

New Bolsover – Local Letting Scheme

1. Introduction

The New Bolsover Model Village is within the Bolsover conservation area which restricts certain types of development; however the Council is upgrading, carrying out essential repairs and modernising all 196 council owned properties that help make-up the Model village. The Heritage Lottery Fund is funding improvements to private residents.

The project has seen an innovative community development programme to encourage local people and participants alike to feel proud of their local area and appreciate its rich history.

Due to the anticipated high level of lets within a short time frame (as property refurbishments become completed) a Local Lettings Scheme ensures a balanced, sustainable community.

Section 166A(6)(b) of the Housing Act 1996 enables housing authorities to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description outside the Council's standard allocations procedure, provided that overall the authority is able to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of S.166A(3) *'to give overall priority for an allocation to people in the reasonable preference categories'*.

This is the statutory basis for 'local lettings schemes', which may be used to achieve a wide variety of housing management and policy objectives.

The Council's Allocations Policy ensures that people in most need are placed in the reasonable preference categories and are able to access council accommodation; therefore this scheme will be used in conjunction with the Council's Allocations Policy.

This Local Lettings Scheme details the method of allocating the properties for rent to applicants initially through the Allocations Policy and then by direct match to create a thriving and sustainable community.

2. Scope

As far as possible, this scheme is designed to:

- meet housing need within the district by making best use of properties in order to create balanced, sustainable communities
- ensure that homes are allocated in a clear, fair and transparent manner
- make sure the Council is complying with housing and related legislation

This scheme will work with the Council's Allocations policy, and amongst other legislation, have due regard in particular to the;

- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 1996
- Localism Act 2011
- Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012
- Welfare Reforms
- Equalities Act
- Human Rights Act

3. Principles

The scheme will link to the Council's Corporate Plan aims by;

- Supporting Our Communities to be Healthier, Safer, Cleaner and Greener
- Providing Our Customers with Excellent Service

The scheme will also link to the Council's Corporate Plan priorities by;

- Ensuring a high standard of environmental maintenance and cleanliness
- Developing attractive neighbourhoods
- Promoting equality and diversity
- Supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people
- Providing good quality council housing where people choose to live
- Increasing customer confidence and satisfaction with our services
- Contributing to improving health and well-being

4. Statement

In addition to the normal allocations procedure applicants to New Bolsover will require an additional interview with a member of housing staff prior to any offer of accommodation being made.

4.1 Scheme and Properties covered by the Local Lettings Scheme

This scheme will apply to all the 196 council own properties at New Bolsover, the majority of which are or will be 2 bed houses after the refurbishment.

The refurbishment requires relocating tenants and residents therefore this scheme will only apply to all new lets (i.e. to tenants who are not current Bolsover tenants at New Bolsover) and any subsequent lets thereafter for a total of three years; the three years commencing after the completion of works to the final property.

4.2 Advertising the Vacant Properties

New Bolsover vacant properties will be advertised through the Council's Choice Based Letting system in accordance with the usual Allocations Policy, with the following exceptions:

- Properties required for decanting to support the refurbishment scheme.
- Any properties that are designed/adapted to meet specific medical needs.
- Properties that are required to deal with an urgent case

Applicants will bid on the properties to express an interest as per the usual council procedure.

Applicants via the Choice Based Lettings system will undergo a first stage assessment of priority/eligibility/ based on the council's usual Allocations Policy and then will be required to undergo a second stage selection process based on the criteria set out in this Local Lettings Scheme.

4.3 Allocations Criteria

The second stage selection process gives the following priorities which will be used as far as is practicable to encourage a balanced community:

- Applicants who are currently in employment, training or any type of voluntary work (including voluntary work within the community) or are actively seeking employment or training
- Applicants who have a local connection to the area through a family member which includes; a son, daughter, brother, sister, mother or father who is over 18 and lives in the area and has done so for at least 3 years before the date the vacancy is advertised. However in exceptional circumstances the Council reserves its right to make a decision based on an individual assessment of a qualifying family member.
- Applicant who have a need to live in New Bolsover to provide/receive essential care in line with the usual Allocations Policy criteria
- Applicants who are not currently council tenants but who have been resident in in the area for the last 24 months as their only or principal home and the tenancy has been conducted in a satisfactory manner.

