

# COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME - SMALL SCHEMES UPDATE FOR CATERHAM ON THE HILL

## Housing Committee Tuesday, 28 September 2021

Report of: Alison Boote, Executive Head of Communities  
Purpose: For Decision & Information  
Publication status: Unrestricted  
Wards affected: Queen's Park, Westway

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### Executive summary:

To update Members on the tender results for Rochester Gardens & Town End Close and the current position at Auckland Road and Windmill Close.

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**This report supports the Council's priorities of:** Creating the homes, infrastructure and environment we need; creating a greener, more sustainable district.

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### Recommendation to Committee:

That:

- A. Members approve the adoption of a Compensatory Tree Planting Scheme within the existing budget of the Council House Building Programme; and
  - B. Members approve an additional budget of £100k for Rochester Gardens / Town End in the event that the planning approval for Windmill Close is not ratified by Full Council.
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### Reason for recommendation:

To support the Council in achieving its strategic objectives in delivering the Council House Building Programme.

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## **Introduction and background**

- 1 The planning applications for an additional 6 affordable homes at Auckland Road and Windmill Close received planning approval on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 2021. The approval is subject to ratification at Full Council in October.
- 2 Planning Committee Members raised issues regarding the loss of trees, tree planting and parking and traffic management during the discussion about Windmill Close and Officers have been working to address those particularly sensitive matters to relieve some of their concerns.
- 3 The Council received two tenders for the building contract for Rochester Gardens and Town End, both from well-known contractors with experience of working on residential schemes in small / tight sites where there are existing residents close-by. The tender has been awarded to the most economically advantageous tenderer as authorised by this Committee at its meeting in June 2018 and Officers are currently negotiating the contract terms.
- 4 It is anticipated that the Council will be in contract by late September / early October. The contractor has a lead in period of 16 weeks during which they will dis-charge the pre-commencement planning conditions. Start on site is now expected to be in early February 2022. Existing residents have been updated accordingly.
- 5 The contractor appointed for Rochester Gardens and Town End will also be contracted to carry out the developments at Windmill Close and Auckland Road (subject to approval by Full Council) as they were also the most economically advantageous tenderer.
- 6 The aforementioned four small schemes will deliver an additional 13 affordable homes in Caterham and the decision was taken to tender all four sites together so as to attract more tenderers and achieve a better price for the Council.

## **Council House Building Programme – Compensatory Tree Planting Scheme**

- 7 The Council has at its disposal a wealth of knowledge and experience relating to trees as well as the land available to plant them on. Since Planning Committee, Officers have consulted with colleagues and have gathered information to establish that the cost to the Council House Building Programme of planting one standard tree is approximately £2,500. This cost includes the purchase, planting, initial care to ensure the tree can establish itself (weekly watering, weeding, mulching etc) and a contribution towards the lifetime management of the tree.
- 8 The Council recognises the tangible benefits of trees – such as rain water interception, urban heat island effect reduction, carbon storage as well as wildlife habitat enhancement and the positive effects our trees have on human mental health and general well-being.

- 9 The Council remains committed to retaining trees and hedgerow on its housing development sites where possible with their removal being a last resort. Where there is unavoidable removal of trees or hedgerow on sites within the Council's house building programme, the Council will deliver bio-diversity net gain through the re-planting of trees and hedgerow either on or near site or in a local park or recreational space. This will be done in consultation with and to the satisfaction of the local ward members and the Council's Tree Officer.
- 10 The Woodland Trust recommends three trees are planted for every one that is removed.
- 11 In the case of Windmill Close, there is a group of trees to be removed, mainly to accommodate the dwellings. Within this group of trees there is one B category tree, meaning a tree of moderate quality and value. All the other trees to be removed are category C or U which means low or very low quality. However, the Council understands that even low-quality trees may confer some or all of the aforementioned benefits and where their loss is unavoidable it should still be offset. At Windmill Close there will be new trees planted on the scheme as well as incorporating the recommendations of the Ecological Appraisal. However, the Council will undertake to deliver an overall net gain to compensate for the loss through the planting of standard trees off-site in a nearby location. The approximate cost to the budget for Windmill Close will be £30,000 and can be accommodated within the approved budget for the scheme.
- 12 In future, it is proposed that Committee Members will be advised on the associated costs of Compensatory Tree Planting when schemes come forward. Such costs are to be accommodated within the existing programme budget.

### **Construction Traffic Management Plan at Windmill Close**

- 13 The Council is in contract negotiations with its preferred contractor following a procurement exercise for the construction contract for Rochester Gardens and Town End.
- 14 As part of the same procurement exercise the contractor will be appointed to deliver the schemes at Windmill Close and Auckland Road (subject to the recent planning approval being ratified at Full Council).

- 15 The contractor has provided a draft detailed Construction Traffic Management Plan in response to concerns raised by planning committee members in order to demonstrate how they will manage construction traffic at Windmill Close. The plan is subject to approval by Officers but is drafted to include:
- Promotion of car sharing and use of public transport
  - Use of local labour where possible
  - No contractor parking on Windmill Close
  - Site deliveries pre-booked with site manager to stagger delivery and prevent vehicles queuing to access the site
  - Wheel washing to prevent mud / contamination leaving the site
  - The loading and unloading of all construction materials will only be permitted in the confines of the development
  - A turning area will be formed within the site and kept clear solely for the purpose of turning vehicles. All vehicle movements will be supervised
  - All residents will receive a letter explaining the above as well as other health and safety information about the site prior to commencement
  - All residents will have a named contact in the site management team including an out of ours / emergency contact
- 16 Since the Planning Committee on 29<sup>th</sup> July, Officers have written to those residents of Windmill Close who may be interested in the Council funding the provision of a dropped kerb and hardstanding to ease their parking concerns. There are approximately five dwellings where this may be possible, and the Council has had one expression of interest so far.
- 17 Officers have also been in discussions with the Ministry of Defence over the potential use of their dis-used land adjacent to Caterham Sea Cadets for secure off-site contractor parking nearby.
- 18 The Council has a proven track record of delivering affordable housing schemes on small and tight sites including developments in roads with no-through-access. Members are directed towards Barnfield Close, The Court and the new Uplands development for evidence of recent successfully managed sites.

## **Budget**

19. The approved budget for the development of Rochester Gardens and Town End is £1,718,000 and the approved budget for the development of Auckland Road and Windmill Close is £1,860,000. The tenders received for Rochester Gardens and Town End came in over budget whilst the tenders for Windmill Close and Auckland Road came in below budget. If all four schemes go into contract there is sufficient budget approved, however if Windmill Close does not receive ratification at Full Council, the budget for Rochester Gardens and Town End will need to increase by £100,000.
20. The costs of the Council's Compensatory Tree Planting Scheme can be met within the existing budget for the Council House Building Programme.

## **Other options considered**

21. In the event that the application for Windmill Close is refused by Full Council, Officers would need to return to Housing Committee to seek approval for the additional budget for Rochester Gardens. This would not be possible until November 30<sup>th</sup> which would delay the appointment of the main contractor and the start of the work. It is considered prudent therefore to seek approval for an additional budget at this Committee.
22. In respect of the Compensatory Tree Planting Scheme it should be noted that there were no planning reasons for refusal of the application for Windmill Close. The scheme has been introduced in response to member concerns that the Council should be seeking a bio-diversity net gain on developments within the Council House Building Programme in keeping with the Council's environmental agenda and the declaration of a climate emergency in February 2020.

## **Consultation**

23. Officers will consult with the appropriate ward members as part of the process of determining a Compensatory Tree Planting Scheme on each future development within the programme.

## **Key implications**

### **Comments of the Chief Finance Officer**

The increase of £100k can be funded by the HRA capital fund and there are no revenue implications.

## **Comments of the Head of Legal Services**

Local authorities are not immune from having to obtain planning permission to develop land. The grant of planning permission by the Council will require Full Council approval and Members will be required to provide a planning decision 'unless material considerations indicate otherwise'. Members will need to decide what weight will need to be given to the material considerations. There is no doubt that what is or is not 'material' under the planning acts is complex, and Officers will need to give guidance to Members on these matters at Full Council. With the above in mind, this Committee does therefore need to give some thought and to consider the Officer recommendation as a contingency in the event that Full Council does not ratify the Council's planning application.

## **Equality**

This report does not disadvantage or discriminate against any different groups with protected characteristics in the community.

## **Climate change**

The introduction of a Compensatory Tree Planting Scheme in response to member concerns is consistent with the Council declaring a climate emergency in February 2020. Habitat restoration, tree planting and woodland expansion will play a huge role in addressing the threats that we face from climate change and biodiversity loss.

## **Appendices**

None

## **Background papers**

None

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