

Report to Cabinet

Report reference: C-005-2021-22

Date of meeting: 21 June 2021



Portfolio: Housing Services - Councillor H Whitbread

Subject: Regeneration of HRA assets – Creating ‘Place’

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1. That Cabinet approves the proposed approach to regenerating and protecting our assets;**
- 2. That Cabinet note our pilot scheme (Limes Farm Estate) which forms part of our overall Capital Expenditure for our improvement and works programme for the next year; and**
- 3. That Cabinet receives a further paper in September outlining a 5-year capital plan, which will form part 1 of our Estate Regeneration plan, this will be subject to agreement of the budget which will take place in line with EFDC budget setting time table.**

Executive Summary

An innovative and forward-thinking approach is being proposed to develop a ‘Place Approach’ to the regeneration of our Estates.

A review has been carried out to inform the future planning of our asset and property management programme. There are 2 specific reasons for this. Firstly, the Social Housing White Paper expressly discusses the need to take a combined approach to upgrading and developing communities. Much research has been carried out about the value of taking a holistic and ‘Place’ approach and treating the whole community, rather than specific asset management improvements, such as painting and outside of a building in isolation. In addition to this, officers have adopted a new approach which is about ‘creating places where people want to live’. As such, officers have formed a project group which has assessed the estates and developed a priority list. This paper sets out our approach and details the importance of protecting our assets in addition to the value of taking a ‘Place’ approach.

This paper meets with our social recovery plan.

Reason for decision

Members are asked to approve our approach to estate regeneration and note the benefits to both the customers and the organisation. Furthermore, that Cabinet note the future requirements of the Social Housing White paper in regards to communities and note our approach is in line with this.

Members are also asked to note our approach to the project which is to initially use Limes Farm as a pilot scheme. This will form the basis of our approach going forward and allow us to test our process.

Options considered and rejected:

Officers considered whether to carry on with our current approach which is to carry out work in an isolated manner based on 'time due' only basis. This was rejected as it does not follow our vision which is to 'create places where people want to live'

Report:

1. Background

Epping Forest District Council has managed assets using a cyclical approach in the past, this means developing a programme where elements are replaced after a prescribed number of years. Although this is a manner which is sometimes used to determine programmes, there is a move towards an emphasis on creating 'Place', which includes protecting our assets.

In taking a Place approach officers can not only address the aesthetics and protect the 'life' of the building but can also provide other elements which together create places where people want to live. The value of creating 'Place' is now being favoured over a cyclical approach as this methodology underpins our vision to work with residents and other stakeholders to create communities. Furthermore, the impact for the community is huge as all elements are dealt with and actioned at the same time, dramatically improving both the estate and the area.

In terms of creating a community there are key elements which influence the way people feel about where they live. These include:

- Actual and perceived levels of ASB and Crime
- Open spaces
- Community Cohesion
- Refuge areas
- Parking
- Lighting
- Access to leisure

Taking a Place approach can have far reaching benefits for communities. The examples below which are from international studies clearly highlight the benefits.

1. *Scientific recognition of the benefits of community involvement for mental health has translated to a range of mental health campaigns across the world. For example, Australia's long-running Act-Belong-Commit campaign encourages people to be mentally healthy by getting involved with a local community group and committing to a meaningful cause, such as through volunteering (Act-Belong-Commit, n.d.).*

2. *At a national level, Iceland embarked on a plan to reduce teenage alcohol and drug consumption by providing more access to community sporting groups. The results of the campaign were ground-breaking. Following the initiative, the percentage of teenagers who reported excessive alcohol consumption in the previous month dropped from 42% in 1998 to 5% in 2016. Likewise, the percentage who reported ever using cannabis dropped from 17% to 7%, and cigarette use fell from 23% to 3% (Young, 2017).*

Officers are already working together in terms of focusing on the wider social recovery of the district. Epping Forest already has a well-established Health & Wellbeing Board and excellent working relationships with key partners. The three overarching themes are identified as: Positive Communities, Positive Activity and Positive Mental Health.

