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**Somerton Residents Group Meeting Wednesday 3rd November 2021 @ 17:30**

**Attendees**

**NCH:** Rachel George, Pravin De Silva, Samantha Reed, Kelsie Cantelo, Wesley Ford

**Residents present:** Andy Grier, Janine Clarke, Barbara Taylor, Paul Hoare, Deborah Hoare, Scott Essery, Jenny Jenkins, Danny Davis, Simon Goom, Tes Ahmad, Rebecca Watts, Brian Stevens, Sharon Dennis, Debbie Clark, Gina Cooke

**Councillors:** Cllr Deb Harvey

**Online:** Cllr Ray Truman

1. **Introduction**
   1. Everyone introduced themselves
   2. Rachel informed residents that this was the first time piloting a hybrid approach (both online and face-to-face meeting) and said that we have tested the arrangement out though not in a full meeting and there bound to be issues we need to resolve.
   3. Rachel advised residents that the agenda can be seen on screen and reviewed the actions from the last meeting
   4. Meeting dates to be reviewed moving forward but will keep to Wednesday for the foreseeable
   5. Have looked into providing devices from residents who may require them to join sessions online, any resident who does to let NCH know
   6. Meeting will take place in January following feedback from Steering Group
   7. Other items will be picked up through the agenda
   8. Rachel moved onto terms of reference and code of conduct. Comments and suggestions from residents had all been included in the latest version
   9. Rachel requested residents sign document and offered spare copies. NCH to review who has/ hasn’t signed the terms of reference **ACTION NCH**
2. **Surveys** 
   1. Pravin provided an update on Michael Dyson surveys, informing residents that they have been completed and focused on identifying where there is rising damp, condensation causing mould and penetrating damp. We are still working through the information we have received.
   2. Residents asked when they would be able to see the survey data. Rachel explained that we are planning on sharing specific information about individual homes with residents themselves and more general information with this group, which will help us look at the potential approach for different areas. Rachel explained that we would want to share this with residents and the group as soon as possible though would most likely now be in January
   3. A resident asked whether the survey looked at cracking. Pravin confirmed that cracking was part of the MD surveys and would be fed back to residents.
3. **Financial Advisor Group**
   1. Pravin informed residents that we have had interest, but no-one has offered to do the entirety of the work, so NCH are re-looking at this, we may have to split the required services between different providers. We will still have resident involvement in this process. **ACTION NCH**
   2. Kelsie asked if there’s anyone who is interested in Financial Advisor Group, who has not already showed an interest. A resident said that he thought he’d registered interest but hadn’t heard anything. NCH to follow up. **ACTION NCH**

**4. Voluntary purchasing of homes**

4.1 Rachel explained that NCH are now in a position to voluntarily buy back homes in Somerton for those home-owners who are looking to sell.

4.2 A resident explained that she doesn’t like the term “buy-backs” because it suggested that all homes were previously owned by NCH which may not be the case. Rachel agreed that NCH would change terminology used. **ACTION NCH**

4.3 Discussion around how property purchase would work, letters to be sent to all homeowners detailing the process. **ACTION NCH**

4.4 Query around who could sell and if they needed to be in the boundary line, Rachel confirmed at present anyone interesting selling their homes within current area would be included, although as the project develops and boundaries are confirmed this may change.

4.5 Question around whether condition of property and the survey information would be taken into account for the valuation, Rachel explained that the valuer would consider the condition of the property because that is vital to understanding the value however the valuation does not take into account the potential regeneration scheme and it wouldn’t take into account the recent MD surveys, as that is not why we carried out the surveys.

4.6 A resident asked about the process for buying a new home and selling their existing one and the potential to buy off plan. Rachel explained that the process would be tailored with each homeowner with usually the sale/ buying process happening on the same day however this is something we expect to be working up with the financial advisor.

4.7 Councilor Harvey queried what happens with residents that no longer have a mortgage. RG said that NCH has already committed that where existing homeowners no longer have mortgages, we wouldn’t expect them to if they bought a home in the new development. There was a further question about exactly how this would work and a reference to the shared ownership model. Rachel said that while she and others at NCH had operated these sorts of schemes previously we want the financial advisor in place to make sure we are giving out the right information that works here.

5. **Project plan**

5.1 Pravin talked through project plan, outlining processes and key milestones for every quarter. In response to some particular points:

5.2 Pravin assured residents that NCH want residents’ feedback on design aspects and opportunity is given to this in the steering group meetings and in the proposed consultation events.

5.3 Pravin explained that once we have Welsh Government approval at the first ‘concept’ stage, we can develop design options in more detail.

5.4 Councilor Harvey asked about ‘establish areas for refurb’ being in Oct-Dec 2021 Rachel said this was because looking at the areas for regeneration and refurbishment is expected to be a process, for example:

* some areas may be clearer sooner, based on home ownership levels and the condition of homes that regeneration may not work there
* other areas may take longer to establish for example while home owners are considering their options

We are aware that residents need to know sooner rather than later the proposed approach for their home and we are working on this as quickly as possible.

5.5 Rachel explained that ‘P2W’ is the passport to work process, where we talk to residents individually about their housing needs to make sure we are designing the right homes for the existing community. There was a discussion about different house types and housing need. Rachel explained that households are re-housed in accordance with the Councils housing allocations policy and their housing need.

