

NEWS RELEASE: 6th April 2009



Boost for Penrith as 17 more homes are launched - and more to follow



Eden Housing Association (EHA) has just held the official opening of 17 affordable homes in Penrith. This positive news is a real boost for the town which has seen so much development work come to a halt in recent months.

The new scheme of houses, flats and maisonettes for rental and shared ownership sale represents the fruit of a productive partnership between EHA and Eden District Council (EDC).

The development was brought to EHA by Atkinson Homes, and was developed and funded in conjunction with Eden District Council and grants from the Homes and Communities Agency (formerly Housing Corporation).

Built on the site of Victoria House and gardens, it includes sympathetically designed new build as well as the tasteful renovation and conversion of the two existing dwellings. Visually impressive, it makes optimum use of the space available.

In her opening remarks, Joan Johnstone, Chair of EHA said "The new build properties are timber frame construction with high insulation levels, which will provide low fuel costs for the residents, especially valuable at this time of hardship we all face. We are proud of both the design and appearance and the fact that we have been able to provide so many spacious units on a relatively small site. A lot of credit is due to our construction team, Atkinson Homes, Manning Elliott Architects, Donleys Quantity Surveyors, and our own Development Team."

Steve Atkinson, Director of Atkinson Homes said "It is an imposing building, full of character which brought its own challenges, but the finished development was certainly worth the effort."

The properties are being occupied by a mix of people including singles and families of all ages - all with a local connection. Originally there were 10 properties for rent and 7 for outright sale, but with the economic downturn, EHA changed the 7 outright sale properties to shared ownership, adapting to the changing economic circumstance and catering for those that could no longer afford a mortgage to own their home outright.

The development was officially launched by Councillor Tony Brunskill, Chair of Eden District Council who said "It is common knowledge that Penrith faces a potential housing crisis through the lack of affordable housing for rental and purchase in the town, which is, sadly, growing with the affect of the economic downturn. Schemes like this, of which we

need significantly more, will have an impact on the sustainability of the local economy as well as on the lives of local people in housing need.

I am delighted to see that the rented accommodation has been let to local people, all of whom were experiencing difficult housing circumstances. The homes for sale are also being offered to a mix of families, couples and single people trying to get a foot on the property ladder, most of whom work locally and all of whom are unable to afford local market prices or obtain mortgages. Their presence close to their employment can only be beneficial to local businesses, their growth and sustainability. The completion of this scheme is, in effect, a microcosm of what is referred to as a 'balanced community' with wider economic benefits."

There is even more good news for the town as EHA also revealed that they have planning permission for at least 30 more homes on 5 developments in Penrith, beginning later this year - with more in the pipeline.

Paul Davies, Chief Executive at EHA concluded by saying "We are on target to create 50 new homes this year and are in discussions with the HCA for grant funding to support more affordable developments. We have built an excellent relationship with local partners like EDC and Atkinson Homes who bring us sites, and look forward to continuing this in the future."



Anyone interested in finding out about affordable home development should contact Paul Davies on 01768 861400 or email paul.davies@edenha.org.uk

Left:

Paul Davies CE EHA, Steve Atkinson from Atkinson Homes, Joan Johnstone chair EHA and EDC Chair, Councillor Tony Brunskill at the side of the Victoria House Development.

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For more information regarding this press release or for more pictures, please contact Tracey Errington on 07799 640 290 or email tracey@marketsense.net

Affordability thresholds

Government guidelines use up to 3.5 times household income as the threshold for 'affordability' – in 2007 prior to the downturn, the Eden District ratio was 7.6 - more than double the guideline set. Even with the current fall in house prices latest figures for Penrith itself are between 6 and 6.5 times, with average prices at £216,369 and median prices at £178,200**. This suggests the demand for rented accommodation is set to increase. Eden Council estimates that 265 "affordable" homes need to be built each year until 2011 to meet demand. It has 1,095 people waiting to rent a home but says some do not bother to join the waiting list because they think they have no chance of success.

*Cumbria County Council, 2007.

** source: House Price.co.uk, October 2008-February 2009.