

Cabinet/Committee:	Tenants' & Leaseholders' Consultative Forum
Date:	11 November 2008
Subject:	INFORMATION REPORT – Estate Services report on Garages
Responsible Officer:	Gwyneth Allen, Division Director Adults & Housing
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Barry Macleod – Cullinane – Portfolio Holder for Adults & Housing
Exempt:	No

## **SECTION 1 – SUMMARY**

This report sets out an update review of garage and other sites, which offer opportunities for development. The report considers the problems associated with garages disrepair, market rents and levels of voids and seeks a discussion on the best use of these areas.

### **FOR INFORMATION**

## **SECTION 2 - REPORT**

2:1 Garages form part of the housing asset portfolio and provide income in the region of £550,000 per annum. These funds form part of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) income and are used to support delivery of housing services. In 2007 - 2008 garage rents were increased to market levels following benchmarking within the borough and comparisons with other London boroughs.

2:2 Although rent increases inevitably lead to some reduction in take up of garages overall income to the HRA has increased. Comparisons with previous years are set out below.

Income to the HRA in the last 3 years is as follows:

- 2006 – 2007 £384,066
- 2007 – 2008 £526,060
- 2008 – 2009 £262,708\* up to 21<sup>st</sup> October 2008<sup>1</sup>

The number of empty garages in the last 3 years is as follows:

- 2006 – 2007 138 empty garages
- 2007 – 2008 233 empty garages
- 2008 – 2009 315 empty garages

Of the 315 empty garages currently void these can be summarised as follows:-

- 147 in disrepair and cannot be let
- 168 empty garages are available for let for which there is little or no demand
  
- A large number of garages are in disrepair and the required funds to bring them back into use are not available.
- Low demand exists in some areas of the Borough,
- Some areas are in generally poor condition, poorly lit and generally run down; car owners are reluctant to leave vehicles in these areas.
- In some instances the level of rent is unaffordable, this is an issue in the current financial climate

2:3 Available funds to repair garages and bring them back into use is limited due to pressures within the repairs budget, The need to charge rents to sustain and support other services charged to the HRA requires that market rents are maintained.

2:4 Three reports featuring elsewhere on the agenda are relevant to HRA garages:

- a) HRA Finance Report
- b) Report on Response Repairs
- c) Review of Community Halls

2:5 These reports provide information on the issues facing the HRA to meet the needs of the local community and achieve increased supply of housing in the borough.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures produced from anite

They draw attention to the financial pressures. In addition Harrow has very high demand for permanent affordable rented housing to.

2:6 Dis-used or no longer viable garage sites provide possibilities for increased supply of new housing opportunities.

2:7 Attached at appendix "A" are 3 tables setting out potential opportunities to develop a number of sites in addition to those that have been assessed as potential for development.

- Table 1 shows sites, which have potential and require further detailed investigation. This is subject to consultation with local residents.
- Table 2 shows other sites, which have some development possibilities and will require further work.
- Table 3 shows sites, which are deemed not suitable for development and therefore will require further detailed consideration to achieve best use.

2:8 Following discussions at TLCF opportunities for development will be explored further and in more detail in parallel with consultation with local residents. Firm proposals for any proposed development will be subject to formal planning applications and partner organisations' committing to fund new construction.

2:9 Subject to individual arrangements the sites shown in appendix "A" have the potential to provide Harrow with much needed new social housing. It is on this basis that the Harrow is keen to use available land for development.

2:10 Each site has been visited and where appropriate a view from planning officers has been sought. The information and comments regarding each site is contained in appendix "A".

2:11 TCF are asked to receive the report as information and to comment on the approach being taken to use available land for potential new housing.

#### 2:12 **Financial Consideration**

At this stage development costs have yet to be identified. The impact of either capital or revenue costs associated with the future of these premises would need to be considered as part of the budget setting process for the HRA.

### **SECTION 3 – FURTHER INFORMATION**

Future reports will be submitted to TCF as progress is made and prior to any council decisions.

## **SECTION 4 - CONTACT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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### **Background Papers:**

The Housing Strategy

The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan