

**Report of the Director of City Development**

**Report to Executive Board**

**Date: 18 July 2012**

**Subject: Derelict and Nuisance site programme**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input 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. The issue of derelict and nuisance properties affects the lives of residents across the city, the appearance of town and district centres and neighbourhoods, and how areas are perceived by investors.
2. In summer 2011, work began to explore the extent of the problem in Leeds and to consider ways in which the Council could tackle the issue in a climate with resource constraints. A number of properties have been identified for consideration, in consultation with area committee chairs; some of which have been derelict for many years.
3. In February 2012, Executive Board supported the allocation of a rolling budget from the Capital Programme totalling £500,000 over the next three financial years to support work to deal with the most difficult derelict and nuisances sites. The project is allowing a focus on the problem by co-ordinating LCC processes and a proactive approach with property owners.
4. This report identifies the target properties and describes the approaches being pursued.

**Recommendations**

Executive Board is recommended to:

- i. note progress with the project to deal with derelict and nuisance sites; and
- ii. agree the first tranche of properties to be tackled and request a further report in June 2013 covering the progress during 2012/13.

## **1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 This report sets out the emerging derelict and nuisance site programme and provides an overview of the early work undertaken.

## **2. Background information**

- 2.1 Across the City, there are a large number of sites and buildings which are unused, derelict, in a poor state of repair, or potentially hazardous or unsecured. They provide a poor image of neighbourhoods and district centres, and have a history of attracting anti-social behaviour, fly tipping and other illegal activities.

- 2.2 In order to identify the extent of the problem of derelict and nuisance properties across Leeds and to consider how best to tackle the problem, an internal project steering group has been set up including officers from Asset Management, Planning Services, Building Control, the Area Leadership Teams, Environmental Services and Regeneration.

- 2.3 Initially the top 10 worst offending properties were identified. These are set out below and are primarily in the middle of neighbourhoods or detrimental to the economic viability of district centres and are widely recognised as the most difficult to tackle properties and persistently receive the most complaints due to anti-social behaviour and security issues.

- 2 Branch Road, Armley
- Chapeltown Road Old Gurdwara and Hindu Temple
- Former Jyoti video shop, 195 Chapeltown Road
- Former Lingfield Public House, Alwoodley
- Former Mobil service station, Chapeltown Road
- Seacroft Grange, York Road
- Former Lord Cardigan Public House, Bramley
- The Hermitage, 31-37 High Street, Kippax
- Former South Leeds Sports Centre
- Former Ralph Thoresby School site

- 2.4 67 properties have now been identified including a number of heritage buildings. The properties list includes a mix of both Council and privately owned property. The list has been compiled with input from Area Committee Chairs, Environmental sub-groups and Ward Members to ensure that it is as comprehensive as possible. The list is being regularly updated to ensure that any emerging issues are recorded and to ensure that action is being prioritised appropriately. The current list of properties can be found in Appendix 1.

- 2.5 The intention of the project is to work through the list of properties, prioritising action on those properties which have the most significant impact on neighbourhoods, district centres, or which have important heritage features. Action is being prioritised so that a first tranche of sites will be tackled in year one; ranging from

'speedy resolution possible' sites to tricky sites where the problems are complex and where action needs to be started now, but may take longer to finalise. As such not all of the properties will be dealt with fully in the first year but significant progress will be made.

- 2.6 Most of the properties are in private ownership or control. Some of these have come about due to economic changes, such as the reduction in numbers of petrol stations or public houses, leaving vacant sites which are not very marketable in a more challenging property market. Through the derelict and nuisance site programme, there are also opportunities for the Council to work more proactively with some owners and leaseholders to explore future opportunities for properties before they become vacant.
- 2.7 Many of the properties which are listed in Council ownership are the result of various service reviews which has meant they have been declared surplus to requirements and vacated with the intention to either re-use within the Council or sell on. However, partly due to the circumstances in the property market, a number remain vacant and in a deteriorating condition. In addition, some buildings, such as the ex Royal Park School site are subject to consideration of alternative uses which have proved very difficult to conclude.
- 2.8 The project steering group has found that action to deal with sites by the Council has historically occurred in isolation, missing the opportunity for efficiencies that can be gained by dealing with a number of sites in parallel; and missing the gains that could be made by following through co-ordinated action across the range of Council services and external agencies whilst also working more proactively with property owners to assist with solutions.
- 2.9 In terms of Council properties, the Scrutiny Board, Resources, has over the past year considered void properties and recommended closer working between Asset Management and Corporate Property Management to prevent properties standing empty, improving maintenance of vacant properties, whilst also speeding up the process for identifying alternative uses. Its recommendations are being implemented in relation to streamlining the process to improve the co-ordination of service decisions in withdrawing properties and the decisions about future use to be considered concurrently rather than consequentially.

### **3. Main issues**

- 3.1 The approach to dealing with Council and privately owned properties differs. Where a property is owned by the Council, the priority is to ensure the building or site is secure and that the health and safety of the public is safeguarded. The Council's Asset Management service also works proactively to explore and market future opportunities for vacant properties in its ownership. For example in the case of the former Park Lees Adult Education Centre, the Council has demolished the disused building and made the site safe and is now moving towards the marketing of the property for future development.
- 3.2 Where properties are privately owned, the approach is more complicated and involves the Council attempting to engage with owners to encourage them to voluntarily deliver interim improvements to their property, whilst also exploring the opportunity for longer term solutions. This can involve work to clean up and secure

sites as completed on the former petrol station site on Broad Lane in Bramley and the demolition of properties, which has occurred at the former Lord Cardigan public house also in Bramley. However, demolition is only an interim solution with the re-use or redevelopment of cleared sites being essential.

