

Somerton Resident Steering Group meeting: Wednesday 3 August 2022, 17.30

Attendees

NCH: Rachel George, Phillip Lott, Rebecca Sluman,
Oxford Architects: Andrew Brown, Terry Lai

Residents: Janine Clarke, Danny Davis, Gwyneth Johnson Mcloughlan, Lindsay Brown, Carol Williams, Ceri Antonen, Barbara Taylor, Paul Hoare, Deborah Hoare

Councillors: Debbie Harvey, Timothy Harvey, Alex Pimm

Introduction

Phillip advised the group that the meeting was being recorded, there were no objections

1 Action from previous minutes

1.1 Rachel explained that questions were raised at the last meeting that we have addressed and put into a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document that we will go through at the end of the meeting in the communications agenda section

2 Project Plan

2.1 Rachel shared her screen to show the Somerton project plan

2.2 Rebecca explained that at the last meeting we talked about Newport City Homes going out to speak to all our customers. Leaflets were delivered the week before last and we have been in Somerton last week and over the next few weeks carrying out visits. The purpose of this is to get to know our customers more, who is living in our properties, this may have changed over time, we also need to find out what our customers want to do, do they want to stay in Somerton, do they want to move out. Is the property they are currently living in suitable for their needs, do they need a smaller or larger property, do they need a property with adaptation. To date we have carried out 76 visits. I explained that myself, Gareth, Kelsie, Alison and Cheryl will be carrying out these visits over the summer

2.3 Rachel went on to explain that the purpose of us doing these visits is to ensure that this information informs our design proposal to ensure we are building the right homes. Newport City Council have said that there is a need for 1-bedroom flats in Somerton which we don't currently have, we also don't want to build too many flats that aren't required. This is why we are talking to our customers now to gather their information so we can use it to ensure we are providing and building the right mix of homes for the community of Somerton

3 Valuer

- 3.1 Valuations to date, we have had 32 valuation request and they have all been carried out. Offer letters and valuation reports have been sent out to all 32 homeowners. 14 valuations have been accepted and are with solicitors for Newport City Homes to buy back those properties. 6 homeowners have appointed a valuer to get a second valuation on their home. 12 homeowners I am in conversations with some are awaiting a second valuation of their home and others are in the process of appointing a solicitor.
- 3.2 Rachel explained that the other piece of work that we want to carry out around homeowners is we have appointed Peter Alan, they are a local agent and will help us look at our offer for homeowners, who wish to stay in Somerton as part of the new development. In our development we want to have options for existing homeowners who want to stay in the area as homeowners, we are going to work with Peter Alan to develop an affordable home ownership option.
- 3.3 Peter Alan will also be able to provide financial advice to those homeowners who are thinking that they might want to stay in Somerton in the new development in a new home, Newport City Homes will be able to pay for those homeowners to have financial advice from Peter Alan
- 3.4 With Peter Alan working on both of these projects, they will be able to feed back to us, not personal information but information to ensure we can tailor our advice and our options, we want to develop options that are really attractive and affordable for people and need their expertise to guide us on this
- 3.5 A resident asked what are the options, pensioners can't get mortgages. Rachel explained that we are committed that for homeowners that don't have mortgages we won't expect people to get a mortgage we will provide an affordable home ownership option for people without the need for a mortgage if they don't currently have one. This is the reason for us working with Peter Alan so we can work up options that would be suitable for people

4 Design Update

- 4.1 Andrew explained that most of the slides that will be shown in the presentation were shown at the last meeting, but there was a consensus that after the last meeting there was some important information in the slides that we didn't have the time to look at and discuss this information
- 4.2 Andrew showed the first slide which showed the regeneration schemes that have been shown to date, Acacia Avenue, Hawthorne Fosse and one corner of

Sycamore and Hawthorne Avenue, these are design proposals and we are looking at other areas of the estate as we cannot look at areas in isolation

4.3 Andrew showed a slide which looked at potential area for regeneration these are Laburnum Drive, section of Sycamore Avenue, Ashley Road and Poplar Road, Libeneth Road and corners of Sycamore and Hawthorne Avenue. These are areas that we will be looking at with the design team, these just proposals currently. These are possible regeneration site because:

- There is a higher proportion of NCH ownership
- A high proportion of existing properties have damp problems as identified in the survey reports
- It will provide great opportunities for regeneration and placemaking

