

Newsletter

October 2024



Pictured: Families and staff cut the celebration cake as White Horse Housing Association marks 40 years

FAMILIES came together to celebrate 40 years of White Horse Housing Association with a day packed full of fun and games.

The family fun day at the Codford Social Centre was arranged to mark the anniversary of the association's foundation in October 1984, when it began life as Wiltshire Rural Housing Association. Tenants from all over Wiltshire, Swindon and Somerset came to enjoy fun and games – and cut a huge celebration cake.

“It was lovely to see everyone enjoying themselves and to hear the laughter of all the children,” said Operations Director Belinda Eastland. “We hope the day summed up what we stand for as an organisation – bringing people together and being there for them.”

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40 YEARS

Richard Kitson

Richard Kitson has been a member of White Horse Housing Association's board for more than 30 years, having joined in 1990 when it was Wiltshire Rural Housing Association.

During his career he has been Chief Executive at Aster Group, Group Director for The Guinness Trust, Director of Housing at Bath City Council and Test Valley Borough Council. He was also President of the Chartered Institute of Housing in 2001.

I didn't actually start my career in housing, I was at a local authority dealing mainly with housing finance but decided housing was much more interesting.

While at Bath in 1990, I was approached by Nick Bacon, who had contributed to a seminal 1987 report called Village Homes for Village People, which examined the difficulty with providing homes in rural areas. He knew I lived in Wiltshire and said Wiltshire Rural Housing Association needed some help and guidance and would I be interested in joining the board? I thought it would be interesting because I was dealing with city housing and this would keep me in touch with rural issues.

The association had been set up six years earlier by Wiltshire Community Council, now Community First. It had no direct employees and used Diana Farrow, the community council's director, as its secretary. It relied on the National Agricultural Trust's field worker to find sites for its housing and oversee the development.

It had built just 34 houses in its first six years and there was a concern it needed to grow faster. It was also now managing homes and it was felt my housing experience would be really helpful.



Pictured: May 1988 - The Association's first four homes are built at Lodge View, Tilshead



Pictured: April 1990 - Six bungalows built at Cherry Orchard, Codford. These homes won a Wiltshire Design Award a year later.

It had only become registered with the Housing Corporation in 1988, which enabled it to apply for grants to build homes. Once it had access to grants, which in those days contributed 80 or 90 per cent of the cost of the homes, there was a rush of possible developments. From 1990 to 2004 we built 170 homes, which in 14 years was incredible.

We've had periods where we've had to consolidate as well, for example after the financial crisis in 2008, when we hardly built any new homes for four years.

Our first priority has always been to build affordable rural village homes to help villages remain sustainable. Early on there was an 'in' to getting land, either from a charitable trust or a benevolent owner, which enabled us to acquire sites without having to compete in the private market.

These sites would often be outside the usual development land provisions, provided the homes met local needs and were affordable. It meant we could acquire land at well below market price.

We have also benefited from planning policy that requires a proportion of affordable homes to be part of open market developments. Many schemes in recent years have involved working with smaller regional builders and we have built some good relationships.

In 2012 the board agreed to help create a Community Land Trust to help those who wanted to provide more affordable homes. With the help of partners including Community First and Wiltshire Council, we created the independent Wiltshire Community Land Trust. It's been a struggle to make a difference, particularly with a lack of affordable homes funding, but it was great to see the fantastic passive haus scheme at Hook Hollow in Seend completed this year and we know there are others in the pipeline.

The board and the staff have always championed sustainability and that way of thinking has culminated in the homes at Hook Hollow. Setting good environmental standards has not been without challenges. We were early adopters of air source heat pumps, which have not always been reliable. But as we have continued to use them, improved models have emerged. If we or others hadn't used them to begin with, where would the experience be to make them better?



Pictured: Jan 1991 - Refurbishment and new build of four homes at Moors Cottages, Minety



Pictured: Oct 2004 The Association marked 20 years with eight Eco homes on former Crown Land in Breach Close, Bromham



Pictured: June 2024 - Ten passive haus homes, developed in partnership with Seend CLT, opened at Hook Hollow, Seend Cleeve

From our early days we have always tried to do things a certain way. Providing a more personal service, knowing our tenants and trying to manage homes with a conscience was a good way forward and set the standards for what you see today. We are also fortunate to have a very committed staff team and we see at first-hand how they go the extra mile to help our residents.

As the association has grown there have been opportunities to get good people joining the board and I have encouraged people that I felt could add value. After my retirement from Aster I became chair and felt fortunate for the board's knowledge and expertise.