- 3.3 The Council also has a range of enforcement powers to force owners to undertake required works. This includes the serving of notices, promoting prosecution cases for non-compliance and undertaking works in default. The approach to privately owned properties is summarised diagrammatically in Appendix 2.
- 3.4 February 2012, Executive Board supported the allocation of a rolling budget from the Council's Capital Programme, totalling £500,000 over the next three financial years to 2015, to support the project. This funding will be used to support any work with owners and enforcement action, including the undertaking of any works in default. Budget will allow work with property owners to try to constructively resolve barriers to improvement. It will also cover some enforcement action, including undertaking works in default where necessary. As some of these costs will be recoverable, more derelict sites or properties can be tackled.
- 3.5 Tranche 1 of the project includes 34 properties and can be found in Appendix 1. Over the course of the next year progress will be made on all of these properties although due to the complexity of issues surrounding a number of sites not all will be fully dealt with, but significant progress will be made. It is planned to deal fully with 5 properties by June 2013 and to resolve immediate problems on a further 17.
- 3.6 To date through the adoption of the approach set out in this report the following progress has been made:-
- demolition of the former Cottingley Arms public house and delivery of a temporary landscaping scheme;
  - demolition of the former Middleton Arms public house in readiness for redevelopment as a new Aldi store;
  - demolition of the former Park Lees adult education centre with the site being prepared for marketing and disposal;
  - demolition of the former Lord Cardigan Public House, Bramley;
  - clean up and improvements work undertaken to the former petrol station on Broad Lane, Bramley;
  - clean up work and securing of the former Mobil petrol station site on Chapeltown Road;
  - work has commenced to refurbish Seacroft Grange
  - agreement has been given to the leasing out of land at Roseville Road/ Gledhow Terrace for car parking;
  - agreement to allow the former Malvern Public House to be used as a general store;
  - maintenance works undertaken to land at the corner of Gledhow Terrace and Roundhay Road.

3.7 Overall the Council is absolutely committed to dealing with properties once and for all and is prepared to take whatever action is needed to get properties improved. The Council will send a strong message to property owners that it will no longer tolerate the poor maintenance of properties, but equally will seek to work proactively and positively with them to deliver interim improvements as well as development and refurbishment schemes.

## **4.0 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 This project initially came about through discussions between Area Leaders and Area Committee Chairs, who prioritised the need to tackle derelict and nuisance. Following an exercise to scope out the project, Area Committee Chairs were briefed in March 2012. Reports are in the process of being taken to the Area Committee Environmental sub groups to ensure that the most problematic sites are included and appropriately prioritised.

### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

4.2.1 An Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration screening has been completed which has identified that there are no specific issues which need to be considered as part of this programme. However, equality and cohesion will be considered as progress is made with specific actions which are managed through the programme.

### **4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities**

4.3.1 This project contributes to the delivery of a number of the City Priorities including Housing and Regeneration, Sustainable Economy and Culture, and Safer and Stronger Communities.

### **4.4 Resources and Value for Money**

4.4.1 In February 2012, Executive Board agreed to the allocation of a rolling budget over the next three financial years of £500,000 to support the derelict and nuisance property programme. It is anticipated that a large proportion of any expenditure to support legal action against private owners or works that the Council undertakes in default can be recovered.

### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

4.5.1 Legal services will support any enforcement activity which results in prosecution proceedings or legal action.

### **4.6 Risk Management**

4.6.1 Possible medium to high-level risks related to the implementation and potential outcomes associated with this project are as follows:

- failure to rigorously progress actions in a co-ordinated and timely way may impact upon the ability of the Council to promote change and robustly defend the action

which is taken. This is being mitigated through the programme management arrangements established;

- unsuccessful recovery of funds from property owners reduces the potential legacy of the programme. This is being mitigated by establishing a process of assessing the likelihood of recovering funds prior to spending money.

## **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 The top 10 most problematic properties were initially identified across the city. These properties are the most difficult to resolve but attract persistent complaints due to their location in the middle of communities, their impact on the viability of district centres, and their focus for anti-social behaviour and security issues.
- 5.2 Through exploring the issues surrounding derelict and nuisance properties further, 67 properties have now been identified. These are in both Council and private ownership, and some are listed buildings.
- 5.3 The Council aims to deliver a concerted and co-ordinated approach to action on derelict and nuisance sites across. This will include the rigorous use of enforcement action where private owners are reluctant or unwilling to voluntarily deliver improvements to their properties.
- 5.4 34 sites are included in the first tranche of the project. Progress will be made on all tranche 1 sites over the course of the next year. These include sites where speedy resolution is possible and more tricky properties where problems are more complex and solutions will take longer to achieve.
- 5.5 Over the course of the next year, 5 properties are to be fully resolved and the immediate problems are to be resolved on a further 17.
- 5.6 Through the approaches set out in this report, early successes have been achieved, with progress made on 10 properties. This has included the demolition of unsafe and eyesore buildings, the cleaning up of sites and commencement of works to deliver refurbishment/ redevelopment schemes.
- 5.7 The approach to maintaining Council owned assets in a co-ordinated way has been reviewed following the recommendations of Scrutiny Board (Resources). Work is now undertaken concurrently to identify a future strategy for properties, while services are looking to come out of buildings. In addition, through this programme work with partners such as the probation service may be extended to allow further work to be undertaken to improve cleared sites.

## **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 Executive Board is recommended to:-
  - i. to note progress with the project to deal with derelict and nuisance sites; and
  - ii. agree the first tranche of properties to be tackled and request a further report in June 2013 covering the progress during 2012/13.

## **7. Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

### **7.1 EIA Screening Form**

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<sup>1</sup> 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.