

**Somerton Resident Steering Group meeting**   
**Wednesday 12 January 2022, 17.30**

**Attendees**

**NCH:** Rachel George, Llyr Morris, Kelsie Cantelo, Rebecca Sluman, Laura Palfrey, Cheryl Jackson

**Residents:** Barbara Taylor, Paul Hoare, Deborah Hoare, Lindsay Brown, Raqaia Mahmood, Brian Stevens, Simon Goom, Naomi Davies, Janine Clarke, Rebecca Watts, Sebastian Czarnecki, Matthew James, Danny Davis, Ceri Antonen

**Councillors:** Cllr Deb Harvey and Cllr Ray Truman

**Please note**

This meeting was held as an online meeting due to the situation with Covid-19 at the time. Residents were contacted individually in advance to discuss arrangements.

**1** **Introduction**

1.1 Everyone was offered the opportunity to introduce themselves

1.2 Rachel advised residents that the agenda can be seen on screen and stated that we would come back to discuss the actions regarding the TOR, Voluntary Purchase Scheme and Financial Advisor. Rachel acknowledged in the last meeting it was suggested by a resident that the project plan be a standing item on the agenda for this meeting and stated we would discuss this in this meeting

1.3 Rachel explained that the majority of the meeting will consist of the looking at the mapping of the areas, the results from the Michael Dyson surveys and feedback, opinions and views from the group on each area

1.4 Rachel informed residents that NCH sent the project plan out to the group before the meeting, and stated that NCH would talk to the group about the current layout of the plan

1.5 Rachel covered meeting etiquette for online meetings and reminded the group to use the mute function while not speaking and asked everyone to use the ‘raise your hand’ function and the chat box

1.6 Rachel asked the group to think about if they would be happy for NCH to record the section of the meeting where we discuss the maps of each area, survey results and steering group feedback. Rachel advised NCH would ask their permission when we reach that part of the meeting. It was stated that group members can turn their cameras off at this point of the meeting if they don’t want to be recorded

1.7 It was explained that recording the meeting will help with the discussion of how we are going to feedback to the community and that NCH may use the recording as part of future communications

2 **Terms of Reference**

2.1 Rachel explained that NCH sent out the terms of reference which has been amended in line with resident comments. Rachel stated that NCH would like people to sign and agree it as NCH wants this group to be a safe place where everyone is signed up to working constructively. One copy has been signed and returned to NCH. Rachel advised that following this meeting NCH would be contacting the group individually to see how we can agree the document with each member. **Action NCH**

2.2 Comment from residents’ that they hadn’t received the TOR from NCH. Rachel explained we don’t have every member’s full contact details and we would be in contact to get the information and resolve this

**3.** **Project Plan**

3.1 Rachel shared her screen and asked if everyone could see the plan

3.2 Rachel explained the format of the plan had been amended following comments on the original plan and asked if this was more helpful and if there were any more suggestions or comments for us to consider

3.3 A resident stated this was a good format and very a useful document

3.4 A resident asked is the information listed on the left-hand side provisional or more what NCH are likely to adhere to regarding dates

3.5 Rachel explained this is what we are expecting to do and when. Things may change, but the idea is having the project plan with allow is to communicate any changes as they arise

3.6 Rachel discussed the information highlighted in yellow is what we plan to do in the next three months which includes; Resident Steering Group meetings, planning a community event, voluntary purchase scheme for homeowners, looking at the areas in the plan with the views from the group while considering the results of the Michael Dyson surveys, the sustainable drainage process and the pre-planning process as we start to look at design work, the consideration of the work for work for refurbishments

3.7 Kelsie advised there was a question from a resident in the chat box stating NCH say that the voluntary homeowner purchasing will start this year. Will this still go ahead if WAG do not give their approval? Since it seems to start prior to seeking said approval

3.8 Rachel explained the answer is generally yes as we need WAG’s approval at different stages around the design and the grant process. WAG don’t approve the scheme in itself; they approve different elements. We know there are risks in us looking to purchase homes of residents at this stage where we don’t know for certain the scheme is going to go ahead. However, because we have put residents in this position by starting to look at these areas, we think it’s something we should be looking at doing because we have been asked to do it by residents

3.9 A resident asked, It says that you have been "considering the areas" for the last 3 months, do you have any update over your considerations to date?

3.10 Rachel explained one of factors we consider are the Michael Dyson surveys. Individual results of these surveys will be sent out to each resident and we aim to do this by the end of January. The high-level results which will contribute to our thinking about the areas suitable for regeneration or refurbishment, are on the agenda to discuss with the group today.

