

# Somerton Resident Steering Group meeting: Wednesday 7 June 2023, 17.30pm

## Attendees

**NCH:** Pravin DeSilva, Phillip Lott, Rebecca Sluman, Rachel George, Sally Dixon, Emily Martins, Nicholas Collier

**Oxford Architects:** Andrew Brown, Terry Lai

**Residents:** Janine Clarke, Linda Clark, Danny Davis, Paul Jenkins, Debbie Clarke, Sharron Dennis, Carol Williams

**Councillors:** Deb Harvey, Tim Harvey, Alex Pimm

## Introduction

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

### 1 Action from previous minutes

1.1 The group asked us to share information on the Somerton website page on home options, this hasn't been done, as we attended the Councillor Surgery and answered lots of people questions and didn't know if this would help.

1.2 The group stated it would be beneficial if they could see how we evaluate an empty home to see if it is fit to be relet and if it isn't what works are needed to get properties up to this standard. Prav explained that we have Nicholas Collier from our Empty Properties team to talk through the process later in the meeting.

### 2 Project Plan

2.1 Prav explained that we have updated the project plan in line with design changes

2.2 Prav explained that the most crucial part of this project plan is the timescales; we have looked at the phasing of the works and have put together a phasing plan.

2.3 A resident asked where residents affected by the first phase (Acacia Av) will move to if they want to remain in Somerton? NCH responded that this is being worked through, and there will be support for both those who want to move out of the area, as well as those who wish to stay (potentially using the refurbished properties)

2.4 A resident asked about temporary works to bring back properties back into use, Prav explained that we are looking at funding opportunities to see if empty properties can be bought back into use.

2.5 Cllr Tim Harvey asked if NCH envisage that works will get quicker as each phase goes on, Rachel explained that the timescales are largely dependent on factors outside NCH control, and the majority of the time for development will be on ground works and associated other works (such as dealing with level differences). Due to this, some phases (e.g. those with greater level changes across the site) will take longer than others.

### 3 Design Update

#### Regeneration

3.1 Andrew explained in May's meeting, that the Welsh Government concept submission had been submitted

3.2 The pre-application submission is being prepared – the information in the application reflects the upcoming planning application, which is full planning for Acacia Avenue and outline for all the other regeneration areas

3.3 Refurbishment tender information has been issued

3.4 Proposed community information and event dates

3.5 Andrew explained that we have carried out and will be carrying out the below surveys:

- Acoustic surveys in empty NCH properties are complete
- Ground Investigations to Acacia Avenue on site this week
- Additional Ground Investigation work have taken place following the clearance of vegetation on Acacia Avenue
- Ecology surveys, tree surveys and transport surveys will take place over the Summer 2023

3.6 Andrew showed the map of Somerton that has been used to show the areas for regeneration and refurbishment, there have been some design changes.

- Area 4 (Hawthorne and Sycamore Avenue) is now showing as a regeneration area
- Area 12 (Hawthorne Avenue on the roundabout) is now showing as a refurbishment area
- Area 13 (High numbers of Libeneth Road) is now showing as refurbishment

3.7 Councillor Deb Harvey asked if Area 13 was originally a regeneration area, Andrew confirmed that it was, but due to ownership we are now proposing this area as refurbishment.

3.8 Andrew showed an updated design map which has the above areas included

3.9 For the proposed designs we will be looking at:

- Cost exercise in progress for TopHat MMC option
- Also looking at other MMC options to compare
- Welsh Government Concept Submission – Which has been approved for Acacia Avenue, they have given us comments and feedback for us to investigate but there is nothing significant. Andrew will share the comments in the next meeting
- Pre-application submission being prepared, we have done this previously but there is a new head of planning at Newport City Council, and we want to show them our design proposal
  
- 3.10 A resident asked about the proposals, specifically the map showing a mix of properties, 1 and 2 bed apartments, 2, 3 and 4 bed homes and 1 and 2 bed apartments for older persons and bungalow
  
- 3.11 Andrew showed another map which now looks at phasing for the regeneration areas, these are set out as:
  - Phase 1: Area 1 – Acacia Avenue, Acacia Square, Myrtle Grove, half of Poplar Road
  - Phase 2: Areas 2A, 2B and 2C – laburnum Drive and sections of Sycamore Avenue
  - Phase 3A: Areas 9A, 9B, and 11(on Sycamore and Hawthorne Avenue).
  - Phase 3B: Area 11(remaining houses on Libeneth Road) and Area 12b.
  - Phase 4: Areas 4 and 7 – Hawthorne Fosse, Hathorne Avenue and Sycamore Avenue
  - Phase 5: Area 5 – Ashley Road and half of Poplar Road
  
- 3.12 we will now be looking at the use of Modern methods of Construction (MMC) for the regeneration programme.
- 3.13 We are looking to start phase 1 (Acacia Avenue) in the Summer of 2025, phases will then follow
- 3.14 The above is subject to, further scheme progression, approvals such as internal NCH and planning and further community consultation and engagement
- 3.15 Andrew showed high level images of how the Acacia Avenue site could look like, considering the level changes of this site. These images are subject to further development
- 3.17 Aberthaw Road and Chepstow Road are currently shown as 4 storeys, this is a potential limitation of using MMC, we will be using these images in the pre- application documents to show the NCC planning department the designs and images

