



Sheltered Housing - Getting Better, Getting Fit for the Future



Executive Summary - July 2015

1. Introduction

1.1 Stroud District Council commissioned Ark to carry out an in-depth review of its sheltered housing portfolio to assess the viable options for achieving a sustainable sheltered housing service and to advise on a modernisation strategy. The review involved a number of carefully sequenced steps including:

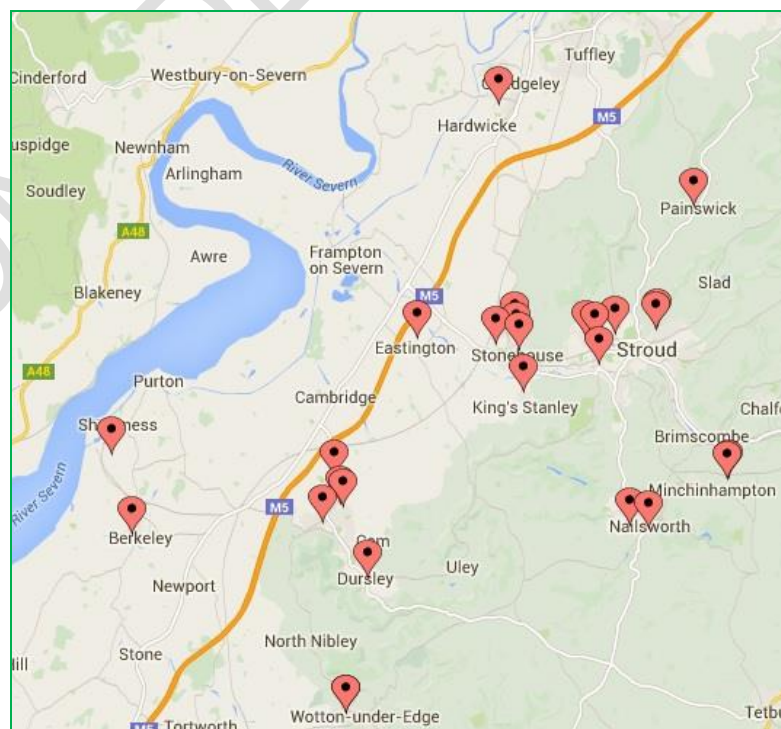
- A 'document review' of the Council's plans and those of key stakeholders, including Gloucestershire County Council, to understand strategic context;
- A review of stock information including investment plans and forecasts, repairs history and void times and costs;
- Undertaking on-site inspections of the schemes to assess its physical characteristics, the scheme's setting and neighbourhood surroundings;
- Reviewing the 'market' - the location of alternative 'competing' provision and likely demand for sheltered housing in the future; and
- Considering the available options and producing a preferred option for each scheme that forms part of an overarching strategy.

2. Scheme profile

2.1 The Council's sheltered housing stock consists of 788 homes in 28 schemes. Almost all the schemes are purpose built and all are at least 25 years old. Over 40 per cent was built over 45 years ago, in the 1960s.

2.2 The stock at an individual scheme level is diverse. Half the schemes comprise of purpose built blocks containing solely flats, while almost a third (32 per cent) comprises a combination of both flats and bungalows. Four schemes (14 per cent) contain just bungalows.

2.3 In terms of size, almost three quarters of the homes have one bedroom. Bedsits account for around 11 per cent and bungalows account for almost 40 per cent of the stock. Only 5 per cent of homes have more than one bedroom. The distribution of the schemes across the district is shown below:

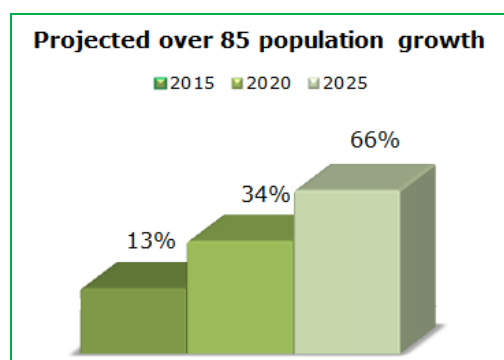
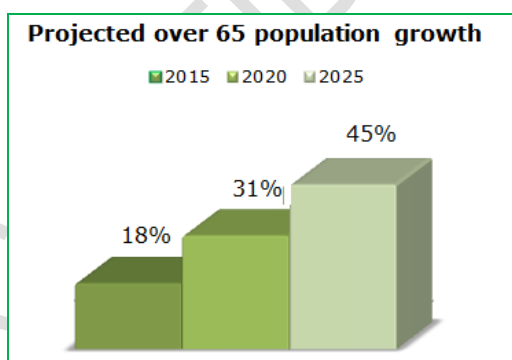