**4**  **Financial Advisor**

4.1 Rachel advised in October/November we tried to appoint the financial advisor to however, there wasn’t one company that was able to offer the services required. Our brief has now been split into 3 and as of 12th January 2022 is has now gone back out on our procurement portal. We should be at a point in February to make the selection process

**5** **Voluntary Purchase Scheme**

5.1 We have had enquiries of the Voluntary Purchase Scheme and we are drafting a comprehensive FAQ document to send out homeowners. We will be able to start the process in February once we’ve appointed our valuer

5.2 A resident asked a question on the chat box: Are you trying to get approval for refurbishment or regeneration. In which direction are we going first?

5.3 Rachel advised as NCH the decision that we took looking at all the options, regeneration might offer the best long term option for Somerton but we know it might not work in all areas in some areas refurb might be the best thing to do

**6 Mapping and areas: survey results, resident’s views**

6.1 Rachel explained that we were now moving onto the mapping of the areas and handing over to Llyr to deliver this part of the meeting. Rachel stated that we will be sharing the high-level results from the surveys and asking the views from the residents on each area

6.2 Rachel asked permission from the group to start recording the meeting from here, as reminded them that we could use this recording for future communications and the wider community. Rachel advised they were free to turn off their cameras as we are start the recording. There were no objections to recording the session from the group

6.3 Llyr shared his presentation on screen with the group and provided a summary what the Michael Dyson surveys were looking at. Llyr explained the 3 types of damp the surveys identified and captured and explained that if a property had a combination of the 3 types of damp that property would only be counted once in the survey. Llyr included in his summary that we would be looking at other factors in addition to the Michael Dyson surveys; historic work, repairs, the groups’ views and feedback, WAGs requirement for decarbonisation, opportunities we may be able to improve such as, pedestrian access and active travel. Included in Llyr’s summary numbers of properties included NCH and homeowner and percentages of the results were given to the group

6.4 Llyr explained we had broken the results into a number of areas/zones and stated these were not set and we can change the mapping with feedback from the group if they felt there were amendments needed. A few comments were received during the session for the team to amend.

6.5 The colour coding of the first, summary map was explained by Llyr to the group, advising that the darker the colour of the zone the higher the prevalence of damp was occurring in that area

6.6 A member of the group asked if they could have a copy of the slides. Rachel answered that we will be asking for input on how we share this information with residents.

6.7 Llyr described the graphs for the area, what each colour represented on the graph and the percentages of these results

6.8 A resident asked if they were able to see which individual properties were surveys. Llyr explained that we wouldn’t share information highlighting individual properties to adhere to GDPR and this is why we are using percentages

6.9 **Zone 1, - Hawthorne Square, Linden Road and Somerton Road** Llyr shared the results of the surveys, comments included:

* A resident stated the allotments are good for the community, but they could be promoted more as there isn’t much uptake for them. Has the environment been taken into consideration for this area due to the wildlife currently there? Rachel explained that as part of any part of planning process environment and wildlife will be considered. Llyr added as part of a planning application you would need to show an ecological enhancement before approval
* A resident in the chat box wrote they were not aware of the allotments in this area
* There is a big open space in the middle of the square and could this be utilised, could this be a public or community space. Llyr responded to this comment that we have a landscape architect that could look into this.

6.10 **Questions**

* A resident asked a question, regarding properties in zone one and a number are boarded up and if this would have had an impact on the condition of the property and would this effect on the overall results of this zone. Llyr answered the void properties were also included in the surveys
* Rachel explained the void properties should not have affected the results of the surveys, due to at the point of the property being boarded it would have been decided they were not economically viable to bring the property back into use. Rachel explained NCH had tenanted properties after bringing them back into use and residents needed to move out of these properties due to damp issues reoccurring. Rachel also discussed that in some properties damp can be made worse by people living in the property, so surveying empty properties shouldn’t make the results worse in those areas.
* A question was asked why NCH were unable to gain access to their own properties. Rachel explained that we can ask for access, but unless it’s an emergency, we would need people’s permission to enter the property under in these circumstances. We also wanted to get the surveys done quickly to move forward with the work, we also didn’t want to threaten people with legal action because of refusals for access and wanted this to be voluntary for people. Rachel added that if enough residents want to have their property surveyed, NCH could look to do that, but we would need people to volunteer to do that.

* Llyr contributed that Michael Dyson called at each property 3 times to try and gain access. Llyr asked for any more observations on this.
* A question was asked about semi-detached properties which were privately owned, if one required refurbishment or regeneration but the other was ok, would NCH look to but both properties. Llyr responded at this point we are looking at the results of the surveys and for feedback and there will be an opportunity for these questions as we move forward.
* A statement from a resident in chat explained Laburnum Drive seems to be more affected because of the terrain and that it’s not a home issue but the terrain. Rachel answered that was an interesting comment and we would pick this up when we come to look at the results for that area. Rachel asked before we move onto the next zone if anyone had any views on the area regarding access, ASB or the allotments.

