

# **GWYNEDD LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY 2007**

## **Report on the Facilitated Evidence Gathering Sessions**



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**HUGHES-ISHERWOOD REGENERATION CONSULTANTS**



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## 1. Introduction :

### The Commission – its Scope, Purpose and Nature

1.1 A spate of recent advice issued by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) obliges Gwynedd to review its Local Housing Strategy (LHS) and to produce a new Local Housing Strategy during 2007, for the period 2007-2012. The new LHS is also required to consider a ten year period beyond that, up to 2022.

1.2 The latest WAG research – which looks closely at affordability issues – is pertinent.

1.3 A range of evidence gathering methods are encouraged in recent guidance and in that spirit, Gwynedd County Council (GCC) commissioned Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants (HIRC) to assist them in establishing a series Facilitated Evidence Gathering Sessions to inform the GCC LHS 2007.

1.4 Gwynedd CC's timetable required that the commission commence in early January and that a report be ready towards the end of February, 2007, in order to fit in with the broader timetable for presenting a Draft LHS to WAG later in 2007. This created a demanding timetable for the commission.

1.5 Gwynedd CC had its own lists of local organisations which were always ready to assist the Council in addressing its strategic housing role, especially -

- > the local housing associations (registered social landlords - RSLs)
- > specialist charities supporting vulnerable people, and
- > a range of specialist officers within Gwynedd County Council.

1.6 In keeping with the spirit of the advice set out by WAG, GCC officers were keen that the sessions be “as open as possible” and that they should draw out of other organisations and experts “what their issues are” and “what more Gwynedd needs to do”. HIRC therefore suggested a wide ranging list of additional invitees for the evidence gathering sessions, including representatives of -

- > organisations expert in eco-efficiency and modern housing technology
- > university and other social research institutions (in Wales and the UK)
- > national (UK wide) organisations demonstrating best practice
- > private sector volume house-builders in Wales (and N.W. England)
- > private sector specialist housing providers
- > major local employers and their representative bodies
- > providers of support infrastructure for local land-use development
- > local small and medium-sized builders and developers
- > local design companies specialising in heritage and eco-best practice
- > local community initiatives
- > providers of housing, care and other services to the elderly
- > providers of housing and other services to other vulnerable groups
- > organisations concerned with Welsh cultural matters
- > experts on black and ethnic minority (BEM) issues
- > local architects and chartered surveyors
- > neighbouring local authorities, and

> major governmental and non-departmental public bodies.

1.7 It was anticipated that there would be four sessions – one each on the four essential themes identified in the Gwynedd’s Community Strategy -

- > supply / sufficiency
- > affordability
- > quality,

and

- > suitability.

1.8 HIRC were commissioned to produce material to support the evidence gathering sessions, which included production of -

- > a ‘General Background Note’ to GCC LHS 2007 (see [Annex A](#))
- > four ‘Issues Notes’ on themes selected by GCC - quality, suitability, supply/sufficiency and affordability (see [Annex B](#))
- > a ‘Letter of Invitation’ explaining the rationale (see [Annex C](#))
- > an ‘Evidence Gathering Form’ (see [Annex D](#)), and
- > a note on the format for the ‘Evidence Gathering Sessions’ (EGS)(see [Annex E](#)).

1.9 The timetable was set by Gwynedd’s need to make progress on the LHS 2007 and to send a draft LHS 2007 – following public consultation – to WAG by June 2007.

1.10 The timetable set by Gwynedd CC allowed a reasonable period of notice for the sessions proposed. But, in the event, little interest was expressed in attending the planned EGSs on ‘Supply/Sufficiency’ and ‘Affordability’ issues, two of Gwynedd’s main themes.

1.11 Gwynedd CC’s officers and Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants (HIRC) then reviewed the position and it was decided to adjust the earlier GCC plan and to hold sessions as follows -

- > one EGS mainly on ‘quality’ issues
- > one EGS mainly on ‘suitability’ issues, and
- > one special session with the Gwynedd Housing Partnership (c.24 senior representatives from a wide range of organisations concerned with housing and social matters in Gwynedd).

1.12 The attendees / contributors at these three sessions (listed in [Annex F](#)) proved, in practice, to be individuals and organisations with a good record of supporting the County Council in its current housing and social policy work, and the Council’s specialist officers were keen to contribute their knowledge, also. The Housing Associations, in particular, were very supportive of the process.

1.13 Notwithstanding that, we were rather disappointed by the low response from the much wider set of organisations which we had advised needed to be involved in order to develop a more dynamic strategic approach to housing matters in Gwynedd. We would urge a determined and continued effort to try and involve the wider list of organisations approached (see [Annex G](#)) in order to

inform the County's strategic housing role in the future and to strengthen its capacity to deliver better housing in Gwynedd.

1.14 Interest at all three sessions focussed mainly on quality and suitability issues. The main points of evidence are set out in a structured framework in [Section 3](#) of this Report.

1.15 For those who want to study the evidence in more detail it is appended in [Annex H](#) (for the first two sessions), and in [Annex I](#) (in respect of the meeting with the new Gwynedd Housing Partnership). The scale of challenge in respect of affordability in some rural communities is evidenced with reference to recent figures on the Abersoch area (in [Annex J](#)).

1.16 At a late stage in the contract, HIRC were asked to provide a short extra piece of text in the Final Report on the interface between housing issues planning and regeneration issues in Gwynedd. The tight time constraints – with only a few days allocated to undertake that extra task – did not allow for a full 'evidence gathering' investigation and analysis. It would have been helpful to have been able to speak at length to all the key figures in the regeneration and land use planning areas in Gwynedd, and perhaps in neighbouring areas. Therefore, that part of the report is informed principally by HIRC's own research and knowledge of the Gwynedd area and experience in these subjects. It should, therefore, be regarded as a preliminary set of views and ideas to be explored and tested further by Gwynedd CC while the Draft LHS 2007 goes through its public consultation exercise. (For more detail see [Annexes K, L and O](#).)

1.17 HIRC were also encouraged to offer their own ideas and examples of relevant best practice on key issues revealed during the course of the commission. (See [Annexes M, N, O and P](#).)

1.18 The bibliography used is set out in [Annex Q](#).

1.19 Finally, information on the HIRC personnel working on this study is set out in [Annex R](#).

1.20 At the time of writing this report, Gwynedd CC was also planning a de-briefing session on this Report for the elected members of the Council – in April, 2007.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

E1. The commission given to HIRC was to facilitate and to report back on four sessions involving key stakeholders in the development of Gwynedd's Local Housing Strategy. The sessions were to be based on four themes identified through the development of the Community Strategy, namely the supply, affordability, quality and suitability of housing in Gwynedd.

E2. As the exercise unfolded it became clear that there was insufficient explicit interest (or expertise) in the first two aspects; so only two sessions were held on the quality and suitability of housing in the district. However, in the event, these consultations also covered supply and affordability issues, at least in a qualitative and anecdotal manner. And to complement the contributions from the quality and suitability sessions, attended largely by members of GCC and tenants' associations, a further meeting was held with senior members of the Gwynedd Housing Partnership, including councillors and representatives of housing associations, which contributed broader aspects of Gwynedd's overall strategic approach on other issues such as the planning, regeneration and community strategies. It is as important to emphasise what this report could not attempt, namely costed alternative ways of tackling Gwynedd's policy needs: much as this would have been of considerable interest (and of increasing interest as our knowledge of the area deepened), neither time nor resources permitted it.

E3. The findings from the sessions held have been arranged in the main body of the report in SWOT format (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats), and in 'bullet point' form. Many points were made, and inevitably an executive summary can not do justice to them all. We would identify the main features of the policy making process in Gwynedd in so far as it relates to the development of the Local Housing Strategy, under each of these headings, as:

### Strengths

- We see the very process in which we were engaged as one of the strengths of Gwynedd's approach, putting it alongside other authorities distinguished by (and commended for) putting their residents and tenants at the heart of policy development. There is both a broad understanding of the strategic issues facing the district, not least from future climate change effects and its responsibility for promoting the Welsh Language and culture through all aspects of its policies, and an equally focussed understanding (particularly on the part of its tenants' representatives) on detailed management and maintenance issues.
- The coverage of some special interests (such as those of the BME communities and others with particular needs – young people benefiting from the Family Mediation Service and the soon to be introduced Gwynedd Charter on Children and Young People's Rights, female victims of domestic violence, gypsies, ex-offenders, alcoholics, etc) appears to be well understood.
- Information is being disseminated on the Council's website (such as access to mandatory disabled facilities grants to carry out adaptations to

dwellings, the fitness standard, and standards for HMOs, and the availability of discretionary Major and Minor Works Assistance offered to repair homes).

### Weaknesses

- In terms of its policy making, we gained the impression that more could be done to integrate the key aspects of planning, regeneration, social services and housing repair and renewal within the Council. There appeared to be little evidence, as yet, of a holistic approach, and scepticism about the scope to attract private investment from the rest of the UK into a rural county, without so far having experimented substantially with the development of relationships as a precursor to private involvement in specific schemes.
- Nor is there enough pride in Gwynedd's own achievements to date, such as good examples of area renewal involving conservation area work on houses in the Caernarfon Conservation Area which could be given greater prominence; this too is a precondition for engaging the interest of the private sector.
- The needs of mainstream communities, such as the frail elderly (who are looking for self-contained accommodation and support services rather than residential homes and for whom as many as 5 'extra-care / frail elderly' homes might be required in Gwynedd) and young people (16-18 year olds), needing to find their own accommodation, along with family accommodation generally in south Gwynedd, and housing and other resources to care for the disabled (an increasing number of children have disabilities), need to be addressed directly.
- Other specific needs include a child-care centre (the closure of that in Bangor was seen as a retrograde step), a day centre for the homeless, provision for the mentally ill, training for private landlords in housing management, and better contractual control of energy efficiency remedial measures.
- Stronger links should be made to other Gwynedd Council policies and provision, for example in relation to health and leisure facilities.

### Opportunities

- The potential LSVT provides the best opportunity to resolve problems with Gwynedd's own stock.
- New powers are available to local authorities through the Regulatory Reform Order, allowing them to extend their enabling role to private sector housing and to take a flexible approach to change of use from commercial to residential buildings, which along with better information on their own land holdings, should provide an opportunity for Gwynedd to become more pro-active in devising new schemes to address housing and regeneration problems.
- New equity release mechanisms may provide an opportunity to find funds for private sector housing renewal, although such are the practical issues that the Council would need to explore the possibility of providing substantial support in setting up such a scheme, possibly through an arms-length public company using private funds.

- New approaches to the delivery of housing and regeneration outputs, through joint-venture companies or companies limited by guarantee (explained further in [Annex P](#)), also provide an opportunity for attracting private sector funds.
- Greater use of Welsh architectural expertise, a relatively minor component of overall construction costs, could make a major difference to the perception of Gwynedd by the development community.
- Every opportunity could be taken to ensure the stock is 'suitable' for modern needs, which implies more renovation, more self-build schemes, and the provision of more social rented property, along with accredited builder's schemes.

### Threats

- The sheer scale of the problem in both public and private sector housing sectors in the face of GCC's very small housing budget and the limited scale of potential development sites / opportunities giving low returns, which may require a more active acquisitions policy in order to build stronger and more mutually supportive relationships with the private sector generally.
- In relation to its own stock, the threat is that the Welsh Housing Quality Standard may not be attainable by 2012, and may not be appreciated as much by tenants if the quality of the work involved in upgrading their property is not adequately controlled and complemented by work to the external environment of their homes.
- In developing policies one of the major threats – climate change and its impact on coastal and mountain communities – needs to be explicitly recognised.
- Social changes that call into question the value of large seaside properties, or flats over shops in town centres, or even terraces designed for a different industrial age, also need to be recognised in policy documents.
- Second homes (almost half of those in Abersoch, and many in other attractive villages) threaten the vitality and Welsh culture of villages and small towns.

**E4.** In addition to considering the implications of these Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats we feel, on the basis of our experience with other local authorities devising housing and regeneration strategies, and embedding them within a planning and community framework, that it would be helpful for Gwynedd officials to study best practice from other authorities, of which we give some examples in [Section 4](#) and [Annex M](#). These cover the development of strong housing and regeneration partnerships, a systematic approach to policy development and review (dealt with in detail in [Annex K](#)), consultation and involvement of residents, alternative approaches to the organisation and delivery of housing renewal, the use of new powers under the Regulatory Reform Order, equity release for repair and renewal, design-led approaches to housing provision and renewal and improving housing conditions in rural areas.

**E5.** The Final Recommendations can be briefly summarised:

- firstly, that the development of the new GCC Local Housing Strategy 2007 should continue to focus on the needs of the 'customer' through further evidence gathering sessions with residents and tenants, with greater involvement and devolution to the local level; that it should adopt a holistic and integrated approach to the development of its policies; should be evidence based and should be developed in the light of best practice elsewhere
- secondly, that in devising its strategies and its delivery mechanisms that GCC should commit itself to a design-led, local regeneration best practice approach to tackling housing issues in Gwynedd in order to develop settlements 'in the round', and in a manner which offers sustainable development for the future; should begin to develop relationships with private sector developers, and more specifically investigate urgently the scope for a 'joint venture company' arrangement with a skilled national developer; explore the possibility of using equity release mechanisms, if necessary supported by the Council; examine whether its quality control procedures to monitor contractor performance are satisfactory; and should give careful consideration to the comments and suggestions we make in the sections and annexes on planning and regeneration issues, ideas and skills
- thirdly, that in seeking community endorsement of the emerging strategy GCC should ensure that there continues to be wide-spread consultation amongst the many actual and potential stakeholder organisations within Gwynedd, to invest in working with Gwynedd County Council's officers to promote and deliver culturally appropriate, well designed and 'green' local regeneration and housing schemes across Gwynedd
- fourth, that the new Gwynedd Housing Partnership (including the SNPA) should consider this report, and GCC ensure swift progress on implementing the Recommendations, and that the whole of Gwynedd and all its housing sectors be fully addressed in the new GCC LHS 2007.

**E6.** In our view this consultation exercise has been a valuable step in the process of devising a Local Housing Strategy adequate to meet Gwynedd's needs and aspirations and as part of the process of producing a suit of strategies to take the Council forward over the next few years in relation to its planning constraints, and its regeneration needs and possibilities. There have inevitably been some gaps in the information available, and a general shortage of quantitative detail, which will hopefully be addressed by a new housing needs assessment (to which a housing market assessment would be a useful adjunct). This has limited our ability to assess the scale of the issues facing Gwynedd. Nevertheless we have been impressed by the process, and the frank yet open-minded way in which colleagues have confronted issues yet supported each other. We can only hope that this report will help guide the eventual outcome to a satisfactory conclusion.

### 3. Report on the Evidence Gathering Sessions

3.1 The major points emerging from the three sessions held during February 2007, as detailed in the annexes (especially [Annex H](#) and [I](#)) is summarised and analysed below in a SWOT analysis fashion, under these headings -

PART 1 – Overview of the State of Housing in Gwynedd

PART 2 – The Quality of Housing

PART 3 - The Suitability of Accommodation

PART 4 - Supply and Sufficiency Issues, and

PART 5 - Affordability Issues.

3.2 In each case we set out -

A. Main Points Emerging (from the 3 Sessions)

Strengths  
Weaknesses  
Opportunities  
Threats

B. Additional Information (gathered by HIRC)

- other information imparted by GCC officers, and
- other researches / findings of HIRC.

This analysis - together with an exploration of relevant Best Practice (set out in [Section 4](#)) and the Wider Planning and Regeneration in Gwynedd (covered in [Section 5](#)) - informs the pointers set out in Towards a GCC LHS 2007 (in [Section 6](#)).

### 3.3 PART 1 – OVERVIEW

#### A. Main Points Emerging (from Evidence Gathering Sessions)

##### Strengths

- an open approach to policy development through asking broad questions of what the strategic drivers in housing and other areas ought to be, and how they should relate to each other
- widespread commitment to sustainable development and dealing with ‘climate change’ risks
- willingness of all participants to contemplate new way of doing things
- good support for GCC / Gwynedd from the RSLs
- signs of work commencing in GCC on regeneration policy/strategy, and
- willingness to start planning for systematic replacement of some of the older housing.

##### Weaknesses

- scepticism about the scope to attract private investment from the rest of the UK into a rural county with Gwynedd’s economy
- little work as yet undertaken on, and hence limited experience of, integrated ‘mixed use’ schemes involving both housing and regeneration activities
- a lack of private sector developers in Gwynedd, and
- concerns on the part of tenants on the quality of work done by outside contractors (especially in relation to energy saving measures) and apparently weak control by Gwynedd Council’s contract managers.

##### Opportunities

- awareness of the new guidance on housing issues in Wales (from WAG) which encourages innovation, and provides an array of tools and powers
- GCC’s willingness to release its own land for worthy local housing projects
- progress being made towards developing a County-wide regeneration strategy, plus a Llŷn/Pwllheli Local Regeneration Plan as forerunner to 7 others – promising full coverage (through 8 Local Regeneration Plans in all) across Gwynedd in due course, and
- GCC officer interest expressed in ‘joint venture companies’.

##### Threats

- the very limited housing budget of GCC (currently c. £3M/annum), and
- the sheer scale of the problem in both public and private sector housing sectors.

#### B. Additional Information (gathered by HIRC)

We were informed by GCC officers -

- that the Council’s budget for the forthcoming financial year will be tight – as a consequence of its settlement grant position,
- that there is a computerised land holdings data-base in Gwynedd CC

- the Council housing stock has reduced substantially in recent years, and
- the current stock of Council housing (as at end January 2007) was 6266, and at the end of December 2006 there were another 117 Right To Buy (RTB) applications being dealt with.

We discovered also –

- a serious-mindedness of approach to Gwynedd's housing challenges among all the Council members and officers we encountered, which bodes well
- Gwynedd has some claims to good practice on housing issues – which need to be showcased and publicised beyond Wales in order to build the Council's external reputation with potential investors (including private developers and WAG) – and auditors
- but limited experience in Gwynedd of working with and getting the best out of deals with the major developers
- lack of a strong supportive wider network of key private sector players (national and specialist develop-builders, and local builders) - potentially a major brake on progress
- GCC officers' tendency to put this down too readily to the limited scale of potential development sites and opportunities, and low return, and
- a lack of clarity about the way in which housing issues will feature in the regeneration strategy-making, and the means of ensuring good linkage with planning policy-making.

And we heard enough to suspect that -

- GCC's housing renewal and community regeneration work would probably benefit from a quick injection of more ideas, expertise/'know-how', determination and pace, and really smart use of the Council's own resources – especially its own land, but also its financial muscle and powers, and that
- GCC's overall agenda for housing and regeneration would benefit from building stronger and more mutually supportive relationships with the private sector generally.

### 3.4 PART 2 – QUALITY

#### A. Main Points Emerging (from Evidence Gathering Sessions)

##### Strengths

- serious consideration being given to LSVT – with the tenants to be formally consulted shortly
- widespread recognition that the Council will not be able to address much via traditional repairs grants in the next few years (given the budgets emerging for that) – triggering (i) severe prioritisation, and (ii) a more indirect facilitative approach, plus (iii) fuller use of the Council's regulatory powers
- willingness of Gwynedd CC to consider new approaches
- some experience in Gwynedd of housing 'area renewal' approaches, and
- experience in Gwynedd of good work on houses in 'Conservation Areas'.

##### Weaknesses

- as the local development plan describes the housing situation in Gwynedd – *“The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 shows that 35 of Gwynedd's 69 wards were amongst the worst 20% in Wales as regards housing deprivation. The influence of the industrial revolution is a root cause of this, having inherited housing unsuitable for today's needs. Of Gwynedd's housing stock, 47% were built before 1919, the third highest figure for Welsh unitary authorities. Only 22.7% of the housing stock was built after 1964, the lowest proportion among Welsh unitary authorities”*
- the demand/supply balance in Gwynedd mean that only c.200 new houses a year of all types are being built – so the projected life of current housing will in principle have to be unrealistically long
- no certainty that even an LSVT will fully meet WHQS by 2012 – partly because of timing issues and partly because of the expense and the physical constraints on modernising the interiors and layouts of older Council houses (eg those built hard up against steep hillsides)
- too much emphasis on continual repair to poor and outmoded houses and not enough on replacement ('gradual renewal') in Gwynedd overall
- not enough consideration given to providing leisure facilities and other health and social services near housing - for a good quality of life
- many older houses on steep terrain with narrow access, etc
- terraced ex-quarry cottages with inadequate kitchen spaces: so, lots of poor rear extensions have been built
- redundant seaside boarding houses - thought to be difficult to adapt, and
- the tenants' reps' view that Council house repairs were often unsatisfactory and not fully quality-checked by GCC.

##### Opportunities

- equity release schemes to repair and improve private sector homes are a potentially important way forward in Gwynedd to encourage private owners to look after their own dwellings, although this may require GCC

to promote the idea, and to engage and possibly subsidise private sector companies to enter this underdeveloped 'market'

- scope and need to undertake demonstration projects on various aspects – to show people how quality can be improved – and to improve the performance of local developers and renovators
- opportunities through the above to demonstrate how to improve the tiny kitchens found in much of the public and private stock in Gwynedd
- exploring new procurement models, and
- providing advice to the general public on timely and cost-effective repairs, and recognition and incentives/rewards for that.

#### Threats

- climate change – higher winds / more storms - damaging to ageing properties (and increased flood risk to property on low lying land)
- the scale and concentration of second home ownership
- fears of a potential down-market spiral in the quality of seaside flats and flats over shops, unless satisfactory new uses are found for them
- hidden chronic under-investment by private sector owners and landlords – leading to unfitness and unsatisfactory living conditions for many people: which may require GCC to adopt a more interventionist and enforcing style – with more extensive use of environmental health officers and agencies, and
- inappropriateness / inflexibility of some of the traditional housing stock.

### **B. Additional Information (gathered by HIRC)**

We were told by GCC officers that –

- the Council encourages tenant and community groups and 'Estate Warden Schemes'
- there is a Tenants Advisory Committee – which is now clear that the tenants are principally concerned to see housing improvements and are not too concerned as to who may be the landlord, and
- community development work is being undertaken with the intention of engaging younger people in helping to improve the housing estates.

It was also clear to us that -

- the Council's officers were keen to hear tenant representatives' views
- the tenant representatives' unhappiness about the quality and timeliness of workmanship displayed in Council housing repairs was also reflected in a recent Re-Inspection of the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Services,
- but that a new Tenant Compact had recently been established
- the Council has a policy on anti-social behaviour – and has recently experimented successfully with providing football training on a large estate in Caernarfon to interest young people, and
- the complexities of housing benefit mean that equity release schemes will probably be an unwise choice for many older people on low incomes in Gwynedd.

[cf. Recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation research]

### 3.5 PART 3 - SUITABILITY

#### A. Main Points Emerging (from Evidence Gathering Sessions)

##### Strengths

- clarity about what older people want – as much independence as possible, for as long as possible, and a bungalow, if possible (and not much demand for ‘gated estates’)
- good provision for female victims of domestic violence
- a general perception that the BEM community, which is relatively small, is generally well integrated, well employed and well housed
- clarity about the needs of the growing number of gypsy/travellers, and the need for at least one extra large sites and several smaller ones
- a favourable view of the work being done by official agencies re ex-offenders, ex-servicemen, and also for those with learning difficulties
- clarity about the need for both a ‘self-referral night hostel’ for the very few with nowhere to stay, and
- clarity also on the need for a ‘wet hostel’ to deal with alcoholics.

##### Weaknesses

- there is perceived to be an acute need for better housing provision for homeless young people (16-18 year olds), in Bangor/Caernarfon area and the more rural areas, and specific provision (eg a foyer to assist young people to get into work)
- move-on accommodation is also needed for that group – otherwise others cannot be sheltered
- lack of accommodation for single men (in the Caernarfon and Bangor areas)
- lack of family accommodation generally in south Gwynedd
- lack of housing and other resources to care for the disabled
- lack of a day centre for the homeless in the County
- closure of the Bangor child-care centre was seen as a backward step
- lack of specialist ‘frail elderly’ accommodation for those who did need that level of support
- lack of provision for the mentally ill
- lack of in-depth hard information about the suitability of housing in relation to the needs of the BEM community, specifically
- lack of information about recent in-migration from the EU and elsewhere
- internally and externally and in terms of access to leisure facilities - many properties were not suited to modern lifestyles
- unreasonably cold living conditions (due to poor insulation and high heating costs) was an issue for many residents – whatever their personal needs and requirements, and
- private landlords, not well trained in housing management skills.

##### Opportunities

- money is available to make progress on some of these issues
- very few ‘rough sleepers’

- more flexibility in planning decisions for specialist housing types could speed improvements in people's lives
- better use could be made of empty properties to meet some social needs
- incentives were seen as the way forward to provide new and improve old housing to make it more suitable for some needs and lifestyles, and to benefit people's health
- more renovation, more self-build schemes, and the provision of more social rented property would help to ensure the stock is 'suitable' for modern needs, and
- 'accredited builder' schemes would also help.

#### Threats

- the number of children with disabilities is increasing
- family break-up leads to two households both of which have to accommodate children on visits – an additional housing pressure, and
- old-style sheltered accommodation does not meet the current generation's expectations - they want private facilities, their own front door and two bedrooms (one for visitors).

### **B. Additional Information (gathered by HIRC)**

We were informed by GCC officers that –

- an upper estimate for rough sleepers across Gwynedd might be c. 30
- a sub-regional needs and investment strategy to deal with the needs of gypsies is planned and should establish the transit camp needs more clearly
- that GCC already has a 'Family Mediation Service' to help enable young people to stay in the parental family home
- that the Council has tried a 'supported lodging scheme', but that it was not very successful, and
- as many as 5 'extra-care / frail elderly' homes might be required in Gwynedd – and that the Social Housing Grant funding might not be sufficient to deliver that, thus necessitating the attraction of private investment.

In addition -

- the Council had recently adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – and proposes to produce a Gwynedd Charter on Children and Young People's Rights
- access to mandatory disabled facilities grants to carry out adaptations to dwellings (to benefit disabled people) are clearly set out on the GCC website ; ditto, the fitness standard, and standards for HMOs, and the availability of discretionary Major and Minor Works Assistance to repair homes, and
- the Council last updated its policy for Private Sector Housing Services in November 2005.

### 3.6 PART 4 - SUPPLY / SUFFICIENCY

#### A. Main Points Emerging (from Evidence Gathering Sessions)

##### Strengths

- there is clearly much good quality, attractive, traditional and modern, well maintained housing stock (new and older) in the private market across Gwynedd (and little disrepair visible externally)

##### Weaknesses

- various point made by those attending the three sessions relate to a perceived serious shortage of supply of social rented housing relative to the real need for that type of housing in Gwynedd, at present
- the extent of hidden homelessness – especially in rural areas – and the difficulty of acquiring hard data on it
- there are no current plans for a major new Housing Needs Assessment (but see below)

##### Opportunities

- lobbying the WAG on ceasing the right-to-buy - both Council and RSL housing - to encourage more 'direct' provision of new social rented stock

##### Threats

- the National Park's planning policy to block private sector market housing was cited by a few people as an a obstacle to delivering affordable homes in mixed tenure developments in the Park.

