

Report Title Here**Local Lettings Plan Request Morris Meadows, Netherton**

Date of Issue:	September 2024	
Date of Decision:		
Report to:	Cabinet Member Housing & Highways	
Report of:	Assistant Director of Place (Economic Growth & Housing)	
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member Housing & Highways	
Wards affected:	Netherton & Orrell	
Is this a key decision:	No	No
Included in Forward Plan:		
Exempt/confidential report:	No	

Summary: To seek approval to agree to a Local Lettings Plan for Morris Meadows, development in Netherton.

Recommendation(s):

(1) That Cabinet Member approves the use of a Local Lettings Plans by One Vision for the new build development at Morris Meadows, Braidwood Road in Netherton.

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

1.1 One Vision housing association are pursuing a New Build scheme at Morris Meadows in Netherton.

- The development consists of shared ownership and rent to buy houses and an apartment block containing 58 affordable rented flats (18 x ground floor, 20 x first floor and 20 x second floor).

The property breakdown is as follows:

- **24 x 1-bedroom apartments**
- **33 x 2-bedroom apartments**
- **1 x 3-bedroom apartment**

- 1.2 One Vision Housing propose the use of a Local Lettings Plan (LLP) to allocate the properties on the site. The Council's own Allocations Policy (Property Pool Plus) Section 2.2 states:

Local Letting Schemes

4.3.1 The local authority and registered providers can use local lettings schemes to achieve a wide variety of housing management and policy objectives subject to agreement with the local authority. The following list is intended to be illustrative and in no way prescribed or definitive:

- 1. Allocating accommodation in rural villages and giving priority to applicants with a connection to a particular parish.*
- 2. Creating more mixed and/or sustainable communities.*
- 3. Dealing with a concentration of deprivation.*
- 4. Ensuring properties that are particularly suited to being made accessible (e.g. ground floor flats) are prioritised for those with access needs.*

Property Pool Plus Housing Allocation Scheme Procedure

- 5. Relocating essential workers such as teachers, nurses and police officers within a reasonable travelling distance from their work.*
- 6. Supporting people in work/volunteering or who are seeking work or seeking volunteering opportunities.*
- 7. Dealing sensitively with lettings in rural areas to sustain communities by giving priority to those with a local connection of more than two years.*
- 8. Where a child to adult ratio could be lowered on an estate where there is high child density or, conversely, young single people could integrate into an estate where there is high ratio of older persons.*
- 9. Where there are reasons to positively discriminate due to age, for example accommodation is only suitable for applicants under the age of 35 years, or over the age of state pension entitlement.*

- 1.3 The statutory basis for "local lettings policies" is within Section 167(2E) of the 1996 Housing Act which enables accommodation to be allocated to people of a particular description, that fall within the reasonable preference groups, or provides that additional priority can be given to people in any of those preference groups.

In 2010, the Communities and Local Govt Department and Chartered Institute of Housing issued a Good Practice guide for the use of Local Lettings Plans. This

recognises that Local lettings policies may be used to achieve a wide variety of housing management and other housing policy objectives. For example, local lettings policies may be used to “protect existing stable communities”, and “improving community stability and cohesion”. The guidance also describes the use of ‘Sensitive Lettings’ which can be used to address specific issues, such as the make-up of a particular block of flats, ie. having the ability to by-pass applicants to avoid potential lifestyle clashes that could arise by rehousing certain groups of applicants under one roof.

- 1.4 The PPP Allocations Policy is principally designed for the allocation and letting of individual properties. In many new-build developments housing associations are letting multiple properties at the same time; in this case 58 new affordable rented homes. The proposal from One Vision Housing, below, sets out their reasoning for an LLP and how the LLP would operate.
- 1.5 In summary, All allocations on this development will be subject to the agreed One Vision Housing PPP lettings criteria and 100% of the properties will be advertised via PPP.

All properties will be advertised via PPP but priority for at least 24 (41%) of the properties will be given to applicants who are in employment or full-time education/training (where they can demonstrate that they have sufficient finances to pay rent). However, offers will be made in accordance with priority need.

Properties will be advertised to all bands with preference to those in employment or full-time education/training. However, offers will be made in accordance with priority need. This criterion is to help create a sustainable and balanced community.