6.11 **Zone 2, Hawthorne Avenue and Palm Square,** Llyr gave the results of the surveys, comments included:

* Cllr Harvey stated there was a lot of green space and asked what it is. Andrew explained this was shrub land on banks and the levels dip.
  1. **Questions**
* The group were asked for their views. Cllr Harvey asked if 1 house was in Zone one and the semi-detached attached to it was in zone 2. Llyr responded that these areas are not set (Note as in 6.2 this was raised in the meeting and the areas will be reviewed/amended as discussed)
* A resident stated this land was acquired from Newport City Council by the railway and this is for the potential railway station. Another resident stated they were wondering if the regeneration work is related to the potential railway station, and that there are 11 houses in Palm Square, mostly homeowners and only 3 NCH tenants. Cllr Harvey asked, are you saying all of these houses would have to go because of the train station.
* Rachel explained that we do not have all the information regarding this, but of the information we are aware of there have been no formal decisions made about a train station. As NCH we will try and work on this with colleagues from the council, WAG and others to see if this going to be happening and where, but at the moment a railway station is not definite. Cllr Harvey said this will come down to WAG
* Within the chat box there was a question asking if we are unable to do anything with the terrain what is the point of building new houses at the same site, if we can’t rectify the problem? Rachel answered that we agree there is an issue with the terrain and may be contribute to the issue and we will talk about this when we get to Laburnum Drive, generally there is always a building solution, this may be putting this into refurbishment or when rebuilding

6.13 **Zone 3, Hawthorne Fosse and Hawthorne Avenue,** Llyr shared the results of the surveys, comments included:

* The road leading up the school was narrow and a better entrance to the school would be beneficial due to congestion around pick up and drop off times
* It’s a dark area
* Could the access be residents only on the road leading to the school
* It was mentioned that parking an issue across all schools in Newport

6.14 **Questions**

* A question was asked if we would be doing any work to the school and Rachel responded we have had conversations with the Local Authority and they are not considering any work to the school, we will continue to have conversations as we go through the design process, but for the time being the school is not included.

6.15 **Zone 4, Ashley Road and Somerton Crescent,** Llyr shared the results of the surveys, comments on included:

* Ashley Road is a big space
* It was asked if this road is used as access to the school or if this could be used for access to the school. A resident responded that it isn’t used currently. There are a few entrances to the school, this one is always closed

6.16 **Zone 5: Acacia Avenue, Poplar Road and the bungalows.** Llyr shared the results of the surveys, comments on this included:

* The concrete steps from Aberthaw Road do not appear to be safe
* There are a few void properties in this area
* Could access to hope community centre and the shop be improved
* A community building provided by NCH to replace the Hope Community Centre given the extent of work that will be going into the area. Another resident stated that regenerating the area for the better of the community, surely a community building would promote the regeneration of the area and would have thought this was essential as a regeneration program
* Better access to the Hope Centre as it is currently a long single lane road

6.17 Rachel responded to these statements advising if regeneration was to go ahead, we would consider retail provision, and we would talk to shop owner directly. Currently we are not proposing a community building provided by NCH in this area. If the Hope Centre are interested this would be a discussion for NCH and the Hope Centre. Rachel included in her responses that NCH fully support the community and an aspect of Laura’s role in relation to community work and engagement with stakeholders, NCH want to provide support to community groups but not in the way of buildings

6.18 **Zone 6: Sycamore Avenue.** Llyr shared the results of the surveys, comments included:

* Cllr Harvey stated better properties overall are needed in this area particularly the top row. Cllr Harvey suggested this may be due to the terrain behind the properties
* Parking is an issue on this road
* The street looks run down
* The road is very narrow
* Potholes throughout the road

6.19 **Zone 7, Laburnum Drive,** Llyr shared the results of the surveys, comments included:

* The high percentage of damp was noted by residents from the survey results. Llyr highlighted that this area has a variation in the types of damp found within the surveyed properties
* Could a defence be put in this area for the homes to be protected
* There was another street called Maple Avenue behind this, which has now been removed which she felt was due to the same issues that are present now. A resident responded that this street was removed previously because the soil kept moving and this is still moving.
* Could this street be one-way, as it is very narrow
* Not enough parking, the residents from the flats also park on this street
* Could the steps be removed to assist with access for residents

6.20 Andrew stated there could be several reasons of the causes of damp in the area. Whether we refurbish ore regenerate this area there are ways we can make sure the homes are safe and warm for the residents.

6.21 Rachel acknowledged the terrain and location of the homes and some may not get as much sunlight, these are all factors that will be considered

6.22 A question from a resident stated, the results of the survey, and the comments of others who live there suggest that work here is urgent, and something should be done to make these houses safe and warm for people living there now. The problems faced in this area should be actioned without having to wait for this whole process. Rachel responded that we are unable to do ad-hoc refurbishment or regeneration as we need to follow a process, however if residents need resolution immediately, NCH can discuss this with those people on an individual basis.

