

Rose Meadow, Northwich

Local Lettings Policy



Introduction

This Local Lettings Policy has been developed to deliver sustainable lettings for new build homes for affordable rent at Rose Meadow, Northwich. The allocation of a number of new build homes in a single location over a short period increases risks to both Great Places and the wider community if appropriate and sustainable lettings are not achieved. Great Places therefore proposes to vary the standard allocations criteria for the prioritisation of applicants for these homes.

There are 227 new build homes in this scheme, 24 of which are affordable home ownership properties and 44 of which are for affordable rent. This policy relates only to the allocation of affordable rented homes in the Rose Meadow development through West Cheshire Homes Choice Based Lettings scheme. These properties are located within one small area of the larger estate, therefore forming a new distinct community. The property breakdown is as follows;

Affordable Home Ownership

24 x 3 bedroom homes

Affordable Rent

18 x 1 bedroom apartments

26 x 3 bedroom homes

Context

This policy seeks to complement the West Cheshire Homes Allocations Policy. Applicants for rehousing who meet the criteria set out in the Allocations Policy will be prioritised by the West Cheshire CBL scheme to ensure that the approach is compliant with Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) in providing the greatest priority for those who have Reasonable Preference.

This Local Lettings Policy supports all of the aims of the West Cheshire Homes Allocations Policy, the Affordable Housing Statement, housing strategies and vision.

Great Places is investing heavily in the construction of homes both for rent and for sale in the west Cheshire area. Great Places is delivering an ambitious development programme and must ensure that steps are taken to protect its assets and the communities in which they are located in order to continue to deliver new homes.

Aims & Objectives

- To create a balanced, sustainable community, with a mix of residents successfully managing their tenancies and making a positive contribution to the local area in terms of its socio economic profile and reputation.
- To provide low income working households with improved prospects of accessing an affordable alternative to costly and often unaffordable private rented housing.
- To recognise and reward the valuable contribution made by volunteers and carers.
- To support the Council in its objectives and its statutory duty to offer Reasonable Preference to those in housing need
- To protect the capital investment made by Great Places in the area through the delivery of sustainable tenancies.

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Rationale

In other schemes where Great Places has let homes without the application of additional lettings criteria, and where properties were let solely on the basis of housing need, the results have been damaging. In one new build scheme of 19 homes there were 15 cases of ASB, 3 voids and 7 referrals for tenancy support in the first 18 months. This has occurred because most of the lettings have been made to applicants in the most urgent housing need, and who are therefore often the most complicated, often with complex medical and support needs, very vulnerable households or homelessness and in priority need. A large number of lettings to these groups in a single area can be detrimental to the new tenants, existing tenants, the wider community and the landlord.

Where Great Places has implemented policies similar to this proposal we have experienced few problems. The approach delivers a more sustainable mix of residents from across the rehousing groups. The additional criteria are relaxed for re-lets as the risk of introducing potentially more vulnerable tenants one at a time is more manageable for the landlord and less disruptive to the community. There is much reduced risk to community sustainability at re-let than the initial let of a new build scheme.

What is involved?

At first let all available properties will be advertised on the West Cheshire website to applicants in priority bands A and B, with additional priority for working households, volunteers and carers (defined below). Applicants where all adults are of a pensionable age will not be subject to the additional criteria described. Priority between eligible applicants who meet the specified criteria will be according to the West Cheshire Allocations Policy to ensure that those with the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity to access housing. Adverts for homes will specify the eligibility criteria for each home.

Working households are defined as households in which at least one adult of 18 years or over is employed (full time, part time or zero hours contract) or self-employed. That person must be 18 years or over and work for at least 16 hours per week.

Volunteers must have been volunteering for a continuous period of at least 6 months up to the point of offer. Volunteering must be for a not-for profit organisation or a charity.

Carers are defined as those who provide care and are in receipt of Carer's Allowance.

Where all nominations of applicants who meet the specified additional criteria are exhausted without a successful letting being made, applicants who do not meet the criteria will be considered for the property, in the priority order defined by the West Cheshire Allocations Policy. If necessary this may involve re-advertising properties without additional criteria.

Across all lettings Great Places will aim to achieve a minimum of 50% of lettings to working households.

Re-lets on the scheme will not be subject to any additional criteria unless a further Local Lettings Policy is agreed for re-lets on the scheme. Re-lets will meet the criteria set out in the Affordable Housing Statement – see Appendix A.

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Triggers to Implement Alternative Allocations Approaches

If the approach described above does not deliver a mix of residents to achieve sustainability of the scheme an alternative approach will be implemented. Any decision to move to an alternative approach will only be following discussion with the CBL Team Leader and by mutual agreement.

