



EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

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| REPORT OF: | Executive Member for Growth and Development |
| LEAD OFFICERS: | Strategic Director of Growth & Development |
| DATE: | Friday, 29 March 2024 |

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED: Growth and Development
Finance and Governance

WARD/S AFFECTED: Blackburn Central;

SUBJECT: Purchase by Agreement of an Individual Residential Property at 7 Coleridge Street, Blackburn. BB2 2NL

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To seek approval to purchase the above long-term empty property by agreement as part of the Council's Empty Property Strategy to reduce the number of long-term empty properties and provide much needed accommodation for the Borough.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Member:

Upon being satisfied that:

- a) it would contribute to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the borough;
- b) there is a compelling case in the public interest in bringing empty properties back into use.
- c) sufficient funds exist for carrying the resolution into effect.

2.1 Authorise the Strategic Director for Growth and Development to agree terms for the acquisition by agreement, therefore negating the requirement to use compulsory purchase powers to ensure that this property is brought back into use.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 As part of the Council's commitment to bringing empty properties back into use, this property has been evaluated using the priority scoring matrix (Appendix 1). It scores highly due to the fact that the property has been empty since August 2022 and is currently in a poor state of repair.
- 3.2 The proposed purchase by agreement site is outlined in red on the attached plan (Appendix 2).
- 3.3 This pavement fronted mid-terraced property is situated in the Blackburn Central ward of the Borough and is set in a residential street consisting of similar properties. This terraced block formed part of the Griffin Renewal Area where 165 properties were identified for clearance and others benefitted from grant funded schemes that improved the external appearance of each row of terraced houses.

- 3.4 The terraced row containing this property was identified as requiring action in the longer term, however, the removal of Housing Market Renewal funding by Central Government resulted in the inability to complete the renewal area, leaving the terraced row in its original condition.
- 3.5 The property is situated adjacent to the Griffin phase 2 development site which has been identified for multi-tenure housing. It is essential that the appearance of the property is improved prior to the commencement of build on the site which will attract potential buyers to the area. In its current condition, the property would contribute to a negative impression of the area as a whole.
- 3.6 The property has stood empty since August 2022 and is in a poor state of repair. The external condition is poor and neglected, which is having a negative impact on the local neighbourhood.
- 3.6 The property has been the subject of complaints regarding its condition from both local Councillors and residents, including.
- The general poor condition and appearance of the building
 - The fact the property continues to remain empty.
 - Fly tipping in and around the rear yard.
- 3.7 Substantial efforts have been made to contact the owner to encourage him to bring the property back into use. However, his personal circumstances require that the property be sold quickly. A purchase by agreement in this case will allow the Council to ensure that it is refurbished to a good standard and re-occupied in a timely manner.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

- 4.1 Tackling empty properties supports the key priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan and the Empty Property Strategy.
- 4.2 There are currently around 2,771 empty properties (March 2024) accounting for 4.4% of the total housing stock in the Borough, of which 1,826 (2.9%) are classified as empty and unfurnished with 952 (1.5%) of those homes classified as long-term empty homes (over 6 months) with 327(0.52%) of those being empty for over 2 years. Whilst most properties will only be empty for a short time, others have been empty for a long time and need to have action taken to remedy this.
- 4.3 Continued efforts are required to ensure that properties are empty for a minimum period of time and the Council's message that long term empty properties will not be tolerated continues to be communicated.
- 4.4 There are currently no grant funding opportunities available to support empty homes refurbishment (previous HCA initiatives ended in March 2015). Direct support and signposting is offered to help owners to bring their properties back into use. Where owners are unwilling or unable to bring their properties back into use, enforcement action is considered to be the most appropriate course of action to be taken.
- 4.6 Empty properties in the borough can have negative environmental impacts on neighbourhoods in addition to being a wasted housing resource. At neighbourhood level, empty properties attract fly tipping, crime, arson and nuisance. It is a priority to tackle these problems through enforcement as part of the wider effort to improve neighbourhoods and prevent blight.
- 4.7 Bringing empty properties back into use creates extra accommodation for rent or sale and could also generate additional income for the Council via New Homes Bonus (NHB) payment.

- 4.8 The costs will be funded from the Neighbourhood Intervention Fund which is part of the Council's Housing Capital Programme; there are sufficient uncommitted funds available within the programme to support the acquisition of this individual property.
- 4.9 Once acquired, the property will be offered for sale via a local estate agent to the highest bidder with preference given to buyers who intend to owner/occupy the property once renovated. A building licence will be granted to the buyer and formal sale is completed once the property has been renovated to the Council's required standard. This approach also encourages the use of local labour and local spend.
- 4.10 To date, 33 properties have been acquired either by purchase by agreement or compulsory purchase through the Neighbourhood Intervention Project. This has facilitated the renovation and re-occupation of some of the most problematic properties across the Borough and helped to reduce anti-social and criminal activities, which the empty properties attract.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Local Plan Policy CP4: Housing Development highlights that a number of sites of differing sizes and locations are allocated within the Plan to contribute to the Borough's housing supply, along with support for development on urban windfall sites (including underutilised or previously developed land). An allowance has also been included within the Local Plan housing trajectory to account for long term empty properties being brought back into use. As a result, bringing empty homes back into residential use will contribute to the Borough's housing supply.
- 5.2 Bringing housing back into use would increase housing supply in the borough. Properties may be occupied by owner/occupiers or be available as private rented accommodation. It would also free the local community of the problems created by properties standing empty and derelict for such a long time.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The funding for the purchase by agreement is available in the Neighbourhood Intervention Fund which is part of the Council's Housing Capital Programme.
- 6.2 The costs will be funded from the Neighbourhood Intervention Fund which is part of the Council's Housing Capital Programme; there are sufficient uncommitted funds available within the programme to support the purchase of this individual property.
- 6.3 Some revenue budget will be required to fund the subsequent sale of the property. The amount required will be approximately £1,000 for the estate agent's fees. This will be funded from within existing budgets.
- 6.4 Capital receipts from sale of assets funded by the Neighbourhood Intervention Fund are recycled back into the project so that further purchases by agreement or CPO's can be undertaken as and when required.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 If purchase by agreement cannot be secured, under the provisions of section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 the local authority may acquire houses or buildings which may be suitable as houses, together with any land occupied with the houses or buildings. The power is available even if the

ownership of the property is to be transferred to someone else.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Resources needed to purchase the property will be provided by the Empty Properties Team. Some support will be required from the legal team to carry out the conveyancing process.
- 8.2 Some support will be required from the Growth Team's surveyor to carry out a valuation of the property concerned and agree the purchase price.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 Comprehensive consultation has been undertaken to understand the impacts of empty properties on local communities. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) supports bringing empty properties back into use. This has also been reflected in the Council's Local Plan which treats empty properties as a valuable resource towards meeting housing need within the borough.
- 10.2 The further development of the Council's Empty Property Strategy has also consulted stakeholders and agencies prior to consideration of further tools to tackle empty properties.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded and published if applicable.

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| CONTACT OFFICER: | Nicola Fox: Principal Housing Projects Manager |
| DATE: | 18 th March 2024 |
| BACKGROUND PAPER: | Empty Property Strategy |