Housing and built environment: issues and objectives

“Our goal is to ensure that the design and development of our built environment meets the needs of the community and contributes positively to the objective of stronger, safer, sustainable communities’.

Housing: setting the context

There is a lack of affordable housing to rent or buy for the Penzance area community. The rise in the price of homes, and the gap between earnings and the costs of home ownership means that the gap is increasing. At the same time there is a high proportion of second homes in the area. The shortage of affordable housing has led to an increase in homeless families housed in unsuitable temporary housing such as bed and breakfast (B&B) hotels for too long. The use of such housing as a temporary expedient is bad practice and the poor housing conditions could lead to future poverty and social exclusion such as: poor health; adversely affected school attendance; poor education attainment; greater risk of accidents and health problems; barrier to employment; greater risk of mental health problems whilst homeless; all of this places extreme pressure on the family, their health and their future well being.

Whilst we recognise that there are existing agencies and authorities addressing the issue of affordable housing, our remit is to ensure that the community is closely involved in the consultation over the nature of that provision. This is one of the key elements currently missing in the affordable housing programme: understanding the way in which people want and need to live if communities are to be built around the needs of the residents. Opportunities such as live and work units, housing for the elderly with care facilities to hand, green spaces for young people, the future of second homes, are all part of our wider housing issues.

The South West Regional Spatial Strategy identifies that 4,800 dwellings must be built over the next twenty years, amounting to 240 per year. For Penzance, this means some 1,000 dwellings as its share of the figure. This is in the context that currently in Penwith approximately 3,500* people need affordable housing, of which approximately 1,400* are from the Penzance area. Whilst the current threshold percentage of new dwellings requires 30% to be affordable, Penwith District Council’s Draft Core Strategy seeks to increase this to 50%; at the same time the threshold for this will reduce to a minimum development of five units. *(At the time of writing).

The MCTI process, through Penzance Futures, is able to play a significant role in working with the planning authority to consider where new...
development sites might be located, and the consequent effects on the overall built environment and infrastructure.

As a result of the first meeting of the Theme Group, a number of basic principles were put forward by the community that are embodied in the following objectives.

**Housing and built environment: objective 1**

To establish a working partnership with the planning authority in order to ensure community opinion is constantly sought in all aspects of housing development, through the Housing and Built Environment Delivery Group

Considerations will include:
- Ways in which to ensure wide community representation, and how the wider community can be enabled to put their views forward
- How best to make the partnership effective given the constraints and guidelines to which the planning authority is required to work
- The role of housing development in the context of the longer term economic regeneration of the area and therefore the need for this partnership to work closely with other Theme Delivery Groups identified in this Plan

Potential partners:
- Penwith District Council Affordable Housing Working Group*
- Penwith Housing Association
- Residents Association representatives
- Town and Parish Councils
- Townscape Heritage Initiative
- Developers as appropriate
  * Please refer to note on inside front cover, which applies to all following references to Penwith District Council

To support the work of this partnership, and in order to ensure community opinion is considered, informed and authoritative, the Theme Group identified the need to establish a set of guidelines or principles that met a range of concerns and issues identified not only by the group but also revealed through the research process.

**Housing and built environment: objective 2**

To determine a set of principles for housing development in the Penzance area, to advise the planning authority on areas for new housing development over the next twenty years, and to determine the consequent infrastructure needs

Considerations will include:
- The need to ensure strong, viable, sustainable communities
- The need to minimise travel from home to work, shop, and leisure
For older people, the issue is about housing that meets their needs, so they can live where they choose to live, and have the option of sheltered housing should they choose it; helping people to stay in their homes longer, which may involve carrying out adaptations to enable independent living; help in maintaining the home; and security from ‘distraction burglaries’ which prey upon the elderly homeowner.

Over the past 10 years, 5-7% of care homes in Penwith have closed, and it seems likely that there will be more closures whilst fees remain relatively low and market forces prevail, a situation compounded by a proposed reduction in the number of hospital beds in the future. So as plans for affordable housing are developed, provision for a mix of housing that meets the needs of the elderly is essential.