Programme

To develop our programme officers from the following disciplines were brought together to form a project team:

Discipline	Contribution to project
Estates and Land	<p>Lead on the Council's resident involvement and communication strategy with local residents in respect of the project. To reconstitute a formal Residents Association for the Estate, to create Block / Road Champions and a resident Focus Group to assist with two-way communication between residents and the Council, to ensure that every resident from the Limes Farm estate is heard and has an opportunity to be involved as little or as much as they wish.</p> <p>To arrange and facilitate public meetings, consultations and community events as might be necessary to support the project.</p> <p>To understand the needs, wants and aspirations of our residents and to create a list of estate enhancement opportunities which can be fed into the project, with the intention of realising as many of these aspirations as we are able, subject to feasibility and the resources available.</p>
Neighbourhood Services	<p>To inform on the current challenges faced by the Neighbourhoods Team in relation to our estates and properties.</p> <p>To form a view on best practice during and completion of the project with a view</p>

	to designing our ASB and providing safer estates for our residents
Community, Culture and Wellbeing	Using an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, work directly with the community to build healthy, happy, cohesive and resilient communities. Work with wider agencies to enhance the health & wellbeing offer through proactive partnership working.
Development	Working as a part of the project team to review and access estates to develop the priority list. Complete site inspections of other estates to be able to offer advice on construction and input in the design stages.
Asset management	Undertake regular Stock Condition Surveys to external and communal areas of blocks of flats and internally to individual flats.

Methodology

To understand which estates should be prioritised the team agreed that the state of the asset should be the first consideration.

This was agreed to be most important as the state of the asset is key to meeting some of the basic needs such as a safe, dry home. Further to this the team then reviewed the levels of crime and ASB on estates. The team then used this to shape a picture of our top estates requiring regeneration. Therefore, using both quantitative and qualitative data.

Other important contributing factors included

Factor	Impact
Compliance with the 5 key areas Electrical testing, Gas Safety, Asbestos, Fire Safety, Lifts.	<p>Electrical Testing - All electrical installations should be inspected and certified in accordance with NICIEC Regulations. For rented accommodation, the maximum period recommended between the inspections is five years with a certificate issued to evidence to this.</p> <p>Gas Safety - The Council (and all Landlords) have a legal duty to ensure all gas appliances, even the tenants own appliances, are inspected by a qualified Gas Engineer every 12-months, and a certificate issued to evidence this.</p>

	<p>Asbestos - The Council has a duty to maintain an Asbestos Register. The 'duty to manage' asbestos is included in the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012.</p> <p>Fire Safety - All blocks have a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) and an action plan of remedial action is being managed. All FRA are reviewed regularly or if there has been a significant change which has affected the fire risk or the fire safety measures in the block.</p> <p>Lifts - The Council has a legal responsibility to make sure that any lifts are maintained and in safe working order. The regulations state that any passenger lifting equipment requires servicing and a thorough inspection every six months irrespective of how frequently it is used.</p>
ASB and Perceived ASB	<p>ASB statistics are taken into account when deciding how much resource we will need to dedicate to one area, The Police stats play a large part in this process so we are able to garner such information as the levels of car crime, general ASB and basic crime stats.</p> <p>We will also look at the amount of current cases managed within that area and if there are similar themes to the types of ASB we are dealing with.</p> <p>The perception of ASB on our estates is always greater than the actual in reality, often contributed to by the reputation of an estate. This can be exacerbated by a lack of investment in key security measures and general upkeep of the stock.</p> <p>The deprivation of certain estates play a large part in levels of ASB, which can lead to petty crimes and drug related activity, as young people can be drawn into a life of crime at an early age.</p> <p>We have seen a conscious rise in more serious crime being committed on our</p>

	<p>estates and in our housing stock, which is following an upward trend, particularly on estates with county line affiliations.</p>
<p>Outdoor spaces</p>	<p>We are fortunate that many of our estates are surrounded by large opens spaces which are kept neat and tidy. During the pandemic our outdoor spaces have become particularly important to us, and we have seen a surge of interest from residents wishing to see gardening, tree planting and growing projects in their local areas. Not only do these projects make our estates look more aesthetically pleasing, they help the environment, support education, health and wellbeing and bring communities together.</p> <p>The physical and mental health and wellbeing of our residents is paramount. Our estates contribute to this by providing spaces where people can enjoy exercise and can get out and about. Some estates do not enjoy local amenities and would benefit from improvements such as play areas, outdoor gyms, landscaping and community facilities, which provide opportunity for communities to come together and support community cohesion.</p> <p>A number of our estates suffer from a other issues. Pavements and roads are often in poor condition. It is common to find tree roots pushing up pavements, presenting a risk in terms of trips, slips and falls. In some areas, pavements have been covered over by vegetation and have become unusable. Also there is sometimes inadequate refuse provision, which contributes to fly tipping.</p> <p>The cleanliness of an estate also affects the way we feel about living there. Not all of our estates enjoy a cleaning & caretaking service. These areas fall to residents to maintain themselves. These areas often look neglected and reflect badly on the Council and contribute to customer dissatisfaction. Further, inadequate clothes drying provisions on</p>

