

Garage Management Strategy



St Albans
City & District Council

Housing Services

Introduction

This strategy has been developed following the implementation of the Housing Strategy 2023-2026. The Council have committed to delivering a clear strategy that identifies future use of Council owned garage sites in the district. The aim of this strategy is to consider whether sites should be retained, refurbished, redeveloped, or disposed of and the rationale for making these decisions.



Local Context

The Council owns 2324 garages across the district. As of July 2023, there were 1191 garages that were occupied and 1133 garages that were 'void', i.e. not tenanted. This equates to an occupancy rate of 51%.

The breakdown of the number of occupied garages by area is detailed below:

| Area | Occupied | Void | Total |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| St Albans | 616 | 608 | 1224 |
| Wheathampstead | 85 | 96 | 181 |
| Sandridge | 26 | 16 | 42 |
| Colney Heath | 33 | 30 | 63 |
| Smallford | 11 | 9 | 20 |
| London Colney | 88 | 154 | 242 |
| Park Street | 57 | 23 | 80 |
| Chiswell Green | 50 | 19 | 69 |
| Redbourn | 40 | 58 | 98 |
| Harpenden | 179 | 119 | 298 |
| Bricket Wood | 6 | 1 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 1191 | 1133 | 2324 |

Despite the number of void garages there are waiting lists for each area. As can be seen in the table below, the majority of those waiting to rent a Council garage are private tenants.

| Area | Private Tenant | Council Tenant | Total |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| St Albans | 518 | 33 | 551 |
| Wheathampstead | 77 | 12 | 89 |
| Sandridge | 52 | 11 | 63 |
| Colney Heath | 14 | 4 | 18 |
| Smallford | 19 | 3 | 22 |
| London Colney | 80 | 7 | 87 |
| Park Street | 82 | 5 | 87 |
| Chiswell Green | 25 | 2 | 27 |
| Redbourn | 51 | 9 | 60 |
| Harpenden | 235 | 12 | 247 |
| Bricket Wood | 35 | 1 | 36 |
| TOTAL | 1188 | 99 | 1287 |

The three most popular areas where there is a waiting list for a garage are:

- St Albans City Centre
- Fleetville
- Cottonmill

The data above indicates that there are sites where there is maximum occupancy and people are waiting to rent a garage in a specific location. There are sites with a high level of void rates where there is no demand. There are several reasons why a garage may be void. These include but not limited to:

- Too small for a modern car.
- Poor security, e.g., insufficient lighting.
- Location too remote from property.
- Poor condition.
- Cost of rental.



Unused garages typically fall into disrepair and become victim to anti-social behaviour so discouraging their use even further.

It is not known how many garages are in use for car parking or storage. Storage of personal items can lead to an increased risk of break-in and insurance claims to damaged goods.

Strategic Context

The Council Plan sets out the priorities designed to deliver a viable, happy, inclusive, and sustainable community. One of the priorities is to deliver more social housing. One of the objectives of this strategy is to identify sites that are suitable for redevelopment to deliver a mix of social housing that meets the needs of the community.

Financial Context

In 2023 / 24 the garage rents are £12.83 per week for a council tenant and £15.40 per week for a private tenant. The table below provides details of the annual income, annual day to day repairs and expenditure, and capital expenditure.

| | 2019 / 2020 | 2020 / 2021 | 2021 / 2022 | 2022 / 2023 | 2023 / 2024 (forecast) |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Income | £792,302 | £754,928 | £711,175 | £700,450 | £781,050 |
| Repairs and maintenance costs | £40,001 | £34,953 | £40,674 | £24,195 | £25,368 |
| Capital expenditure | £107,920 | £93,731 | £73,669 | £94,980 | £100,000 |



Day to day repairs are minor works carried out to garages and garage sites. Capital expenditure involves more programmed works such as garage door replacement, lighting, replacement roofing and resurfacing of garage forecourts.

In addition, garage sites are included on the Council's insurance policy that covers the housing stock. The annual cost of this element of the policy is in the region of £5,000. There have been no claims on this policy in the past five years.

There has been a lack of investment in the garage stock due to other competing priorities. In recent years, budget resources have been directed to maintain the Decent Homes Standard, deliver new social rented housing, and make significant energy improvements to the housing stock. This has meant that it has not been possible to increase the budget for capital improvements.

The majority of garages were built more than 40 years ago. The methods of construction have changed, for example precast concrete panels, asbestos sheets are no longer used. A significant sum would be required to refurbish garage sites in need of major works.

It would make sense to dispose of some sites for a capital receipt to enable investment in other sites. In addition, the Council should consider transferring some sites to a Registered Provider where there are redevelopment options as this will then not incur any borrowing costs. Doing nothing is not an option either given the condition of some sites, storage issues and incidences of anti-social behaviour.

Vision



A comprehensive garage sites review was carried out in 2015. This review forms the basis of the future vision of managing garage sites in the district. The conclusions reached and the outcomes identified within the review are still relevant today in terms of rights of way and planning challenges. They have helped to inform sites which have since been developed for social housing, are in the process of being developed or included within the current five year pipeline of sites to be developed.

Since 2013 / 14, 11 sites across the district have been developed, delivering 70 properties for social rent and five properties for shared ownership.

It is the Council's ambition to realise the development of three sites per year across the district for social housing. These properties will contribute to the social housing stock in the district for applicants from the Housing Register.

The Council will engage with the local community when considering future redevelopment of garage sites.

To achieve this vision, the Council is developing an action plan detailed overleaf with a range of options to consider realising its objectives.



| Proposal | Options |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Retain garage site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify sites of high occupancy, or potential high occupancy, for capital improvements. Review rent levels for more popular sites to maximise income levels. |
| Redevelop garage site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand on existing pipeline of sites to be suitable for development. Consider transfer of sites to a Registered Provider to develop for social housing. Identify budget in capital programme to redevelop sites to retain as Council housing. |
| Disposal of garage site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Package sites up to maximise sale value. Review options to offer sites up for public auction. |
| Alternative use of garage site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demolish garages to create additional parking bays. Demolish garages to create cycle stores. Convert into storage units available for rental. Outsource management, maintenance, and refurbishment to an external contractor. Use of electric charging points. |



The strategy has been developed with the intention of identifying ways that the Council can:

- Maximise value from its assets-through maximising garage income by refurbishment or disposing of sites for a capital receipt to re-invest.
- Deliver more social housing.
- Reduce levels of anti-social behaviour.
- Deliver community benefits.
- Identify a specific option for every garage site in the district, prioritising those sites with occupancy rates of 50% or less.

The strategy will be monitored by way of an annual update to the Housing and Inclusion Committee. This will set out progress on performance against all the aims and measures set out within the strategy. This update will be published on the Council’s website. It is intended this strategy will respond to local issues and review best practice nationally to ensure we deliver on our commitments and meet our key priorities. The strategy has a timescale of three years, and it will be refreshed and updated for 2027.



Redevelopment of new housing on a former garage site in Harpenden.



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