



Development Strategy
2023-2026

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Introduction

The Association owns just over 600 properties providing a variety of homes in the Cumberland district of Cumbria. It is important that we maintain our existing stock and make sure our tenants have good quality homes to live in but also that we take opportunities to deliver additional homes to meet local housing needs.

This Strategy works to the objective set in our Business Plan to develop 150 – 200 new homes for rent by 2030 including more older persons housing and more family provision, these having been identified as priority needs. It sets out our development plans for the future and what we will do to achieve these.

The Business Plan identifies the addition of 39 properties in the three-year period from 2023 to 2025 at a cost, net of any grant's receivable, of £5.46 million in total and at an average cost per property rising from £120k in 2021 to £156k in 2025. Current priorities for properties to be provided are two, three and four-bedroom family homes and two-bedroom bungalows. Existing cash resources of £1.1 million, derived from operating cash surpluses, will part fund the capital spend with the balance being raised as additional loan finance with the first drawdown expected June 2023.

Statement of Aims and Objectives

Provide new housing in line with identified needs



Ensure all properties are good quality, affordable and have an energy efficiency rating of 'B' or above



Develop housing in communities where affordable homes are needed



Deliver value for money schemes that are financially viable ensuring that maximum benefit is derived from our assets

Provide new housing in line with identified needs.

Housing for Older People

A priority is to provide accommodation for older people. Housing provision that meets the needs of older people has significant benefits to their health and well-being while easing social care and NHS budgets.

This need has been identified by the most recent local needs analysis carried out by the former Allerdale Borough Council and has been supported by demand analysis of the Cumbria Choice Based Lettings Scheme. In addition, the Association's tenant profile data shows several older residents living in larger family homes and requiring more appropriate housing, particularly on the Westfield estate. The Cumbria Choice demand analysis indicates a high demand for bungalow accommodation.

The Local Housing Needs Assessment 2022 published by the former Allerdale Borough Council notes a super ageing population and a need to develop housing that will enable longer term independence. Allerdale Borough Council has now been replaced by the Cumberland Council however the Local Housing Needs Assessment 2022 is the most up to information for the area in which Westfield operates. The Local Housing Needs Assessment states that the area formally known as Allerdale, has an older age structure than seen regionally or nationally and slightly higher levels of disability compared with the national average. The assessment states that between 2022 – 2032, there will be a 17% increase in the population aged 65+ and a 21% increase in those aged 65+ with mobility problems. As a result, one of the objectives in the Local Housing Assessment 2022 is to increase the supply of housing for older people.

The ageing population has also led to an increased pressure on the budget that provides disabled adaptations in our properties. It is hoped that by developing appropriate homes we can meet the housing needs of the ageing population across the Westfield area and lower the need for adaptations in homes that are not suitable for people as they age.

In addition to independent housing for older people we will explore options for Hub and spoke models combining accommodation with support and care services. This may include consideration of the Minto Centre on the Westfield estate as a base for some care and support provision.

Family Homes

The Local Housing Needs Assessment also details the need for more two- and three-bedroom properties as continued demand can be expected from newly forming households. In line with this need the Association will seek to develop more family homes in localities where a need is identified.

While the focus will be on rented homes initially, we also recognise home ownership aspirations. In terms of shared ownership housing and low- cost housing, these have had limited success in West Cumbria in recent years. Low sale values have been prohibitive with respect to developing homes for market sale. However, we will consider low-cost home ownership and shared ownership schemes where it is appropriate to do so and where these are viable options.

We will continue to work closely with Cumberland Council and will be informed by local priorities for housing as well as other need and demand data.

Ensure all properties are good quality, affordable and have an energy efficiency rating of 'B' or above.

One of our strategic objectives is to develop good quality housing that meets current and future needs, including homes that are affordable and that are energy efficient.

We are committed to providing the right housing, to the right standards, in the right places and at the right cost. All properties will be built to design and quality standards that deliver a good quality affordable home and will create environments that are attractive, useable and durable. All new schemes will comply with quality standards set by National Design Space Standards which is supported by Homes England. We will integrate feedback from other teams, and from residents, into our future designs and specifications by ensuring that our project brief is regularly reviewed. This feedback will include informing consideration of the medium- and long-term maintenance needs of new developments.

The safety of our tenants is paramount so all homes will be built to comply with current government guidelines regarding fire, gas and electrical safety, as a minimum.