3. Resident profile

- 3.1 Demographic changes means that sheltered housing tenants are increasingly diverse with a much wider range of expectations, needs and ages. Sheltered housing tenants in 2015 are older and frailer than those who lived in the schemes when originally built – often living with dementia or chronic ill-health. For example, 11 schemes have more than 10 per cent of the residents aged over 90 while nine schemes have more than 40 per cent of residents aged over 80.
- 3.2 Alongside demographic changes, allocation policies mean that younger people are moving into sheltered housing, some having no care or support needs but others have complex needs, such as substance misuse or with a history of homelessness. Stroud has 3 schemes where more than 10 per cent of residents are aged under 60.
- 3.3 These ‘imbalances’ make it harder to provide a service that meets all tenants needs and aspirations. Willow Road - a scheme with 24 units serves as an example of this trend. This scheme has over a quarter of residents over 80 and a quarter under 60. Interestingly over 16 per cent of residents are currently working.

4. The local housing market

- 4.1 Stroud district has a population of 112,779 (2011 census) of which 21,977 (around 20 per cent) are aged 65 and over – higher than the Gloucestershire average. The population has increased by 5 per cent in the last decade with the number of over 65s expected to increase by over 60 per cent by 2031.
- 4.2 Most UK household growth is driven by older people. Overall, 41.0 per cent of households in Stroud are made up of only older people (aged 55 or over) and a further 11.7 per cent contain both older and non-older people. Older people in Stroud are slightly more likely than average to live in social rented housing.
- 4.3 Analysis carried out by GCC in 2012 on the need for older people’s services identified significant projected growth in the 65+ and 85+ populations over the next 10 years (shown below).



- 4.4 In Stroud a significant source of growth in household numbers is the projected increase in the number of single people of pensionable age by 78.5% and 2+ pensioner households by 52.9%. This in part reflects Stroud’s appeal to older people. For example, about a third (31 per cent) of market demand across the Stroud and Dursley area originates from retired households.
- 4.5 In total there are 844 households registered for accommodation suited to older households on the Gloucestershire Homeseeker database - 493 where the head of

household is aged over 65 and a further 351 in the 55-64 age bracket. Over half (58 per cent) of the 65+ group specifically require ground floor accommodation. This means that almost 6 out of every 10 'typical' applicants for sheltered housing (aged 65+) would not wish to be housed in first floor flats at a number of the Council's homes for example, at Glebelands, Ringfield Close and Jenner Court.

- 4.6 Overall, we believe that there are over 2000 sheltered homes serving Stroud. This figure includes other 'competing' schemes that fall within a natural catchment area that goes beyond the postcode and Stroud's geographical boundaries.
- 4.7 The level of competing provision is very high in some areas. For example, in the GL2 area in the north which includes parts of the Gloucester urban area including Hardwicke, the Council's stock consists of less than 10 per cent of the available provision for rent. Over 30 per cent of sheltered housing provision that may serve residents in the district is found in this postcode area. In addition, competing provision is high in the GL5 postcode area covering Stroud and GL6 which includes Nailsworth and Minchinhampton.

