

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.