



**AMBER VALLEY  
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

# **HOUSING RENEWAL POLICY 2003**

## **CONTENTS**

- 1. Summary of the New Housing Renewal Framework**
- 2. Housing Renewal as part of Amber Valley's Corporate Objectives**
- 3. Foundations this Policy**
- 4. Reviewing and Revising the Policy**
- 5. Priorities for Assistance**
- 6. General Grant Availability**
- 7. Comments about the Policy**
- 8. Appeals**
- 9. Review**

## **1. SUMMARY OF THE NEW HOUSING RENEWAL FRAMEWORK**

- 1.1. The new Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 on housing renewal came into force on 18 July 2002. It repeals most of the existing legislation concerning the use of grant aid as a tool for housing renewal. The only area remaining unaffected is the mandatory Disabled facilities Grant, which Councils will still be expected to provide.
- 1.2. The Council now has a general power to provide grants, loans, advice and materials or to directly carry out work, for the purpose of repairing, improving, extending, converting or adapting housing accommodation. Qualifying criteria for renewal schemes, amount of grant assistance, and any conditions attached to the grant are now at the discretion of the Council.
- 1.3. Freeing local authorities from such a rigid grant framework marks a milestone in housing renewal. Local Authorities now have the opportunity to invest their available resources into projects that have been identified as having the potential to benefit the community as a whole, while still protecting the individual's right to a decent home.
- 1.4. Before these new powers can be used the Council has to publish a policy setting out its approach to housing renewal as a requirement of the Regulatory Reform Order. Therefore, this policy replaces the Amber Valley Borough Council's 1998 Grants Policy (Revised 2001).

## **2. HOUSING RENEWAL AS PART OF AMBER VALLEY'S CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

- 2.1. The Amber Valley Community Plan lays out the vision for a better Amber Valley. It is a framework that comes from all sections of the population; from young people, disabled people, elderly people, industrialists, rural settlements, parish councils, small businesses, councillors and people from ethnic minority groups. From this document the Council has drawn up a set of values and priorities for 2002/05 and housing is seen as contributing heavily towards a number of these priorities: -
- “Helping to Create Safer, Sustainable Communities” - “our housing policies will work to facilitate the provision of an adequate housing stock of good quality long term housing, within an environment that is attractive to residents.”.
  - “Promote Healthy Communities” - “Narrow the gap between worst off and best off in our communities”. The policy of targeting our grant resources at those areas that have been identified as being in the greatest need is addressing the problem of ill health through poor housing.
  - “Protect and Improve the Environment”. Ensuring energy efficiency measures are included as part of any grant schedule, the Council is re-affirming its commitment to protecting the environment and at the same time protecting the fuel poor from excessive energy bills.
- 2.2. The Councils published Housing Strategy sets out its approach to facilitating and enabling initiatives to provide good quality, sustainable housing accommodation in the Borough. Links to the Community Plan that defines the wider vision for local communities are identified. The Housing Renewal Policy is a key element of the Housing Strategy as it sets out the Councils approach to regeneration of the local housing stock.

### **3. FOUNDATIONS OF THIS POLICY**

- 3.1. This Policy sets out the Council's approach to facilitating and supporting housing renewal. The responsibility for the maintenance and repair of private houses primarily rests with the owner, however these properties are also the homes of future generations and are a valuable asset. Timely and considered intervention can be vital in order to preserve the housing stock and improve the health and well being of people living in sub standard conditions.
- 3.2. The policy aims for area intervention that is designed to safeguard the housing stock and contribute towards healthier and safer communities whilst moving away from a grants dependent culture. Any assistance we provide should be seen as the Council stepping in to prevent further decline in areas with social, health and housing based problems. Therefore, serious consideration has to be made to how the resources that we do have, need to be targeted to achieve the most benefit to the individual and the community.
- 3.3. The resources available for housing renewal are limited and although the intention is to continue to maximise the funding available for housing renewal, it would be impossible for the Council to fund all the needs of the private housing sector and nor should it. For that reason, owners with significant capital will be expected to fund or contribute towards the cost of necessary repair works and apart from mandatory disabled facilities grants, grant assistance will only be given when there are sufficient funds available. However we will use that funding to tackle inequalities in health suffered by vulnerable residents living in the poorest quality housing. Any major changes to the resources available will require the policy to be reassessed.
- 3.4. Although the policy is not primarily concerned with the legal enforcement of housing standards it will sometimes be appropriate to recourse to the law to ensure improvements in housing conditions. Where this is considered necessary it will be done in accordance with relevant national legislation and Council published enforcement policies.