5. Communication and Consultation

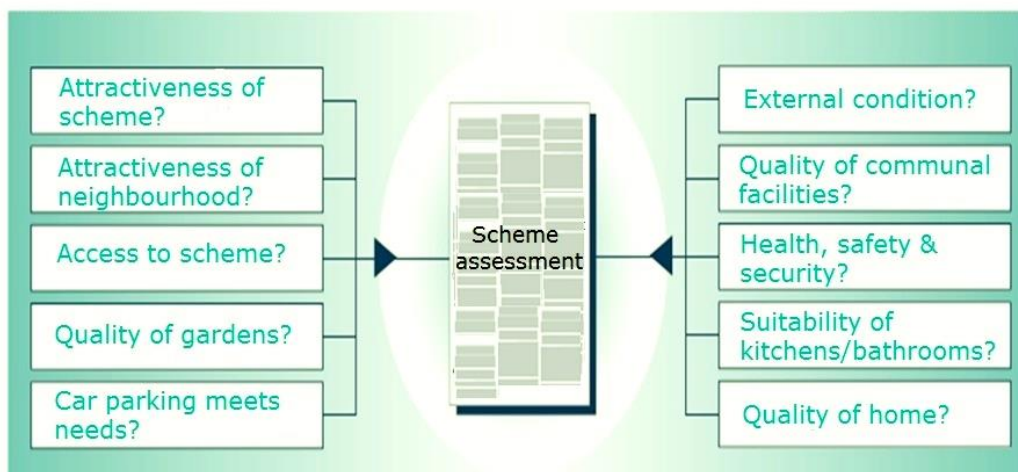
- 5.1 As part of any review of this nature one of the major challenges is to engage with all the stakeholders in an appropriate and timely way. The Council's 'Older Persons Housing Project Board' decided it was best to defer detailed consultation until the outcomes of the review were completed and 'at risk' schemes identified. In this way, we will be able to talk to residents, their families/advocates in a more informed and constructive way, encouraging greater ownership and empowerment of residents and in turn leading to increased satisfaction and individual well-being.
- 5.3 Ark also met with some key external and internal stakeholders over the course of our assignment. The key findings from the consultation are set out in the main report.

6. Asset performance

- 6.1 Stroud provided void data for the last three years for each of the schemes. This allowed us to review the performance of the schemes from a number of perspectives.
- 6.2 Our key findings are as follows:
- Repair numbers and costs too high in some schemes
 - Void costs in small number of schemes consistently high
 - Turnover in some schemes over 20 per cent
 - 'Demand' problems in some schemes (bedsit and unit size)
 - Void times can be too long and some schemes have long-term voids
 - The Council needs to ensure its plans are based on robust stock condition data

7. Scheme Assessments

- 7.1 The most significant stage of this review was the assessment of the schemes. This involved reviewing the asset performance data and local housing market information collected. Most importantly, this stage was informed by an on-site inspection and discussions with local staff.
- 7.2 Each scheme inspection involves an appraisal of the schemes from a number of perspectives illustrated in the figure below.



7.3 Schemes were categorised using a simple traffic light (Red/Amber/Green) system to reflect the degree of 'risk' they present to Stroud's ongoing business. The breakdown of results is shown below:

Category	Scheme	Number of Homes
RED	Cambridge House, Dryleaze Court, Glebelands, Ringfield Close, Willow Road (5 schemes)	173 homes – (57 of 86 bedsits) 22 per cent of homes
RED/AMBER	Burdett House (1 scheme)	25 homes (6 bedsits) 3 per cent of homes
AMBER	Archway Gardens, Ashcroft House, Chapel Lane, Concord, George Pearce House and Trinity Drive, Grange View, Grove Park Road, Jenner Court, Malvern Gardens, Sherborne House, Springfields Court, The Beeches, Vizard Close (13 schemes)	336 homes 43 per cent of homes
GREEN	Ashwell House, Broadfield Road, Draycott, Dryleaze House, Hamfallow Court, Hazelwood, The Corriett, St Nicholas Court, Walter Preston Court (9 schemes)	254 homes 32 per cent of homes

7.4 The recommendations based on the findings are that:

- 13 schemes including almost half of homes are retained in the longer term in their current form to continue providing older people's housing. These should benefit from improvements such as:
 - Improving communal entrance, lounge and garden;
 - creation of scooter stores and improving car parking; and
 - Lift installation where practicable
- 5 schemes are improved for an alternative use. These schemes are not suited to specialist older people's housing. However, they are probably sustainable as 'age-exclusive or 'age preferred' for people aged 50+.
- 3 schemes should be remodelled for continued older peoples use. To ensure these schemes are fit for the future the Council needs to invest in remodelling to

address problems around the quality of the 'offer'. In this way, the modernised schemes will better meet the needs of older people and ensure they are sustainable in the longer-term. Typical works proposed include:

- Remove bedsits and improve space standards;
 - Introduce some 2 bed accommodation; and
 - Maximising return by converting 'specialist' facilities or other assets
- One scheme should be remodelled for alternative use. In this case the scheme, Chapel Lane, is best suited to return to more general needs provision - probably 'age-exclusive' for people aged 50+. Opportunities for redevelopment to provide additional units and revenue returns should also be explored on this site.
 - 6 schemes should be decommissioned as older people's housing. The performance and quality of these schemes is poor and remodelling to meet modern and future needs is not an economic or practical solution. Our presumption is that most of these sites could form part of the Council's active development programme although a more detailed feasibility study is needed to make an informed decision on redevelopment or disposal.

