for single males, possibly out of work and on benefits.

On balance, supports the proposals.

**Opposition
Spokesperson:**

Councillor Tony Vickers - supports the measures in 2.6-2.9 but questions whether the preference categories in 2.4 will prove suitable. Also asks whether creating the plan with its conditions for these particular properties creates pressure elsewhere on stock for single males, possibly out of work and on benefits.

Local Stakeholders:

Sovereign South and West

Officers Consulted:

June Graves, Head of Social Care Commissioning & Housing

Cathy Dodson, Housing Options Team Leader

Elizabeth Wallington, Housing Register Officer

Trade Union:

Is this item subject to call-in.	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position		<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by O&SMC or associated Task Groups within preceding six months		<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>

Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 Sovereign South & West (SSW) own and manage Arcade Mews and Maidenhead House. Both are blocks of general needs flats, situated directly within Newbury town centre, immediately adjacent a mix of commercial/retail and residential properties including several pubs and takeaways which are open late in to the evening. There are no communal gardens or drying areas at any of the sites and there is no designated car parking.
- 1.2 The flats are unsuitable for families and are occupied principally by younger people, of whom 80% are in receipt of benefits. Due to their location, both blocks experience anti-social behaviours and vandalism, from residents, their associates and non-residents.
- 1.3 SSW have approached the Council and requested that a Local Lettings Plan (LLP) be put in place for each block, in order to manage and reduce the behaviours in the accommodation, and to try and create a stable community within the schemes.
- 1.4 Section 167(2) of the 1996 Act requires that the Council must give 'reasonable preference' to certain groups of people through the Allocations Policy. It is permissible to implement Local Lettings Plans so long as the overall scheme ensures that reasonable preference is given to people in the reasonable preference categories, and that the policies do not discriminate, directly or indirectly, on racial or other equality grounds.

2. The Proposed Local Letting Plan

- 2.1 The objectives of this Local Letting Plan are as follows:
 - (a) to create a community that is sustainable
 - (b) to ensure that current and future residents feel safe and content in their homes and have the same opportunities as any other resident
 - (c) to minimise any possible stigmatisation of residents living in these properties
 - (d) to protect the public and residents from nuisance/anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the town centre
 - (e) to create a sense of community within the blocks.
 - (f) to promote a sense of pride within the blocks
 - (g) to reduce turnover and potential refusals of properties
- 2.2 The existence of the LLP may mean that vacancies will not always be allocated to the applicant who can demonstrate the greatest housing need. Applicants with a lower priority may be considered for an allocation if their housing may help to maintain a stable community

- 2.3 Currently, 75% of vacancies are advertised through the West Berkshire Homechoice scheme for bidding by applicants on the Common Housing Register.
- 2.4 It is proposed that preference will be given to applicants who:
- (1) Are living and working within West Berkshire
 - (2) Are living outside of West Berkshire but are employed within the district for a minimum of 16 hours a week (proof will be required)
 - (3) Applicants who are key workers (definition as set out in the Thames Valley Key Worker Study DATE) and who have a local connection to West Berkshire through work or residence
 - (4) Social Housing tenants who are giving up family accommodation and are able to evidence a well-managed tenancy
 - (5) Couples, at least one of whom meet the above criteria
- 2.5 The aim is to achieve a balanced community with 50% of residents employed and 50% unemployed and a mix of single and couple households.
- 2.6 Applicants with a known history of convictions for criminal or anti-social behaviour, drug abuse or drug dealing will not be considered for accommodation within the scheme. Bids will not normally be considered from those who have housing related debt or an outstanding notice for any breaches of tenancy with a registered social landlord. Applicants will not have been previously evicted from a council tenancy or a RSL property
- 2.7 Where any of the issues in section 2.6 are identified, the Council will check with other partner agencies, such as the Police, Probation Service, Primary Care Trust, Drug and Alcohol Action team, etc. on the suitability of the applicant to be housed at Maidenhead House or Arcade Mews before the offer is sent out.
- 2.8 Applicants moving into one bedroom flats may have a range of support needs. Based on the town centre location of the schemes, a maximum of 20% with high/medium needs (tenancy support services, additional support services from statutory or voluntary agency) can be included. Applicants with support needs should have an established support package in place and must be prepared to continue to accept this support once in the property until the support provider agrees that it is no longer necessary
- 2.9 As the LLP changes the allocation preferences for these two schemes, it will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that it is achieving its objectives and to ensure that the LLP is still required.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 **That the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport Policy, Housing and Economic Development approve the adoption of the Local Lettings Plans as appended to this report, for Arcade Mews, Newbury and Maidenhead House, Newbury, subject to an annual review.**