An example was Mike Ash, who I learnt was moving to Wiltshire. He had just retired from the civil service and had been the government's chief planning officer for England. He contributed valuable planning advice, had plenty of ideas, was committed to our ethos and went on to succeed me as chair. We also had Chris Wilson, who was a partner in KPMG, and many others.

We have been able to recruit these excellent board members because it's a small organisation where you can see results quickly and you have a huge influence. Being small has also made us agile. When we were approached about taking on 96 houses at Kilmersdon – homes that would need investment to bring them up to standard – it was a risk. But we had experienced people on the board who had done this kind of thing before and weren't phased by it.

There are two things that have made White Horse Housing Association successful and give me confidence for the next 40 years. First there is the enthusiasm among the board and staff to improve people's lives and do something that's of value to individuals. The other is that we're committed to high standards and being very good about what we do, and I think that's most important.

When I left Aster and became chair of White Horse, someone asked me what it was like to go from running an organisation with 16,000 homes at the time, to chairing a small one. "It's like having previously been running a railway and now I've got a nice little train set," I replied.

I enjoyed my time at Aster but in a smaller organisation you are nearer the front line and you see some things happening quite quickly, which is pleasing. It has involved addressing some difficult challenges but it has always felt worthwhile.



Pictured: Board members at one of the Annual Away Days.



Pictured: Oct 2015 - A major expansion as 96 homes in Kilmersdon, Somerset, are transferred from Kilmersdon Housing Association. It means a change of name - to White Horse Housing Association.



Pictured: Rebranding and new offices. Former employee Lily Kara and long standing employee Tracy Crook.

Longest-serving tenants happy in their 'beautiful' village



Pictured: John and Mary Carter at their home in The Gardens, Rushall

They were married at Devizes Register Office in 1974, followed by a reception at The New Inn in Burbage, near to where John grew up. They first lived in a farm cottage in Rushall before buying a mobile but when Mary found she was expecting their first son they put their names down for a house with Wiltshire Rural Housing Association and were delighted when they were offered the neat two-bedroom home in The Gardens.

"Princess Anne came to open the houses now long after we moved in," says Mary. "The first year we were here was cold but the housing association sorted out the heaters and it was cosy after that."

Before having children Mary worked at Hinchley Engineering in Devizes, she later worked as a lunchtime supervisor at Rushall Primary School and at Rushall Manor, where her mum had also worked years earlier.

John worked for more than 50 years as a driver for W Mundy & Son in Burbage. "When I finished up I was doing a coal round for them, I used to go around the villages around here," he recalls.

"The customers were always pleased to see you, especially if you went out of your way to kind of carry the coal in for them and look after them. I missed the Christmas tips, that was the time of year they would want to appreciate what I did for them."

The couple have two sons, Jamie and Darren, now 44 and 40. Mary says being able to live in the village where she grew up and stay close to friends

JOHN and Mary Carter are White Horse Housing Association's longest serving tenants, having moved into their home in The Gardens, Rushall in 1991.

"We've been very happy here," says Mary. "We have always had lovely neighbours and the area is beautiful."

She admits she might be biased about that, having grown up in the village. She and John first met at primary school in Pewsey but it was another decade and a half before they got together. "I think somebody in one of the pubs around here told me that Mary was up here and I called over to see her," John recalls.



Pictured: John and Mary Carter on their wedding day in 1974

and family has been important to her and John. "I always wanted to stay here because my mum was still here then and I had friends," she says. "We couldn't have had better neighbours, I used to push Nigel next door in his pram and now he still lives there."

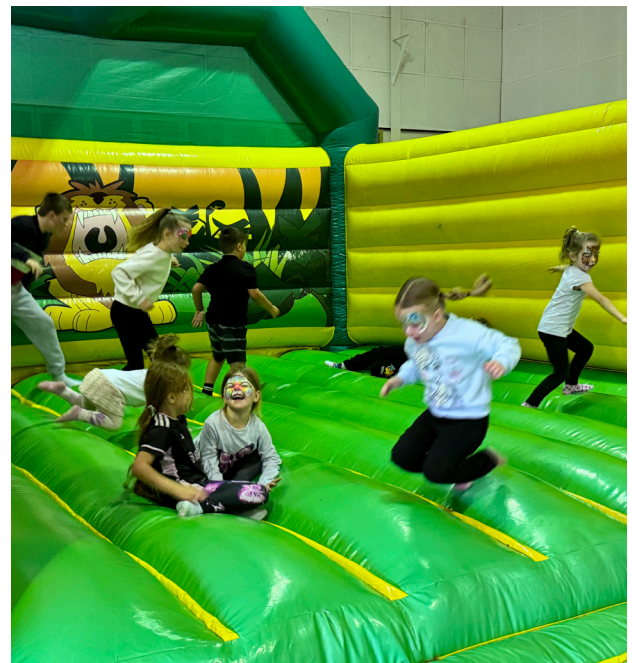
The couple keep themselves busy with their budgies and their garden and say they enjoy their life in the village. "It's a lovely area, it's changed a lot in one respect because it used to be all farm workers living around here," says Mary.