#### B. Additional Information (gathered by HIRC)

We were informed by GCC officers that –

- there is a UDP for Gwynedd (outwith the National Park) largely in place
- within the National Park there is a commitment to producing a new style Local Development Plan as required by WAG
- a Local Housing Market Assessment exercise is underway on a shared basis with other LAs in the North West Wales Spatial Planning Area
- Land Availability Studies have been conducted in Gwynedd
- Gwynedd CC's own land ownership is listed in a computerised data-base
- an LSVT is mooted – which could encourage new investment more generally in housing in Gwynedd – which should also be both a fillip and a challenge to local builders
- GCC puts c. £1M /annum into the Homebuy scheme – and had a target of 30 units last year, and exceeded that, reaching 32 units: but only 2 new houses had been bought through the Homebuy scheme
- GCC has c.3000 names on its Housing Register, but is not sure that all are greatly in need of a house or a house transfer
- however, it is clear that young singles are poorly provided for because of a general lack of accommodation to offer them

- the WAG Social Housing Grant (for affordable housing schemes) is perceived to lack flexibility and to be limited by its tight cost guidance figures
- GCC is currently putting more emphasis on bringing empty properties back into use: c.1300 are now empty for longer than 6 months for no apparent reason, and only a tiny number are public sector properties, and there are no 'difficult to let' properties in the public stock - and all this points to more proactive work by GCC's Empty Dwelling Management Orders, and targeted grant-aid
- the Council-housing stock has dwindled appreciably under the right to buy (with the latest Council stock figures down to 6266 and falling at the end of January 07) but only 32 Council houses had been sold recently – probably because of the WAG's new and low £16K cap on discounts, and the higher price estimates (now often c.£100K), and that
- GCC is already using 'private sector leasing' to staunch the shortage of accommodation for people with a variety of special needs.

We found the UDP and its supporting pre and post inquiry documentation to be a useful source of information about general housing demand and supply in Gwynedd at the point where the UDP was researched and written, a few years ago, and it is an indicator of Gwynedd's likely approach over the next few years to supply / sufficiency issues. The key points are set out in [Annex O](#).

#### WITH RESPECT TO FUTURE SUPPLY:

(1) In Gwynedd (outwith the National Park), the UDP Inquiry Inspector's Notes on 'Supply' issues suggests that in total the overall supply of land for the UDP area for the plan period of 15 years is actually 4179 units made up of (i) "*commitments*" = 991 units (ii) "*assumptions re – small and windfall sites*" = 1380 units, and (iii) "*allocations*" = 1808 units.

(2) In the National Park area - the NPA currently has more than a five year supply of land available for future housing needs.

### 3.7 PART 5 - AFFORDABILITY

#### A. Main Points Emerging (from Evidence Gathering Sessions)

##### Strengths

- a GCC Affordable Housing Officer and an RHE are in place and working well, and
- c.200 affordable homes delivered or in the delivery pipeline now – a product of 3 years work in Gwynedd.

##### Weaknesses

- hidden rural homelessness - difficult to pin-point, measure, and solve.

##### Opportunities

- WAG's current consideration of need for a National Network of Rural Housing Enablers for Wales, and all that it may entail
- LSVT – if approved – should improve 'affordable' ex-Council homes, and
- RSLs keen to help, by developing small schemes across Gwynedd.

##### Threats

- demand for affordable housing far outstripping supply.

#### B. Additional information (gathered by HIRC)

We were told by GCC officers –

- that there may be scope for an 'assisted purchase' scheme, and
- but that generally budget constraints meant that the Council faced having to concentrate mostly on (i) the mandatory functions and (ii) the renewal areas, and (iii) allowing bespoke self-build infill schemes and extensions, plus (iv) progress on identifying sites for new affordable housing units for development in partnership with the RSLs.

In addition -

- some GCC land is being disposed of (at less than the market price) to assist affordable housing schemes
- 'affordable housing' is one of the 'Theme Priorities' established in the Consultative Draft Regeneration Strategy (2006) for Gwynedd
- there is an 'Affordable Housing Partnership' in Gwynedd
- the Council recognises that affordability is not simply a matter of building more houses for sale, and that equity sharing and renting options have a part to play in meeting the need for affordable homes,
- there is now the option of allocating sites for 100% affordable housing (under WAG's TAN2: Planning and Affordable Housing' of June 2006), and
- some communities pose a very considerable challenge – given the high price of houses and the strong competition for houses from incomers, retirees and second homers (see [Annex J](#) - which outlines the situation in Abersoch, in the Dwyfor area of Gwynedd).

## 4. Best Practice – Housing and Area Renewal

4.1 Given that there are so many local authorities and public bodies involved in dealing with housing, cultural, social and economic matters in the UK and Wales, it is inevitable that many different approaches are possible.

4.2 Gwynedd CC intends to produce a new LHS which will be effective in housing terms, break new ground in addressing its major housing challenges, and link into the other major strategic documents, in particular that dealing with its community strategy.

4.3 Gwynedd County Council invited HIRC's Directors to comment - on the basis of our own knowledge of the subjects, the area and our relevant experience - on the scope for developing best practice in Gwynedd.

4.4 In our view, there are several aspects to exploring best practice -

- making the most of good examples from within Gwynedd, which needs to be continually reviewed and disseminated
- identifying potential emerging areas of best practice based on an area's unique character, and
- being aware of areas where 'more needs to be done' and 'all workable ideas with a good track record' should be seriously considered by identifying existing best practice from external sources, which implies a high degree of awareness of emerging trends, and links to other authorities.

4.5 In the first category, we consider that Gwynedd could do more to catalogue and present stories on past and current success on housing-related matters in Gwynedd (with the assistance of staff who are expert in public relations).

**G1 - Gwynedd's track-record of combined effort (across all sectors) in conserving, extending and continually adapting older buildings to meet modern residential needs, especially in the rural areas and statutory 'conservation areas'.**

### SUPPORTING DETAIL:

- within the Caernarfon Conservation Area – grant-aided repairs to many houses within the Conservation Area under a Townscheme agreed with Cadw (now a part of WAG, and responsible for Welsh Historic Monuments)
- the work of the Caernarfon Town Company - which buys, renovates and lets shops and related property in the old town and develops new facilities in adjacent areas (eg Y Galeri – the theatre/conference facility/café/bar/cinema/small business units complex) – a very good example of local regeneration pursued patiently over many years in an town with an economy which is slowly becoming stronger
- progress made in gradual in-filling (with a variety of houses to suite local needs and taste) the scattered older rural settlements as they adapt to meet new roles as commuter villages – a good indicator and guide as to

how to revamp such settlements organically by allowing continual infilling, substantial adaptations and extensions

- work done over several years to lower of the overall height and changing the internal layouts of blocks of flats in Maesgeirchan (Bangor) to form more popular types of unit, and
- the elegant block repair/enveloping scheme on a long terrace fronting on to the A5 in Bethesda; and
- much evidence across Gwynedd of older cottages, ruins, farm buildings, etc. having been substantially modernised, improved and extended, with evidence of good design throughout, usually by private owners.

**G2 - Gwynedd's experience of delivering a wide range of services to a local population which has a high proportion of elderly people, with respect for individual dignity.**

SUPPORTING DETAIL:

- the availability of a very good range of 'mobile services' (including grocerers, fish-mongers, chiropodists, hairdressers, etc.) in rural areas of Gwynedd, which visit the remoter rural villages across Gwynedd
- rural village doctors' surgeries with nursing services and pharmacies attached
- a good range of residential homes, care and support facilities
- official and voluntary schemes to drive people to facilities, and
- Antur Waunfawr's work for older people with learning disabilities (providing local employment and independent homes close to their relatives), and
- c.50 important local community initiatives listed in the Gwynedd Community Strategy (2004).

**G3 - Gwynedd's progress over decades in integrating new development within highly sensitive landscapes (the National Park, ASONB, Historic Landscapes), etc.**

SUPPORTING DETAIL:

- a considerable number of individual houses allowed as exceptions to planning policy on houses in the countryside, which in the main have been well integrated into the landscape, within the Snowdonia National Park and Llŷn AONB,
- the (still relevant) early Gwynedd CC Design Guidance on how to design new homes to fit visually into the countryside of Gwynedd,
- the largely unsung attractive design of 20<sup>th</sup> century holiday villages in Gwynedd (Porthmadog Marina, Felinheli Marina, Portmeirion), and
- the enduring design quality of older 19<sup>th</sup> century 'model villages' (including the settlements of Tremadog and Llandegai, etc) and some of the industrial terraces.

4.6 In the second category, we think there is scope for Gwynedd to develop a reputation as a respected source of emerging good practice on the following:

**G4 - Gwynedd's need to manage housing interventions and related policies in order to protect and promote the Welsh language and culture.**

POTENTIAL:

- as the stronghold of the Welsh language in Wales, Gwynedd simply must meet this challenge
- its progress on ensuring affordable housing in Dwyfor is a good example of relevant intervention, and
- over and above what is already being done, Gwynedd might also –
  - seek to extend coverage of cultural impacts in Environmental Impact Assessments to cover linguistic issues (thus ensuring, *de facto*, 'Linguistic Impact Assessment')
  - negotiating tough planning gain agreements to lever in more resource for Welsh language promotion / teaching / fun events, etc. where the development is to be allowed
  - lobby WAG for changes in planning policy and law to enable this approach (if challenged) to work, and
  - focus on researching and doing what it lawfully can to ensure that a proportionate % of Welsh-speakers inhabits each type and value of housing across Gwynedd, and
  - experiment with other interventions to bring more second homes, empty homes and other property into use as permanent housing stock for local people.

**G5 - Gwynedd's scope as a demonstration area - celebrating the scope for ensuring full integration of BEM communities in housing, housing-related and other services.**

POTENTIAL:

- not many areas in the UK have a small BEM population which seems to be well-integrated and very well-employed in the main, as appears to be the case in Gwynedd
- but Gwynedd needs to test this perception and investigate the housing and wider experience of BEM communities in Gwynedd to see whether they are as well integrated as assumed, or whether there are issues to be addressed, and take effective measures to deal with any housing and other issues which may arise, and
- focus on measuring and ensuring that a representative proportion of BEM people inhabits each category of housing in Gwynedd.

**G6 - Gwynedd's scope to virtually eradicate 'rough sleeping'.**

POTENTIAL:

- given the small number of rough sleepers (thought to be between 10 and 30 max), Gwynedd could set itself a more ambitious target (eg no rough sleeping for more than 24 hours once it is discovered) – as an expression of its will to meet the WAG's desire to eradicate rough sleeping in Wales.

4.7 In the third category, we think Gwynedd would gain from studying in greater detail the following topics, not so much as a reflection of a lack in anything in the Council's or the wider community's approach, but to ensure that Gwynedd stays within the mainstream of local authorities tackling housing and other related issues in an integrated way.

- BP1 Development of Active Housing and Regeneration Partnerships
- BP2 A Systematic Approach to Policy Development
- BP3 Consultation and Involvement of Residents
- BP4 Organisation and Delivery of Housing Renewal
- BP5 The Use of New Powers under the Regulatory Reform Order
- BP6 Releasing Equity for Repair and Renewal
- BP7 Design-led Approaches to Housing Renewal and Repair
- BP8 Improving Housing Conditions in Rural Areas.

Expansion of these Best Practice headings is to be found in [Annex M](#).

## 5. Wider Planning and Regeneration in Gwynedd

### 5.1 CONTEXT

5.1.1 HIRC were asked during the course of the contract to consider how the GCC LHS 2007 needed to evolve to be responsive to wider planning and regeneration issues and opportunities.

5.1.2 What follows in this section is largely evidence gathered and digested by HIRC independently, through desk-study (plus our knowledge of the subjects and the area).

5.1.3 The time constraints set by the Client did not allow for extensive research and discussions with the planners, so these comments should be seen as a guide and an indicator rather than a definitive analysis.

5.1.4 It was no part of our brief to review the quality of the planning services as such across Gwynedd, but we have noted the Wales Audit Office observations on the planning services in Gwynedd (both in GCC and SNPA) in [Annex O](#), for completeness, as it is an important piece of evidence.

### 5.2 PLANNING IN GWYNEDD AS A WHOLE

5.2.1 We were informed by participants at the Evidence Gathering Sessions that planning policy sometimes thwarted proposed social housing schemes: and two examples given were -

- a case where the Council refused an RSL's proposal to develop 8-10 units in one settlement (Glasinfryn) because policy dictated that no further housing development should be allowed in that village, and
- planning policies which, it was claimed, did not allow mixed-tenure schemes in the Snowdonia National Park, thus making it difficult to deliver affordable housing there.

5.2.2 We were told by GCC officers -

- that one CPO type development was being progressed (with a site being assembled on land owned in part by the GCC Housing Dept., in Bangor)
- that two sites (Council-owned bits of land) were being opened up for development (at Garndolbenmaen and Dyffryn Ardudwy), and
- some 'self-build' plots (5-8) were being provided at Maesypany.

5.2.3 Our desk study exploration of the current land use planning situation in Gwynedd and the Snowdonia National Park is summarised in [Annex O](#).

#### 5.2.4 THE RELEVANT PLANS

(i) With respect to the Gwynedd Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which applies to those parts of Gwynedd outwith the National Park, which we explore in more detail in [Annex O](#), we think that –

- the challenge of drafting a plan which encourages new and better housing development and housing re-development – and which meets the need for various forms of general, affordable and specialist housing to be delivered expeditiously - without opening the door to unacceptable levels of in-migration (which would thwart GCC's major policy aims, especially its responsibilities in respect of defending and promoting the Welsh languages and culture) is a very testing one, given the external pressures
- despite its rather defensive tone and numerous expressions of concern about current and potential impacts on Gwynedd's cultural and environmental character, the UDP need not, in our view, be an impediment to delivery of a reasonable supply of new housing in Gwynedd to meet the general needs and specific interests of the local communities, providing that a bit of flexibility is allowed in its interpretation as research emerges on current housing pressures
- although we do think it could afford to be bit bolder in seeking to re-shape the existing housing offer and allowing larger extensions and replacement buildings to meet contemporary expectations, emerging eco-efficiency standards and emerging needs for better housing in all tenures/categories (and perhaps would do so in response to a strong regeneration strategy and supporting teamwork in Gwynedd)
- despite the critical need for more affordable housing in Gwynedd (outwith the Park), the hope of delivering affordable housing almost exclusively over wide areas of Gwynedd which the UDP implies, was (rightly) questioned at the Inquiry
- although there is a problem of low incomes in Gwynedd, it is clear that many locals are also quite wealthy, and we think there is probably scope for selectively encouraging a bit more choice at the upper end of the open market in Gwynedd (ie allowing a few more large houses and top quality flats to be built) to encourage wealthier locals to move up rather than out of the local housing market, without creating any serious environmental or cultural impacts
- in that context, the UDP misses a key opportunity - to encourage (selectively only) conversion of attractive large seafront buildings in the 'main holiday centres' into top-quality permanent residences with an element of affordable housing as part of the scheme (despite the risk that a few may become second-homes), and
- we hope that the Inspector's Report (due shortly) will guide GCC's UDP gently towards a more balanced approach.

(ii) With respect to the Snowdonia National Park Authority's planning policies, expressed in the Eryri Local Plan (ELP)(of 1999), which we explore in more detail in [Annex O](#), we think that -

- the housing polices are unsurprising for their time, and a reasonable 'rough-guide' as to what its needed now
- not a significant impediment to current progress on improving housing in the Park at the moment, given that the out-of-dateness of the Plan inevitably means that larger development proposals will have to be determined more on their merits, and against national and regional policy guidance, in practice,

- there is scope for the SNPA to derive much sustenance and guidance on best practice from other NPAs in the UK on local housing policies and initiatives – in order to help develop its emerging new Local Development Plan into something which will be both up-to-date and far more dynamic in dealing with local community needs (including housing issues).

(iii) With respect to both, somewhat surprisingly, neither GCC's UDP nor SNPA's ELP currently –

- assert much by way of ambition to reduce the number or proportion of second homes in areas where there is already too strong a concentration of second homes, using current law and practice, other than by blocking the development of open market housing and seeking to only allow new development which consists of affordable housing in such areas, and
- express an intention to look favourably, exceptionally, on small scale local redevelopment / regeneration schemes in such areas which might meet a wide array of socio-economic and cultural objectives and also serve to drive up overall housing quality in such localities, whilst also removing / redeveloping some second homes.

## 5.2.5 EMERGING HOUSING RELATED ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In addition, we would suggest that the next round of land use plans for the County of Gwynedd (including the NPA area) should factor in (in relation to housing issues):

- (i) more confident statements and policies on the type of internal re-shaping of settlements and their settings (both major and minor) which Gwynedd needs and would positively welcome (bearing in mind that the LPAs can encourage but do not have to approve complex or unusual developments unless fully satisfied with them, and will probably be involved in creating most partnerships which develop them)
- (ii) deeper consideration of the potential impact of climate change on the many flood risk areas in Gwynedd, the scope or not for flood protection measures, and the extent to which settlement might have to be substantially modified to cope (and the housing consequences in respect of existing houses, allocated sites and the sites yet to be identified for housing use)
- (iii) deeper consideration of the alternative, higher ground options for the future - including more substantial infilling of former quarry villages now acting as commuter villages supporting the larger towns in Gwynedd, (especially Bangor and Caernarfon), which would necessarily embrace addressing any deficiencies in local community facilities in such villages, in order to produce more sustainable settlements and to manage the transport and emissions implications

- (iv) upward drive in design and eco-efficiency standards in all future housing in Gwynedd regardless of type or location
- (v) 'elbow room' in policy terms to encourage and enable Gwynedd as the Local/Strategic Housing Authority to ensure specialist housing schemes for a variety of vulnerable groups, on their merits, wherever it would usefully serve the community, providing certain basic tests of sustainability, design quality, and impact on amenity, are met
- (vi) scope (within the context of the North West Wales Spatial Plan Area) for regeneration schemes which also deliver better housing in a variety of tenures and categories for Gwynedd
- (vii) recognition that the Menai Bridge (Anglesey) and Bangor (Gwynedd) continues to be essentially one large settlement spanning the Menai Straits – with scope for exciting regeneration schemes – but necessitating close understanding and working with Anglesey's planners
- (viii) policies which encourage the revamping and modernisation of traditional dwellings in an appropriate manner - and which allow (where possible) better internal space standards, more generous kitchens, better gardens, parking, access, and landscaping, etc.
- (ix) in very traditional, and less flexible older housing areas, using 'conservation area' status boldly as a significant tool and first step in underpinning a strong local regeneration strategy and drawing in more resource from WAG and its specialist agencies as well as the private sector (replicating the experience in Caernarfon, elsewhere: possibly, we merely suggest, why not in Blaenau Ffestiniog next?)
- (x) encouraging the selective small-scale redevelopment of older areas which do not merit modernisation and/or conservation
- (xi) concentrating on developing each large village and small town 'in the round', with a tailored mix of uses, facilities and housing type, as do the French, and
- (xii) embracing an existing - or developing its own - methodology in respect of pre-development linguistic impact assessment and post-development linguistic monitoring, as merely an elaboration of the current Environmental Impact Assessment 'cultural assets' analysis.

[NB. Since completing this report we have been advised that Gwynedd CC has taken positive steps on the latter. The Council Board of 13<sup>th</sup> March 2007 approved a report entitled 'Technical Guidance Note: Planning and the Welsh Language' which recommended a joint pilot scheme with the SNPA – which will run initially (post training) for a six months period (from April 2007 onwards), and which requires a language statement or a language impact assessment in specific circumstances.]

## 5.2.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG PLANNING SERVICES

In our experience, land use planning is essentially a national service with a pronounced local flavour. Local authorities which perform really well on local regeneration and local conservation (with all that entails in terms of delivering more and better housing) invariably have very strong and active planners and good planning services, who take an active interest in sustainability, design, environmental quality, regeneration and better housing – thus ensuring that the needs of the area and national planning requirements are, both, fully met.

**5.2.7** Contrary to what the general public may believe, planners who are determined to achieve high standards, and who negotiate demanding ‘deals’, brokering complex agreements and improvements to emerging schemes and applications, and who can make a cogent case at inquiries (for example for an occasional relaxation of policy to enable a complex major proposal to obtain a CPO and planning permission) are a great asset to local regeneration, and can encourage better local standards all round to the overall benefit of the locality.

## 5.2.8 DEVELOPING ALL THE RELEVANT SERVICES IN GWYNEDD

On the basis of our desk study alone, we think the measures taken to develop the planning services in GCC and SNPA should include:

(i) study of planning ‘best practice’ within unitary councils and NPAs – aimed at bringing planning practice in GCC and SNPA up to the standards of the best in Wales and the UK – using benchmarking, study visits and general encouragement as much as formal training

(ii) study of techniques which deliver very high ‘design/conservation’ and ‘eco-standards’ – as they will be key, in our view, to swift and sure progress overall on housing issues both within the National Park, and in many other sensitive and/or problematic areas in the rest of Gwynedd, over the next few years

(iii) developing and adding to the technical skills and capacity to cover all the key planning topics (internally if possible, or using specialist consultants, if not), and

(iv) developing a ‘team work’ approach to addressing local regeneration challenges and associated local housing schemes – involving planners, housing staff and regeneration specialists within GCC, and SNPA planners, and possibly the development staff in the RSLs (which should help to attract and secure good housing development proposals and planning deals for Gwynedd).

## 5.3 REGENERATION IN GWYNEDD

**5.3.1** We confine ourselves here to looking at what our limited investigation of progress on regeneration in Gwynedd tells us about the scope for Gwynedd to use its planning and regeneration processes to make more progress, directly or indirectly, on housing issues.

5.3.2 In discussion with GCC officers we learnt that –

- the 1986 ‘Slate Initiative’ to upgrade former slate mining/quarrying villages (eg. Bethesda, Deiniolen, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Corris, and Trefor) via Renewal Areas, is now coming towards a close
- a full Regeneration Strategy is now being prepared
- the Council published a Consultation Draft of a Gwynedd Regeneration Strategy in September in which ‘regeneration’ is defined as an *‘intentional effort to improve the area’s economy, environment and society in order to create healthy, prosperous and dynamic and sustainable communities’* - although we were not able to see the draft document that was scheduled to be submitted to Gwynedd Council’s Board in April 2006, nor did we have an opportunity to speak to those writing the document
- there is concern amongst some Council officers that Gwynedd is not yet fully alert to local regeneration methods and practices, not least because there is insufficient ‘cross-fertilisation’ between departments (such as planning, regeneration and housing) and professionals (whether those dealing with housing or planning)
- various activists and ‘movements’ are lobbying via Community Councils for more action, and
- there is interest in exploring the ‘joint venture company’ approach to housing renewal and regeneration.

### 5.3.3 SOCIO-ECONOMICS

While not specifically being asked to do so at the outset of this commission, it became clear during the meetings and discussions that advice on the development of housing and regeneration strategies, and their place within Gwynedd’s overall planning context, could be helpful. We start from a brief analysis (from readily available material) of the overall socio-economic position in Gwynedd. This can be summarised by the following -

- of the 118,000 people in Gwynedd, 59% (compared to 60% in Wales on average) are of working age
- 76% (compared to 75%) are economically active, with broadly similar profiles of employment, except that there are significantly more self employed in Gwynedd (14%) than in Wales overall (6%)
- the numbers of unemployed (3.5%) is significantly less than on average (5%)
- of those who are economically inactive, somewhat more in Gwynedd (21.5%) are not seeking a job than in Wales overall (19%)
- the broad distribution of occupation types (managerial as opposed to process workers, for example) is very similar to the average for Wales, but
- there are fewer manufacturing jobs (7% compared to 14%), and fewer in finance, IT and other business activities (7% compared to 13%), more in public administration, education and health (41% compared to 33%), distribution hotels and restaurants (31% compared to 24%), and in tourism-related activities (14% compared to 8%)
- there are more part-time employees (42%) than the average for Wales (35%)

- education levels are slightly higher in Gwynedd than the average
- gross weekly pay is broadly similar to (98% of) the average for Wales (although it is 10% less than the average for Great Britain), and
- the number of people applying for job seekers allowance (about 2.5%) is no different from Wales (or GB) overall, although there is a somewhat greater concentration of long-term and more elderly job seekers in Gwynedd.

National Statistics, Nomis Labour Market Statistics for Gwynedd, 2005-6  
[www.nomisweb.co.uk/forum/profile.aspx](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/forum/profile.aspx)

**5.3.4** While these figures do not indicate a fragile economy (such as can be found in some of the older industrial areas of South Wales or other parts of the UK) its concentration on tertiary and part-time jobs rather than primary or secondary full-time jobs, suggests that the area does not have the spread of activities that many analysts consider necessary for self-starting economic growth, and is vulnerable to the vagaries of external forces.

**5.3.5** Although this data does not allow 'drilling down' into local area problems, information on multiple deprivation at ward level, supported by local knowledge, does allow for the identification of areas of need as opposed to those of relative economic prosperity and potential growth. This shows Gwynedd to be amongst the least deprived of Wales' local authority districts, with a relatively narrow spread of deprivation across wards, with only two wards (consisting of 3% of the population) ranking amongst the most deprived 10% in the country – Marchog 1 and Peblig in Caernarfon. However, this result is due to below average levels of deprivation in respect of income, employment, health, education and environment measures. In relation to housing, 40% of Gwynedd's wards have above average levels of deprivation, with 20% having above average levels of deprivation as measured by access to services. It is this analysis that underpins Gwynedd's approach of distinguishing between Areas of Need and Areas of Opportunity, along the following lines:

Areas of need:

- *Deprived Communities* (e.g. communities which includes wards designated under the Communities First programme, with specific attention to the most deprived communities within the Multiple Deprivation Index 2005); and
- *Peripheral Communities* (e.g. the communities that are most deprived under the 'access to services' domain, which is identified by the Multiple Deprivation Index 2005)

Areas of opportunity:

- *Growth Areas* (e.g. communities identified as Growth Areas and Key Centres in the Wales Spatial Plan); and
- *Communities with strategic projects* (e.g. communities where there is a regeneration scheme which would create substantial opportunities for a wide area).

WAG (2005) Local Government Data Unit, *Welsh Index of Deprivation 2005*

5.3.6 This appears to be an entirely rational and evidence-based response to the information that is available, and the proposed activities identified in the Consultation Draft, namely concentration on affordable housing, services for children and young people, skill development, entrepreneurship and language (to which could be added, as a result of this exercise, services for the elderly, better energy efficiency measures, and more attention to the external environment) do seem to be relevant for the areas of need.

### 5.3.7 EXPANDING THE HOUSING OFFER

For the 'areas of opportunity' GCC may need to consider :

- how to expand the 'offer' by making provision for more up-market housing to encourage those who might otherwise commute into and out of the district for relatively high income jobs (and there appears to be a flood of high income people leaving Gwynedd every night along the A55, particularly from the Bangor area) to live in it permanently
- improving the quality of town centres, and
- paying particular attention to the quality of the built environment and the level and quality of services.

That in turn will require the Council to make particular efforts to attract private sector developers (including those not necessarily based in Gwynedd at present) to operate in the County.