- 3.18 Cllr Deb Harvey asked if we have consulted the design out crime officers, Andrew explained that we have shown them designs and as the designs are progressed, we will have further meetings with them to discuss the designs
- 3.19 Andrew showed a landscape design for the Laburnum Drive site which starts on Laburnum Drive and goes down to Sycamore Avenue and down to the school gates
- 3.20 Rebecca explained that now we have a landscape design for Laburnum Drive we will look to speak to NCC about the woodland area and the options available to opening sections of the woodland area up
- 3.21 Cllr Tim Harvey asked if building in a traditional method, using bricks would slow down the build. Rachel explained that the design need more work and we need to make sure what the make up of the ground is, as the groundworks are usually the main issues for works being held up and there has been a shortage supply of brick, so we are looking at all avenue to build these new homes
- 3.22 A resident asked if Laburnum Drive is being brought down to street level, Andrew explained that we are exploring all options for this street. Sally explained that having the steps up to Laburnum Drive isn't desirable and isn't suitable for everyone household

## Refurbishment

3.23 The tender information is due back on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> June and the evaluation period is the 12<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> June, we would like some of the group to help mark the questions that we came up with, with some members of the group a few months back

3.24 Rebecca will send out an email to those that have attended this meeting to see if anyone is interested in help mark the questions, date is set for Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> June at 5:30pm

## 4 Communication

4.1 Andrew explained that NHC are getting together a newsletter that will be sent out to the estate in the next coming weeks

4.2 We are still looking to hold a consultation event, but we haven't got a date confirmed as we need to wait for the reports to come in from the ground investigation works

4.3 Rebecca will attend the Councillor Surgery on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June, 11am at The Hope Centre

4.4 Rebecca, Prav and Phill will attend a Councillor Surgery in September at the Hope Centre, this will be an evening surgery to ensure we are capturing people who work during the day

## 5 Empty Properties

5.1 Rebecca introduced Nick Collier as NCH's Void Surveyor who has surveyed the empty properties and the properties that we have purchased in Somerton

5.2 Nick started by showing a void survey that he has surveyed for a buyback property, this survey has the types of works that need to be carried out and the cost associated with these works

5.3 Nick explained that most properties will require some type of work and we work within the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) and Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

5.4 Nick explained that when a property becomes empty, we need to carry out asbestos surveys and any asbestos present needs to be removed

5.5 Nick explained that this property and a vast number of properties in Somerton need damp works to be carried out, there are follow up works such as hacking off plaster and render, re skimming and then you need to decorate and in some cases it is easier to decorate a whole property then doing it on a room by room basis

5.6 This property needed a rewire, a lot of the buy backs need a whole property rewire; this is because we need to wire in smoke alarms, some don't have earth cables etc

5.7 This property needed a new boiler, but the pipe works and radiators didn't need upgrading

5.8 A lot of the work that is carried out is usually carpentry work, this property didn't need a lot of works carried out in this respect, there were a few doors that need easing

5.9 For the damp works to take place the skirting needs to come off, these then need to be put back on or replaced

5.10 Windows are also another costly item, if they don't all need replacing there will be frames and panes that need doing in various rooms

5.11 Nick explained that if you need to remove wallpaper then due to the make up of the walls (black mortar, lath and plaster) the walls will need skimming

5.12 We also carry out garden works, they may look fine on first looks, however we need to look at health and safety issues, such as trip hazard, out building that are not safe or made from asbestos, then these need to be removed. We also look at boundary fences, retaining walls these need to be maintained. Within WHQS we need to ensure that we are providing a certain amount of patio area for our customers

5.11 This property needs a new kitchen and out of all the buyback every property has needed a kitchen and approx. 80% have needed a new bathroom. Unfortunately, with a kitchen if it is in ok condition, we are unable to maintain going forward as they are usually discontinued, so new kitchen need to be installed

5.12 For this property all the works came in under £21,000

5.13 Cllr Tim Harvey asked what our timescales are for letting a property back out, Nick explained that not including the buy backs they need damp works to be carried out in them, but those properties that can have the works carried out to them then they will. Rebecca explained that we have let out 4 properties over the last 12 months and works will be carried out on another property in Sycamore Avenue that will be relet

5.14 Cllr Deb Harvey asked what rent we are losing if these properties are not re-let. Rachel explained that once a property becomes empty, we look at the cost to get this home back up to a lettable standard against the rent we would get back. We are in talks with Newport City Council (NCC) and Welsh Government (WG) to look at funding options so we can bring these properties back into use on a temporary basis

5.15 A resident asked about the timescales with the phasing of the works. Rachel explained that now we have a proposed phasing plan we will be looking at these phases and looking at what properties we can carry out works to through this funding stream with NCC and WG

5.16 A resident asked how many homes do not meet the minimum standard. Rachel explained this is the reason why we are carrying out works in Somerton, from the Michael Dyson surveys it was identified issues within some homes and we are carrying out remedial works where needed

## **6 Voluntary Purchase Scheme**

6.1 Philip gave an update and explained that we are buying back properties that are within the legal stages. Going on from this we will be looking to purchasing properties in a phased approach

6.2 At the moment we will not be carrying out any new valuations

## **7 Any other business**

7.1 No one had any issues to raise

## **6 Next Meeting**

Time and date of next meeting:

**Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> July: 17:30pm – Hybrid meeting**