

NEWS RELEASE

The Eden Housing Association looks back at 10 years of successful change

Eden Housing Association (EHA) held its Annual Meeting last week, marking its 10th anniversary with a look back at the last ten years and outlining the future. Guests included



residents and past Board members as well as partners, local councillors and Guest speaker Sarah Dunning, Chief Executive of Westmorland Limited.

EHA Chairman Mr Ken McKean began by reminding everyone that EHA's core ethos was about building homes and creating communities - he highlighted the York Street development in Penrith as a prime example. This development received limited grant funding from the Housing Corporation, so an innovative solution was developed to provide a combination of owned and rented accommodation.

"This is one of the Associations strengths and it highlights that this type of development can build strong communities and provide affordable homes."

The property portfolio has changed in ten years, houses were bought through the right to buy and 318 new homes have been built – that leaves the portfolio with 1509 properties - 2 short of the original total they took over in 1997. Looking to the future Mr McKean set the challenge to release 50 new homes into the communities each year - something that the Association has achieved for the first time in the year 2006/7.

Four of the founding Board members were present at the AGM along with the Chairman of Eden District Council - Councillor Keith Morgan, who was with the Council during the transfer. He commented that "There were worries at the time that something less good would result from the Governments decision to transfer. However our fears have consistently been disproved. From the residents view point of housing in the district, social housing is better than it has ever been."

During his review of the last ten years, Paul Davies, Chief Executive highlighted some of the greatest challenges and successes. EHA has completed major repairs and home improvements to ALL the properties transferred from the Council. He highlighted that residents now have a wider choice for interiors and was also proud of their environmental commitment to using sustainable materials with high levels of insulation.

"The bar is constantly raised as expectations and lifestyles change; so we recognise the need to update and remodel developments. The revamped supported housing schemes at Rampkin House, Appleby and Sim Court in Penrith are prime examples. But it took support from residents like Eunice Pringle to help win over the Housing Association for grants – so we must also thank our communities for their support.

Without doubt, the Sanderson's Croft Estate in Kirkby Thore has been one of the biggest challenges. From the initial transfer from the Council we recognised that the project was about community, interaction and initiative. Today the homes and environments are improved and there is great play area – the whole community should be proud of what they have achieved"

"In the last 10 years EHA has spread its wings and now works throughout the county in partnership with a wide variety of organisation including Mitre Housing, Impact, NEET, Eden

District Council and more recently Thomas Armstrong. “ Venerable David Jenkins from ‘Mitre’ confirmed “We have worked with EHA for three years; we have the happiest relationship and look forward to the next 5 years.”

Community support and development has gone from strength to strength over the last ten years. “Some of the greatest success is in the improvements to the supported housing service. The team has seen recognition with national awards and praise from Cumbria Supporting People, but it is the improvements in quality of life for our residents that makes us proudest”

Working in the communities we have forged strong partnerships to provide better services and information, technology now makes it easier to reach more isolated rural communities and we are proud to be delivering what our customers ask for. We now have Welcome packs for new tenants and are in regular touch, with new tenant visits to make sure they know what help is available.

Paul also reminded guests that “Property does not have to look cheap; it can look attractive and still be affordable”. EHA has won several design awards including White Hart Yard in Penrith and The Old Institute Building in Appleby. Further success was achieved with the Pooley Bridge development which received recognition in many spheres; Peter Dixon, Chairman of the Housing Corporation highlighted our Pooley Bridge at the recent Affordable Rural Housing Conference and concluded “that this is what rural housing is all about”. The development was opened by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales who has also included it as part of his national Good Design Guide.

One of the biggest challenges now facing the Association is the diminishing market for first time buyers. The Chief Executive reinforced their commitment to shared ownership to support people who can no longer afford to buy property on their own and congratulated the team on their successful bid to become sole Cumbrian Agent for the Government’s HomeBuy initiative run by EHA under the banner of Affordable Homes Cumbria.

Paul Davies concluded by saying “It is the challenges we face and how we succeed that shows we do not stand still. We face our issues and look for continued improvements – there is no time for resting on laurels!”

Guest speaker for the afternoon was Sarah Dunning, Chief Executive of Westmorland Limited. During her presentation Sarah placed great emphasis on the strength of a local workforce and rural communities – particularly in places like Tebay. She began by saying that “Community is important to us, we have a large staff and draw from rural towns like Tebay, Kirkby Stephen Appleby and Penrith. We are interconnected with the community and often see 2 – 3 generations from one family working for us. It is a rural business, work and community become inseparable. We work with a variety of local community groups and are acutely aware of issue of affordable homes in Eden. This is a key issue when trying to maintain a local workforce. Listening to the comments raised during the AGM today has certainly been thought provoking. The issues facing Eden Housing Association also have a massive impact on local businesses; forging a better understanding and new partnerships should help maintain our local communities for the future.”

-Ends-

Picture above: Paul Davies CE with Sarah Dunning Guest Speaker and Ken McKean Chairman

More pictures overleaf:.....



The 4 original Board members: Mac Carlyle, Ron Richardson Kay Richards and Ken McKean



Canon Jenkins (Mitre Housing) with Paul Davies



Val Martin with Eunice and Paul Davies