### 5.3.8 KEY STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL LOCAL REGENERATION

The first stage in this process, as other areas embarking on regeneration have found, is to seek to build long term relationships with developers, in general terms as well as in relation to specific schemes. The results can be seen in some (but by no means all) of the local authorities in the North West of England

—

- the City of Manchester's success and slickness in engaging private sector developers, and on the back of that in convincing central government that they have the managerial ability to deliver schemes meeting government objectives, and so bidding and lobbying successfully for grant-aid and major projects
- the very successful 'joint venture company' approach between Halton BC and the brownfield site specialist developers St Modwen's (see [Annex P](#))
- Knowsley's talent for publicising its own progress
- progress on bringing empty properties / empty dwellings into a variety of uses achieved by design-led companies such as Urban Splash which after many years of imaginative conversion of warehouses to residential use is now also finding a solution to poorly maintained and almost derelict terrace dwellings in run-down areas of relatively poor areas of Salford (an approach which might be helpful, for example, in upgrading large seaside properties in Gwynedd), and
- Bolton and Wigan's success, as recognised by the IDeA's Beacon Scheme (see [Annex M](#)) in re-organising their housing services to ensure good

consultation with residents and tenants, and an integrated approach to regeneration and management of the housing stock.

5.3.9 But it is not always necessary to look abroad – Gwynedd could make more of:

- the largely unsung achievement in improving the Walled Town in Caernarfon - through dogged and patient effort over many years - in a historically sensitive site with many listed buildings, and drawing in much external (mostly free) expertise on conservation matters, plus conservation grants and special projects money and using a Town Trust approach to enable continuity and quality development in and around it, and
- well designed, one-off, high quality, private sector ventures in Gwynedd which flourish despite their remoteness from major centres of population, and which offer a range of jobs and help to support local villagers' lifestyles and culture both directly and indirectly (of which Portmeirion is a very good example – and now they are really well established - the marinas).

5.3.10 An important second stage involves strategy. We think the obvious way forward is to create a robust GCC Regeneration Strategy that either incorporates or contains very strong links to the Local Housing Strategy for Gwynedd. A really strong 'umbrella' strategy is needed which specifies Gwynedd's vision, aims, objectives and target outputs for a consistent and ambitious set of 'local regeneration plans and projects'. We list – in [Annex K](#) - the things we would hope to see covered in a Regeneration Strategy for the County of Gwynedd that will be a powerful document for achieving progress.

5.3.11 The third key ingredient is multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working to deliver the strategy and to guide the production of masterplans and ensure that every masterplan is accompanied by a workable delivery strategy produced in conjunction with all the key players. It is to be hoped that Gwynedd will soon find the resources it needs to undertake several such exercises, despite the financial challenges it faces.

## 6. Towards the GCC LHS 2007

6.1 This section takes into account the main messages from the last three sections – the evidence gathered from the people who are most familiar with housing issues in Gwynedd, the notes on relevant best practice, and the notes on wider planning and regeneration in Gwynedd. It is also informed by our experience as senior managers in local government, central government and non-departmental public bodies.

6.2 We address the issues in four sections, entitled (i) the overall vision for housing in Gwynedd, (ii) housing quality, (iii) housing suitability. (iv) housing supply and sufficiency, and (v) housing affordability.

### 6.3 THE OVERALL VISION FOR HOUSING IN GWYNEDD

6.3.1 All national policy in the UK and Wales these days starts with outlining the desirability of delivering more sustainable development overall. WAG has a duty to achieve sustainable development, local authorities are expected to deliver it also, and the community strategies are expected to be *de facto* strategies for delivering sustainable development at the local scale.

6.3.2 We would therefore advise that the overall ‘umbrella’ statements for the GCC LHS 2007 should refer to -

- ~ the importance of ensuring **sustainable development** everywhere on Earth, including Wales, and Gwynedd, and adopting it as a ‘key driver’ for Gwynedd’s strategies
- ~ as an important sub-set of that refer to current **climate change** considerations (the emerging scientific consensus that there is a problem there to be addressed and risks to be appraised and managed, urgently)
- ~ applying the ‘**precautionary principle**’ – leading to GCC commitment to swift progress to contribute to reducing emissions of green-house gases (especially carbon dioxide and methane) as quickly as possible
- ~ not losing sight of these major concerns in the effort to improve the **overall quality of life** in Gwynedd
- ~ respecting higher-level **governmental strategies** (UK wide and WAG) which deal with these major issues (current and future)
- ~ the importance of establishing that the LHS 2007 would be a strategy for **all types and quality of housing** in the County
- ~ the aims/objectives set for housing in Gwynedd in the **Gwynedd Community Strategy** (which refers to housing quality, suitability, supply/sufficiency and affordability)
- ~ the other **three related strategic documents** that matter (ie the local development plan, the children’s services plan, and the health and well-being plan)
- ~ the wide range of lower level **service plans** which will be informed by those strategies - especially those impacting on

housing issues (eg. the Council housing stock, open spaces and highways maintenance)

- ~ the Council's **performance plan** and procedures for progress monitoring and reviewing policies and plans, and
- ~ proposals for **developing / training** both the elected members and staff (with, we would suggest, an emphasis on day study visits to easily accessible sites in the North West of England and the Midlands with conditions broadly comparable to those in Gwynedd, where comprehensive renewal is being undertaken).

**6.3.3** It is possible to debate whether the four characteristics selected by Gwynedd (quality, suitability, supply/sufficiency and affordability) are sufficiently distinct to act as policy 'drivers'. They seem to us to be somewhat abstract notions needing considerable 'unpacking' before they can be converted into specific aims, objectives, outputs and targets. But we take the view that as they are set out in the higher level Gwynedd Community Strategy, the sensible thing to do, in terms of policy hierarchy and policy development, is to stick with them.

**6.3.4** In developing a new GCC LHS 2007, Gwynedd could demonstrate its respect for the evidence and other advice (and its own avowed commitment to sustainable development, dealing with climate change, and addressing Gwynedd's overall housing challenges) by concentrating on the following -

- working closely with the EA to avoid new development in current and future flood-risk areas – especially in the rural areas
- ensuring close dialogue between planners, regeneration specialists and housing officers in Gwynedd - as to how, when and where 'key housing related and other developments' desired by the Council and its partners are likely to be developed, and how they can ensure 'policy alignment' between major strategies and plans to help smooth progress (without breaching national guidance)
- speeding-up and beefing-up the approach to local regeneration, particular that which offers the prospect of introducing 'mixed-use' mixed tenure schemes that address a wide variety of economic, environmental and housing issues, simultaneously, including new/better housing in established urban areas, and the larger villages
- whilst aiming for more low-cost / affordable / specialised housing, also allowing some redevelopment for new market housing in coastal areas and the larger villages where there is also the prospect of delivering some more units of affordable housing as part of an agreed 'package'
- working with the RSLs and others to develop a demonstration project for carbon-zero homes, which also respects the traditional style of housing in Gwynedd (ie. large windows at the front, steep roofs, wide eaves, local stone detailing, slate roofs),
- a drive to retro-fit the Council-owned housing stock (pre or post LSVT) with simple, cost-effective, energy-saving measures, and
- trying to get across the scale of the housing challenges facing Gwynedd on one side of A4 (and a list of key facts, in [Annex L](#) below, is offered as a start in that direction).

## 6.4 HOUSING QUALITY

6.4.1 In addition to the evidence already gathered, we think –

- externally, the housing stock as such (in all sectors) has a reasonably good outward visual appearance and the older private sector housing has much character – which is a strong plus-point
- it will be important to set very high design standards for new and improved housing (as in South Yorkshire – where the authorities are very committed to that approach and have engaged Eira Hughes to help develop and deliver it)
- to encourage ‘equity release’, GCC would need to talk to residents face to face (as they have done successfully with their ‘Here to Help’ ‘fuel poverty action initiative’ with British Gas)
- there may be merit in studying Birmingham’s approach to equity release – and lessons to be learned from the low response to the Flintshire/Wrexham pilot scheme
- the projected growth in the numbers of students generally should mean no lack of a market for student flats, and adequate returns on investment for those who let them
- the terraced form of much of the older housing, means that physically there is scope (over time) to stave off the inevitable deterioration by facilitating deals with developers to demolish and replace the least satisfactory rows with minimal disruption to other infrastructure
- that there is scope also to encourage neighbouring owners to knock 2/3 units into 1 modern one – whilst retaining much of the character façades – for housing (and other) uses, with minimal disruption to communities, socially, plus
- there is still much scope to enhance older council estates via low-cost environmental improvements to the immediate surroundings (eg. decorative tree planting, mass bulb planting, minor repairs and local sprucing up schemes) – thus also encouraging the owners and tenants to invest more time and effort into their property. (NB. Much work of this type was done in the 1980s in Arfon, notably in Llanberis, using a wide variety of grant-aid schemes), and
- that local management and maintenance of such estates, with much involvement by residents, pays great dividends.

6.4.2 In developing a new GCC LHS 2007, Gwynedd could demonstrate its respect for the evidence and other advice on improving housing quality by -

- reviewing current Council-housing repairs issues, funding and standards
- developing, in partnership with major private sector lenders, a model of equity release which can confidently be promoted to the better-off owner-occupiers in Gwynedd
- not promoting ‘equity release’ to the less well-off owner-occupiers
- working with developers and builders on new schemes in Gwynedd
- where free-standing houses fall into serious disrepair – employing regulatory measures, and allowing the market to work

- prioritising measures and grant-aid to address and resolve any mid-terrace problem properties in otherwise satisfactory terraces over the next few years
- realising that there will be no better time than now to both (i) encourage good landlords and (ii) to get tough with poor landlords and enforce the environmental health and housing laws generally with respect to private sector rented property
- lobbying WAG for a 'Welsh Lettings Standard' (and perhaps setting a Gwynedd Standard in the meantime)
- working with the appropriate 'sector skills councils' to improve skills among existing local builders embracing environmental audit schemes used by other local authorities to identify and take action on problems in the external environment around older housing
- ensuring extensive improvements to older council estates as/when they are transferred under LSVT (including the simple environmental measures identified above in para 6.4.1 and cleaning rubbish from the rivers on a regular basis, etc), and
- steering grant-aid towards the new priorities - bearing in mind the need to sustain the better terraces with a long future ahead of them - which will require devising appropriate new 'tests' (and probably the confidential grading of older terraces to aid investment and other decisions, in the first instance). (See [Annex N](#) for a possible grading system for the old industrial terraces.)
- committing itself to high design standards and maintenance
- adopting four key pieces of guidance for all GCC housing policy and decision-making processes -
  - ~ the latest guidance from the Design Council for Wales
  - ~ BRE Eco-Homes,
  - ~ Lifetime Homes,
  - ~ ACPO 'Secured by Design'
- continually publicising/using/updating the GCC design guidance notes, and
- appointing an architect as a Design Champion to facilitate discussion with potential major investors, applicants and the public.

## 6.5 HOUSING SUITABILITY

6.5.1 In developing a new GCC LHS 2007, Gwynedd could demonstrate its respect for the evidence and other advice on housing suitability by -

- considering in detail the scope for dealing with the suitability issues very directly - using its own land, buildings and other resources – in order to make swift progress on the pressing housing 'suitability' issues
- setting out a wide-ranging set of (cross-directorate, cross-sector) measures for improving the lot of 16-18 year olds in Gwynedd who are in need of housing
- investigating scope for a 'foyer' development for such 16-18 year olds - probably in the Bangor/Caernarfon area, and possibly also in the more rural southern part of the County - for those lacking parental care and other family support (despite the best efforts of the mediation service)

- committing immediately to a research exercise to test whether and to what extent the BME community is well housed, to report back with recommendations on what specific improvements are needed
- identifying one large permanent site for gypsies/travellers in Gwynedd
- conducting a swift research exercise to identify the best options for a series of smaller temporary stop sites for gypsies/travellers
- working with the relevant RSLs, specialist agencies and charities to determine the need, location, specification and funding for a new hostel/s – to enable self-referral by homeless people and day care
- linked to that – preparing a policy and then acting to all but eradicate rough sleeping in Gwynedd
- working with the relevant RSLs, specialist agencies and charities to determine the need, location, specification and funding for a new hostel/s, including a new 'wet-hostel' - with a suitable range of back-up services for people with severe alcohol / drug addiction problems who have yet to commit to giving these up
- embracing various measures which can be effected quickly (including renting private stock, converting older buildings (a) in the Council's ownership and (b) in other ownerships, plus building a few new RSL/GCC units) to provide more social rented affordable housing for (i) young people moving on from any foyer schemes established, (ii) other young people who need housing, and (iii) families on low incomes
- reviewing Gwynedd's full inventory of buildings - with a view to identifying scope for fast (temporary or permanent) conversions to meet the various needs identified above – especially the specific needs of certain families for larger homes to deal with elderly relatives and disabled children
- considering also - despite the inevitable public scepticism - use of high-quality temporary buildings on well located, Council-owned sites in the places where they are needed in order to meet some of these needs *pro tem*
- reviewing GCC's policy and practice on support for child-care and related child-centred facilities and support on the small number of very large 'council housing estates' in Gwynedd
- working with other agencies to provide regularly updates, advice and minor grants to assist people to avoid fuel poverty and to keep warm
- liaising with and informing all private landlords in Gwynedd about their responsibilities – and providing access to an easy training scheme (eg an internet and hard-copy training pack)
- releasing more of the Council's land and privately owned land (via planning decisions) for well-designed and landscaped self-build schemes in and around the established large villages /small towns, for local people
- investigating – with appropriate training and accreditation bodies – the scope for achieving higher standards of accreditation and skills among the existing small builders in Gwynedd (including laying on half-day site-based seminars)
- rationalising and adapting current sheltered accommodation to better meet the current older generation's expectations (for private bathrooms

and kitchens, their own front door, and a room for relatives/visitors to stay overnight), and

- not overlooking the need for suitability of housing in all housing categories, including those at the upper end of the market.

## **6.6 HOUSING SUPPLY and SUFFICIENCY**

6.6.1 In developing a new GCC LHS 2007, Gwynedd could demonstrate its respect for the evidence and other advice in respect of housing supply and sufficiency by –

- focusing at the most senior corporate level on using its own property resources, powers and influence to best effect to make progress on future housing supply and sufficiency issues
- investigating ‘Council as guarantor’ schemes for tackling empty property (including flats over shops)
- producing an LHS 2007 which does not fail to address the private sector offer as well as the public sector challenges, especially the overall age and condition of the stock
- giving serious consideration now to climate change/ flood risk complications as advised by the Environment Agency in relation to both the existing and new development, and future land allocations
- challenging the prevailing view that using unusual housing solutions (including possibly pre-fab add-on extensions) is somehow stigmatising, as the quality of new units nowadays is likely to be very high, and so long as the upkeep and support services are good, should remain high, and
- aiming for improved housing choice and quality in all the housing categories.

6.6.2 We think there may be scope to develop the approach to supply and sufficiency in the future by addressing the many points raised in [Section 5 \(Wider Planning and Regeneration\)](#) – especially those raised in respect of -

para 5.2.4 – the relevant plans

para 5.2.5 - emerging housing related issues and opportunities

para 5.2.8 - developing the relevant services in Gwynedd

para 5.3.7 - expanding the housing offer

para 5.3.8 - key steps for successful local regeneration

which are supported by the analysis of progress on the relevant plans in [Annex O: The Current Planning Situation in Gwynedd \(in Respect of Housing Issues\)](#).

## **6.7 HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**

6.7.1 We think -

- the need for more affordable housing in Gwynedd is clear
- the risk is that unless efforts to meet the demand for affordable and low cost housing are reinforced in the shorter term – there would be an

increased risk of out-migration and/or homelessness – potentially with knock-on impacts on the Welsh language and culture

- lack of Rural Housing Enabler coverage of the Arfon area of Gwynedd is a weakness – particularly as RHEs work could potentially have a powerful redistributive effect on the use of Social Housing Grant in Wales (potentially bringing in a larger cut of the Welsh budget plus other private sector monies from the UK generally if they produce good proposals)
- there is very little new private sector building ongoing in Gwynedd
- a new, more adventurous, local regeneration mindset/approach – with the active involvement of a strengthened planning service, and strategic housing officers – would help generate a few more opportunities to glean affordable units through Section 106 Agreements, and
- creating a land-bank (as suggested by GCC's Affordable Housing Officer) would be a smart move and probably cheaper and faster than using CPO procedures – so long as the planners are involved from the start in informing the Council's internal (confidential) discussions as to what type of site to buy and where, so as to avoid waste of resources.

6.7.2 In developing a new GCC LHS 2007, Gwynedd could demonstrate its respect for the evidence and other advice in respect of housing affordability by -

- continuing to work with the RSLs to deliver more affordable housing
- investing immediately in extending RHE coverage to cover Arfon
- releasing more small GCC-owned plots, in and around settlements, for self-build schemes (built to meet specific, high, not low, standards)
- forging new relationships/partnerships with local and national builders/developers to entice the private sector to help meet the demand for mixed tenure development (with an element of low-cost and affordable housing) in the larger settlements
- considering substantial new incentives for those who buy small second homes for 'conversion' to permanent use (eg. Council Tax discounts and a priority for repairs and improvement grants, with default clauses)
- allowing more central development and 'infilling' opportunities in the rather dispersed settlements on elevated ground (outwith the National Park) within say no more than 20 minutes travel-to-work of the larger towns in Gwynedd which offer a reasonable range of employment opportunities – especially those near Bangor and Caernarfon
- identifying / creating a 'land- bank' for an enlarged programme to deliver affordable, low-cost and self build homes, and
- considering the various points made in [Section 5 \(Wider Planning and Regeneration\)](#), above.

## 7. Final Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Gwynedd's physical housing problems are a little different from the norm, but not radically so.

7.2 Some are straightforward and are capable of being addressed using current best practice gleaned from Gwynedd's own experience and wider experience in Wales, and across the UK.

7.3 The 'big issues' overall in respect of housing for Gwynedd seem to be -

- maintaining an overall good quality of life and sustainable development
- entailing sensitive economic development in potential growth areas, good health, social justice and equality of opportunity everywhere
- plus improvements in housing conditions and better access to essential services in the more deprived areas
- ensuring that all aspects of Council activities, including the housing, regeneration, planning and cultural teams, have the capacity to deliver
- conserving and promoting local Welsh language and culture
- meeting the WHQS in Council / social rented housing by 2012
- hence the need to explore LSVT
- addressing the needs of the old housing stock (almost half pre-1919 in the private owner occupied and rented sectors) for which the economic rationale, namely the primary extraction activities, has largely disappeared, leaving much of it outmoded for modern uses and needs, and some of it (almost 10%) in poor condition
- devising methods and means of organisation and delivery to maintain, repair and modernise the stock properly – to bring it as close to modern-day standards as is cost-effective
- complying with WAG policy on eradicating fuel poverty by 2010 and the need for better energy efficiency and warmth in current housing – as 22,500 households in Gwynedd may be at risk of fuel poverty
- meeting the needs of the frail elderly – to enable them to stay in their own homes for as long as possible, or move to accommodation that preserves their sense of autonomy yet offers practical support
- needing a significant (but as yet uncertain) quantity of new, social rented, affordable homes, and low-cost homes to meet particular and general needs
- finding ways of augmenting the GCC's settlement grant from WAG with 'special initiatives' monies, grants from other major funders
- developing a strong regeneration strategy which will lever in significantly more private sector investment to help address housing problems and opportunities in Gwynedd
- also making progress in improving choice of housing at the upper end of the open market, and
- ensuring a coordinated and consistent, multi-agency, all-Gwynedd approach to these challenges.

7.4 The housing problems in Gwynedd are more challenging to address in one sense because of the national and local aspiration to defend, conserve and promote the distinctive Welsh language and culture - and that means inevitably more elaborately wrought and tested plans and proposals, with strong monitoring of schemes and solutions. The room for manoeuvre is small but Gwynedd can, under current rules:

- > legitimately favour 'local people' in the provision of affordable housing (eg. by setting 10-15 year residency qualifications for access to its more generous local housing initiatives)
- > release land as plots for local housing schemes of varying types
- > use planning powers and negotiations to boost local community 'gain'
- > use the current EIA system's current 'cultural interests' facet to justify calling for developers to prepare *de facto* Linguistic Impact Assessments, and establish its own methodology for that if a national one does not emerge within the next few months from WAG, and
- > simply research the real occupancy of recent and future new build schemes to test whether or not they have been taken up by local residents, or not, and the occupants assimilation in the locality, and
- > share the results with WAG and others in order to inform policy and possible changes to the rules.

7.5 In the light of all these issues, and the material assembled during (and in the margins of) the evidence gathering sessions, our recommendations are, therefore, as follows -

**RECOMMENDATION 1 :** that the development of the new GCC Local Housing Strategy 2007 should -

- continue to focus on the needs of the 'customer' through further evidence gathering sessions with residents and tenants, with greater involvement and devolution to the local level
- adopt a holistic and integrated approach to the development of its policies by embedding the LHS within its planning framework and regeneration and other policies
- be evidence-based, both in relation to needs and market trends, and
- seek other examples of best practice in the production of regeneration and housing strategies – beginning with those set out in [Section 6: Best Practice - Housing and Area Renewal](#) and [Annexes K, M and P](#) of this report.

**RECOMMENDATION 2 :** that in devising its strategies and its delivery mechanisms that GCC should -

- commit itself to a design-led, local regeneration, best practice approach to tackling housing issues in Gwynedd in order to develop settlements 'in the round', and in a manner which offers sustainable development for the future
- begin to develop relationships with private sector developers, and more specifically investigate urgently the scope for a 'joint venture company' arrangement with a skilled national developer to address the opportunities for wider regeneration in its larger towns and villages (with some housing spin-off)

- explore the possibility of using equity release mechanisms, if necessary supported by the Council, to attract private sector funds to address the problems of the older private sector housing stock
- examine whether its quality control procedures to monitor contractor performance (on housing repairs) are satisfactory, and
- consider carefully the comments and suggestions - on planning and regeneration in Gwynedd - made in [Section 5 : Wider Planning and Regeneration](#) and [Annexes N, O and P](#) of this report.

**RECOMMENDATION 3 :** that in seeking community endorsement of the emerging strategy GCC should ensure that the long list of organisations in [ANNEX G: Other Invitees](#) is -

- kept well informed and regularly invited to comment on the GCC LHS 2007 exercise as it progresses
- coaxed into taking more interest in assisting Gwynedd CC and its Local Housing Partnership's efforts, over the longer term, to improve housing in Gwynedd, and
- encouraged to invest in working with Gwynedd County Council's officers to promote and deliver culturally appropriate, well designed and 'green' local regeneration and housing schemes across Gwynedd.

And, for the avoidance of doubt -

**RECOMMENDATION 4 :** that in order to make progress -

- GCC's senior managers, and the new Gwynedd Housing Partnership (including the SNPA) should read and discuss this report in order to inform their future approach to strategic housing issues
- GCC should prepare a succinct 'Interim Project Plan' - within a month - to ensure a swift start on implementing all the strands of Recommendations 1-3 above (as all are either 'Essential' or 'Highly Desirable' and need to be commenced now in order to ensure tangible progress within the next few years)
- GCC should draft a new 'All-Gwynedd', 'all housing sectors' GCC LHS 2007 taking into account WAG guidance and this report, especially the distillation set out in [Section 6](#), and
- GCC should consult the public upon it before submitting it to the Welsh Assembly Government in the summer of 2007.

## **8. Acknowledgements**

8.1 Our thanks go to David Humphreys (Manager of the Housing Policy and Performance Unit in the Care Directorate of Gwynedd County Council) and to all who gave generously of their time and expertise to assist us with this study.

# THE ANNEXES

# Annex A: The General Background Note

## GENERAL BACKGROUND NOTE

### Introduction

Gwynedd CC intends to reconsider its Local Housing Strategy 2004 – 2008 in the light of more recent advice on the preparation of such strategies<sup>1, 2</sup> for the period 2007-2012, in particular that they should be based on up to date local evidence on demographic trends, housing and employment markets; active consultation with all partners; and contribute to better joined-up strategies addressing regeneration and social justice.

### Gwynedd's Overall Aim and Objectives

The Council's overall aim is to

*to become a more vibrant, prosperous, open and cohesive community that values and promotes its unique cultural and natural assets and makes a positive contribution to a more sustainable world<sup>3</sup>*

while its objectives in relation to housing are to

*improve the sufficiency, quality, affordability and suitability of the housing stock to meet the changing needs of the population<sup>4</sup>.*

### Gwynedd Profile

Gwynedd is a medium-sized rural local authority area in the north west of Wales comprising less than 120,000 people, with a broadly similar age distribution to the rest of rural Wales, and subject to one of the lowest levels of in-migration. From 1981-2001 its population increased by 4.5%, compared to 8.3% for rural Wales. It has the highest level of Welsh-born (70%) and Welsh-speaking people (66%) compared to rural Wales overall (65% and 38%). Levels of economic activity, inactivity and unemployment in Gwynedd are broadly similar to the average for rural Wales, although incomes are relatively low. Wards in the west of Gwynedd (particularly the Llŷn peninsula) contain lower proportions of economically active households, due to retirement or permanent sickness. There are slightly more than 50,000 households, 77% of which live in owner occupied houses (the highest in Wales). The age and condition of the stock give rise to concern - over half is pre-1919 compared to a third nationally, and 9% (over 5000 houses) are unfit. Gwynedd had the lowest house prices of all unitary authorities in 2003 (£84,600 cfd. to £102,600 for rural Wales) although still £20,000 more than prices in the Valleys.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> WAG: 'Better Homes for People in Wales' National Housing Policy for Wales, (2001)

<sup>2</sup> WAG: New Guidance for local authorities in Wales on the Preparation of Local Housing Strategies, October 2007

<sup>3</sup> Gwynedd 2021 Vision Statement

<sup>4</sup> Gwynedd Community Strategy 'Gwynedd Together'

<sup>5</sup> SJRRR 1/06 The Role of the Housing System in Rural Wales, January 2006

## **Main Issues**

There are a number of areas that will need investigating through the evidence sessions, or subsequently by further detailed research.

### Demographic Trends:

The extent and impact of in-migration into rural and coastal areas: and the related number of retirement homes and second homes, both in relation to the housing market and on the Welsh language and culture.

The extent of 'real need' among 3000 people on the Housing Register and the need for 'extra care' (for the frail elderly) in homes and services.

The extent of accommodation needed for vulnerable people, such as young single people, those in hard-to-reach rural areas, those with mental health problems and ex-offenders, BME communities, migrant workers from the Eastern EU, Gypsy/travellers (for example in transit sites) and rough sleepers.

### Housing Market Trends:

Trends in demand, prices and supply in the owner occupied sector, and in particular localities - notwithstanding Gwynedd's position as one of the lowest-price areas in Wales.

The need for affordable housing mainly in rural, but also some urban, areas even if it appears to be less in Gwynedd than other rural districts.

### Housing Stock Condition:

The implication of aiming to bring the existing stock up to Welsh Housing Quality Standards by 2012<sup>6</sup>. GCC think this might require c. £60M, and a further £130M more to achieve a readily sustainable / maintainable level of quality. This will need large scale private sector investment.

The possibility of releasing equity in Gwynedd's homes.

The consequences of the potential stock transfer ( c. 6,300 of social rented units) to a new organisation, if the existing tenants vote for it, which will provide some of this necessary investment.

The extent of fuel poverty – 38% of the population is thought to experience 'fuel poverty', mainly in the 60% solid-wall construction houses in Gwynedd, and the impact of a recent partnership with British Gas.

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<sup>6</sup> The Welsh Housing Quality Standard, Guidance For Local Authorities On The Assessment Process And Achievement of The Standard, April 2002

The extent of proactive work required to tackle the 1300 'empty properties' - mostly in the private stock - in Gwynedd.

### **The Four Facilitated 'Evidence Gathering Sessions'**

Gwynedd CC plans to draw together a wide range of people with relevant expertise to share information and identify further evidence and policy development needs in order to inform the new LHS.

