

# Velmore Regeneration Project

***Supporting the housing needs of bungalow residents who will be affected by the Velmore Redevelopment proposals.***

## INTRODUCTION

The following information is provided by First Wessex Housing Group (FWHG) in support of a planning application to demolish 100 'over 60s' designated bungalows and create new housing on the Velmore estate. It sets out FWHG's commitment to working alongside affected bungalow residents in order to ensure that their needs are met at every stage of the redevelopment process and that they are suitably rehoused in permanent accommodation of their choice. It outlines the steps that we have taken so far to achieve this aim.

The Velmore Regeneration project currently involves a planning proposal to demolish 100 one-bedroom bungalows situated on seven roads throughout the estate. These will be replaced with a mix of bungalows, flats and family housing. The project also involves the refurbishment of 18 one-bed bungalows on Somerset Crescent and the retention of 5 one-bed bungalows on Taunton Row and 4 one-bed bungalows on Belmont Road. 127 bungalow properties will be affected in total, however only 100 will be affected as a result of this planning application.

In May 2007 new Chief Executive of FWHG, Peter Walters took over the responsibility for the Velmore Regeneration Project and assigned Director of Development and Regeneration, Hazel Warwick to lead the project. In June 2007, Peter Walters reported in the Velmore Matters newsletter that the Group would provide a bungalow for any resident who wished to stay on the Velmore estate. The organisation then formally withdrew previous planning applications in a letter dated 29 May 2007 and committed to taking a 'fresh look' at the Velmore project in consultation with bungalow residents in order to ensure that tenants' views would be fully considered in the '*decisive stage of the decision making process*' [Ref: *Report by Dr Clark, April 2007*] and their needs would materially affect the accommodation mix in the new planning application.

## CONSULTATION: WITH AFFECTED TENANTS

The primary aim of the consultation process during the pre-planning application period has been to ascertain the housing support needs and location preferences of every bungalow tenant. This information has been used as a basis for estimating the number of bungalows that will be required on the estate and the most suitable locations for them to be situated.

We have consulted with residents and key stakeholders using a range of methods, as follows:

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- **Reconvening of the Velmore Residents' Steering Group** in June 2007 to include representatives from the Velmore Residents' Association, local councillors and EBC Housing and Planning officers as well as resident road representatives.
- **Individual needs assessment visits** carried out by the Relocation Liaison Adviser and Sheltered Housing Assistant in June and July 2007 in order to ascertain the housing needs of individuals, whether they would like to remain living on the estate or move away and whether they could cope with more than one move. The most important aim of the survey was to gain an indication of the number of bungalows that would be required on the estate for existing residents. The survey also enabled us to gather useful information on rates of car ownership, dog ownership, wheelchair and scooter use and the numbers of individuals requiring level access showers in new properties.
- **Focus group sessions.** Tenants were invited on a road-by-road basis to Surrey Court (a central location on the estate) in August 2007. These meetings gave residents and their families a chance to comment on two draft proposals for bungalows on the Velmore estate and to air their views on where else they would like to see bungalows built. Tenants' views were recorded on post-it notes and the information was collated and summarised by the FWHG development team and passed to the project architects for consideration. **(See appendix 2).**

One of the key outcomes of these focus group sessions was that a significant proportion of tenants felt that the Kent Road site backing onto the park was a poor location for bungalows and would be better suited to family housing. As a result of these comments the draft proposal for 9 bungalows on the Kent Road site was abandoned.

- **Consultation meetings.** These were held in October 2007, to show residents further revised ideas for bungalows on the estate. Tenants were shown draft proposals for a mix of 74 new, refurbished or retained bungalows on the estate and were given an information sheet explaining each proposal **(See appendix 3)**. Tenants were also asked to fill in a questionnaire allowing them to comment on each proposal and to state which developments they would like to live at in order of preference **(See appendix 4)**. Residents who did not attend the main consultation meeting or two follow-up events were sent an information sheet and a questionnaire by post and offered a home visit. The results of questionnaire survey were then used to revise the final numbers of bungalows at each proposed site and to enable the Group to start planning the phasing of development in order to ensure that the maximum number of residents would be able to make one permanent move to their preferred choice of location both on or off the estate.

- **Pre-planning application information event.** The final mix of bungalows was shown to tenants at a meeting on 11 December 2007 at the Velmore Chapel. An updated information sheet and 'update questionnaire', for those who may wish to alter their accommodation choices were sent by post to all residents prior to this meeting. (**See appendices 5 and 6**).

