Mixed Tenure Development: a NIFHA study visit

There has been a drive amongst policy makers to promote a greater tenure mix in new and existing neighbourhoods. This is (in part) due to a significant body of research that correlates greater social mix with benefits for individuals and wider society. Housing associations in Northern Ireland are beginning to deliver new mixed tenure development, but there are challenges in this approach, not least the lack of planning support which exists elsewhere in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

NIFHA and the Department for Communities have partnered to develop a new resource to identify some of those challenges and further progress mixed tenure in Northern Ireland. To gain a practical insight, delegates from Northern Ireland visited the North of England to learn lessons from housing associations leading on tenure mix.

The delegation included representatives from the Department for Communities; Northern Ireland Housing Executive; the National House Building Council and the housing association sector.

We planned to learn from three associations delivering much needed homes of multiple tenures in Yorkshire: Together Housing; Wakefield and District Housing (WDH) and Yorkshire Housing. Unfortunately due to a cancelled flight we were unable to meet with Together Housing, however we are hoping to gain some understanding from their experience at a later date.

Together Housing

We had intended for Together Housing to be the first stop on our trip. Unfortunately heavy fog in Leeds Bradford airport dashed these plans. Together Housing are delivering mixed tenure in a joint venture arrangement. This was of interest as joint ventures could be a way for housing associations and private developers to cooperate in future to deliver homes for Northern Ireland, without the formal planning agreements that operate in other jurisdictions.

In Hull, Together Housing are working in partnership with Hull City Council and
Compendium Living to secure the first phase of an eight year programme to complete the Council’s regeneration activity in the Ings area of East Hull. This is an £80 million project to deliver up to 850 mixed tenure homes over the next 10-12 years.

**Wakefield and District Housing (WDH)**

When we were unable to meet with Together Housing, the team in WDH kindly agreed to spend additional time with us. WDH went above and beyond at very short notice and the delegation greatly appreciated this.

As the name suggests WDH operates within the Wakefield district. In the next year WDH plans to develop a range of home ownership options including outright sale and shared ownership.

Kevin Dodd, WDH’s Chief Executive, explained how the association has created an innovative new housing company in partnership with Wakefield Council. The subsidiary body is helping to accelerate the delivery of new homes and generate revenue for further housing investment in their district.

Delegates were particularly interested in WDH as it is one of very few housing associations in the UK which is building new homes using its own workforce. WDH’s Homebuilder Team has now constructed 16 properties since its launch in 2012, with seven new homes built in the last year.

We were then able to visit some of the mixed tenure developments that have been carried out by WDH in the last few years.
Yorkshire Housing

On the second day of our trip we met with Yorkshire Housing. Yorkshire Housing is the region’s biggest developing housing association – over the next three years it plans to deliver 1,600 new homes in Yorkshire. This includes homes to buy and rent to meet local housing needs.

The staff of the Yorkshire Housing commercial arm (Space Property) gave us an insight into their work and how they have delivered mixed tenure development. Sally Lynch, Head of Space Property, exemplified how a housing association can maintain its social mission while carrying out more commercial activity.

Yorkshire Housing arranged visits to two sites in Penistone. We visited a 22 home mixed tenure development, featuring a mixture of properties for sale and for affordable rent, catering for different housing needs of people living in the town.

We then visited a site currently under construction. On the site will be 33 units.
Interestingly, the site mostly comprises market sale, with 27 homes of this tenure. Of the rest, seven are shared Ownership and two are affordable rent homes.

Conclusion

Delegates will now take the lessons learned from our trip and use these to inform the development of a mixed tenure development resource. We are grateful to all of the participants for taking the time out of their schedules. We also greatly appreciate the time taken by Together Housing, WDH and Yorkshire Housing to arrange a diverse and informative programme for us.