The four thematic, facilitated 'Evidence Gathering Sessions' will identify more precisely the issues, key facts, potential responses and the need for further evidence. They will be themed as follows:

- Supply / Sufficiency
- Quality
- Affordability
- Suitability.

### **Cross-cutting Issues and Trends**

There are a number of cross-cutting issues, for example -

- Conserving the native Welsh language and culture
- Respecting people's diversity and diverse needs
- Environmental considerations due to Climate Change
- Encouraging greater eco-efficiency and 'Sustainable Development'.

### **Contact Details**

If we have overlooked any issues you consider to be critical at this stage, please let us know. You can contact:

- David Humphreys, Housing Policy and Performance Manager, Gwynedd CC (Email – [DavidHumphreys@gwynedd.gov.uk](mailto:DavidHumphreys@gwynedd.gov.uk) ), or
- Eira Hughes DipLA, MCD, MRTPI, MLI, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants (Email - [eira\\_hughes@btinternet.com](mailto:eira_hughes@btinternet.com)).

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*This note was prepared by HUGHES-ISHERWOOD Regeneration Consultants using GCC's and WAG information – on behalf of GWYNEDD CC.*  
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## Annex B: The Issues Papers

### QUALITY

#### 1. Context

In its Community Strategy, Gwynedd is committed to “*improve the sufficiency, quality, affordability and suitability of the housing stock to meet the changing needs of the population.*” which means “... *housing that is consistent with the Welsh Housing Quality Standard....(namely) that the house is in good condition, has suitable space standards, and is energy efficient.*’ ( GCC, LHS 2004-2008).

#### 2. Major Choices - for structured discussion (plenary)

- Does the current Quality Standard fully reflect Gwynedd’s ambitions, or should it encompass design and aesthetic considerations in line with CABE’s or DCW’s approach, and even ‘quality of life’ issues on the use of mobile and on-line services, or the way in which housing sits in the landscape and interacts with the environment?
- How could the private sector and owner-occupiers be encouraged to improve their own housing at their own cost ? How do you encourage ‘step change’ yet increase the rate of largely self-reliant housing improvement?
- What degree of progress should we expect of the new housing management organisation which might take over the transferred stock? How have others performed in comparable situations? What lessons where are there to be learned from best practice elsewhere?
- Acute pockets of very poor quality housing – are there many areas where the private or public housing stock is going down rapidly rather than up in quality, which might require major intervention – and what hope is there of their transformation? Where are they and what options should we consider in order to tackle them?
- The wider countryside – how do we encourage landscape-sensitive modern replacements / extensions/ new uses for the smattering of very poor housing units across Gwynedd (eg very tiny pre-1919 cottages, 1930s style wooden chalets, and cheap 1960s extensions)?
- Wider ranging, small-area local regeneration (with a housing element): where are the most suitable sites for this approach in Gwynedd (which might engage the interest of private developers, and produce an element of affordable housing)?

- Does the BEM or other vulnerable communities in Gwynedd have 'affordable housing' needs, and if so where, to what extent and of what type?

### 3. More Specific Considerations

We may need to break into 3 workshops to tackle these 'thorny' issues:

**Workshop 4** - *What measures are needed to minimise the extent of housing in poor condition, and what scope is there for Gwynedd to deliver modern, 'zero-carbon' and energy efficient housing ?*

**Workshop 5** - *Inside the home – how can Gwynedd raise the 'standards' inside new and older housing ( all tenures) to much higher levels, to meet diverse and shifting needs and demands, quickly?*

**Workshop 6** - *Beyond the front door – how can Gwynedd ensure very high standards on related matters – in relation to safety, accessibility, quality and management of the public realm, general facilities, and good connectivity to a wide range of services and/ the local economy – to suit the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?*

### 4. Process / Next Steps

- The notes taken at the EGS will be compiled into a report which will be presented to Gwynedd CC at the end of February 2007.
- That report is likely to form an Appendix to the GCC LHS Consultation Draft document - which will go out to public consultation throughout Gwynedd during the summer of 2007.
- At that point, it is anticipated that the local communities will be heavily engaged in the process of developing and finalising the new LHS.

### 5. Contacts

If we have overlooked any issues you consider to be critical at this stage, please let us know. You can contact:

- David Humphreys, Housing Policy and Performance Manager, Gwynedd CC (Email – [DavidHumphreys@gwynedd.gov.uk](mailto:DavidHumphreys@gwynedd.gov.uk)), or
- Eira Hughes DipLA, MCD, MRTPI, MLI, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants (Email - [eira\\_hughes@btinternet.com](mailto:eira_hughes@btinternet.com)).

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*This note was prepared by HUGHES-ISHERWOOD Regeneration Consultants using GCC's information – on behalf of GWYNEDD COUNTY COUNCIL.*  
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# SUITABILITY

## 1. The Context

Housing suitability covers a range of considerations, from acute homelessness<sup>7</sup> which is measured in terms of a person's specific health or disability needs and the proximity of social services or family support, and the size, condition and facilities of dwelling houses; to more general issues of whether people are well matched to the housing available and their particular needs, in terms of employment, health, age or disability, safety and security, and general well being and ethnic origin.

## 2. Major Choices – for structured debate (plenary)

- What is the extent of revealed and hidden homelessness in Gwynedd and how adequate is the local authority and wider community response?
- Does Gwynedd's LHS demonstrate good practice on 'suitability' in Gwynedd by recognising the diverse needs in the community and what areas of weaker practice does it need to address and prioritise?
- What is the scale of the challenge posed by the numbers of frail elderly in Gwynedd over the next few years? Why is sheltered housing becoming less popular in Gwynedd? Is 'Lifetime Homes' the best response? How much resource should the public sector devote to that, and could the private sector (properly encouraged and regulated) do more?
- How should the recent focus on Children's Services in LAs be recognised by Gwynedd's housing strategy?
- Where is there most understanding and support for 'best practice' in dealing with vulnerable groups within the local community and in what areas is there a need for more?
- Home adaptations/extensions/modifications – is that work sufficiently resourced, flexible, fast, and appropriate to the needs of the population in Gwynedd, and/or is a new understanding required with funders, doers, and land-use planners?
- Sites for very specific user groups ( eg gypsies /travellers, mental health services, ex-offenders) – is the collective effort to ensure decent housing and quality of life for all of these equally ? What more development of official and public thinking, ideas and solutions is needed in Gwynedd?
- Are the monitoring arrangements for recording progress and adjusting policy on these more vulnerable residents sufficiently robust, well disseminated and influential in informing investment in Gwynedd? Is the private sector

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<sup>7</sup> Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2006

well briefed on the needs and potential for profitable provision of sites and services for these groups?

### 3. More Specific Considerations

We may need to address 3 particular issues:

**Workshop 10** - *Children, young persons and the 'average' family - how well does Gwynedd's housing provide for younger residents, and what further evidence is needed on how to help them, and where?*

**Workshop 11** - *The fit and frail elderly - how good is the research into and provision of housing for older residents in Gwynedd, and what further evidence and provision is needed on their needs?*

**Workshop 12** - *Special categories of people - how well does Gwynedd research and help provide appropriate housing for (i) the BEM community, (ii) asylum seekers, (iii) gypsies and travellers, (iv) farm labourers / contract workers, (v) rough sleepers, (vi) the homeless, (vii) victims of domestic violence, (viii) legal immigrants, (ix) the severely disabled, (x) those with mental health problems, (xi) those with addiction issues, (xii) ex-offenders, (xiii) ex armed forces people and (xiv) any other vulnerable groups and individuals (eg those with learning difficulties)? What does it do really well, and where can it improve, and how?*

### 4. Process / Next Steps

- The notes taken at the EGS will be compiled into a report which will be presented to Gwynedd CC at the end of February 2007.
- That report is likely to form an Appendix to the GCC LHS Consultation Draft document - which will go out to public consultation throughout Gwynedd and beyond during the summer of 2007.
- At that point, it is anticipated that the local communities will be heavily engaged in the process of developing and finalising the new LHS.

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- David Humphreys, Housing Policy and Performance Manager, Gwynedd CC (Email – [DavidHumphreys@gwynedd.gov.uk](mailto:DavidHumphreys@gwynedd.gov.uk)), or
- Eira Hughes DipLA, MCD, MRTPI, MLI, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants (Email - [eira\\_hughes@btinternet.com](mailto:eira_hughes@btinternet.com)).

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# SUPPLY / SUFFICIENCY

## 1. Context

A Local Housing Market Assessment is being undertaken in partnership with neighbouring LAs in North West Wales (Gwynedd CC with Anglesey CC, Conwy CC, Denbighshire CC, and the Snowdonia National Park). In addition, the Gwynedd (land-use) local development plan is in preparation. The results of these sessions will either feed directly into these activities or point to the need for further evidence.

## 2. Major Choices - for structured discussion ( plenary)

- How much more new build is either necessary, desirable or beneficial in/for Gwynedd – to meet rising expectations and market demand?
- How ‘adaptable’ / ‘extendable’ / ‘improvable’ is the current housing stock to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century needs – particularly in the private sector?
- Should there be more emphasis on phased replacement to reduce the age of the housing stock? If so, which areas should be redeveloped?
- What further incentives and assistance could we realistically pursue in order to dramatically accelerate that process of modernising the stock, whilst also conserving all that is best and most attractive in Gwynedd ‘s older housing stock ?
- What is the scope for adapting and reconfiguring other (non-residential buildings and specialist housing which no longer fits the bill) to provide modern residential units in North West Wales – in order to meet current and future needs?
- Where the land use plan allows new housing - how can landowners be persuaded to release that land?
- Do we need to do more in Gwynedd to give greater emphasis to BEM issues – and if so where and how?
- How do we get the balance right between meeting local residents’ needs, maintaining an in-flow of much-needed private investment, shouldering some of the UK’s obligations in relation to EU inward migration, and conserving and strengthening the native Welsh language and culture?
- Is the release of more small plots for local residents’ self-build on a larger scale justifiable in order to enable local residents to remain in the locality, and what safeguards would be necessary to complement such an approach?

- To what extent should Gwynedd CC use the stronger powers available to LAs (eg. to declare CPOs)?
- What scope is there for mutually beneficial deal-making with larger private sector investors/developers/ builders in order to make progress on area regeneration and housing issues simultaneously?
- What can be done to attract successful medium-scale developers of high quality housing and local regeneration schemes (of the type produced by Urban Splash in the North West of England) ?

### 3. More Specific Considerations

Depending on the number of attendees we may split into three workshops:-

**Workshop 1** - *How far ahead do we need to look, how much new build is really needed in Gwynedd, and how much could be met by better use of existing stock, or re-use of derelict buildings and brownfield land?*

**Workshop 2** - *What other major emerging demographic, economic and social trends need to be factored in now and how will these impact on future housing supply/sufficiency in Gwynedd?*

**Workshop 3** - *What scope is there for using the supply of housing to help support the conservation and strengthening of a distinctive Welsh language and culture - in line with 'Iaith Pawb' WAG's National Language Policy for Wales ?*

### 4. Process / Next Steps

- The notes taken at the EGS will be compiled into a report which will be presented to Gwynedd CC at the end of February 2007
- That report is likely to form an Appendix to the GCC LHS Consultation Draft document - which will go out to public consultation throughout Gwynedd during the summer of 2007
- At that point, it is anticipated that the local communities will be heavily engaged in the process of developing and finalising the new LHS.

### 5. Contacts

If we have overlooked any issues you consider to be critical at this stage, please let us know. You can contact:

- David Humphreys, Housing Policy and Performance Manager, Gwynedd CC (Email – [DavidHumphreys@gwynedd.gov.uk](mailto:DavidHumphreys@gwynedd.gov.uk)),
- Eira Hughes DipLA, MCD, MRTPI, MLI, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants (Email - [eira\\_hughes@btinternet.com](mailto:eira_hughes@btinternet.com)).

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# AFFORDABILITY

## 1. The Context

Affordable housing is defined<sup>8</sup> as -

*“housing provided to those whose needs are not met by the open market”*  
which:

- *“meet the needs of eligible households, including availability at low enough cost for them to afford, determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices; and*
- *include provision for the home to remain affordable for future eligible households, or if a home ceases to be affordable or staircasing to full ownership takes place, any subsidy should generally be recycled to provide replacement affordable housing.”*

Affordable housing can be social rented housing or intermediate housing including equity sharing schemes such as Homebuy, or an element of mixed tenure schemes<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. Major Choices – for structured discussion (plenary)

- Well over 200 affordable homes for local people have or are now in the process of being developed throughout the county as a result of the Gwynedd Affordable Housing project: how much more needs to be done?
- Given the call from the community for more affordable homes and that Welsh Assembly Ministers are keen to see more progress using the full array of ‘tools and powers’ currently available to LAs, what more can and needs to be done?
- Is intervention by the LA the only way forward? What more can the private sector do to meet this need?
- Is sufficient resource and effort being put into delivering affordable homes?
- What ideas need to be embraced in order to achieve more progress and what are the resource implications?
- How pragmatic an approach should be taken (in relation to using available sites)?
- Should public sector landowners prioritise release of ‘spare land’ for affordable housing over other possible land-uses? What would be the implications?
- Is the ‘Homebuy’ scheme a significant contribution to the problem of affordability and if so how could it be expanded?

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<sup>8</sup> WAG, TAN 2. June 2006

<sup>9</sup> WAG, MIPPS, June 2006, para 9.2.2

- Empty properties in built-up areas: should they be prioritised for action to bring them into use as affordable homes?
- Could the RSLs/HAs do more– and, if so, where should they put their effort?
- Is there any evidence on the number and/or location of sites that are available and suitable for developing affordable housing?
- Are there potential investors in regeneration / mixed tenure / affordable housing schemes in Gwynedd?

### 3. More Specific Considerations

We may need to break into workshops to consider the following issues:

**Workshop 7** - *How many ‘affordable’ homes are needed in the most urban areas of Gwynedd ( namely Bangor, Caernarfon, Pwllheli, Porthmadog, Dolgellau and Blaenau Ffestiniog), who needs them, and how might they best be provided within those settlements?*

**Workshop 8** - *How many more ‘affordable’ homes are needed in the more rural areas of Gwynedd, and how might they best be provided by the various agencies?*<sup>10</sup>

**Workshop 9** - *What is needed in order to increase the capacity to deliver more affordable housing as part of the wider and local regeneration of urban and rural areas of Gwynedd?*

### 4. Process / Next Steps

- The notes taken at the EGS will be compiled into a report which will be presented to Gwynedd CC at the end of February 2007.
- That report is likely to form an Appendix to the GCC LHS Consultation Draft document - which will go out to public consultation throughout Gwynedd and beyond during the summer of 2007.
- At that point, it is anticipated that the local communities will be heavily engaged in the process of developing and finalising the new LHS.

### 5. Contacts

If we have overlooked any issues you consider to be critical at this stage, please let us know. You can contact :

- David Humphreys, Housing Policy and Performance Manager, Gwynedd CC (Email – [DavidHumphreys@gwynedd.gov.uk](mailto:DavidHumphreys@gwynedd.gov.uk)), or
- Eira Hughes DipLA, MCD, MRTPI, MLI, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants (Email - [eira\\_hughes@btinternet.com](mailto:eira_hughes@btinternet.com)).

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<sup>10</sup> Hughes-Isherwood ‘Wales: Rural Housing Enablers – Report on the Current and Future Arrangements’ (October 2006) for Cymdeithas Tai Eryri, Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd, Gwerin HA, Pembrokeshire HA, the Welsh Fed of HAs, in partnership with the WLGA and WANPAs, and grant- aided by WAG.

## **Annex C: The Letter of Invitation**

From:  
GWYNEDD COUNTY COUNCIL  
Care Directorate  
Mona Building  
High Street  
Caernarfon  
GWYNEDD

Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2007

Dear Sir / Madam

### **GWYNEDD LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY 2007 - THE EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSIONS (February 2007)**

Gwynedd Council cordially invites you and your colleagues to attend one of the most important events of this year for housing in North Wales.

Gwynedd County Council is in the process of preparing a fresh LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY (LHS) – which will be presented in draft to the Welsh Assembly Government later in 2007.

Shelter is a fundamental need for all, and housing quality shapes lives and whole communities. We know that good housing supports employment and encourages social and environmental progress – but understanding how the housing market is working, and how to address the gaps that it is not filling, is a very delicate strategic task. And driving up standards in the existing housing stock presents many challenges and some great opportunities.

Four 'Evidence Gathering Sessions' are to be held shortly to inform Gwynedd's new LHS:

1. on 'Supply and Sufficiency'
2. on 'Quality'
3. on 'Affordability', and
4. on 'Suitability'.

An outline of the programme is attached ( see Annex 1). All four Sessions will be held in early February, in different venues across the County – to reflect the reality and variability of the County's geography – and each will start at 1.30pm and finish by 5.30pm.

We would greatly value your attendance and contribution in order to ensure that your insight, knowledge and experience fully informs the new Local Housing Strategy for the whole of Gwynedd.

The Strategy will powerfully guide housing work in Gwynedd over a 5 year period, and must look beyond that also to a time horizon of 15 years hence.

We intend that it should be a very influential document – guiding the collective effort in Gwynedd to improve housing choice, quality, availability and affordability, and also encouraging socio-economic, cultural and environmental progress.

We are inviting people and organisations with a wide range of specialist expertise, local knowledge, and particular interests of relevance – so we anticipate lively discussion and exchange of information. Those discussions will be facilitated by Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants, who are assisting us with this task (see Annex 2).

Will you help us?

**Please register now by filling and returning the attached registration form by Monday 29<sup>th</sup> January.** (see Annex 3).

NB. We will soon be issuing short Pre-meeting Briefing Note for each of the Evidence Gathering Sessions. Please make sure that you alert us to your email address – if you have one – so that we can send these out to you quickly and keep you abreast of our early thinking and future work on local housing strategy in Gwynedd.

We look forward to hearing from you...

Yours truly

DAVID HUMPHREYS  
Housing Policy and Performance Manager  
Gwynedd Council

**EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSIONS (GCC / LHS ) 2007  
CONTENTS**

**Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2007 - Housing SUPPLY / SUFFICIENCY in  
Gwynedd**

**Venue – Plas Menai, The National Watersports Centre, Caernarfon, LL55  
1UE**

*Workshop 1 - How far ahead do we need to look, how much new build is really needed in Gwynedd, and how much could be met by better use of existing stock, or re-use of derelict buildings and brownfield land?*

*Workshop 2 - What other major emerging trends need to be factored in now and how will these impact on future housing supply/sufficiency in Gwynedd?*

*Workshop 3 - What scope is there for manipulating supply to help support the conservation and strengthening of a distinctive Welsh language and culture (within the parameters laid out in current law and WAG guidance)?*

***Who should attend? We are inviting –***

- Neighbouring local authority planning and housing officers
- Housebuilders and developers
- Major landowners
- Major organisations interested in land use patterns
- Academics re socio-economics, cultural and planning issues
- WAG officials ( re statistics, planning, housing strategy)
- Experts on demography and its implications for housing
- Experts on migration issues
- Welsh language activists
- A range of Welsh language and culture organisations
- Experts on mainstreaming BME issues
- Analysts of emerging concerns (including the ageing housing stock, fuel poverty, less predictable climate, eco-efficiency, etc)
- Private and public sector town planners
- Experts on EIA (and Linguistic Impact Assessment)
- Registered Social Landlords / Housing Associations.

**Monday 5<sup>th</sup> February February 2007 - Housing QUALITY in Gwynedd  
Venue – Snowdonia National Park Study Centre, Plas Tan y Bwlch,  
Maentwrog LL41 3YU**

*Workshop 4 - What measures are needed to minimise the extent of housing in poor condition, and what scope is there for Gwynedd to deliver modern, 'zero-carbon' and energy efficient housing ?*

*Workshop 5 - Inside the home – how can Gwynedd raise the 'standards' inside new and older housing ( in all tenures) to much higher standards, and meet diverse and shifting needs and demands, quickly?*

*Workshop 6 - Beyond the front door – how can Gwynedd ensure very high standards on related matters - re safety, accessibility, quality and management of the public realm, general facilities, and good connectivity to a wide range of services and/ the local economy – to suit the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?*

***Who should attend? We are inviting –***

- Experts on the Welsh Housing Quality Standards
- Experts on sustainable construction and eco-efficiency
- Housebuilders
- Experts in local area regeneration with high design quality
- Experts on wider area renewal
- Major landowners
- The University of Wales, and FE Colleges
- Organisations with an interest in housing, land-use and its environmental impacts
- Local architects
- Local builders / small developers with much experience of adaptations, extensions and improvements
- Public and private sector town planners
- Development controllers and building regulations officers
- Experts in the state of Gwynedd's current housing stock
- Experts on mainstreaming housing need in BME communities and other special sectors of need
- Experts on external security / policing – eg Secured by Design, CCTV
- Experts on accessibility and local transportation issues
- Social care and health officials
- Housing Associations
- Chambers of Trade
- Providers of mobile services within / to Gwynedd.

**Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2007 - Housing AFFORDABILITY in Gwynedd**  
**Venue – Pwllheli Rugby Club, Parc Bodegroes, Efailnewydd, Pwllheli**  
**LL53 5TH**

*Workshop 7 - How many 'affordable' homes are needed in the most urban areas of Gwynedd ( namely Bangor, Caernarfon, Pwllheli, Porthmadog, Dolgellau and Blaenau Ffestiniog), who needs them, and how might they best be provided within those settlements?*

*Workshop 8 - How many more 'affordable' homes are needed in the more rural areas of Gwynedd, and how might they best be provided by the various agencies?*

*Workshop 9 - What is needed in order to increase the capacity to deliver more affordable housing – if/as/where needed - as part of the wider and local regeneration of urban and rural areas of Gwynedd?*

***Who should attend? We are inviting –***

- Housebuilders and private sector developers
- Major landowners / owners of large rural estates
- Public and private sector town and country planners
- WAG housing officials
- Rural policy experts and related housing experts
- Rural lobbying groups
- Specialists on affordable housing – including rural housing enablers / officers
- Estate agents and chartered surveyors
- Housing policy officers and Housing Associations.

**Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2007 - Housing SUITABILITY in Gwynedd**  
**Venue – Queen’s Hotel, 1 High Street, Blaenau Ffestiniog, LL41 3ES**

*Workshop 10 - Children, young persons and the ‘average’ family - how well does Gwynedd’s housing provide for younger residents, and what further evidence is needed on how to help them, and where?*

*Workshop 11 - The fit and frail elderly - how good is the research into and provision of housing for older residents in Gwynedd, and what further evidence and provision is needed on their needs?*

*Workshop 12 - Special categories of people - how well does Gwynedd research and help provide appropriate housing for (i) the BEM community, (ii) asylum seekers, (iii) gypsies and travellers, (iv) farm labourers / contract workers, (v) rough sleepers, (vi) the homeless, (vii) victims of domestic violence, (viii) legal immigrants, (ix) the severely disabled, (x) those with mental health problems, (xi) those with addiction issues, (xii) ex-offenders, (xiii) ex armed forces people and (xiv) any other vulnerable groups and individuals (eg those with learning difficulties)? What does it do really well, and where can it improve, and how?*

***Who should attend? We are inviting –***

- Experts on children’s services
- Experts on the fit and frail elderly and their lifestyles.
- Specialists in home adaptations
- The University and FE Colleges
- Public and private sector town planners
- WAG Housing officials
- Housebuilders and small builders
- Housing Associations
- Experts in services for the elderly ( Social Care, Hospitals and Clinics, the NHS)
- Experts on equalities, and vulnerable minority groups and their issues – including CRE, gypsy communities, contract workers, the disabled, those with mental health problems, women’s support groups, etc.
- Managers of current and planned exemplar projects for vulnerable groups
- Experts on housing policy and finance

## ANNEX 2

### THE FACILITATORS for the EGSs (GCC / LHS ) 2007 HUGHES – ISHERWOOD

Hughes -Isherwood Regeneration Consultants are specialists in -

- Regional Policy and Spatial Planning
- Devising Deliverable Regeneration Schemes
- Sustainable Development in Urban and Rural Areas
- Countryside and Heritage Conservation

Working for Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants on this Contract are -

EIRA HUGHES DipLA, MCD, MRTPI, MLI ( Director, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants) is also an Enabler for the Transform South Yorkshire HMR Pathfinder Scheme, and a SOLACE Enterprises Associate. She was previously Executive Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhood Services for an English Unitary Council, with a focus on devising, master-planning and delivering major regeneration schemes and before that she was the Director of Planning, Environment and Regional Policy Co-ordination for the Government Office for the North West (of England). Previous to that she was Head of Conservation Policy and Advice and Chief Planner for the Countryside Council for Wales; and worked on housing and planning policy and practical regeneration schemes for Newport and Arfon Borough Councils, and Manchester City Council. Eira is professionally qualified as a town planner and a landscape architect.

BARON ISHERWOOD BA (Econ), PhD ( Director, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants) is currently advising the French Government on regeneration best practice in the UK. He was previously Director of Regeneration for the North West Development Agency, in England, with responsibility for many major regeneration programmes and initiatives; and before that he was Director of Strategy ( and Regeneration) for the Government Office for the North West - where he managed very major (Single Regeneration Budget and EU) programmes. He has also been a Regional Controller for Housing, for GONW. He held a range of civil service posts in Whitehall on health, housing and environmental issues; and, also worked on agricultural economics for the international Food and Agriculture Organisation in Rome. Baron is an economist.

DAVID BRIGHTMORE Dip.BAdmin, DipAD ( HIRC Associate) is the Former Chief Executive of the North Wales Housing Association, a Former Chair of Newydd Housing Association (in South Wales), and the Former Chair of the Oriel Plas Glyn-y-Weddw Trust. Previous to that he worked for a number of public and private sector agencies on housing renewal, including Abbey National Building Society (as an inner-city housing co-ordinator), and as Head

of Renewal Strategies in Newport Borough Council's Housing Department: and he also worked in a private sector architectural practice in South Wales. David is now principally an exhibiting artist.



[www.hughes-isherwood.com](http://www.hughes-isherwood.com)

Main Contacts:

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Tel – +44 (0)1352 752 383

Email - [eira\\_hughes@btinternet.com](mailto:eira_hughes@btinternet.com)

Tyn-y-gornel, Gwernaffield Road, MOLD, Flintshire. CH7 1RE

MANCHESTER – Baron Isherwood BA, PhD.

