

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

HOUSING AND MAJOR PROJECTS POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Tuesday, 10th March, 2015

Present:- Councillors Eleanor Jackson (Chair), Steve Hedges (Vice-Chair), Brian Simmons and Gerry Curran

Also in attendance: Derek Quilter (Divisional Director for Project Management) and Graham Sabourn (Head of Housing)

66 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

67 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

68 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor June Player and Councillor Tim Ball had sent their apologies to the Panel.

69 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Steve Hedges declared an 'other' interest to the Panel as his son works for Curo and his wife works for Mencap.

Councillor Eleanor Jackson declared an 'other' interest to the Panel as she is the secretary for the Meadow View Action Group (Radstock anti NRR campaign group) and her house is situated very close to the former railway lands.

She also declared an 'other' interest to the Panel as she is a governor at St. Nicholas' CE Primary School, Radstock.

In light of the anticipated contributions from speakers she also intimated that Councillor Gerry Curran was the current Chair of the Development Control Committee. She said that she had been advised that Councillor Curran would not be compromised by their statements.

70 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none. The Chair asked that officers keep an eye on matters that she had raised with them recently via email during the 'purdah' period.

71 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

Helen Dudden addressed the Panel. She spoke of how she had previously lived in a Georgian flat that was owned by Curo. She explained that since the flat had floor to ceiling mould in almost every room she had tried to move from the property for five years before successfully doing so.

She informed them that the flat was not insulated properly, that ice formed on the inside of the windows during winter, that rats were living under the floor boards and that the use of additional heating had cost her £1,000 pa.

She said that she had written to Don Foster MP to explain her situation, but that he had shown no concern. She added that she believed that there had been problems with the Homeseach system while she was trying to secure a move and that some correspondence had been lost. She said that she had reported these matters to the Local Government Ombudsman.

She explained that since she had moved from the property it had been turned from an ugly duckling into a beautiful swan and is now available for tourist accommodation.

She concluded by questioning whether Curo were rightly serving the community.

The Chair thanked her for her statement and said that the Panel had been made aware of Curo's restructure plans at previous meetings.

Councillor Steve Hedges asked where her previous property was situated.

Helen Dudden replied that it was in Johnstone Street, Bath.

Councillor Steve Hedges commented that 95% of the complaints that he receives relating to Curo are about damp. He added that there was little the Panel could do on this matter but asked for the minutes to be passed onto Councillor Tim Ball in his current role as the Cabinet Member for Homes & Planning.

The Head of Housing commented that he was aware that Mrs Dudden had made a complaint to the Council relating to her flat conditions and the Homeseach process. He said that both complaints had been dealt with via the Council's complaints procedure and that Mrs Dudden had not been happy with the outcome and had taken the matter further with the Local Government Ombudsman. He informed the Panel that in summary the Ombudsman had considered that the Council had taken appropriate action and was not at fault in this matter.

Steve Bendle addressed the Panel. He said that the Council's Housing Policy should be reviewed in light of the currently reported waiting list figure of 5,000. He recalled a recent conversation that he had had with his sister regarding property prices in Sweden and that a new three bedroom property there costs only £140,000.

He questioned Curo's need to charge 80% affordable rent and the amount of internal borrowing that they do. He added that he also had doubts over the suitability of their repairs service.

He asked the Panel to pursue the matter of allowing a tenant and a Councillor representative back onto the Board of Curo.

He said the Council's ambitions for new homes should be raised and for the waiting list to be reduced year on year.

The Chair thanked him for his statement.

Councillor Steve Hedges commented that he felt that the housing problem could be solved if the 'Right to Buy' process was stopped. He said that the waiting list would be halved in four years.

Councillor Gerry Curran commented that he believed that the Council were hitting their current targets for new dwelling completions. He added that many Councils were now considering whether they should begin to act as developers under the powers vested in them in the Localism Act.

The Chair agreed that the Council was meeting its targets for new dwellings. She added that she hoped more rural housing schemes would be brought forward in the future.

Steve Bendle commented that the homes planned for Foxhill were great but that the prices as 'affordable' were not realistic. He added that he felt the Government could have done more to reduce the cost of the land.

Vicky Drew addressed the Panel. A copy of the statement can be found on the Panel's Minute Book and a summary is set out below.