- Advertising through West Cheshire CBL delivers insufficient bidding levels to allocate the homes available. For example, where there are 10 properties available and only 8 eligible bids are placed.
- Advertising through West Cheshire CBL has provided insufficient demand to enable the application of additional criteria to be effective (e.g. the number of suitable and eligible applicants who have bid for homes is equal to or less than 1.5 times the number of properties advertised) and therefore the Local Lettings Policy is unable to deliver sufficient diversity of new tenants.
- Fewer than 50% of allocations are made to working households.
- There is more than 1 report of significant antisocial behaviour (where legal action is required) being caused by the tenants in the new development, or 3 reports of low level antisocial behaviour. While to some extent we expect to manage cases of antisocial behaviour we would not expect this to occur in the very early stages of a tenancy in a new build scheme. Given the relatively short period over which the new properties are let we would therefore not expect to identify cases of antisocial behaviour.
- There is more than 1 referral to Great Places' General Needs Tenancy Support Service for tenants with vulnerabilities which are creating tenancy management issues. Great Places has limited capacity to support tenants in general needs homes and therefore the number of referrals must remain within manageable limits. We currently provide this type of support to 1% of our customers across all stock and therefore a limit of one referral for the Rose Meadow development is aligned with our expectations of support need.

Alternative Allocations Approach 1

Properties will be advertised to applicants in the housing options band of the West Cheshire Homes CBL. Properties advertised in this way will be subject to additional criteria for working households, volunteers and carers. All applicants will be required to meet the criteria outlined in the Affordable Housing Statement.

Alternative Allocations Approach 2

Properties will be advertised through the 'available now' function of the West Cheshire Homes CBL. This means that properties can be accessed without the need for advertising or bidding cycle, and will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. Properties advertised in this way will be subject to additional criteria for working households, volunteers and carers. All applicants will be required to meet the criteria outlined in the Affordable Housing Statement.

Alternative Allocations Approach 3

Properties will be allocated through a range of mechanisms which may include direct marketing through estate agents or newspaper adverts, Rightmove, or by direct referrals from West Cheshire. Properties advertised in this way will be subject to additional criteria for working households, volunteers and carers. All applicants will be required to meet the criteria outlined in the Affordable Housing Statement.

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This approach will be implemented where the original proposal and the first and second alternative approaches described have not delivered the desired results.

Monitoring and Evaluation

New Build allocations are evaluated internally by Great Places to analyse the outcome of the Local Lettings Policy. This will be a one-off report as this policy relates only to the first lets at this new build development.

Appendix A - Affordable Housing Statement



Rose Meadow -
Affordable Housing S1

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Equality Impact Assessment

1. Is this a key strategic document, major policy or procedure or service change? Examples may include: Homeless Strategy/ Customer Involvement Strategy	YES		NO	
			✓	
2. What impact will your document or service delivery change have on the public or staff, giving particular regard to potential impacts on minority groups? Issues to consider include race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, carers and other socio-economic factors	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	DON'T KNOW
			✓	
3. Please explain your answer: Provide a narrative explaining why you gave the impact rating above.	<p>This policy relates to a small number of new build homes and therefore the impact is low. However it is critical to get the balance of allocations correct in order to protect the reputation of the new scheme and maximise sustainability of new tenancies.</p> <p>This policy has been designed taking into account with findings of the Ealing case law (2016). The policy does not seek to ring-fence properties to applicants based on their economic circumstances, and it includes equivalent priority for workers, volunteers and carers. In this way it ensures equality of access to priority for all potentially vulnerable groups.</p>			

1. If, for question 2 you have answered LOW, there is no need to continue to an Equality Impact Assessment.
2. If, for question 2 you have answered DON'T KNOW, please discuss with a member of the EIA Group who can confirm whether an EIA is required.
3. If you have answered YES to question 1, and you have identified MEDIUM or HIGH impact in 2, you should move on to an Equality Impact Assessment and complete the section below:

If you have completed a full Equality Impact Assessment please provide the following:

What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment? (Q10 from the full EIA form)

As a result of these conclusions what actions (if any) will be included in your business actions and wider review processes? (Q11 from the full EIA form)

If you require any help please contact a member of the EIA group:

EIA@greatplaces.org.uk

Policy Approval Date:	
Equality Impact Assessment Date:	9 th May 2018

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Safeguarding impact	N/A
Policy Review Date:	N/A
Lead Team:	Customer Services
Level of Authorisation Required:	Director