
Report of the Director of Neighbourhoods & Housing

Neighbourhoods and Housing Scrutiny Board

Date: 10th January 2007

Subject: Regeneration in Beeston Hill and Holbeck – the role of the private sector and complementary service delivery and environmental factors

<p>Electoral Wards Affected:</p> <p>Beeston and Holbeck</p> <p>City and Hunslet</p>	<p>Specific Implications For:</p> <p>Ethnic minorities <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Women <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Disabled people <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Narrowing the Gap <input type="checkbox"/></p>
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Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members of Scrutiny Board with a final report on progress with the regeneration of Beeston Hill and Holbeck. This supplements a previous tour of the area and two reports at the Board's September and November meetings.
- 1.2 This report specifically addresses the following and remaining topics from the agreed terms of reference for this investigation:-
 - The role of the private rented and development sectors. In relation particularly to this issue, the Board is asked to welcome Mr. Frantzis, a private landlord who owns properties in Beeston Hill, and to receive comments from Mr. Frantzis on his views of how the area has changed over the last few years.
 - Complementary improvements to service delivery and environmental factors

1.0 Background

- 2.1 Members of Scrutiny received an initial report at their September meeting. This outlined, amongst other things, statistical information on the area; gave a historical perspective; provided information on recent major developments, housing investment and raised the difficulties with the scale of back-to back housing. A tour of the area preceded Members' consideration of this report. In November a second report assessed partnership work and infrastructure, and funding and resources and Mr. Steve Williamson from re'new gave evidence on the partnership issue.

- 2.2 As part of the Board's agreed terms of reference for this topic, the final issues to be considered are complementary improvements to service and environmental factors; and the role of the private rented and private development sectors.

2.0 The role of the private rented sector

- 3.1 A study by Sheffield Hallam University in 2000 showed that Beeston Hill had a transient population, was an area of low demand for housing, with a high turnover, high void levels and a market in decline. There was also likely to be an increase in the transient nature of the population with 49.5% stating they were likely to move out of the area over the next 5 years. The reasons for this were issues of antisocial behaviour, crime, poor quality housing and physical environment.
- 3.2 In 2000 there was a private rented sector level within Beeston Hill of 26%. Over the following years this level has increased to approximately 42% with a similar reduction in the level of owner occupation. Whilst there is no evidence to substantiate why this has occurred, anecdotally it has been suggested that as house prices have increased and owners have come out of negative equity, they have sold up and moved out of the area – although many people have only moved to other parts of Beeston. The main buyers in the market have been the private rented sector hence the increase in their stake in the area. The last census information showed that the private rented sector accounted for over 20% of the housing market within the whole of Beeston Hill and Holbeck. Within the older housing stock where most of the sector is located it is estimated to be approximately 32% (1750 properties). The city average for the private rented sector is 10%
- 3.3 The original Beeston Hill Housing Strategy identified the need to address the rising private rented sector. As part of the SRB4 programme the Beeston Hill Private Rented sector project was created. This was a joint SRB4 and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund project. Its aim was to work with the good landlords and target the poor landlords to improve the standards within this market and the project was developed in conjunction with landlords. It created the Beeston Hill Accreditation Scheme, an agreed enforcement methodology, financial assistance for members and the targeting of non accredited landlords to improve standards or drive poor landlords out of the market. The accreditation scheme standards were set above those of the Leeds Landlords' Accreditation Scheme (LLAS). Both the landlords and their properties were accredited. Grants were available in conjunction with other regeneration activities in the area to improve their properties to the legal decency standard. Also as part of the scheme a local landlords' forum was created. This was a means of involving the private landlords in the regeneration of the area.
- 3.4 Since its inception the project has had varying successes. Initially the localised accreditation scheme had 25 members covering 96 properties, which was approximately 10% of the private sector market. Unfortunately, despite promotional activity, it has not been possible to significantly increase the number of members. Whilst new members were attracted, existing members were removed from the scheme following inspections and enforcement action. Membership is currently 26 members covering 126 properties. This is now approximately 6% of the private rented stock. However, the forum has provided successes in improving the dialogue with the sector and involving them in the future regeneration thinking. Also, by proactively targeting the sector, there has been increased enforcement activity in the area. Since the commencement of the scheme the project officers have taken a total of 14 successful prosecutions. The last prosecution resulted in a £7,000 fine for two breaches of the House in Multiple Occupation Management Regulations. All these

successes have been published in various forums. The feedback from the sector is that the targeting of the poorer landlords is welcomed.