#### **4. REVIEWING AND REVISING THE POLICY**

- 4.1. The Local House Condition Survey planned for later this year will provide vital information necessary for reviewing this policy in the spring of 2004. After that review, the policy will be reviewed every two years unless there is evidence to suggest that an earlier review is needed.

## **5. PRIORITIES FOR ASSISTANCE**

5.1. There has always been a link between poor housing and ill health and the Private Sector House Condition Survey carried out in 1998 and the Public Health Report for Amber Valley in 1999 confirmed that the Borough's worst housing conditions are located in areas associated with levels of ill health that are higher than the Borough average. As a result the Council has already declared that the Eastern Wards should be priority areas for housing renewal and that support will be given to vulnerable and elderly residents by: -

- Helping Low income households maintain and improve their homes
- Reducing the number of unfit properties
- Returning empty properties to housing use
- Providing employment within local building trades
- Improving energy efficiency and security to counteract fuel poverty and the fear of crime

### **5.2. Area Intervention**

5.2.1. For the time being we will continue with our policy of targeting resources towards unfit properties in the Eastern wards and vulnerable elderly persons throughout the Borough. The Eastern wards were identified in the 1998 Amber Valley House Condition Survey as having the majority of unfit properties and the Public Health Report 1999 confirmed that these wards are also have the worst socio-economic indicators and levels of ill health above the average for the Borough.

5.2.2. The house condition survey scheduled for 2003 will provide an updated and current picture of housing standards across the Borough. This survey will also look at the potential impact of the planned changes in the housing fitness legislation and identify any small areas or blocks of housing that would benefit from tighter focused intervention by the Council. This information will be used to formulate a revised policy in 2004 after extensive consultation with our partner organisations and the public.

### **5.3. Assistance for Vulnerable People**

5.3.1. The Council's work with the "Care and Repair " home improvement agency run by Walbrook Housing Association, has resulted in necessary repair work being carried out to the homes of many elderly residents to allow them to remain independent in their homes. Using Home Repair Assistance Grants in this way has proved to be popular and successful and grant aid will continue to be offered through Staying Put and Minor Works Grants.

5.3.2. Disabled Facilities Grants are provided to fund necessary adaptations to the home of a disabled person so that it meets their needs. This could be achieved a variety of measures such as installing a stair lift or the conversion of a room to give specialist bathing facilities.

5.3.3. There will always be situations where cases should be considered as an exception to the area based policy on renovation grant allocation; for example

where a house has no access to an inside toilet or bathroom. However, only houses that have been lived in by their current owners for some time will be considered.

#### 5.4. **Initiatives to Tackle Identified Issues**

##### 5.4.1. ***Empty Properties***

Empty properties can often become an eyesore, attracting graffiti, litter and vandalism. If they are allowed to become derelict they contribute to a “run down” feeling in affected neighbourhoods. Properties in this condition are removed from the pool of available housing, often depriving young people of the chance to buy or rent in their own town or village.

##### 5.4.2. ***Energy Efficiency***

As part of the Council's commitment to reducing damaging CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, tackling fuel poverty and raising the health and well being of all the Borough's residents, the Council will continue to include energy efficiency measures wherever possible when we offer housing renewal assistance.

##### 5.4.3. ***Enforcement***

There will be instances where the Council will use its legal powers to ensure the safety of residents. Any legal intervention will be done in accordance with the relevant legislation and the Councils adopted enforcement policy.

