

DATE OF COMMITTEE  
4<sup>th</sup> April 2012

## REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR QUALITY OF LIFE

### TITLE OF REPORT Strategic Housing Service Development

#### EXEMPT INFORMATION

None

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Member approval to utilise identified resources to support activity to bring empty homes back into use.

The proposals in this report will build on previous work in this area to enable the delivery of a high profile project with Waterloo and other key partners that will utilise additional Government resources for empty properties that have recently been secured for Tamworth.

The proposals in this report will further strengthen the Council's approach to bringing empty properties back into use and widen housing choice for local people.

Additionally, the proposals will deliver a value for money project that will assist in the delivery of priorities identified by the Tamworth Strategic Partnership and within the Council's Healthier Housing Strategy.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet approve the use of £90,000 from the Coalfields regeneration funds to support the delivery of a defined Empty Homes Project with Waterloo Housing Group, the County Council and the Homes and Communities Agency.

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Work to bring empty properties back into use has been developed to ensure the Council is well positioned to increase the supply of housing via this route to help meet the needs of Tamworth residents. The proposed use of resources to further develop and deliver work on empty homes represents a value for money means by which to complement increasing housing supply on new build sites. Value for money will be achieved as the Council will secure 20 additional units of affordable housing via use of the £90,000 Coalfields regeneration funding whereas it would cost approximately £2million to build 20 new build affordable homes.

The Council's approach to empty homes has been recognised further afield by the Homes and Communities Agency and this has proved to be beneficial as the Council now has the opportunity to work with Waterloo Housing and others to utilise Government funding to bring empty properties back into use for affordable housing to meet a range of identified need.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

The continuation of work on empty homes will require the utilisation of the Coalfields regeneration funding. Members have previously approved the use of £70,000 for this purpose. This is consistent with the intended use of these resources for housing renewal purposes.

As part of this approach it is proposed that an additional £90,000 of the Coalfields regeneration funding should be utilised to assist in the delivery of a project with Waterloo Housing Group to deliver 20 units of affordable housing in Tamworth. Waterloo have recently been successful in securing Government funds for empty homes. The project will demonstrate excellent value for money as it will attract additional investment into Tamworth and will ensure 20 units of affordable housing are delivered utilising substantially less resources than would be the case to build 20 new affordable homes.

Additionally, the project will assist in the prevention of homelessness by increasing the supply of housing in the Borough and reducing the need to utilise temporary accommodation. By implementing an approach to homelessness which is based on prevention the Council is able to achieve significant financial savings. For example during 2007/08 before an embedded homelessness prevention approach was in place the Council spent £186,968 on bed and breakfast accommodation costs. During 2010/2011 when prevention approaches had been adopted the cost of such expenditure was £28,798.

The Government and Homes and Communities Agency recognise the added value of pooling resources to achieve positive outcomes relating to work on empty homes and the success of the Waterloo bid supports this approach and will potentially raise the profile of the Council nationally in this area of work.

## **LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND**

The empty homes project with Waterloo and other partners will be fully risk assessed and will be required to comply with Homes and Communities Agency guidelines.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

Working with key partners to develop further the Council's ability to bring empty properties back into use will assist in increasing the supply of much needed decent and affordable housing in Tamworth.

Additionally, delivery of the empty homes project will contribute to improved health, educational and economic outcomes for local residents and towards the delivery of key priorities identified by the Tamworth Strategic Partnership and adopted by Tamworth Borough Council.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### *Use of Coalfields regeneration funding*

The Council secured funding for private sector housing renewal following involvement with a sub-regional research project that explored the implications for housing following the demise of the coal mining industry. These funds were to be used to facilitate housing projects that would bring about housing renewal and regeneration locally.

To date, Members have approved the use of £70,000 Coalfields regeneration funding to bring empty properties back into use. This activity forms part of the broader approach to private sector housing and will build on the work that has been undertaken to date to increase the supply of housing in Tamworth.

In addition to utilising these resources to deliver additional homes via the Council's existing policy and procedures, it is proposed £90,000 is set aside to support the delivery of the successful bid made by Waterloo Housing Association for available Government funds to tackle empty homes. Waterloo secured £785,700 to be utilised in projects across 5 local authority areas. Of this total amount, £154,000 will be allocated for use in Tamworth (this equates to £7,700 per empty home).

The Council, Waterloo Housing Association, Staffordshire County Council and the Homes and Communities Agency have worked together for a number of months to formulate a credible and successful bid for Government funding that will be specifically targeted on Tamworth to bring 20 empty properties back into use as affordable housing (details of how the scheme will operate are attached at **Appendix A**). As the Council cannot currently manage empty homes in the private sector that have been brought back into use, it was considered the proposed scheme would deliver additional units of affordable housing that would be effectively managed and maintained by one of the Council's preferred development partners.

Within the bid submission, it was proposed each organisation would pool resources and combine this with the Government allocation to deliver additional affordable homes to meet a range of identified housing need. Of the 20 units proposed in Tamworth, 5 will be used to meet the needs of disabled residents identified by the County Council. In order to facilitate this, the County have given initial approval to match fund the Borough Council and allocate £90,000 to this project.

The inclusion of a financial contribution from both the Borough and County Council and the proposed collaborative approach were considered essential if the bid was to be value for money and ultimately successful. The combined funds totalling £334,000 will deliver 20 units of affordable housing which is considerably less than the £2million (approximately £100,000 per unit) it would cost to achieve the same outcome via a new build scheme. This approach, and the success of the bid, will not only increase the supply of much needed affordable housing in Tamworth but also enhance the reputation of the Council nationally by having worked with partners to secure limited Government resources.

#### **REPORT AUTHOR**

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#### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

#### **APPENDICES**

- **Appendix A: Waterloo Empty Homes Project**

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