She said that private tenants and those forced to look to rent privately in Bath, particularly those on low to average income are unfairly discriminated against by the Landlords and Letting Agents.

She said that for a tenant looking for a property to rent in Bath at the current time, the lowest prices of 3 bed family homes on the outskirts are between £895 and £950. She felt she must stress that this price is by no means representative of the astronomical rent expected in the vast majority of private lets locally, most are far far higher.

She added that not only is the Local Housing Allowance limited to the equivalent of £822 pcm but at the time of researching this on Right Move there were only two properties advertised for families even close to the LHA marker (albeit £70 short). The rest of the properties that were being advertised were for single professionals or students sharing.

She asked if the Panel or the Council would be willing to publicly accredit Letting Agents with fair, moral and ethical practices. She asked if any reward could be given to those agents who accept deposit bonds from the likes of Swan Advice and other

charities. She asked if a cap could be enforced on the unaffordable rents and could the problems faced by people in our city be highlighted in such a way that would encourage landlords of decent, reasonably priced properties to bypass the agents and let through Homesearch on long term leases.

She concluded by saying that the situation for many people in our city is untenable, depressing and unfair.

The Chair asked for the comments made by Steve Bendle and Vicky Drew to be passed to the Cabinet Member for Homes & Planning, Councillor Tim Ball.

Clarke Osborne, Chairman of the Stanton Wick Action Group addressed the Panel. He said that he wished to speak about a concern from the community relating to a planning application. He said that they were concerned by the decision of the Chairman of the Development Control Committee to deny the consideration of the application at an open committee and that delegated powers had been given to a planning officer.

Councillor Steve Hedges intervened to state that he did not believe this to be the correct forum for such a debate.

The Chair explained she had been persuaded to allow the speaker to speak because there was no meeting of the PDS Panel for Planning, Transport and the Environment, and no Cabinet meeting before the election. She had not known that a decision on the application had now been taken. Decisions cannot be rescinded without going to a court of law.

Councillor Gerry Curran explained that a system for delegating decisions has been in place for eight years and that these decisions are made by him and the Divisional Director for Development. He added that 96% of planning applications are dealt with under delegated powers and that it is not for this Panel to interfere in that process.

The Chair said that if they wished to take the matter further they should consider writing directly to the Divisional Director for Development, their Ward Councillor, local MP Jacob Rees-Mogg or the Secretary of State. She added that all Councils used powers of delegation because they were acting under a government directive to speed up the planning process.

72 MINUTES - 20TH JANUARY 2015

Under minute 60 (Boat Dwellers & River Travellers Update) the Chair noticed that the fourth bullet point should contain the word 'practice' instead of 'practise'.

Under minute 61 (Paulton – Development Update) Councillor Brian Simmons said that he had made the comment that made reference to the former Great Mills site not Councillor Ben Stevens.

With these amendments the Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chair.

73 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Divisional Director for Project Management introduced this item to the Panel. He said that the overall redevelopment of the former railway lands in Radstock had been a priority for the Council as it provides much needed affordable housing units and creates job opportunities. He added that the B&NES highway works on track to be completed by the end of April.

The Chair commented that the apprentice opportunities were welcome as well as the links to the local college. She said that the local traders however still remained unconvinced of the benefits. She added that the loss of five mature trees through part of the works was disappointing.

The Chair asked for confirmation that the order of developing areas had changed and that Area 3 would now be developed before Area 1.

The Divisional Director for Project Management confirmed that that was the case and that Area 1 would be financed through the house sales on Area 3. He added that the reserved matters application for Area 3 would be submitted shortly.

The Chair commented that if cobbled stones were to be used within the development this would cause a problem for disabled people and those with mobility issues. She asked if this could be looked into.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked if there was any update on the Household Waste / Recycling site in connection with BWR.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that they were actively working with Crest on the matter and that Household Waste was likely to transfer to the Pixash Lane site in Keynsham. He added that options for Recycling were being assessed.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked what progress was being made on the Westmark site as that had been considered a possibility for Key Worker Housing at one time. He added that he had heard a rumour of it being used now for student accommodation.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that he was aware of the interest in having student accommodation on the site but that a decision would be made as part of the planning process.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked if the surface problem relating to Victoria Bridge was being addressed.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that a problem had been identified with the bridge anti-slip surfacing (peeling away from deck beneath) and that it was being attended to by the contractor as it was in the early stages of the defects liability period. He added that testing and trialling of alternatives were

underway to define a permanent solution and that the contractor was regularly visiting site to keep it in a safe and usable state.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked when the London Road redevelopment would be completed.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that a further £200,000 of additional works had been requested and that the project was now due for completion by the end of April.