Tel – +44 (0)161 486 9853

Email - [Baron.Isherwood@btinternet.com](mailto:Baron.Isherwood@btinternet.com)

2B Hilltop Avenue, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire. SK8 7HN

## ANNEX 3

### EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSIONS (GCC / LHS ) 2007 REGISTRATION FORM

**1<sup>st</sup> February 2007 - Housing SUPPLY / SUFFICIENCY in Gwynedd**

Name :	
Title:	
Org:	
Email address:	
Do you want to attend this EGS ?      YES/NO      ( <i>Please indicate.</i> )	
<i>If yes, please select a Workshop -.</i>	
Workshop 1 -	YES/NO
Workshop 2 –	YES/NO
Workshop 3 –	YES/NO

**5<sup>th</sup> February 2007 - Housing QUALITY in Gwynedd**

Name :	
Title:	
Org:	
Email address:	
Do you want to attend this EGS ?      YES/NO      ( <i>Please indicate.</i> )	
<i>If yes, please select a Workshop -.</i>	
Workshop 4 -	YES/NO
Workshop 5 –	YES/NO
Workshop 6 –	YES/NO

## 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2007 - Housing AFFORDABILITY in Gwynedd

Name :	
Title:	
Org:	
Email address:	
Do you want to attend this EGS ?    YES/NO    ( <i>Please indicate.</i> )	
<i>If yes, please select a Workshop -.</i>	
Workshop 7 -	YES/NO
Workshop 8 –	YES/NO
Workshop 9 –	YES/NO

## 6<sup>th</sup> February 2007 - Housing SUITABILITY in Gwynedd

Name :	
Title:	
Org:	
Email address:	
Do you want to attend this EGS ?    YES/NO    ( <i>Please indicate.</i> )	
<i>If yes, please select a Workshop –</i>	
Workshop 10 -	YES/NO
Workshop 11 –	YES/NO
Workshop 12 –	YES/NO

**Please fill and return this Registration Form** either by –

- (i) email (to [JulieEJones@gwynedd.gov.uk](mailto:JulieEJones@gwynedd.gov.uk)), or
- (ii) phone (to 01286 679481 in Gwynedd Council), or
- (iii) fax (to 01286 679071 in Gwynedd Council), or
- (iv) letter (to Julie E Jones, Admin Assistant (Housing Policy), Care Directorate, Mona Building, High Street, Caernarfon, Gwynedd).

## Annex D: The Evidence Gathering Form

### EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSIONS (GCC / LHS ) 2007 EVIDENCE GATHERING FORM

Your Name :
Title:
Org:
Email address:

Theme of the Session / Workshop	
SUPPLY / SUFFICIENCY	YES/NO
QUALITY	YES/NO
AFFORDABILITY	YES/NO
SUITABILITY	YES/NO

POINT OF FACTUAL INFORMATION / HARD EVIDENCE :
SOURCE / YEAR / REF re THAT INFORMATION :
CONTEXT:

**Please fill and hand in this Evidence Gathering Form at the end of the Evidence Gathering Session.**

## **Annex E: The Format for Evidence Gathering Sessions**

### **STRATEGAETH TAI LLEOL GWYNEDD 2007 Y Sesiynau Casglu Tystiolaeth**

### **GWYNEDD LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY 2007 The Evidence Gathering Sessions**

**1.15 - 1.30**

Cofrestru / Registration

**1.30 - 1.45**

***Croeso ( Eira Hughes, Ymgynghorwyr Adfywio Hughes–Isherwood)***

***Welcome ( Eira Hughes, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants)***

**1.45 - 2.00**

***Cyflwyniad ar Thema'r Dydd (gan Dr. Baron Isherwood)***

***Presentation on the Theme of the Day (by Dr. Baron Isherwood)***

**2.00 - 3-00**

***Trafodaeth ar Brif Thema y Sesiwn (Eira Hughes i lywio)***

***Discussion on the Main Theme of the Session (Eira Hughes to steer)***

**3.00 - 3.15**

Gorffwys / Break

**3.15 - 4.00**

***Y 3 Gweithdy - CG(DH), HIRC (EH a BI) i lywio***

***The 3 Workshops - GCC(DH), HIRC(EH and BI) to steer***

**4.00 - 4.45**

***Adrodd yn Ôl - o'r Gweithdai***

***Report Back – from the Workshops***

**4.45 - 5.00**

***Trafodaeth ar Faterion Tai Lleol Eraill***

***Discussion on Other Local Housing Matters***

**5.00 - 5-30**

Cau y Sesiwn / Close the Session

## Annex F : The Attendees / Contributors

### INVITEES WHO WERE ABLE TO ATTEND ONE OR MORE OF THE FACILITATED EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSIONS

Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd	Gwynne Jones Housing Director
Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd	Noela Jones Housing Manager
Cymdeithas Tai Eryri	Walis George Chief Executive
Gwynedd County Council	Emyr Vaughn Evans Policy and Performance Manager, Care Directorate
Gwynedd County Council	Susan Griffiths Manager, Homelessness and Supported Housing Unit
Gwynedd County Council	Meirion Griffith Senior Research Officer
Gwynedd County Council	Darren Griffiths Strategic Co-ordinator – Children and Young People
Gwynedd County Council	David Humphreys Manager, Housing Policy and Performance
Gwynedd County Council	Arwel E Jones Senior Manager, Policy and Operations
Gwynedd County Council	Bethan Wyn Jones Gypsies and Travellers Links
Gwynedd County Council	<i>Cllr.</i> Linda Ann Wyn Jones Lead Member, Housing Portfolio
Gwynedd County Council	Vernon Jones Grants Officer
Gwynedd County Council	Dafydd Lewis Strategic Director - Care

Gwynedd County Council	Sheila Phillips Senior Supporting People Officer
Gwynedd County Council	Catherine Roberts Senior Community Safety Officer
Gwynedd County Council	Janet Roberts Housing Co-ordinator – Older People
Gwynedd County Council	Meirion Roberts Grants Officer - Disabled Facilities
Gwynedd County Council	Dewi Rowlands Strategic Director - Environment
Gwynedd County Council	G. Rhys Thomas Manager – Private Sector Housing
Gwynedd County Council	Ffrancon Williams Head of the Housing Service
Gwynedd County Council	Rhys Alun Williams Policy Officer
Gwynedd County Council	<i>Cllr.</i> R.H. Wyn Williams Senior Lead Member - Environment
Gwynedd County Council	<i>Cllr.</i> John Wyn Williams Senior Lead Member - Care
Gwynedd County Council and Gwynedd Local Health Board	Shan Lloyd Williams Strategy and Health Partnerships Co-ordinator
Gwynedd Tenants & Residents Federation	Margaret Bracegirdle Secretary
Gwynedd Tenants & Residents Federation	Val Jones Member (GTRF)
Gwynedd Tenants & Residents Federation	Parc Lari Member (GTRF)
Gwynedd Tenants & Residents Federation	Alan Moseley Member (GTRF)
Gwynedd Tenants & Residents Federation	John Owen Member (GTRF)

Gwynedd Tenants & Residents Federation	Dilys Pritchard Member (GTRF)
NACRO Cymru	Julie Simonsen Project Worker
North Wales Housing Association	Paul Diggory Chief Executive
North Wales Housing Association	Lynne Evans Head of Supported Housing
North Wales Housing Association	Colin Halliwell Maintenance Manager
Shelter Cymru	De Hathaway NW Area Service Manager
Snowdonia National Park Authority	Carys Dafydd Communities Officer
South Gwynedd Women's Support	Elwen Roberts Development Officer
Rural Housing Enablers (Wales)	Arfon Hughes RHE (for Dwyfor & Meirionnydd)
UNDOD	Charles Simkiss Programme Director
University of Wales (Bangor)	Amy Hunt Student Housing Officer
University of Wales (Bangor)	Tracey Morris Housing Assistant - Student Housing Officer

## Annex G : Other Invitees

OTHER ORGANISATIONS INVITED - BUT NOT ABLE TO ATTEND MEETINGS OR TO SUBMIT COMMENTS AT THIS STAGE

Adam and Francis Voelcker (Architects)  
Age Concern – Gwynedd / Mon  
Agorfa Bond Scheme  
Ap Thomas Partnership (Architects)  
Arriva Bus Co. – North West and Wales  
Bartlett School of Planning (UCL)  
Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZed)  
Bellway Homes Wales  
Berwyn Parry Builders Ltd  
BT Group plc  
Building and Social Housing Foundation  
Cadw (WAG)  
Cariad Care Homes  
Carter Jonas  
Centre for Research in the Built Environment  
Centre for Social Policy Research and Development  
Cerrig yr Afon Residential Home  
Chartered Institute of Housing Wales  
Chester, Ellesmere Port and North Wales Chamber of Commerce  
Children in Wales  
Coleg Menai  
Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)(Wales)  
Communities First  
Community Development Wales  
Community Housing Wales  
Conwy County Council  
Country Landowners and Business Association (Wales)  
Countryside Council for Wales  
Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales  
Cwlwm  
Cyfle Support Services  
Cymdeithas yr Iaith  
Cymorth Llaw Ltd  
Cynefin Environmental Consultants  
Daron Builders  
David Wilson Homes (North West)  
Denbighshire County Council  
Department of Work and Pensions  
Design Commission for Wales  
Enviro-build  
Farmers Union of Wales  
GISDA  
Heritage Builders Ltd  
Home Builders Federation (Wales)

Inner World  
Institute of Rural Health  
Institute of Welsh Affairs  
Isle of Anglesey County Council  
Johnnie Johnson Housing  
Mencap  
Menter Iaith Gwynedd  
Merched y Wawr  
Miller Homes – North West  
National Trust – Wales  
North Wales Police  
North Wales Race Equality Network  
North West Wales NHS Trust  
North Wales Wildlife Trust  
Portmeirion Hotel and Trust  
Redrow Homes (North West) Ltd.  
Social Services Improvement Agency - Gwynedd  
Substance Misuse Services  
Tesco  
The Alzheimers Society (Gwynedd)  
The Regeneration Institute  
The Snowdonia Society  
Urban Splash  
Urdd Gobaith Cymru  
Wales Careers Service  
Wales Rural Observatory  
Watkin-Jones Construction Ltd  
Welsh Assembly Government  
Welsh Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs (WISCA)  
Welsh Language Board  
Women's Support Group – Bangor and District  
Young Farmers Clubs (Wales)  
Youth Offenders Team – Gwynedd

## Annex H: Evidence Gathered at Two Sessions

Held on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> FEB 2007 - at Plas Tan-y-Bwlch, Maentwrog, and the Queens Hotel, Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Below, we set out the evidence gathered.

### A. HOUSING IN GWYNEDD IN GENERAL

Overall stock / replenishment– about 200 new houses a year are added to the stock (ie an annual addition of less than 0.5%).

Council Housing (8,500 properties or 15% of the 56,600 housing stock in 2000, but reducing since then to c. 6,300 properties) will need to meet the WHQS by 2012, but there are insufficient resources (the estimated cost is c. £360M) to achieve that at present. The Council is currently consulting with tenants about a possible stock transfer scheme which would raise the resources available to treat existing problems in the existing stock. However, many doubt whether there is sufficient time to meet that target.

Yet in some areas (eg Bethesda where the council housing is pre-war) it is claimed that it would be a waste of money to bring them up to the WHQS, and that many should be pulled down. Examples were given of fuel poverty, inefficient and ineffective attempts to put it right, poor managerial control of installation staff (eg double glazing fitted to unheated outside toilets and garages, yet no money for insulated doors), and no overall approach to the regeneration of small areas (eg not addressing external environmental problems such as rubbish-strewn roads and rivers).

Over half the private sector stock (77% of which 67% is owner-occupied) was built before 1919. Almost one in ten are unfit. House prices are relatively low, reflecting relatively low incomes. The question is whether to invest in renewal areas built for the Victorian area that do not meet the needs of modern life. However, demolition remains an emotional issue. The level of grant activity at £3M pa is only a third of a few years ago and entirely inadequate to deal with the estimated £147M of repairs required. What really needs to be unlocked is the personal equity in this sector, particularly for the 75% of owner occupiers without mortgages, which might amount to £3.5 Billion.

Recent changes in legislation, in particular the abandonment of the unfitness standard, are very significant. In place of objective criteria established under the 1957 Act in relation to dampness, roofing problems, wall cracks, etc, the measuring stick (the WHQS) is now more subjective. Even so, few of the private sector dwellings are likely to satisfy it. With individual grants no longer readily available, it falls to the Council to decide how it is going to meet the continued needs in the private sector, and how it is going to target its very limited resources. New mechanisms are required to decide who is to receive a grant. The Council needs to maintain a flexible approach.

The current owners are thought to be often asset-rich but cash-poor. The scope for persuading people to realise part of the asset value in order to repair and upgrade their property would seem to be great. There may be complications (eg. in terms of impact on benefit entitlement) to be addressed, and recent research on the extent and effectiveness of equity release schemes in England found very few households availing themselves of the opportunities. But if it could be pursued in Gwynedd such investment would have many wider benefits ( eg boosting local building trades and the local economy). The key question for the Council is what it might do in partnership with others in order both to dispel the concerns and to accelerate and facilitate such investment.

Meanwhile, the Council is investing in area renewal approaches ( eg a Renewal Area in Blaenau Ffestiniog). This certainly, judging from the experience of Beacon authorities in England, is the right way to go. In addition to dealing with physical housing conditions, area renewal offers the prospect of addressing other concerns such as safety and security, education and health, and the quality of the environment.

The private rented sector (10%) poses a particular problem for the Council – the quality of accommodation is low on average, and the council are not necessarily aware of which houses are being rented out. There appears to be intimidation, in the sense that those who wish to improve rented housing are frightened of receiving eviction notices, and protection for private lettings is perceived as very weak. People are afraid to complain.

The key problem in both the owner-occupied and private rented sector is affordability, with 2-up/2-down cottages selling typically for £100,000 yet average incomes in the order of £15,000.

Many of the problems with the stock and the working of the housing market stem from the fact that the original reasons for providing housing in many locations are no longer there – either very small houses in mining villages or even large family houses along the coast. Considerable economic and social changes have had and are having an effect on the housing stock. Many are past their useful life. There are big problems on which big decisions are needed. It is important to move away from palliative care and seek better ideas and examples (from outside the area, and using the experience of consultants) of good practice.

Unfitness – c. 9% of the dwellings in Gwynedd are likely to be unfit and the majority are in the private sector. It is estimated that improving the unfit properties might cost c £147M. In the late twentieth century, Gwynedd, like most other local authorities, provided generous grant-aid towards the cost of repairing older properties. But, the current budget for housing investment of c. £3M /annum does not offer the prospect of making much progress through that route. Other ways forward must be found.

Local regeneration effectiveness – there ought to be one point of contact for area regeneration schemes, to cover all aspects of development, management

*and maintenance with the responsibility and power to co-ordinate private and council activities.*

*Private sector grants should be accompanied by restrictive clauses on onward sale.*

*It would be desirable to align housing benefits in the private sector and council housing.*

## **B. HOUSING QUALITY**

*The Role of Design – there should be greater use of good architects, both in relation to housing and landscape, to meet overall the Welsh objective of being a green and pleasant country. Examples to look at included:*

- exemplar housing from the Design Council for Wales' competitions*
- South Yorkshire – very high standards adopted for new housing*
- Salford (eg.Langworthy) – for innovative design, and*
- better use of materials could be specified in Building Regulations.*

*Targeting – demonstration projects are needed to raise the aspirations of residents, who need to be more involved in the development of ideas for renewal areas, and improve the performance of private sector developers and renovators.*

*Area regeneration schemes - need greater emphasis on replacement rather than repair, much of which merely has to be repeated in the not too distant future.*

*Redundant property - eg hotels along the coast ought to be brought back into productive use, and flats over shops where insurance issues can be resolved, which could also lead to a more active street scene in Gwynedd's towns and villages.*

*Overall quality of life - greater emphasis needs to be given to aspects of the quality of life available to the elderly and the young in particular, and to their leisure needs.*

*Better monitoring of contractor performance is essential to ensure value for money and good quality.*

*More and better private sector developers need to be encouraged to work in Gwynedd.*

*Alternative procurement models should be explored, for example companies at arms-length from the local authority, possibly developed out of existing local authority teams benefiting from 'soft-contracts', focussed very narrowly on service delivery.*

Advice and information - Council responsibilities need to extend to providing advice and information on quality of renewal and repair to both private and public sector residents.

Council housing renovation – in addition to better heating and insulation, more attention needs to be paid to kitchens, which are often far too small.

Owner-occupiers – need better education on the importance of maintaining their property, possibly by the introduction of a Charter Mark, or incentives via council tax discounts for well-maintained properties.

Landlords - need better training in their obligations to tenants, and a system of accreditation may help achieve that.

### **THE THREE WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS: HOUSING QUALITY**

**What measures are needed to minimise the extent of housing in poor condition, and what scope is there for Gwynedd to deliver modern, ‘zero-carbon’ and energy efficient housing ?**

The big challenges are –

- the age of the stock, and the poor condition and unfitness in much of it
- insufficient grant-aid monies to trigger swift improvement, and
- the cramped spaces within older houses – kitchens spaces in older houses are often tiny and in no way match modern space standards and aspirations.

These problems could be better addressed by -

- leveraging in more private sector investment
- helping small local builder/developer firms to develop
- encouraging ‘community entrepreneurs’ to meet local service needs
- using local knowledge on how best to approach key people
- ensuring tenant involvement (as in recent SRB schemes), and
- avoiding the tendency to revert to ‘them and us’ (tenants / owners) discussions when projects reach the fine scale detailed design stage.

Incentives might help –

- eg. 10% discount off council tax if certain ‘green fittings’ are fitted.

**Inside the home – how can Gwynedd raise the ‘standards’ inside new and older housing ( all tenures) to much higher levels, to meet diverse and shifting needs and demands, quickly?**

Within Gwynedd, the challenges are –

- the large number of very cold, hard to heat dwellings in Gwynedd
- getting private sector owner occupiers to manage and maintain their property to higher standards
- changing the local culture from repairs grant-dependency to private investment utilising savings and equity value

- *the implications of the new and more sophisticated (post 2004) ‘fitness standard’*
- *finding new ways to tackle ‘redundant’ properties, and*
- *balancing the need to prune the dead wood out of the old stock (ie demolish and/or replace) with the need to maintain the distinctive character and heritage of Gwynedd).*

*Particular challenges included –*

- *lack of clarity about future student numbers in Gwynedd, and*
- *maintaining the current good progress in improving student accommodation, and*
- *finding new roles for former coastal guest houses.*

*Opportunities included –*

- *scope for a Charter Mark scheme for small builders who assist in delivering the private sector improvements needed.*

*Lingering problems included –*

- *the sheer number of second homes in certain settlements.*

***Beyond the front door : how can Gwynedd ensure very high standards on related matters – in relation to safety, accessibility, quality and management of the public realm, general facilities, and good connectivity to a wide range of services and the local economy – to suit the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?***

*The context is –*

- *an older housing stock with few new houses (60 new in the Snowdonia National Park area, and 120 new in the rest of Gwynedd, last year), and*
- *local HAs / RSLs working together and with the Council (under the ‘UNDOD’ initiative) to share knowledge and experience.*

*Local socio-economic research suggested that -*

- *life outside Gwynedd’s towns is far more expensive*
- *rural households pay more and get a lower level of services*
- *the cost of travelling from rural areas (into work, shops and hospitals) is high, and*
- *this coupled with low incomes creates problems which need to be addressed by a wider range of strategies.*

*More generally, the Workshop considered that there was a need -*

- *to boost the local economy further (so as to ensure proper private housing maintenance and improvement)*
- *to focus more on addressing ‘real needs’ and not just ‘grant-chasing’, and*
- *to realise that the increasingly fragile older housing stock in Gwynedd would fail more frequently and extensively if – as predicted - exposed to stronger storms and winds, in coming decades.*

*The Council's recent local researches also suggest that –*

- *traffic is a major concern in relation to young people's safety, especially*
- *this concern is strongest on late 1950s ex-Council estates*
- *parking and garaging arrangements are often a problem*
- *use of 'Secured by Design' standards is desirable, everywhere, and*
- *local residents need advice on how to retro-fit and improve older property in a cost-effective and professional manner.*

*Suggestions are that –*

- *land 'surplus to requirement' following reviews (eg redundant school buildings and grounds) could be used to pump-prime local regeneration schemes, and*
- *more could be done to reuse flats over shops (as 99% are unused - mostly because of highly restricted 'through-the-shop-only' access, and health and safety issues)*

*The bright spots are –*

- *the 'Local Collaborative Framework' for improving older estates, which is working well*
- *the interest expressed by local housing associations in doing more work with the Council to improve particular estates / areas, and*
- *feedback from tenants which suggested that they very much appreciated new double glazing and good heating systems in their homes, and that once those were installed tight space standards ceased to be viewed as a problem.*

*Related issues still to be addressed are –*

- *the lack of a 'Welsh Lettings Standard'*
- *the lack of good ( building skills) tradesmen in Gwynedd*
- *reluctance to take on apprentices lest they become competitors later*
- *the fact that the RSLs also have problems of poor quality older stock to address (eg Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd – 20% of its stock consists of older terraced housing and even among the 80% which is 'newish' – there is a lot which does not meet the WHQS)*
- *the reality that much older housing (even when substantially improved) would not / could not meet all aspects of the WQHS (which was perceived to be a very high standard to meet), and*
- *the need for rigorous 'options appraisals' in respect of potential investment in more or better housing (including unconventional options).*

*Aesthetics -*

- *Gwynedd design standards are established - but not well known, and*
- *they needed to be communicated to people / prospective applicants / developers, etc.*

*Exposure to the elements is an issue –*

- *especially for old and ageing housing stock on hillsides*
- *exposure to high winds and rain, and*

- *houses located tightly against hillsides and each other, spatially – which often made it very difficult to find room for level / easy access, and also much needed environmental and infrastructure improvements.*

### **C. HOUSING SUITABILITY**

#### ***In respect of the Existing Housing Stock -***

*The stock is the product of past development, much of it in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. That, plus steep terrain, narrow roads and restricted access to support facilities limits the adaptability of Gwynedd's existing stock.*

*Large, seaside, former boarding house are as difficult to adapt to meet current uses and expectations as much of the older Victorian terraced houses.*

*Tenants' view - their representatives said - is that the repair work to council-owned property (carried out by contractors) is unsatisfactory, and the perception is that it would be better if every piece of repair work done was checked by the Council's own staff, afterwards. It was suggested that the Council were concerned to "passify rather than satisfy" tenants. And some tenants were reported to be reluctant to complain about poor workmanship – fearing they might be evicted if they did so.*

*In the PUBLIC SECTOR – the WHQS set the pace, and the Council's plans were now in place. The proposal to move towards an LSVT approach would follow the usual procedures during the course of 2007.*

*In the PRIVATE SECTOR – the situation is more complex, and a number of points were made (in the workshop discussions) on this, as follows:*

- *Suitability in general -*
  - *better information is needed on improvements in the rate of decline of older properties, for which more resources are required*
  - *'accreditation' of private rental properties was on the 'wish-list', and work was ongoing in Gwynedd to raise standards in much of the private rented stock*
  - *new/replacement dwellings should be superior to the existing ones in many ways – but there is a need to balance that with maintaining the character of places, and the local heritage, and*
  - *redundant property types (eg seaside hotels) need to be tackled.*
- *Student Accommodation -*
  - *there was a lack of take-up by student landlords in area renewal schemes*
  - *but quality issues were being addressed in new development being built for student accommodation*
  - *the true demand for student accommodation needed to be established more clearly, and*
  - *there were also environmental issues in relation to student accommodation.*

- *Environmental / Ecological Issues -*
  - *excessively cold houses were seen as a big issues (poor insulation / high heating costs) in the older private stock*
  - *but it might be too early as yet to set a standard.*
  
- *Grant and Other Assistance -*
  - *private owners were now being made aware of the fact that the Council could no longer offer grants on demand to improve private housing*
  - *and perhaps incentives could be used – perhaps Council tax based ones for self-funded improvements and repairs – and initiatives to offer discounts in related fields (eg. repairs materials)*
  - *perhaps there could also be incentives for new build schemes – both more encouragement and rewards, and*
  - *there was scope to link this to the current interest in environmental issues (eg. energy efficiency, and the health benefits of housing improvements).*
  
- *Management Issues -*
  - *more training is clearly needed for landlords in housing management (given their general will to ‘do more’).*
  
- *Information and Advice -*
  - *there is a need to educate private owners on the importance of maintaining their property and the responsibilities of home-ownership, and*
  - *the local authority could/should provide general advice and guidance, and*
  - *‘accredited’ builders could be useful in helping to implement it.*

*Overall - the session concluded that there may be a danger of over-reliance and focus on one sector at the expense of others: all tenures needed to be addressed, and more rented property, more self-build schemes and more renovated property is needed in Gwynedd.*

### **THE THREE WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS on SUITABILITY**

***Children, young persons and the ‘average’ family - how well does Gwynedd’s housing provide for younger residents, and what further evidence is needed on how to help them, and where?***

***Children / Young People -***

*The greatest needs are in relation to 16-18 year olds, especially in rural areas.*

*Better use could be made of empty properties, although the fact that those younger than 18 years old cannot get a tenancy is a complication. In addition, private rents are often too high for young people to afford even when receiving Housing Benefit.*

*Better design and adaptation of the built form may provide some solutions – for example, in relation to the development of ‘foyer’ schemes for the young.*

*Family break up imposes extra demands on the housing stock – one family effectively becomes two, with both needing properties with rooms to properly accommodate all the children on visits.*

*Ceasing of funding of the Bangor Child-Care Centre has increased problems on that estate.*

*Also, the number of children with disabilities is increasing.*

***The fit and frail elderly - how good is the research into and provision of housing for older residents in Gwynedd, and what further evidence and provision is needed on their needs?***

***The Elderly –***

*Some accommodation, particularly that with shared bathrooms and with small rooms and unable to accommodate visitors, is no longer popular whereas schemes such as that in Dolgellau offering 2 bedrooms, a living room and a dedicated front door, are not at all difficult to let although the consequence is there is little onward movement from this type of property.*

*In rural areas, most elderly people would like to move into bungalows.*

*Equity release (and/or loans repayable of later sales) could in principle provide extra resources for elderly people although there may be considerable practical problems.*

*Ceasing the ‘Right to Buy’ should be considered.*

*Despite the high proportion of elderly people there has been little interest expressed in developing specialist gated estates, and other private semi-sheltered accommodation for the elderly in Gwynedd. But there are 5 residential homes in Bangor.*

*Consideration is being given by Council officials to the need for extra provision of some sort for the frail elderly – either where they are currently living (so that they maintain maximum independence) or in ‘extra care’ accommodation. But the latter would require development / probably mixed tenure – supported by Social Housing Grant from WAG.*

***Special categories of people - how well does Gwynedd research and help provide appropriate housing for (i) the BEM community, (ii) asylum seekers, (iii) gypsies and travellers, (iv) farm labourers / contract workers, (v) rough sleepers, (vi) the homeless, (vii) victims of domestic violence, (viii) legal immigrants, (ix) the severely disabled, (x) those with mental health problems, (xi) those with addiction issues, (xii) ex-offenders, (xiii) ex armed forces people and (xiv) any other vulnerable groups and***

**individuals (eg those with learning difficulties)? What does it do really well, and where can it improve, and how?**

**(i) The BEM Community**

*The Chinese are scattered throughout the County, usually in the take away / restaurant business, and are self-sufficient in terms of housing. They also seem to be very well integrated (eg a family in Blaenau Ffestiniog who are Welsh speakers and very much a part of the local community).*

*The BME communities are very well integrated in the hospital / health sector and the University of Wales at Bangor – often working as consultants / doctors at Ysbyty Gwynedd, or as lecturers / researchers / students at the University. The perception is that the permanent BEM community in Gwynedd is generally successful and well-housed.*

*The Black Environment Network has its HQ in Llanberis.*

**(ii) Asylum Seekers**

*There had been a wave of Kashmiri asylum seekers fairly recently: that has, so far, posed no problems. Their numbers tapered off as ‘designated areas’ were identified.*

**(iii) Gypsies and Travellers**

*There is an unmet demand for facilities suitable for gypsies in Wales - the network of local authority Gypsy Traveller sites requires some £3 million of additional expenditure over the next 5 years to bring it to a good standard of repair – this could amount to some 200 - 250 long stay site places by 2011 ...and additional places for 100-150 families on transit sites.*

*Cf. The Accommodation Needs of Gypsy / Travellers in Wales; Local Government and Public Services Committee, March 2006 analyses the state and quality of Gypsy sites in Wales – and deals with the provision of such sites in Wales.*

*There is no such thing as a single gypsy category – in addition to the ‘traditional’ Romany, there are Irish gypsies/travellers moving from fair to fair (who come over in large numbers for the summer and then return to Ireland), Welsh gypsies, English gypsies, and ‘New Age’ families who tend to use illegal sites – and therefore no single site would satisfy their needs. There is also frequent disagreement between these groups, though generally the Romany and Irish contingents get on. Traditional housing is unacceptable to gypsy families.*

*The gypsy population is growing and is projected to increase by 4-5K across England and Wales over the next few years – so further investment generally is likely to be needed.*

*In North Wales, only Wrexham, Flintshire and Gwynedd County Councils make provision for gypsies, at present: Anglesey, Conwy and Denbighshire do not.*

Gwynedd needs at least one extra large permanent site and a number of other smaller temporary sites (their locations dependent on travelling patterns).

