

Classification: Open	Decision Type: Key
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Report to:	Cabinet	Date: 09 September 2026
Subject:	Redevelopment of The Elms, Whitefield	
Report of:	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth	

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The Elms is a long-term disused Council owned brownfield site, located on Elms Close in Whitefield. In March 2024, the Cabinet approved the disposal of the site to a strategic delivery partner/member of the Council's Registered Provider Partnership Framework, for the development of an independent living scheme for residents aged 55 and over.
- 1.2 Since that decision, an updated feasibility assessment and cost appraisal, combined with policy directives at Greater Manchester level have identified a potential opportunity for the Council to direct deliver the scheme and retain the stock for social housing use
- 1.3 This change of strategy is also due to increased Homes England grant levels and the availability of additional funding sources, including retained Right to Buy receipts and affordable housing commuted sums.
- 1.4 Consequently, this report seeks approval for the Council to procure a multidisciplinary design team to act on its behalf to undertake a detailed feasibility study, development appraisal, cost plan, scheme design, planning assessment and viability testing, to determine the feasibility and deliverability of an independent living apartment scheme comprising approximately 16 one-bedroom social rented homes, specifically designed to support older residents. The estimated cost of this commission is in the region of £210,000 - £230,000 + VAT which there is provision for within the HRA Business Plan. The approval for award of each of the contracts for the contractors that form part of the multidisciplinary team, will be submitted to the relevant Director for approval in line with the Council's Operational Decision and Cabinet process.
- 1.5 If the scheme proves viable, a further report will be presented to Cabinet seeking approval to progress to the next phase of development. If direct delivery proves to be unviable, the Council will consider disposal of the site to a strategic delivery partner/member of the Council's Registered Provider Partnership Framework, in accordance with the original approach previously approved by Cabinet in March 2024 (see appendix 1).
- 1.6 It is proposed that the eventual scheme will be funded from retained Right to Buy receipts, affordable housing commuted sums and grant funding from Homes England where eligible.

2.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Approve the principle of progressing proposals for the redevelopment of The Elms through a direct delivery approach, as set out within this report.
- 2.2 Authorise the procurement of a multidisciplinary design team, via a compliant public sector framework to undertake the detailed appraisal, design development, planning and viability work required to assess the feasibility and deliverability of the proposed scheme.
- 2.3 Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place and Executive Director of Finance to oversee delivery of this stage of the project, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth.
- 2.4 Note that if the proposed scheme proves to be viable, deliverable and capable of securing planning consent, a further report and funding strategy will be presented to Cabinet seeking approval to progress to the next phase of development.
- 2.5 Agree that, should direct delivery prove to be unviable, the site may be disposed of to a strategic delivery partner/member of the Council's Registered Provider Partnership Framework, in accordance with Cabinet's previous decision of 13 March 2024. Any such disposal will be subject to compliance with the requirements of Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

The recommendations will:

- Act as a trailblazer project for further social housing delivery and signal Bury's commitment to the GM target of 50,000 new homes by 2039.
- Support delivery of the Council's Housing Strategy, wider regeneration priorities and Government objectives to increase the supply of social rented accommodation.
- Facilitate the Council's brownfield first approach to housing delivery by bringing a long-term vacant site back into use.
- Deliver much needed affordable housing for older residents (including those with long-term conditions), helping them maintain their independence and reduce the need for more costly interventions.
- Address identified demographic pressures, promote independent living, support health and wellbeing, and provide housing options better suited to the needs of an ageing population.
- Increase the supply of accessible and adaptable homes to meet the changing needs of an ageing population.
- Reduce ongoing costs associated with securing and maintaining a vacant site.
- Deliver wider social, environmental and economic benefits, including additional Council Tax revenue.

- Enable the Council to retain ownership of the completed development, increase its housing stock and create a long-term income stream for the HRA (Housing Revenue Account) to help sustain housing services.

- 3.1 The procurement of a multidisciplinary design team gives the Council the opportunity to undertake robust due diligence before committing to construction expenditure, and will provide greater certainty regarding deliverability, planning considerations, costs and funding requirements.
- 3.2 It should be noted that no commitment to construction or project delivery beyond the feasibility and planning stage is being sought through this report.