"White Horse have been really good, they keep the houses well and if we ever need anything doing it is done straight away. We've been very lucky and we're both happy here."

A Day of fun and laughter marked 40 years of White Horse Housing Association as tenants came together to celebrate.



Residents from across Wiltshire, Swindon and Somerset were invited to WHHA's family fun day at the Codford Social Centre to enjoy games, lunch and entertainment.



The children, who had been greeted with a tombola on their arrival, were entertained by Ace Entertainment, who delighted them with magic tricks, party games, balloon creations and a Punch and Judy show. They had hardly got their breath back when they were hurling themselves around on a bouncy castle provided by the Trowbridge Town Team.



When they did stop they were able to have their face painted by brilliant make-up artist Crazy Cheeks – and it wasn't just the children who took advantage of her talents.



The adults were entertained by singer Jo Deacon and three hectic games of bingo, called by Operations Director Belinda Eastland and capped with prizes of chocolate, prosecco and £50 in cash.



Everyone enjoyed a buffet and drinks from the social centre's bar and through the day the hall was a buzz of conversation and excited laughter from the children.

Photographer Keith from Braze Photography also provided a memento of the day for everyone with his photo booth.



Couldn't leave these two out of the newsletter - couple of cute munchkins!!



All of the guests came together to cut a huge celebration cake provided by Napes Cakes. The cake's design mirrored the one baked to mark WHHA's 20th anniversary at a party in Bromham in 2004.

Belinda said the day was a perfect way to mark 40 years of providing places for families to grow up. "It was a lovely day and we really enjoyed seeing the families and individuals coming together," she said. "There were young and old all having a good time together and in a way that's a perfect reflection of the communities we build."

She said the day would not have been a success if it hadn't been for the hard work of the staff and entertainers. "So many of our team and our tenant scrutiny panel put a huge amount of work into the day, helping to organise the entertainment and being there to make sure everything went smoothly," she said.

"I'd like to thank everyone for their contribution, to the social centre for hosting us and also to all of the entertainers and residents who came along and made it such fun. It was a fitting way to mark 40 years."

Check out our Facebook page for more pictures and video of the day.

Repairs and maintenance column

Maintenance Manager Darrel Smith & Winston give us their regular update on what their repairs and maintenance team are up to.

OUR new grounds maintenance contractors have been really digging in, pardon the pun, and I'm delighted to say that we've had really good feedback.

It's no exaggeration to say that negative comments about the state of our open spaces have fallen dramatically. Yes, there have been one or two issues but we've dealt with them along the way and I think the vast majority of people are happy.

We've had good feedback generally from the customer satisfaction surveys we've sent out so thanks to everyone who has taken the trouble to do that. As we head into our traditional October hedge-trimming we are really pleased with the progress we've made.

It seems to have been raining almost constantly since the middle of September and we have had a few reports of flooded drains and leaking gutters, which have all been dealt with swiftly. People have been very responsible and reported them quickly, it's important to let us know if you see any flooding before it becomes more of a hazard.

Talking of progress, our major refurbishment work at Kilmersdon has been paused for a short while but rest assured we'll be getting back to it as soon as possible. It's a huge task and we want to make sure it is completed efficiently and cost-effectively.

If you are playing maintenance column bingo and have mould and smoke alarms, on your card, you are in luck because I'm going to mention them again.

As autumn temperatures fall it's tempting to leave your windows closed but when it's warm inside that's when condensation can build up, which leads to mould. The golden rule is to have a consistent temperature indoors and make sure there is ventilation.

Smoke alarms are even easier to monitor than condensation – but if they aren't they can be far more deadly. You are ten times as likely to die in a house fire if you don't have a working smoke alarm. I'll be posting a video about how to check your alarm on our Facebook page so keep an eye out for it. Do please test your alarms and if there's a problem and you can't fix, call us.

On the subject of bingo, I hope everyone enjoyed the family fun day to mark the 40th anniversary of White Horse. It was lovely to see so many of you there.

Till next time, stay safe and enjoy your autumn.



White Horse Housing Association: The next 40 years



White Horse Housing Association's Chair David Trethewey and Chief Executive Steve Warran mark its 40th anniversary by looking forward to what the next 40 years may bring.

