

Item No. 1	Classification: Open	Date: 9 March 2006	Meeting Name: Regeneration and Resources Scrutiny
Report title:		Decant Process	
Ward(s) or groups affected:			
From:		Strategic Director of Housing Strategic Director of Regeneration Assistant Director of Education	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the report be noted.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Schedule of key events

Heygate

- January 2000 - Southwark Land Regeneration (SLR) adopted as preferred partner
- May 2000 – Co-operation agreement drafted. Decision to stop reletting
- April 2002 – Relationship with SLR formally ended by Ratification Committee
- June to December 2002 - Initial Housing Needs Survey
- April 2003 – Development Framework agreed by Executive
- March 2004 – Overall scheme agreed by Executive – status of Supplementary Planning Guidance
- May 2004 - Decant Policy agreed by Executive – in addition early leaseholder acquisitions commenced
- February 2005 – Leaseholder Policy agreed by Executive
- July 2005 – RSL Partner appointment agreed by Executive

Aylesbury

- September 2005 – redevelopment of Aylesbury agreed by Executive.

Wooddene

- December 1998 – SEI programme agreed by housing Committee
- January 2000 – SEI decision for Wooddene – demolition agreed by Strategic Committee / Council
- May 2002 – reletting stopped
- July 2003 – Exception to Decant Policy agreed for Wooddene by Executive
- June 2004 – Decant start agreed

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Council's policies

a) Communications with residents

Heygate

Communication about scheme has taken place over a long span, but many Heygate residents refer to the 'false start' occasioned by the protracted but unsuccessful relationship with Southwark Land Regeneration. Most useful media have been: Heygate Newsletters (in addition to wider Elephant & Castle Newsletters), Exhibitions for Heygate residents, Standing exhibition material in Area Office and face-to-face contact through household referencing and registration process. For newsletters and exhibitions, feedback from the earlier material was an overwhelming desire for information on timetable. The phasing for the scheme has still not yet been established, but the use for some time of an outline phasing plan and development timetable has given some comfort to residents. Concerns are many and varied e.g. the desire to move quickly and resettle in new home, or to stay in place for a defined time and then to move elsewhere maybe in response to schooling and childrens' ages. It is clearly stated that the information is in outline and subject to change, and sometimes this point can be overlooked, but its value seems to outweigh the occasional difficulty that can arise from it not being 'set in stone'.

Information about the council owned sites to be developed by Housing Associations for Heygate residents was used mainly in exhibition material after the framework for development was adopted. Expanded material has since then been used in the rehousing information pack issued to residents. The pack also contains information about the policy option of a relet Council property; the pack is currently being updated to include information on Southwark Homesearch.

Aylesbury

As with Heygate, there has been a large amount of communication with residents, but once again the scheme suffers from having a long history, and although there is a fresh start, it will take time to develop understanding and trust in the process. Newsletters are the main vehicle currently, but there will need to major set pieces, such as masterplanning, and procurement of partners around which to structure communication about the scheme. An outline phasing plan has been produced to inform the evaluation of the scheme's viability, and it is proposed that this be used for communications purposes. It will also assist with decisions about investment and reletting until the masterplanning process develops more information.

Although some parts of scheme development have progressed as far as the Heygate early sites, the overall approach has still to be put in place. An update report is being prepared for the 14th March '06 Executive. The approach depends on a number of contributions: agreeing policy for decant, policy for leaseholders, establishment of phasing plan or at least confirmation that the scheme in the SouthWest corner, arrangements to provide new housing supply off estate and at Boyson Road / Aylesbury Day Centre for Aylesbury residents. Very little information on the replacement sites has yet been made available.

Wooddene

As essentially a decant and disposal scheme, with all the decant capacity being provided by the general stock, Wooddene differs from Heygate and Aylesbury. However, it also differs in so far as the decant phase is active now. Communication about a wider scheme, delivery of replacement housing etc has not been relevant. Although newsletters and meetings have been used as communication tools, as a decant scheme, the individual contact through referencing and rehousing has been the main method of communicating with residents. Although a largely demand-led approach, this method also needed to be proactive with some households.

This scheme has no identified sites for housing supply; therefore communication on this issue has not been relevant.

b) Security and services

There are a number of primary issues that are repeated within each scheme that by their nature require a planned management response. The area offices that have responsibility for these schemes must have protocols in place in order to effectively manage the projects.