4.0 Alternative Option Rejected – Disposal to a Registered Provider/Strategic Delivery Partner:

- 4.1 Dispose of the site to a strategic delivery partner/member of the Council's Registered Provider Partnership Framework, consistent with the original approach.
- 4.2 Whilst this option would facilitate redevelopment of the site, it would forgo the opportunity for the Council to expand its housing stock, generate a long-term rental income stream and retain control over the design, quality and management of the scheme. Additionally, the anticipated capital receipt from disposal for affordable housing purposes is expected to be minimal.

5.0 Other Options Considered and Rejected:

5.1 Do Nothing/Retain the Site:

This option has been rejected due to increasing demand for housing for older people in the borough. Demographic projections indicate that demand for this type of accommodation will continue to rise over the coming years. Leaving the site undeveloped would fail to address identified housing needs. The proposed scheme will create additional housing capacity and help address gaps in provision.

This is a brownfield site located in an area of high demand for social housing. A feasibility assessment identified an independent living scheme for older people as the most appropriate use of the site, reflecting both identified local housing need and the Council's strategic priorities. The site is particularly well suited to this form of development due to its proximity to existing older persons' accommodation and its location within a well-established and supportive community.

Retaining the site would provide no strategic, social or financial benefit to the Council. The site would continue to incur maintenance and security costs whilst remaining a dormant asset.

5.2 Disposal to a Private Developer:

This option has been discounted as the proposed social rented independent living scheme is unlikely to be delivered through the private development market. In addition, the Council would lose the opportunity to increase its social housing stock and secure long-term rental income.

5.3 Sell the Site Without a Defined End Use

This option has been rejected because it would remove Council influence over the future use of the site and could result in development that does not align with local housing priorities. The site presents a strong opportunity to provide specialist accommodation for older people and contribute to wider strategic objectives.

Report Author and Contact Details:

Name: Roz Catlow-Patterson
Position: Head of Housing Growth & Development
Department: Place
E-mail: r.catlow-patterson@bury.gov.uk

Name: Jackie Summerscales
Position: Strategic Housing Delivery Manager
Department: Place
E-mail: j.a.summerscales@bury.gov.uk

6.0 Background

- 6.1 The Elms is a long-term disused council owned brownfield site measuring approximately 3,122 sqm (0.3 hectares), situated within a well-established residential area off Elms Close, Whitefield. The site previously accommodated a 2.5-storey Victorian building comprising five self-contained flats. The building had been vacant for approximately three years prior to its demolition in 2023.
- 6.2 In March 2024, Cabinet approved the disposal of the site to a strategic delivery partner/member of the Council's Registered Provider Partnership Framework, for the delivery of an independent living scheme for residents aged 55 and over. This decision was based on a feasibility assessment which concluded that a direct delivery approach was not viable at that time.
- 6.3 Following an updated high-level feasibility study undertaken in May 2025 and subsequent cost appraisal completed in June 2026, the Council has reviewed its position. The results indicate that a direct delivery approach is now considered viable, due to increased Homes England grant levels and the availability of additional funding streams including Right to Buy receipts.
- 6.4 As a result, the Council proposes to undertake direct delivery of the site through the Housing Growth & Development Team within the Place Directorate, subject to the outcomes of further appraisal work.

- 6.5 Under this approach the Council would retain strategic oversight and ownership of the development, whilst the design, planning and construction stages would be delivered by appropriately procured consultants and construction contractors appointed through compliant procurement frameworks.
- 6.6 The intended scheme would provide circa 16 energy efficient one bed social rent apartments, to meet the needs of older people and support independent living.
- 6.7 The homes would be designed in accordance with Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS). Approximately 15% of the units would meet M4(3) wheelchair user standards, with the remaining homes meeting M4(2) accessible and adaptable dwelling standards, ensuring they can accommodate people with limited mobility. A scheme of this nature would enable older people to live independently for as long as possible thus generating cost savings to adult social care budgets.
- 6.8 It is proposed that the scheme will be funded from retained Right to Buy receipts, affordable housing commuted sums and grant funding from Homes England's Social and Affordable Homes Programme (SAHP) 2026 – 2036 where eligible.
- 6.9 Preliminary financial assessments undertaken by the Council's Finance Team indicate that, in the absence of borrowing costs, the development would generate a positive rental income stream for the HRA from the outset.
- 6.10 In recent months the Council has completed a range of preliminary site investigations including feasibility, environmental and geographical assessments, to identify potential development constraints and risk. The results of these investigations have been positive and support progression to the next stage of appraisal.