7.5 Ark has completed a breakdown by scheme of the outline costs to deliver a programme flowing from the preferred option. The total cost is **£4,678,800** which captures the improvements or remodelling identified and associated fees. The Council should test the proposed capital costs, unit changes and revenue impacts of the programme with its HRA Business Plan in order better to gauge its capacity to support the proposed changes.

7.6 Below is a 'pen picture' review of the Council's highest risk schemes.

Burdett House, Stonehouse GL10 2LS

Burdett House was built in 1977 in a predominantly residential area approximately 1 mile away from Stonehouse. It consists of 25 homes – 6 small bedsits, 10 one person flats, (8 can accommodate two people) and 9 one bed bungalows of which 3 are big enough for two people. The flats and bungalows are in a linked block with 8 properties in a lower section away from the main scheme and communal areas.

Car parking is satisfactory but the scheme is not served by a local bus service. This means that some residents (over a quarter of whom are over 80) find it difficult to access local amenities (shops, GPs, PO etc.) and relevant activities.

Access around the scheme is difficult for some less mobile residents. There is no scooter store and the site is sloping. Access to communal facilities for lower section residents is via an external path or a stairlift in the main corridor.

The overall quality of accommodation at Burdett House is poor – although homes have benefitted from improvements the bedsits are small and relatively unpopular. Although there is little 'competing' provision the area is well-served by alternative Council accommodation. These factors contribute to very long void times and high level of refusals.

The number and cost of repairs raised each year appear satisfactory. The communal lounge, although well used has an unwelcoming 'institutional' feel.



Categorisation for Action: Red/Amber
Preferred Option: Redevelop/Dispose

Cambridge House, Dursley GL11 4AZ

Cambridge House is in Dursley in a residential area close to the town centre. It consists of 20 homes - 18 one-bed bungalows, 4 of which can accommodate two people and 2 bedsits. The former wardens' flat has been converted to create two first floor flats. It was built in 1962 with bungalows arranged as a long terrace accessed off a rear open walkway.

The scheme is not popular and 'lettability' is difficult despite being set in an attractive site that is well-maintained and well located for easy access to local amenities. The décor, fixtures and fittings in the communal lounge and kitchen are dated.

There is a high number of long-standing residents with a third over 80 and with 15 per cent over 90. Despite this, the turnover of tenancies and the number of refusals are high. The most common reasons given for refusals are that the property or area is unsuitable or the home is too small.

The overall design and construction falls well below modern standards. Homes are often small, badly arranged with poor natural lighting and insulation. The number of repairs appears satisfactory but repair costs are relatively high which may reflect the age and construction of the scheme.



Categorisation for Action: Red
Preferred Option: Redevelop/Dispose

Drylease Court, Wotton-under-Edge GL12 7BA

Drylease Court was built in 1969 in an attractive residential area close to the town centre and local amenities. There are 63 homes in total. 21 one-bed bungalows, (18 big enough for two people), 21 one-bed flats, 3 two-bed flats and 18 small bedsits.

Drylease Court benefits from close proximity to a range of local shops and other amenities. However, access to and from the town is difficult for some residents due to a very steep hill. Despite this, there is no scooter store and limited car parking. This is particularly important as over a third of existing residents are over 80.

Drylease Court's biggest weakness is the poor quality of accommodation. There is a high concentration of bedsits which are small and difficult to let. The scheme itself is relatively unattractive with some evidence of under investment in maintenance and decorative repair.

The number of repairs carried out and spend on repairs and voids are in line with the expected benchmark but arguably lower than the scheme needs. Some homes do not currently meet the Decent Homes Standard and some first floor flats are not served by a lift. Consequently, Drylease Court has 18 long-term voids with an average void time of over 850 days.