##### 5.4.4. ***Clearance***

Some properties will be unsuitable for improvement or conversion at reasonable expense. Where this happens the Council will carefully appraise the situation and if necessary, take enforcement action in order to demolish the house or houses with a view to redevelopment of the site.

## **6. GENERAL AVAILABILITY OF GRANTS AND ASSISTANCE**

### **6.1. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's)**

- 6.1.1. Mandatory DFG's remain available Borough wide for property adaptations to improve the quality of life of private homeowners and tenants with disabilities.
- 6.1.2. The need for the adaptation is determined by an Occupational Therapist from the Derbyshire County Council and Amber Valley Borough Council will only award the DFG if the suggested work is reasonable and practicable and falls within the qualifying criteria for a mandatory DFG. All DFG's will be assessed and administered in accordance with the current legislation.
- 6.1.3. The amount of grant paid is determined by a "test of financial resources" of the applicant and cannot exceed £25,000. This is a legal requirement that is covered in detail by legislation and over which the Council has no influence.
- 6.1.4. No budget is currently available for discretionary DFG's.
- 6.1.5. Any property owned by Amber Valley Housing, that needs adaptation for a disabled occupant, will be subject to the same qualifying criteria as other applicants for Mandatory Grant assistance. The Council has a five year commitment to "ring fence" funding for DFG's in these properties. Funding for DFG's in Amber Valley Housing properties is additional to the agreed level for DFG throughout the rest of the Borough. A review of funding arrangements will occur at the expiry of the 5-year agreement when all applications will be serviced from a single fund. For 2003/04, £500,000 has been allocated towards disabled adaptations across the Borough, with a further £450,000 allocated to disabled adaptations in Amber Valley Housing dwellings.

### **6.2. Discretionary Renovation Grants**

- 6.2.1. Discretionary renovation grants up to the maximum of £15,000 are available to qualifying owner-occupiers and landlords of unfit properties within the target wards (listed below) to improve properties to the statutory fitness standard. Note: Because of the number of people held on a waiting list for renovation grant assistance; for the year 2003/04 and until future policy revisions, these grants will only be available to people currently on the renovation grant waiting list that meet the qualifying criteria.
- 6.2.2. Discretionary renovation grants may apply to:
- Owner/occupied properties.
  - Private tenanted properties.
  - The return of empty property to housing use.
  - Conversions of empty properties to units of self contained accommodation.
- 6.2.3. The target ward areas for discretionary renovation grant assistance are:
- Langley Mill and Aldercar
  - Alfreton
  - Heanor East

- Heanor West
- Ironville and Riddings
- Somercotes

#### 6.2.4. **Renovation Grants to owner occupants:**

6.2.4.1. Owner-occupiers grants will be assessed by a test of the financial resources (means test).

6.2.4.2. All applicants must have owned and lived in the property for the previous three years (not applicable to landlords and renovation grants for empty properties).

#### 6.2.5. **Renovation Grants to Landlords:**

6.2.5.1. Landlords will be offered up to 75% of the eligible cost of renovation calculated on sliding scale in relation to a range of qualifying criteria e.g. projected rental income, landlords management record, location of property, availability of nomination rights, membership of accredited landlords scheme.

6.2.5.2. The Council will have the option of tenancy nomination rights for a period of 5 years.

6.2.5.3. Landlords will be encouraged to sign up to the planned 'Accredited Landlord' scheme.

#### 6.2.6. **Renovation Grant Qualifying Works**

6.2.6.1. Properties will be assessed against the current housing fitness standard and where a property is classified as being unfit by the Council's inspecting officer, assistance will be available for items of major and/or serious disrepair e.g. roofs, damp proofing, windows and doors, bathing and kitchen amenities. Small/minor repairs that are easily remedied at relatively low cost will not be included on schedules as it is accepted that these are general maintenance works that an owner should reasonably undertake.

