



St Paul's Regeneration – Phase 2

Local Lettings Plan 2015

“Creating a desirable place where people choose to live”

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Executive Summary

This proposal for a Local Lettings Plan describes Cheltenham Borough Homes' (CBH's) plan for the selective first let of all 24 new CBH-owned properties within the **second phase** of the St Paul's regeneration programme, in the existing Crabtree Place site. The purpose of the plan is to support the regeneration work at Phase 1 by considering measures to maintain low levels of anti-social behaviour and crime, to enhance social development, and help build a more sustainable and cohesive community.

It outlines the work undertaken so far by CBH at Phase 1, particularly to embed community development principles throughout its services in the area, and details the suggested lettings strategy for Phase 2 to mitigate potential issues with the addition of a new wave of residents to an existing community which is still in a relatively transitional state.

It considers the fact that Phase 2 properties will be made available at 'affordable rent' level by adding a tenant affordability assessment into the process, which was not necessary for Phase 1.

Introduction

- The St Paul's neighbourhood is located in central Cheltenham, neighbouring the town centre. There are approximately 250 Council-owned properties within the neighbourhood, the majority of which were built in the 1930s. The area was characterised by high crime, high levels of anti social behaviour (ASB), which led to a poor estate environment and consequently made properties very difficult to let. In 2007, St Paul's was in the bottom 5% nationally in terms of Indices of Multiple Deprivation.
- In 2004-2005 a 'Planning for Real' exercise was carried out with residents to look at plans to regenerate the neighbourhood. Residents provided feedback on issues such as crime, traffic, housing, community facilities, jobs, training and health. In July 2005 the CBC Cabinet accepted recommendation for CBH to lead a multi service project team to develop regeneration proposals. In 2006 a Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment (NRA) was carried out, looking at property condition survey, development of options, vision and objectives for the area. Residents were then consulted on the options for the area. In December 2006 the NRA recommendations, which were a mixture of decent homes works, transformational improvements and full demolition and redevelopment, were accepted by CBC Cabinet.
- The first phase of the physical regeneration, which involved works to Manser Street, Hudson Street and Hanover Street was completed in 2012 and included transformational work to 90 properties, as well as providing 48 new build homes.
- The second phase of the regeneration, with first homes available in March 2015, includes properties of the following types:
 - **4 1-bed flats** – CBH rental
 - **10 2 bed flats** – CBH rental
 - **10 3 bed houses** – CBH rental
 - **32 properties for outright sale**

The Local Lettings Plan in context

The Local Context

- St Paul's has historically had a poor reputation due to high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.
- The area is currently nationally recognised as being in the bottom 10% in terms of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation.
- The area is predominately made up of socially rented family homes.
- There is a high degree of unemployment, health inequality, teenage pregnancy, and families experiencing poverty issues within the area.
- Since the implementation of the lettings plan for Phase 1, void turnaround times in the last three years have been consistently better than the average across all CBH lettings, and the average offers per letting in line with the average across our stock. This shows that the measures taken thus far have worked, supporting the need for a continued planned lettings approach for Phase 2.

Timeframe	St Paul's Phase 1 properties let	St Paul's Phase 1 average void turnaround time	All CBH average	St Paul's average offers per letting	All CBH average
2012/13	16	11.1 days	15.2 days	1.6	1.5
2013/14	17	17.4 days	20.3 days	1.6	1.6
2014/15 (to end Sept 2014)	9	15.3 days	17.6 days	1.6	1.7

The CBH Context

- CBH is committed to comprehensive physical and social regeneration of the St Paul's area
- The CBH hub, sited in Windsor Court in the heart of Phase 1, provides an invaluable doorstep facility for residents and local partners.

- Good partnership working exists between CBH and key partners such as Social Services and Inspiring Families to help and support vulnerable residents and families living both within CBH properties and the wider community.
- CBH deals robustly with ASB within the neighbourhood. Numerous interventions have been and are used to deal with ASB, including informal actions such as warning letters and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, moving to formal action such as ASB Injunctions (which can exclude persons from an area or from carrying out anti-social acts).
- CBH works closely with the Police in order to assist in dealing with any prolific criminals that may reside within the neighbourhood.

