



The balance between the amount of housing lived in by the people who keep Blakeney the attractive place it is and those coming to spend leisure time here has been gradually tipping in favour of the latter over the past half century. We undoubtedly need visitors to keep coming and to feel welcome, but we also need to maintain a healthy housing stock for the continuing benefit of the local community.

We are seeking input from all interested parties to enable us to make the right decisions on some major issues affecting us and how we continue to conduct our business, and to discuss the possible impact these difficult decisions may have on the village and the surrounding area.

We have recently had to move a family from one BNHS property into another BNHS property, so that essential work can be carried out on the empty property. Our contractors have estimated a cost of at least £175,000 to carry out repairs and improvements. This property is also a Listed Building which means we require Consent from the North Norfolk District Council Conservation Officer and therefore some modifications will necessitate a more expensive solution to ensure the historic fabric of the building is maintained. A further requirement on us is to meet the Government's target to get all rented property to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) grade C or above by 2028.

Given the nature of some of our older houses, it is our experience that estimated costs always escalate and a final figure of well over £200,000 is very likely.

This level of expenditure would far exceed our annual disposable income and would represent more than we have ever spent on any property in the Society's history, even allowing for rising costs. We do have reserves but to use them would deny us the opportunity to engage in a second development in addition to the Langham Road project already in the pipeline.

The Government's target of EPC grade C or above applies to all our properties and with an estimated cost of achieving this upgrade at £20,000 - £25,000 per property, the financial problem becomes even worse. We could apply for an exemption for our Listed buildings (28 of the 39 we look after directly) but to do so would be to leave our tenants living in properties of a lower standard than other comparable rented houses. We could also apply for a costs ceiling exemption on the unlisted properties but this is not behaving like a responsible landlord. It may take longer but we believe it is important to aim for the 'C' grade target.

The Society's only income is the rent paid by its tenants, but it has also been fortunate to receive some very generous legacies, which it has always tried to use responsibly.

What do we do? We see our Options as follows:

1. **Spend our reserves on the work needed to upgrade the empty property.** This would amount to denying the community the opportunity to benefit from a future seven or eight homes planned in a Second Development currently being mooted. The First Development in the pipeline – also for seven or eight homes on the Langham Road - is now in the early stages of planning consultation and legal deliberation.
2. **Drop out of the Langham Road Development.** This would deny the community the seven or eight houses already ear-marked for allocation to local people.
3. **Carry out basic repairs on the empty property.** These would be unlikely to last more than a few years at which point we would have to carry them out all over again.

4. **Employ a Fundraiser and/or someone with the skills to identify and apply for any available grants to cover the type of remedial work needed on 1 Little Lane.** As a group of Volunteers, the existing Committee is unable to take on this type of extra work, so it would be necessary to find someone who can.
5. **Sell the empty property and use the funds from that sale to buy a more suitable property in the Community.** We know of one such that is available.

The Management Committee, after much soul-searching and examination of the implications, favour this last option.

We are fully aware and understand that the last two options will stir up strong feelings, not least because the property concerned forms part of the John Wallace Legacy. John, in his will, recognised the need to remain flexible when he wrote that the properties are to be left to the BNHS ‘without creating any binding trust’.

To fund the future Energy Performance Certificate requirement works, we will need to consider our options going forward but it has to be acknowledged that this too may include selling one or two properties.

Because we recognise how much the BNHS means to the local community and how much sentiment will be generated, we are inviting your constructive comments on how best you feel we should proceed.

Subject to views expressed at the AGM, we are prepared to call an Extraordinary General Meeting for the purpose of further discussion of this dilemma.