

Council meeting 23 February 2022
Questions on notice from Members

(1) Councillor Whitaker asked Councillor Dowding:

Given the Derelict Space on Corner of Yorkshire Street as you turn off from Regent Road it is apparent this land has been derelict and left in a poor state since the building was knocked down following a fire a few years ago. It is a consequently a major concern given that we have businesses and people wanting to bring Yorkshire Street back into a place for people to visit so it is essential something positive is done with this land.

Can I ask The Cabinet Member what efforts on The Part of The Council have been done to deal with this derelict land-in relation to tidying this land up and bringing back into use?

Councillor Dowding replied:

The Council has made contact with the landowner who has agreed to clear all the vegetation and resecure the site hoarding. In addition, the landowner has also agreed to obtain professional advice on the matter of the exposed gable wall that has been left in poor condition. The owner has been requested by the Council that this should be progressed within weeks rather than months.

The Council is actively monitoring the situation.

As his supplementary question, **Councillor Whitaker asked:**

Do you agree with me that the community could be given the opportunity to bring it back into use and should there be debate with the local community?

Councillor Dowding replied:

Yes, I agree that this would make an ideal pocket park however there would be land ownership issues and maintenance costs to consider in whether that would be at all possible. Councillor Dowding agreed to look into it further.

(2) From Councillor Pritchard to Councillor Matthews:

The Council has retro fit some Council owned houses. When will we be able to see the data from these improvements to the energy efficiency of these houses?

We are very excited by the completion of the first phase of whole house refurbishment and retrofit works to 19 properties at Mount Avenue on Beaumont. The project was designed and managed by our Repairs and Maintenance Service with remaining properties on this estate due to be completed in the next financial year. Following the success of this scheme, we intend to invest a further £4m in similar projects over the next 4 years.

The potential energy efficiency improvements for tenants and carbon emission reductions are significant. Current estimates envisage an annual reduction of 30% carbon emissions per household. We are currently engaging with Mount Avenue resident to help turn potential savings into reality. To gain a better understanding of energy use tenants have volunteered to take part in a long-term study in partnership with Lancaster University. Over the heating season, devices have been fitted monitoring energy use before and after the works. The data will be collected over the year and the following heating season and will inform the design of future projects, as well as advice to tenants to make energy more affordable, and contribute to carbon reduction ambitions we share. We will of course share the results of this when available.

Council Housing has a target of achieving an EPC 'C' band rating or better for all our properties by 2030. We take a whole house, fabric first approach, undertaking an energy assessment, occupancy survey and condition survey. Any deficiencies in energy performance are identified and an energy plan is generated recommending specific improvement measures specific to that property. Additionally, across our stock we continue to upgrade and install the most energy efficient components. A typical energy loss model of a house demonstrates the benefits of improving the performance of walls, floors and roofs. Energy performance plays a big part in all our procurement decisions, from new doors and windows, gas & electrical appliances, ventilation and depth of insulation.

(3) From Councillor Pritchard to Councillor Matthews:

This could be helpful to the rest of our district, helping people make decisions on improvements to their properties, eg. heat pumps, solar panels, solar water heaters and thermal cladding, are a few things to be considered, so do we have any knowledge of which would make the biggest difference to a property?

Properties should be treated individually or grouped together where we have strong knowledge of property types / components, and there are still many complexities linked to this area of work in terms of technology available, cost of installation, impact on energy bills for residents and access to locally qualified providers. This continues to be an evolving landscape.

Within Council Housing we have undertaken training to bring in-house our energy performance certification and we assess, and design energy improvement works to those properties assessed. For example, by fitting Solar PV panels where the installation will generate the greatest benefit, typically to sheltered accommodation. We are beginning to assess the potential of district heating schemes and have installed our first heat pump with more planned.

However we also appreciate that residents across the district also need support and advice. Our Home Improvement Agency supports older and disabled residents to remain safe, warm and secure in their own homes. Last year the HIA recruited a dedicated Energy Retrofit Technical Officer to assist vulnerable residents receiving Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), to improve the energy efficiency of their homes at the same time. Since last summer over 55 grant applicants have been assisted with a range of measures including, boiler repairs/servicing, new heating systems, replacement window/doors, loft, under floor and cavity wall insulation. The HIA has also secured funding to provide DFG applicants with free energy advice and minor energy improvement measures such as, LED bulbs and draughtproofing.

We are currently working on a business case to establish the options for extending this approach to other householders who want this expert advice on a charged for basis as a trusted provider.

Councillor Pritchard asked, by way of a supplementary question: *You mentioned local providers for insulation and things like that, where would we go to for a list of local providers?*

Councillor Matthews replied that there was a shortage of local providers but she would get a list to Councillor Pritchard.

(4) From Councillor Pritchard to Councillor Matthews:

As a Council, do we have a thermal imaging camera? These are excellent for showing where the heat is being lost from a house.

We recognise thermal imaging is potentially a useful diagnostic, alongside our current assessment techniques described above. We have access to a camera for specific surveys. We use it, for example, to identify cold spots around window and door openings and roof heat loss. Thermal imaging has also been used to diagnose moisture, dampness and leaks to diagnose repairs affecting thermal efficiency.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Pritchard asked: *If we have, could it be used by residents in our district, so they could be better informed about where the heat is being lost from their homes?*

Achieving actual savings depends on energy performance of the building, and to large extent the energy choices made, how residents control their energy use and the habits and routines and of each household. As previously mentioned typical energy loss models of a house demonstrates the benefits of improving the performance of walls, floors and roofs.

In our Council owned homes to help make informed decisions about energy, all new tenants are supported by a visit from our Energy Support Officer, providing energy advice, helping tenants economically use appliances and controls and apply for available grants. We also identify any problems, recommend measures, or make interventions to assist the tenant.

In other properties more vulnerable residents can be supported with advice and interventions via our HIA.