When in or on the 'permanent' gypsy sites, the residents pay rent, electricity, and Council Tax.

**(iv) Farm Labourers / Contract Workers**

Farm workers moving out of tied cottages as farms cut costs are sometimes an issue. Local authority resistance to change of use of accommodation to permanent dwellings on the open market limits the use of this as a housing resource.

**(v) Rough Sleepers**

Rough sleepers: usually male, mostly ex-prisoners, and half in Bangor: but the numbers are not large overall (14 at the last count). The number of rough sleepers is now thought to be fewer than 10 (and is to be investigated by a survey scheduled for March 2007).

**(vi) The Homeless**

In the north of the County, particularly in Bangor and Caernarfon, the main issue is lack of suitable accommodation for homeless young people, to the extent that only 14 people were able to move on last year, compared to almost 40 people in earlier years, meaning that they have to stay in unsuitable accommodation for up to 14 months compared to 3-4 months previously: 4 times as many people need to be accommodated as can be accommodated.

In the south of the County, both family and young people's accommodation is needed (although no precise numbers are available).

Over 600 people between 16 and 25 needed support in finding housing (60% male, 40% female), but very few of them could be directly helped.

Housing for young offenders can be relatively successful at an individual level for a short time, but because of bottlenecks caused by being unable to find alternative accommodation within the 28 days required under the legislation, there is little possibility of providing continuity in housing provision for this group.

Hidden homelessness is thought to be significant, but cannot be uncovered by normal methods.

Accommodation is lacking in general for single men, across the County but most especially in Bangor and Caernarfon. Only 8 can be accommodated in the NWA Hostel in Bangor, and the typical stay has quadrupled in recent years - extending to 14 months - because of lack of move-on accommodation. There is a decreasing prospect also of moving people on into Council accommodation.

*Lack of a day centre for the homeless is a problem (as they need somewhere where they can get information, advice, rest, showers, etc.). But despite money being available to build /provide one, it has not happened. Difficulty in getting planning permission is one issue. Political support - in the face of strong resistance from local communities - may be difficult to retain.*

#### **(vii) Victims of Domestic Violence**

*Accommodation to deal with domestic violence is available in 2 units, in Blaenau Ffestiniog and Bangor, and is better than in recent years, but finding accommodation in a preferred area is difficult, and more expenditure is required on security measures. Goods locks and good lighting help a lot. The Police are supportive.*

#### **(viii) Legal Immigrants**

*There has been a community of Poles in Gwynedd, in a special settlement near Pwllheli, since the Second World War.*

*There are increasing numbers of immigrants in Gwynedd, including Poles and other Eastern Europeans – but they tend to be crammed into private rented accommodation / hotels, and there is no evidence as yet of housing need, although many will be able to establish a 12 month legal connection ere long, and may then present themselves as having a housing need.*

*NACRO and Shelter have noticed a number of Portuguese people in the Bangor area, plus women from the Philippines (enticed as potential wives).*

#### **(ix) The Disabled**

*80% of adaptations are age-related.*

*A key problem is that 'communities are breaking down' and families no longer look after each other to the same extent – yet there are insufficient Council resources to care for disabled people, and such money as is available from insurance is very rarely spent on facilities.*

*There is no planning for disabled homes – a proposed one, in Criccieth, did not in the event get planning permission.*

*Instead of residential homes, the strategy is to provide extra care and facilities in family houses, although often disabled people do not want to live in areas where such dwellings are available. Adding on 'mobile units' as extensions would be difficult because of the physical constraints experienced in terrace housing, and there was a risk of resulting stigmatisation.*

*The 'Lifetimes Homes' programme is helpful, but will not release additional stock.*

*One particular example was found as a result of RHE work, in Llanbedr and Harlech, where 27 families need smaller homes rather than the 5-bedroom houses currently occupied.*

*No links are currently being made with private developers in relation to disabled housing.*

*The number of children with disabilities is increasing.*

### **(x) People with Mental Health Problems**

*Mental health issues are largely ignored at present.*

*People with mental health problems often strongly resist being identified as such - even when medically diagnosed, because they fear stigmatisation. Referral to Community Health Teams may also be resisted for that reason.*

*Such people often have other problems to contend with – perhaps alcohol – which increases the risk of anti-social behaviour which then creates and perpetuates homelessness: and street (no address) homelessness means that they cannot access services, even if they decide that they want to.*

### **(xi) People with Addiction Issues (Alcoholism / Other Drug Dependency)**

*Those with alcohol problems are greater in numbers than drug addicts, although the latter are more demanding even with their access to the Doorstep project. (The 'Doorstep' project can purchase properties up to a value of £75K for 'dry' addicts, but it is very difficult to find properties at that price.)*

*A 'wet hostel' for alcoholics who have yet to give up drinking is needed. Most hostels have a 'no alcohol' policy. Once someone has lost their hostel tenancy, they are in great difficulty. Loss of a local authority tenancy is almost irreversible, also. Alcoholics who are home owners are in a much safer position.*

### **(xii) Ex-offenders**

*Ex-offenders experience difficulties in moving on from bail hostels even though Prison Link Cymru has a good record.*

*Ex-offenders tend to be regarded as having made themselves 'intentionally homeless'. And local authorities resist housing repeat, 'revolving door', offenders.*

*High risk offenders (including Schedule 1 sex-offenders) are housed in a hostel near Bangor.*

*Convicted arsonists are very problematic – as they add considerably to (housing) insurance risks and costs.*

### **(xiii) Ex-Armed Forces Personnel**

*After the Gulf Wars, there was a good number – but there are fewer now. But some ex-servicemen suffer from post traumatic stress disorders. The Soldiers, Seamen, Airmen and Families Association (SAAFA) – a national charity to help people in need - is supportive, and WAG is perceived to be keen to raise the profile on these issues.*

### **(xiv) People with Learning Difficulties**

*For many years, many of these people were resident at and cared for at Bryn y Neuadd Hospital (in Llanfairfechan). In recent years, there has been a 'structured resettlement programme' in place, which works well. Some problems remain – especially issues as to how to help people when their parents become old and cannot cope with their care – a problem which is likely to grow in size.*

### **Other Comments**

*Multiple / overlapping, social / housing problems – are common, with one leading to or exacerbating another, creating an increasing spiral of problems and hopelessness which takes enormous effort (and much support) to reverse.*

*A night shelter : there is no 'self-referral' night shelter in Gwynedd at present – and one is needed. (The nearest night shelter is in Rhyl.)*

*People out on the streets with no address to give - cannot access the other services they might need.*

*Pets – People with issues often had pets (and it seems that it can be easier to find a charitable refuge for the pet than suitable accommodation for their owners or for adolescents in general).*

## **D. ON HOUSING SUPPLY / SUFFICIENCY**

*Single people – more accommodation is required for this group.*

*Freeing-up units – there is a need to free-up three bedroom homes for use by families by encouraging the elderly to move to bungalows, although there is a major problem in getting people to accept dwellings in areas that are foreign to them.*

## **E. ON HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**

*A significant number of houses (now c.6,300 in Gwynedd) are currently council houses – so they are in social rented housing use that can be deemed 'affordable'. These are scattered throughout Gwynedd's settlements.*

## **Annex I : Meeting with Gwynedd Housing Partnership**

**MEETING with the new GWYNEDD HOUSING PARTNERSHIP–  
of 2PM, 21st Feb. 2007, at Plas Menai, nr. Caernarfon**

Below, we set out HIRC's Notes on Evidence Gathered.

### **Present:**

*Eira Hughes, HIRC  
Dr. Baron Isherwood, HIRC  
Members of the Housing Partnership*

### **1. INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIR**

*Dafydd Lewis (Chair) introduced HIRC - Eira Hughes and Baron Isherwood.*

### **2. HIRC PRESENTATION**

*Eira Hughes explained that HIRC had been commissioned in January 2007 to assist Gwynedd CC in gathering evidence to inform the Gwynedd LHS 2007. The emphasis was to be on gathering evidence from others.*

*Gwynedd had planned to hold four evidence gathering sessions, and so far two had been completed – one on housing QUALITY and another on housing SUITABILITY in Gwynedd. This meeting was a third opportunity to gather evidence. More evidence on housing SUPPLY/SUFFICIENCY and AFFORDABILITY would be particularly welcome at this point.*

*The contract had been embellished in two respects in recent days:*

- (i) it had become clear at the earlier FECS that there was an expectation among certain GCC officers that HIRC would be advising on best practice as part and parcel of the exercise - and so HIRC would do so; and*
- (ii) on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> Feb, GCC as client had extended the contract to include a short overview of planning and regeneration issues as they related to housing matters in Gwynedd.*

*Dr. Baron Isherwood gave a presentation which covered the following matters:*

- Gwynedd's Community Strategy Aims and Housing Objective*
- the Design Council for Wales' 'Building a Future for Wales – a Strategy for Sustainable Housing'*
- the purpose of the day's meeting*
- demographic trends*
- key issues for Gwynedd*
- housing market trends*
- housing stock condition*

- *cross-cutting issues and trends*
- *housing SUPPLY in Gwynedd– context and issues*
- *housing AFFORDABILITY in Gwynedd – context and issues*
- *housing QUALITY in Gwynedd – context, issues, key questions*
- *housing SUITABILITY in Gwynedd – context, issues, key questions*
- *process – Next Steps.*

*In doing so, he referred to:*

- (i) *various aspects of HIRC’s previous experience and expertise in housing, planning and regeneration matters, of relevance*
- (ii) *advised the meeting of the views expressed by those who had attended the earlier evidence gathering sessions in Maentwrog and Blaenau Ffestiniog*
- (iii) *drew attention to associated issues around – inter alia:*
  - ~ *relatively low levels of replacement and repair, the extent of need in both the council and private sector stock*
  - ~ *the feeling that the meetings had not yet produced firm evidence on in-migration despite anecdotal evidence on –*
    - ~ *second homes, leaving villages dark at night*
    - ~ *hidden rural homelessness (‘sofa surfing’)*
  - ~ *need for housing (perhaps a foyer) for 16 -18year olds,*
  - ~ *the potential for developing the role of Rural Housing Enablers (and HIRC’s recent report on RHEs in Wales which had concluded that a national network would be desirable*
  - ~ *the scope for using enhanced CPO powers*
  - ~ *many examples of good practice on housing renewal drawn in particular from the North West of England where HIRC have much personal experience*
  - ~ *good practice in Yorkshire re empty homes*
  - ~ *EH’s recent hands-on experience of systematic clearance and rebuilding of parts of the Castlefields Estate Runcorn, and the need to consider systematic gradual renewal of the ageing housing stock in Gwynedd*
  - ~ *the scope for mixed tenure housing as part of wider local regeneration schemes undertaken by partnerships*
  - ~ *the need for more information on employment / incomes*
  - ~ *the virtues of the French approach of developing villages holistically ‘in the round’, and*
  - ~ *a question as to the extent to which we should take climate change into account in the next LHS round.*

### **3. THE DEBATE**

*Dewi Rowlands (GCC) – had two issues -*

- (i) *climate change - a very big issue, especially in Gwynedd coastal areas - and relevant right now, which ought to be one of the drivers of a new strategy*

*(ii) access to services – the need to bring housing close to the already established services or face huge costs for transporting people to the services they need (eg hospitals) and for taking the essential services out to the people, especially the frail elderly, in their homes (a big issue in Pen Llŷn).*

*EH (HIRC) responded that –*

- (i) it was agreed that climate change was a big challenge – with dramatic impacts potentially on river-mouth areas and other coastal areas,*
- (ii) the barest assessment of the costs of moving a small village to higher land was sufficient to establish the massive cost involved*
- (iii) there would be huge costs involved in defending the cities and other settlements against the seas and the position of any new housing needed to be carefully considered in that context, given housing longevity*
- (iv) the range of outreach and voluntary mobile services in Gwynedd represented good practice, which other areas across Britain would need to emulate in response to demographic change*
- (v) such services could enable the elderly to stay in their own homes for as long as possible – which was what most of them wanted*
- (vi) the old, amorphous former quarry villages on higher ground near larger towns were now fulfilling new roles as commuter villages, and might benefit from more intensive development / infilling – which might also offer people good houses with sea views, close to main towns, and the intensification of development in those settlements might help to support a wider range of local services, more sustainably.*

*Paul Diggory (NWA) –*

- (i) also saw climate change as a huge ‘driver’*
- (ii) plus the need to achieve carbon-zero / carbon-neutral homes, soon.*

*Arwel Jones (GCC) –*

- (i) thought it would be useful for the HIRC Final Report to list four or five ‘drivers’ including climate change, quality, suitability, supply and affordability to be used in the new GCC LHS 2007*
- (ii) that the Report should also set out options and ideas for delivering progress on these*
- (iii) and that “costed options” needed to be developed (in a separate study if need be...).*

*David Humphreys (GCC) -*

- (i) rehearsed the process*
- (ii) explained the tight timetable – and the need to get a Draft LHS through a public consultation and to WAG by June 2007.*

*Cllr. R.H.Wyn Williams (GCC) –*

- (i) the extent of second homes was a great concern to him / a big problem – in some areas it reaches 70%*

- (ii) *affordability was another big issue for him – in many areas what used to be affordable is no longer affordable*
- (iii) *but the gap between what people earned and what was needed to buy a home - even an 'affordable' or Homebuy home – was still growing, and exacerbated by rises in interest rates, the increasingly large deposits demanded on a house, etc.*
- (iv) *he had concluded that there was a clear need for more rented housing to house people in Gwynedd*
- (v) *next month GCC would be debating / deciding whether to compulsory purchase a piece of land for new housing in Pen Llŷn, and*
- (vi) *mixed tenure schemes were impossible to pursue in the National Park area because of Policy B10 – which only allowed affordable houses to be built in the Park.*

*Walis George (CTE) -*

- (i) *expressed a view that community facilities were needed where new housing was to be built, and that people's needs needed to be central to the development of a new housing strategy*
- (ii) *wider regeneration activity to deal with social and economic needs, as well as housing, was needed in such areas to ensure that Gwynedd people were able to enjoy a good quality of life*
- (iii) *the comments made about the National Park were important, and the SNPA's involvement in the process was critical*
- (iv) *there needed to be target areas / target communities – but which in practice?*

*Dafydd Lewis (GCC) – explained the SNPA's scope for involvement.*

*BI / EH (HIRC) responded that –*

- (i) *identification of target areas for action would be helpful, and*
- (ii) *referred to the scope for gradual renewal.*

*Arwel Jones (GCC) –*

- (i) *emphasised that a County-wide Regeneration Strategy was being produced shortly, and*
- (ii) *the Llŷn/Pwllheli area would be the first area to have a Local Regeneration Strategy which would set a pattern for the rest (making eight sub-areas, all told).*

*Cllr. Linda A. Wyn Jones (GCC) –*

- (i) *considered that the Building Regulations were too tight and prevented young people from buying an old house and doing up a house at their own pace to suit their own needs, and*
- (ii) *questioned central government's commitment to investing in improving housing at present.*

*EH (HIRC) –*

- (i) *referred to huge spending in years past on housing*

- (ii) *emphasised the importance of sending central government the hard data and rational arguments – which would influence finance distribution, and*
- (iii) *referred to her South Yorkshire experience – where poor housing quality was a brake on socio-economic progress and TSY's decision to clear the worst and to upgrade the rest and to build new houses to very high standards – thus spiralling up quality - plus using Enablers, and training local authority professionals in design issues.*

*Ffrancon Williams (GCC) –*

- (i) *saw scope for forging new and better ways forward for addressing certain issues in Gwynedd also.*

*Emyr V Evans (GCC) –*

- (i) *thought communities not houses should be the focus*
- (ii) *alleviating poverty would continue to be an important theme, and*
- (iii) *was sceptical of the ability of Gwynedd to attract developers and money to invest more in housing.*

*Walis George (CTE) -*

- (i) *referred to evidence of private sector willingness to invest in parts of Gwynedd – Bangor (student flats), Llandudno ( elderly persons accommodation).*

*EH (HIRC) –*

- (i) *cited RSLs experience of working with housebuilding firms and indirectly accessing major private sector investment*
- (ii) *emphasised the conservatism of investors, but also the way in which investment monies inevitably moved towards quality proposals*
- (iii) *referred to her experience re Joint Venture Companies*
- (iv) *noted the importance of producing quality proposals in Gwynedd in order to attract the more and better investment, and*
- (v) *the importance of maintaining faith and confidence in that approach.*

*BI (HIRC) –*

- (i) *referred to experience in Manchester and Salford, and the way in which Manchester's nurturing - over many years - of good relationships with big developers and potential investors had eventually borne fruit in a big way.*

*After the meeting:*

*Emyr Evans (GCC) –*

- (i) *questioned HIRC (EH) about Joint Venture Companies – and how they worked in the North West.*

*Cllr. Linda A Wyn Williams (GCC) –*

- (i) emphasised the importance of addressing the needs of the disabled in HIRC's report / the LHS.*

*Shan Lloyd Williams (GCC/GHB)–*

- (i) provided an Evidence Note on close connection between housing condition and health as revealed by the data - available by postal code - on the number of people who went to hospital with "chronic diseases"*
- (ii) the need for strong direction to tackle this*
- (iii) data available on the number of people and children who experienced accidents in the home*
- (iv) the need to collect information on homelessness*
- (v) and the state of access to health and community care services*
- (vi) data was available on the number of people who had to go into residential care because of lack of grant monies to repair their houses*
- (vii) wanted to see a commitment to providing Extra Care Homes for the Frail Elderly, as well as Lifetime Homes, and Resource Centres (residential homes with nursing care beds) and provision for the confused elderly*
- (viii) hoped that IIA (frail elderly sheltered housing) would be retained in the Strategy*
- (ix) as part of the process of mainstreaming health – would like to see a Health Impact Assessment undertaken on the Strategy.*

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## Annex J: The Housing Situation in Abersoch (Dwyfor)

### MARKET COMPETITION IN RESPECT OF THE AVAILABLE HOUSING STOCK

We set out below a synopsis of recent fact-finding and progress by Gwynedd CC in respect of Abersoch (in the Llanengan Community Area, in Dwyfor).

GCC research shows that –

- the Abersoch area has extremely high house prices
- average house price (March 2005-October 2006) = £410,000
- 45% of the houses in the Abersoch ward are second or holiday homes
- 48% of purchasers (in 2000) were from outside Gwynedd.

Gwynedd's response is to try and find sites for affordable housing schemes in that vicinity by -

- giving it 'top priority'
- conducting a housing needs survey in collaboration with the local Community Council (2004) which identified 40-80 people in need of affordable housing and wanting (i) rented housing, or (ii) shared ownership, or (iii) outright purchase but at a discounted price (lower than market price)
- using the farmers unions, the National Trust and others to identify land for new affordable dwellings (2005-2006)
- discussing a possible development site with the owner – but the owner decide not to proceed, and
- subsequently undertaking a wider site suitability assessments involving the GCC planners and further discussions with landowners (2006 -2007).

But, all this was to no avail – so the conclusions now drawn (in 2007) are that –

- Compulsory Purchase of land may be the only way forward, and
- the Council should now consider purchasing land to create an affordable housing land bank.

Although no new affordable houses have been built in the Llanengan community area – a number of schemes have been approved in the wider Dwyfor (LLŷn Peninsula) area.

93 units in all have received a planning permission (outright or subject to S106As).

They are scattered through 16 settlements, with the numbers ranging from 1-16 at a time.

[Source: Report of the Affordable Housing Officer to the Dwyfor Area Planning Committee of 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2007.]

## Annex K: A Future Regeneration Strategy for Gwynedd

We think that a powerful 'regeneration strategy' for Gwynedd as a whole would need to cover the following -

- relevant **European policy**, and the EU grants available for North West Wales (especially **Objective 1**)
- relevant **UK-wide** and **WAG policies** on:
  - sustainable development / climate change
  - economic development / transport / IT
  - land use planning
  - housing and urban renewal
  - rural issues
  - social policy (health, leisure, etc.), and
  - the Welsh language and culture
- sub-regional (**North West Wales Spatial Plan** area) expressions of the same
- any **other relevant policy documents and research** on matters of relevance to developing Gwynedd (eg. agri-environment schemes)
- any other policies and documents likely to lead to **major developments** of any type in or near Gwynedd, or off its shores
- relevant **large development initiatives already planned** and/or ongoing in Gwynedd (eg new marinas, any expansion of the university, major food processing plants, tourism ventures, power stations, hospitals, the totality of the anticipated new investment in housing (all sectors), and the total public sector investment coming into Gwynedd to support industry (especially agriculture and forestry), etc.
- **key data / relevant facts** to inform a new policy - including facts on:
  - housing
  - the main town centres
  - transport, IT and other communications
  - brownfield / derelict sites
  - local socio-economic-linguistic conditions (including any local angles such as the ageing population, health issues, the Welsh language and culture, a higher than average % of workers in agriculture, tourism, and public administration)
- Gwynedd 's big regeneration **challenges** (eg. distance from major markets, lack of major private sector business to tap, need to attract finance from Cardiff / the rest of the UK / the EU, limited rail infrastructure, derelict and run down former industrial sites, town centres

and the quality of their public realm, design quality and landscape quality of the older and new developed sites, the ecological and landscape sensitivity of the National Park / AsONB / SSSI, and the need to make the most of the large number of mountains, lakes and an accessible coast without harming them)

- Gwynedd's major regeneration **opportunities**, such as :
  - working with local strategic partners - the health sector, major businesses and firms represented or based in Gwynedd
  - main sectors (such as tourism)
  - potential spin-offs from major development planned in or around Gwynedd
  - EU / WAG / private sector funding availability
  - scope for upgrading the retail, public realm, tourism and other wider leisure and cultural experience in and around the main town centres
  - the recognised strategic sites of the Council and its partners for new economic development (including all 'attractive countryside' in respect of the tourism offer), and
  - scope to drive up housing and environmental quality across Gwynedd
  
- **the 'key intentions'** - for the main urban areas/town centres – which should cover:
  - ensuring sustainable development
  - facing up to climate change issues
  - modernising the local economies
  - enhancing town centres
  - enhancing residential areas
  - sprucing up older industrial estates
  - improving the image of the area
  - major housing investment
  - improvements to transport infrastructure
  - improving the public realm
  - creating recreational open space networks
  - better urban design and landscaping, etc.
  
- a **Regeneration Programme** based on that analysis for Gwynedd - setting out, in respect of each of the 'key intentions':
  - specific desirable outcomes
  - achievable actions / key milestones, and
  - measurable outputs
  
- a statement on the **prior-understanding with WAG on any Special Initiatives Grants** they agree to make available (along the lines of the 'Heads of the Valleys Initiative' in South Wales) to assist the Gwynedd Regeneration Programme and its Major Projects
  
- **working on a programme basis**, rather than a project basis (eg. setting a broad programme intention to deliver 300 No. of affordable houses in

Gwynedd as a whole by a set date, rather than listing 100 named sites where they may be delivered)

- the major **masterplanning** exercises to be undertaken for **major projects** (and which external agencies will be asked to help develop them)
- the **client role**, a note on how to be a **good client**, and being adept in **the use of resources**
- indicating how the **private sector** will be involved, via:
  - **Joint Venture Companies**
  - other **deals / joint working**
  - a big effort to **build new partnerships** over the next few years with developers and certain business sectors and firms
- setting out **the funding implications** of the Regeneration Programme as a whole, year on year, for the next 6-7 years, and the likely source/s of that funding (including WAG, RSLs, Private Sector (unspecified), etc.) – based not on supposition or wild ambition or pessimism but on much confidential background pre-discussion with major partners and funding and regulatory agencies as to what is likely to be achievable if everyone ‘works together’ and ‘pulls out all the stops’
- setting out the various **ways in which the funds will be chased down** - with emphasis on using GCC’s own resources (property, capital, staff time, etc.) resources as a starter fund, to be doubled / quadrupled many times over through adopting matching processes, plus seeking grant aid from a very wide variety of institutions/charities, etc, and demonstrating how that will cumulatively lever in very substantial private investment)
- strategic and strong use of certain **regulatory processes** to bring in funds from, or to encourage private sector investment (including S106A planning agreements, and other enforcement processes)
- proposed **governance arrangements** to propel the new strategy, underpinned by a Council-wide Officer Working Party bringing all the GCC skills critical to ‘getting things done’ to one table, regularly
- the **performance management processes** for managing, monitoring and reviewing the programme as a whole and any local sub-sets of it
- indicating the anticipated **voluntary and community sector input**
- indicating foresight and commitment to dealing with the on-going **maintenance liabilities** will be factored in to discussions at an early stage
- the other **project development, appraisal and approval systems**

- a commitment to **overall quality** and **design quality**
- general **risk appraisal** and **sustainability appraisal** of the programme
- **marketing and publicity**
- **bibliography** and **glossary**, and, as an annex
- a **list of already 'approved' and 'shortly to be approved' projects** already in the pipeline and their likely spend profile year on year.

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## Annex L: Key Facts on Housing in Gwynedd

- Gwynedd = 12.26% of Wales : resident population = 116,843 (2001)
- 25% were 60 years old or over
- one in ten people in Gwynedd (12%) provide unpaid care
- there are c. 56,600 housing units (2000) / 50,624 households (2001)
- there were <6,300 Council houses (at Jan.2007) and 3,000 RSL units
- the rest c.50,000 are private houses (housing 80% of the population)
- 77% of the private stock is owner-occupied
- there are c.3,800 second homes, plus c.1900 empty properties
- household growth is generally slow, requiring only c.112 houses a year for 5 years (and there is no shortage of land availability for that )
- annual addition to the housing stock c 200 (= >0.5% annual additional)
- c.38% of residents in private sector stock are at risk of fuel poverty
- 60% of the rented stock has solid wall construction
- average house prices = £100K for a 2up/2down (6 x average income)
- terraced housing – common in urban and rural areas (c.36.4% overall)
- 56.5% of all the private sector stock is pre-1919 (and of low quality)
- private rented stock is of a lower quality than the owner-occupied stock
- general repairs needed across Gwynedd = c.£360M (est. of 2003)
- estimated shortfall to meet WHQS (in social rented sector) = £62M
- unfitness = 1 in 10 (mostly private sector) : est. cost of upgrade = £147M
- repairs grant / housing budget of GCC = c£3M/annum
- personal equity tied up in homes in Gwynedd = c£3.5Billion
- 21.6% of homes don't have central heating
- house prices rose by 56.2% in Gwynedd between 2001-2003
- more recently (2006-07) house price growth has been minimal
- 68% of Gwynedd lies within a National Park
- 1.725M tourists visit annually, and spend an estimated £264M
- 69.5% of the population speak Welsh (heartland of the language)
- hundreds / annum homeless: well over 90% of those are local people
- immigration (of younger families and older retirees) is still a factor
- 50% of the population of Bangor consists of students
- only 1.2% of the population (c.1400 people) are BEM (2001)
- the average wage = c £15,957 (compared with £18,110 in Wales)
- Gwynedd has the fourth highest level of older people in Wales
- 30% of people describe their health as “limiting” or “not good”
- 39% of people of working age are economically inactive
- 30% of workers work in the public sector
- 26% of the population have no formal skills
- 44% of the population is estimated to need affordable housing
- there are 50 significant local community initiatives ongoing right now
- 55% of the population have access to broadband.