4.4 Cllr Harvey asked about the steps and alley way leading to the schools on Sycamore Avenue, will we be doing anything with this as there are issues with anti-social behaviour. Andrew explained that we have been working with the school and they have expressed that the alley way is prone to anti-social behaviour. We are looking at ways to improve the access to the school and this could include widening the alleyway, using landscaping to make it a place people cannot hang around in

4.5 Cllr Harvey enquired about Libeneth Road and the possibility of the new railway station. Rachel explained that we do not have any information about this and this would be between Welsh Government and Transport for Wales, but currently we have not been given any information about t railway station in this area

4.6 Andrew showed areas that will likely be refurbishment only and they include a section of Hawthorne Avenue, Hawthorne Square and Palm Square and Linden Road, for properties that Newport City Homes own

4.7 Andrew showed the areas that will possibly be taken out of the regeneration will be Linden Road and Somerton Road and the properties that Pobl own on Laburnum Drive

4.8 As a design team we are still developing proposal for the rest of the estate to look at what areas that will fall under the regeneration and refurbishment programme

4.9 A part of the next community consultation event, we will look to firm up our proposals so we can bring to the event so we can give clarity to residents

4.10 A resident enquired that as we are progressing quickly with the privately-owned houses, can the slides be updated to show the level of NCH ownership where we are having offers accepted. They wanted to know that if we have an area of regeneration

and a homeowner doesn't want to sell then why are we looking at these areas being regenerated and spending money for architects to come up with designs.

4.11 Andrew explained that with each site and scheme we are looking at we are also drawing up designs where homeowners don't want to sell and designing schemes with this in mind

4.12 Rachel explained we are using the information that we have regarding voluntary buy backs to inform our plans, as this will show a higher level of NCH ownership and we could then potentially look at this as a regeneration area

4.13 We need to find out what is possible and this means talking to homeowners about what they want to do, however we need to firm up our offers for homeowners so we can go out to them and talk to them open and honestly so they can make an informed decision on what is possible for them

4.14 A resident asked about the access to the school from Ashley Road and to the Hope Centre. Andrew explained that we need to take all this into account when designing proposal for each area as access into these are important

4.15 Rachel explained that we have listened to the community's feedback and this is why we have areas we have in the refurbishment scheme

4.16 A resident enquired about Palm Square and they want to be left alone, Rachel explained that we need to carry out works on our homes.

5 Refurbishment

5.1 There will be 2 pilot properties, 1 in Hawthorne Avenue and 1 in Linden Road, they have undergone extensive surveys and investigations works. There is a design team working to look at the specification for these properties, such as moving the external wall insulation and reinstating a new system, new windows and door, photovoltaics on the roofs and air source heat pumps which is a sustainable way to heat homes. From a structural point of view, we have had investigative works on the ground floor concrete slab as there is potential that we may need to remove all the concrete slab as there is potential for movement and heave. We want to ensure that the refurbished homes have a long-life span which will benefit the new residents and NCH

5.2 Rachel stated that we wanted to explain the extensive works that we need to carry out to the homes that will undergo the refurbishment works

5.2 A resident asked how many properties have been put aside to move tenants to move in to and when they will be available. Rachel explained that at a later date we will look at the rehousing need. Whatever area a property falls under either regeneration or refurbishment then people will need to move out of their homes, we would only look to move people once. For the pilot properties we would like to move people in who currently live in Somerton so they can trial the properties for us, and

we will monitor the properties and carry out regular visits to ensure the works that have been carried out are robust

5.3 If we are able to start the refurbishment earlier then we will and the properties that we buy back and they are in the refurbishment area then we will keep them and carry out the works

5.4 Acacia Avenue we are looking at regeneration for this area then we could look to move those people into a refurbished property if they wish to stay in Somerton. For the next phase we can then move people into the new builds. We want to move people once into a property that meets their needs and keep those people who want to stay in Somerton in Somerton

5.5 A resident asked if we have an NCH customer who is in a refurbishment area and they move out but want to move back in because they have lived in there all their lives or for other sentimental reasons. Rachel explained that people will be housed according to their needs and we are currently in a housing crisis and we are governed by Newport City Councils housing allocations policy. Rachel also explained we wouldn't be able to move people out while their home is being refurbished and then move them back in, we will have conversations with people when the time comes to it

5.6 A resident asked what will happen if people do not want to stay in Somerton, could we move people out of the area within our own stock. Rachel confirmed that we could do this

5.7 What area have been put aside to hold all the building materials, it has been said that this is Acacia Avenue. Rachel explained that this hasn't been looked at as we are not at that stage where we have a contractor appointed, once we do this will be discussed with the contractor

5.8 Andrew summarised to say that we are trying to identify an approach for each area and this will carry out throughout the design process. The refurbishment works will be extensive.

