

**MOBILE HOME SITE, EYNESBURY CONTAMINATED LAND
REMEDICATION STRATEGY
(Report by the Head of Housing Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members on: the outcome of the additional soil sampling; the approved approach to remediation of the contaminated land; and the next steps to progress the required works.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This mobile home park was in operation prior to the 1974 reorganisation of local government. Previously it was owned by St Neots Urban District Council. At LSVT (2000) management of the site was passed to Huntingdonshire Housing Partnership (HHP).
- 2.2 There are 50 pitches on the site and residents own their own mobile/park home paying a ground rent to the Council. The site covers about 1.25 hectares. The mobile home park has been partly developed on the site of an old clay pit and brick and tile works.
- 2.3 A site survey was commissioned, in June 2005, both to investigate the land in accordance with the Council's contaminated land strategy and to inform a review of the mobile home site as an asset.
- 2.4 The Council acts as both land owner via its Housing Services section and 'Regulator' via its Environmental Health section.
- 2.5 The Regulator has determined the site to be "contaminated land". The next step was to prepare a remediation strategy for the approval of the Regulator. Additional soil samples were taken from the open spaces and each of the 50 plots to determine the extent of the required remediation works.

3. RESULTS OF THE ADDITIONAL SAMPLING

- 3.1 The Regulator has determined that 46 of the 50 plots require remedial works to be carried out. The results of the samples from the open spaces were not at an unacceptable level, so remediation works are not required.

4. REMEDIATION STRATEGY

- 4.1 The Regulator has agreed the remediation strategy proposed by the consultant on behalf of the land owner. The strategy consists of a combination of three methods:
- **Voluntary agreements** – Residents will be asked to sign an agreement to retain and maintain any existing concrete on the plot, and not to dig soil, or permit others to dig soil, deeper than 600mm (2 feet) or to break through the underground membrane

without permission of the council. The granting of permission would be conditional on the proper health and safety process being carried out by the resident.

- **Retention of existing concrete** - Where concrete is substantial and is in good repair eg the concrete below the mobile homes, driveways and under most sheds the concrete may remain in place. Periodic inspections will be required to ensure that the concrete continues to be in good repair. The ground beneath paving slabs will need to be replaced.
- **Soil replacement.** Areas currently laid to lawn, flower beds, vegetable plots, paving or gravel will be excavated to a depth of 600mm (2 feet) and the soil taken away. The bottom and sides of the excavation will be lined with a membrane and clean soil provided. This membrane inhibits soil below mixing with the clean soil and acts as a physical indicator to mark the limit of the new soil, to deter deeper digging.

- 4.2 The consultant has advised that for health and safety reasons residents would need to vacate their mobile home during the works to their plot. This is to protect them from any dust and machinery such as diggers during the work. Also the digging will expose service cables and pipes and could make access in and out of their home difficult for a time, with a 600mm (2 foot) excavation.
- 4.3 The consultant has estimated that the time needed for residents to be out of their home would be 5 working days. This assumes no problems and that works would continue for a while once residents return to their home. Residents have been advised that it would be safer to assume that they would be out of their home for 2 weeks and hopefully it will be less.
- 4.4 The number of temporary homes available will determine the speed at which the works can progress and therefore the overall contract period. Contractors would be unable to commit to a work programme until the weekly availability of vacant properties for them to work on is known. Five temporary properties are considered to be the minimum requirement to allow the contractor to work on at least two properties at the same time and give continuity of work.
- 4.5 Temporary accommodation would need to be fully furnished because mobile homes and park homes have integral white goods and bedroom fittings which could not be removed from homes.
- 4.6 Housing association homes are in short supply in that location and are not furnished. Private rented furnished property is also in short supply.
- 4.7 A favoured solution is to decant residents to another mobile home on the same site. This would avoid furnishing arrangements because they are normally sold as self-sufficient. This would give the added benefits of residents living in the same location compared to a wider displacement leading to additional inconvenience and disruption which could result in higher claims for disbursements. To avoid having to re-open a Housing Revenue Account Government

agreement would be required but it is not anticipated that this would be withheld.

4.8 Mobile homes have been marketed at various prices but based on circa £80k each a budget of £400k would be required to secure 5 homes, assuming willing sellers.

4.9 A letter has been sent to residents (2 June 2006) detailing the current position and the next steps including a questions and answer sheet. The letter also mentioned that some residents may want to stay with friends or relatives during the works in which case we would give them a lodging allowance. The letter also requested those considering selling their mobile home to contact the council. This will be followed up with each resident and Cabinet will be updated on the latest position at the Cabinet meeting.

5. THE NEXT STEPS

5.1 A brief outline of the tasks and approximate timescales are included at Annex A.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 As previously reported to Cabinet the government via DEFRA has a Contaminated Land Capital Projects Programme (CLCPP) available which can grant Supplementary Credit Approvals in support of work which is undertaken to remediate contaminated land. The support is based on increasing a Council's Revenue Support Grant (RSG) sufficiently to allow the repayments on a loan of the accepted sum. **All things being equal** there would be no net cost to the Council in relation to the amount accepted by the government over a period of years.

6.2 Each claim from the Council will have a technical and value for money appraisal carried out by the Environment Agency, on behalf of DEFRA. The first claim has been submitted (£19k) and payment has been recommended by the Environment Agency to DEFRA. DEFRA have standard conditions when granting money, which means that they would make an 'offer' of payment which needs to be accepted by the council along with the funding conditions. DEFRA has advised that they expect to make us an offer of the full amount claimed by the end of June 2006. A second claim is about to be submitted for circa £33k. The Council is also entitled to recover certain administrative costs relating to the project which would otherwise be charged to the Council's revenue accounts. This will create some headroom for funding items that are not recoverable through the extra RSG.