- 3.5 Empty properties have been an issue for the private rented sector within Beeston Hill and Holbeck as well. In 2000 the void rate within the area was just under 15% of the total stock. 60% of the long term (greater than 6 months vacant) empty properties were within the private rented sector. This resulted in the creation of an Empty Property Strategy, initially funded via SRB4 monies. A strategy was developed which targeted empty properties and encouraged owners to return them back into occupation. The strategy was eventually rolled out across the City and formed the basis of the Authority's current empty property strategy. Within the area the void rate has dramatically reduced over time. The current rate is 2.4%, which is actually below the city average. Even so, 61% of the remaining long term voids are within the private rented sector. To complement the Empty Property strategy for the area the team have targeted long term voids and have directly contributed to the return of 21 hard to resolve long term empty properties to occupation and a further number are in the process of being sold to third parties who intend to renovate the properties for reoccupation. At present, as part of the Intensive Neighbourhood Management initiative, privately owned long term voids are being targeted with a view to returning them to occupation.
- 3.6 Overall the activity of the team has so far resulted in the direct improvement of over 200 properties and has improved the confidence of the sector in the area. Unfortunately as of April 2007 the external funding for the project will cease and an exit strategy will be developed to ensure the successful completion of the project. Discussions have begun as to how best to incorporate the Beeston Hill Landlords Accreditation scheme within the LLAS. Consultation has commenced with the members as to how best to continue the forum, its format, and how they wish to continue to have an important input into the future regeneration of the area. All enforcement activity is likely to be incorporated into the activity of the south area team's day to day workload
- 3.7 At present Beeston Hill and Holbeck is being considered as a potential area for selective licensing, which is a discretionary power introduced by the Housing Act 2004. This is not seen as a replacement for the above project as it does not incorporate any powers to ensure an improvement of housing standards as per mandatory House in Multiple Occupation licensing. However by ensuring all private rented properties are licensed it will allow the identification of the poorer properties so that targeted enforcement may occur. Guidance on the business case and what is expected within any application to the Secretary of State for consideration has just been released by DCLG. Works will be undertaken now to examine any potential business case and the implications of such a scheme for the area. This will involve extensive consultation with various stakeholders including the private rented sector.
- 3.8 As the focus of this part of the report is the private rented sector it was felt that Members of the Scrutiny Board may wish to have the opportunity to meet and discuss the issue with a local landlord. Mr Frantzis is a local landlord of many years standing. He was involved in the consultation and development of the original scheme and has been a member since its inception. His main area of focus for his portfolio is Beeston Hill and Holbeck. He has been in the area for a considerable length of time and has seen the changes that have affected the area.

3.0 The role of private developers

4.1 Another key aspect of evidencing progress in regeneration would be a growing private developer interest in Beeston Hill and Holbeck to offer new build accommodation. Over the last 2-3 years this has become more evident and three sites are listed as examples, which do indicate that private developers are becoming more interested in investing in the area:-

- The “Royal Flush” development (so called because that was the name of the shop that previously operated on that site) at the junction of Dewsbury Road and Admiral Street just as traffic comes over the motorway bridge out of town, was completed in 2005 at an estimated cost of £4 million and did not involve any public subsidy. This provided 43 one and two bedroom apartments and appears to be a sustainable development with properties initially marketed for sale at around £120,000. The development includes parking and secure access. Public art in the form of a new clock that reflects a previous use of the site was also a part of the scheme. This was the first independent private sector development of this scale in the area for a generation.
- Shaftesbury House, the former hostel on Beeston Road, has been the subject of developer interest for some time and the current position is that the Council is awaiting confirmation that contracts have been signed and development can begin. The scheme would provide 172 one and two bedroom apartments and incorporate a gym, restaurant, underground car parking and would seek to be a highly efficient carbon neutral building. If this development progresses then another significant landmark will be improved, again without direct public funding.
- The Hunslet Hall Road shops site has recently been marketed and a good number of offers and proposals received, which are currently being assessed by officers and which will necessitate further discussions. Residential accommodation, however, is a feature of a majority of the proposals and, if seen through to completion, will enhance the image and reputation of the area as being one to invest in.