There are 10 ground floor apartments with level access showers/ wet rooms. The apartments are not wheelchair accessible. Preference will be given to those customers with limited mobility. Medical or Occupational Therapy evidence will be requested from applicants for these apartments.

Applicants will undergo an affordability assessment before an offer is confirmed, whereby the local letting criteria, and any additional checks that may be necessary, will be discussed in detail. During this interview, applicants will be required to demonstrate they understand their responsibilities as a tenant to respect their neighbours and can maintain and sustain their tenancy.

Applicants with a criminal record and/or a history of antisocial behaviour will be considered in the context of whether they are suitable to be a tenant in line with the Property Pool Plus Policy. If there is concern their activities have not abated and will have a negative impact on these properties, neighbours or surrounding community, an offer may not be made or withdrawn. This will be subject to information provided through a police check.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this Local Lettings Plan.

3. Legal Implications

- 3.1 Section 167 of the Housing Act 1996 requires Local Housing Authorities to have an Allocations scheme for determining priorities in allocating housing accommodation.

4. Risk Implications

- 4.1 There are very little risk associated with the approval of this Local Lettings Plan.

5 Staffing HR Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct staffing implications as a result of this decision.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The proposal will assist One Vision (the provider) achieve a balanced community and a mix of people for the new build development in Netherton, whilst still providing housing for those residents most in need.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The Council could withhold approval from One Vision to operate a Local Lettings scheme, although this could be disadvantageous to both the community that they are trying to create and to the Council's working relationship with the organisation.

Equality Implications:
The equality Implications have been identified and risk remains, as detailed in the report.
Impact on Children and Young People:
This will have a positive impact on children and young people, particularly on those who are allocated these new build properties in Netherton.
Climate Emergency Implications:
The recommendations within this report will have a Neutral impact. There are no direct climate emergency implications arising from this report. Any climate emergency implications arising from matters referred to in the Cabinet Member Report will be contained in reports when they are presented to Members at the appropriate time.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Services & Commercial (FD 7790/24) has been consulted and notes the report indicates no direct financial implications for the Council in respect of these proposals.

Chief Legal and Democratic Officer has been consulted and has no comments on the report (LD 5890/24).

(B) External Consultations

The ward councillors have been consulted when the LLP was formulated, and Cabinet Member has since been briefed and agreed to the LLP.

Implementation Date for the Decision:

Following the expiry of the “call-in” period for the Cabinet Member decision.

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Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to this report:

Appendix A; Local Lettings Plan Morris Meadows, Netherton

Appendix B: Equality Impact Assessment Morris Meadows, Netherton

Background Papers:

Merseyside Property Pool Plus Allocations Policy <http://www.propertypoolplus.org.uk>

Appendix A



Local Lettings Plan

Contact: Bianca Perkins

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Morris Meadows, 53 Braidwood Road, Netherton, L30 1AD

Introduction

This Local Lettings Plan (LLP) has been developed to deliver sustainable lettings for the new build homes at Morris Meadows, 53 Braidwood Road, Netherton, L30 1AD.

The site is mixed tenure consisting of shared ownership and rent to buy houses and an apartment block containing 58 affordable rented flats (18 x ground floor, 20 x first floor and 20 x second floor). The property breakdown is as follows:

- 24 x 1-bedroom apartments
- 33 x 2-bedroom apartments
- 1 x 3-bedroom apartment

The allocation of many apartments in a single location, increases risks to both One Vision Housing and the wider community if appropriate and sustainable lettings are not achieved.

One Vision Housing therefore proposes to vary the standard allocations criteria for the prioritisation of applicants for these homes.

Aim of the framework

The aim of the Local Lettings Policy is to make a significant contribution to the overall sustainability of the area.

As Morris Meadows is a new development to the community, we want to ensure that we create a balanced and sustainable community from the beginning by identifying suitable tenants who will settle and make a positive contribution to the local community, ensuring tenancies are sustainable for the long term.

We aim to achieve this by housing a mix of different households, with different lifestyles and economic profiles, whilst at the same time, still providing housing to residents in housing need.

In addition, we aim to protect the capital investment made by One Vision Housing through the delivery of sustainable tenancies.

