

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES, HOUSING & OLDER PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

26 FEBRUARY 2008

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

REVIEW OF THE PILOT PRIVATE SECTOR DECENT HOMES PROGRAMME

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Select Committee of both the progress made with the Oaktree Road/Larch Road, Brereton area and the results of the survey carried out.
- 1.2 To advise what action should be taken to address the issues revealed by the survey.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Select Committee consider the results of the survey and make any recommendations to Cabinet regarding the issues raised by the survey.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 Properties constructed using the Wates methods are susceptible to problems associated with decay of the structural members
- 3.2 This type of property often has poor thermal insulation, old or unsuitable amenities and layout problems; the aim of this proposal is to enable private owners to be supported in the upgrading of their properties, both for their own benefit and that of tenants in this sector.
- 3.3 The Decent Homes standard under the Public Service Agreement 7 (PSA7) is currently being removed by central government and the link to private sector housing is being altered, nevertheless there is still a clear commitment by Government to support work by local authorities to meet the objective of decent and affordable housing for all.
- 3.4 The area is primarily a private sector one with only six properties owned by this Council, all of which are being or have been improved to meet the Decent Homes standard; it is therefore important that opportunity is given to private sector owners to at least ensure that their property meets the decent homes standard.

REPORT INDEX

Background	Section 1
Details of Matters to be Considered	Section 2
Contributions to CHASE	Section 3
Section 17 (Crime Prevention) Implications	Section 4
Human Rights Act Implications	Section 5
Data Protection Act Implications	Section 6
Risk Management Implications	Section 7
Legal Implications	Section 8
Financial Implications	Section 9
Human Resource Implications	Section 10
Conclusions	Section 11
Background Papers	

Section 1

1. Background

- 1.1 In June 2007 Cabinet approved the commencement of a pilot Private Sector Decent Homes Programme in the Oaktree Road/Larch Road area of Brereton, they also agreed to the commissioning of a Decent Homes survey of all the privately owned dwellings in the pilot area.
- 1.2 The properties surveyed were constructed by the National Coal Board in the 1950's as part of a post second world war programme to provide new housing for miners coming to the Rugeley area to work in the local coal mining industry.
- 1.3 All the properties on the estate were constructed using the "Wates" method of construction which involved the use of steel reinforcing members encased in concrete to form the structural elements of the property and infill concrete panels all under a pitched tiled roof constructed of timber. There are inherent construction faults associated with this type of property which have become apparent over the last 20 years.
- 1.4 Because of the inherent problems with this type of property a programme of reinstatement has been undertaken using approved methods to address the likely structural problems associated with rusting of the steel components and associated failure of structural members. Some of the properties on this estate have been dealt with but others remain original.
- 1.5 To enable the Council to consider whether such areas would benefit from support to improve the properties to at least the Decent Homes standard, the survey was undertaken.

Progress

- 1.6 Quotes to carry out the Decent Homes survey were obtained from three suitably qualified organisations; following appraisal of the quotes and accompanying information received, Hestia Managed Services were selected as the contractor to undertake the survey of the 96 properties.
- 1.7 All of the residents occupying the properties concerned were then sent an advisory letter and were invited to assist the Council in deciding whether support for area status was appropriate.
- 1.8 As part of this process a consultation and advice day was held at Brereton and Ravenhill Parish Hall prior to the start of the survey, to assist local residents with any questions they might have had, however this event was very poorly attended.

The Survey

- 1.9 The survey was undertaken during the latter part of 2007 and, whilst there was some support for the work there was some reluctance on the part of some people to support the survey of the properties.
- 1.10 All 96 properties were visited and attempts made to talk to the occupier or owner, all were photographed to enable a view of the condition of the estate to be established.
- 1.11 Of the 96, full surveys were completed on 41 properties and these form the basis of the report prepared by Hestia.

- 1.12 During the survey, six properties were found to be vacant, although none of them are considered to be long-term vacant (Empty & Eyesore properties).
- 1.13 Some of the people (20) who refused the full survey did assist with details about their type of heating and insulation present in their homes and their position regarding welfare benefits.
- 1.14 Hestia were not able to make contact with any of the remaining 21 owners or occupiers despite several attempts.

Overview of results of the Survey

These results refer to the 41 fully surveyed properties.