6.2.6.2. Officers will inspect properties against detailed operational guidance as to what will and will not qualify for grant assistance. This guidance will only be available to members of the public in cases of appeal so as to prevent intentional damage to properties and fraudulent applications.

6.2.6.3. Where works exceed the maximum grant, the Council will prioritise the work to be undertaken. The works required to meet the absolute minimum to comply with the statutory Fitness Standard must be undertaken to qualify for grant. If these works amount to more than the maximum grant, the applicant will be expected to fund these works regardless of their financial assessment.

#### 6.2.7. **Grant Conditions and Repayment**

On completion of grant works, we will continue to attach the 5 year grant condition period and repayment clause as detailed in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (as amended).

### 6.3. **Empty Homes**

6.3.1. Discretionary renovation grant up to the maximum of £20,000 will be available to landlords and private individuals for properties which are unfit for human habitation and which have been unoccupied for at least 12 months (immediately prior to the date of the enquiry). The three-year prior ownership rule does not apply.

6.3.2. The provision of self contained flats, properly converted from unused and unsuitable single units of accommodation, can provide badly needed homes for residents of the Borough and help to remove “eyesores” and derelict properties.

6.3.3. Limited ring-fenced budget will be made available in 2003/04 for returning a small number of long-term empty properties back into use. Therefore, new enquiries relating to empty properties will be considered outside the current renovation grant waiting list.

6.3.4. It is intended that future policy revisions will develop the financial and non-financial assistance provided to owners of empty properties borough wide.

#### 6.3.5. ***Empty Homes Grants to owner occupants:***

6.3.5.1. Grants to prospective owner/occupiers will be assessed by means testing.

#### 6.3.6. ***Empty Homes Grants to landlords:***

6.3.6.1. Grants to landlords for the renovation of empty property will be offered up to 75% of the eligible cost of renovation calculated on sliding scale in relation to a range of qualifying criteria e.g. projected rental income, landlords management record, location of property, availability of nomination rights, membership of the planned accredited landlords scheme.

6.3.6.2. The Council will have the option of tenancy nomination rights for a period of 5 years.

6.3.6.3. Landlords will be encouraged to sign up to the planned ‘Accredited Landlord’ scheme.

#### 6.3.7. ***Empty Homes Grants for conversions:***

6.3.7.1. Discretionary renovation grants will be available to landlords to fund the conversion of empty homes to multiple single units of self-contained accommodation.

6.3.7.2. To prevent profiteering and to ensure that conversions are appropriate to local housing need, the following conditions apply:

- The property must be an unfit house, which has been unoccupied for 6 months or more.
- The conversion must provide self-contained accommodation that is appropriate to local housing need.

- The conversion would not normally result in a reduction in the number of housing units available.
- The circumstances of each grant to be considered on its own merits and approval to be in agreement with the cabinet member for the 'Health' portfolio.

#### 6.3.8. ***Grant Conditions and Repayment***

On completion of grant works, we will continue to attach the 5 year grant condition period and repayment clause as detailed in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (as amended).

#### 6.4. **Grants for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's)/Common Parts of Buildings Divided into Flats**

- 6.4.1. Grants are not available for HMO's, or fire protection works to the common parts of buildings divided into flats. HMO's are houses in multiple occupation as defined as " a house which is occupied by persons who do not form a single household" (Housing Act 1985).

#### 6.5. **Staying Put and Minor Works Grants (previously HRAs)**

- 6.5.1. Walbrook Care and Repair act as our 'Home Improvement Agency' and administer Staying Put and Minor Works Grants on the Councils behalf to provide support through process to vulnerable people.

#### 6.5.2. Qualifying benefits

- Income Support
- Income based job seekers allowance
- Council Tax Benefit
- Disabled Persons Tax Credit

#### 6.5.3. ***Staying Put (replacing Ordinary Home Repair Assistance)***

- 6.5.3.1. Available Borough wide for people aged over 60, in receipt of a qualifying means tested benefit and requiring essential repairs to their properties to help them remain in their own home.