4.2 One of the issues for the area is the lack of available space on which to build without either considering greenspace or having to demolish existing properties, however work that has been undertaken to support the PFI bid to Government has considered various potential sites and soft market testing has indicated that the private sector would be interested in being able to bid for development opportunities and work with the Council on wider regeneration benefits.

5.0 Complementary improvements in service delivery and environmental factors

5.1.1 Some reference was made in the initial report to Members regarding complementary progress in non-housing related service delivery issues and in environmental improvements. This report gives more details on a number of these individual successes and also indicates where further progress needs to be made. The first consideration should be given to some of the quantitative data that can be easily compared because the basis on which the statistics are determined has remained consistent. For the Beeston Hill and Holbeck area this includes the following:-

- The numbers of people receiving a Council benefit has reduced from 51% in 2001 to 43% in 2005

- In 1998 / 99 there were 368 non - domestic burglaries and 938 domestic burglaries. For 2005 / 06 this had reduced to 182 and 242 reported burglaries respectively
- IN 1998 35% of pupils from the area entered achieved level 4 in English at Key Stage 2 and 21% achieved the same level in Maths. In 2005 these figures stood at 73% and 66% respectively
- In 2001 15% of sixteen year olds in the area achieved 5 A* - C grades at GCSE. By 2005 this had increased to 32%.
- In 2000 some 15% of properties stood void. The latest figure puts the total at under 2.5%.
- There are now seven neighbourhood or area residents' forums compared with two five years ago.

5.2.1 Complementary service improvements have sought to target the wide range of issues prevalent within a disadvantaged community so the agenda has focused on a mixture of work using both mainstream and any available external funding, which has included Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and Objective 2 European funding. The following would be some of the headline issues and developments:-

5.2.2 Community safety – police officers who were dedicated to Beeston Hill and Holbeck operated under the SRB Round 4 funding period and this has transposed into the current neighbourhood policing initiatives. Whilst overall crime has reduced by around a third in the last six years, concerns around anti-social behaviour have increased, so current projects such as the Signpost scheme working with 9-14 year olds involved in asb and the recently appointed Neighbourhood Safety Liaison Officers, who liaise with victims, agencies and have a small resource budget to react positively to individual victims' needs, are attempts to respond on this issue. In addition, following comments made at the previous meeting in November, confirmation has been received from the Police that they feel that the prostitution issue in Holbeck, whilst not completely removed, has been significantly and positively addressed and a number of ASBOs have recently been obtained to support the holistic approach being taken using outreach workers.

5.2.3 Streetscene issues – the general state of the streets in the area, given the high density of housing, has always been an issue for residents and remains so with a constant need to keep on top of litter, flytipping, graffiti, and general grounds maintenance issues. Over the years improvements in these areas have fluctuated as different initiatives have been tried, but there does seem to be currently a sustainable improvement that is now visible, partly due to the responsiveness of Departments and other agencies that work in this field, but also through the work of community sector organisations that are consistently putting out the message about taking pride in the area.

5.2.4 Unemployment and skills – this is one of the most difficult areas to see trends that go against national or citywide averages. Partly this may be because the nature of housing in the area does not yet offer enough diversity to encourage people who get jobs, or indeed better jobs, to stay and commit long-term; partly because the image of the area is still one that is relatively transient and so the “revolving door” factor means that sustained reductions in worklessness are particularly difficult to evidence; or

partly it may be due to the barriers faced by residents, particularly those from BME communities, whether in terms of career ambitions, language difficulties or indeed institutionalised obstacles to getting a foothold in particular areas of work. Projects have been developed over the years to seek to address these issues, notably the establishment of the City's first neighbourhood job shop, a one million pound plus European funded project called ASPIRE, and a Learning and Skills Council funded scheme aimed at re-connecting people back into learning and training.

