

**MONTREAL SQUARE CONSULTATION
FEBRUARY 2018**

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Introduction

CHS is exploring the possibility of redeveloping the land at Montreal Square, but no decision has been made yet. CHS is supportive of our residents and understands that this is a very difficult situation. We will support them through this process, and will take the time to fully consult with them. The CHS Board will not make a final decision about the future of Montreal Square without fully taking into account the views of our residents.

Q: What is being proposed?

A: CHS Group is entering into consultation with our residents at Montreal Square as we are considering redeveloping the site of the current houses. It is proposed that these homes are replaced alongside additional new homes, to make the best use of the land available on the site and to help the maximum number of households to have affordable homes in Cambridge. Our aim is to increase the number of affordable homes at Montreal Square, not to make a profit.

Q: What would this mean for current tenants?

A: If the decision is made to redevelop Montreal Square, CHS is proposing that current customers would move out of their homes (possibly in phases) while the rebuilding work takes place. All customers would be offered the option to return to a new home in Montreal Square.

Q: Why is CHS proposing this and why now?

A: As a charity, CHS has a duty and a desire to provide as much affordable housing in Cambridge as we can. Private rented property in Cambridge is unaffordable for people on low incomes. We want to build more homes to help more people. It's currently very difficult for CHS to find or build affordable housing in Cambridge, where need and lack of affordability is greatest; we haven't built a new affordable home in the city for nearly 5 years

CHS entered into consultation with customers at Montreal Square six years ago and decided not to redevelop the site at that time. This is now something we need to review as the housing affordability crisis in the city has worsened significantly since then.

Q: Why has CHS chosen Montreal Square?

A: In order to build new affordable homes in Cambridge, CHS has very few options as other sites are too expensive. In addition to issues with the age and future maintenance of the houses, Montreal Square is the only CHS site in Cambridge suitable to build more new homes than exist there already, due to the size of the whole plot. This would allow us to help more households with affordable homes than would otherwise be possible.

The homes at Montreal Square are also becoming increasingly expensive for CHS to maintain, and to upgrade to modern day standards for existing and future customers. Substantial investment would be needed to make significant

improvements in the energy efficiency of these homes in the short to medium term.

CHS also has a duty to make the best use of its resources and our Regulator requires us to achieve effective management, value for money and best use of our assets. CHS's Asset Management Strategy has identified Montreal Square as a high priority for appraisal. Over the next thirty years, we will need to spend around 45% more per property at Montreal Square, compared to what we will spend on the average CHS property. An additional £360k of investment will be needed within the next five years to bring the properties up to our energy performance standards.

Q: What would the redevelopment look like?

A: Our aim is to provide as many new low cost rented homes as possible at Montreal Square. The proposal we are consulting you on is to replace the current 18 houses with new homes of the right size for you and your neighbours to rent; plus as many affordable homes as possible and possibly some market sale homes to help pay the costs of the redevelopment.

Q: How would CHS support its customers through the process?

A: If the decision is taken to go ahead with the redevelopment, CHS will support you through the process, including finding alternative accommodation on a temporary basis (or a permanent move if you prefer it). CHS would pay the difference in rent for temporary accommodation if it exceeds your current rent. We would also cover any reasonable costs associated with the moving process.

Q: Where would the temporary housing be?

A: CHS would find you somewhere as close as possible to where you need it but we could not guarantee how close this might be. This may be a home that CHS already owns in Cambridge however we do not expect to have enough of these – so we would ask other landlords to help.

Q: What would happen about rent payments?

A: If you choose to return to live in a new home in Montreal Square, you would not pay a higher rent than your current rent for the same size of home would be. We also expect the energy running costs to be significantly lower in a newly built home. If you have a secure tenancy you would continue to have the rent independently reviewed every two years.

You may need to pay a higher rent for a permanent move if you choose not to return to Montreal Square, depending on the size of the property, location and landlord (if you have a secure tenancy and move to another CHS address, you would keep your Fair Rent status).

Q: Would residents have a say in what new homes they can return to?

A: Yes – if the proposal goes ahead and you choose to return to a new home in Montreal Square, you would be able to get involved in the specification and design of your new home in whatever way possible.

Q: How much compensation would be paid?

A: If plans go ahead, each CHS customer would be entitled to a statutory Home Loss Payment, which is set by government. Currently this is **£6100** per tenancy (in addition to any expenses). This may have increased in line with inflation by the time any plans move forward.

Q: Could the compensation affect entitlement to benefits?

A: It depends what assets you already have. It is possible that the compensation might result in some reduction in benefits, and you would need to take advice on this. You may want independent advice, or CHS's own Money Matters Team could help.

Q: What about removal costs?

A: CHS would also cover the cost of moving (to temporary accommodation and back again, or for a single permanent move) as well as any difference in rental costs during a temporary move.

Q: What would happen if customers say no to moving temporarily?

A: We recognise that moving customers out of their homes is very disruptive, creating uncertainty and needing to adapt to major changes. It is CHS's hope that you would feel able to work with us if the decision to redevelop the land is taken. We would do our utmost to make the process as painless as possible by offering as much support as we can. In the event that a decision is taken to redevelop the land and anyone refuses to leave their properties, CHS would have to explore legal action which can lead to eviction, although this is a very last resort and something we hope not to have to do.

Q: If the plans go ahead, when would residents be expected to move out?

A: If the decision is made to redevelop Montreal Square, there would be a period of planning, which we expect to take at least one year. Therefore customers might be expected to leave their homes sometime during 2019, but no earlier. Timescales are subject to the planning process with the City Council, so it is not possible as yet to be more precise. As this is a consultation with residents, the planning process has not started. There is an option for the redevelopment to be done in phases, which could mean that residents can move out in stages.

Q: Can CHS decide to go ahead with the proposals even if customers are not in favour?

A: CHS has a duty to take customers' views into account during the decision making process. This doesn't mean customers have the final say. The final decision rests with CHS's Board – they will carefully consider the views of customers, as well as a wide range of other factors.

Q: Who can residents contact at CHS for more information or support?

A: Your Housing Officer is Mehwash Hussain (01223 713531, mehwash.hussain@chsgroup.org.uk) who can answer your questions or find an answer for you. If she is not available, David Bailey, Housing Manager, can also be contacted (01223 713561, david.bailey@chsgroup.org.uk)

Q: Who can residents contact outside CHS for advice?

A: CHS has notified your City Council councillors of this consultation process (contact details at the end of this document) and your Member of Parliament Daniel Zeichner MP. You can also seek advice at the Citizens Advice Bureau (66 Devonshire Road, CB1 2BL, **0344 848 7979** www.cambridgecab.org.uk) at no cost, or from a solicitor.

Q: When will a decision be made about the proposed plans?

A: The initial consultation with customers about whether to go ahead with redevelopment of Montreal Square is taking place during February 2018. CHS is conscious that you will want to know the outcome of the consultation as soon as possible once all your views have been gathered. The decision on whether redevelopment will go ahead is due to be made by the CHS Board on 13th March 2018, taking into account your views.