- 6.5.3.2. Eligible works include essential repairs, energy efficiency measures and home security measures.

- 6.5.3.3. The applicant must have owned or been resident in the property for a minimum of one year prior to application.

6.5.3.4. There is a limit of £3000 per application. No more than three applications up to a total value of £5,000 may be approved in any three year period, with a minimum of one year between each application.

6.5.3.5. No grant conditions apply after the completion of works.

#### 6.5.4. **Minor Works Grants** (previously Targeted Home Repair Assistance)

6.5.4.1. Available borough wide to disabled owner-occupants who are in receipt of a qualifying means tested benefit. Also available to families with children under the age of 16 who are in receipt of a qualifying means tested benefit and who are living in one of the target ward areas: Alferton, Heanor East, Heanor West, Langley Mill and Aldercar, Riddings or Somercotes.

6.5.4.2. Eligible works include essential minor repairs, energy efficiency and home security measures.

6.5.4.3. The applicant must have owned or been resident in the property for a minimum of one year prior to application.

6.5.4.4. A limit of £3000 per application. A limit of three applications up to a total value of £5,000 in any three year period, with a minimum of one year between each application.

6.5.4.5. On completion of grant works, we will attach the 5 year grant condition period and repayment clause as detailed in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (as amended).

### 6.6. **Loans and Discounts**

6.6.1. Local Authorities have little expertise in this specialised area. However, we intend to work with partners in exploring the possibilities for loans and alternative financial assistance towards a wide range of home improvement work and discounted materials schemes.

6.6.2. As any schemes are developed, they will be published and adopted into future revisions of this policy.

### 6.7. **Advice**

6.7.1. The maintenance of a house is the first and foremost responsibility of the owner and the Council intends to publish an advice booklet giving advice and tips on home maintenance to help people keep their properties in good condition.

## 6.8. **Energy Efficiency**

- 6.8.1. In 2002 the Council re-launched its Home Energy Advice Service to help Amber Valley residents reduce their fuel costs and keep warm. The commitment to energy saving generally and to combating fuel poverty in particular will continue with the policy of integrating energy efficiency measures into the targeted renovation and home repair assistance grants.
- 6.8.2. In addition, advice is available from the Home Energy Advice Service on grants, deals and promotions currently on offer from regional and national organisations operating in the energy field.

## 6.9. **Applications Falling Outside the Scope of the Policy.**

- 6.9.1. It is recognised as important that the policy should be sufficiently flexible to take account of exceptional circumstances. For example, elderly low income households living outside the target area needing property repairs which are too extensive to be addressed by Home Repair Assistance. Exceptional applications will be assessed and, if appropriate, approved in agreement with the cabinet member for the 'Health and Leisure' portfolio.

## **7. COMPLAINTS AND COMMENTS ABOUT THE POLICY**

- 7.1. Any complaints, comments or suggestions about this policy should be made in writing to: -

Sue Sonnex  
Director of Environmental Services  
Amber valley Borough Council  
PO Box 17  
Town Hall  
Ripley  
DE5 3TU

- 7.2. All comments will be acknowledged and a full written reply will be made after your views have been considered.

## **8. APPEALS AGAINST DECISIONS IN INDIVIDUAL CASES**

8.1. Grounds for appeal will be considered where: -

- The policy has not been consistently or correctly applied.
- Exceptional circumstances arise outside the scope of the policy that merit consideration.

8.2. Appeals arising from decisions made in connection with grants and assistance offered should be made in writing to: -

Sue Sonnex  
Director of Environmental Services  
Amber valley Borough Council  
PO Box 17  
Town Hall  
Ripley  
DE5 3TU

## **9. REVIEWING AND REVISING THE POLICY**

- 9.1. This policy will be reviewed after the first year in light of the results from the proposed house condition survey and following consultation.
- 9.2. Future reviews will be carried out every two years unless there are major changes to the resources available or major legislative changes.