

DESIGNATED ORLIT HOUSING

Executive of the Council

1 February 2005

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report on the progress of the designated Orlit improvement programme.
- 1.2 To report on the outcome of the structural assessments undertaken in 2004.
- 1.3 To recommend a future strategy for designated Orlit housing.
- 1.4 To present a programme of proposed improvements.

2.0 Main Report

2.1 General Historical Information

Under the Housing Defects Act 1984, a number of post war, system built, low rise houses were "designated" as defective on the grounds that the structural defect on these house types could not be repaired by normal methods.

These house types are generally known as "Orlit" houses and in Edinburgh's stock the specific types concerned are Blackburn Orlit, Scotcon Orlit, Whitson Fairhurst and Standard Orlit. In 1990 these totalled 862.

The designation of these house types meant that regular structural inspections and assessments were required to establish -

- (a) that the structures were structurally safe for occupation;
- (b) the extent of deterioration of the structure;
- (c) an estimate of the remaining useful life of the house structure;
- (d) an assessment of any remedial actions required.

2.2 City of Edinburgh Council Policy

In April 1988, a report was submitted to the Housing Committee summarising the results of structural inspections and confirming that the houses had a useful life estimate of 10-15 years, subject to regular monitoring and repairs to some ground floor beams. However, in order to achieve this life expectancy, the building envelopes required a considerable amount of work to ensure that the structural elements remained sealed and protected against penetrating rain and dampness, condensation dampness and high humidity conditions. The Housing Committee agreed at the meeting in April 1988 that pilot schemes be undertaken to assess costs, disturbance and quality of the repaired and improved designated houses.

In April 1990, a report on the outcome of the pilot improvements was considered and the decision was taken to embark upon a five-year programme to improve all designated Orbits within the Council's housing stock.

2.3 Orbit Improvement Programme

The improvement programme commenced in August 1990 and was completed by mid 1997. This was longer than the five-year timescale because of financial limitations per annum and agreement of adjacent owners.

The main elements of the improvement programme were new timber windows, external wall polymer render with wall or cavity wall insulation, new roofs and roof insulation, new entrance doors, humidistat controlled ventilation and electrical central heating. The total cost of the programme was approximately £8.7 million.

In general, the improvements were well received by tenants, however, the window design and electrical central heating were areas of some dissatisfaction.

2.4 Central Heating

The selection of electric storage central heating for the Orbit programme was based upon an installation cost which would be cost effective over a 10-15 year life, i.e. have low maintenance needs and a minimal initial capital investment. At the time of the heating system selection, the gas central heating option was estimated to be twice that of the electrical option, with additional annual maintenance and gas safety inspection costs.

2.5 Windows

The window design deliberately sought to use timber framed with single glazing and mid range quality ironmongery. The selection of materials was based on a perceived 15-year life span. The single glazing was included as a means of avoiding condensation on the structural elements and the design included drainage arrangements for condensate, in the later phases some windows had partial double-glazing. Generally, the tenants' view was that omitting double-glazing in the design had resulted in increased heat loss and some of the draught sealing and ironmongery did not perform well after 10 years of use.

2.6 Orlit Structural Assessments

As noted in Section 2.2, the structural assessments in 1988 predicted a 10-15 year useful life. During the improvement programme, further inspections were carried out and repairs undertaken where required.

In January 2004, funding was allocated for further structural assessments and in May 2004, a consultant structural engineer was appointed. Sample surveys of approximately 10% of the designated Orlits were undertaken during June to October 2004. The consultant engineer assessed the data obtained and advised formally in December 2004 that all designated Orlits in the Council's ownership could expect to have a future life of 15 years provided that properties were suitably maintained and adequately heated, and that future structural assessments were undertaken every five years.

It is apparent that the strategy and improvement design for the designed Orlits has delivered a cost effective solution, which will result in a further 15 years beyond the lifespan given in 1988.

The Orlit houses in the city are generally well sized and popular with tenants. A considerable proportion are houses with gardens. The recent structural reports have noted there is little sign of further deterioration of the structure since the inspections in 1988, which encourages us to believe that with continued maintenance the properties will continue to provide good homes for the next 15 years. Based on the traditionally 'conservative' view which engineers are required to take, it is of course quite possible that the lifespan will exceed 15 years although this is beyond the professional advice regarding lifespan. In these circumstances it is recommended that we plan to bring the properties up to the 'Edinburgh Quality Standard' just as we are doing with the all our properties, with the timing of the achievement of the Edinburgh Standard being subject to available resources.

As part of the Better Homes For Edinburgh stock transfer process assessment of the housing stock is being undertaken by external consultants. These consultants will review the recent Orlit structural reports during February/ March 2005.

