

26 April 2010

Dear Resident,

Byker Update

As you know we have been working at ways to best deliver a full improvements solution for Byker and we have been given the opportunity of creating a Community Housing Trust by the Government in order to do this. We wrote to the Housing Minister, John Healey, asking that the Government write off the debt linked with Byker to help fund an improvement programme for the estate, which will focus on improving:

- ◇ community safety
- ◇ energy efficiency
- ◇ environmental issues
- ◇ access to the estate and parking
- ◇ investment in local areas of the estate

To be able to do this on behalf of residents, we have to introduce a Community Housing Trust for Byker. This would be a charity, which would own and look after the estate on behalf of the residents. The Trust would include local residents, who would make decisions on investment, day to day management of the estate and manage a local team. The Trust could also develop training and job opportunities for local people.

What is a Community Housing Trust? There is no simple straightforward answer to that, so we have produced a question and answer sheet to start to help explain. Clearly this will not answer all of your questions, but we hope that it is a good start. Of course there is much more work to be done to ensure that every resident in Byker gets to know as much as possible over the next few months.

A Community Housing Trust will only be established if local residents vote for one. To make sure that you have the opportunity to ask questions and raise any concerns about what this means for you, there will be many opportunities for you to get involved. If a Trust is established, a Board for the Trust will be established, the Board of Trustees on which residents will represent the single biggest group, for example four out of nine positions on the Board may be kept only for residents. Other members on the Board will include representatives from the Council, YHN and independent specialists.

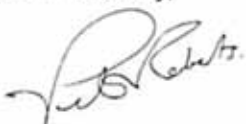
The Board would be responsible for developing policies, making decisions on investment and monitoring the overall performance of the Trust.

We need your help to put the Trust in place. Once we have submitted our ideas to the Government in June and get the go ahead to continue, we will then focus on a ballot for residents in September/October, which will tell us if you think that the Trust is the best thing for Byker. In between now and then we will continue to communicate with you and ask your opinions on what we are doing.

We need you to get involved in the project to help us do what is right for Byker. If you would like to get involved, please contact Caroline Collinson, who is your the local ward coordinator, on 0191 277 3614 or caroline.collinson@newcastle.gov.uk. Your 3 ward councillors are all available to discuss this and answer any questions too.

You can also find out more information about the work we are doing at <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/bykertaskforce> or by calling Katherine Robbie on 0191 275 5609.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Peter Roberts



Councillor Nick Kemp

Questions and Answers about the Proposed Community Housing Trust for Byker

The next few months are an important time for you and where you live. We want to make sure that you understand what's going on and that you know where to get more information if you need it.

Here are some questions and answers that we think you might find helpful at this stage and we will be in touch with more details soon.

You can also find out more information about the work we are doing at:
<http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/bykertaskforce>
or by calling Katherine Robbie on 0191 275 5609.

What do I need to know now?



Has the Trust already been agreed?

No. We can't do this without you. At the moment, it is just a proposal. We will ask all residents to vote and if the majority agree, the Trust will go ahead.

Which houses would the Trust affect?

Check out the map on the back page of this document. Anything within the yellow boundary would be managed by the Trust.

Would the Trust give residents more control over what happens on the estate?

Yes. The Trust would decide what happens on the estate and manage how the budget is spent. The Trust would be run by a board which would have resident representation on it.

Who would own the housing on the estate?

The Trust would own the housing on behalf of the community.

When would the estate be handed over to the Trust?

If residents vote in favour of the Trust, the housing would be transferred over in stages. We would give you details about when this was going to happen.

When would the ballot be held?

We will hold the ballot in the Autumn 2010, but we will give you exact dates in Summer 2010.

How will residents find out more information about the proposed Trust?

Over the next few months, we will make sure that you have as much information as you need about the Trust. We will carry out lots of activities and try and reach every resident. We will hold meetings, have drop in sessions and workshops, as well as general publicity such as posters and leaflets.

Will there be someone we can speak to for impartial advice?

Yes. An Independent Tenant Advisor will work with you.



What other information might I find helpful at this stage?



Why Byker?

Byker is a unique, listed estate and in need of investment to update it. We think the Trust is the best way to make this happen.

How would a Trust fund make improvements to the estate?

If the Trust goes ahead, the Government have agreed to write off the historic debt for the estate, which is around £45 million. The estate would then become an asset to the Trust, allowing them to borrow funding to carry out the improvements. A bit like when a homeowner takes out a secured loan on their property.

Would creating a Trust affect my rent?

We have suggested that the rents remain fixed to the Council rents, so any change would be in line with other social housing rents.

Who would sit on the Trust board?

The Board would be made up of resident representatives, independents such as legal and financial specialists and other key organisations such as the Council and Your Homes Newcastle YHN.

Would the Council control the board?

No. The Council can have no more than 20% membership on the Board.

What would the objectives of the Trust be?

The Trust would have a number of objectives. Ultimately, they would look after housing within the estate and make sure the budget was spent in areas of need. They would also look at possible ways to develop other land on the estate, maybe for new housing etc and tackle some social issues such as unemployment.

Would the estate remain listed?

Yes. All improvements to the estate would protect its heritage value.

Would the Trust have its own staff?

Yes. There will be a team to work on behalf of the Trust.

What would YHN's role be, if the Trust is set up be?

YHN would still deliver the services it does now, but would also support the Trust and the Board.



