

Housing Theme Storyboards

The Community Architect Project

What are the issues to address?

North Prospect has problems affecting both social and private housing stock, much of which has structural defects and requires attention within the next five years. Properties in the area have widespread structural problems, including:

- Structural cracking
- Wall tie failure
- High levels of damp
- Bridged damp proof course
- Penetrating dampness
- Condensation

Sustainability

The current population size and household income levels limit the number, quality and type of facilities and amenities the neighbourhood can support, such as shops and businesses.

Working with the North Prospect Partnership and local residents, we commissioned an architect to work with the community to develop a solution for North Prospect that would:

- resolve the structural problems of existing housing stock and
- ensure that any proposed regeneration of the neighbourhood balances the interests and aspirations of different sections of the local community in a fair and equitable fashion.

This was done by:

- individual stakeholder interviews
- two community events, attended by over 200 local residents
- a housing survey that contacted 1,441 households out of 1,648 (84%)
- two Sustainable Neighbourhoods training days attended by 43 participants.

The community consultation culminated in a housing options workshop attended by residents and key stakeholder representatives. The workshop produced two housing development scenarios for the neighbourhood. These were presented to residents and they were asked to choose their preferred option.

What difference did we make?

The community consultation process helped to increase understanding of the housing redevelopment options. Residents were willing to express their views and preferences and had very clear ideas about the key issues for North Prospect. The housing redevelopment options are now regarded as necessary.

What were the keys to our success?

Working in close partnership with the community and with partner organisations.

What are we doing next?

We will be developing a masterplan for North Prospect with English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation. Residents will be at the heart of the process. Consultation facilitated through the North Prospect Partnership will help ensure that the community will continue to have a central role in the masterplan development process.

Simultaneously we will be continuing to engage with the community via the North Prospect Partnership to consult on the Council's proposal to transfer its housing stock to a new social landlord, Plymouth Community Homes.

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Regenerating Empty Homes in Stonehouse

What was the issue to address?

The Plymouth City Council Empty Homes Team's main objective is to maximise the use of private sector property within the city. The Team had received complaints about the neglected empty houses in the historic conservation area of Stonehouse. These properties are a wasted housing resource, attract anti social behaviour and blight the neighbourhood.

What did we do?

As we had been unsuccessful in negotiating a voluntary solution with owners to bring their houses back into use, we decided to purchase one of the houses by serving the owner with a notice of the Council's intention to purchase the property by Compulsory Purchase Order. The intended action was well publicised in both the Plymouth Herald and the Stonehouse Neighbourhood Newsletter.

The first owner to receive notification had left his large house on a prominent crossroads empty and neglected for over five years. On notification of the Council's intention to purchase the house by order he decided to sell it at public auction. The new owner instructed an architect to draw up plans for approval to renovate and convert it into six flats.

With a satisfactory conclusion to the first piece of action the team started the process again. A second owner was served with a notice. This owner had left the house empty for over ten years and the property had become derelict. Again the result of the notice persuaded the owner to sell it at auction. The Team approached the new owner and asked to work in partnership to renovate and convert the house into two flats and make available for vulnerable households.

The owner has worked with an architect and builder to ensure eco-friendly materials have been used and that the flats are energy efficient. For example an impressive new method of insulating the external structure of the building has been used on this conversion, which is a first for Plymouth.



What difference did it make?

- Three homes are now available for vulnerable households in Stonehouse at affordable rents. These have been delivered by renovating and converting previously disused long term empty properties.
- Another previously empty Grade II listed house is being converted back from a previous unsympathetic conversion into a large and spacious family home. The original features are being reinstated in keeping with the era of the house that is part of a planned 19th century terrace by John Foulston. The house will be available for vulnerable households in 2008/09 at an affordable rent.
- The appearance of the built environment has been improved.



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Making a difference

Regenerating Empty Homes in Stonehouse

What were the keys to our success?

Excellent partnership working was a key element with both internal and external partners pulling together to meet tight deadlines and providing funding and support to ensure outcomes were met.

A special thank you goes to;

- The External Programmes Team
- Warm Homes
- MCaren Design Architects
- Sarsen Housing Association (part of the Aster Group)
- Spectrum Housing Association
- The Housing Corporation
- PCC internal partners
- AD Williams Building Contractors
- J & E Regan Building Contractors Ltd

What are we doing next?

- The Empty Homes Team will roll out its Compulsory Purchase Programme city wide.
- It will continue to focus on the remaining empty houses in Stonehouse and take the appropriate action to ensure owners bring them back into use instead of leaving them to rot.
- It will maintain a high profile marketing strategy to ensure the issues with empty property are widely recognised.



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Improved Housing for Vulnerable Occupiers

What was the issue to address?

Homeowners and private tenants in Plymouth live in some of the worst conditions in the country. Homes can be damp, draughty and dangerous. These problems affect people on low incomes particularly in the rented sector. The Decent Homes Standard was introduced to improve properties. A decent home is one that is reasonably wind and weather tight, heated and has reasonably modern kitchens and bathrooms. In 2005 nearly 35% of vulnerable home owners and 45% of vulnerable tenants lived in homes which did not meet the Decent Homes Standard. Within Plymouth some of the worst conditions were to be found in the neighbourhood of Stonehouse.

The Stonehouse Private Sector Improvement Pilot – was a project set up to address the problems experienced by homeowners and tenants living in run down, non-decent accommodation.

What did we do?

The project used two approaches to solve the problems identified:

- Working closely with private landlords and offering grant assistance towards the cost of renovation.
- Promoting the homeowner grants throughout the neighbourhood of Stonehouse to ensure that local residents took advantage of the financial assistance on offer.

Vulnerable people can be a very difficult group to reach, so members of the team went into the community and carried out door knocking campaigns, café surgeries, leaflet drops and poster campaigns to engage with local homeowners and tenants.

What difference did we make?

The project carried out over 100 house condition surveys in Stonehouse and other neighbourhoods to determine how householders could be helped to improve their homes. In Stonehouse 7 homes were brought up to the decent homes standard and 10 landlord grants have been approved. In addition local landlords spent an estimated £175,000 to bring their rental properties to a decent standard. New heating systems, improved kitchens and bathrooms and better fire escape and alarm systems benefit local tenants directly alleviating fuel poverty and improving residents' health.



What were the keys to our success?

Keys to our success were the engagement of local residents and local landlords. Communication and collaboration has proven much more effective than enforcement.

What are we doing next?

- Plymouth City Council Housing Strategy and Renewals has incorporated the good approaches and techniques from the project into the day to day working practices.
- Homeowners and landlords in Stonehouse can continue to benefit from, and access, grant funding for their homes.
- New approaches for engagement and communication can also be transferred to other areas within the city.



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