

**Wards Affected:**

Woughton

**ITEM 5****DELEGATED DECISION****30 JULY 2019****CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF BUCKLAND LODGE**

Responsible Cabinet Member: Councillor Long -Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration

Report Sponsor: Michael Kelleher, Director Housing and Regeneration

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**Executive Summary:**

Buckland Lodge is a sheltered scheme comprising 34 flats. Cracks appeared to the rear elevation in 2005 and residents of the flats most directly affected were moved out as a precaution. Following a recent structural survey the cost of returning the flats back into use is estimated in the region of £1.8m. Given the number and size of the flats involved – they are very small compared to modern developments – and the relatively low demand for sheltered housing across Milton Keynes, it is considered that this does not represent value for money. It is, therefore, proposed that the scheme is decommissioned and demolished, and the site used to provide new council housing for rent. Before the Council can formerly decide on the future of Buckland Lodge, it must first consult the tenants of the scheme in accordance with s105 of the Housing Act 1985. In addition to this statutory consultation, the views of the Parish Council and Residents Association will be sought.

**Councillor Nigel Long**  
**Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration**

**1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 That the secure tenants of Buckland Lodge be consulted about its future in line with statutory requirements;
- 1.2 That the consultation will last six weeks and will take the form of individual meetings with, and a survey of, the secure tenants of Buckland Lodge;
- 1.3 That wider stakeholders, including Woughton Community Council and Netherfield Residents Association have an opportunity to comments on the potential future use of the site; and
- 1.4 That a further report be considered setting out the consultation responses and making a final recommendation for the future of Buckland Lodge.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 Buckland Lodge is a sheltered housing scheme located on the Netherfield Estate comprising 34 flats. Sheltered housing is accommodation for the elderly (typically those over 60 years of age) consisting of independent units with some shared facilities and a Sheltered Housing officer.

- 2.2 Cracks appeared to the rear elevation in 2005 indicating potential movement of the building. A structural survey was commissioned and confirmed the building was subject to subsidence.
- 2.3 As a precaution, residents of the flats most directly affected were moved out in 2005 and the flats mothballed and secured. The affected area of the building was monitored for a period of time to assess the significance of the subsidence. Further intrusive surveys of individual flats were carried out during the 2005 and 2006 to enable the extent of the damage to be assessed.

**3. Issues**

- 3.1 The flats remain empty and further flats have become vacant over time. There are currently 20 empty flats.
- 3.2 The demand for sheltered housing in Milton Keynes has fallen and the Council is struggling to allocate sheltered housing units in less popular areas. We currently have 15 void sheltered properties available to let with five flats available in one scheme. In addition to this we have a further nine void sheltered properties expected plus we receive nomination rights to registered providers. Table 1 shows the number of households that are registered for sheltered housing by priority band. The low number of applicants in band 1 (highest priority) means we often end up allocating to applicants in lower priority bands including people living out of area. We also allocate sheltered housing units to homeless people or people in hospital to alleviate bed blocking. We are also maximising opportunity to downsize.

<b>Band</b>	<b>Number of applicants</b>
Band 1	13
Band 2	17
Band 3	37
Band 4	3
Band 5	5

Table 1: number of applicants for sheltered housing by priority band

- 3.3 The number of sheltered properties that have become empty has increased over the years and the number of void properties that have been made available to let each year continues to increase. The table below shows the number of sheltered units that have become available to let each year:

Year	Total number of Sheltered voids becoming available to let
2017/2018	380
2016/2017	306
2015/2016	245
2014/2015	301
2013/2014	266

Table 2: Number of sheltered units available to let by year from 2013

- 3.4 Whilst the rate of subsidence is reducing, the total cost of bringing the mothballed flats back into use is estimated at £1.8m. This includes costs directly associated with the flats themselves and of work to the wider scheme to facilitate this. For example, the entire scheme heating system, including boiler, will need replacing to enable new heating pipework and radiators to be installed in the mothballed flats. A copy of the structural survey is attached at the Annex.
- 3.5 The flats at Buckland Lodge are small one bedroom units, each approximately 33 sqm whilst one bedroom flats currently being built are approximately 51 sqm.
- 3.6 There is a demonstrable need for family sized accommodation throughout Milton Keynes. There are currently 963 households waiting for social housing who are classed as having one or more reasonable preference grounds, i.e. a demonstrable housing need with a local connection to Milton Keynes, the vast majority being larger households.
- 3.7 When combining the issues above, i.e. a relative lack of demand for sheltered housing, the anticipated cost of repairing the building, the small size of the flats and the need for larger family housing, the Council considers demolition to be the most appropriate option.

#### **4. Consulting on the future of Buckland Lodge**

- 4.1 The council has a legal obligation to consult its secure tenants on matters of housing management such as changes to the management, maintenance, improvement or demolition of houses let by them, or changes in the provision of amenities.
- 4.2 It is, therefore, proposed that the Council consult the tenants of Buckland Lodge about the future of the scheme.
- 4.3 The legislation does not specify a time frame for consultation or the form the consultation will take. It is proposed that the consultation:
- a) will last for six weeks, and
  - b) will take the form of individual meetings and a survey
- 4.5 The Council acknowledges that the wider community may have concerns and ideas about the future use of Buckland Lodge. As such, relevant stakeholders, namely Woughton Community Council and Netherfield Residents Association,

will be consulted with and asked about their views as to the future use of the scheme. However, priority must be given to representations made by those currently living at the scheme, in line with the Council's statutory obligations.

## 5 Proposals

5.1 It is proposed that:

- a) Buckland Lodge is decommissioned as a sheltered housing scheme and the building demolished and site cleared;
- b) the site is retained by the Council for the purposes of housing and that new truly affordable council housing is built on the site and held within the Housing Revenue Account;
- c) the type of housing (i.e. flats, houses etc) and size (i.e. number of bedrooms) be agreed in consultation with local residents and the parish council;
- d) consideration is given to forms of supported living on the site;
- e) residents of Buckland Lodge be given priority to move to another council owned property (including a sheltered housing scheme) elsewhere in Milton Keynes that meets their needs; and
- f) in addition to statutory home loss and any right to compensation payable, residents of Buckland Lodge will be given financial support to move (including removals, service disconnections and reconnections and reasonable expenses incurred in respect of decoration etc).

## 6 Implications

### 6.1 Policy

Residents affected by any decision made in terms of the future use of the site will be subject to the Council's policy and statutory guidance in terms of consultation and financial compensation in the event of a permanent loss of a home.

### 6.2 Resources and Risk

Y	Capital	N	Revenue	N	Accommodation
N	IT	Y	Medium Term Plan	Y	Asset Management

### 6.3 Carbon and Energy Management

Any new housing on the site will be in line with prevailing regulations for carbon and energy management, with Milton Keynes planning policy applicable for determining the sustainability of any new dwellings.

### 6.4 Legal

The Housing Act 1985 under S105(5) states that:

“a landlord authority shall maintain such arrangements as it considers appropriate to enable those of its secure tenants who are likely to be substantially affected by a matter of housing management to which this section applies:

- a) to be informed of the authority’s proposals in respect of the matter, and
- b) to make their views known to the authority within a specified period;

and the authority shall, before making any decision on the matter, consider any representations made to it in accordance with those arrangements.”

6.5 Other Implications

Y	Equalities/Diversity	Y	Sustainability	N	Human Rights
N	E-Government	Y	Stakeholders	N	Crime and Disorder

Background Papers: None

**Annex:**                      Structural Survey