Councillor Gerry Curran commented that although the Grand Parade & Undercroft application had been refused by the Development Control Committee it was a project worth pursuing. He added that consideration should be given to use of the Parade Gardens entrance and a café / fine dining establishment rather than simply two fine dining establishments.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that the Council has a duty to provide a disabled access and that a different market for the project may now be undertaken.

The Chair said that she had been informed of traffic flow problems around the Abbey due to the location of the new University bus stops.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that he was sure that the Group Manager for Planning Policy & Transport was aware of such matters.

The Chair asked if the recurrence of leaks in the roof of St. Nicholas' School, Radstock was being addressed, as requested by a meeting of the governors

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that the reported problems are being resolved.

The Head of Housing addressed the Panel. He said that he was happy to take questions on the update paper that had been circulated to the Panel.

On the matter of Young Peoples Housing Needs the Chair commented that the ECOTEC report had only researched the area of the Somer Valley and that she would appreciate seeing more information on this subject as a whole after the elections. She acknowledged that advice was now available in The Hollies and the Keynsham Civic Centre whereas before young people had to pay to come into Bath.

The Head of Housing suggested that one topic that a future Panel might like to look into would be Student Accommodation and that the Council should be encouraged to keep an ongoing dialogue with the Universities.

Councillor Steve Hedges wished to offer his thanks to the Head of Housing, the Divisional Director for Project Management and their officers for all their work over the duration of the Panel.

The Head of Housing replied that his staff had welcomed the opportunity of working with the Panel.

Councillor Gerry Curran commented that he agreed with the comment relating to Student Accommodation and the Universities. He added that housing really was one of the biggest issues that the Council faces in the future.

The Head of Housing commented that affordability was a real concern. He added that the figure of 'Right to Buy' properties was not exceeding the number of new homes being built in the area.

The Chair, on behalf of the Panel thanked both officers for their reports.

74 REGISTERED PROVIDERS PRESENTATION - GUINNESS

Stephen Lodge, Director of Asset Strategy & Analysis, The Guinness Partnership gave a presentation to the Panel. A copy of the presentation will be available online as an appendix to the minutes and placed on the Panel's Minute Book, a summary is set out below.

He said that he wished to state that affordable housing was the main element from the start of their developments.

The Context

Fast Changing Sector
Financial Constraints
Service Offer
Product range
Value for Money

He explained that the subsidy from Government had reduced and that that coupled with a market that is producing a less secure revenue stream can make them a less attractive proposition for lenders.

He said that the Partnership also has a role in offering tenants focussed support in trying to go back to work and retraining.

He stated that a greater number of their homes were becoming private or available under market rent.

He said that the Partnership was looking at their asset base as a means for finding funds for new homes / renovations.

The Guinness Partnership

National – 125 years
60,000 homes
Mixed Tenure
Design & Quality
Care & Support

He informed the Panel that the Partnership worked across 173 Local Authorities with 60,000 homes. He said that they developed around 1,000 homes a year, with around 200 of those within the local area.

He stated that the Partnership were clear about their aims on design and quality.

He explained that the Partnership looked after around 500 homes currently within B&NES and that a Development Team was based in Bristol.

Asset Management

He said that they were looking to breathe new life into a number of their properties that were built in the 1970's and 1980's with some becoming holiday lets or available at market rent. He added that properties in London were most appropriate for such activity.

Future Development

He said that the Partnership has a desire to continue to grow and is looking to acquire land, mainly in rural areas to develop. He added that by acquiring land they could have more control over the standard of the properties.

He explained that the Partnership now operates some Extra Care Schemes and would look to develop more of these. He said that people could move into these properties from the age of 55 and that the levels of support required can be tailored.

He concluded by saying that the core business of the Partnership remains Housing.

The Chair asked if they could comment on their current repairs policy.