7.0 Site Appraisal and Due Diligence

- 7.1 Subject to approval, the Council will procure a multidisciplinary design team via a compliant public sector framework. The Council's Procurement Team will lead and manage the procurement process.
- 7.2 The appointed consultants would undertake a comprehensive appraisal of the site including a review of existing survey information, planning policy requirements, development constraints, technical considerations and delivery opportunities. The commission will include preparation of an initial development brief and planning strategy, together with the development and testing of design and cost options to identify the most appropriate form of development. The estimated cost of this commission is in the region of £210,000 - £230,000.
- 7.3 Design proposals will be developed in accordance with planning policy requirements, accessibility standards, Nationally Described Space Standards

and recognised age-friendly housing principles that support independent living. The preferred option will be progressed through pre-application discussions with Development Control.

- 7.4 The design team will prepare all technical assessments required to support a future planning application, including where necessary highways, drainage, ecology, arboriculture, sustainability, viability and ground conditions reports.
- 7.5 The commission will culminate in the preparation of a fully coordinated planning application package, enabling the Council to fully assess the viability, cost, deliverability, planning prospects and funding requirements of the proposed scheme, before making a decision on progression to construction.
- 7.6 Direct delivery of the proposed scheme presents an opportunity for the Council to directly shape and deliver high-quality, age-friendly housing that meets identified local need whilst retaining control over affordability, design quality and long-term management arrangements.
- 7.7 The development would increase the Council's housing stock, create a long-term income-generating asset and contribute towards the financial sustainability of housing services through future rental income.
- 7.8 The decision to explore the possibility of direct delivery of social housing scheme directly strongly aligns with existing Greater Manchester Strategy and new mayoral pledges around the delivery of 50,000 social and truly affordable homes by 2039, which is encouraging GM Authorities to land bank for this end use.

8.0 Next Steps

- 8.1 Subject to Cabinet approval, the Council will commence procurement of a multidisciplinary design team through an appropriate and compliant procurement framework, ensuring specialist expertise is available throughout the pre-construction phase. The appointed consultants will undertake detailed feasibility, design development, planning and viability work to establish whether the proposed development is deliverable and represents best value to the Council.
- 8.2 If the proposed scheme is demonstrated to be viable, deliverable and capable of securing planning permission, a further report will be presented to Cabinet seeking approval to progress to the next phase of development.
- 8.3 This would include progression through planning determination, completion of the detailed technical design, confirmation of project costs and funding arrangements and procurement of a construction contractor through an appropriate and compliant procurement route.
- 8.4 If direct delivery is ultimately deemed unviable, the Council will consider disposal of the site to a strategic delivery partner/member of the Council's

Registered Provider Partnership Framework, in accordance with the approach previously approved by Cabinet in March 2024.

Links with the Corporate Priorities:

The 'Let's do it Strategy' focuses on building a better future for residents by promoting choice and inclusion. The development of an independent living scheme for the over 55's supports the overarching principles of the strategy, as it will promote independence, increase the housing stock and generate rental income.

Equality Impact and Considerations:

A full equality impact assessment has been completed. The analysis has highlighted the need for positive action to support the housing needs of some of our older residents who may also have additional needs. This proposal delivers this positive action without causing disadvantage or detriment to other groups of people

Environmental Impact and Considerations:

The redevelopment of this site is expected to deliver positive environmental benefits by bringing a vacant brownfield site back into use, improving the local environment, providing energy-efficient homes and contributing towards the Council's wider sustainability and climate objectives, whilst ensuring that any adverse environmental impacts are appropriately managed and mitigated through the planning and design process.

Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Lack of confidence in the Council undertaking direct delivery.	This risk is significantly mitigated through the proposed procurement approach. Direct delivery will be supported by the appointment of an experienced multidisciplinary design team through a compliant public sector framework to undertake feasibility, design, technical due diligence and planning work, ensuring specialist expertise is available throughout the pre-construction phase. Any subsequent construction works will be procured through a compliant framework, providing access to suitably qualified and experienced contractors.