The differing needs of different sectors of the community: such as the elderly, and those with disability or limited mobility
- Seeking to develop brown-field sites as a priority
- Ensuring green spaces are preserved and added to as the number of dwellings increases
- The value of considering where appropriate the relocation of existing services, retail and work areas where better solutions can be offered for the long-term benefit of the community
- Opportunities to meet dwelling targets by conversion of existing buildings, flats above shops, live / work units
- The impact of any proposals on existing communities
- The need for transport infrastructure developments
- How best to integrate housing types including affordable and social housing into the community
- Seeking best-practice and creative solutions to affordable housing such as rent-to-purchase, mutual home ownership schemes
- The need for energy-efficient new homes
- The use of local materials and the embodiment of traditional design features in new building schemes

Potential Partners:
- Penwith District Council
- Penwith Housing Association
- Residents Association representatives
- Town and Parish Councils
- Townscape Heritage Initiative
- Treneere Together

Housing and built environment: objective 3

To review the current provision for the elderly, infirm and those with disabilities in the context of care home and at-home facilities

Considerations will include:
- Working with the appropriate authorities, care home providers and support agencies in order to fully understand the needs of and provision for this sector of our community
- Recommendations for addressing the needs of this sector of our community
Whilst there is a high demand for affordable housing, 5% of the housing stock is second-homes, and there are over 500 empty properties in Penwith. Whilst tourism is a key component of the economic health of the area, second-home ownership tends to contribute little to the economy, other than to make less building stock available to buyers, to displace the local community, and to inflate the cost of housing to a point where it is unaffordable to young people and other first-time buyers.

The impact of widespread second-home ownership in our seaside communities, Mousehole and Newlyn, needs to be addressed. The work of the Porthleven Action Group has identified that the residents there are being displaced outside their village into fringe housing developments as holiday home seekers buy up property in the central village area. This is happening in Mousehole, Newlyn, and to a lesser extent in the villages; we need to know precisely the extent and impact on our communities.

Whilst it is not possible to return all second-home housing stock to the local market, the Theme Group held strong views that ways should be sought to limit aspirant second-home owners from buying any new housing stock that comes onto the market.

**Housing and built environment: objective 4**

*To explore ways to more effectively manage the second-home ownership market*

Considerations will include:
- The need for a house-by-house survey of homes to determine the nature of their occupancy
- The economic and social impact on the community of second-home ownership
- The desirability or otherwise of imposing control measures such as local cost disincentives, changes to council taxes on second homes, covenants on new houses
- Ways of returning second-homes to the local housing stock

**Potential partners:**
- Penwith District Council
- Penwith Housing Association
- Residents Association representatives
- Town and Parish Councils
- Care home owners
- Porthleven Action Group
Our built environment

This section looks at the town and surrounding settlements in transition over the next twenty years, and the changing factors which affect the built environment. What influences the nature of our built environment? Is it the roles, performance and limitations of the architects, planners and environmentalists towards sustainable development/environment? Is it the adaptability or resistance of the people to a changing built environment? Or is it the role of politics, dominant culture, ethnicity, religion and consumerism that shapes the built environment and its impact on people? Out-of-town developments are a feature of life in Penzance: are they adding to the strength and sustainability of the community, or are they a threat to the central core of our community?

Influencing the Local Development Framework

At the Built Environment Theme Group meeting, a number of criteria were discussed that translate as key issues for the management of our built environment:

- Retaining and promoting identity and character: recognising distinctive features such as street layout, building styles, materials, yet avoiding a continued copying of the past
- A built environment designed to maintain civic pride
- The potential to build to increase prosperity, but not to simply serve the economic end
- Clarity of definition for public and private spaces
- Quality of the public realm: a safe, secure, uncluttered environment
Ease of movement around the town: acknowledging that the motor-car has broken down much of the quality of our visual space

Retaining and where appropriate re-using landmark buildings

A flexible attitude towards use of buildings, supported by a planning process that supports adaptability

Diversity and choice: a built environment that engages everyone, and provides for all sorts of uses

Issues of sustainability: the impact of wind turbines, solar panels, ground source heat and solar gain systems on our built environment

The need to retain Penzance and the surrounding communities as living and working spaces, not dominated by retirement properties or second homes

The meeting called for consultation at the widest possible level, with maximum possible lead time on consultations, on all developments and schemes that impact on the built environment, despite pressure to respond to Area Action Plans; our planners should have a clear brief from the community, and a community resource on which to draw: in this instance, the Housing And Built Environment Theme Delivery Group (refer to objective 1 above).

**Built environment ‘Action Zones’ and ‘Action Sites’**

This section raises a number of specific objectives identified by the Theme Group, but those objectives (7, 8, and 9 below) need to be considered in a wider context. As an example of the potential development of the Penzance area, this section presents a number of specific areas generally identified as the ‘Mounts Bay Waterfront Development’ in the overall context of the Local Development Framework (LDF): in particular the part referred to as the Penzance / Newlyn Area Action Plan.