5.9 Cllr Harvey stated that it is really important to let the residents of Somerton know what where their properties are. Another resident echoed that the more information that we can share now then the better

5.10 Rachel stated that between now and the middle of September we need to work up a full specification of works, put a programme together which will include the works, meeting zero carbon, costings for these works and we will have to check in with our internal maintenance teams and teams that will manage the properties after to ensure they are maintained. Therefore, we cannot say categorically that Palm Square will be out of the regeneration as we need to ensure the refurbishment works are fit for purpose this is why we are trialling the refurbishment works on the 2 pilot properties.

5.11 A resident asked why can't we put it in writing that we will not be buying back properties if people don't want to sell. Rachel explained that our initial thoughts are

that palm Square will be refurbishment however if homeowners did decide to sell then we would need to revisit our designs for this area.

5.12 A resident asked about the refurbishment works being cost effective as works have happened previously and it hasn't work. Rachel explained that we want to carry out the work on the pilot properties so we have plenty of time for residents to move into them and trial the properties to ensure the works we have carried out are effective, before the refurbishment programme is rolled out across the estate

5.13 A resident stated that the 2 pilot properties will be in a worse state because no one has lived in them for several years. Rachel explained that the studies we have carried out on these properties and the works we will look to carry out such as removal of EWI, new windows and doors, take up the concrete floor will not be impacted if someone had lived in the property or if the property has been empty

5.14 Next steps will be to carry on looking at areas in Somerton, firm up the specification for the refurbishment. Continue to look at and incorporate, placemaking, green spaces and public spaces throughout our designs

5.15 The areas for refurbishment have been looked at because:

- There is a lower proportion of NCH ownership
- A lower proportion of existing properties have damp problems as reported in the survey reports
- We are listening to the views of the residents

6 Communications

6.1 When the group started we put together a communication plans and over time we have tried to get better and we have the monthly steering group meeting, the minutes of the meeting and blog are published online, we had the community consultation event in March and we will be holding another one in September. We realise that we are working to these time scales but appreciate that the community may not know this and it is a long time to wait. Rachel asked how can we make our communication better, a resident said that we just want a date of when we will know for definite what is happening in each area. Another resident said that by us starting on Acacia Avenue will show residents what we are doing and will know it is real.

6.2 Rachel said that we will re-look at the project plan with key dates and we can look to share this at the event in September

6.3 Rachel said that in the event we will hopefully be able to share our plans we may not have design proposal for each area drawn up but we will have a firmer idea of areas that will fall into either regeneration or refurbishment scheme

6.4 A resident said that the website may not be the easiest way to update residents on what is going on. They suggested that we ask every person on the estate for their email address and we can send our updates direct to their email addresses, so they don't have to go looking for information. There can be a link on the email so they

have the information straight away. Rebecca explained that we have been collecting this information during our visits to our NCH customers. It was agreed that we will explore this option – **NCH to look into**

6.5 Cllr Harvey said that with the empty homes in Somerton could we look to turn one of these into an information house, where residents can go to answer any questions. We can look into this but it wouldn't be manned 5 days a week but we will explore options

6.6 Rachel asked if we should send out a letter now before the event, so they have some information before the event, the group agreed that this is a good idea. Then regular updates on social media to advertise the event

6.7 A resident said that the uptake of people filling in a questionnaire at the last event isn't great and maybe to explore other options of obtaining feedback

6.8 Rachel went through an FAQ that we had put together for the meeting from questions that were being asked at each meeting.

6.9 The group agreed that the information around the regeneration and refurbishment will be sent out to the estate at the same time and we can advertise the event at the same time. FAQ will also be sent out with this information

7 Any other Business

7.1 A resident brought up about the condition of the gardens in our empty properties. Rebecca has had discussion with our maintenance team, our estates team will be carrying out works to these gardens over the summer

8 Next Meeting

Time and date of next meeting:

Wednesday 7th September: 17:30pm – Hybrid meeting