Background

Morris Meadows, set in the Netherton and Orrell Ward, is a new build scheme of 58 flats in Netherton just off Dunnings Bridge Road. Handovers are scheduled to take place at the end of September 2024.

Divergence from the standard policy

The local letting scheme for this development differs from our principal Allocation Scheme in the following ways:

- All of the apartments in the development will be let at an affordable rent (up to 80% of market rent including service charges) but below the Local Housing Allowance Rate.
- All tenants will be awarded the standard 5-year fixed term Assured Shorthold Tenancy Agreement as this is the tenure type used by OVH for all housing schemes that are let at an affordable rent. This gives the landlord and the tenant the opportunity to review the tenancy at the end of the fixed term period before signing a new agreement.
- The provision of 2 references will be requested. If an applicant has held a tenancy, then references will be requested from either the current or previous landlord and any offers may be overlooked if references are not provided or are unsatisfactory. We will also consider one reference from Homeless Hostels if no other reference available. All applications will be considered on an individual basis in this respect, and an unsatisfactory reference may result in the re-assessment of the Property Pool Plus application in line with the Property Pool Plus Policy.
- Prospective tenants must agree to undertake an affordability assessment to establish applicants' financial status and suitability for the scheme. This approach is standard practice for One Vision Housing and was adopted due to welfare reforms and rent levels.
- Priority for at least 24 (41%) of the properties will be given to applicants who are in employment or full-time education/training (where they can demonstrate that they have sufficient finances to pay rent). However, offers will be made in accordance with priority need. This criterion is to help create a sustainable and balanced community.

- Applicants with a criminal record and/or a history of antisocial behaviour will be considered in the context of whether they are suitable to be a tenant in line with the Property Pool Plus Policy. If there is concern their activities have not abated and will have a negative impact on these properties, neighbours or surrounding community, an offer may not be made or withdrawn. This will be subject to information provided through a police check.
- Where an applicant is rejected on the basis of their criminal record or past anti-social behaviour they will be notified with an explanation as to why they are deemed unsuitable to be a tenant and given advice as to what steps are available to them to make them suitable to be a tenant in the future.
- There are 10 ground floor apartments with level access showers/ wet rooms. The apartments are not wheelchair accessible. Preference will be given to those customers with limited mobility. Medical or Occupational Therapy evidence will be requested from applicants for these apartments.

Selection Process

All affordable rent allocations managed by One Vision Housing on this development will be subject to the agreed One Vision Housing PPP lettings criteria and 100% of the properties will be advertised via PPP. At least 75 % of future voids will continue to be advertised on PPP in line with our Nominations Agreement with Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council, advising applicants that a local letting scheme is in place and applicants will be required to satisfy the strict criteria already specified. We will continue to give priority to suitable applicants in accordance with the appropriate banding and date order system. This local letting scheme will be reviewed annually.

Applicants will undergo an affordability assessment before an offer is confirmed, whereby the local letting criteria, and any additional checks that may be necessary, will be discussed in detail. During this interview, applicants will be required to demonstrate they understand their responsibilities as a tenant to respect their neighbours and can maintain and sustain their tenancy.

All properties will be advertised via PPP but priority for at least 24 (41%) of the properties will be given to applicants who are in employment or full-time education/training (where they can demonstrate they have sufficient finance to pay rent). However, offers will be made in accordance with priority need.

Applicants given priority for employment should be working 16 hours or more at the close of the bidding cycle and be able to provide as evidence a contract of employment, letter from employer and/ or recent wage slips.

In accordance with One Vision Housing's policy, priority will be given to those applicants who can demonstrate full occupation of the property and can demonstrate they have the finance in place to pay the rent.

In the event there is insufficient demand properties will be re-advertised via PPP to applicants in all bands and consideration will be given to those who under occupy subject to affordability.

For the 10 ground floor apartments with level access shower/ wet room, preference will be given to applicants who require a level access shower/ wet room according to their adaptation needs on PPP.

Monitoring, Conclusion and Review

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 be discussed and agreed with Property Pool Plus.

It is intended that this Local Lettings Policy shall apply to future lets and an annual review will take place.

We will use the following indicators to measure the overall success of this Local Lettings Plan.