Environmental sustainability is an important consideration. Reducing energy costs and fuel poverty is an important goal and all new homes will be fitted with good quality insulation, good quality windows and doors and an efficient heating system that will meet high energy efficiency standards of level B or above. This will exceed the government's target for all properties owned by social landlords to meet an EPC rating of 'C' or above by 2030.

Working to the de-carbonisation agenda we will seek to achieve the highest EPC ratings possible, aiming to make use of available grant funding and the latest technology. We will develop an Energy Efficiency Strategy that details key objectives and how these will be achieved.

Our homes will be designed to create and encourage better living environments for everyone. Design features will be included that increase ease of access such as level thresholds, wider doorways, accessible showers and good accessibility throughout the home. Most people find it easier to move around in their properties without physical barriers in the way such as steps and narrow areas and therefore some bungalows will have panels that can be removed to ensure that they are adaptable for changing needs in the future. Externally they will have wider accessible parking bays and level access to the front and back of the property.

Early development will work to traditional construction methods but focused on achieving high and compliant build standards and high levels of energy efficiency. The Association will research energy efficiency models e.g., passivhaus, and consider modern methods of construction.

Bringing Lifetime Homes design into the general housing stock should, over time, allow older people to stay in their own homes for longer and reduce the need for home adaptations.

In addition, Westfield will be looking into the concept of Passivhaus and the feasibility of providing Passivhaus properties. Passivhaus buildings provide a high level of occupant comfort using very little energy for heating and cooling and the buildings use around 75% less energy than standard UK newbuild properties. Passivhaus buildings have super insulation, stringent levels of airtightness and mechanical ventilation with heat recovery.

Develop housing in communities where affordable homes are needed.

We have prioritised development on the Westfield estate where we have a significant local presence and where there is an identified need for new housing, particularly more older persons and family accommodation. The Association owns land on the estate which has been appropriate for development, and this has enabled us to provide new affordable homes that meet local needs and contribute to the sustainability of the community. In addition, we have acquired land from the former Allerdale Borough Council which is adjacent to the Westfield estate, and which will be developed to provide six x two-bedroom bungalows.

Current development work on the Westfield estate is planned to be undertaken cross two phases. Phase one, currently on site, comprises nineteen bungalows scheduled to be completed by the end of 2023. Phase two comprises five x two-bedroom bungalows and seven houses scheduled to start in late 2023 and complete summer 2024.

All developments on the estate have been the subject of public consultation prior to the finalising of the plans and the submitting of planning applications. We are committed to ensuring effective community engagement and consultation early in the development process. As a minimum consultation will include public meetings, information via social media including our website and Facebook and leaflets and other literature.

We continue to explore opportunities to work with Cumberland Council on sites that they own where the development activity can be adequately risk managed. We have expressed an interest in the redevelopment of the site of the former Southfield School in Workington to provide a mixed property and tenure housing scheme. This site adjoins the Westfield estate and we consider that we are the best placed housing provider, committed to both the local Westfield area as well as the wider Workington area to acquire this site and deliver a scheme aligned to the priorities of Cumberland Council. If successful, the acquisition of this site will be central to growing the portfolio of new builds by the Association as set out in the current business plan. Discussions are still in the early stages with Cumberland Council. If we are not successful in the acquisition of this site, then we will look for opportunities close to our operational area to deliver smaller scale developments.

We will continue to work closely with the newly formed Cumberland Council and other partners. Our development programme will reflect local planning and housing strategy requirements, including consideration of provision of housing in other areas in West Cumbria where a need exists. Scheme concepts and details will be discussed with all relevant stakeholders.

Deliver value for money schemes that are financially viable ensuring that maximum benefit is derived from our assets.

We will use our resources efficiently and effectively to ensure value for money and will use the expertise and skills of others when needed. The availability of development land owned by the association in an area of current stock density provides an opportunity for viable and value for money development. Existing loan arrangements have recently been reviewed and new finance secured on more favourable terms.

Each potential scheme will be assessed for viability with the aim of achieving a positive financial impact. The Association will always ensure that the provision of new homes is financially viable and fundable and will not impact adversely on tenants or the Association itself. We have recently updated the Development Scheme Appraisal model to ensure rigorous assessments of the financial performance of new developments. The appraisal model is based on estimated costs for development, maintenance and management, rental streams and cashflow and is reviewed annually.