***Categorisation for Action: Red
Preferred Option: Redevelop/Dispose***

Glebelands, Cam, Dursley, Gloucestershire, GL11 5NE

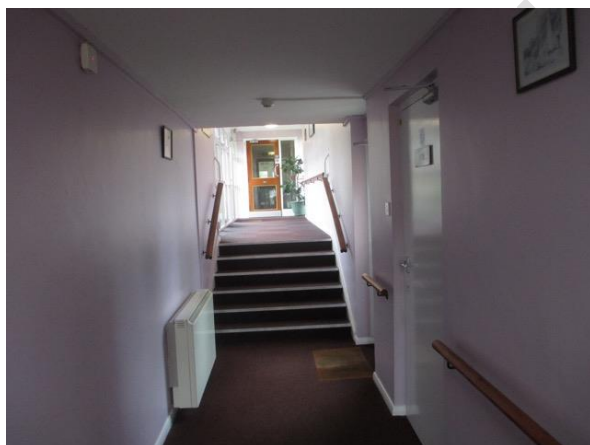
Glebelands was built in 1969 and comprises 40 homes of which 23 are bedsits. There are 12 one-bed flats mostly big enough for two people, four two-bedroom flats and 1 one-bed bungalow which can accommodate two people.

The scheme is in a good location, close to the town centre which has lots of amenities including a nearby medical centre. The location does mean that car parking at times can be difficult. A range of communal facilities are provided although they need updating to make them more appealing.

The scheme's sloping topography and layout with connecting corridors and steps can make access difficult for some residents (over a quarter are over 80). There is no lift access to the first floor or a suitably sited scooter store.

These issues contribute to a high number of refusals, long-term voids and some very long void times. Turnover in the scheme is also very high which is likely to be a reflection of the large number of small bedsits.

The number of repairs carried out is in line with the expected benchmark and the data suggests repairs spend is very low. The reliability of this data should be reviewed as we do not believe that all homes currently meet the minimum Decent Homes Standard.



***Categorisation for Action: Red
Preferred Option: Redevelop/Dispose***

Ringfield Close, Nailsworth GL6 0HY

Ringfield, Close (including Tanners Piece and Upper Park Road) was built in 1963 in a largely residential area. The split site comprises 26 homes made up of 16 flats, 4 of which have two bedrooms and 10 bungalows, 2 of which have two bedrooms.

All the homes are pebble-dashed Reema 'Hollow-land' – a "non-traditional" construction form built to address the acute housing shortage in the post-war era.

The properties are 'as built' with patch repairs and some remedial work carried out to sustain their ongoing use.

Inevitably, these homes experience a very high level of repairs and spend. This presents a number of risks to the Council and will continue to do so without significant investment to protect the structure and fabric of homes.

The properties are spacious and in a popular location. The large communal lounge is regularly used. However, turnover of tenancies is high. Car parking is insufficient for resident's needs, there is no lift access to first floor flats and the scooter store does not meet modern standards.



Categorisation for Action: Red
Preferred Option: Redevelop/Dispose

Willow Road, Stonehouse GL10 2DS

Willow Road comprises 1 one-bed (2-person) flat and 23 one bed bungalows, some small studio-style and 10 that can accommodate two people. It was built in 1965 and has a diverse resident population with over a quarter of residents over 80 and a quarter under 60.

The scheme has an unusual arrangement – sitting as an 'island' at the centre of a relatively unpopular housing estate surrounded by roads on all sides.

The location means that some residents may feel concerned about safety and security. In addition, access to local shops and amenities is difficult for some residents (about 10- 15 minutes' walk to nearest bus stop, GP and Post Office).

The bungalows themselves form a linked triangular shape with the communal facilities including a relatively small lounge easily accessed at the centre.

Homes often have narrow doorways with raised entrance thresholds. Some of the homes suffer from disrepair and need investment in external elements such as fascias, soffits and windows.

Tenancy turnover is high and the smaller bungalows can be hard to let.



Categorisation for Action: Red
Preferred Option: Redevelop/Dispose

8. Recommendations

8.1 To assist the Council we would make the following interim recommendations subject to further discussion and scoping with the Council.

- Consider the draft report and the findings
- Begin process to conduct the design feasibility work
- Work with residents to set the 'Stroud standard' for sheltered housing and improvement and remodelling plans
- Work with partners to improve local knowledge on 'demand'
- Improve financial performance and make best use of assets by:
 - understanding stock condition, unit costs and lifecycles
 - Address long-term voids and reduce 'avoidable' turnover
- Further improve service quality and efficiency by:
 - Fully understanding service charges
 - Explore opportunities around hub activities
- Develop a clear communication plan