[Sources: Gwynedd Together – Gwynedd Community Strategy (2004); and GCC's Local Housing Strategy 2004-2008, and the Gwynedd Briefing Note – New Strategy and Policy Framework (Private Sector Housing Service)(2005)]

## Annex M: Relevant Best Practice – More Detail

One of the more detailed analyses of best practice in housing renewal is drawn from four English local authority areas, two of them are from the North West (HIRC's formative housing development area) – namely Bolton and Wigan both of which were known for their innovative approach – along with Bristol and Leicester. The Beacon's report from local government's 'sector skills council' – the IDeA [1] - provides further information and contact details for these authorities. A visit to those in the North West might be worthwhile. In addition, there is relevant research on the Regulatory Reform Order, and equity release. The notes also refer to other areas where we feel the best practice may be of interest and relevance to challenges in Gwynedd.

### BP1 : Development of Active Housing and Regeneration Partnerships

All the local authorities producing good performance in housing renewal schemes rely upon the development of strong housing and regeneration partnerships to develop effective joint working from a multitude of different public and private sector agencies. With the formation of its new housing partnership Gwynedd is in a good position to develop initiatives to tackle its most pressing housing conditions. However, in addition to the representatives from the Care Directorate (and its Housing Unit) of the Council, along with the housing associations, it may be useful to consider whether to invite other members, such as potential private sector funders, local community organisations, the police and the health service.

Halton BC (now a 4 star CPA authority) successfully established several years ago two Joint Venture Companies with major developers (St Modwen's and Peel Holdings) to redevelop two old town centres. This involved the Council offering some land of its own, and its expertise on town planning matters, accessing regeneration grants and dealing with statutory procedures, to inform large development programmes over several years. Significantly improved shopping and town centre environments have followed, and these have encouraged new housing schemes to come forward. This is a strong approach for economically challenged areas, which would be potentially workable in Gwynedd – in partnership with local medium sized builder/develop companies used to working in Wales and/or North West England, or larger ones working across the UK in the more economically fragile areas. (More detail on JVCs is set out in [ANNEX P](#), below).

Halton BC had a strong Urban Renewal Strategy and also successfully set up three major 'masterplanning' exercises (chaired by Eira Hughes, in her capacity as Executive Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhood Services during 2002-2005) to devise and deliver (with a wide range of partners, including major 'quangos' and key landowners) major redevelopments in three areas – two economic and one housing-based, including the total revamp of the Castlefields housing estate in Runcorn.

The importance of having land and thinking like a developer: even if a council thinks it has little development land with which to play or bargain, it can usually

find some through systematic search, a surveyor's eye for site assembly opportunities and practicalities, and a planner's eye for what might be acceptable – given really good design - in planning terms.

Previous experience (EH/HIRC) obtained while working in Newport, Manchester and Halton - attests to the value of going beyond the formal housing Land Availability exercise (used to inform statutory planning). Thorough interrogation of a council's land ownership data-bases, plus a visit to every piece of land owned (and/or potentially needed) to record its suitability for housing re-development / extension / new development / amalgamation and site assembly exercises is needed. And officers need to be very bullish about the design quality they would expect on such sites in order to see their true potential. Such an exercise in Newport a few years go, for example, yielded c.250 'possible sites' which were then whittled down in more detailed appraisals to a short list of sites sufficient to satisfy a large rolling programme of new build.

Gwynedd CC has started doing this sort of thing – but we think it could do it more systematically across the County to inform its overall regeneration (and not just its housing programmes).

## **BP2 : A Systematic Approach to Policy Development and Review**

Obviously, it is important to ensure very good liaison with WAG and its agencies, and more local strategic partners, and potential major funding partners. It is vital to produce both a Local/Sustainable Community Strategy which commands wide support, and includes the headline messages for the other three Strategies now required of LAs (the Local Development Plan, Health and Well-Being Plan, and Children and Young People's Plan). As important is the painstaking business of ensuring that lower level internal corporate plans, financial strategies, directorate and subject/service plans, and individual work plans stay true to the strategic vision and deliver the nitty-gritty, yet provide 'elbow room' for officers and units with initiative to explore new ways of getting things done.

Central government talks increasingly about 'outcomes' - but in our experience there are few 'outcomes' to boast of unless a team of people is focussed on delivering a correct range of intermediate 'outputs' after working hard on assembling the best possible set of 'inputs' – including political will, chief officer determination, the finance, and all the organisational, professional and technical skills required.

In the same way that Gwynedd is developing a housing strategy that links to its community strategy, Leicester City Council's renewal strategy is set within the context of a wider policy framework embracing decent homes and linking renewal to other services. However, Leicester benefits from political commitment which results in a sustained capital programme. In addition, Leicester's Black and Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy demonstrates the importance of housing renewal in contributing to community cohesion.

Wigan's strategic planning process involves -

- research into housing conditions and markets at least once every 5 years
- more frequent monitoring of housing markets (e.g. prices and voids)
- considering national, regional and local priorities
- formulating, with partners, a clear strategy with SMART objectives tackling 3 simple themes: 'people and choice', 'neighbourhood renewal' and 'quality homes'
- translating the strategy into real world action through key policies, such as the Housing Assistance and Enforcement Policy, and work programmes, and
- ensuring performance and customer satisfaction are used for learning.

### **BP3 : Consultation and Involvement of Residents**

Gwynedd's Evidence Gathering Sessions involving both experts and residents deserves a place amongst emerging best practice in this crucial area. It might also consider the following examples.

Both Wigan and Bolton use local community panels, in Wigan's case with budgets devolved to resident and stakeholder groups, to deliver local renewal plans and in Bolton establishing Urban Care and Neighbourhood Centres to act as facilitators. In addition, Bolton has introduced an innovative 'Percentage for Art' scheme that uses creative arts projects to develop ideas on regeneration involving environmental art, public art, video, dance, drama and photography. HIRC attended some of these events, and saw a high level of resident involvement and participation facilitated by local artists.

The overall approach in each of these authorities is 'to put the customer at the very centre of housing renewal' and to propose renewal options that meet the needs and aspirations of local communities. As Gwynedd is attempting, they make extra effort to reach out to those people who are vulnerable and/or socially excluded. They also try to avoid thinking in 'silos' in the belief that holistic working with communities within partnerships is the best way to deliver sustainable outcomes.

The one caveat to this is that while residents' views need to be established early on, and regularly tested along the way - it may not be wise or possible to involve them in the hard-nosed bargaining process between officials (across a wide range of organisations) who need to agree a Delivery Strategy for an emerging Masterplan. And the experience we have gained over the years – working on major regeneration schemes and programmes – attests to the value of never releasing a Masterplan Document without having first established through production of a sister Delivery Strategy informed by deeper analysis of the practicalities of delivering the scheme/s on site/s. Various 'Project Management Systems' exist to help with this – but for really complicated and complex schemes 'Critical Time Path Analysis' is probably the most helpful.

### **BP4 : Organisation and Delivery of Housing Renewal**

Bolton Council has delegated both public sector housing and private sector housing regeneration to 'Bolton at Home', its Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) the only one in the country to have this dual function.

Leicester tackles housing conditions and environmental improvements using its in-house home improvement agency from a de-centralised office, with its New Deal Employment Training for Work schemes offering construction training for young people, at the same time rebuilding boundary and alleyway walls. Leicester has also adopted new programmes in conjunction with its Fire and Rescue Service to reduce fire deaths, and the local primary care trust to reduce falls and to meet Older People targets. It also introduced a homeowner's 'Warm, Safe and Sound Helpline'.

Bristol is developing a new Loan Fund in partnership with 10 other local authorities and the Wessex Reinvestment Trust that offers low interest loans to those living in non-decent homes. The Council advises that enforcement should be used as only as one of a range of tools, and preferably as a last resort.

Wigan on the other hand does tackle empty homes by both enforcement (where council tax owners are initially warned then, after being given reasonable opportunity, the Council intervenes using Compulsory Purchase Orders where necessary) and by assistance, where responsible landlords (social or private) are invited to bid for combined grants / loans under the Empty Houses Challenges Fund.

This type of work is also undertaken nationally by the Empty Homes Agency, ([www.emptyhomes.com](http://www.emptyhomes.com)) which works to devise and promote solutions to bring empty and wasted property back into use, not least by the laying of Empty Dwelling Management Orders - legislation to enable local authorities to take over the management control of dwellings that have been empty for six months or more. Changes in the rules on VAT, and council tax have also made it more cost effective to bring empty homes back into use.

[1] Improvement and Development Agency, Beacon Theme Guide, Housing Renewal 2004-5.

## **BP5 : The Use of New Powers under the Regulatory Reform Order**

Gwynedd CC will be well aware of the sweeping new powers that are available to it under the Regulatory Reform Order which provides it with a general power to provide "assistance" "in any form" "to any person", to improve, repair, adapt or rebuild residential premises and effectively extends the possibility of 'enabling' to the private sector. In addition, it provides for the possibility of introducing loan finance and leverage to reduce the dependency on grant aid. Underpinning it is the new 'decent homes' housing and the tendency to concentrate attention on vulnerable households living in 'non-decent' homes.

However, the granting of wide ranging powers has not been followed through, in many authorities (other than those in Housing Market Renewal Areas in England), by much action. Research in this field [2] has found that relatively few council staff work on private sector housing renewal activity, and they have not been able to find private lenders to attract private finance and develop a portfolio of affordable loan products, to the extent that area-based activity appears to be giving way to client-orientated programmes based on the needs of vulnerable households living in 'non decent' homes, particularly (as in

Gwynedd) in relation to energy-efficiency. Gwynedd may wish to consider the opportunities and challenges presented by the RRO, and the possibility of exploiting it to greater advantage.

[2] Rick Groves and Sian Sankey, Implementing new powers for private sector housing renewal, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Dec 2005.

## **BP6 : Releasing Private Equity for Repair and Renewal**

While the possibility of equity release as a mechanism to provide further resources for Gwynedd's housing renewal programme was mooted at the Evidence Gathering Sessions, subsequent enquiries seem to indicate that considerable further effort will be needed to uncover examples of effective initiatives in this area. In England and Wales only 25,000 home owners (of all incomes) conclude equity release deals each year out of a potential pool of over two million older home owners with housing assets worth over £50,000 but incomes so low that they qualify for means-tested benefits. While the commercial market now has suitable and safe equity release products for most older home owners it is still difficult to secure a deal on some kinds of property (such as some former council housing, or accommodation with substantial service charges). The process is complicated. Those on benefits may be little better off. It is very difficult to use equity release to pay for additional care at home.

To take the idea further Gwynedd would have to pursue some of the suggestions proposed in the research [3] undertaken so far, namely to assist homeowners to release a modest amount of housing equity each year without loss of means-tested benefits, and without increasing charges for council-funded care at home; to share risk with the private sector where commercial deals are not available, or possibly to help establish an arms-length company using private finance but sponsored by Gwynedd to offer equity release deals to begin to develop the market in such products.

[3] Rachel Terry and Richard Gibson, Obstacles to Equity Release, Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2006.

Gwynedd's financial challenges are the greater and its scope for action tighter because it does not manage to prise out of the WAG the 'Special Initiatives' grants which can make a great difference - but our experience is that such monies tend to gravitate towards strong ideas, and skilled and determined practitioners, in practice.

One way of doing this successfully is to grab the moral high-ground and go down 'the conservation route' (as Gwynedd has done previously in Caernarfon) in other areas of Gwynedd – perhaps extending that approach to the best / better traditional terraces – which the RICS [4] now advise can be cost-effectively renovated and are often better houses than their proposed replacements (see [Annex N](#)).

[4] RICS Wales Website, [www.rics.org.uk](http://www.rics.org.uk) 2007

In South Wales, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Design Council for Wales, Cadw, Cardiff and Bridgend Councils, CITB–Construction Skills, the Civic Trust for Wales, the RICS (Wales), the Federation of Master Builders, and other agencies, several LAs and the RICS have joined together to make recommendations for the renovation and restoration of older terraced housing under the banner of the Valleys Built Heritage Project, which has a website ([www.myvalleyshome.org.uk](http://www.myvalleyshome.org.uk)) which explains how to renovate older terraces well. More and more significant Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Townscape Heritage Initiatives may be an important part of the way forward in Gwynedd, also.

There may also be scope to persuade landlords to do more through establishing Landlord Forums which will inform and engage them – as Congleton seems to be succeeding in doing. And Halton runs a Landlord Accreditation Scheme to “provide decent landlords operating through the Borough with the recognition and support they deserve” [6]

[5] Congleton BC Website – Landlord Forum and Information Pack [www.congleton.gov.uk](http://www.congleton.gov.uk) , and Halton BC Website – Housing [www.halton.gov.uk](http://www.halton.gov.uk) (2007)

## **BP7 : Design-led Approaches to Housing Provision and Renewal**

One of the 2006 winners of the Design Council / Commission for Wales’ [6] competition for new housing, all of it in an elegant vernacular style, was located in Gwynedd (Llyndu, Caernarfon, designed by David J. Wilkinson).

[6] Design Commission for Wales [www.dcfw.org.uk](http://www.dcfw.org.uk)

The Council could perhaps do more to encourage local architects and civic trusts to take part in such competitions in order to ‘showcase’ good schemes in the area.

In addition, there may be design solutions to other housing challenges, such as bringing more flats above shops into use, flexible provision for the elderly and the disabled, retro-fitting existing properties with ecology-measures, and conversion of too-large family houses for sheltered dwellings. There are many sources, in addition to civic interest and architectural groups, which can advise on best practice in this area.

Transform South Yorkshire is a major, Objective 1, grant-aided initiative. Early analysis of the problems in the South Yorkshire sub-region indicated that the poor quality of the housing offer was putting a huge brake on the area’s overall socio-economic prospects. People aspired to better quality housing and were voting with their feet. The approach adopted involved many strands, including (of potential relevance to Gwynedd):

- commitment to high standards of design in all new housing schemes – as a pre-requisite,
- working closely with CABE and adopting its ‘Building for Life’ standards
- setting up ‘TSY Enabler Panels’ which employ seasoned, practitioners / professionals in the private sector to support LA staff, and to assist prospective developers in developing their ideas and practice with

- an emphasis on ‘Delivering Design Quality’ [7], and
- producing a bespoke ‘Design Awareness Course’ for c.100 staff from the 4 LAs (Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield) for planners, surveyors, landscape architects, engineers and housing managers (designed and co-ordinated by TSY Enabler Eira Hughes (of EHCS and HIRC) with the first run due to run from May to November 2007).

[7] TSY – [www.transformsouthyorkshire.org.uk](http://www.transformsouthyorkshire.org.uk)

- Sheffield City Council has developed a particular way forward which involves:
- identifying all their surplus land holdings (including extensive recently-cleared former council housing estates, and other bits and pieces) – a huge amount of land across the whole of the city,
  - developing its ‘Area Teams’ to write specifications for developing these sites for mixed tenure housing developments - which must meet not only :
    - CABE’s ‘Building for Life’ standards, but also
    - BRE’s ‘Eco-homes’ standards, and
    - ACPO’s ‘Secured by Design’ standards, and
    - the ‘Lifetime Homes’ standard
  - reviewing the regeneration skills and training needs of staff working on housing issues (a study undertaken by TSY Enabler Eira Hughes – of EHCS and HIRC),
  - teaching staff what is involved in being a ‘good client’, and
  - directly employing ‘Design Advisers / Design Champions’ on their staff.

## **BP8 Improving Housing Conditions in Rural Areas**

Gwynedd may wish to explore ways of improving villages ‘in the round’ (that is, taking a holistic approach to the cultural (especially linguistic), social, economic and environmental improvements of small settlements, increasing the amount of affordable housing through the efforts of rural housing enablers, exploring incentive-based (rather than regulatory) measures designed to draw second homes back into the permanent stock), and addressing the particular needs of the inhabitants.

There is a Rural Affordable Housing Officer for Gwynedd, and an independent Rural Housing Enabler (for the Dwyfor and Meirionnydd areas). HIRC has recommended in its recent study ‘Wales: Rural Housing Enablers’ [8] (published in February 2007) – developing a National RHE Network to cover the whole of Wales, currently under consideration by WAG and the relevant national bodies. HIRC also recommended development of the role of RHEs to enable them to help generate small-scale local regeneration schemes in rural areas. Extending RHE coverage to include the Arfon area of Gwynedd would be a step forward.

[8] Hughes, Eira and Isherwood, Baron (HIRC) – Wales: Rural Housing Enablers – Report on the Current and Future Arrangements, 2007.

In addition, many rural areas in England are actively promoting on their own websites the ‘Homebuy’ and other national schemes to help local people to buy homes [9], including -

- Ribble Valley – which promotes the ‘Homebuy’ scheme run by Plumlife (the Homebuy Agent for Greater Manchester and Lancashire), and
- Congleton BC – which promotes a shared-ownership scheme to enable developers to sell properties to an RSL, which then sells a percentage of the property (usually starting at 50%) to prospective purchasers / first time buyers who then pay a low cost rent for the rest, and can ‘staircase’ upwards towards owner-occupation (although on certain sites in rural areas, ownership is restricted to 75%).

[9] Congleton BC Website [www.congleton.gov.uk](http://www.congleton.gov.uk), and Ribble Valley Website [www.ribblevalley.gov.uk](http://www.ribblevalley.gov.uk), 2007.

Bringing empty homes and property into use offers the prospect of very fast progress. Kent CC [10] have pursued this by launching a £5M fund to bring 9,000 empty properties into use – offering loans of £25,000 per unit to owners and loans for conversions, in order to make a quick impact within three years. Meanwhile, Ipswich BC targets first-time buyers offering them a £25,000 grant to renovate a home empty for more than a year, and Waltham Forest LBC provides grants to landlords who renovate empties, plus subsidising the rental cost for unemployed people who move into them. Other authorities use enforcement (Manchester picks off the ‘worse 10’, in sets, for action under Empty Dwelling Management Orders), and Great Yarmouth has sought 20 CPOs for empties in the last few years, using the Town and County Planning 1990 powers where a property needs renovating, and Housing Act 1985 powers where a home is empty but in reasonable condition.

[10] Kent CC Website [www.kent.gov.uk](http://www.kent.gov.uk), and LGC Nov 2006 article ‘Filling the Empties’

Shropshire CC [11] has commissioned Age Concern to provide a ‘Help at Home’ schemes to help older people maintain their independence at home – involving 120 paid home support workers – who assist 1,000 local people (over 65) with shopping, gardening, vacuuming, pet care and transport. Age Concern also has supporting social / community events –including 39 ‘pub lunch clubs’.

[11] Shropshire CC Website [www.shropshire-cc.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire-cc.gov.uk) and LGC 29 June 2006 article ‘Growing Old with Dignity’

In Holland, there is a tradition of co-housing for older people which is now creeping into the UK, where older people live in a group of independent units with opportunities for occasional communal meals and celebrations: three examples in the UK include the Older Women’s Co-Housing and two rural pilot schemes - Cold Street Farm, Dorset and Vivarium, in Fife (Scotland). We think this type of special scheme is worth exploring and encouraging, as it might provide more housing choice for local people and breathe new life into some of Gwynedd’s redundant large buildings in seaside, urban and rural areas.[12]

[12] Bakewell, J. Guardian ‘We oldies look after ourselves’ 3.6.06, and [www.owch.org.uk](http://www.owch.org.uk)

## Annex N: A Classification System for Older Terraces

A simple classification of older terraces for Gwynedd would assume that all the established settlements, villages and hamlets are basically sustainable, with rare exceptions, given investment to bring them closer to modern standards.

The exceptions might be a few very remote tiny hamlets and isolated terraces, especially those not on a bus route, nor within 20 minutes of a town with a wide range of facilities, not related to any ongoing businesses – which might need to be regarded as principally tourism-related settlements (suitable for second-homers and specialist tourism-related businesses in the main).

A core criteria for such a classification system might be -

- (i) architectural and historic quality (as a top priority)
- (ii) capability of being modernised internally and through rear / end extensions
- (iii) extent of physical 'elbow room' externally for improving access, parking, gardens
- (iv) the current state of repair and overall condition
- (v) general connectivity to other services, leisure, buses, trains and shops: and
- (vi) connectivity to major physical regeneration initiatives.

What follows is a first sketch of such a classification system to help direct public and private investment rationally into the properties with the better prospects –

G1 - statutory 'Conservation Area' or almost conservation area standard, (worthy of considerable investment, over an indefinite timescale)\*\*

G2 - of good character, worthy of retention, long term, and reasonably capable of being improved / modernised / extended (worthy of further investment – for many years to come)\*\*

G3 - of reasonable character, and reasonable longevity (worthy of some investment now)\*\*

\*\* G1 / G2 / G3 – could be worked up into a 'special initiative' for Gwynedd - on a par with initiatives mooted for South Wales on the 'Traditional Valleys House' (see [Annex M](#))

G4 - of poor character, and with limited scope for improvement, modernisation and extension – likely to need redevelopment within the next 25 years (only worthy of shorter term investment to make it habitable)

G5 - very poor terraces, in general disrepair, hopelessly unsuited to modern needs, and with no elbow room for satisfactory redevelopment and little scope for improvement (a priority for enforcement to prolong its life at minimal standards for a few years only at most – while other more significant solutions are explored and delivered)

G6 – very serious extensive disrepair and dilapidation, unpopularity and low demand (requiring strong enforcement measures and/or total redevelopment, soon – with investment to be to that end only), and

G7 - terraces which may also have a key role in relation to specific major regeneration and employment initiatives.

Such systems are inevitably always sensitive and can be controversial. But, of necessity, they are already used to help decide which blocks to clear and which to retain in older housing areas in the UK (public and private) which need selective demolition/renewal and substantial general regeneration.

The experience of the Housing Market Renewal Areas and other 'priority estates' initiatives, suggests that the market often responds very positively to area and block renewal initiatives, probably simply because they display clear intent by the public authorities, the big 'quangos' and their selected private sector partners to invest very considerably in such areas.

But, sometimes the market responds in unexpected and complicating ways – with very poor property being bought up cheaply in the hope of making a profit from CPO and related land transaction processes.

For that reason alone, the responsible authorities need be prudent, take expert advice on the housing condition, and keep such classifications confidential for as long as possible.

# Annex O: The Current Planning Situation in Gwynedd - in Respect of Housing Issues

## 1. The Unitary Development Plan (for Gwynedd, outwith the National Park)

1.1 Much research informs the preparation of any local plan – such as the Gwynedd Unitary Development Plan, and the reality is that they are all technically complex documents.

1.2 In the years leading up to the unveiling of the UDP Plan, much research was commissioned and analysed in order to help shape the policies and the reasoning behind them, including, for example –

- (i) successive studies of housing land availability in the Gwynedd area have found that - for land use planning purposes - the land supply is adequate for the calculated future requirements
- (ii) the last Gwynedd Local Housing Needs Survey (done in 2000, published in 2002), the joint effort of GCC planners and housing staff, suggested the Bangor, Caernarfon and Porthmadog areas had the highest demand and greatest shortfall, but that there was sufficient supply of land readily available to last not just for the next 5 years as required, but for over 7 years, and
- (iii) the Land Availability Studies undertaken more recently (eg. the 2005 Land Availability Study) indicated no lack of land.

1.3 We also know that the Council has had regard to -

- a. Regional Planning Guidance for North Wales (Oct 2002) which advised Gwynedd on the figures to set itself in relation to new dwellings, and
- b. detailed projections for population, households and houses - commissioned of the London Research Centre (because up-to-date projections were not available at that time from the Welsh Assembly Government) – to inform the UDP's preparation, its Deposit stages and the Pre-Inquiry Changes.

1.4 In the context of identifying housing needs and demands and policies on housing in Gwynedd (outwith the National Park), the above is now largely a matter of historic interest. What matters now is where things stand in respect of the progress of the Plan towards adoption – put simply, what the Plan says now, what the Inspector says, and what the UDP will then say at adoption.

1.5 So, the **current planning situation** in a nutshell is –

- the UDP was placed on deposit in the summer of 2004
- a Public Inquiry into the UDP was held in April 2006 and it considered the Pre-inquiry Changes (including minor updates) produced in Sept. 2005
- the Inquiry held in 2006 had more than 2800 objections to consider

- of the 4 key issues identified by the Inspector – two were housing related (i) the allocations to be made for market housing, and (ii) the policies on affordable housing
- the Public Inquiry was reopened briefly in mid-January 2007
- GCC Unitary Development Plan is (at the time of writing this report) at ‘post-inquiry stage’ and the Inspector’s Report is awaited (sometime in the Spring of 2007)
- thereafter, Gwynedd CC will need to consider the Inspector’s Report – and decide what it will do in respect of changes advised by the Inspector (ie the ‘statutory modifications’ leading to ‘plan adoption’)
- GCC’s proposed modifications will need to be advertised, before the Plan is finalised, and formally adopted by the Council
- once adopted it will replace the Gwynedd Structure Plan and any relevant local plans
- GCC will then need to monitor and review its implementation, and prepare for the next round of plan-making, to produce a (new-style) Local Development Plan
- GCC’s progress in that respect will inform its participation in higher-level planning work including the North West Wales Spatial Plan work (which process will be complicated by the fact that the adjoining County Council’s UDPs/Local Development Plans are all at different stages of preparation),
- a multi-LA ‘local housing market assessment’ is being planned, and
- the need for more up-to-date factual information on housing needs and demands is likely to become urgent before long.

#### 1.6 We know that -

- the UDP’s stated main objective is sustainable development
- its aim, GCC says, is to “*create favourable conditions to safeguard, sustain and develop our communities – culturally and economically – while protecting the environment and the area’s special features*”
- it lays out planning policies for a 25 year period, up to 2016
- the UDP’s approach is generally very controlling, and it is clear that the needs and interest of the Welsh language - which WAG recognise as a proper planning consideration - is given a considerable weight.
- it establishes 8 Dependency Catchment Areas, directing development to the ‘sub-regional centre’ (Bangor) and ‘urban centres’ (Pwllheli, Caernarfon, Porthmadog, Blaenau Ffestiniog)
- it takes a restrictive line on development in the other rural settlements thus focussing on “*Only limited development which is required to meet genuine needs derived within the local community ...*”
- in 6 Dependency Catchment Areas (Bangor, Caernafon, Llŷn, Porthmadog, Ffestiniog and Bala), various sites are allocated for new ‘general needs’ housing
- strategic housing allocations are set out under SP10 (and Appendix 3) and they set aside a number of ‘allocated’ sites across Gwynedd for development to meet ‘general housing need’ (mostly in the larger settlements) – the figures given being :
  - # 782 in the Bangor Dependency Catchment Area (DCA)

- # 580 in the Caernarfon DCA
- # 181 in the Llŷn DCA
- # 82 in the Porthmadog DCA
- # 68 in the Ffestiniog DCA
- # 5 in the Bala DCA

- making an overall total of c.1700 new units between 2001 and 2016 (with the greater part of it delivered in 2010-2011)
- with varying proportions of affordable housing (from 0-40 %) - which might deliver, we deduce from the figures given, c.240 affordable units (in the Bangor/Caernarfon/Llŷn/Porthmadog DCAs)
- but a Pre-Inquiry Change suggests that affordable housing will now be sought in respect of all those allocated sites
- and this set of policies and allocations was closely studied at the Inquiry
- so, different figures and percentages may well emerge, before the UDP is finally adopted, and
- several statements in the UDP encourage re-use of land and buildings in general, although some of the allocated housing sites are on greenfield land.