Stephen Lodge replied that a national restructure of their repairs service was underway and that they were seeking to rollout a 24 hours service. He added that currently properties were assessed and then those judged to be in most need were actioned first.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked if they had any local sites in mind for development.

Stephen Lodge replied that they did not at the present time.

Councillor Gerry Curran commented that when sites are identified there is normally a good deal of competition to secure them.

Stephen Lodge replied that it is not always feasible for them to challenge bids for a site and they look to secure sites where possible before they come to market.

The Chair, on behalf of the Panel thanked him for attending and the presentation.

75 FORMER MOD SITE - FOXHILL - MULBERRY PARK

The Curo representative was not able to attend the meeting. The Chair asked for the item to be moved to a future item on the Panel's workplan, and the presentation to be circulated to members.

76 SOMERDALE UPDATE

Adrian Slade, Project Director, Taylor Wimpey gave a presentation to the Panel. A copy of the presentation will be available online as an appendix to the minutes and placed on the Panel's Minute Book, a summary is set out below.

Key Milestones

- January 2012 - Taylor Wimpey selected by Kraft as preferred developer
- January 2012 – April 2013 - Taylor Wimpey commenced work on planning application in conjunction with landowner and local authority, comprehensive community engagement and technical studies eg archaeology.
- April 2013 – Hybrid Planning application with Environmental Impact Assessment submitted to BANES
- September 2013 – Planning committee unanimous resolution to grant planning permission
- February 2014 – S106 signed and planning permission issued
- April 2014 – Work started on site delivering new homes and infrastructure
- September 2014 – Sales outlet opens
- November 2014 – First new residents move in

Current Progress – Phase 1

- Phase 1 consists of 154 new homes – mix 2,3,4 and 5 bedroomed homes.
- Affordable Housing – 43 new 2,3 and 4 bedroomed homes.
- New homes sold – 30
- New homes occupied – 17
- New homes under construction for 2015 – 46

Economic & Community Benefits

The economic and community benefits of the redevelopment at Somerdale are significant. The construction of 700 new homes, 120,000sqft of employment space, new primary school, sports and conference facility and associated infrastructure offers an opportunity to stimulate the economic growth both locally and regionally. It also assists in meeting housing needs.

Construction Impacts

- direct employment – 1,277 person years of construction employment over the 10 years period of build or 128 per annum
- Indirect employment – 123 spin off jobs in the supply chain/local community per annum
- Economic output - £88m through goods and services over the build period

Expenditure Impacts

- £12m pa spent local shops and services during build
- £33m by residents of the scheme per annum

Operational impacts

- 1,068 direct new job opportunities
- £97m economic output per annum
- 73 new jobs created in the local market through indirect employment

Local authority revenue Impacts

- £6.5m New Homes Bonus Payments
- £1.1m additional council tax per annum
- £0.7m new business rate revenue per annum
- £7m S106 and other planning contributions

Next Steps

- New Fry Club opens in June
- Next phase of development to be submitted for reserved matters
- Change of use of existing care home site to provide additional 30 new homes – 11th March planning committee
- Procurement of new primary school

Councillor Gerry Curran commented that it shows what can be done with a site of such scale and said it was pleasing to think that possibly 60 residents could be on site by the end of the year.

The Chair commented that she was impressed with how the scheme had developed. She asked what the plans were for the large iron gates that used to be the entrance for the site.

Adrian Slade said that they were being retained on site.

The Chair suggested that if the Development Control Committee take part in annual tour that they visit the site as part of it.

Councillor Gerry Curran agreed with that proposal. He asked if the changing facilities near the tennis courts were to be improved.

Adrian Slade replied that as part of the New Fry Club 14 new changing facilities were being built and that they would be available for those playing tennis to use.

The Chair, on behalf of the Panel thanked him for his presentation.

77 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Chair introduced this item to the Panel. She asked for the Foxhill (MoD Site) presentation to be heard at a future meeting and for an update on Boat Dwellers & River Travellers to be added as a future item so that the Panel's previous work is monitored.

The Chair then made the following statement. A copy of which will be available online as an appendix to the minutes and placed on the Panel's Minute Book, a summary is set out below.

I would first like to thank the officers who have patiently borne the brunt of our efforts to make policy and scrutinize the Council's procedures and projects. Especially to be mentioned in dispatches are Mark Durnford, Emma Bagley and Donna Vercoe. Their work was especially valuable when we had a Task and Finish Group.