## **ANALYSIS AND REVISION**

Four key messages emerged from the October and November consultation sessions. Firstly, the Westfield Crescent development was not as popular a choice with residents now that they had been given alternative choices of bungalow locations. Secondly, Surrey Road was an extremely popular location for new bungalows and we clearly needed to raise the numbers of proposed bungalows on this road in order to meet tenant demand. Thirdly, although the refurbishment option was extremely popular, tenants' aspirations for the space and layout of living accommodation had not been adequately met by the designs shown at the consultation sessions. Fourthly and finally, the disabled persons' units (DPUs) on Belmont Road were not popular because they were not in a significantly large enough cluster and were surrounded by general needs housing.

With these key messages in mind, FWHG issued a new brief to the architects, Kenn Scaddan Associates, in a planning meeting on 22 November 2007 to:

1. Abandon the proposal for 24 two-bed bungalows at **Westfield Crescent** and develop a new proposal to include four chalet style bungalows within a general needs development.
2. Revise plans to include a further ten two-bed bungalows on **Surrey Road**, bringing the total number up to 16.
3. Develop further design proposals for the 18 **Somerset Crescent** refurbishments to include an extra bedroom and an exterior door in the kitchens where space permits.
4. Revise plans to include a further 7 bungalows on **Belmont Road**, bringing the total number to ten.

This has brought the final bungalow mix to **71** bungalows as follows:

	<b>New 2 bed</b>	<b>New DPU</b>	<b>Refurbished</b>	<b>Retained</b>
Belmont Road	7	3	0	4
Cornwall Road	0	0	0	0
Kent Road	2	0	0	0
Somerset Crescent	12	0	18	0
Taunton Row	0	0	0	5
Surrey Rd / Sussex Rd	12	4	0	0
Westfield Crescent	4	0	0	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>9</b>

We then held a final residents' drop-in consultation session on Tuesday 11 December at the Velmore Chapel where tenants were invited to view the changes to the proposals and to amend their preferences on an update questionnaire if they wished to. This process is regularly updated as tenants contact us to alter their choices so that we always have a reasonably accurate picture of tenant demand for the different bungalow schemes on the estate and can plan the rehousing programme accordingly.

## **CONSULTATION: WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY**

Once we had completed the full programme of consultation with bungalow residents and were confident that we had incorporated their essential requirements within the designs of new and refurbished bungalows we then organised a **Public Information Event** to consult with the wider community on the overall planning application. This event was held on **Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April** at the Velmore Chapel.

The aim of the event was to provide residents, private owners, private renters, Atlantic Housing tenants and other Registered Social Landlords tenants, with the opportunity to view and make comments on the proposed plans for the redevelopment of the bungalow properties on the Velmore Estate.

Personal letters of invitation were sent directly to every household, business and local groups, elected members on the estate.

In addition those attending were also asked to tell us about their needs' and ideas for the future from their perspective as a resident living in the community.

Atlantic Housing requested this information to influence how the *developer's contributions* are allocated. As part of the redevelopment process we took the lead on this phase of consultation as we felt we had a responsibility to our tenants and the wider community to try and ensure that any financial contribution to the community is distributed where it is most needed.

The event was designed as a drop in event. Residents could call in anytime between 10am – 8pm. There was entertainment for children provided between

10.00am – 6.00pm so as not to preclude parents with young children from attending.

274 people attended the event on the day (see *Table 1 below*) with a further 261 'hits', specific to the Velmore Redevelopment, on the Atlantic Housing website. In total we received over 700 comments from residents.

## **THE REHOUSING PROCESS**

### **Background**

The Relocation Liaison Adviser has been supporting tenants who have wished to move away from the estate since January 2006. Initially, only tenants who resided in bungalows on Kent Road or Westfield Crescent, which were included in the first two planning applications, were eligible for Home Loss and Disturbance payments but the previous executive team ruled in March 2006 that tenants from bungalows on other roads may claim a discretionary expenses payment of up to £1,000.

Following the withdrawal of plans the new executive team decided that residents of all affected bungalows on the Velmore estate would be eligible for a full Home Loss payment upon moving in recognition of the uncertainty and worry caused by the delays to the planning application. This measure was publicised to tenants in the June 2007 edition of Velmore Matters and implemented with immediate effect.

Since January 2006 fifty residents have been supported to move to properties elsewhere. There are currently **64** occupied bungalows on the estate and **63** voids. At the most recent count 56 residents stated that they wished to either remain in their own bungalow or move to a new, refurbished or retained bungalow on the estate after redevelopment.