6.23 **Zone 8, Libeneth Road,** Llyr shared the results of the surveys, comments included:

* Cllr Harvey stated she feels residents would not like to lose any of the open space or garden space in the areas.

6.24 Rachel stated it would be interesting to know what work has been done to their home to resolve the damp issues and that we could talk with her individually

6.25 Rachel summarised the mapping of the areas by explaining the results of the surveys are one of the ways we will move forward in deciding what approach we will be taking for each zone as well as the consideration of the views of residents, ensure we have the information on historical repairs for the properties, homeowners that volunteer for their homes to be purchased by NCH

7 **General Questions**

7.1 Question in the chat box, when can we expect a final decision on what areas will be refurbished or regenerated? Rachel explained that we understand people want to know as soon as possible, we are still going through the process of getting on board our financial advisors and other work that contributes to the decision making. The project plan states consideration of decisions for each area to be September.

7.2 Cllr Harvey asked, can we not have too many flats, because issues faced in other parts of my ward, the main problems are coming from the flats. Rachel answered that NCH need to provide houses for residents. NCH will need to provide some flats because of the housing need within Newport

7.3 Cllr Harvey suggested that the ages of the residents be considered. Rachel explained that we will look at specific needs, such as people with family links and within that we may provide specific older persons housing. The group seemed interested in providing specific housing for older people.

7.4 Question from chat box Should we be registering interest or anything if we would like to be involved in the voluntary purchase, and/or is there any information that can be sent out yet? Rachel responded that we are pulling together an FAQ regarding this and for anyone interested to let us know. We will also post FAQs online

7.5 Rachel addressed a question in the chat box about not getting a straight answer from NCH. It was explained that when we are able to give definitive answers we will. We think this work will take until September, if the process is done more quickly, or if it takes longer, we will make everyone aware

7.6 A resident stated damp isn’t unique to Somerton, will the severity of damp be taken into consideration? Rachel answered we will look at all factors, and the result from the surveys show the severe types of damp, but these are just one of the factors we are looking at when making decisions and to make sure we can meet WAGs standards for housing

7.7 A resident asked if it is WAG who will make the decision if NCH can go ahead with the scheme. If WAG say yes and NCC say no what would happen? Rachel explained there are collaborations included within the whole process, to include residents, planning authority, WAG and others. There are various standards we need to meet which we will include through the design. We work closely with everyone throughout the process so that we develop a way forward that is supported by everyone.

**8 Communications Plan**

8.1 Rachel shared the communications plan with the group discussion on the plan and the contents within it. The methods and previous communications were explained to the group as well as future plans for how we communicate with residents and stakeholders

8.2 Rachel stated that we would like to start producing a newsletter for residents. Cllr Harvey agreed that a newsletter would be useful to convey the right information to everyone. There were people within the chat and a resident vocally in support of a newsletter.

8.3 Rachel stated how we have considered comminutions needs for residents such as translations, comms for visually impaired and asked for any other consideration. Rachel also asked if communications plan needed to be a standing subject on the agenda. Cllr Harvey stated she felt this needed to stay on the agenda

8.4 Rachel said we would send the communications plan out with the minutes for comments. **ACTION NCH**

8.5 Rachel asked how the survey result information should be shared with the wider community, suggestions from residents:

* that we need to be transparent and all information be shared even if it is difficult to understand
* some of the information within the slides could be simplified as they are some are difficult to read or understand
* some of the mapping needs adjusting
* numbers are better than percentages

8.6 Rachel suggested sharing the survey results within the newsletter, this was agreed by Cllr Harvey and a number of residents.

8.7 Rachel discussed the frequency of the newsletters and suggested after every 3 RSG meetings and update was included within the newsletter as this would be realistic for NCH. Our monthly meeting minutes will be published with the blog online

8.8 A suggestion in the chat box from a resident, Couldn't the newsletter be a summary of the key points of the last few blogs, plus anything extra that's popped up in between? Rachel responded yes to this

8.9 A resident thanked Kelsie in the chat box for providing information

8.10 Rachel stated in the agenda for the next meeting we will give a general update, communications and discuss the design

8.11 Question in chat, next meeting virtual or face to face? Discussion around how the meeting will be held and suggested we use Nexus House as we have the right technology to support this for those able to meet face to face with the rest joining us online. We will risk assess 2-3 weeks before the meeting

8.12 Rachel thanked the group for their attendance and advised we would send out he minutes, communications plan and the presentation in its current format to steering group members**, ACTION NCH**. Rachel advised group members can share information from this meeting with people individually and asked them to let us know beforehand if information is shared online so that we can pick up comments

**Next meeting: Wednesday 2nd February 2022**