

Report of HEAD OF STRATEGY AND INVESTMENT
Report to INTERIM CHIEF OFFICER PROPERTY & CONTRACTS
Date: AUGUST 2014
Subject: PROPOSED DEMOLITION AND FUTURE LAND USE
 GARAGES 1 – 7 HIGHFIELD ROAD, ABERFORD LS25 3AY

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Farnley and Wortley	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: (10.4.(3)) Appendix number: 1,4, 5.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. Garages at 1 – 7 Highfield Road, Aberford were constructed in the 1960's to provide parking provision for residents living in the vicinity of Highfield Road and Abbots Close. However, since 2004 demand has dwindled. In 2014 no demand remains and all seven garages are currently empty and incurring rent loss. The poor condition of the garages is starting to blight the area. There are holes in two of the asbestos sheet roofs. Local children are known to play on the roofs of the garages and this is a health and safety concern to parents and agencies in the area.

2. Three options have been considered for this site. Option 1 – remove from rent charge and demolish to provide for additional off road car parking provision. This is the preferred option. Although the site is too small to provide a small residential development, it provides a competitive capital cost and removes from rent charge garages that cannot be let.

3. Option 2 considers sale of the garages to a developer as a self-build site and would pass the cost of demolition to the developer. However, because LEDA view the site as too restricted for development, it is unlikely that a contractor could be incentivised to purchase the garages and land.

4. Option 3 considers refurbishing the garages to make them more secure and attractive to let. However, following local consultation with tenant, residents, local councillors and the Aberford District Community Interest Group, refurbishment would not generate demand and therefore retaining garages could not be justified.

5. The report concludes that Option 1- demolition and leaving the site for additional car parking is the best option to improve the aesthetics of the rural setting, and remove from rent charge garages that can no longer be let.

Recommendations

It is recommended that approval is given to the proposals as outlined in Appendix 1 - Option 1, which is to remove from rent charge and demolish the garages.

1 Purpose of this report

1.1 This report seeks approval in principle to the proposals outlined in Option 1 demolition to:-

- Cease advertising and letting the garages.
- Remove from rent charge
- Demolish all seven garages at Highfield Road, LS25 3AY, leave as a hard landscaped area with provision for unsecure parking; Install boundary fencing to bridge the gap where the garages stood to contain farm animals within the farmer's boundary during and after demolition works.

2 Background Information

2.1 The seven garages are located in a sustainable and sought after neighbourhood. However there is no demand for the garages due to residents utilising alternative off road in-curtilage parking within property boundaries or on street lay-by car parking provision to enable cars to be parked next to their properties.

- 2.2 Appendix 2 shows the property location and Appendix 3 provides a photograph of the site, with an area marked as a potential small development site, as illustrated in picture 2.
- 2.3 The garages are constructed on a solid concrete base, set between brick pillars and partition walls with asbestos sheet roofs. Original timber doors to five of the garages remain affixed but are in poor condition, whilst the 2 other doors have been replaced in recent years.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 The deteriorating condition of the 7 garages is impacting negatively upon families living in the immediate neighbourhood. There is a gated community of 3 large detached homes which were constructed in 2000. One of the owners of these properties in January 2014 complained that the condition of the garages was having an adverse impact on the ability to sell their property and could potentially lower the sale value (see Appendix 3 – Picture 1). However, as at June 2014, the property is no longer for sale.
- 3.2 Three options have been considered for the site. A high level cost benefit analysis for each option has been carried out and a summary of results is provided in Appendix 1.
- 3.3 Option 1 – Demolition. This option is favoured as it provides a cost effective option in terms of capital outlay by preventing increasing rent loss on garages that can no longer be let, outlined in appendix 5 – Tables 4-5, and provide use of the site as an additional road side parking facility and turning head within the cul-de-sac area, rather than prolong the current blighted condition.
- 3.4. Option 2 considers sale of the garages to a developer as a self-build site and would pass the cost of demolition to the developer. However because LEDA, minutes of meeting 19 June 2014, and planning view the site as too restricted for development, it is unlikely that a contractor could be incentivised to purchase the garages and land. Therefore this option could be too difficult to deliver.

3.5. Option 3 – Refurbishment is outlined as outlined in Appendix 4 – table 3. The most expensive option and assumes that investment in the garages would generate demand. However, this is unlikely due to alternative and better car parking being closer to homes by way of in-curtilage, lay-by and grouped car parking provisions.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.2. Councillor Ann Castle, Councillor Rachael Procter and Councillor Mathew Robinson of the Harewood Ward have been consulted about the proposals. Councillor Mathew Robinson and Ann Castle have responded giving approval to demolish due to the long period of time that the garages have been void and the current lack of demand. They would like to see the site made tidy after demolition.