It is proposed that we adopt a strategy that describes Penzance, Newlyn and the surrounding area as a series of zones, and determine what actions are necessary to preserve, or to develop, each Action Zone in the context of the longer-term plan for the area, and in relationship to each of the other zones. It is further proposed that within each Action Zone we identify Action Sites: specific areas of land, which may already be built upon, as specific sites suitable for improvement and development in line with the plans for that particular Action Zone.

Those specific areas we have chosen to call Action Zones; they run from the east to the west of the area under consideration, described below.

**Action Zone 1:** the ‘Gateway’ entrance to Penzance running from the B&Q roundabout along Eastern Green and up over the by-pass embankment or via the Chyandour entrance to Penzance town. This area needs to be given a face-lift to give a far more distinctive sense of arrival specific to this part of Cornwall, e.g. the introduction of Golowan-style banners or landmark sculpture by local artists, and dramatic sub-tropical planting. There is also the opportunity to develop a Park and Ride facility for the Penzance area on the redundant rail-sidings site.

**Action Zone 2** refers to the ‘Wharfside’ including the bus / rail terminus. There is potential to explore the possibilities of developing a Marina part-funded by realising potential development of the Wharfside car...
park and gas-works site. The illustration at the foot of the previous page shows a possible scheme to divert the road to extend the pedestrian area together with development of a new Yacht Club club-house, also accommodating the Canoe Club et al. There is also the potential to resolve the ongoing problem of forming an effective all-weather protection for passengers at the bus station waiting area.

**Action Zone 3:** generally the harbour area taking in the future development of the Isles of Scilly link: harbour and passenger facilities; plus potential for sustainable development of the adjacent areas: the redundant Trinity House buildings, Coinagehall Street site, the dry dock, Bosuns Locker, Abbey Basin et al, and the future development of St Anthony’s Gardens and Jubilee Pool.

**Action Zone 4** refers to the Promenade and Wherrytown area. Future development of the waterfront and adjacent land running from the Promenade through to Newlyn Gallery area beyond Eastern Green: upgrading and potential development of the Promenade including sea defence measures; potential development of the Jewsons and Beachfield Hotel sites, the Co-op store and garage, the skateboard and boating pool sites; and the complimentary development of the Newlyn Green / Gallery and Fisherman’s Memorial site.

**Action Zone 5:** the Coombe through to Newlyn centre, the fish market, and on to Penlee Quarry; including proposed sustainable redevelopment of the Newlyn Central Fish Market and fish processing facilities, and the consequential redevelopment of the redundant processing buildings within Newlyn and the Coombe.

### Housing and built environment: objective 6

**To agree ‘Action Zones’ and ‘Action Sites’ for the Penzance area, and to develop long-term plans for those zones through extensive community consultation**

Considerations will include:
- How best to achieve a long-term vision, by the community, for the area
- The need to build on current plans for Newlyn prepared by the Newlyn Fish Industry Forum
- The relevance of current plans for the area identified in the Area Action Plan
- The work of the Penzance Harbour Users Association
- Developments at Penlee Quarry
- Projects within this plan concerned with housing, a link road for Mousehole / Newlyn, and with traffic management

**Potential partners:**
- Penwith District Council*
- Newlyn Fish Industries Forum
- Penzance Harbour Users Association
- Town and Parish Councils

In considering longer-term plans for Penzance area, and specifically the harbour and the Promenade, we need to refer to four key objectives described further in this plan within Traffic and Transport, and one of the
objectives described in the Economy section, because they clearly impact on the potential to radically rethink our public spaces. They are:

- **Traffic and transport** objective 1: ‘A Park and Ride scheme for Penzance and a congestion charging scheme to significantly reduce the impact of commuter and visitor traffic’
- **Traffic and transport** objective 4: ‘To more effectively manage the delivery of goods to town centre retailers, and the collection of goods from producers and suppliers’
- **Traffic and transport** objective 5: ‘Establish a distribution / transfer centre on the outskirts of Penzance supported by an environmentally-friendly local delivery service, in order to minimise the impact of delivery vehicles in Penzance and Newlyn’
- **Traffic and transport** objective 9: ‘To investigate options for a new link / relief road for Penzance / Newlyn, and opportunities to combine housing development and economic regeneration initiatives within the same scheme’
- **Economy** objective 7: ‘Develop a long-term strategy to re-invest in our coastline and our marine frontage’

The Theme group meeting also discussed two sites in detail, the harbour and the Promenade, and whilst they are identified within the Action Zones above, they merit specific attention.