Review and update since 2012

- The Local Lettings Plan 2012 has not undergone a formal review, though light-touch evaluation of its success can be shown through the positive average lettings times and average offers since Phase 1 properties were made available from the end of 2012.
- ASB and crime are at steady levels, the area has a more positive reputation and perceptions of the regeneration are good from tenant, staff and partner perspectives.
- The estate quality has been maintained successfully over the last two years, and minor physical changes are being made as residents demonstrate how they are using the space (e.g. new bollards are needed, paving or adaptations on 'desire path' lines).
- The new Community Hub at Windsor Court delivers a varied weekly timetable of community development activities including Kids' Clubs and Youth Clubs, Parent and Toddler Group, exercise sessions and job clubs, in order to promote engagement and to provide routes to employment, increased health and wellbeing, a sense of community and social responsibility and involvement. Wherever possible, local volunteers are sourced to support sessional work.

Phase 2 - Affordable Rents

The 24 new properties will be made available at affordable rents level. The introduction of a new affordable rent homes should allow a more diverse offer for the range of people accessing CBH

housing. The phase 2 flats and houses will be available to tenants up to a maximum of 80% of market rent and allocated as detailed below.

Cheltenham Borough Homes have taken the decision to avoid flexible tenancies at this time, which may be subject to review in the future. At each property re-let, the market rate will be reassessed and the affordable rent charge set accordingly. CBH will be looking to support existing tenants into the new properties wherever possible to promote positive communities.

Phase 2: The Local Lettings Plan¹

The reasons why a further Local Lettings Plan is being considered for St Paul's are:

- to ensure the continued regeneration of the area
- to maintain the low levels of ASB and crime in the area
- to improve the sense of community
- to increase the employment levels within the community
- to improve sustainability of tenancies

CBH will use this Local Lettings Plan to cover all initial lettings of the Phase 2 new build CBH properties. It is envisaged that, for the impact of the plan to be fully measurable, a minimum period of 12 months will be required so as to allow for this section of the community to settle in.

It is accepted that some new residents maybe 'unknown quantities' – i.e. persons with no known previous criminality or ASB, but who may still cause issues after they move in. This would be outside the control of the Local Lettings Plan; however, given that these residents will be on Introductory Tenancies, decisive, firm and swift action will be required should any issues arise.

Therefore, the Local Lettings Plan is proposed to include an initial CBH-tenant allocation process, general allocation criteria and exclusions as follows:

1. CBH Tenants

- From February 2014, Cheltenham Borough Homes will have 24 tenancies to allocate from the second phase of the new build development.
- In order to reduce the strain on the area of welcoming 24 new households, it is proposed that CBH allocate 20% (5) of the properties to existing tenants. This will release some family accommodation across the borough, and most importantly, this will also give CBH a core of tenants who can successfully sustain their tenancies.

¹ This plan is specific to Phase 2; the lettings plan for Phase 1 still remains in place for all Phase 1 properties and the wider St Paul's CBH-managed tenancies.

- All sizes of property will be available: 1 x 1-bed flats, 2x 2 bed flats and 2 x 3 bed houses.
- Once an advert has been placed for the correct size of property on Homeseeker, Cheltenham Borough Homes will print out a list of our tenants who have bid on the properties in St Paul's. These applicants will be ranked by the Homeseeker system, and the highest ranked CBH tenant bidding for each size of accommodation will be visited. A visit will not be arranged if CBH already has evidence that the applicant does not meet the Lettings Plan criteria, and the process will then move to the next ranking applicant. A record of all evidence collected, known, given or received will be kept for the Lettings Plan.
- The reason for the visit will be threefold: 1) to conduct an affordability assessment; 2) to identify any existing housing management issues which will not have been flagged through the Homeseeker bidding process; and 3) for the applicant to have an opportunity to learn more about the new build project as a whole, as well as the ethos behind the community regeneration plan for St Paul's. The Housing Officer will ensure that all parties present will have a clear understanding of the role they will be expected to play in contributing to this.
- Any offer will be withdrawn if the tenant does not satisfy the affordability assessment.
- CBH will use the same criteria to assess the CBH tenant's applications as for the adverts below. The same level of local connection (see below) will be sought as for the other lettings. Any applicant with a criminal record, specifically with convictions involving harassment, abuse or violence including (but not limited to) public order, assaults, domestic abuse or incidents involving weapons, in the last 5 years, will be considered and may be excluded from allocations in St Paul's due to the Lettings Plan.

CBH will not offer tenancies in St Paul's to households where the tenants or members of their family are/is:

- persons with a history of ASB at current or previous tenancies within the last 5 years. This includes those subject to informal interventions such as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts.
- persons for whom a Possession Order had been obtained, or who had previously been evicted for ASB or who had been the subject of an injunction for ASB within the last 5 years.