4.1.3. Conversations have taken place with 20 heads of households living in the neighbourhood about their views regarding the 3 options. Responses indicated:

- Option 1- Demolition was viewed as positive by removing blight from the area and providing better alternative uses for the site. Concern was raised about the continuing deterioration of the garages, some of which have rubbish left in them and the holes in two of the asbestos sheet roofs were considered a health and safety concern.
- Option 2. This option was viewed as not viable, because contractors would not buy land if planning permission could not be obtained to build on it.
- Option 3 - Refurbishment of the garages was viewed as alleviating the immediate problem of improving the condition of un-kempt garages. However, they were of the view that demand would not be restored. This was due to alternative off street parking within the property and on street parking on the roadside or lay-by car parking was available at no cost, whereas renting a garage has a yearly cost impact, as illustrated in appendix 5, table 4. Therefore generating demand by refurbishing garages is not likely.

- 4.1.4 The Aberford District Community Interest Group expressed an interest to retain garages for vehicle or storage use. However, their interest was withdrawn on the basis that there was not enough demand for them to pursue this project and are now happy to leave the matter for Housing Leeds to resolve.
- 4.1.5. LEDA, 19 June 2014, discussed the issues about retaining or demolishing the site. The prospects for use as self-build development as part of the Housing Investment strategy was considered, but dismissed by planning because the prospect of this site becoming a development house plot was unlikely given the fact that the majority of it is required for access to properties 17/19 Highfield Road and Maple Gardens (3 properties) and the space is used as an important turning area for cars/service vehicles using Highfield Road which is a 'dead end road'.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration. (EDCI)

- 4.2.1 Due regard has been given to equality and diversity and an Equality Impact Screening has been completed and is included with the background papers to this report as Appendix 6. No negative impact from the proposals have been identified which could affect different equality characteristics; likely public concerns about the proposal; council activities or employment practices or unlawful discrimination and equality of opportunity.

4.3. Council Policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1. To demolish the garages will meet Leeds City Priority Plan, Best City to Live by:
- Reducing empty properties.
 - Improving the environment

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 Resources would need to be identified in the 2014/15 Capital Programme to carry out the proposal.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 All seven garages are empty so there are no legal requirements to follow such as serving Notice to Quit for obtaining garage possession.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 Demolition of the garages will remove the Health and Safety threat of children playing on the asbestos sheet roofing.

4.6.2. Demolition of the garages will leave a gap in the boundary with neighbouring land which is used for grazing sheep and dairy cattle. Therefore demolition of the garages needs to be followed with same day fence installation to bridge the gap. Fence material, length and height would require a measured site survey and be agreed with the owner of the farm.

4.6.3 Consequences of not going ahead with an option as illustrated in Appendix 1 would be about:

- Leaving dangerous empty garages that are a blight and risk to local community safety.
- Potential decreases in the market value of surrounding housing stock.
- Attracting people seeking to cause vandalism and unnecessary security costs.
- Causing adverse publicity that may occur and impact negatively upon LCC's reputation to effectively deal with empty properties.
- Failing to meet departmental objectives in which the council aims to work together with key partners to improve conditions where people live that are clean, safe, well maintained and sustainable for the future.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Option 1 – Provides a cost effective solution to demolish garages that no longer serve a use to the local area, whilst adding value by providing hard standings for additional grouped parking. As a low cost option compared to option 3 in terms of

capital outlay, this would also stop further rent loss and provide for positive use of the site rather than prolonging its current blighted condition.

- 5.2 Option 2, provides the lowest capital cost and would have been the preferred option had LEDA and the Planning Department approved self-build on the site. Because the site was deemed as unsuitable this option could not be delivered.
- 5.3. Option 3 - Refurbishment is the most expensive capital option, but would provide a positive return on investment should the refurbishment generate demand. However, local consultation with residents, agencies and local councillor's endorse that refurbishment would not generate further demand due to free and better alternative car parking provision in the vicinity.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1. The Interim Chief Officer of Property and Contracts is recommended to approve the proposals outlined in Option 1- Demolition :-
- Cease advertising and letting the garages
 - Remove the garages from rent charge
 - Demolish the 7 garages at Highfield Road, Aberford to the foundations, which will enable continued use for vehicles to use the area as parking provision and a vehicle turning area; Provide boundary fencing to bridge the gap where the garages were located.

Background documents¹

Appendix 1: Confidential - Table 1: High level Option appraisal Cost Benefit Summary

Appendix 2: Location plan - 1-7 Highfield Gardens

Appendix 3: Photographs of 1-7 Highfield Gardens.

Appendix 4: Confidential - Garage Profile - Table 2 – Estimated demolition costs schedule. Table 3 – Estimated refurbishment costs.

Appendix 5: Confidential - Rent loss - Table 4 - Rent loss per garage. Table 5 - Rent charge per year

Appendix 6: Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Screening form

Appendix 7: Delegated Decision Notification

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.