**The harbour area**

Along with the Promenade, the harbour area offers more potential than any other public space, and we endorse the proposals presented at this meeting for a marina at Penzance, put forward by the Penzance Harbour Users Association. PHUA believe that the harbour represents a relatively unexploited resource which has the potential to add substantially to the economy of the area. They believe the harbour should be the centrepiece for the regeneration of the town. The current harbour facilities were designed principally to support the coastal freight trade, and except for passenger and freight services to the Isles of Scilly, that has largely been replaced by an increase in use for leisure and sport. Lack of investment in facilities for small-craft users means that the facilities that exist are inadequate, and compare poorly to similar coastal towns elsewhere.

Currently, one of the main uses for the harbour area is that of a car park; there is limited access and storage for boat-users, and opportunities to develop the area for leisure activities, a leisure ‘culture’, are prohibited by the need to park cars in the town. Therefore the PHUA proposals need to be modified in the context of a proposed substantially traffic-free environment.

**Housing and built environment: objective 7**

To re-develop and expand the Penzance harbour area in order to provide new and extended facilities and to provide a focus for regeneration

Considerations will include:
- The need to provide deep-water berthing
- The need to create a large area of protected water which will enable the establishment of an all-tide marina
The Promenade

The same need applies here: to consider the regeneration of the Promenade in the context of a far more traffic-free environment, with that area no longer serving traffic heading for Newlyn, Mousehole and beyond; and within the context of Economy objective 7: ‘Develop a long-term strategy to re-invest in our coastline and our marine frontage.’

The Promenade is a unique asset that is largely unexploited: the area offers limited recreational facilities other than walking its’ length, no café-culture, no places designed for people to gather together; it is not a flexible or easily adaptable space, and plays a minimal role in festivals like Golowan as people gather more readily in other parts of the town. The built environment behind the Promenade offers little in the way of landmark architecture, and even less in terms of any cultural contribution to the town; nor is it a vibrant retail area. Nonetheless the Promenade is a key space in the hearts and minds of the residents of Penzance; and should play a key role in a new vibrancy for the town.

Any redevelopment of the Promenade needs to be linked to plans described above for the regeneration of the harbour, and other objectives to create a traffic-free or limited-access environment. It would also need to be linked to a longer-term solution to the threat of flooding to those properties that lie behind the Promenade, such as those in Daniel Place. In creating a sheltered marina, plans would also need to propose ways to reduce the potential for storm damage along the length of the Promenade.

Potential partners:
- Penwith District Council
- Penzance Harbour Users Association
- Penzance Town Council

Housing and built environment: objective 8

To consider the long-term future of the Promenade as a vibrant public space making a significant contribution to the identity, economy, and culture of Penzance

Considerations will include:
- The need to provide against storm damage and rising water levels
- Essential links to Traffic and transport objectives 1, 4, 5, and 9, designed to control traffic
Securing the future of landmark buildings and significant structures

Penzance townscape is recognised by its setting in the environment, and by key landmark buildings. Many of these buildings were constructed at a time of former wealth, to celebrate industrial, economic, cultural, religious or civic achievement, or merely to indicate standing within the community. Contexts change: what required a substantial and imposing structure in the 19th and 20th century may be served by a digital communications network in the next twenty years. As an example: will Lloyds Bank want to retain a physical presence in its current building, or will banking systems have changed entirely by 2027? Will we still use St Johns Hall as we use it today? If we are to preserve our landmark buildings, and to plan long-term for the possible acquisition and re-use of other substantive buildings and properties, we need to start planning now.

Housing and built environment: objective 9

A policy to secure the future of landmark buildings and other significant structures in our community

Considerations will include:
- Identifying all those properties to which this policy might apply
- Determining ways in which those buildings can be returned to the public domain, such as by acquisition by charitable trusts or other community-based organisations
- Exploring new flexible, adaptable uses for landmark buildings
- Targeting buildings for purchase, preservation and adaptation

Potential partners:
- Penwith District Council*
- Town and Parish Councils
- Penzance Harbour Users Association
- Penzance Civic Society
- Penzance Town Council

Links to Housing and built environment objective 6 above
- The potential to create a flexible space that meets the needs of a wide cross-section of the community, such as performance space, play space, meeting-places, cafes and restaurants
- Opportunities to build the Penzance 'identity,' to add to the overall experience of Penzance, and contribute to the economy