

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE	Communities, Housing and Infrastructure
DATE	19 May 2015
DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	Seaton Backies One
REPORT NUMBER	CHI/15/158
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Committee for the detail of this project to be developed and consulted upon.

Environmental improvements to two 'Backies' within Seaton:

26 to 32 Seaton Place East; 15 to 21 Seaton Road; 16 to 22 Seaton Avenue; 15 to 17 Seaton Drive;

and

4 to 7 Seaton Gardens; 5 to 7 Seaton Avenue, 8 to 14 Seaton Drive.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

The Committee is recommended to instruct the Director of Communities Housing and Infrastructure to:

- a) develop this proposed project in detail;
- b) conclude the grant applications with the grant funders that have indicated support for this project;
- c) consult with the private owners of flats within these blocks, and seek their consent for the proposals; and
- d) report back to Committee on these outcomes.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The capital cost of this project has been given an indicative estimate of £498,000, excluding fees.

It is proposed that the capital cost is met by the Housing Revenue Account (£396,000) and grants from Aberdeen Greenspace (£51,000) and Aberdeen Forward (£51,000).

It is proposed that the Housing Revenue Account meets the cost of removing and replacing dilapidated installations, relocating the BT poles, and providing external lighting.

It is proposed that grants fund the provision of structure planting, bulb planting, and the provision of improved play and seating facilities.

Upon completion of the works these backcourts and play areas will be readily maintainable by the Council's environmental and repairs teams and these maintenance works will remain within the normal range of such works.

#### **4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS: Private Owners**

##### **4.1 Consents**

The consent of the private owners will be required if improvement works to individual back courts are to be undertaken.

Of the 150 flats, within 25 closes, 32 flats have been sold under Right-to-Buy legislation. Private owners have the right of veto on improvement works being undertaken to 19 of the back courts.

Where a decision cannot be made to improve individual back courts, it is proposed that repair works are undertaken. In such an eventuality the owners will not have the right of veto and they will have an obligation to meet a proportional share of the costs.

If, and where, improvement works are undertaken there will be little practical means of recouping a share of the costs from the private owners. Hence the recommendation (in section 3) that the Housing Revenue Account meets the cost of the majority of the works.

In return for subsidising the private owners the HRA will:

- achieve a better living environment for all the residents (in particular the children);
- reduce future maintenance liabilities, with the removal of some of the wash houses; and
- increase the participation of the residents in the use and control of their neighbourhood (in particular the children).

##### **4.2 Land Ownership**

Aberdeen City Council owns the major part of the land referred to in this report. Some of the cellars are, however, privately owned.

Where these cellars are removed, along with their adjacent wash houses, it is intended that these private owners will be given the opportunity to participate in an excambion process that will allow their land to be relocated (so as to allow the erection of private sheds in more appropriate locations).

## 5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

The initiative to tackle the poor environment within Seaton first came about from a group of young mothers who were concerned that their children had nowhere safe to play. This led to the Seaton Backies steering group being formed in 2012.

A study trip by the steering group to a number of exemplar sites in Glasgow was undertaken and this was followed by three consultation events, in 2012 and 2013, to gauge the views of both the adults and children living in Seaton. Play areas, growing space, new storage facilities, and drying areas were found to be priorities for the residents of Seaton.

The Seaton Backies steering group have continued to be active, since 2012, improving the environment in Seaton, in partnership with other groups and organisations. They have helped organise the upgrading of a wide range of environmental features (play areas, a road underpass and planter boxes) with the assistance of the local community, Aberdeen Greenspace Volunteers, Church of God volunteers, and members of staff from Total Oil UK, Bibby Offshore and BP. In addition, Britvic Funding helped the creation of a new play area, within another Backie.

A 'Planning for Real' consultation event was held on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2015. Much of the preparation for this event was undertaken by the school children of Seaton Primary School. This 'Planning for Real' event:

- updated the community's wishes for these Backies;
- assisted cross-generational participation; and
- reinvigorated activist numbers.

***'Planning for Real' event: the pupils of Seaton Primary School constructed a model of Seaton. Members of the community then added comments as to what they considered were the issues within Seaton, and also what they wished done to enhance the area.***

The Council's proposals have since been tested by undertaking door-to-door sample interviews (25 households within the areas of the proposed works have been interviewed). These interviews have confirmed support for some wash houses being removed, and some wash houses being retained and repaired. It has also confirmed support for enhanced play and sitting-out areas being provided.

- a) The wash houses and cellars, that are no longer required, are to be removed.

- b) The wash houses and coal cellars, that are required, are to be repaired.
- c) The dilapidated fencing is to be removed and replaced to a revised configuration that enhances the usability of the Backie (to be consulted upon).
- d) The dilapidated clothes poles are to be replaced, where required. The existing paving dilapidations are to be made good.
- e) Litter and dog dirt bins to be provided. Dog grids and a dog toilet are to be provided.
- f) External lighting is to be provided. The BT poles are to be removed.
- g) Structure planting is to be provided, to enhance the usability of the Backies.
- h) Flower bulbs are to be planted by the residents and school children
- i) Enhanced play equipment, safety surfaces and seating is to be provided.

## **6. IMPACT**

### **6.1 Neighbourhood Regeneration**

This project will assist the enhancement of local identity, which will, in turn, support the regeneration of Seaton. It is envisaged that this project will encompass both physical and community regeneration.

### **6.2 Community development**

The community will be encouraged to develop during the course of this project and become empowered to make increasing use of their environment and take increasing control.

It is envisaged that the works, and the Council's community support team, will help establish steering groups from each Backie that will facilitate the community:

- making decisions as to the detail of what is to be implemented in their area;
- self-police the use, misuse and maintenance condition of their area; and
- lead on future developments.

During the course of the project there will be a continued interaction with the local schools. The children will be given the opportunity to plant flower bulbs, within these Backies. Where possible, the project will be employed to provide a practical demonstration of the curriculum requirements for teaching of environmental issues.

(This involvement with the schools will reinforce the Council's on-going use of the nearby community woodland as an educational resource, as part of the Tree-for-Every-Citizen project).

### **6.3 Corporate parenting**

It is envisaged that 2 work-start corporate parenting posts will be supported, by these works.

The trainees will participate in the works on this site, and in other locations. The trainees will be provided with a range of training, in support of the works, and to address any individual barriers to entering employment.

The Council's previous training projects and collaborations have been successful in providing pathways into full-time employment.

## **7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK**

The primary risk to this project is obtaining the consent of the private owners for any improvement works.

This risk has been greatly reduced by not making the progress of the whole project dependant on the consent of all the owners to all the works: the works to each back court will be progressed to the degree allowed for by the consents received. The works to some back courts may be restricted to being repair works; to other areas a higher standard of environment will be achieved. It is envisaged that having delivered a higher standard of environment to some areas peer pressure and financial pressure will facilitate the other areas also being brought up to a good standard

Further detailed consultations will be undertaken with the tenants and private owners in order to manage this risk.

## **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

'Seaton Backies, Planning for the Future'.  
Final report by erz Ltd, for Aberdeen Greenspace, December 2012.

## **9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS**

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