	<p>many estate creates a raft of unintended consequences.</p> <p>The quality of signage on an estate can have a big impact on its overall feel. A beautifully designed building can be made to look less attractive through the addition of poor signage. Replacing signage and improving wayfinding would have a positive impact on some estates.</p> <p>A key priority for most residents is feeling safe and secure in their home and the wider estate. Whilst some estates benefit from CCTV, many estates do not. Further, our estates often lack secure provisions for pram and cycle storage and a number of flat blocks still do not have secure door entry systems.</p>
Community opportunities	<p>Wider participation in positive activities, both physical and cultural, on and around the estates, will improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life of local residents and address identified health inequalities.</p> <p>Improved community cohesion and resilience through engagement in such activities and working with EFDC CCW team and Community Champions</p> <p>Residents will have improved mental wellbeing through community engagement initiatives</p> <p>Enhanced local environment, including tackling and improving anti-social behaviour</p>

Limes Regeneration - Our current progress to date

At Limes Farm the project team have begun consulting residents on the proposed works, what these will include and how they can get involved. As a result of our initial engagement a new Residents Association with block champions has been setup giving the project a direct communication channel to the residents that live there.

With the proposed works being external the project will focus on ensuring the estate is watertight, structurally sound and compliant. For example, window replacements, balcony/walkway repairs, controlled access upgrades and fire risk assessments works. In addition, a large focus will be put on potential regeneration opportunities and how we can create a warmer, more connected place for our residents to live. Initial

discussions with residents have included proposals such as, new tree planting initiatives, new outdoor play areas and better estate signage. These will be explored further as the scheme develops.

The high-level timeline for the Major Works at Limes Farm Estate is as follows:

- Tender and appoint Design consultant – 4 Weeks
- Concept and Technical design phase – 6 Weeks
- Section 20 Stage 1 (Notice of Intent) – 5 weeks
- Tender and Appoint Principal Contractor – 4-6 Weeks
- Section 20 Stage 2 (Notice of Estimates) – 5 weeks
- Construction programme – 52 Weeks

Whilst at a very early stage, the project team have been working with residents to better understand the needs, wants and aspirations of for the estate. There are already a number of key themes emerging from our meetings to date, which include better bin provision, pathway repairs, landscaping, tree planting, better signage / wayfinding, the full reinstatement of the football pitch, a dog walking area and a green gym.

As the project progresses, our new Residents Association, Block / Road Champions and customer Focus Group will help us to ensure meaningful two-way communication between residents and the Council, ensuring that every resident from the Limes Farm estate is heard and has an opportunity to be involved (as little or as much as they wish). Furthermore, has the opportunity to influence and shape the improvements made to their estate, for the benefit of the whole community, following a similar approach to the one adopted in our new Scheme, 'More than Bricks and Mortar' as agreed by Cabinet last year.

At the heart of this recommendation, as is the case for More than Bricks and Mortar, is a clear statement of intent about the Council's commitment to affirm our estates as integral to the Council's long term vision for the District, where our estates are viewed as privileged parts of the District and to celebrate our estates as great places where people want to live. This is particularly key at a time when due to the Coronavirus pandemic residents are spending larger amounts of their time at home.

Next Steps

Using our methodology officers have identified several other estates which would benefit from this approach. These discussions are in their infancy and further capital funding would need to be sort and agreed by Cabinet. Furthermore, work will need to be carried out to source some capital funding from other sources. Cabinet can expect a paper regarding this towards the end of the year.

Furthermore officers are in the process of considering the appropriate approach with regards to capital works and the contribution from leaseholders. A paper will be presented to Cabinet in due course.

Consultation undertaken:

Officers have been extensively consulting with residents at the Limes Farm Estate.

In terms of our wider piece we will also be working with:

Local Schools

Police

Local community groups

Resource implications:

Our Capital expenditure has been agreed for 21/22. To facilitate the progress of our plans a project manager has been employed. This is budgeted for.

Legal and Governance Implications:

There are several Leaseholders living on the estate. A paper is currently being prepared to recommend a strategy for working with those residents in terms of S20 legislation and future costs.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

The regeneration would include several initiatives to help alleviate fuel poverty and support the green agenda

Background Papers:

NA

Impact Assessments:

Attached

Risk Management:

Should the programme not go ahead there is a risk that our assets will become unrepairable and this result in a huge cost for EFDC. Furthermore, indirect cost will increase as crime, ASB and other related social problems increase.