3.0 Options

Although the structural elements have a useful life of 15 years, there are some elements within the buildings that require to be considered as follows.

3.1 Windows

The window handles, catches and draught-proofing requires maintenance and in some instances, renewal. Some painting and staining of windows also requires to be undertaken and consideration could be given to partial secondary glazing.

3.2 Electrical Wiring

The electrical system was partly rewired during the improvement programmes from 1990 to 1997. Some upgrading of the wiring would be required if the kitchen and bathroom improvement programmes were to be undertaken.

3.3 Central Heating

According to current database information of the 578 designated Orlit houses in our ownership, 463 have electrical storage heating systems and 89 have gas heating systems. There has been some dissatisfaction expressed by tenants regarding the running cost and flexibility of the electrical storage heating system.

3.4 Kitchens and Bathrooms

Apart from *ad hoc* kitchen and bathroom improvements and some additional cabinets and cupboards installed at tenancy changes, the kitchens and bathrooms are as installed when the houses were built under the 1946 and 1950 Act. Although many tenants have undertaken their own improvements over the years, the main kitchen and bathroom fixtures and fittings are as original. In this respect these houses are in the same position as traditionally constructed properties built at that time.

3.5 Entrance Doors

The main doors to houses and blocks of flats were renewed in the Orlit improvement programme. They have generally performed satisfactorily but

in some instances improved draught proofing is required and flat entrance doors require to be renewed.

4.0 Proposals

- (a) Maintain the general fabric of the building with normal planned maintenance work, with specific attention to window repairs, electrical rewiring and maintenance painting programmes.
- (b) Undertake the installation of gas central heating system to all designated Orllts. There have been some complaints from tenants regarding the running cost of electrical storage systems. It is recognised that the installation of gas heating systems will be more affordable and hence will be more likely to be used by tenants to provide adequate heating to the complete house and structure.
- (c) Also include these houses in the kitchen and bathroom improvement package currently being offered in the *By Design - Your Home, Your Choice* programme.

5.0 Financial Implications

The costs associated with these proposals totalling £6.6 million could be contained within the HRA Capital programme and the additional funding anticipated through the Better Homes For Edinburgh (BHFE) Strategy assuming a positive ballot. It would be possible to programme some of this work to undertake the maintenance items and the gas central heating in 2005/6. It may be possible to carry out the new kitchen and bathroom package as early as 2006/7, depending on the stock transfer ballot result.

6.0 Communication Strategy with Tenants/Owners

In order to reassure tenants and make owners of designated Orllts aware of the outcome of our structural assessments it is proposed that an information leaflet is circulated to all tenants and owners of designated Orllts. This leaflet will also explain the dependence of the timing of the improvements on the results of the ballot for stock transfer.

In addition to the leaflet, officers from the housing service will meet with area boards and local resident associations to answer any questions that may arise from the leaflet.

7.0 Recommendations

That the Executive agrees to:

- 6.1 The investment proposals outlined in paragraph 3.6 for all designated Orbits, with maintenance elements and central heating being programmed in 2005/6 at an estimated cost of £1.7 million and the kitchen and bathroom improvements being included in the BHFE investment strategy at an estimated cost of £ 4.9 million. Expenditure on kitchen and bathroom improvements may be possible beginning as early as 2006/7, depending on the stock transfer ballot result.
- 6.2 Adopt a programme of sample structural inspections on all Orbit types at five yearly intervals.
- 6.3 Adopt the communication strategy outlined in Section 5.0 above to tenants and owners occupying designated Orbits owned or previously owned by City of Edinburgh Council.



Mark Turley
Director of Housing

21/01/05

Appendices:

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Wards Affected: City Wide

Background Papers: Housing Defects Act 1984
Pilot Proposals for Designated Defective Orbits - Housing Committee, 12 April 1988
Orbit Housing Report - Housing Committee, 3 April 1990

Agenda item:

Report title: DESIGNATED ORLIT HOUSING

In accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, the contents of this report have been noted by the appropriate Executive Member.

Without prejudice to the integrity of the report, and the recommendations contained within it, the Executive Member expresses his/her own views as follows:

Signed:



Date: 21st January 2005

For information – Standing Order 57(1) states:

"Heads of Department will prepare reports, with professional advice and recommendations, on matters requiring decisions by the Executive:

- a report seeking decisions on matters of corporate strategy, corporate policy and corporate projects will be submitted direct to the Executive
- a report seeking decisions on matters relating to the special responsibilities allocated to an individual member of the Executive will be submitted, in the first instance, to that member. The member will add his or her own recommendation to it before submission to the Executive. Where the Executive member disagrees with the advice and the recommendation of the officers, the Executive member will also state his or her reasons."