

REPORT TO:	Palfrey and Pleck Local Neighbourhood Partnership	DATE:	29 March 2006
FROM:	Gary Fulford Chief Executive Central Walsall Housing Trust	AGENDA ITEM:	6
TITLE:	Palfrey and Pleck Local Neighbourhood Partnership (LNP) Work and Role of the Walsall Housing Group in the LNP Area		
SUMMARY:	This report along with a presentation will outline the work being undertaken by whg in the Palfrey and Pleck areas of Walsall		

1. INTRODUCTION

Further to a request from the Palfrey and Pleck Local Neighbourhood Partnership the following report has been produced to outline housing management and regeneration work being completed in the area.

2. MANAGEMENT

Central Walsall Housing Trust has management responsibilities for 1859 properties within the Palfrey and Pleck LNP boundary which are made up of the following property types.

	NUMBER
1 Bedroom Flat	477
2 Bedroom Flat	300
Bungalow	211
2 Bedroom House	131
3 Bedroom House	736
4 Bedroom House	3
5 Bedroom House	1
TOTAL	1859

Housing management teams including estates management, income collection, customer services, choice based lettings, property services and major works all provide services to the area.

Major Works Programmes

Over the last three years our major works' programme in the LNP area has invested the following.

	NUMBER	£
Rewires	310	263,258
Central Heating	278	1,838,708

Windows	692	1,266,253
Kitchens and Bathrooms	519	2,033,440
Environmental Works	7 schemes	1,104,069
Demolition	36 units	165,151
TOTAL		6,670,879

Projects

A number of projects have been identified and completed over the three years since transfer and are detailed below.

Scarborough Close

Eight flats in the 16-flat block had been empty for more than 3 years when the Trust took over the management of the former council properties in March 2003 and were scheduled for demolition. The Trust has invested in a major refurbishment programme so the flats now have new windows; kitchens and bathrooms; central heating and electrics. Solar powered lighting is also being looked at for the communal areas as part of the Trust's environmental initiative.

Other flats in the block – which is designated for the over 45's – have also been improved and £120k is being spent on environmental improvements in the area.

More than 100 people have expressed an interest in renting flats in Scarborough Close after a £385k face-lift.

Alexandra Road

Alexandra Road consists of 9 x 2 bedroom flats. At the point of transfer this block had 2 voids and was designated as a block for demolition. The reason for this was that it had developed a reputation during a long period of anti-social behaviour and empty properties could not be let. On Transfer, anti-social behaviour was dealt with and the block was removed from the demolition list. Major works have now completed windows, kitchens and bathrooms along with environmental works, landscaping, door entry and improved lighting with investment totalling £119k and all properties are now occupied.

41-51 Bescot Street

This block consists of four one-bedroom flats and two bed-sits and since transfer four properties have been empty. Refurbishment work and environmental work is taking place to improve the block.

The block was originally considered for demolition due to incidents of anti-social behaviour and unpopularity of the existing properties. Anti-social behaviour has now been resolved and demand for flats generally in the area indicates that the properties will let once refurbished.

Primley Avenue

In partnership with WMBC we provided financial support to the Primley Avenue Open Space Project that provided considerable improvements to Primley Avenue park and the fencing at the rear of our properties in Primley Avenue.

Scarborough Close Garages

Another partnership initiative with WMBC involves the gating of the garage site on Scarborough Close that will improve security and prevent the increasing amount of fly tipping in the area.

Moorside Gardens

Moorside Gardens has been one of our flagship environmental projects totally transforming the external communal areas with extensive landscaping, front and rear; new windows and door entry systems along with improved lighting.

Resident Involvement

Running as a theme through much of the work we have done in Palfrey and Pleck has been resident involvement. Tenant consultation has been completed throughout the major works' programme and to identify environmental priorities.

In Pleck, for the past two years, the Priority Estate Project (PEP) has acted as tenants' friend during the clearance of the blocks of flats, supporting tenants throughout the process. It has also established a stakeholders' group that regularly meets with senior officers to discuss progress on the Pleck flats site and proposals for the future.