Allocations will be required to meet the eligibility criteria for the size of property to discourage under-occupation and overcrowding of the dwellings and make best use of housing stock, with the exception of up to 10% of properties which may be let to couples without children, however this will be subject to an affordability test due to the under occupation charge criteria.

Properties may be refused to households with a history of anti-social behaviour or poor conduct of a previous tenancy. Where the applicant meets one of the following criteria they may not be offered a tenancy in the scheme for a at least a period of two years, if the applicant;

- is known to have been involved in anti social behaviour within the last 2 years,
- is unable to demonstrate an ability to sustain a tenancy for a minimum period of the last 12 months,
- has an unspent criminal conviction,
- has been convicted of, or has been held responsible for, criminal damage or arson within the last 12 months.
- has a drug, alcohol or other addiction including those in rehabilitation,
- has extensive support needs.

4.4 Compliance with the scheme

To limit the detrimental impact of long term vacant properties, in the event that insufficient bids are received from applicants meeting the criteria, the Council reserves the right to direct match properties in order to maintain a sustainable community.

The Allocations Policy then may be employed to a property that has been unsuccessfully let.

4.5 Selection of shortlisted applicants

Applicants will be initially assessed using the Allocations Policy and then the shortlisted applicant/s will be subject to a further selection procedure which will be:

- A personal interview by a Housing Officer to ascertain the applicant's current circumstances to determine eligibility for a property under the criteria of this Local Lettings Scheme.

Following the interview subsequent verification of circumstances may be required and may include, but is not exhaustive;

- A verification visit to their current accommodation to confirm personal and household circumstances and evaluate ability to act in a 'tenant like manner' in terms of upkeep of property and garden.
- Checks on current and former tenant rent accounts where applicable.
- Checks to confirm previous tenancy good conduct.
- Checks with the Probation Service and/or the Police.
- A risk assessment of vulnerability to evaluate feasibility of support plans to sustain the tenancy.
- Assessment against local connection criteria.
- Credit checks and affordability evaluation using household income and expenditure.
- Evaluation of risk in relation to uncontrolled debt.
- Medical needs assessment.

Once any subsequent verification has been completed successful applicants will be offered a tenancy in accordance with the usual Council's Policy. Unsuccessful applicants will be informed in writing.

Households may be required to agree to participate in progress visits as requested (reasonable notice will be given) with Council Officers to ensure ongoing sustainability of the tenancy who will then be able to provide further support/assistance if required.

4.6 Duration of the Local Lettings Scheme

The scheme will be put in place from the first lets and extend for three years after the completion of works to the final property.

4.7 Monitoring and Review

The scheme will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that it remains appropriate to the scheme and continues to support the sustainability objectives. The scheme will be reviewed after 3 years or earlier if it is not meeting its objectives and is no longer viable.

4.8 Equal opportunities

The Local Lettings Scheme is required to comply with equality legislation and in particular, to ensure that there is no unlawful discrimination in the allocation of dwellings.

4.9 Refusal and appeal

The selection framework and checks employed may not be an automatic barrier to access housing, where an applicant has been unsuccessful in securing a property at New Bolsover through the Local Lettings Scheme, housing advice in terms of other alternative housing options and support will be given.

Applicants who are refused accommodation through the Local Lettings Scheme will be advised of the reason in writing. If an applicant is not satisfied that the Local Lettings Scheme has been administered correctly they must set out the reason in writing to request a review of the decision.

Any reviews, complaints or appeals will be handled in accordance with the usual district wide allocations policy and procedure.

4.10 Elected Members' Involvement in Allocation Decisions

The Allocation of Housing (Procedure) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997/483) prevent an elected Member from being part of a decision-making body at the time an allocation decision is made, when either:

- the accommodation concerned is situated in their division or electoral ward, or
- the person subject to the decision has their sole or main residence in their ward.

The regulations do not prevent an elected Member from representing their constituents in front of the decision making body.

5. Responsibility for Implementation

Bolsover District Council's housing department will be responsible for implementing this scheme.