

## Blakeney Neighbourhood Housing Society Chairman's report for the year to May 2020

What do I write in a year when everything we have taken as normal has been booted out of the window? I am writing this when we are into our sixth week of lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In Blakeney and North Norfolk in general we are probably amongst the lucky ones. There is undoubtedly financial hardship, unemployment, some supplies are short and the future is very uncertain. Against that there is an amazing community spirit and everywhere one looks there are acts of kindness and selflessness. So far the weather has been kind to us with one of the driest Aprils on record. Taking a daily walk takes so much longer than planned as everyone wants to chat – at a safe distance of course. At the time of writing we are well past the first peak and hopefully we will make sure the second peak will be smaller when it does come. We all have to play our part.

The Housing Society is in good form. We have an excellent Committee which works well. The Committee Officers (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Housing Officer) are in regular contact between meetings dealing with day to day matters as they arise. We generally meet as a Management Committee every two months. I hope am right when I say we also have an excellent relationship with our tenants and they with each other. We have several generations of several local families to show the Society is doing what it is supposed to be doing by providing homes for local people.

Our relationship with our main contractor, Big Sky Construction, remains good and after a few teething troubles with procedural matters during the early part of 2019 they have taken over from the previous contractors extremely well. There have been a few criticisms that the new company is employing some of the personnel from the old company. While that is true I believe the individuals concerned are working to a much better standard than they were previously.

2019 has been a quieter year on workload. We completed a full refurbishment of a property by late springtime and then re-roofed two other properties by early summer. The usual number of tenant led repairs and regular maintenance activities, sweeping, boiler servicing, gutters, alarms and painting kept our contractors busy. After Colin Brown moved from 103/105 High Street the vacancy gave us the opportunity to sell the 'flying freehold living room' from 103 HS to the owners of 107 HS. Using the money raised we have embarked on a major refurbishment of 103/105 incorporating the unused shop back into living accommodation. We will end up with a refurbished house of equal size to what it was before at no cost to us and, if things progress as planned a sizeable sum left over. Inevitably work has ceased at present due to the corona virus lockdown.

### **Development**

The idea of at least one new build development is beginning to look as if it will happen. Fingers crossed. Working with the Parish Council and Broadland Housing Association, sites have been identified and initial sketch plans have been drawn. It now boils down to the seemingly endless negotiations with the landowner and district planners. One breakthrough is an agreement with the NNDC allowing the BNHS to have primary and ongoing tenant allocation rights based on BNHS selection criteria. The legacies mentioned last year will provide the necessary funding from the BNHS.

## **Tenants**

This year there have been relatively few changes of tenants.

Aiden Weston and family have moved from 100 High Street to 80 High Street.

Jessica Wilkinson and family have moved from 53 High Street to 100 High Street.

Colin Brown has moved from 103 High Street to 53 High Street.

George and Jilly Dawson have moved into Wildfowlers in Cley.

Naomi Weston has moved out of 87 High Street and Victoria Easa has moved in. We wish every success to Naomi.

## **Finances**

Financially the Society is well placed. Our reserves are sound and we have funds available for the developments as and when they happen. There are concerns about the lockdown and the effect it has already had on the local economy and the ability of some tenants being able to pay their full rents. We have written to all the tenants asking them to keep closely in touch and to share their concerns with us. We will approach each situation sensitively and make arrangements with each tenant as appropriate.

## **Committee**

There have been some changes to the Committee of Management. Last year Kevin Walker retired as Treasurer but stayed on keeping the books for us. Richard Cole joined us as Treasurer. Unfortunately, due to outside pressures Richard has since resigned and Kevin has recently announced his intention to retire from the book-keeping role by the end of 2020. I would like to express my thanks to Kevin for all his hard work for the Society over the years and to Richard for his invaluable tenure as Treasurer. I am pleased to say that Don Glaister has joined us as Treasurer.

Naomi Weston joined us on the Committee last year but found her job as a nurse with the NHS prevented her from attending meetings so she has stood down. We have told her she is welcome to rejoin us whenever she feels able to do so. She is one of our NHS heroes and I thank her for everything she is doing for us all.

As you may already know Anne Maw had a severe stroke from which she didn't recover and sadly passed away. Anne was an absolute stalwart of the Society, never shy about telling us all off when necessary and forthright in her opinions, not to mention correcting spelling and punctuation errors with some glee whenever we produced some report or set of minutes. I really miss her and her sense of humour.

At last our revised tenancy agreement is ready to roll out and will be used for all new tenants from now on.

We currently have 83 Shareholders.

As I said last year the BNHS is not just about houses. This year what I said is even more applicable. It is far more about the people who live in the cottages and the people who make it work. It is an extremely successful example of a community working together to achieve something special. And it is special. I am very privileged to have been able to serve the Society.