During 2005 we commenced estate walks in Alumwell, involving local residents, officers and Councillors. This was an opportunity to discuss improvements that have been made and proposals for the future. It was also an opportunity for local residents and local Councillors to identify problems and areas of concern. Action plans were then subsequently drawn up and issues resolved.

Due to the high proportion of BME residents in both the Palfrey and Pleck area and Central Walsall Housing Trust generally, we are working in partnership with Trelawny Overseas Relief Association (TORA) to increase BME resident involvement. TORA is an Afro Caribbean agency based in Caldmore who have contacts with the majority of BME agencies in Walsall.

TORA is now working with us to co-ordinate a perception survey of BME residents' views about the choice based lettings process.

Tenancy Management

Palfrey and Pleck has produced a number of tenancy management challenges for Central Walsall Trust some of which are detailed below:

- **Flaxhall Street Alumwell.** During 2005 this street suffered from ongoing anti-social behaviour. We worked with the police and local residents to put in place a dispersal order and identify the perpetrators. Actions subsequently helped to resolve a number of issues.

Properties that had been empty for a while in Flaxhall Street have also been brought back into management after extensive major works. Unfortunately two properties are still blighted in the area due to non-

compliance by the owner of one property. This is an ongoing issue that we are encouraging the council to resolve.

- **Pleck Flats.** Initiatives with the police to help combat crime and fear of crime in the area have included
 - a distribution of personal attack alarms to all elderly residents of Scrimshaw House
 - b commitment from the police to increase the use of the police base within Scrimshaw House
- **Floating Support.** Sustaining tenancies has been one of the Trust's priorities and to help facilitate this we have been working with Bromford Housing Association to provide specialist floating support thus helping tenants to sustain their tenancy. In addition to this Caldmore Housing Association Elderly Asian Floating Support Scheme provides support to six of our elderly Asian tenants in Palfrey.
- **Neighbourhood Impact Officer Service.** During 2005 we completed a comprehensive service review of our caretaking service which involved challenging, consulting and comparing the service. The results of this process culminated in the formation of the new Neighbourhood Impact Officer service. This new service will commence 3 April 2006 and will be highly visible, impact service across our high-rise properties and develop across low-rise properties.

3. REGENERATION

The Walsall Strategic Regeneration Framework

- 3.1 whg and Walsall Council have jointly commissioned the preparation of a Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) for housing and district centre regeneration in Walsall. The SRF is a high level framework that will provide an overall assessment of the housing market in Walsall, together with an assessment of the economic health of and prospects for the district centres. More specifically, it will inform whg and Walsall Council, and other housing agencies operating in the Borough, in making investment decisions for housing and district centres.
- 3.2 The SRF has four principles (each with three objectives), directly related to regional and sub-regional policy:
- ? Town centre neighbourhood and neighbourhood regeneration
 - ? Investing for the future
 - ? Quality of life and
 - ? Capitalising on economic assets.
- 3.3 The SRF has made the following strategic conclusions for the Central Walsall area including Palfrey and Pleck:
- ? Must seek to secure a higher quality and greater range of housing choice for existing residents, as well as achieve new inspirational housing within the town centre, thereby increasing its population and critical mass.

? Emphasis should be placed upon:

- (i) Provision of larger accommodation in order to address the over-supply of 1 and 2 bed properties in the social rented sector
- (ii) New build and conversions for owner-occupation/shared ownership which can diversify the tenure mix
- (iii) New build townhouses and other related non-terraced accommodation in order to broaden the choice of housing
- (iv) High quality provision for an expanding elderly population, particularly the significant Asian community.

3.4 The SRF has primarily focussed on strategic issues impacting district centres such as Bloxwich, Darlaston, Willenhall and Aldridge and Brownhills. The housing characteristics of the Central Walsall area (including Palfrey and Pleck LNP) have also been examined within the SRF.

Walsall Urban Regeneration Company (WRC)

3.5 Palfrey and Pleck sit within the Walsall Urban Regeneration Company (WRC) footprint and have received much consideration within the WRC Framework.