5.2.5 Involvement of the private sector – the private sector can be helpful in ways other than simply property issues and close work has taken place over the last couple of years to try and engage the skills of the private sector more actively with priority regeneration areas like Beeston Hill and Holbeck. Notably these would include the Leeds AHEAD organisation which has brokered the use of private sector knowledge and skills as opposed to hard cash to support voluntary and community groups in a number of different ways from legal to organisational to business planning. Similarly Leeds Community Foundation has now launched a “Leeds 11 Fund” which has secured £100,000 to be spent on offering grants to groups in that postcode area which are focusing on social enterprise initiatives, and particular support for the fund has come from businesses in the Holbeck Urban Village community. Finally, it is planned to develop a formal strategy that will tie together the agencies who are developing the regeneration of the Urban Village and the Beeston Hill and Holbeck area into agreeing key outcomes that will help bed in strong links between the two neighbouring areas, which could be in terms of job and training opportunities, mutual promotion of facilities or access to affordable housing.

5.2.6 Especially given the limited space available for children and young people to play, environmental factors are vitally important in an area like Beeston Hill and Holbeck with the nature of some of the terraced housing. Since the concerted regeneration work began in 1999 various sites have been developed or upgraded. Within a list of the most notable of these would be:-

- Cross Flatts Park, which has seen significant investment in new and refurbished facilities and the Friends of Cross Flatts Park group is a model example of how the community sector can both campaign for and actively undertake improvements.
- Holbeck cemetery. Again a Friends of group has helped in developing schemes and ideas for this space.
- Brickfield Park is a new and now well used greenspace, converted from disused allotments and borders some of the densest terraced areas
- A new skateboard park was opened last year.
- Smaller schemes such as use of goalends; attractive boulders to prevent access by cars on to greenspace; and improvements to a number of the playgrounds in the area through SRB4 funding have all improved certain sites.
- Beyond specific greenspace areas a main connecting underpass is currently being improved between Holbeck and Beeston Road.
- Upgrades to former toilet yards, now often used as binyards have taken place in some areas and a more extensive scheme is now underway in Beeston Hill supported by the Area Committee.
- Use of the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund through the Intensive Neighbourhood Management Programme in parts of the area will also bring in smallscale but nevertheless important improvements that make residents feel safer, more confident about their area and improve its image with people passing through.

However, it is the continuing success of groups like Beeston in Bloom and Holbeck in Bloom, and the on-going support of agencies such as Groundwork Leeds that will ensure that the environmental agenda is kept at the forefront and continues to be prioritised to an appropriate level. In terms of major areas that need further investment and attention, Holbeck Moor would be one that is likely to be a priority over the coming months.

- 5.3 Service delivery and environmental factors have improved in the area – any genuine assessment of the situation five or six years ago compared with the situation today will come to that conclusion. But in many senses, although the area has probably now caught up with similar comparable inner city areas, there is work still to be done to continue the upward trend and make improvements sustainable. Key priorities in service delivery will be to maintain the focus on crime and antisocial behaviour and bring figures that have increased during this policing year into line with the downward trends of the last few years; also to address cohesion issues with young people both within the area and between young people from Beeston Hill and Holbeck with neighbouring communities; and to sustain the message that is present locally, but not always recognised beyond the area, that the real Beeston Hill and Holbeck is not accurately reflected by the image given to it over the last 18 months since 7/7.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 This report has assessed some of the developments within the private rented sector in Beeston Hill and Holbeck during the last few years and taken evidence from a current stakeholder landlord. The report has identified that private developers are becoming more interested in the area and that some sites are developable and sustainable without public subsidy. In terms of service delivery and environmental improvements the report concludes that much has been achieved but there is a long way to go to get to the point where the focus on the area can be eased and ultimately withdrawn. This may happen as the housing market starts to change more significantly.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 Members of the Board are asked to:-

- a) Note and comment on the report in relation to section 3.0, the role of the private rented sector in Beeston Hill and Holbeck
- b) Take evidence from and ask questions of Mr Frantzis, a private landlord, who has properties in the area, on this issue
- c) Note and comment on the report in relation to sections 4.0 and 5.0, the role of private developers and complementary improvements to service delivery and environmental factors
- d) Agree any recommendations arising from consideration of this report and to agree that a final report is drawn up to summarise the main conclusions from the scrutiny of the regeneration work in Beeston Hill and Holbeck and to make any appropriate recommendations.