To ensure full and robust financial and risk evaluation of new schemes, a Development Committee scheme meets to consider appraisals for any scheme with a value of £500,000 or more and to recommend to Board as deemed appropriate. The evaluation will consider the impact upon the Business Plan as well as the viability of the activity or development itself. The Development Committee will ensure that the new developments do not place the organisation at risk of breaching its internal commitments and that any risks associated with a development are within the Board's risk appetite for development. The Development Committee comprises of four members as nominated by Board on an annual basis. The Development Officer will co-ordinate meetings at scheme feasibility stage.

More generally Board approval will be required for new activity, including but not limited to:

- Property development of a new type, geographical area or tenant group
- Regeneration schemes
- Changes in use and/or client group for multiple homes
- New trading activities

We will continue to work closely with Homes England and seek grant funding to support new development keep rent levels affordable and reduce financial risk.

We will ensure that the development programme does not compromise the interests of our existing tenants, or our ability to invest in their homes and services. This will be achieved by regular review of our Business Plan and financial forecasts including reviews of financial outturns on new developments, and of future maintenance needs based on up to date stock condition data. Based on continuing to develop in areas where we already have concentrations of stock, little or no increase in housing management costs is envisaged over the period of this strategy.

We will work to ensure excellent communication and joint working between staff teams

across the Association in order to use resources and knowledge available to inform this assessment.

To facilitate the building of properties in phase one and phase two, the Association has entered into contracts with a Contractor and Consultants without going through a tender process. Selection was based on recommendation, reputation and general knowledge of the Contractor and Consultants. Board approval was then sought prior to any contract and was fully costed. Consultants' rates and Contractor pricing are benchmarked by independent assessment to ensure the costs are competitive and to ensure that value for money is provided.

We will look to achieve social value from such a partnership, for example through the provision of apprenticeship opportunities. We are mindful of the benefits of working with local companies that have a track record of delivering similar schemes and can contribute to the local economy by their approaches to procurement, employment and training.

Over recent years, we have purchased properties from private developers under a section 106 agreement – a section 106 agreement ensures that private developers provide high quality affordable housing on new developments. Properties are sold to local housing associations at a reduced price so that they can be made available to let to local people who are most in need of affordable housing. The rents on these properties are affordable and remain so in the future.

We are due to take handover of four x three-bedroom homes in Summer 2023 and a further four x two-bedroom homes in Spring 2024 from Story Homes. These are situated in High Harrington.

The Government is proposing to scrap section 106 agreements and replace the legal with the Infrastructure Levy. However, this change will take place after the period of this strategy (it will be introduced over the next decade) and therefore in the meantime we will continue to actively seek opportunities with private developers and other potential partners to purchase new build homes that have been designated for mixed development and that meet identified community needs

In the past Westfield has also bought back properties on the Westfield estate to help support the sustainability of the neighbourhood. However, due to the financial commitments surrounding the new developments and the large-scale improvements Westfield is carrying out to the existing stock to ensure our properties are energy efficient and can meet high energy efficient standards by 2030, the purchasing of buy-back properties is under review for the time-being. We still strongly believe that by investing in our communities, we help strengthen and sustain those communities and it is hoped following the review that the purchasing of buy-back properties may be possible in future years.

We will explore alternative construction procurement methods, ensuring risks are well understood.

How Will We Monitor Progress?

To ensure we are focussed in working towards the aims set out in this strategy, we will monitor and measure our progress by:

- Board will receive quarterly updates on a scheme-by-scheme basis including pipeline schemes and will include reviews of aims if needed.
- Detailed prior financial appraisal and formal approval process for new schemes.
- Monitoring the financial performance of new schemes once complete as part of the annual review of the Association's Business Plan

In addition, residents of new homes will have the opportunity to feedback after living in the homes for six months. This will enable us to consider any improvements in subsequent projects.

Audit Requirements

Following on from a recent internal audit, it has been recommended that the development procedures be formally documented and submitted to Board for approval. Once approved by Board, training will be provided to all relevant staff. The completion for this piece of work is October 2023.

Links to Other Key Documents

Business Plan

[Financial Regulations](#)

To be completed by Corporate Services Officer

Document Control

Business Owner (name & job title)	Diane Gorge, Development Officer
Policy Author (name & job title)	Diane Gorge, Development Officer
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Document History

Date	Version Number	Author	Description of Update
25/05/2023	3	DG	Key changes are: Updates on the current financial commitments/loan requirements, Progress on the development programme, Latest local authority Housing Needs assessment details, Aim of achieving an EPC 'B' rating on all new homes (previously 'C') and a commitment to explore passivhaus or similar construction methods to maximise efficiency. Statement re: exploring smaller development opportunities should the Southfield School site not progress