3.6 The WRC Area Framework suggests for a more wider choice of housing – including at the more inspirational ends of the market. The rationale being that the knowledge-based industries chase good labour; and thus part of the strategy must be about providing the supply side conditions that will attract it.

The Black Country/Telford Housing Market Renewal Area

3.7 This proposed Housing Market Renewal Area (HMRA) is identified as an area of potential risk of low demand for certain property types and neighbourhoods.

3.8 The West Midlands Regional Housing Board has allocated funding – over the period 2004/05 to 2005/06 for establishment of a prospectus for integrated public investment to tackle housing market weakness and changing markets in Black Country, Telford.

3.9 The Phase 1 report¹ confirms that the HMRA location has a large central area of housing market weakness, which includes Palfrey and Pleck. This area suffers from low value, a concentration of homogenous and relatively unattractive housing, poor environments and high levels of deprivation.

3.10 Whg's representation on the HMRA Steering Group will ensure it is at the forefront of developments and able to influence policy and attract resources for the betterment of Walsall and Palfrey and Pleck area.

Pleck Flat Regeneration

3.11 In 2005 whg entered into partnership with Bovis Homes to deliver the Group's regeneration plans. Bovis Homes are in discussions with whg regarding the principles to access social housing grant, on the site of the Pleck flats in order

¹ Black Country Telford Housing Market Renewal Area – Phase One [2005]: A Final Report to Wolverhampton City Council (on behalf of the HMRA Partnership)

to regenerate the area. Strong support has been received from Walsall Council and WRC to ensure that the urban form of the proposed development meets with the guidelines contained within WRC's Regeneration Framework: that any development is to high standards of design, layout and accessibility.

- 3.12 It is proposed to develop a mixed tenure scheme on the site which would meet WRC's regeneration agenda for aspirational housing.

Marion Talbot House Regeneration

- 3.13 whg has recently completed an option appraisal on the site occupied by the Marion Talbot House. It has been agreed that the site will be regenerated with the provision of new housing. Bovis Homes are aware that the scheme design for the Pleck Flats will require re-housing of the residents of Scrimshaw House. They have suggested the opportunity to develop Marion Talbot House site for social housing that would meet the needs of the Scrimshaw House residents.

Ripon Road, Scarborough Close, and Thompson House (Spout Lane)

- 3.14 whg are currently undertaking a suite of property investment appraisals including sites in the Palfrey and Pleck area:

? garage blocks adjacent to Ripon Road, and Scarborough Close
? Thompson House, Spout Lane.

- 3.15 These investment appraisals are based on a wide-range of factors including regeneration and financial. Once implemented they will lead to the successful regeneration of key sites within Palfrey and Pleck.
- 3.16 We are also actively looking at other landholdings we have in the LNP areas to identify further sites for redevelopment.

Skills Centre

- 3.17 whg Skills Centre Training Agency Centre is one of the main providers of construction training in Walsall and within Black Country. The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) has recently awarded the highest grade of outstanding. The Centre has high achievement rates for Advanced and Foundation Modern Apprenticeships and has 100% retention rates for apprentices.
- 3.18 The Centre has undertaken a recruitment drive for 11 Apprentices on behalf of 4 external employers, Belway Homes; Wates; Frank Haslam Milan; and Delmar Electrical.
- 3.19 The Skills Centre is an invaluable resource which will be deployed to capitalise on opportunity that will arise from local developments including the Manor Hospital regeneration.

4. CONCLUSIONS

We will continue to work with other agencies in Palfrey and Pleck to create communities in which people want to live. Our priorities will continue to be neighbourhood management, regeneration and sustaining tenancies.

These will be achieved through existing service teams and the new Neighbourhood Impact Officer service teams commencing in April 2006. Also by ensuring that opportunities to consult and communicate with the residents of Palfrey and Pleck are created and additional resource and investment is secured to meet the area's regeneration needs.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The LNP is asked to note the work of whg in the area to date and the outline plans for the future.