- persons with high support needs who have failed to accept support or do not have adequate support in place and who may impact on neighbouring properties
- persons owing any monies i.e. former tenant arrears over £250 or significant (i.e. >£500) rechargeable repairs invoices to CBH, **AND** who have not kept to an agreed repayment plan having missed a minimum of 3 consecutive repayments.
- any person owing over £2000, either in rent arrears or rechargeable repairs.

2. General Allocations

- The remaining 19 new properties at Phase 2 will be subject to the lettings plan, and when advertised under Gloucestershire Homeseeker will be marked as subject to a Local Lettings Plan.
- All applicants will be ranked by the Homeseeker system, and the highest ranked applicant bidding for each size of accommodation will be visited as per above. A visit will not be arranged if CBH already has evidence that the applicant does not meet the Lettings Plan criteria, and process will then move to the next ranking applicant. A record of all evidence collected, known, given or received will be kept for the Lettings Plan.
- Applications for the houses and flats drawn from Gloucestershire Homeseeker will be assessed with consideration for other allocations within each block and section of houses.
- As the properties are not owned by Cheltenham Borough Council, but by Cheltenham Borough Homes, assured tenancies will only be offered to applicants over the age of 18.
- The same level of local connection (see below) will be sought as for the other lettings. Any applicant with a criminal record, specifically with convictions involving harassment, abuse or violence including (but not limited to) public order, assaults, domestic abuse or incidents involving weapons, in the last 5 years, will be considered and may be excluded from allocations in St Paul's due to the Lettings Plan.
- CBH reserves the right not to offer a tenancy to an applicant if this would increase child density in a manner which CBH could not then support.

CBH will not offer tenancies in St Paul's to households as per the additional criteria set out on page 8.

- Applicants will be prioritised according to:

Local connection

All applicants will have a local connection to Cheltenham as defined by Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and detailed within the Gloucestershire Homeseeker Allocations Scheme.

Child density

Cheltenham Borough Homes will need to ensure wherever practicable that child density does not exceed 80% of bedspace capacity for the whole scheme.

3. Exclusions

- This plan clearly indicates which characteristics CBH wishes to have discretion over exclusion from offering accommodation at St Paul's. Any applicant or member of their household with a criminal record as detailed above in sections 1 & 2 will be excluded from allocations in St Paul's due to the Lettings Plan.
- Persons not considered for re-housing at St Paul's Phase 2 would remain eligible for re-housing into other properties in the Borough where no Local Lettings Plan exists.

Implementation and Review

- The top successful bidder for any void properties at St Paul's will be checked for the above by using information given, known, obtained or received and, if no record of crime or ASB, will then be visited by a member of the St Paul's housing team to discuss their bids, affordability of the property, and the importance of our regeneration work in the area. The second and third highest bidder will go through this process if required, subject to the outcomes of the meeting with the bidder(s) above them.
- The decision regarding all applicants in the top positions who are being considered for exclusion will be made in partnership with the St Paul's Senior Neighbourhood Housing Officer, the Empty Homes Team Leader and the Housing Options Team.
- A published Local Lettings Plan for St Paul's Phase 2 will be available via the Cheltenham Borough Homes website.
- This plan will be subject to periodic review and the outcomes of this and the Local Lettings Plan for Phase 1 will need to be closely monitored. Indicators include continued reduction in turnover of properties and ASB cases. Full reviews of both Phase 1 and Phase 2 will be conducted between CBH and CBC at the end of 2015, and every 12 months thereafter.
- The Local Lettings plan needs to be subject to some flexibility depending on its success. The residents need to be included in any decision to reduce or remove the Plan and will also be dependent on the outcomes regarding sustainability and ASB reduction as above. It is not proposed that the plan is removed for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

By the time the St Paul's regeneration is complete, approximately £8 million will have been invested into the area. At present, through intensive, multi agency community development work, the area is improving and is not beset by the issues that have historically characterised St Paul's. Following the completion of the building works at Phase 2, it is crucial to the overall regeneration of St Paul's that the properties are let in a way that will encourage sustainability, community cohesion and allow the successful work undertaken to date, to continue.

This lettings plan is designed to ensure that this happens and that the regeneration project as a whole is successful, and meets the aims and objectives that were originally set out at the beginning of the process.