These are summarised as follows:

- **Day to Day Service provision**

This captures services such as

- Cleaning and ground maintenance – These services must be maintained to the standard of permanent properties but to include the risk of increased levels of bulk waste and furniture caused by out-going residents or opportunist people who target the estate for the disposal of waste.
- Engineering services – This includes lifts, heating, ventilation systems and other electrical services. These are all costly to maintain and with a limited “life” expectancy difficult decisions have to be made about repairing or renewal of appliances which will be made redundant once blocks are decanted.
- Estate Lighting – As blocks become empty the lighting generated from homes into communal areas reduces and an increased reliance on the communal lighting is required. An awareness of this factor will lead to increased lighting being provided to compensate for associated loss of lighting.
- General maintenance – providing clear guidelines to staff on the ordering of work. Such guidelines to be known in advance by residents. Such work to give value for money.
- Pest Control – Monitoring for increased levels of rodents, clearing empty homes of rubbish and likely food for pests, and reviewing any block baiting treatments as the scheme develops.

- **Visibility**

Housing staff will undertake day to day inspections within the scheme to identify housing management issues. This is the normal task undertaken by Southwark as a landlord. The presence needs to be supplemented where felt appropriate by support from:

- The warden services
- The metropolitan police
- Contractor services.

This visibility will provide re-assurance to residents that the area that it is not forgotten and that services will continue to be maintained.

- **Responses to risk of vandalism/squatters/crime**

There is a significant risk that as estates/blocks are decanted and fewer residents are in occupation that low level crime and anti-social behaviour will increase. Areas of concern are;

- Vandalism – graffiti and the disposal of rubbish and furniture is likely to occur.
- Squatting – Empty homes will be a target for squatters and other criminal elements to use the dwellings for a range of purposes.
- Crime – There has been a link established between squatting and low level crime which on occasions is linked to serious crime. The remaining residents are particularly vulnerable to this.

In addition to the measures described above a strategy should be in place to:

- Improve security of empty homes by grills or other measures to deter squatting.
- Remove services and other essential appliances to discourage squatting.
- Increase patrols on the area and this should include evaluating the merits of deploying security guards.
- Working with the police to prevent crime and to tackle criminal activity within the area.

c) Options for leaseholders

In previous schemes, there has been a single approach for leaseholders in regeneration schemes ie acquisition by the Council of the leasehold interest in properties, with leaseholders securing replacement accommodation for themselves. Even where a Compulsory Purchase Order has not been made, the Council operates under the statutory framework as though a CPO is in place. This prescribes the terms on which properties can be purchased and other compensation given. Negotiations are therefore based on open market valuations, with the Council covering the costs of leaseholders' valuation and legal advisors. There is also provision for Home Loss (10% of value for resident leaseholders), and disturbance payments. If leaseholders are demonstrably unable to secure alternative accommodation on the basis of the compensation due to be paid by the Council, policy allows a rehousing provision to be made by the Council. This is the general approach applied to earlier schemes and to Wooddene. For Heygate, the policy for leaseholders agreed by Executive in February 2005 determines that the offer of a tenancy will be on the same basis as tenants being rehoused ie a choice between becoming a RSL tenant within one of the new early housing developments or within the Council's existing stock.

The Heygate policy contains further options for leaseholders, as follows:

- Buying a shared ownership unit. This option relates to shared ownership units developed as part of the Elephant and Castle scheme, and would

involve the Council acquiring the leaseholder's current property for market value plus a loss payment plus other disturbance items. The compensation paid would be transferred wholly into a percentage equity ownership (typically around 50%) of a shared ownership unit provided by a Housing Association with rent being paid on the balance equating to about 3% of the outstanding equity. In order to qualify for this ownership option the leaseholder household would have to meet certain earnings criteria. Generally priority for access to shared ownership schemes is given to tenants of RSLs or the Council, rather than to existing leaseholders.

