

Affordable Housing provision Bath Road Depot

CURRENT SITUATION

The rise in homelessness is a national problem. As changes to the welfare system continue to bite, homelessness is expected to become an even greater problem. As recently as 13 September the National Audit Office put out a report highlighting the alarming increase in homelessness and the growing difficulties facing local authorities in dealing with it.

The report stated:

There were 77,240 households in temporary accommodation in England in March 2017, an increase of 60% since March 2011.

These households included 120,540 children, an increase of 73% from March 2011. Homelessness at present costs the public sector in excess of £1 billion a year. More than three quarters of this – £845 million – was spent on temporary accommodation. Three quarters of this spending – £638 million – was funded by housing benefit.

The ending of private sector tenancies has overtaken all other causes to become the biggest single driver of statutory homelessness in England. The proportion of households accepted as homeless by local authorities due to the end of an assured short-hold tenancy increased from 11% during 2009-10 to 32% during 2016-17.

In addition, it appears likely that the decrease in affordability of properties in the private rented sector, of which welfare reforms such as the capping of Local Housing Allowance are an element, have driven this increase in homelessness.

The full report is well worth reading and is available on this link:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/homelessness/>

That national trend is reflected here in South Bucks. Government has recognised that things have to change and is providing additional funding to Councils along with new duties to prevent homelessness and accommodate those in need.

- South Bucks has no designated temporary housing accommodation to meet its statutory homelessness duties
- As a result – we are a hostage to fortune, increasingly reliant on temporary lettings in nightly let and bed and breakfast accommodation. This is an expensive way to address a problem which is getting worse
- We are supporting the provision of more affordable rented accommodation through schemes like the redevelopment of Gerrards Cross Police Station which will provide both rented and social rented units, but we need to put more resources in to providing temporary accommodation to reduce the cost of emergency housing currently forecast at costing the Council £750,000 gross in the current financial year, or £487,000 net.

Stats:

The annual number of applications for homelessness assistance received by the Council rose from

- 59 in 2013/14 to 102 last year 2016/17.
- Inevitably, the cost of providing temporary accommodation has also risen - from £63,680 in 2013/14 to a projected £487,000 for the current financial year as previously stated. It's a hell of an increase and it shows no signs of reducing

Then there's the human cost:

- Average waiting time for permanent two-bedroomed housing is two years
- Further stress for families already stressed by the process of becoming homeless moved into temporary housing, often away from their support network, possibly in accommodation inappropriate for their needs
- Children displaced from schools and, their friends
- Poorer employment opportunities
- Higher risk of ill health and long term illness
- In short, fractured, chaotic lifestyles for many of these people

WHAT WE PROPOSE AT BATH ROAD DEPOT

- Making use of vacant council-owned land to provide 12 temporary units of one and two-bedroomed self-contained units
- We would seek temporary planning permission for five to ten years
- The site currently has planning permission for employment use
- We would be seeking temporary planning permission for residential purposes to give us a 'breathing space' while we investigate possible provision of further temporary housing accommodation at other locations
- This is on Green Belt land, potentially contentious – but these pictures will indicate the quality of it
- We are consulting with Taplow and Burnham parishes, Burnham health promotion centre, Citizens' Advice Bureau and community groups in Burnham.

THE UNITS

- Close to amenities – transport links, schools, shops, medical centres, possible work opportunities close by and access to open spaces
- Will be equipped with white goods – fridge, cooker, washing machine etc
- Parking provision
- Units will be fully insulated

- Fitted with sprinkler system to minimise fire damage
- CCTV fitted
- The type of construction we're minded to use is very versatile and means the units can be moved at a later stage. The National Audit Office report mentioned earlier actually refers to its use in Lewisham. It states:

Lewisham is using an off- site construction method to provide self-contained temporary accommodation on brownfield land. Lewisham considers this method to be ground breaking and will provide cost-effective and high-quality accommodation. The construction method is intended to allow for speedy delivery and to enable the building to be moved once permanent development plans for the land are in place

BENEFITS

- Land prices in South Bucks premium – this is council-owned land lying dormant while we are paying premium prices for bed and breakfast accommodation
- An investment of £2.7m will reduce emergency housing costs to the Council taxpayers by £200,000 a year enabling payback within 10 years
- This will help us address our safeguarding responsibilities to vulnerable households experiencing homelessness

FOR THE FAMILIES & INDIVIDUALS

- Units will provide stability and consistency enabling people to establish normality in their lives until permanent provision can be found
- Temporary housing – but secure while there
- Units are self-contained so no sharing kitchens/bathrooms
- Better family life, less disruption – more consistent schooling, friendship groups for children
- Mixed one and two bed units means a good social mix – creating a community atmosphere
- Support to enable a 'community' assisting tenants to obtain benefit and other advice through support networks and build a sense of community whilst they remain there
- Some dignity and hope for their future