

calling . . .



**All residents of Bishopsfield,
Charters Cross and Gibson
Court**

Bishopsfield, Gibson Court and Charters Cross

News update - May 2009

Harlow Council and East Thames completed a review of your estate at the end of last year. We carried out a survey to look at the condition of the homes and external areas plus extensive consultation with residents. Following this review, it became clear that the stock condition and deprivation issues in the area meant that action was not as pressing as other estates in Harlow. As a result, Housing Committee decided in March that Bishopsfield and Charters Cross should no longer be classified as a short term priority estate. This means options such as the full redevelopment of the area are not being considered.

Having said this, the consultation exercise highlighted a great deal of dissatisfaction amongst council tenants with the condition of their homes. At the same time, the stock condition survey showed that the Council would find it difficult to find the money needed to bring the houses and flats up to the Decent Homes Standard.

During the review, residents raised the idea of transferring the homes to a housing association as a potential means of safeguarding the future of the area and finding the resources needed to bring the homes and area up to high standard. We think that this is a route worth exploring further. This update newsletter sets out the main findings from the recent review and a way forward that we want to follow over the next few months.

Main findings of the review

During the latter part of 2008 we carried out extensive consultation through a mix of surveys, meetings, focus groups and drop-ins.

The main findings of the consultation were as follows:

- Most tenants and owners we spoke to liked living in the area and valued their homes and the area. Many people said that the design of the estate and their homes was unique and special.
- Council tenants were concerned about the condition of their homes and wanted to see them repaired and improved.
- There were concerns about the general maintenance and management of the estate and people said that what was needed was some 'tender loving care'.
- There were concerns expressed about the design and condition of the podium and undercroft garages.
- The recent improvements at Charters Cross were seen as effective, but tenants and owners said that more needed to be done.

The stock condition survey showed that there were no immediate structural problems with both the podium and bungalows that were beyond reasonable repair. It did show, however, that the Council homes fell below the Decent Homes Standard and that bringing them up to standard would need a large amount of money.

Next steps

We found that Bishopsfield and Charters Cross are popular and unique areas valued by many people we spoke to. Our challenge is to build on this and find a solution that achieves the necessary investment to ensure the areas have a sustainable future for the next 30 plus years.

As things currently stand, only stock transfer to a housing association has the potential to do this. For council tenants who transfer, it will mean that rents will be affordable and controlled by government policy to ensure that they converge with council rents for similar properties. Equivalent rights of tenure could be transferred.

The money for repairs and improvements will have to come from rents, but unlike councils, housing associations do not have to pay over money from rents to the government and also they are not subject to the same controls on borrowing money. Work has to be done over the next few months to see how viable stock transfer is.

We also need to look at how sustainable the flats, podium area and undercroft garages will be in the medium to long term.

No transfer proposals will be successful unless they have the support of the council tenants who live in the area. This means that we will want to continue consulting council tenants about the possible transfer of the homes and residents generally about the future management and maintenance of the area. Our first job will be to help set up a residents steering group to work with us on developing the proposals.

In the short-term, all the undercroft garages are being transferred to East Thames and the aim is to move forward with the resident management initiative.

Resident involvement is going to be at the heart of what we do next, both with looking at the future of the estate and upgrading the garages. Our first step will be to work with residents on setting up a local group of residents that will look at these issues. Read more about what we are planning to do about this overleaf.

Setting up a new residents steering group

We now want to work with Harlow Council tenants on possible transfer of the homes and residents generally on the future of the area and the management of the garages.

Our first step is to bring together a number of volunteers who are willing to join a residents' group and work with us over the next few months to develop plans for the area and the garages. This will be alongside a lot of other consultation work we will be carrying out across the area.

On 27th and 28th of May, staff from East Thames and Harlow Council will be calling on all homes in the area to ask your views about the garages and to find out whether you would be willing to join a residents' group. We will be supported in this work by Partners in Change. There are also other ways you might want to get involved and we will ask you about these as well.

If you are out when we call, we will leave short questionnaire for you to fill in and return to us.

Your involvement is important – this is your opportunity to have a say in improvements to the homes and the area.