

John McMorrow – Director Easthall Park

More than Housing

I am John McMorrow Director of Easthall Park Housing Co-operative based in Easterhouse, Glasgow, Scotland.

Can I thank you for your invite to attend this conference and to this beautiful City.

It is my intention to give you a brief overview of some of our work and I have selected the theme of “More than Housing” as our work to be successful means much more than just dealing with the physical regeneration of an area.

I have selected some photographs that will give you an idea of what we have been trying to achieve.

Easthall Park is a fully mutual housing Co-operative (which basically means that all our tenants are shareholders and all shareholders are tenants) and the organisation was registered as a social landlord in November 1991.

The reason that the Co-operative was set up was as a consequence of the poor housing conditions that the tenants found themselves in and the fact that the City of Glasgow Housing Department had no money available to carry out regeneration in the area.

The condition of the area (as seen in these slides) was very poor and no one wanted to live any longer in the houses, as they were badly managed, poorly maintained. The only people that moved in were those that had little or no choice and the turnover of tenants leaving was in the region of 30% each year as many moved to escape the poor living conditions.

The area was blighted by anti-social behaviour, high crime, vandalism and was rapidly becoming a place in which no one wanted to live anymore.

The housing conditions at the very least were poor and so were the tenants that lived in the homes with over 95 % receiving some form of state benefits.

In an attempt to resolve some of these problems our organisation was set up and our management committee, which is made up solely of tenants in the area set about trying to resolve initially the housing conditions.

So in February 1992 we purchased just over two hundred properties from the council and embarked on the physical regeneration of the area.

The original funding to purchase the properties from Glasgow City Council (approximately £3,000 per home) was in the form of a grant that we received from the Government agency formerly known as Communities Scotland.

This same agency gave us a proportion of the funding that we required to upgrade the homes or to build new homes in the form of a grant. The remainder we obtained from the banks and building societies. We pay back these loans over a 25 or 30 year period and the money we receive from the rents covers the costs of these loans, pays for the staff, overheads and covers future maintenance and management of the properties.

When I was first employed by the Co-operative we only had three members of staff and we have now grown to the point where we now have ten staff.

Over the last 16 years we have spend in the region of £40million carrying out the improvements or refurbishment of properties, demolition those that needed knocked down and building new homes that suited the requirements of the people in the community.

Previous homes were not only in a poor condition but they were all the same size and as a consequence there was a high concentration of people in a small area and this in itself caused some anti-social behaviour problems.

Our Committee supported by the staff appointed architects and other consultants to help us determine the best way of resolving the physical problems with the buildings and as mentioned some were refurbished, some demolished and these were replaced with new houses to suit the needs of the community from small flats to larger family homes.

To date we have carried out nine large contracts (varying in price from £2m - £6m) and have gradually taken on more properties from the City Council or purchased land from them to the point that we currently own just under 500 homes. We also manage a further 400 homes on behalf of Glasgow Housing Association.

At present all our tenants live in refurbished or new homes that suit their requirements.

Quality of work is paramount to ensure that the properties are built to last and all our new homes are designed to the latest standards to ensure this is the case.

Our most recent contract is on site and this is the first of two in the adjacent community to Easthall which is blighted by similar problems I mentioned earlier and we are in the process of building another 146 homes for rent, which will cost in the region of £20m.

These properties have been designed to ensure energy efficiency and we are continually evolving the design to make the homes as eco friendly as possible.

Our turnover is now only 5%, which is about on average two empty homes per month and every time a house becomes empty we are able to move a new tenant in within one working day so we are losing no rent.

We now have a very healthy waiting list with 500 people on our list for housing.

Our last inspection by the Housing Regulator (the Government Agency that monitors the performance of Housing Associations and Co-operatives in Scotland) awarded the organisation an “A” or excellent for our services to our tenants.

Although we have carried out the physical regeneration of the properties the organisation recognised from day one that it is not enough to just improve the housing conditions so we have also been involved in the social regeneration of the area.

We have created community facilities linked to our offices along with our own small public park to create an environment in which the community could come together. Funding from this came from our rental income, the City Council, Communities Scotland and various small grant awards.

These facilities include a community hall, community cafe, free access to the Internet and we have worked with members in the community to improve the quality of life for our residents.

The Centre also provides a variety of other activities and these include Money Advice work, youth activities, homework clubs, lunch clubs, social nights, literacy and numeracy classes, keep fit activities and even Bingo.

The Centre even has its own ATM (automated cash machine) that allows people to access their money without charge as some of these machines were charging people £1.50 for every transaction.

Specific initiatives that we have been involved in include creating employment opportunities by getting the main contractor to take on local people whenever they are refurbishing or building new homes, employing apprentices to train young people in building skills.

We have offered facilities to training and employment schemes so that local people could gain access to these and one excellent example was a training scheme that trained people in childcare so that they could become employed in childcare as this was a particular problem to allowing access to employment for single parents.

We have worked with young people in the community to tackle the causes of anti-social behaviour and this work has included simple things like setting up football teams.

In the last few months our under 19s team even managed to raise funds (£10,000) to allow them to go on a training holiday in Spain. This was particularly satisfying as some had never been out of the country before.

Other things that we have set up included work with an artist to enhance our park and young and old worked with the artist to develop what they wanted to see in the park. This resulted in a playhouse and a flagpole for the park. Not something I would have ever imagined happening.

We have installed wind turbines to produce electricity for the community facility and these were the first of their kind in Glasgow.

Funding (£60,000) for these turbines came from the City Council, Scotland Centre for Architecture and the energy saving trust.

It is envisaged that we will produce 40% of the energy that we require for the Centre and at the same time reduce our carbon emissions as a consequence.

We used this opportunity to get the community involved in looking at ways in which they can be more environmentally friendly and part of this work included working with young people to make them aware of ways in which they can play their part in saving the planet.

Our most recent employment initiative was to obtain funding from the Government to set up a unique college qualification namely a HNC in community work and housing.

This brand new qualification allow members of the community to obtain a qualification that will allow them access to employment in either housing or in community work.

The students (12 are in the first class) are based in college three days per week with the other two as a work placement in a Housing Co-operative or Housing Association and they receive a training allowance of £200 per week whilst they obtain their qualification.

It is hoped that this new qualification will extend to Scotland wide and early indications are that this is possible and we are extremely pleased that we have been able to set this up.

Our work throughout the years has been varied with the physical regeneration and the social regeneration carried out and I can honestly say that no two days are the same.

The future for the Co-operative looks good despite the challenges in the Housing Sector and the fact that we are all affected by the recent credit crunch.

As mentioned earlier we have started our first phase of new homes in the community next to us, which is an area of extreme deprivation.

Plans are in place to buy more homes from the biggest Landlord in Glasgow (Glasgow Housing Association) who took over from the City Council some 5 years ago.

Despite this we recognise that much still needs to be done. When we first began over 95% were in receipt of some form of housing benefit this figure is now 60%.

Despite this our community are still some of the poorest in financial terms in the Scotland. Government in Scotland has an ethos that getting people to work will move them from poverty however many of our tenants work and still are poor because of the type of work they are involved in.

Low paid employment or part time employment is still prevalent in our area and who knows how much the credit crunch will impact on our community.

Needless to say although the physical construction work has been carried out to our homes there is still much to be done in ensuring that our tenants enjoy their new homes and this work entails us in supporting all in the community to get the best from their area by creating opportunities for young and old.

As I stated at the beginning our work as a social landlord involves “Much more than housing” and I hope I have given you some insight into what we have achieved and what we will continue to do as a Housing Co-operative based in Glasgow, Scotland.