Appendices

Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment – Stage 1

Appendix B – Proposed Local Letting Plan for Arcade Mews, Newbury and Maidenhead House, Newbury

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments – Stage 1

Introduction

The purpose of this impact assessment is to improve the work that we do by making sure that we anticipate the impact of services and policies on all of our customers and employees. By doing this, we can make sure that we provide products and services that people want and need, make sure that we do not discriminate and that we promote equality in the provision and take up of our services. If we have got our project planning right this may largely be about evidencing what we have done already rather than starting something new.

How do equality impact assessments fit in with the work that we do?

We carry out a stage one impact assessment when we develop a new service or policy or review existing ones. This will identify where the policy or service is a high priority and where it could have a significant impact on particular diversity groups. Where we identify a priority we will carry out a Stage two equality impact assessment and include any actions that we need to take to help those who do not have fair access to the service or policy. Stage two will also contain the evidence of where we already have systems or processes in place which make sure that all groups have equal access to the service.

We will review progress in making the service or policy more accessible as part of our monitoring arrangements.

Stage 3 of the process will be to publish the outcomes for our residents and tenants and what we changed as a result of the impact assessment.

What to do

This impact assessment will consider any different needs on the basis of individual circumstances and also as a result of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, transgender, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

This is a three stage Equality and Diversity impact assessment.

Stage 1 – identifies the priority

Stage 2 – identifies the issues, summarises your consultation and the steps you are taking to make improvements

Stage 3 – is a summary of outcomes achieved which will be published externally

Stage 1 is our screening process which identifies the priority of the impact assessment through ten simple questions. To establish a high priority impact assessment we need to answer yes to six or more of the questions; this is only a guide.

Stage 2 is the detailed impact assessment which outlines what the issues are, who we have consulted, what action we will take and how we will monitor the outcomes.

Stage 3 is a storyboard which identifies the issues, explains our actions and illustrates the outcomes which will be or have been achieved. Stage 3 is the part we will review as we make activities happen and achieve our outcomes in order to explain more fully the achievements from undertaking this impact assessment and associated activity.

All impact assessments (Stages 1, 2 and 3) are on the Equality and Diversity pages of the intranet and all Stage 3 assessments are published on the website.

Equality & Diversity Impact Assessment - Stage 1

<p>Title: Local Lettings Plans</p>
<p>Description of the policy, process or strategy:</p> <p>The purpose of this local lettings plan for town centre flats at Maidenhead House and Arcade Mews is to provide a stable community within the blocks</p> <p>The objectives of the Local Lettings plan are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) to create a community that is sustainable ii) to ensure that current and future residents feel safe and content in their homes and have the same opportunities as any other resident iii) to minimise any possible stigmatisation of residents living in these properties iv) to protect the public and residents from nuisance/anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the town centre v) to create a sense of community within the blocks. vi) To promote a sense of pride within the blocks

Stage One – Identifying the Priority

The following 10 questions will help you to identify whether this policy, process or strategy is a high priority.