I would also like to thank senior officers, especially Graham Sabourn and Derek Quilter, and their teams, who taught me a lot.

It will perhaps (I hope) be the task of the next administration to build on the work we have endeavoured to do on the Major Projects experience to construct *local* economic strategies tied into housing and infrastructure development, so that we do not end up with soulless housing estates of commuters.

Firstly, this Panel was required to scrutinise policy moving through the system: elements of the Core Strategy, the Houses in Multiple Occupation, and the Licencing of HMOs. We had to interact with other Panels on matters such as homelessness and river safety, but I think we made a significant contribution. Certainly our compliance could not be taken for granted. No rubber stamps here! Thank you all for wading through pages and pages and exposing the really important points for development.

Secondly, while I was in charge, we surveyed the areas where Major Projects were supposed to flourish and enhance development or even, dare I say it, regenerate a community. So we considered the developments in Keynsham, Paulton, Midsomer Norton, Westfield and Radstock.

Thirdly, we did some important policy work ourselves. Next to the Homecare Study I chaired as Task and Finish for the Wellbeing Panel, I am most proud of the Boat Dwellers and River Travellers study which I hope will produce tangible results for good for those who live on our rivers and canals. It has already attracted European research interest via the University of Cardiff, and I have just received an email from the lead researcher (Dr Lawson) saying as a result of studying our efforts, he had completely changed his view of scrutiny, and saw what a positive value it had.

Fourthly, we have engaged in what I hope will be a constructive dialogue with 'responsible providers' and heard the plans of Curo, Knightstone, and Guinness. I hope others will follow later this year.

Finally I think we have been open and receptive to tenants and members of the public who raised their concerns in a way most helpful to us. So I have encouraged people to bring their problems forward to us, so that we can try and find either a policy resolution, or an individual answer. The bronze level of alarm systems in Curo Housing is a good example of this. There has also been an opportunity to improve communications between Council / residents / providers, as in the more recent case of 'preparation for tenancy' and debt counselling.

Councillor Steve Hedges wished to thank her for her role as Chair on behalf of himself and the other members of the Panel.

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services

LHA as of April 15

shared £314 Right move £375

1 bed £588 Right Move £625

2 bed £724 Right Move £775

3 bed £822 Right Move £895- £950

A minimum of £50 to be added

Private tenants and those forced to look to rent privately in Bath, particularly those on low to average income- are unfairly discriminated against by the Landlords and Letting Agents in Bath

For a tenant looking for a property to rent in Bath at the current time, the lowest prices of 3 bed family homes on the outskirts are between £895 and £950. I must stress that this price is by no means representative of the astronomical rent expected in the vast majority of private lets locally, most are far far higher. Not only is the Local Housing allowance limited to the equivalent of £822 pcm but at the time of researching this on Right Move there were only 2 that were advertised for families even close to the LHA marker (albeit £70 short). The rest of the properties being advertised for single professionals or students sharing.

For whatever reasons, families stuck in a cycle of renting privately can expect to only have security for the first 6 months of their tenancy. Tenants have expressed to me (and I have personal experience) that after this period the rent will immediately and incrementally escalate, pricing you out of the property or the buy to let landlord may sell up. By which time Letting Agents will also -at the landlords behest no doubt – have added another £20, £30 or even £50 to the value of their properties. The LHA cap may slightly alter to the tenants favour as scant recompense but in most cases our wages will remain static despite this - and food and bills will have risen.

Of course this is not even the highest of concerns I have heard, to be in the lofty position to not be able to afford your rent without making huge sacrifices to your basic nutritional and wellbeing needs and essentials in the first place, you must first be qualified enough that a Letting Agent will view you as suitable tenant material. The mandatory credit checks, bank statements and wage slips will immediately make it clear that you cannot afford the rent without Housing Benefit top ups. In many cases and for many Agents this means you will not even be considered for a property...Ever.

If you are desperate enough and many are, you will be asked to provide a guarantor who earns enough. Clearly if your mum is on a state pension or is not landed gentry you stall here.

If you get the guarantor there is still the little matter of providing them with 6 months rent in advance (as is becoming standard in local Letting Agents), 6 months or the many thousands of pounds expected from the hard up tenant will ensure, of course, that there isn't even the slightest risk to the landlords investment ~~for~~ the full, minimum tenancy term.