- Average length of tenancy
- Turnover of homes
- Number of Anti-Social Behaviour reports
- To add: Equality Impact Assessment for this LLP
- Consultation with the ward members prior to going to Cabinet Member

Appendix B

Initial EIA

Person responsible for the assessment	John Rice – Policy and Strategy Manager Christina Mooney – Customer Access Team Leader
Team	Neighbourhood Services
Name of the service, service area or Policy to be assessed	Local Lettings Policy for Morris Meadows
Is this a new or existing Policy / service area	New Policy
Date of assessment	19-09-24

Please provide a brief description of the service/Policy or the proposed change to the service/Policy.

- OVH in agreement with Sefton MBC are looking to introduce a Local Lettings Policy for the Morris Meadows development, 53 Braidwood Road, Netherton, prior to the scheme being handed over and ready for first lettings, anticipated to be from October 2024, onwards. The mixed tenure site comprises of shared ownership and rent to buy houses and a low-rise apartment block (three storeys) made up of:
 - 24 x 1-bedroom apartments
 - 33 x 2-bedroom apartments
 - 1 x 3-bedroom apartment
- The apartment block only (not house type properties) would be subject to the Local Lettings Policy and the inclusion of additional letting criteria (to be included in adverts for vacant properties through the sub-regional choice-based lettings scheme – Property Pool Plus - PPP) for a proportion of the available properties (34 of the total 58, which would be maintained if any properties become available for future letting and for the indefinite period where the Local Letting Policy, in its proposed form, is in place)
- The additional lettings criteria is as follows:
 - 10 of the 18 ground floor apartments have level access showers / wet rooms and preference will be given to applicants whose housing needs match this type of facility (note the properties would not be fully wheelchair accessible)
 - Of the remaining 48 properties, 24 would be reserved for applicants who are in employment or full-time education.

- All applicants, covered by the Local Lettings Policy will need to have satisfied PPP eligibility conditions and normal Reasonable Preference Criteria / Banding and Date Order weighting will apply.
- In line with OVH's own allocation criteria, preference will be given to applicants who can demonstrate full occupancy of the property and those covered by the Local Lettings Policy may be subject to additional checks e.g. supply of suitable references, affordability assessments and where there is evidence of anti-social behaviour - appropriate steps have been taken to alter this type of behaviour

Before you start this assessment, please consider...

What are the likely areas where there could be a differential impact?

- By its nature, a Local Lettings Policy seeks to introduce additional / alternative lettings criteria than would normally apply to similar property types and tenures. The proposed Local Letting Policy to be applied to the apartment type accommodation on the Morris Meadows development gives preference, in the first round of bidding, to those who can prove they are economically active (i.e. in employment) or those who are currently in full time education. The preference for applicants whose housing needs would require a level access bathroom / wet room would apply to all similar properties that have these type of facilities (regardless of economic status)
- The Policy would, therefore, provide a differential outcome for housing applicants that bid on the Morris Meadows apartment block that do not meet the above criteria (specifically those who are not in employment or in full time education)

Who are the main stakeholders/beneficiaries in terms of the recipients of the Policy?

- In introducing and maintaining the Local Lettings Policy, OVH is seeking to create a balanced and sustainable community whilst meeting identified housing need. If the Policy achieves these outcomes there will be benefits for OVH, which would include but are not exhaustive of:
 - Economic viability by achieving a return on investment from the development through rental income.
 - Maintaining a strong demand for properties and preserving reputation as a fair / accessible landlord of choice
 - Minimising the need for tenancy intervention measures, achieving value for money and allowing staff resources to concentrate time and effort on activities that bring wider community benefit or on customers who have identified support needs.
 - Protection of assets
- OVH customers (and the wider community) in the vicinity of the scheme would benefit from a well-managed development where the occupants can form roots and take pride in their homes.
- Sefton MBC (and potentially other local authorities in the PPP scheme) benefit by the discharge of the statutory housing duty.

Is there an opportunity to better promote equality of opportunity or better community relations by altering the Policy or working with other partners or communities?

Yes

- There is always benefit to be gained through a joined-up partnership approach, however, there are not thought to be any specific partnership arrangements that would need to be put in place to ensure the effective operation of the Policy initiative. As part of a general approach to allocations i.e. applicable to all properties available to rent and across all tenures, OVH has revised its procedures to ensure the data capture of customers individual needs has improved. This applies at the commencement of tenancy agreements and throughout and will involve provision of direct support or referral to third part agencies, as required. The relationships with these partner agencies are well established and are considered to work effectively.