### **Human Rights**

Prior to this planning application Public Law Solicitors made representations on behalf of some of the residents of the Estate to the effect that their human rights would be breached by the proposed redevelopment. EBC did not feel able to decide the issue and so FWHG appealed against the non-determination and the matter went to a Public Inquiry. The Inspector initially found that he could not rule out the possibility that the human rights of some of the residents of the estate might be affected by the proposals, but that finding has since been the subject of an appeal to the High Court. The High Court ruled that the Inspector was incorrect in his analysis of the human rights position, and his decision has now been quashed.

It is now clear that that the granting of planning permission for this redevelopment scheme would not infringe the Article 8 rights of any of the affected tenants because they are protected in any event by the Housing Acts.

AHL has made a further commitment to ensuring that the rights of tenants are not adversely affected by the redevelopment by stating publicly that we will not serve Notices To Seek Possession on any residents in order to redevelop. Tenants are not obliged to move and if individuals choose not to do so then we will plan the phasing of the building of the redevelopment scheme in order to support their wishes to remain in their own homes. Already letters have been issued to two residents on Westfield Crescent who have expressed concerns regarding moving reassuring them that we will not redevelop their homes until a future date when they have terminated their tenancies of their own accord.

We will continue to work in co-operation with residents in an effort to ensure that their needs are met within the redevelopment scheme and that they are given the opportunity to move to alternative permanent accommodation which meets their housing support needs and is in, or near to, the location of their choice. This accommodation may be on the Velmore estate or, alternatively, we will reserve suitable two-bed bungalows in other areas of the Borough in accordance with tenants' preferences.

### **Rents**

Tenants moving from a one-bed bungalow on the Velmore estate to a new or refurbished two-bed bungalow on the Velmore estate will continue to be charged an equivalent one-bed rent in recognition of the fact that they have given up their existing one-bed home at the Group's request in order to move to a two-bed and therefore should not be compromised financially.

### **Planning and phasing**

FWHG intends to develop the estate in phases in order to support the needs of the frailest residents and to ensure that the minimum number of people have to move twice in order to get their first choice of permanent alternative accommodation.

The following tables give a summary of tenants' first choice housing preferences as recorded in the questionnaire survey which was first distributed at the October consultation event and the later update questionnaire which was distributed in December 2007. Upon viewing draft proposals, tenants were asked to prioritise their housing choices in order of first, second and third preference. This information is regularly updated and so the tables give a 'snap shot' picture of tenant preferences at **30 June 2008**. The information gained has been extremely useful in enabling the Group to determine the desirability of each of the proposals for bungalow provision and to make amendments accordingly prior to the planning application stage.

Of the remaining 64 residents, **56** have stated that they would like a new, refurbished or a retained bungalow on the Velmore estate (including their own property where applicable) as their first or only choice and **8** have stated that they wish to move away from the estate as their first or only choice.

**Table one: Retained and refurbished bungalow properties**

	Belmont Road 1 bed retained	Taunton Row 1 bed retained	Somerset Crescent 2 bed refurbishment
Number of properties available	4	5	18
No of tenants who stated this option as their first choice of accommodation (including those who reside there already)	3	4	23
Total under / over provision	+1	+1	-5

**Table two: New build bungalow properties**

	Belmont Road 2-bed DPU	Kent Road 2-bed bungalow	Somerset Crescent 2-bed bungalow	Surrey Road 2-bed DPU or standard bungalow	Westfield Crescent 2-bed bungalow	Any new 2 bed bungalow–no preference stated
Number of properties included in the proposals	10	2	12	16	4	N/A
No of tenants who stated this option as their first choice of accommodation (including those who reside there already)	1	2	2	18	2	4
Total under / over provision	+9	1	+10	-2	+2	N / A

These figures are being regularly updated as tenants move away or re-evaluate their preferences.

## SUMMARY

The pre-planning application consultation sessions have enabled the Group to gather extremely useful information. The next stage is to complete a mapping

exercise to determine how best the development can be implemented in order to support tenants' needs and minimise disruption to their lives.

The consultation process is ongoing and FWHG will continue to identify tenants' needs and preferences at regular intervals throughout the redevelopment process and endeavour to accommodate them wherever possible.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1**      PowerPoint presentation summary of tenants' housing needs from needs assessment analysis.
- Appendix 2**      Brief to Kenn Scaddan Associates following August focus group sessions
- Appendix 3**      Information handout 1 given to tenants at the October consultation meetings and posted to non-attendees.
- Appendix 4**      Questionnaire 1
- Appendix 5**      Information handout 2, posted to residents in December 07 prior to the pre-planning application information event.
- Appendix 6**      Questionnaire update.