1.7 It is safe to conclude therefore that -

- there will be some scope for the private market to invest in developing new housing to meet projected general needs (due to household growth arising from a reduction in household size and intended/planned economic growth, etc.) in Gwynedd, over the next few years, and
- the Inspector will advise as to whether or not the supply allowed by the UDP needs to be increased and/or the policies need to be relaxed, as suggested by objectors.

1.8 All that matters now is the opinion of the Inspector, and GCC's reaction to it, but we would venture these observations –

- tight control on development and its quality is appropriate in Gwynedd given its difficult challenges
- but, the art of planning policy-making is not simply to control development but also to raise sights and encourage good new development to resolve sticky local planning issues.

For example, while acknowledging that the effect of *“increased house prices”* leads to *“an increasing number of the area’s housing stock being out of the financial reach of local people”* and that the situation is *“most acute in coastal and rural areas”* (para 1.2.35 UDP), the UDP policies react to this by being very restrictive on new development in both situations. But it could also have said more about the sort of conversions (another form of development) it might greatly welcome – generally or exceptionally – in such situations in order to encourage developers (including the Council’s own potential development partners) to re-shape the housing offer (including some seaside and second home properties) to meet current and future local needs for permanent homes on a low-cost and/or affordable basis.

1.9 Although the UDP will already be helping to guide planning decisions,

it may yet have to be substantially modified before it is fully adopted. Generally speaking, Inspector's (at post-inquiry stage) will use their Report to suggest changes which serve to gently correct and straighten out the reasoning (where necessary) and suggest some amendments to produce a good and polished plan, in step with national guidance and best practice and properly reasoned throughout, before it is formally adopted.

1.10 Some of the paperwork produced for and during the Public Inquiry (April 2006) is interesting. For example, the Inspector's summary of the principal points made by participants at the Round Table Session on the Overall Requirement for and Supply of Land for Housing (dated 6<sup>th</sup> April 2007) which (i) notes -

- that the overall requirement for the plan area for the 15 year plan period is 4178 (extra) units of housing and, on that basis, 1392 units for the first 5 years,
- the supply of land is equal to that requirement, for the whole of the 15 year plan period, and
- the overall supply of land for the UDP area for the plan period is:
 

➤ <i>“commitments</i>	=	<i>991 units</i>
➤ <i>assumptions re - small and windfall sites</i>	=	<i>1380 units</i>
➤ <i>allocations</i>	=	<i>1808 units</i>
		-----
		<i>4179 units”</i>

(ii) and which notes that GCC and its partners have not undertaken an Urban Capacity Study of the potential for additional sites to arise from previously developed land within the built-up area.

1.11 The Gwynedd UDP Inquiry (2006) Inspector's Report on the Round Table Session on Affordable Housing 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2006 notes that of the 1380 units assumed to be released from small and windfall sites, c. 73% would need to be affordable housing units in order to deliver the target figures for affordable housing – which would probably be very difficult to deliver, and which could put a big squeeze on the scope for market housing in smaller settlements: an issue which the Inspector identified and is bound to consider very carefully.

1.12 The UDP and its supporting documentation (especially the Inspector's Reports on the Round Table Sessions) are a useful source of background information on relevant issues and facts about affordability in Gwynedd. For example –

- there are references to the local housing needs survey (of 2000) which established a need for minimum of 130 units of affordable housing per year (to arise from a mixture of vacancies, conversions and new build, and to meet needs from all sources, across the whole of Gwynedd and not just in the UDP area)
- so within the UDP area (ie. outwith the National Park) the proportionate figure would be 105 units of affordable housing units per year – requiring over 15 years a total of 1575 affordable dwellings to be made available from all sources (a challenge)

- the UDP's supporting text suggests that the planners are open to proposals worked up by RSLs and others to meet a specific need in villages
- the UDP differentiates sharply between mere demand/desire for an affordable home, and real and local need, and seeks to establish two categories of need with very precise definitions of each, which - the UDP Inquiry Round Table Discussion Notes suggest - will shortly be revised by GCC and replaced by terms which match those set in the new TAN 2 (ie. 'intermediate housing' and 'social rented housing'), and
- other UDP policies on affordability are much as you would find in any current UDP - referring to 'perpetuity' of use, 'occupancy conditions', 'supplementary planning guidance', 'rural exception sites', etc.

1.13 In addition, UDP related documents reveal that -

- research undertaken in 2003 shows that the majority of houses on the open market which are affordable are terraced houses in post-industrial settlements, and
- GCC research also suggests that detached and semi-detached houses are proportionately more expensive in Gwynedd than in neighbouring counties.

1.14 Reflecting on this, we think it is also important to remember that there are many local people in Gwynedd who are better-off, and their numbers will be growing also, and so there is bound to be a need for a bit more choice at the higher end in respect of open market homes. New housing initiatives could be targeted in that direction, also. Even though planning policy as such does not allow new market housing to be restricted to local people only – there are doubtless ways of making such schemes particularly attractive to better-off local people.

1.15 Also, looking at housing supply issues across Gwynedd for all categories of housing - the lack of an Urban Capacity Study is a weakness it would be wise to correct soon. This is not simply because it is useful for statutory planning processes, but because experience derived from the North West of England (where Eira Hughes, as Director of Planning for GONW, persuaded all LPAs to assess capacity) and other areas is that it really stretches a local authority's thinking: thinking about the potential of already developed land and small pieces of property and land in its own control - and that of other key landowners - to be used and reused positively, more efficiently and sustainably for the benefit of the community at large, with spin-offs in terms of market and low cost and affordable housing potentially.

1.16 Two simple examples of the way things are often done elsewhere will illustrate the point :

- public sector depot sites and minor offices, and mainly open ground uses are often located on very good, easily accessible sites on the edge of settlements, and can usually easily be relocated by an LA - with the new development financing the relocations as part of a redevelopment deal with the private sector, and supplying a mixed-use, mixed-tenure development, and

- the scope for extensive revamping of large older buildings (eg. former hospitals, schools, former commercial buildings, and seafront boarding houses) and their surroundings for a multitude of new uses, in different ways (given a bit of creativity) becomes more enticing when one simply disregards land ownership and sectoral boundaries and assumes that regeneration specialists, chartered surveyors, and accountants can broker a deal to assemble and revamp a new development site almost anywhere if there is potential to deliver a bit of really choice upmarket housing (plus a few affordable units) as part of a deal carefully negotiated with the Council as a corporate body well in advance of any formal planning applications being made to it as an LPA.

1.17 We noticed also that these comments tend to chime with a set of concerns raised in passing by Baker Associates' in their combined Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) (required by EU Directive 2001/42/EC) and a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Gwynedd UDP Deposit Draft, in 2004 – about the emerging UDP's limited, rather inconsistent commitment to re-using previously used land and property. Gwynedd CC's planners counter this by saying that : (i) Gwynedd does not have a vast amount of previously used land in suitable locations (for new development), and (ii) greenfield sites have only been allocated for housing and employment sites where surveys have shown that there is no suitable 'previously used land'. But, we think, a fresh look at already developed property and its adjacent land might yet be worthwhile.

1.18 The Round Table 'Notes' make it clear that the linguistic assessment proposed by GCC (in Pre-Inquiry Change to UDP, Policy A2, para 2.2.7) would not apply to the committed sites (already with planning permission) or the UDP's allocated sites (already selected having regard to such an approach), but would apply to 'small and windfall sites' as these come forward for planning permission, throughout the plan area. Then the notes go on to say, rather ominously - *"the confirmation by the LPA that there is no established methodology for such appraisals casts doubt on the scope for implementing Policy A2."*

1.19 It will be interesting to see what the Inspector concludes on this matter, and whether the proposed policy on linguistic assessment will endure in the light of the fact that GCC did not offer a methodology (someone else's or its own) to support the concept at the Inquiry stage (although some progress has been made since).

1.20 The UDP policy areas which might impact most on housing matters include guidance on:

- (i) DENSITY – for new general housing development new development – a low-ish 25 houses per hectare is set as a standard in practice
- (ii) PHASING – there is an intention for phased release of sites
- (iii) DEVELOPMENT BRIEFS – they are to be prepared for each designated housing site, and
- (iv) FLOOD RISK – which applies to many areas of Gwynedd - including:
  - Traeth Bach (Porthmadog)
  - Abermaw

- Pwllheli
- Tywyn
- Blaenau Ffestiniog
- the southern LLŷn estuaries
- Seiont (Caernarfon), and
- the river areas of Bangor.

1.21 The Deposit Draft UDP also sets an extremely tight policy for additional new dwellings in rural villages (for environmental, social, cultural and linguistic reasons). This was referred to in our GCC LHS 2007 Evidence Gathering Sessions. It was also questioned at the UDP Public Inquiry stage (ref – Gwynedd UDP Inquiry– Inspector’s Report on the Round Table Session on Affordable Housing 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2006). It is likely, that in the light of GCC’s suggested Pre-Inquiry Changes and debate at the Inquiry, that this policy will be relaxed a little by GCC. Also, that all sites of 5+ units (allocated or windfall) will be required to deliver an element of affordable housing.

1.22 In addition, there are many UDP policies which would interest those who attended the GCC LHS 2007 Evidence Gathering Sessions, as it:

- includes a policy for ‘rural exception sites’ for affordable dwellings alongside existing villages
- includes the usual restrictive policies on new dwellings in the open countryside (other than agricultural and forestry dwellings)
- opposes more second homes across the county – but only where second homes already represent 10% or more of the current housing stock
- states that GCC will continue to campaign for second homes to become a distinct use under the Use Classes Order
- supports conversion of redundant buildings to housing use but for affordable housing only, and sets its face against allowing conversion of buildings for general housing use (a policy which we believe needs rethinking to embrace more possibilities)
- resists conversion of buildings which serve a community need or ‘holiday accommodation’ in the ‘main holiday centres’ (Barmouth, Abersoch, Caernarfon, Criccieth, Llanberis, Porthmadog, Pwllheli, and Tywyn)
- supports replacement of poor dwellings in rural villages and the countryside which cannot be satisfactorily improved/converted, but subject to a number of restrictions (and it is suggested that ruins, pre-fabs, and buildings of conservation or historic value would not qualify)
- is favourably disposed towards conversion of dwellings into flats, bedsits and HMOs (so long as there is not already an over-provision of this type of accommodation in the street or area, and in that context it mentions pressures in Bangor – because of the student population – and areas with many large houses such as Pwllheli, Barmouth, and Caernarfon)
- supports conversion of property above shops and commercial units into flats
- supports also the provision of sites for gypsies where there is evidence of genuine need for the development
- opposes the use of static caravans, chalets and cabins for permanent residential use, and

- supports the development of ‘new residential (care) homes’.

## **2. The Planning Policies for Areas of Gwynedd within the Snowdonia National Park**

In January 2005, the National Park Authority decided to suspend work on its emerging Eryri Unitary Development Plan (although a considerable amount of time had been invested in it and considering objections to it) and to commence the preparation of a new-style Local Development Plan (LDP) in response to new arrangements introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

The Wales Audit Office’s recent Annual Letter notes:

- the lack of an up-to-date development plan
- that a Delivery Agreement for the LDP (and a Park Management Plan) was approved by WAG in September 2006, which provides for the LDP to be adopted by 2010 and the Park Management Plan by 2007, and
- that the NPA has more than a five year supply of land available for future housing needs, and that many of the proposals and policies in the Eryri Local Plan are still considered to be relevant.
- the NPA does not have the resources to produce an interim policy – so the Eryri Local Plan continues to be used for development control purposes.

[Wales Audit Office (2007) Relationship Manager’s Annual Letter (incorporating the Appointed Auditor’s Annual Letter – for Snowdonia NPA).]

The NPA website says it is

*“committed to developing a more integrated and inclusive approach to policy development by:*

- *aligning the National Park Management Plan with a Local Development Plan*
- *taking a more rounded approach to community involvement in policy development,*
- *building in the principles of sustainability, and*
- *incorporating formal assessment of environmental implications.”*

[SNPA website [www.snowdonia-npa.gov.uk](http://www.snowdonia-npa.gov.uk)]

So, in practice, within the Park, planning decisions will have to be guided by the Eryri Local Plan to the extent its policies are reasonably up to date, the relevant (more recent) regional and national planning guidance, and the emerging Local Development Plan, as and when it is available. And, as the new LDP progresses through its preparatory stages, it will gather increasing importance in the decision-making processes.

In the meantime, the ‘Eryri Local Plan incorporating Minerals and Waste 1993-2003’ (1999) – which was guided by higher level statements of policy in the Gwynedd Structure Plan - continues to provide the broad policy context for assessing development proposals within the Snowdonia National Park.

It is inevitably out of date on much of the supporting detail, but the core is concerned with the Park's long-term sustainability, conservation, amenity and enjoyment, etc. and policy continuity is no bad thing in that broad context. It also has some interesting things to say about housing issues in the Park, including that:

- the NPA area contains more than 50 towns and villages
- c.14 of the larger towns and villages are statutory 'Conservation Areas'
- house building operates on two scale – sites for >5 units (deemed 'large') and sites for <5 units (usually developed by local builders or individuals on a self-build basis) in the Park
- the 1996 (Meirionydd) Housing Needs Survey revealed that no one in the south of the Park preferred to live in a housing estate of more than 15 properties (from which the NPA has deduced that it would be wise to avoid large estate type development)
- the increasing pressure placed upon the NPA (with the decline in Council house building) to release land for individual homes on sites outside towns and villages (not necessarily for those in the greatest need) – leading to criticism that the NPA has been ineffective and inconsistent in planning affordable housing, and
- that the rehabilitation of existing stock, and the conversion and change of use of farm buildings and chapels, are popular methods of providing new housing.

In terms of detailed analysis, it cites inevitably out-of-date but interesting evidence (eg on the Meirionydd Local Needs Survey 1996 which revealed that 56% of households were retired, unemployed or on State benefits, with very low income levels, 27% had an income below £100 a week, and of the 44% in paid employment, half had an income less than £11,000 per annum. Average household income was £12,766. And the NPA calculated that no house worth more than £31,200 could be classed 'affordable' and that the cheapest self-build bungalow of that time would cost about £30,000 (on a free plot) which at that time exceeded the price of the cheapest housing on the general market.)

Thirteen years on, these statements still contain a germ of truth, but the mid-1990s situation was one of a depressed housing market in the Park with some 36% of homes for sale staying on the market for more than 2 years, and that is no longer the case. The market situation has moved on appreciably since then, in response to external forces, and house prices in the Park have risen very substantially indeed.

In terms of housing policy, the Eryri Local Plan (ELP) –

- notes the scale of housing development going on around it (under the control of other LPAs) in towns like Bangor, Llanrwst, Blaenau Ffestiniog, etc. which provide a focus for jobs, and public services.
- acknowledges the need for an element of general market housing within the Park, with the bulk of any new housing to be built in and around the larger towns in the Park
- worked to the housing allocations set in the Gwynedd Structure Plan (still extant) and worked out that its target figure was to build 475 new units in the plan period (ie by 2003)

- but within the two equivalent ‘focal centres’ in the Park (Bala and Dolgellau) the NPS is principally concerned to assimilate small housing schemes - without harm to the cultural character – within the set ‘housing development boundaries’
- identifies 6 ‘larger villages’ (Harlech, Aberdyfi, Trefriw, Llan Ffestiniog, Trawsfynydd, Betws y Coed) where for a variety of reasons it sees little need for new units
- plus c. 45 ‘small villages’ (eg Rhyd-ddu, Beddgelert, Garreg Llanfrothen and Nantlle), where small scale housing provision at a rate appropriate to their existing population is allowed, in theory, although the scope is seen as much constrained in practice by the fact that the villages are often tightly constrained by the surrounding mountain landscapes
- and the NPA calls for high quality design, no significant harm to the neighbouring residential amenities, unreasonable loss of trees and hedgerows, or damage to important open space, or significant harm to the character of a settlement
- includes a policy on housing in ‘hamlets’ (eg. Nant Gwynant and Nantmor): allowing a small amount of carefully regulated house building for farm workers, retiring farmers or local people who wish to remain in the area - in the interests of social vitality of hamlets as a facet of Welsh rural life (although the NPA acknowledges that living in a hamlet means total dependency on personal motorised transport, and that they do not regard them as environmentally sustainable locations for new house building)
- has the usual policies on housing in the open countryside being acceptable only for agricultural and forestry dwellings
- has several policies seeking to control long-standing unimplemented outstanding planning permissions
- notes the popularity of the Park as a retirement destination, together with second home and purchase and the consequential raising of the price of the better quality stock
- foresees that most newly built property will remain beyond the means of those on the lowest rate of pay within Snowdonia to those with special needs
- includes a corporate commitment to provide non-profit making affordable housing for local people – through new build, acquisitions and conversions of property by the two RSLs (Tai Clwyd, and Tai Eryri) – to provide rented accommodation for single people, young families, and special needs groups
- knows it is obliged in planning decisions to have significant regard to the needs of those who cannot afford open market housing,
- has the usual policies on ‘rural exception sites’, agricultural dwellings, etc.
- knows that it is obliged to work with the ‘Local Housing Authorities’ and to incorporate their strategies into its development policies.\*

[\* A large part of the Park lies within Gwynedd, so Gwynedd County Council is the Local housing Authority in that area, and under that banner can intervene on housing issues in the Park and seek additional leverage on SNPA’s Plans.]

- takes a restrictive line on conversion of non-residential property into housing, but a more accommodating one on extensions to existing dwellings
- recognises, with regard to residential care establishments, the likely need for more sheltered housing, nursing homes and residential care homes for the local (older and ageing) population, and wisely does not allocate any particular site/s but takes a flexible line on location, setting some broad criteria to test suitability, sustainability and impact on amenity, and
- sets precise criteria for testing the acceptability of proposals for gypsy sites.

Other National Park Authorities in the UK take a strong interventionist stance on dealing with local community issues - including affordable housing matters – so it will be interesting to see whether SNPA follows suit as the new LDF emerges.

[Hughes, Eira and Isherwood, Baron (HIRC) – Wales: Rural Housing Enablers – Report on the Current and Future Arrangements, 2007]

### **3. Overall Planning Performance and Development Control**

We would say by way of prelude that -

(i) all land use plans need to be interpreted and used expertly – and while all plans emphasise that a plan needs to be ‘read as a whole’, non-planners do not really understand what that entails, and the provision of training to non-planner colleagues might be helpful in that regard

(ii) much depends in planning processes on the quality of the individual application, its sensitivity to the abiding planning concerns (rationality, access, amenity, design, visual impact) as well as the requirements of particular policies and the skill with which it is presented in the context of the relevant plans and procedures, and

(iii) the latter is an area where very skilled and experienced planning practitioners have much to impart to both frustrated applicants and nervous local planning authorities.

We note below the current external perception of the quality of the planning performance in the area covered by Gwynedd CC as a Local Housing Authority.

#### **(i) Gwynedd County Council**

The recent Wales Audit Office Annual Letter draws attention to a recent inspection of the Planning Services which adjudged it to be ‘fair, with uncertain prospects of improvement’ – and it includes a long list of issues, procedures, processes, skills-issues, performance and other matters to be addressed and improvements needed, plus signs of progress made so far, and the outstanding concerns.

[Welsh Audit Office (2007) Relationship Manager's Annual Letter - Gwynedd CC]

(ii) Snowdonia National Park Authority

The recent Wales Audit Office's recent letter states that the NPA *"has made some progress improving its Planning Service but it faces a significant challenge as it does not have an up-to-date planning policy, and its speed in determining planning applications is one of the lowest in Wales."*

[Welsh Audit Office (2007) Relationship Manager's Annual Letter - Snowdonia NPA]

#### **4. The Way Forward**

In the context of progressing the GCC LHS 2007, specifically - which is our only concern here:

- the current lack of clarity on housing policies and figures in planning terms across Gwynedd as a whole is a complicating factor, and
- this Annex is an important piece of background evidence in interpreting that situation.

## Annex P: Joint Venture Companies for Urban Regeneration

In the UK, the government encourages 'Private – Public Partnerships'.

- JVCs are a form of Public-Private Partnership where responsibilities are shared, equally.
- A commercial company, limited by shares – held by the public and private sector partners.
- Policy decisions require the consent of both parties – so objectives of both must be complementary.
- Requires formal legal agreement (Memorandum, Articles of Agreement, and Shareholders Agreement) and a Business Plan.
- JVCs have a Board of Directors to make decisions and to take responsibility legally.
- Separate - legally – from the constituent bodies.
- Assets are put in at the start usually equal in value – money, land, etc
- Assets will fund the start of a rolling programme – with profits in large measure (apart from the private developers' agreed cut of the profits) recycled back to cover the preparatory costs for the next phase of schemes to be delivered.
- Reputation matters: the public sector agency and the private company must each be assured that the other is to be trusted.
- Each uses their 'know-how' to best effect / a good learning process.
- Should be arms-length from the public sector body's regulatory processes: but can be informed informally of regulatory requirements like any other private sector developer asking for early (pre-application) advice.
- The public sector agency will be required to demonstrate that entering into such an arrangement clearly delivers 'value for money' for the public.
- When problems occur, the public agency partner usually has to work hard to sort them, behind the scenes, using all its 'know-how'.
- Private sector partner brings commercial awareness, development experience, and many contacts with builder-developers, etc.

### WIDNES REGENERATION COMPANY / HALTON BC & ST.MODWEN

- Between Halton BC (Pop c.112K) and St.Modwen Properties Company (private sector regeneration property specialists [www.stmodwen.co.uk](http://www.stmodwen.co.uk))
- Board Members – Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and Chairman and Chief Exec of St.Modwen.
- Advised by senior staff of both organisations at the Board meetings – quarterly – including the Council's Treasurer and the St.Modwen Finance Director, and both sets of senior 'major regeneration project' directors.
- Between the Board Meetings - behind the scenes - the advisors to both sides would work very hard together in (officer) working groups to work up deliverable schemes.
- Complimentary objective – to redevelop a small run-down town centre.

- Brought in a major retail unit – an ASDA superstore – in a complicated deal with lots of loose ends re interface with neighbouring landowners which the JVC partners: both JVC partners had to work hard to resolve the problems.
- Good progress achieved on a wide range of schemes.
- St.Modwen's Chair always says this approach only works where the Council has strong leadership politically and at officer level.

[Contact - Chairman (and past CX) – Anthony Glossop, St Modwen Properties Co., St Modwen HQ, Quinton Business Park, Quinton, Birmingham. B32 1AF. Tel – 0121 222 9400]

## **RUNCORN / HALTON BC & PEEL HOLDINGS**

- Halton BC has a similar arrangement with Peel Holdings (a major property, airport owner/manager, etc. company) re the revamping of Runcorn Town Centre – a small town centre.
- New shopping / mixed use development - now completed.
- Progress (despite the wealth of Peel) had to await an upturn in the retail market – frustrating for local politicians.
- Infrastructure capacity limitations took a lot to negotiate away – much of that falling to the Council to sort.

[Contact – Ed Burrows, Peel Holdings – Project Leader for Peel. Ed used to be a Halton BC officer years ago – which helped to build trust in dealing with a huge company - Peel Holdings ([www.peelholdings.co.uk](http://www.peelholdings.co.uk)).]

## **SIMILAR ARRANGEMENTS ELSEWHERE IN THE UK**

- Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs) are usually types of JVC.
- Nottingham Regeneration Limited (NRL) URC - established to regenerate Nottingham Town Centre – [www.nottinghamregeneration.ltd.uk](http://www.nottinghamregeneration.ltd.uk)
- East Midlands Property Investment Fund (EMPIF) – JVC set up by English Partnerships and East Midlands Development Agency – to create a £100M fund to invest in managing, developing and putting out sites onto the market – [www.urbed.co.uk](http://www.urbed.co.uk)
- English Cities Fund - JVC involving English Partnerships, AMEC and Legal & General to invest in mixed-use schemes in town centres and their fringes in 'assisted areas', etc. (including Wakefield's town centre). [www.englishpartnerships.co.uk/englishcitiesfund.htm](http://www.englishpartnerships.co.uk/englishcitiesfund.htm)
- Newport Unlimited ( a URC/JVC) – involving Newport Council / Welsh Assembly Government / Welsh Development Agency – all 3 made equal financial contributions at the start to regenerate Newport Town Centre over 15-20 years. [www.newportunlimited.co.uk](http://www.newportunlimited.co.uk)

EH Oct.2006

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## **Annex R: Hughes - Isherwood Regeneration Consultants**

Working for Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants on this Contract, for Gwynedd CC, were –

### LEAD:

EIRA HUGHES DipLA, MCD, MRTPI, MLI (Director, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants) is also an Enabler for the Transform South Yorkshire HMR Pathfinder Scheme, and a SOLACE Enterprises Associate. She was previously Executive Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhood Services for an English Unitary Council, with a focus on devising, master-planning and delivering major regeneration schemes and before that she was the Director of Planning, Environment and Regional Policy Co-ordination for the Government Office for the North West (of England). Previous to that she was Head of Conservation Policy and Advice and Chief Planner for the Countryside Council for Wales; and worked on housing and planning policy and practical regeneration schemes for Newport and Arfon Borough Councils, and Manchester City Council. Eira is professionally qualified as a town planner and a landscape architect.

### MAIN SUPPORT:

BARON ISHERWOOD BA (Econ), PhD (Director, Hughes-Isherwood Regeneration Consultants) is currently advising the French Government on regeneration best practice in the UK. He was previously Director of Regeneration for the North West Development Agency, in England, with responsibility for many major regeneration programmes and initiatives; and before that he was Director of Strategy ( and Regeneration) for the Government Office for the North West - where he managed very major (Single Regeneration Budget and EU) programmes. He has also been a Regional Controller for Housing, for GONW. He held a range of civil service posts in Whitehall on health, housing and environmental issues; and, also worked on agricultural economics for the international Food and Agriculture Organisation in Rome. Baron is an economist.

### ADDITIONAL ADVICE / ASSISTANCE :

DAVID BRIGHTMORE Dip.BAdmin, DipAD (HIRC Associate) is the Former Chief Executive of the North Wales Housing Association, a Former Chair of Newydd HA, and the Former Chair of the Oriel Plas Glyn-y-Weddw Trust. Previous to that he worked for a number of public and private sector agencies on housing renewal, including Abbey National Building Society (as an inner-city housing co-ordinator), and as Head of Renewal Strategies in Newport Borough Council: and he also worked in a private sector architectural practice in South Wales. David is now principally an exhibiting artist.

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HUGHES-ISHERWOOD REGENERATION CONSULTANTS**

*Front Cover : Housing in the Bangor area of Gwynedd.*

*Back Cover : Council/former Council housing, Beddgelert; flats above and in extensions behind shops, Blaenau Ffestiniog; and small bungalows and terraced housing in Blaenau Ffestiniog.*

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