

I am here to speak in favour of this application and the improvements that it stands to bring to the area.

As members will already be aware, change of usage to residential accommodation has already been approved; today we are only asked to decide on fenestration, fascia, and door presentation.

However I would like to emphasise, for those who are unaware of the social importance and significance of this development, just how important it is.

Foy House has been purchased by TDC for temporary accommodation. Our aim is to provide flexible, secure and well planned temporary accommodation to reduce stress for our residents and increase our direct provision and ensure that as few individuals and families as possible are placed out of area, which is often a deeply distressing experience for our residents. This is a new and exciting provision for us, in terms of being able to directly support families within our area, and we were determined to plan it well, and I believe we have done. As we have not done this before we have taken advice regarding layout and fittings from professionals and colleagues across Kent who are experts in the provision of temporary accommodation, to ensure that we are providing the best arrangement possible in this flagship project.

People come into temporary accommodation for many reasons. Living in temporary accommodation is an experience that requires thought and care from landlords to make stays as positive as possible; our plans for Foy House are our chance to show what we are capable of as a temporary accommodation provider, and a chance to bring yet more of our housing service in house, reducing costs and increasing our control and management of the service simultaneously.

It is becoming ever more obvious that housing is about more than simply providing accommodation. Houses are not simply buildings; they are homes, and in no area of accommodation is this more important to be aware of than in temporary accommodation.

We are here to decide on what is a clear improvement in appearance, which will be actively involving the community around the building in terms of colour scheme, as part of supporting a vital, essential and life changing service for our residents. This presents a huge step forward for our council and I hope very much that all members hope for the same for our residents in terms of an in house, temporary accommodation service with an exceptional internal and external finish.

All our units are designed to maximise space, provide essential facilities, promote energy efficient usage, and very importantly provide facilities that specifically keep the needs of households in temporary accommodation in mind.

All units conform to the Nationally Described Space Standards to ensure that families are guaranteed good size accommodation in their time of need. All are heated electrically, with electric ovens and hobs to promote energy efficiency, and we are looking at installing solar panels to further improve energy efficiency and help resident families with their energy costs. All have open plan living/dining rooms to try and maximise the feeling of space, at a time when families need considerate use of space the most, all have access to the courtyard garden and lift to increase accessibility, and very importantly for families and individuals who find themselves in need of temporary accommodation, all have very good size storage cupboards and access to a communal laundry room. A bike store is also being provided, to tie in with our larger aims of helping communities to be as active as possible via our new developments.

Looking at the development floor by floor gives us a good idea of the overall plans and why we have designed the development this way.

The basement of the development will be used for meters and CCTV equipment and therefore will not be used by residents.

The ground floor will contain one two bed flat, and one one bed flat, again providing a good mix of households. This floor, with both side and front access, also includes the management office, for easy access, also the bike store, again for easy access, and the bin store.

The first floor includes one two bed flat and two one bed flats, again to provide a good mix demographically, and the planned area for the laundrette, to maximise access for all flats.

The second floor includes one one bed flat and two two bed flats, and provides maintenance access to the roof.

We aim to submit planning following this meeting if approved. Internal stripout is due to take place in January 2021, with work starting on the development in April 2021. We are planning to complete in early 2022.

Consultation, as always, is key to a successful development. We are keen to work with residents and businesses in the area and will be writing to them shortly to advise them of our designs and also ask them for their opinion on the external finish of the building.

Our design team have already produced several options, and we will conduct a poll within the local community to find out the most favourable.

Foy House is yet another important step towards our Housing service becoming a strong, centralised local provider. It offers us a chance to provide high quality accommodation for families in difficult situations, under our protection as their landlord. We have a duty to protect residents, especially when they are at their most vulnerable; and tenants have a right to high quality, well planned accommodation regardless of the permanence of their residency. Our plans for Foy House stand to help us achieve both our responsibilities and our aims, and I look forward to hearing your views.