What, if any, differential impact could there be due to...

	Positive impact	Neutral impact	Negative impact	Reason
Age		✓		Other than the usual age restrictions that would apply to the granting of tenancy agreements (to those over 18 only unless on licence) the impacts of the Policy are thought to be neutral in this category. There is slight risk that the Policy may limit opportunity for those whose working time is over i.e. they have retired and / or of pensionable age but the numbers are contained enough for this risk to be negligible
Disability	✓			The preference that will be given to customers whose health conditions would benefit from level access / wet room facilities is considered to be a positive impact
Gender		✓		The impacts in this area are neutral i.e. a customer's gender would not form part of the decision making process in allocating the

				properties to be included in scope of the Policy
Race		✓		As above - age have no bearing on decision making process
Religion		✓		As above, would have no bearing on decision making process
Sexual Orientation		✓		As above, would have no bearing on decision making process
Gender Identity / Gender Expression		✓		As above, would have no bearing on decision making process
Marriage or Civil Partnership		✓		As above, would have no bearing on decision making process
Socio Economic Impact		✓		Whilst it is recognised that there will be a small negative impact of the operation of this Policy on those who are not in employment / full time education, the availability of alternative accommodation that would be available to these groups is of sufficient quantity and availability that the impacts are almost negligible
Human Rights		✓		There are not considered to be any implications on Human Rights that would result from the operation of this Policy.
Is there potential for any adverse impact				No

Please explain why...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This assessment has not identified any potential for adverse impact for any group. The slight differential impact for those who are not employed or in full time education does not then lead to an adverse impact, due to the wider housing options that are available 	
Can any adverse impact be justified on any grounds	No
Please explain why...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No adverse impact of this policy could be justified. If this occurs during operation and if this were to be discovered in any way this should prompt an immediate review of the Policy provisions 	
Please outline what measures or changes you have or will put into place to mitigate any identified negative or adverse impact	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the Policy is new and has not been assessed in live application, it may be that there are unintended consequences that have not been considered in this assessment. To guard against any unintended consequences the Policy will be closely monitored during the first twelve months of operation and will be subject to a full review / approval process annually thereafter Ongoing monitoring will assess the opinions of those directly impacted i.e. customers that are allocated properties in the apartment-type accommodation at Morris Meadows and this will be considered alongside other indicators such as turnover rate of properties / tenancy sustainment in presenting an evidence base for continued application of the Policy via the approval bodies (OVH Executive Management Team and Sefton MBC via relevant committee structure) The additional lettings criteria that will be applied as a result of this Policy will only be relevant at the point of allocation / letting. This will ensure that those that experience a change of circumstances at any point e.g. loss of employment will not experience any adverse impacts affecting the occupation of their home as a result (provided rent payment and all other tenancy conditions are adhered to) OVH has introduced a number of positive initiatives to ensure the information / need for any differential service provision or additional support required for tenancy sustainment is kept up-to-date and is acted upon (including, where required, referral and signposting to partner agencies). This includes operation of the 'Vulnerable Persons and Reasonable Adjustments Policy' and better data capture via every customer interaction. These initiatives provide a safeguard that all reasonable steps are being taken to support tenancy sustainment, including those that will directly be impacted by the operation of the Local Lettings Policy It is recommended that the wording of the Local Lettings Policy be reviewed to remove the term 'full time employment' so as to not impose any restrictions to those that may be working part time. It is recommended that the wording 'limited mobility' (in the proposal being considered for approval by Sefton MBC) is considered carefully or is rephrased to be more precise to 	

prevent confusion for applicants / challenge in the case of refusals and for the need for this to be evidenced by Occupational Therapist report / recommendation to be rephrased (as this may not be widely available to housing applicants)

- It is also recommended that the Policy is kept under review for changes of tenancy type that may be introduced as a result of the Renters Rights Bill, currently in the parliamentary approval process, when confirmed as legislation and when commencement dates are known (conversion of all rented type tenancies to assured periodic type and removal of fixed terms). Tenants that will be impacted by change of tenancy type should be informed at the earliest opportunity when this information is confirmed.