Questions	Yes/No
<p>If you want to add an explanatory note please do so in this column under each of the numbered questions.</p>	
<p>1. Is there any reason to believe less favourable treatment of equality groups exists?</p>	<p>No, the Local Lettings Plan (LLP) treats all residents the same. In the lettings plan considerations for lettings is not based on any of the 7 strands. This is not differ from the standard lettings process.</p>
<p>2. Will/could this issue have a significant impact on any of our residents or tenants?</p>	<p>Yes, create a balanced community which will benefit existing and future residents through the provision of a sustainable community</p>
<p>3. Does/could work in this area provide an opportunity to reduce discrimination?</p>	<p>No,</p>

4. Could work in this area allow different diversity groups to be engaged and included in service planning and/or decision making?	Yes, the annual review of the LLP could include feedback from current residents of the flats concerned
5. Does/could the issue provide the opportunity to foster good relations between different groups or contribute towards community cohesion?	Yes, the aim of the LLP is to develop a sustainable community at the individual sites. This will create a sense of pride and a balanced mix of residents.
6. Will/could this issue result in the procurement of services, goods or facilities?	No
7. Could work in this area improve access to employment and services for diversity groups?	No.
8. Is there any reason to believe that the community affected by this particular service are different from the general profile of our residents?	Yes, the profile of residents living in these blocks differs from our wider resident profile. There is a higher percentage of single vulnerable adults with drug and alcohol dependency. There is also a higher degree of mental health and unemployment.
9. Has this issue received a high profile - (Community/Political/local or National agenda)	Yes, high profile with the community safety team related to the higher levels of ASB in the areas
10. If equality issues are not addressed is there potential for an adverse impact on particular groups or on the business generally?	No,

Decision around priorities

Priority	Number of questions answered "Yes"	Rating
High	6 - 10	
Medium	3 - 5	5
Low	0 - 2	

If this is a high priority continue with a full Equality Impact Assessment Stage two and three.

If this is a medium take a decision on whether or not to proceed.

If its low, no need to go any further just keep a copy of Stage one for future reference.

Completed by:

Date: 17/10/11

Local Lettings Plan

Newbury Town Centre Flats at Maidenhead House and Arcade Mews.

Purpose of the Local Lettings Plan

The purpose of this local lettings plan for town centre flats at Maidenhead House and Arcade Mews is to provide a stable community within the blocks

Objectives of the Local Lettings Plan

The objectives of this local lettings plan are as follows:

- i) to create a community that is sustainable
- ii) to ensure that current and future residents feel safe and content in their homes and have the same opportunities as any other resident
- iii) to minimise any possible stigmatisation of residents living in these properties
- iv) to protect the public and residents from nuisance/anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the town centre
- v) to create a sense of community within the blocks.
- vi) To promote a sense of pride within the blocks
- vii) to reduce turnover and potential refusals of properties
- viii) Residents may be asked to sign up to a Local Neighbourhood Agreement that will set out additional conditions that are specific to the scheme.

The existence of the lettings plan may mean that vacancies will not always be allocated to the applicant who can demonstrate the greatest housing need. Applicants with a lower priority may be considered for an allocation if their housing may help to maintain a stable community

Property Types and Background

The two blocks of flats that this local lettings plan covers are both situated directly within Newbury town centre, immediately adjacent a mix of commercial/retail and residential properties including several pubs and takeaways which are open late in to the evening. There are no communal gardens or drying areas at any of the sites and there is no designated car parking.

The benefits that the town centre location brings are the proximity to shops and public transport. There are bus and train stations within easy reach and all of the schemes are well located for those without transport.

1 – 8 Maidenhead House

Comprises, 8 No. 1 Bedroom, General Needs flats for rent over retail units.

The front communal entrance door opens directly onto the pavement; there are several public houses in the immediate locality and several all night food outlets nearby. As a result, the area frequently suffers from individuals gathering in the area late at night with the front door frequently being the subject of vandalism caused by non-residents.

The flats are on 2 levels although there is no lift to access the first or second floors. The stairs steep and therefore problematic for those with mobility issues or older persons.

Occupant Profile

- Majority of occupants are single males
- Ethnicity : 100% white British.
- Over 80% occupants are in receipt of full Housing Benefit

The block is not suitable for families due to the size of the flats and location. There is also no storage facility for bikes and pushchairs.

The turnover of flats is not very high with only 4 No. voids created between 1 January 2001 and 1 January 2011. There has been a community established between some of the longer standing residents, evident during work relating to an eviction in relation to noise nuisance. The communal door has previously been replaced following numerous incidents of vandalism and anti-social behaviour. The new, anti-vandal main entrance door has increased security for residents in the block.

