

Report of: Housing Leeds

Report to: Chief Officer, Housing Leeds

Date: May 2017

Subject: Local lettings plan for Connect Housing at Boggart Hill Road, Seacroft, LS14

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Killingbeck and Seacroft	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input 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: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. Approval is sought to develop a Local Lettings Plan Framework for the new affordable homes at Boggart Hill Road, Seacroft, LS14, managed by Connect Housing.

Recommendations

2. Approve the Local Lettings Plan for Boggart Hill site managed by Connect Housing.

3. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To seek approval for the Local Lettings Plan for the new affordable homes at Boggart Hill Road managed by Connect Housing.

2 Background information

- 2.1 In September 2009 the council developed a Local Lettings Policy Framework for new build Affordable Housing being provided by housing associations across the city. This was to allow sustainable lettings to be made to customers outside the statutory housing need categories.
- 2.2 The framework applied to developments delivered through the Affordable Housing Strategic Partnership.
- 2.3 More recently, the council has developed a new approach to letting its own new build development, through the Beeston Hill and Little London PFI schemes, and the Council House Growth Programme. The principles applied include giving preference to existing council tenants who can demonstrate an excellent tenancy record and giving preference to customers who were living in overcrowded or under occupied accommodation, people in employment, members of HM Armed Forces and with a local connection to the area.
- 2.4 On new build housing association properties, the council generally has 100% nomination rights meaning all offers of accommodation other than internal housing association transfers must be made to customers on the Leeds Homes Register who are in Band A or Band B.
- 2.5 A number of schemes have been let where housing associations have requested permission to categorise some Band C applicants as nominations in order to meet their target of 100% nominations. This is in order to achieve sustainable lettings and greater flexibility by making a proportion of lettings to applicants who are not in assessed housing need. This would also allow housing associations to meet their own lettings criteria, for example, where they have a charitable status or are community based. In addition, housing associations are undertaking more robust affordability assessments due to forthcoming benefit cuts and where properties are being let on Affordable Rents based at 80% market value.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The Boggart Hill Road development in Seacroft, LS14 will provide 10 units of accommodation, which will comprise of 10 x 2 bedroom houses. All will be let on Affordable Rents of approximately £115 per week (based on 48 wk cycle). The rent amount is a provisional figure which will be revaluated based on property value near completion.
- 3.2 The Boggart Hill Road development is built to Passivhaus Low Energy Standard, which ensures extensive low energy efficient homes, with lower bills offsetting the higher rent to some degree.

- 3.3 Connect Housing HA has signed a nominations agreement with Leeds City Council that 100% of the properties will be allocated to nominees from the Leeds Housing Register.
- 3.4 The properties are due to be handed over to let in October 2017 and will be advertised through the Leeds Homes Choice Based Lettings scheme for customers to bid on in the usual way.
- 3.5 The key elements of the Local Lettings Plan proposed for this scheme, taking into account the local circumstances and property types are set out in the preference order below;
- 50% (5) of the properties to be allocated in priority order (i.e. based on housing need)
 - 50% (5) of the properties will be allocated in priority order (i.e. based on housing need) to working households
 - All applicants will be required to have or gain some understanding of and willingness to fully utilise the energy saving features these properties have to offer.
- 3.6 Under the local lettings plan the Council will require Connect Housing to;
- 3.6.1 Undertake additional checks on all listed household members prior to letting, including follow up of references to determine previous tenancy management issues, national insurance number verification, employment verification, and in depth checks for previous rent arrears and antisocial behaviour.
- 3.6.2 Provide additional support and intensive management to customers with support needs to ensure that customers can live independently and sustain their tenancy
- 3.6.3 Use starter tenancies (similar to the Council's introductory tenancies) where tenants are given reduced security of tenure for the first twelve months, to ensure then can maintain an agreed standard.
- 3.6.4 Set up a tenancy management programme for all new residents on affordable housing developments that includes;
- Intensive monitoring during the starter tenancy period to instigate early action for breach of tenancy agreement
 - Periodic inspections to confirm identity, condition of property and household make up
 - Resident group liaison to assist in maintaining good standard and sustainability
- 3.7 Overall the council expects that at least 50% of all offers are made to applicants from the Leeds Homes Register in Band A or Band B on the initial lets, and for the 50% nominations (5 properties) to be made up elsewhere in Connect's stock. Under the nominations agreement the re-lets will be subject to 50% nominations.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.5 Phil Lacey, Senior Development Officer at Connect carried out pre-consultation talks with local Councillors Hyde and Selby prior to the commencement of the scheme.

Connect have informed local residents of the development and its unique features in the form of leaflets which have been posted through letterboxes.

Connect hosted a multi-agency 'construction open day' on the 7th April which was attended by one of the ward members and Leeds City Council officers.

4.1.6 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.1.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed in partnership with Connect Housing.

4.1.2 These are listed in the EIA, but in summary the LLP will mean that when shortlisting Connect will consider all cases individually, including any mitigating factors to make sure any decision to bypass is proportionate and can be justified. This includes assessment of the previous tenancy record and employment criteria, which will cover households who aren't able to take up paid work, eg carers, disabled customers, retired people etc.

4.1.3 In the event of any allocations being made to customers outside Band A or Band B, Connect Housing will liaise with Housing Leeds prior to making a formal offer of accommodation.

4.1.4 Connect Housing HA will be required to monitor lettings made under the LLP by BME group and age, and benchmark against lettings made to comparable properties without a LLP.

4.1.5 Leeds City Council to monitor lettings to customers in housing need through the nominations agreement.

4.1.6 In exceptional circumstances customers with a disability, an urgent housing need, with caring responsibilities or other special circumstances may be exempted from the requirements of the LLP where this may be seen to cause discrimination. This would be in agreement with Housing Leeds and Connect Housing.

4.2 Council policies and City Priorities

4.2.1 The existing Nominations Agreements with housing associations runs from 2016 – 19. However, on request from a housing association, the council may develop a standalone Local Lettings Plan to incorporate greater flexibility on new build developments, provided any reduction in nominations is made up on other relets throughout the year.

4.3 Resources and value for money

4.3.1 Resources are required from within Housing Leeds for the drafting of the individual plan, the consultation work with local ward members and residents, the advertising of the developments on the Leeds Homes website, assisting with the nominations and the monitoring of the plans on a long term basis to assess if aims are being met and adhered to.

4.3.2 These resources have been identified from current staffing and therefore no additional resources will be required.

4.4 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.4.1 As a Local Authority Leeds City Council will ensure that the Local Lettings Plan is available publicly on request and is transparent. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the plan before implementation.

4.4.2 Allocations will be closely monitored to ensure lettings are being made in line with the agreed plan and done fairly.

4.5 Risk Management

4.5.1 There is a risk that Connect Housing, in partnership with Leeds City Council may receive complaints from customers who are not offered a property. This has been taken into consideration when agreeing the criteria for the allocation of properties to ensure that lettings will be made fairly and in accordance with the Equality Impact Assessment. There will be robust mechanisms for shortlisting in place. Complaints and queries will be dealt with promptly and openly.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Leeds City Council is within its rights to impose allocation criteria to properties built by RSLs under nomination and S106 agreements.

5.2 It is appropriate to take advantage of this opportunity and allocated under a lettings plan shaped to benefit and meet the needs of the customer of Leeds.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Approve the Affordable Housing Local Lettings Plan for the development at Boggart Hill Road and the Equality Impact Assessment (see Appendix 1).

7 Background documents¹

7.1 Copy of proposed Equality Impact Assessment is attached.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.