

Eden Housing Association celebrates 20th anniversary at Annual Meeting



Eden Housing Association (EHA) is celebrating their 20th anniversary and marked the occasion this week (Tuesday 26 September 2017) at their annual meeting which looked back over their history.

Held at Stoneybeck Inn, Penrith, around 80 guests attended the meeting including past chairs of the organisation, staff and stakeholders. On display were documents and photographs from the earliest days, as well as the original transfer video and a wall of people pictures featuring staff, schemes, homes and events across the era.

The transfer of 1,508 properties from Eden District Council (EDC) to Eden Housing Association took place on 22 September 1997 under the auspices of Eden District Council Chief Executive Ian Bruce, EDC Chair Bernard Thornborrow and the Housing Association's first Chief Executive Paul Davies and Chair Ron Richardson.

Initially the Association lost properties under the right to buy scheme, but with planned development of new build affordable homes, it now has a stock of 1821 properties across Cumbria and manage a further 140 properties for Mitre Housing Association, Allonby Almshouses and Lyvennet Community Trust.

The affordable housing landscape has changed greatly in recent years, as highlighted in the report on the past year from John Clasper, Chief Executive of Eden Housing Association.

Like many housing associations, EHA has gone through a process of change to cope with demands of tightening budgets. This year has seen the completion of an organisational review which has led to a slimmer structure as a result of the rent reductions imposed by Government.

On a positive note, John Clasper spoke of their new way of working, looking at ways to retain value by adopting a new 'Neighbourhood Approach'. EHA is one of only eleven organisations in the country to receive the Good Practice Accreditation from the Chartered Institute of Housing. Other achievements pointed to in the past year included introducing 19 new homes in Penrith and Appleby and taking on the community alarm response service in Carlisle to support an additional 1,000 customers.

Past Chairs of the EHA Board spoke at the meeting, recounting their strongest memories. As first Chair, Ron Richardson spoke about nurturing the process from working with EDC to get information to tenants so they could make an informed decision and about the people who were so influential at the time but no longer with us including Paul Davies, Bob Clark, Ivy Wilkinson, Edgar Craig and Mac Carlisle.

Second Chair was Ken McKean, he recalled becoming managing agents for Mitre Housing Association and the strong synergies both organisation's have of caring about tenants. The most gratifying project during his years as Chair was the Door Step Green Project in Kirkby Thore. As well as improving homes at Sandersons Croft, it also created a space for recreation and really improved the estate. Ken said, "I went back for another look last month and it is still looking good."

Joan Johnstone was Chair from 2007 to 2011. For Joan, working with tenants and establishing strong resident involvement was close to her heart. ECHO - the new Tenant's and Resident's Assembly was set up and training and development resources were expanded. Joan's stand out memories relate to the development of Heysham Gardens Extra Care Scheme in Carlisle "Winning the contract to build Heysham Gardens was a highlight, we are a small housing organisation with big ideas and we should be proud of how well it has turned out."

Fourth Chair was Leo Finn who could not be present but sent a message recalling the launch of fourteen new homes in Coniston.

Current Chair Henry Barker spoke of watching the Association grow over time, being proud to be the current Chair working hard with committed Board Members and staff to guide the organisation through the current uncertain times.

Speaker for the event was Andy Beeforth OBE and Chief Executive of Cumbria Community Foundation (CCF). His memories of EHA began when meeting Paul Davies at the Academy of Chief Executives and the relationship with the organisation has grown since.

CCF has a history of working closely with housing associations and currently has a project with Cumbria Housing Partners, directly investing into social value projects aimed at benefitting tenants. He highlighted the difficulties of people living in rural locations and talked about two projects including the Northern Fells Development Group and Appleby's Dementia Dancing in Centre 67. EHA has been directly involved with the Winter Warmth Fund at the Big Sleep event which last year raised £130,000 – that provided grants for 1,200 older people in the county.

Summing up Andy said “The average person buying a home needs an income of £37,000 to secure a mortgage, in our region, the median income is £25,332. Even raising a deposit is difficult. These statistics alone show the importance of housing associations and the role they play. We can all do more by working together to give people the futures they deserve.”

The meeting concluded with poet Phil Houghton reciting a poem specially commissioned for the anniversary – it was entitled ‘Abode’.

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Main Picture: Past and present Board Members/Chairs and EHA Executive Team with speaker Andy Beeforth and poet Phil Houghton

Joan Johnstone (past Chair) and Henry Barker (current Chair) cut the 20th anniversary cake watched by two past Chairs Ken McMean and Ron Richardson and CEO John Clasper.