On top of this you will of course be expected to pay fee's amounting to many hundreds of pounds on top and a further month and a half's rent as a deposit. Just as an example, this is potentially £6920 if the lowest rent I found was an example.... Just for a basic home.

If you manage to find someone to lend you this amount then you can rest easy knowing your home is secure for the next 180 odd days. Your children can attend the school consistently, the loan shark will know where you are when he wants his repayments and potentially, you can relax temporarily before the whole thing starts again.

It would be interesting to know how many of the 5000 on the homesearch list are stuck in the family wrecking experience that is privately renting in Bath?

Would this panel and our council be willing to publicly accredit Letting Agents with fair, moral and ethical practices. Could we in any way reward those agents who accept deposit bonds from the likes of Swan Advice and other charities. Could we in any way enforce a cap on the unaffordable rents and could we highlight the problems faced by people in our city in such a way that would encourage landlords of decent, reasonably priced properties to bypass the agents and let through Homesearch on long term leases.

The situation for many people in our fair city is untenable, depressing and unfair.



Housing & Major Projects Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel

Stephen Lodge
Ben Cane

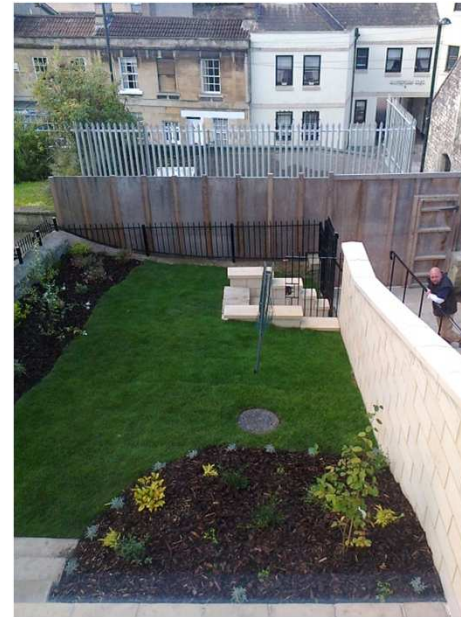


Affordable Housing



The Context

- Fast Changing Sector
 - Financial Constraints
 - Service Offer
 - Product range
 - Value for Money

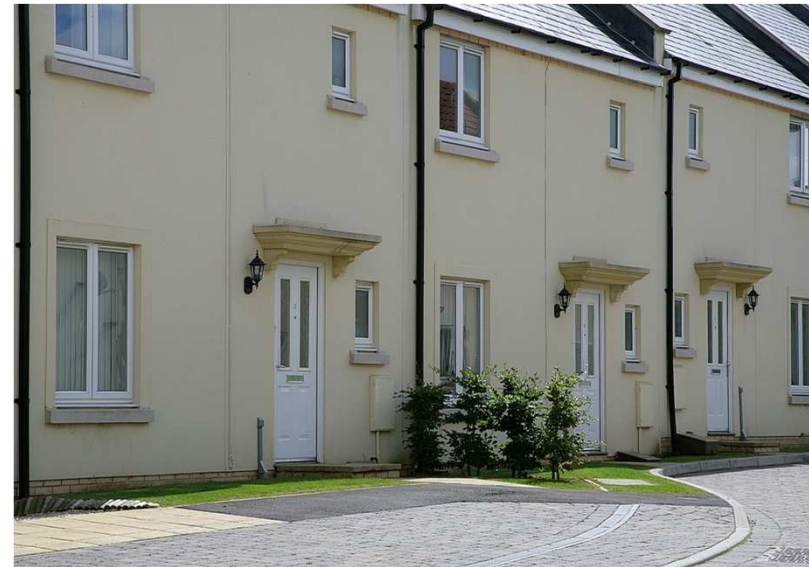


The Guinness Partnership

- National – 125 years
- 60,000 homes
- Mixed Tenure
- Design & Quality
- Care & Support



Guinness in Bath & North East Somerset



Asset Management

Page 65



Future Development



Future Development



Affordable Housing



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Somerdale, Keynsham Update

10th March 2015

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- Consultation Event at Fry Club



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New Homes under Construction



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Q&A

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