1.15 Survey results

Owner occupied	22
Tenanted	19
Receipt of means tested benefit	31
Households with children under 16	15
Households with >60 year old occupying	16
SAP rating lowest	35
SAP rating highest	85
Loft insulation present	41*
All double glazed windows	30
Part double glazed windows	11
Gas central heating	40
Solid fuel (Smokeless Fuel)	1
Hot water cylinders fitted	21
Thermostats fitted (working order)	11
Properties with low energy light bulbs	22

* Loft insulation varies between 25mm and 270mm

Decent Homes Standard Compliance

- 1.16 This standard considers four criteria, each of which must be complied with for the property to be judged Decent Home compliant.
- a) The absence of Category One hazards as defined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
 - b) Dwellings must be in Reasonable Repair (as defined) and will not be compliant if they fail one key component and/or two other components.
 - c) Dwellings must have reasonably modern facilities and services (as defined) and will not be compliant if they fail 3 or more of the 6 components.
 - d) Dwellings must provide a reasonable degree of Thermal Comfort (as defined).
- 1.17 The following results apply to the 41 fully surveyed properties.
- a) Category 1 hazard (Housing Act 2004)

None of the 41 properties were found to have any Category One hazards as defined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
 - b) Reasonable Repair

Five properties failed this criterion because they each failed to comply with one key component. Four properties had some or all of the windows which needed replacing. One property had a significant amount of tiles missing from the roof.

One house needed repairs to the central heating boiler and another house had two radiators which were not working. These issues are classed as non-key components and hence do not cause the properties to fail the Reasonable Repair criterion.

None of the houses were found to have significant problems with the external wall structures, spalling of brickwork, wall finishes, chimney stacks, roof structures, external doors, electrical systems and gas fires.
 - c) Facilities and Services

None of the properties failed this criterion as defined in the standard, however one house was found to have kitchen facilities which were over 20 years old and in need of replacement. All kitchens had sufficient space and adequate layout.

Five houses were found to have bathroom facilities which were over 30 years old and in need of replacement. All bathrooms and toilets were found to be appropriately located.

d) Thermal Comfort

This criterion requires dwellings to have efficient and fully controllable heating systems along with adequate loft insulation and cavity wall insulation (where cavities are present).

23 properties failed this criterion due to lack of controllability over the gas central heating systems installed, e.g. lack of thermostatic radiator valves and lack of room thermostats.

Two houses lacked sufficient radiators.

Nine houses had sufficient loft insulation to comply with the standard, however, very few of the houses have the current recommended level of loft insulation (270mm).

Section 2

2 Details of Matters to be Considered

- 2.1 The results of the survey indicate that the condition of the properties in this area does not warrant any special status being designated to the area. It would appear that any issues with properties can be properly dealt with on an ad hoc basis.
- 2.2 However, it must be emphasised that the survey undertaken was against the Decent Homes Standard and was not a full structural survey. A full structural survey would have required some intrusive inspection of the structure of the properties, and fewer private owners or occupiers are likely to have consented to this. These properties are of a type known to develop structural defects and properties that have not had remedial work undertaken will require it in the future.

Section 3

3 Contributions to CHASE

- 3.1 Private sector housing in the Cannock Chase District Council area represents 96% of the total stock and therefore plays a very important role in the economic wellbeing of the district as a whole.

Section 4

4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention) Implications

- 4.1 Properties which are not maintained to reasonable standards are likely to increase the occurrence of anti social behaviour and crime as the infrastructure declines and properties become void.

Section 5

5. Human Rights Act Implications

5.1 Article 8 provides that:-

- (1) 'Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
- (2) There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interest of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedom of others.'

Section 6

6 Data Protection Act Implications

6.1 None identified.

Section 7

7. Risk Management Implications

7.1 The Council has a statutory duty to take action in respect of any unsatisfactory Housing conditions that it becomes aware of.

Section 8

8. Legal Implications

8.1 The legal implications are contained within the body of the report.

Section 9

9. Financial Implications

9.1 Provision exists within the General Fund Capital programme for financial assistance to meet the Private Sector Decent Homes requirement as outlined in the report to Cabinet in June 2007.

Section 10

10. Human Resource Implications

- 10.1 There are no human resource implications arising as a direct consequence of this survey and associated activity.

Section 11

11. Conclusions

- 11.1 The area surveyed is a mixture of private and public sector rented property with some owner occupiers. From the report no assumption, can however be made to suggest that one or other ownership leads to poor conditions, some of the properties in poorer condition being owner occupied.
- 11.2 Most of the properties are maintained in reasonable condition for their age and there are no significant or urgent problems associated with the construction technique, some of the properties have had work carried out to address the concrete structural problems.
- 11.3 Apart from some properties requiring upgrading of insulation and heating systems there is little to support special treatment of the area; most of these issues can be dealt with through existing support schemes, such as Warmfront grants or through normal maintenance and improvement.
- 11.4 There may be a need to consider individual cases for assistance or support to enable works to be carried out to meet the decent homes standard, but these should be dealt with on an ad hoc basis.
- 11.5 Support and encouragement should be given, either directly by the Council or through partner organisations such as Spirita Care & Repair to those owners, tenants and landlords that require assistance.
- 11.6 No special area status should be considered.

Background Papers

- (a) The Decent Homes Standard
- b) Report prepared by Hestia from survey
- (c) Housing Act 2004 Part 1