5.6 A resident looked at what the surveys/ information section for Oct – Dec 2021 and asked whether NCH was already delayed because these items are not complete Rachel explained that the plan is a high level look at what we expect to start when, it doesn’t mean that those items will be fully complete within that timeframe. It was suggested that the format be amended to show case the length of time tasks will take. Rachel said she will discuss internally and see how we could improve the format to give a better idea of timescales and to show that some tasks will take longer. **ACTION NCH**

5.7 Another resident suggested that we revisit the project plan at regular intervals as a live document. It was later agreed this be a standing item on the agenda for each meeting. **ACTION NCH**

5.8 A resident said he is really pleased with the project plan, because the biggest fear for the community is the fear of the unknown so this shows residents the expected timeframes. Others expressed relief knowing that works weren’t going to start on the estate too quickly. NCH were asked when there will be a copy of the project plan available to the group and wider community

5.9 Rachel confirmed that the project plan would be available publically alongside the minutes of the meeting. Residents said that the project plan alone is not enough to inform all Somerton residents. Suggestions were made for a letter to go to all residents with this or the improved plan. **ACTION NCH**

5.10 A resident suggested that we should have a communications strategy to make sure that the right information goes out at the right time to the local community. **ACTION NCH**

5.11There was a discussion on the best way of keeping other residents up to date with the steering group meetings. Some suggestions were:

* That steering group meetings be recorded for people to watch in their own time
* That non members be able to watch meetings live, on a webinar format so they can hear but cant join in
* That recordings allow people to hear what they want to and that written notes are best

5.12 Sam said that she is monitoring the comments from residents online and they can only hear Rachel speaking, so there are problems with volume and technology in this setting

5.13 Rachel said the best approach would be that meetings are both available online and with written notes. She added that NCH have the technology set up at their offices to carry out meetings in person and online. Kelsie asked residents to show whether they would be interested in meeting at NCH offices to allow a better hybrid meeting. The majority of residents raised their hands.

5.14 Resident asked how the refurbishment pilot would work. Rachel said we would look at the area least likely to be a part of the regeneration and pilot the likely refurbishment works to check that they would deliver the results we want. A resident asked where people would move for this to happen. Rachel said that if they wanted to stay in the area we would look to rehouse them locally.

5.15 Rachel answered a query about sustainable drainage and explained that it’s more natural ways of drainage that we’d have to factor into our designs. It is referred to as SUDs – sustainable urban drainage and is required by Welsh Government.

5.16 Queries were made about dates. In summary Rachel said:

* we expect that it will take around a year to work on the designs with residents and submit the planning application
* it currently takes in the region of 9 months to obtain planning approval
* it takes 6 – 9 months to get the right contractor on board
* then each phase of re-housing residents, demolition and new build takes around 18 months

5.17 Residents expressed that they are happy with the transparency, agree that the timeframes are realistic and can see the steps we need to go through.

5.18 Councilor Harvey asked why we have to Welsh Government approval on the design, Sam explained that as well as planning with NCC, WG now sign off the design it goes hand-in-hand as part of the process. Rachel explained that Welsh Government are making sure that we use quality materials and consider place making requirements.

5.19 Councillor Harvey expressed her concerns over sub-contractors. She asked NCH to commit to not allowing contractors to pass work down to sub-contractors who are fit for the work. Rachel said that contractors do use sub-contractors, however what we will commit to is that the community will be part of the contractor selection process and that we can include in the contract the requirement to know who all the sub-contractors are and that they can complete the work to required standards. Group participants were happy with this.

5.20 Queries made about boundary line, with a resident unsure as to why NCH would be demolishing homes that have nothing wrong with them. Rachel said there is no intention to demolish good houses and that is why NCH are trying to get as much information as we can about the homes to understand their condition.

5.21 A resident queried the boarded-up properties. Rachel explained that we have a process whereby we assess the cost of making the property suitable for re-let. Often properties we get in Somerton have high costs, also we have re-let homes only for issues to become problematic quickly and families have needed to move out again, which isn’t fair. Some residents noted that some homes had been re-let recently.

5.22 A resident asked why we spent money to show plans initially. Rachel said that this was to show what we could do and see if people liked the initial proposals. A resident expressed dislike for flats and said as well as properties being important, people are important too. RG explained that we have a responsibility to make sure that we are building properties that suit the mix of housing needs. Rachel acknowledged that we got some of those designs wrong and that we are going to do better. Councillor Harvey reiterated that building a mix of house types is important; that while some residents like bungalows they take a lot of space and it’s not always possible to build them and informed us that there 8,700 people homeless, waiting for a house in Newport, as of 30 November 2021.

**6. Next meeting**

6.1 Rachel said that at the next meeting we would like to start talking to residents about design, to find out what you like and don’t like about the estate at the moment to see what we can do to make improvements, or things you think it’s important we keep or enhance.

6.2 Some residents started to make some comments about specific areas, the condition of homes in certain locations. Rachel suggested that at the next meeting NCH brings some large scale maps, we could bring high level survey information and we could hear your views on the particular areas. **ACTION NCH**

6.3 Residents felt this meeting would be welcome and should be to a face to face meeting at the hall only

**Next meeting: 12 January 2022**