

### Runnymede Borough Council's Garage Strategy 2022 - 2028 (Housing, Andy Vincent)

**Synopsis of report:**

The Garage Strategy proposes a mechanism for identifying and addressing poor conditions within Runnymede Borough Council's garage stock.

Runnymede Borough Council received £685,900 in garage rents (net of voids & vat) in 2021/22 – maintaining or even growing that income is essential to the continued financial viability of the authority.

14 sites have been identified where void levels (the number of garages empty) exceed 20% of the total number of garages on a site.

The strategy proposes that viability appraisals of these sites should be conducted; considering demand, investment required in each site versus alternative use.

**Recommendation:**

That Members approve Runnymede Borough Council's Garage Strategy (Appendix A) noting that viability appraisal findings will be reported to the November Housing Committee

That Members approve the consultation approach outlined for the garage strategy. Wide consultation on the strategy and a detailed site by site consultation if 'change of use' is proposed for a current garage site.

#### **1. Context and background of report**

- 1.1 Within the Housing Business Centre Plan 2021/22 a commitment was made to produce a Garage Strategy to consider the future of the Council's garage stock, investment required and sites for potential alternative use.
- 1.2 A draft of the Garage Strategy was considered at the February 2022 Housing and Enabling Member Working Party with the following action identified at that meeting: -
  - Next steps would be to seek permission to consult at the June Housing Committee.
- 1.3 Income from Runnymede Borough Council's garage stock was appropriated from the Council's Housing Revenue Account to the Council's General Fund with effect from April 2013, as reported to the Corporate Management Committee. This followed Secretary of State Approval and mirrored the approach of many other local authorities.
- 1.4 Runnymede Borough Council's Housing Revenue Account therefore own the sites with income, and associated costs being paid from the General Fund.

#### **2. The Purpose of the Garage Strategy**

- 2.1 The proposed strategy sets out a program for systematically identifying and considering the future of 'poor performing' garage sites.

- 2.2 The strategy initially will focus on sites where occupancy levels are below 80% (less than 80% of the garages on a site are occupied) and work towards the better performing sites as the program develops.

### 2.3 Consultation on the Garage Strategy

It is proposed that the Housing Service takes a two-pronged approach to consultation on the Garage Strategy.

1. That broad consultation on the strategy is undertaken with the wider tenant and resident population between 1<sup>st</sup> September and 30<sup>th</sup> October 2022. Consultation will involve: -
  - a. September – Annual Report
  - b. Web page – directed by social media platform & dedicated web advert
  - c. Email residents who rent garages from us
2. That detailed consultation is undertaken with residents on a site-by-site basis where the potential for a change of use is identified via the viability assessment.

### 3. Monitoring of Delivery and Next Steps

- 3.1 It is proposed that the work identified within the plan to undertake assessments of the initial 14 sites is commenced following the June Meeting of the Housing Committee.
- 3.2 The results of the consultation with tenants and residents and of the initial viability assessments will be reported to the November Housing Committee.
- 3.3 A working group containing staff members from Planning, Corporate Assets and Housing will meet regularly to review progress against the strategy, compile reports to the Housing Committee and to consider additional actions that may need adding to the strategy as part of its annual review.

### 4. Policy framework implications

- 4.1 The Housing Service Business Centre Plan 2022/23 commits the service to the: -

*“Development of a garage strategy to identify opportunities to consider alternative use of the sites or ensure that the sites receive the appropriate level of investment” – completion June 2022*

### 5. Resource implications/Value for Money (where applicable)

- 5.1 No resources are being requested as part of the development of the Garage Strategy. Resources will be required to deliver the strategy.
- 5.2 Requests for resources will be brought forward following each phase of the viability assessments and consideration as to the future use of each site.

### 6. Legal implications

- 6.1 Use of garages is granted by way of a weekly licence that requires charges to be paid in advance, by direct debit. The authority must keep the buildings in repair and ensure the licensees use their units properly. The terms restrict usage to only

‘garaging of a private motor vehicle’ and prohibit use for any other purpose, expressly excluding for trade or business, or ‘for the storage of personal effects or furniture’.

- 6.2 The authority can terminate the licence simply by delivering a written, 7-day notice to the licensee. No ‘grounds’ are required, so it is purely at the authority’s discretion as licensor and means that vacant possession can be obtained quickly, if necessary.

## **7. Equality implications**

- 7.1 There are no equality issues as this strategy relates to property rather than individuals.

## **8. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

- 8.1 Consideration in the proposals for the future of garage sites might be given to environmental/sustainability implications. An example of this could be electric vehicle charging points on the sites – which could generate an income for the authority to supplement any lost garage income.

## **9. Other implications**

- 9.1 Runnymede Borough Council’s garage assets are currently an under-utilised resource. Maximising their usefulness or the usefulness of each site will ensure that the Council is getting the best return from its asset.

## **10. Timetable for Implementation**

- 10.1 If the strategy is approved – viability assessments of the initial 14 sites will commence immediately.
- 10.2 Consultation on the strategy will take place between 1<sup>st</sup> September and 30<sup>th</sup> October – with the strategy being brought back to the Housing Committee in November for formal approval.
- 10.3 This consultation exercise follows the Council’s Consultation Strategy principles.
- A. Consultations should have a clear purpose and start at an appropriate stage
  - B. Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted
  - C. Consultations should be clear and concise
  - D. Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time
  - E. Responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion and facilitate scrutiny

## **11. Conclusions**

- 11.1 It is recommended that action is taken to address the deteriorating condition of the Council garage stock.
- 11.2 This strategy is being proposed as a mechanism to do that.
- 11.3 It is essential that the income stream garages provide to the Council’s General Fund is maintained, to ensure that there is no impact on the delivery of services to residents.

**(To resolve)**

**Background papers**  
None