	Progression beyond each stage is subject to further viability assessments and Cabinet approvals, with an alternative delivery route available should direct delivery prove unviable.
Site constraints, abnormal ground conditions, contamination or other unforeseen technical issues could increase project costs or affect the viability of the scheme.	Preliminary site investigations have been undertaken to identify any issues or hazards that could impact development. The results of these investigations have been positive to date.
The proposed development may not secure planning permission, or that planning conditions and statutory requirements could result in design changes and additional costs.	These risks will be mitigated through the appointment of a multidisciplinary professional team, before any decision is taken to progress beyond the planning stage. The planning risk is low due to the site already being classified for housing. Effective management and engagement through regular meetings with consultants. An alternative delivery route is available should direct delivery ultimately prove unviable.
Construction cost inflation could impact the financial viability of the project.	
Aborted costs if the proposed scheme is deemed to be unviable.	
Funding availability may differ from initial assumptions.	The proposed scheme meets the national funding priorities of the Social and Affordable Homes Programme (SAHP) 2026 – 2036. Initial, positive discussions have been undertaken with Bury's Homes England lead.

Procurement Implications

Procurement will work with the Regeneration team to maximise Value For Money and ensure the compliance with Council Contract Procedure rules and the Procurement Act 2023

Legal Implications:

If disposal remains a potential outcome the Council will need to comply with s123 Local Government Act 1972 (or rely upon any applicable consent) at the point of disposal.

As a contracting authority, the Council is required to adhere to relevant procurement law in procuring goods, works and services, in addition to following its own Contract Procedure Rules. Both the Procurement Act 2023, and its predecessor the Public Contract Regulations 2015 provide for the utilisation of a Framework as a compliant route to market.

Cabinet may lawfully delegate executive operational decision-making to a Director under the Local Government Act 2000, subject to the Council's constitution and scheme of delegation. Any delegation must clearly define its scope and remain within approved policy and budget parameters. Changes to the programme must not constitute a new key decision unless properly authorised and compliant with procedural requirements. The Director must also comply with all conditions attached to the grant funding. Any variation outside these limits will require further Cabinet approval.

Financial Implications:

The feasibility study will be funded from the approved HRA capital programme.

Appendices:

Not applicable

Background papers:

Cabinet Report – The Elms 13 March 2024.

Glossary of Terms:

Term	Meaning
Affordable Housing Commuted Sums	Financial contributions in lieu of affordable housing delivery.
Age-friendly housing principles	These principles aim to create a supportive and inclusive environment for older people, allowing them to age in place and contribute to their communities.
Brownfield site	Land that has previously been developed for residential, industrial or commercial purposes, and is now underused, abandoned or vacant.
Energy efficient	The practice of delivering the same service while consuming less energy to achieve savings.
Homes England	The UK government's housing and regeneration agency, responsible for funding and supporting delivery of new affordable homes.
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	A statutory account maintained by the Council to record income and expenditure related to the housing stock.
Housing Strategy	A comprehensive plan that outlines how Bury intends to address its housing needs and wider objectives.
M4(3) wheelchair user standards	The highest accessibility standards for new homes in England, specifically designed for full time wheelchair users.

M4(2) accessible and adaptable dwelling standards	The guidelines for designing homes that can be easily adapted to accommodate individuals with varying mobility needs.
Independent living scheme for older residents	A housing arrangement designed to help older people maintain independence and privacy while providing access to support when required.
Multidisciplinary design team	A group of professionals who will collaborate to undertake detailed feasibility, design development, planning and viability work to establish whether the proposed development is deliverable and represents best value to the Council.
Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS)	Define the minimum gross internal floor area, bedroom sizes, storage space, and floor to ceiling heights to ensure homes are spacious, functional, and support long-term wellbeing.
Public sector framework	A pre-approved contract arrangement that allows public sector organisations to procure goods and services from a list of pre-approved suppliers.
Registered Provider Partnership Framework	A strategic partnership between the Council and registered providers for the delivery of affordable housing in the borough.
Right to Buy receipts	Income generated when council tenants purchase their homes under the Right to Buy Scheme.
Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972	Allows local authorities to dispose of land for the best consideration reasonably obtainable.
Social and Affordable Homes Programme (SAHP) 2026 - 2036	A government initiative aimed at increasing the supply of affordable housing in England. It provides up to £39 billion in funding over the next 10 years to support delivery of around 300,000 social and affordable homes.
Social rent	A type of low cost housing where rents are set by a government formula based on local incomes, typically around 50% of market rent.