

## Council

08 July 2025

## Part 1 - Public

## Matters for Decision



Cabinet Member                                      Councillor Robin Betts, Cabinet Member for Housing, Environment and Economy

Responsible Officer                                      Eleanor Hoyle, Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Report Author    Linda Hibbs, Head of Housing and Health

## Bluebell Hill Temporary Accommodation Project

### 1        **Summary and Purpose of Report**

- 1.1        This report provides a capital plan evaluation for the Bluebell Hill temporary accommodation project and seeks Member approval for the associated budget.

### 2        **Corporate Strategy Priority Area**

- 2.1        Improving housing options for local people whilst protecting our outdoor areas of importance.
- 2.2        Delivering a temporary accommodation scheme on a previously utilised piece of land allows the Council to mitigate the cost of providing temporary accommodation, have management control of temporary accommodation within the borough and does not require the development of a greenfield site.

### 3        **Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- 3.1        APPROVE the capital plan evaluation for the temporary accommodation project at Bluebell Hill.

### 4        **Introduction and Background**

- 4.1        One of the stated aims in the Council's Housing Strategy 2022-2027 is to 'minimise the use of nightly paid accommodation to manage temporary accommodation costs and seek alternative provision'. The Strategy specifically mentions that the Council will 'explore alternatives to nightly paid temporary

accommodation and ways to help households secure suitable alternative accommodation, for example purchasing property or developing provision, and leasing schemes' and will 'use Council and Registered Provider options for temporary accommodation where possible.'

- 4.2 As per the decision made by Cabinet on the 04 April 2023, Blue Bell Hill commuter car park was closed and the site secured to prevent any pedestrian and vehicular access; and future opportunities for alternative use of the site has been explored with Kent County Council.
- 4.3 To explore potential delivery of the Bluebell Hill car park site for temporary accommodation (TA) a feasibility assessment report was undertaken by Bloomfields.
- 4.4 A pre-planning enquiry was made in September 2024 as part of the feasibility work. The Planning Officer advised the proposal could be considered acceptable on balance provided that a range of points and policy considerations are adequately met; key points are impact on the National Landscape and addressing site restraints such as noise and air quality. A number of surveys around key site issues have been completed to feed into the project.
- 4.5 On 03 June 2025 Cabinet agreed that the Bluebell Hill car park site be allocated for temporary accommodation delivery. The procurement approach of seeking a two-stage design and build tender was also approved with associated timetable.

## 5 Proposal

- 5.1 The proposed approach is to procure a contractor to deliver a modular housing scheme at Bluebell Hill on the basis of the proposed approach in the Bloomfields feasibility study.
- 5.2 Members of Housing & Planning Scrutiny Select Committee and Cabinet have seen a draft capital evaluation report as part of the previous reporting on this project however attached at **Annex A** is the final version. Members should note the partnership funding for this project has reduced from £5,096,663 to £4,670,663 as the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) and revenue reserve for capital schemes funding has been updated to allow for commitment to the resettlement programme. Members will recall that the provision of resettlement properties to enable sustainable settled housing to those on the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) so that they can build new lives in the UK, find employment and integrate into communities is integral to the LAHF round 3 programme. Local authorities have to commit to this provision in order to access funding for temporary accommodation provision.
- 5.3 Within the Capital Plan Evaluation and since being reported into Housing & Planning Scrutiny Select Committee and Cabinet the revenue impact section has

also been updated to allow for estimated staffing costs and to demonstrate the potential revenue saving of £157,500.

## **6 Other Options**

- 6.1 No other Council owned sites have been identified for potential use for Temporary Accommodation. To purchase a site would likely render any business case undeliverable.

## **7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 7.1 The funding for this project is identified within the Capital Plan Evaluation.

## **8 Risk Assessment**

- 8.1 There are a number of key risks to this project as identified in previous reports including LAHF timescales, delivery skills and capacity, planning approval, KCC covenant, mitigation on site of environmental impacts and funding. Where possible mitigation measures are in place. A full project risk register is being developed to meet the Council's recently adopted project management standards.

## **9 Legal Implications**

- 9.1 It is proposed that a Design and Build Contract is utilised to manage delivery of this project. This will be included in the procurement pack for bidders, which will be prepared with advice from the Procurement Partnership and Legal.
- 9.2 The Head of Property and Administrative Services is now engaging with the Property team at KCC regarding the restrictive covenant in place on the site.

## **10 Consultation and Communications**

- 10.1 A wider public communication strategy is being developed and will be implemented from June 2025.

## **11 Implementation**

- 11.1 An officer project group has been established for this project, chaired by the Head of Housing & Health and including Housing and Property officers. The project is reviewed via the Housing Portfolio Officer Group, which has oversight of the programme of activity to develop the Council's Temporary Accommodation Portfolio and is also reviewed via the Corporate Property Delivery Group, which oversees all large capital projects relating to Property. This approach has ensured that colleagues in relevant operational and corporate teams are inputting at key project stages and robustly reviewing the project approach.
- 11.2 Formal reporting into Members will take place as the project progresses. In addition to these opportunities for the project to be scrutinised, the responsible Cabinet Members will be briefed on a regular basis.

## 12 Cross Cutting Issues

### 12.1 Climate Change and Biodiversity

12.1.1 Adaptation and resilience have been considered.

12.1.2 Climate change advice has not been sought in the preparation of the options and recommendations in this report. Ecology and Biodiversity reports are being completed as part of the current package of survey work.

### 12.2 Equalities and Diversity

12.2.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

### 12.3 Other If Relevant

- Procurement
- Business Continuity / Resilience

12.3.1 Procurement options have been reviewed with the Procurement partnership.

12.3.2 The ongoing revenue cost to the Council of providing Temporary Accommodation is a significant risk to the financial stability of the Council.

Background Papers	None
Annexes	Annex 1 – Capital Plan Provision