6.3 Cabinet approved a supplementary estimate of £35k for consultancy work on the 12 January 2006. Consultants were invited to quote to draft a remediation strategy and to give costing for future technical assistance based upon the approved method of remediating the land. This was to ensure that the same consultant would advise throughout the project and that future consultancy cost would be within a framework of known costs.

6.4 The lowest priced consultant was above the supplementary estimate for the cost of the work. To avoid delay, and following discussion with

the leader of the council and the executive member for housing, the first part of the work, to draft a remediation strategy, was commissioned which, at £22k, was within the total amount approved by Cabinet.

- 6.5 The second stage of technical assistance will be based on submitted hourly rates. It is estimated that £25k will be required for this stage. These costs are 100% eligible for government grant support.
- 6.6 The cost of employing a surveying consultant to carry out a measured survey of the plots, which is required to inform the specification of works and in support of planning permission is £4k. This cost is anticipated to be 100% grant funded.
- 6.7 The cost of employing a horticulturist to plot the vegetation on individual plots (on the plans from the surveying firm) and to provide cost estimates for replacement of plants to compensate residents is £2k. It is unlikely that this will be grant funded.
- 6.8 The cost of employing a quantity surveyor to estimate the total cost for budget and tendering purposes is £3k. This cost is anticipated to be 100% grant funded.
- 6.9 The mobile homes proposed to be purchased as temporary accommodation would be resold on completion of the works. Mobile homes would be subject to the same market inflation risks and advantages as other homes although there is likely to be continued demand at this lower end of the housing market. There have been a number of sales during the last year indicating willing buyers despite the site being known to be suspected of and latterly known to be contaminated. At the time of sale of the temporary accommodation the land to the plots would have been remediated and publicised. The conveyancing costs for purchase and sale is estimated at £800 for each mobile home. There is a risk that full costs of buying and selling the temporary accommodation would not be recovered. This cost is not eligible for grant funding.
- 6.10 There will be ongoing costs associated with the provision of any form of temporary accommodation whether it be mobile homes or houses for instance safety checks and cleaning between tenancies. These costs will be included in a future report to Cabinet when other costs associated with the carrying out of remedial works are known. These costs are unlikely to be eligible for grant funding.
- 6.11 Residents will not be required to pay rent and council tax on the temporary accommodation in addition to continuing to pay ground rent and council tax on their own plot as this would be inequitable. The cost of Council Tax would be circa £6k. Whilst it would be possible to recharge electricity and other fuel charges for the short period each tenant would be in the temporary accommodation this would have a high administration overhead and the sums involved (circa £30 per tenant) should be covered by the Council as a gesture of goodwill.

6.12 Financial summary

It is not possible to accurately forecast the full financial impact of the scheme at this stage as various tasks are required to be completed before even the detailed specification for the main contract can be finalised. However, subject to the following assumptions, it is likely that the net cost to the Council of the whole project will not be too significant:

- The mobile homes for temporary accommodation can be sold for around the purchase price.
- Government Supplementary Credit Approvals are issued for those elements of the cost that are anticipated above together with the main contract for remedial works and relevant administrative costs.
- The Government Revenue Support Grant scheme is not amended to the Council's disadvantage.

Approval is required to the following costs to allow the next stage of the project to proceed:

CAPITAL COSTS	2006/07
	£,000
Acquisition of mobile homes	400
Conveyancing costs	4
Scientific consultancy stage 2	25
Surveying Consultancy	4
Quantity Surveyor	3
Planning Permission	1
TOTAL	437

REVENUE	2006/07
	£,000
Horticulturalist	2
Temporary accommodation council tax, electricity and other fuel costs.	8
TOTAL	10

7. SUMMARY

- 7.1 The Regulator has determined that 46 of the 50 plots require contaminated land remediation works. The open space does not require remediation works.
- 7.2 The Regulator has agreed the land owner's proposed remediation strategy. The specialist scientific consultant has advised that residents need to be moved out of the homes, for health and safety reasons, during the works to individual plots.
- 7.3 The ground works now need to be specified and tendered. There are additional costs that now need to be incurred to progress planning

permission and to tender the works. Grant claims will be made to Government as appropriate.

- 7.4 The estimated cost of the ground works is not yet available and will flow for the next stage of consultancy support and in-house specification.
- 7.5 Based on the assumptions in paragraph 6.12 above it is expected that there will not be a significant net cost to the Council resulting from this unavoidable project.
- 7.6 This report deals with the remediation strategy and pre-tender preparations for the main remedial works. A future report will deal with the budget requirements for the remedial ground works.
- 7.7 Cabinet are asked to approve the additional finance to progress the required unavoidable works.

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 That the report be noted.
- 8.2 That Cabinet approve a supplementary capital estimate of £437k and supplementary revenue estimate of £10k to fund the works necessary to progress the next stage of the project of seeking tenders.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Section 78A)


DETR Circular 02/2000 [Chapter A of Annex 3 and Part 4 of Chapter B of Annex 3]

Cabinet Reports, 3 November 2005 and 12 January 2006

Contaminated Land Survey

Notification of contaminated land

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BRIEF PROGRAMME AND APPROXIMATE DATES

Consultants to survey plots	June 2006
Specification of the works	June/July 2006
Seek Planning Permission	July/August 2006
Select contractors and tender the works	July/August 2006
Cabinet approvals. Select successful contractor and enter into contract	September 2006
Contractor commences works	October 2006
Contractor completes works	April 2007

Notes:

- a) The programme is an indication of the steps to be taken and is not comprehensive.
- b) The timing of activities is indicative and will be subject to change. The duration of site works is dependent on the amount of temporary accommodation being available and the cooperation of residents.