- Buying a retained equity unit. This would involve the transfer of the compensation into a share of the equity in a new property being built as part of the scheme. No rent would be payable on the outstanding equity, rather a charge would be put on the property so that at the time of a future sale the percentage of outstanding equity would be recovered by the housing provider. The percentage that would have to be acquired will be the subject of negotiation with the RSLs throughout the early housing sites procurement process, but unlike the shared ownership option the percentage that would have to be acquired is likely to be above 80% as no rent would be received by the RSL in respect of the equity it retains. The ability of a leaseholder to be able to qualify for this route is dependant on the outcome of the affordability assessment
- Comparative value transaction. This would involve the Council buying the existing leasehold interest at Heygate, and then selling the leaseholder a leasehold interest in an existing void property. Clear criteria will need to be established operate the process

The additional Heygate options for leaseholders have yet to be implemented as part of the scheme.

d) Determining the effects on school populations

Despite the intentions of the Decant Policy 2002, the Council has not yet delivered a scheme where large number of households move at the same stage as new developments are completed. The reality has been individual households making arrangements with schools as decant opportunities have been identified. The Heygate and Aylesbury schemes will bring a new dimension.

Number of tenants still to be decanted

The current occupancy breakdown for the three schemes is as follows:

Heygate – 1212 units

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|-----------------------|-----|
| • Voids | 25 |
| • Voids – temp accomm | 276 |
| • Voids – sheltered | 27 |
| • Leaseholders | 140 |
| • Tenanted | 744 |

Aylesbury – 2759 units	
• Voids for relet	38
• Voids – held	11
• Voids – Bradenham	26
• Leaseholders	471
• Tenanted	2213
Wooddene – 324 units for redevelopment	
• Voids	264
• Voids – temp accomm	16
• Leaseholders	5
• Tenanted	39

Decanting implications for Education

At this stage it is difficult to assess fully the implications for pupils from the main estates where decanting is proposed. This is because we do not yet know where these young people will be accommodated following the decant. Clearly, if the pupils are to be rehoused in new units that are reasonably close to the existing accommodation, as may be the case for a number of pupils on the Heygate, then there are no implications as pupils can continue to attend their existing schools. If pupils are likely to be moved further afield, then much will depend on whether parents wish their children to continue at their existing school, something we would normally wish to encourage given the disruptive nature of children moving schools.

Another consideration is whether pupils living on any particular estate attend schools close to their residence. In the case of the Aylesbury Estate, for example, only 123 of the 362 secondary age pupils attend Walworth School. The remainder already travel a distance, mainly to aided schools, and it is not unreasonable to assume these pupils will continue to travel from any decant sites. A similar situation applies at the Heygate where only 29 of the 75 secondary age pupils attend either Geoffrey Chaucer or Walworth with the remaining travelling, again mainly to aided schools.

Given that secondary pupils are normally expected to be able to travel some distance and the Mayor of London offers free travel to all school pupils, our assessment is that there are no significant issues around secondary pupil's education following the decanting.

For primary age pupils, some of the issues are similar in that a significant proportion of parents choose to place their children in schools slightly further afield because of their desire for an aided school. However, in the Aylesbury 587 of the 816 primary age pupils attend schools close to the estate; the majority of these choosing either Michael Faraday or the Surrey Square schools.

Clearly, the regeneration around the Aylesbury will not result in all the existing pupils being moved at one time and if the majority of residents will be moved to alternative accommodation on the estate as new units are made available then it is unlikely that children's education will be disrupted.

As the decanting proposals become clearer, we will be able to do a more specific assessment of the implications, including considering the need to transport pupils in order to facilitate continuity of education provision. As these schemes will not commence for a while yet and in some cases the pupils will have completed their

education before they are even considered for decanting, we cannot be precise about the need for any special arrangements or the possible costs of this if it is deemed necessary. However, the Education Department is clear that wherever possible, we would want young people to change schools only where it is essential because of a significant family move or they are moving between phases.

Decanting Policy Guidance.

There is no specific written guidance about re decant policy. If a scheme warrants a different approach from general policy, a decision is required by the Executive and the specific scheme approach is set out. This is then reflected in decant information packs, and the consultation process, including individual household referencing. Regular decant meetings take place internally regarding each scheme, involving the relevant officers, to review progress and to ensure adherence to programme/contract dates.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Scrutiny Papers	Scrutiny Team	Carina Kane 020 7525 4393

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Keith Broxup; Paul Evans; Mike Smith	
Report Author	Maurice Soden	
Version	Final	
Dated	28 February 2006	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Borough Solicitor	No	No
Finance Director	No	No
Executive Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional/Community Council/Scrutiny Team	28.02.06	