



## RESTORING COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME

Board Meeting – 19 June 2003

### 1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on progress of the Restoring Communities Programme (RCP) which is being co-ordinated, on behalf of the SIP, by the Policy & Projects Section within the Planning & Building Control Division, East Ayrshire Council. In particular, the issue of vacant and derelict property and absentee landlords/owners is addressed.

### 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Restoring Communities Programme is an element of the Community Environmental Improvement Action Plan process and is the main focus of existing staff resources. The RCP aims to tackle the problems of dereliction and decay in the settlements identified as being in most need within the Coalfield Area. The pilot project being carried out in Main Street, Auchinleck is progressing well.

### 3 AUCHINLECK PILOT RCP PROJECT - PROGRESS TO DATE

- 3.1 The Phase 2 consultant study was produced by Ryden in March 2003. The study investigated the organisational, funding and staffing requirements of the RCP and recommended the most appropriate delivery mechanism.
- 3.2 As part of the Phase 2 study, a Town Appraisal for Auchinleck was also undertaken by the consultant in conjunction with community groups and the RCP Regeneration Officer.
- 3.3 To drive forward the RCP, an Officer Working Group, led by Planning & Building Control Division staff, has been set up. This group incorporates relevant key personnel within the Council. At a later stage, a Project Implementation Steering Group will be established consisting of relevant agencies and appropriate community representation.
- 3.4 As part of the RCP, East Ayrshire Council has established a Derelict Property Revolving Fund to assist in addressing the problem of a high concentration of vacant/derelict properties, in private ownership with non-active owners and poor quality environment. Details of the proposed operation of the fund will be the subject of a future report to the Council's Development Services Committee and the SIP Board. In the interim, the pilot project in Auchinleck has successfully identified the opportunity posed by the vacant/derelict properties at 115/125 Main Street and the first derelict property has now been demolished.

## **4 VACANT & DERELICT PROPERTY - ABSENTEE LANDLORDS/OWNERS**

- 4.1 The main aim of the RCP is to tackle the problem of dereliction and decay within settlements and to this end existing vacant and derelict properties will be identified and where possible included in regeneration projects. This is dependent on a number of factors including successful identification of ownership, co-operation and suitability for inclusion.
- 4.2 As part of the Phase 1 Ryden report, a survey was carried out of vacant property and gap sites on Main Street, Auchinleck. In conjunction with this survey, the RCP Regeneration Officer has produced a property database. The two reports show that 21 properties in Main Street are either derelict, vacant or of unknown use. Of these, the ownership details are known for only 14 properties. To establish ownership of the remaining 7 properties would require title searches which can be carried out by the Council's Legal Services Division at a cost. The cost of individual title searches can vary from a few pounds to a few hundred pounds, dependent on factors such as clarity of boundaries and the sufficiency of descriptions within the titles to identify the property address.
- 4.3 A number of regeneration projects have been identified and are being progressed that may involve the regeneration of particular properties. Title searches can be carried out for properties where ownership information is not readily available. The regeneration projects include a:
- Quality Retail Scheme
  - Housing Improvement Initiative
  - One Stop Shop.

Suitable properties will be investigated for inclusion in each of the projects as required. Following the required title searches, it is proposed that a letter be issued to known all property owners within a defined town centre boundary. The letter will highlight the responsibility of property owners to maintain their property to a certain acceptable standard and outline the relevant regeneration initiatives, which may be available to assist.

- 4.4 Representation has been made to both the New Opportunities Fund and the Scottish Land Fund to seek support and funding to progress the Restoring Communities Programme. Every opportunity will be used to raise the issue of absentee landlords/owners at local and national level.
- 4.5 The lessons learned through the pilot project in Auchinleck will be taken on board and utilised in the process of rolling out the RCP to other communities.

## **5 TARGETS ACHIEVED**

- 5.1 Detailed below are the targets achieved to date.
- phase 1 & 2 consultant studies completed by Ryden;

- database of priority projects within Auchinleck produced in conjunction with the Town Appraisal;
- database of vacant and derelict properties produced;
- RCP Regeneration Officer in post;
- Auchinleck Town Appraisal completed;
- Officer Working Group set up and in operation;
- pilot project at 115/125 Main Street progressing - first property now demolished utilising the Derelict Property Revolving Fund. Advance discussions with the owners of 119 and 123 Main Street, through the Councils Economic and Property Team, have been undertaken and it is hoped that these properties will be demolished in the next 2/3 months;
- draft Action Plan produced for the development of the RCP for a 5 year period;
- investigation carried out of the potential links with other existing and proposed projects within the SIP area; and
- CISWO involvement secured to take forward a 'one-stop' shop.

## **6 TARGETS & PRIORITIES FOR 2003/2004**

6.1 Set out below are the targets and priorities for the Restoring Communities Programme for the financial year 2003/2004:

- finalise the organisational, staffing and funding requirements for the RCP and adopt the most appropriate delivery mechanism to implement the RCP;
- continue the employment of the existing RCP Regeneration Officer;
- produce a detailed Action Plan for the development of the RCP for a 5 year period;
- produce a complete property database for properties within the Main Street area, including ownership information;
- implement the identified priority projects in Auchinleck including the proposed 'One Stop' Shop in conjunction with CISWO, the development of a community newsletter and website, setting up a Quality Retail and Housing Improvement Scheme and implementing the Well Road Park environmental improvement project;
- formulate a public communication strategy;
- hold regular meetings of the EAC Officer Working Group and form a Project Steering Group consisting of relevant external agencies and appropriate community representation; and
- investigate potential external funding sources.

## **7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 It is recommended that Board members:

- i) note the progress made regarding the development of the Restoring Communities Programme.

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**9 June 2003**