1 – 10 Arcade Mews

Comprises 10 No. general needs flats for rent over commercial and retail units.

There are 2 entrances, both leading onto the town centre. The entrances frequently suffer vandalism caused by individuals including the occupants or associates of those living in the block, attempting access. Both doors have been replaced with anti-vandal doors in order to increase security.

The internal layout is confusing, with 2 floors, several stairwells and different ways to walk around the block.

Occupant Profile

- The majority of occupants are single males
- Ethnicity: 100% white British.
- Over 80% occupants are in receipt of full housing benefit.

Properties are occupied by residents from a broad age range including single occupant households to couples and one young family. Whilst several households are known to be working the majority are not.

The block is unsuitable for young families due to the size of the flats, location and the lack of lift. The stairs would also cause a problem for those with poor or limited mobility.

Tenancy turnover is low with 10 No. voids between 1 January 2006 and 1 January 2011. Due to the layout, occupancy and turnover, no sense of community has been achieved.

Lettings

75% of vacancies are advertised through the West Berkshire Homechoice scheme for bidding by applicants on the Common Housing Register.

Preference will be given to applicants who:

- Are living and working within West Berkshire
- Are living outside of West Berkshire but are employed within the district for a minimum of 16 hours a week (proof will be required)
- Applicants who are key workers (definition as set out in the Thames Valley Key Worker Study DATE) and who have a local connection to West Berkshire through work or residence
- Social Housing tenants who are giving up family accommodation and are able to evidence a well-managed tenancy
- Couples, at least one of whom meet the above criteria

The aim is to achieve a balanced community with 50% of residents employed and 50% unemployed and a mix of single and couple households.

Exclusions

Applicants with a known history of convictions for criminal or anti-social behaviour, drug abuse or drug dealing will not be considered for accommodation within the scheme. Bids will not normally be considered from those who have housing related debt or an outstanding notice for any breaches of tenancy with a registered social landlord. Applicants will not have been previously evicted from a council tenancy or a RSL property

Where any of the above issues are identified the Council will check with other partner agencies, such as the Police, Probation Service, Primary Care Trust, Drug and Alcohol Action team, etc. on the suitability of the applicant to be housed at Maidenhead House or Arcade Mews before the offer is sent out.

Applicants moving into one bedroom flats may have a range of support needs. Based on the town centre location of the schemes, a maximum of 20% with high/medium needs (tenancy support services, additional support services from statutory or voluntary agency) can be included. Applicants with support needs should have an established support package in place and must be prepared to continue to accept this support once in the property until the support provider agrees that it is no longer necessary

Families with children will not be considered for the schemes, as the accommodation is not suitable for this household type. Adverts should be worded to make it clear that the flats are not suitable for families.

Disputes & Resolution

Should there be any disagreement regarding any proposed letting the case shall be identified by full application details and reasons for the disagreement. In the first instance an appeal will be made to either the Housing Strategy & Operations Manager of the Local Authority in the case of lettings through the Common Housing Register or the Re-housing Manager of Sovereign South & West in the event a letting is a Sovereign Internal Transfer applicant(s).

Equalities Impact Statement

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached to this LLP as an appendix.

This local lettings plan does not discriminate directly or indirectly on grounds of race, ethnicity, gender or disability.

It may discriminate indirectly in terms of age as potential residents are required to have held a previous tenancy. The reason for this is because of the need to create a more stable community. There has been evidence of some younger residents struggling with their tenancies in the town centre due to pressure from friends who have found it a convenient place to stay after a night out.

The plan aims to ensure that the schemes are representative of the local community and promote community cohesion.

Review

As this Local Lettings plan has been established to address housing management issues, it is important that it is reviewed on a regular basis. West Berkshire Council and Sovereign South & West commit to reviewing this Local Letting Plans annually. The review may result in the continuation, amendment, or the ending of the Local Letting Plan.

Whilst considering its effectiveness note will be taken of the reasons for any tenancy terminations, number of re-lets, number of refusals and the reasons, reports of anti-social behaviour and, costs of communal repairs and cleaning.