Steve: "The expansion of the association over the last ten years has been quite rapid and we have gone from 239 to 430 properties. Part of that expansion was the transfer of 96 homes in Kilmersdon but the rest of it has been new developments and that's been achieved because we've managed to implement a realistic business plan so we can understand what our resources will allow us to do and borrow money accordingly to fund that expansion. We definitely see that continuing.

"You've also got to start thinking about the balance between new development and maintaining your existing homes. Although most of our homes are less than 40 years old, the older properties do need more maintenance and those issues will start to impact us more in the future.

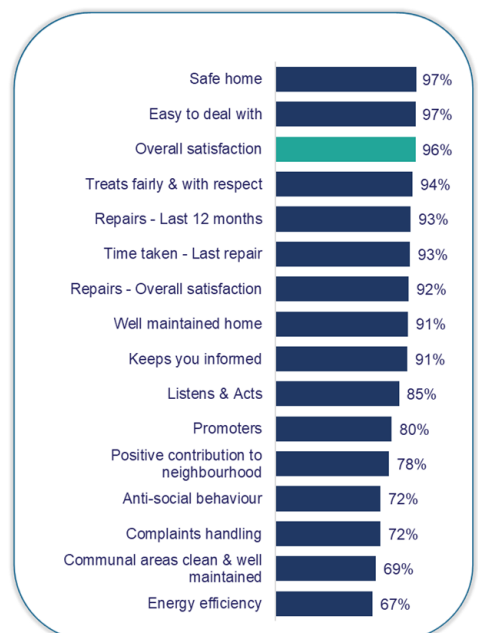
"But we want to continue building affordable, energy efficient rural homes in order to enable people in rural villages to access homes in the place they want to live. We recently secured a new loan which will help to fund further development over the next five years."

David: "We've got this gap between our ambition and what we can do, and then there's the ambition of the government to build more homes, which you would think would help us. If the government's housebuilding target numbers are to be believed, we could be three or four times bigger in 40 years, not that we necessarily want to do that.

"Where we are now with our high levels of tenant satisfaction, the schemes we're building and our position in Wiltshire and beyond, it is great and that should position us to really move on at pace. The way in which we work and the things we do are really strong, we've got great tenants and great housing schemes. We want more developers and councils to come and talk to us and work with us."



Pictured: Kilmersdon property



Steve: “The developers we’ve worked with say we’re always very easy to work with because we are easy to communicate with and decisions are made a lot quicker. They like the fact that when there are problems, we help them sort them out and they like the way we allocate properties to people with a local connection. The way we manage those properties is also good for their development.”

David: “Finding the space to build is going to be key for us. Where there are rural exceptional sites, which mean only affordable housing can be built, it is actually more beneficial to us because there's no commercial housing. Under Wiltshire Council's current core strategy you can only build up to ten homes on these sites, but that's going to change to 20. If viability is tight, we will be able to build a few market homes ourselves to make it work. So there will be more flexibility for us.

“There are a lot of villages that don't want to ever change and they will resist any development. But there are more parish councils and villages realising they do need more housing, otherwise they're just going to die.

Steve: “Seend was one of those villages, when they first approached us in 2017, they said, “our school is in danger of closing, we need to expand our village and get more development in to keep the school open and the pub and the shop going”. I think that is slowly dawning on lots of other villages and that hopefully will drive the ambition to allow more development.”

David: “Having a really good landlord like White Horse Housing really takes the pressure off the public purse in the long run. The work our excellent team does with residents to keep them in their homes, to stop them becoming homeless and prevent them from needing additional care services is massively valuable”.

“Our Tenancy Plus support, which uses grant money from Wiltshire Council, has clearly had an impact on the profile of our rent payments during the year because actually we've been able to help those people through some very tough times.

“I'd like to be able to have more positive discussions with government ministers. The current full rural housing programme has, for the first time, money ring-fenced specifically for rural schemes. That has forced Homes England, the government's funding arm, to go out and seek rural schemes. Every time I talk to them, they want to bite my arm off and give me money because they've got that target”.

“We need that to be maintained because that's the only way to get the growth in rural areas. It's going to be quite important that they continue to focus on rural communities. We have to find a way of convincing them, based on our track record and our experience, that they should give us the money to develop – and they've got to give it to us in a way that enables us to deliver, without all the bureaucracy.”

“Our reputation could place a greater value on our organisation in the future, and there's no reason we can't make more of it. We need to build on all the positive stories we've got to tell about what we've achieved and how we've grown.”



Pictured: Site development meeting



Pictured: New tenants at Hoares Lane, Kilmersdon Ali Sen & Romany Cooper



Pictured: Steve Warran, Chief Executive & Charlie Luxton at Hook Hollow, Seend Cleeve opening day

Tackling mould

OPEN windows and doors to allow fresh air circulation

USE extraction fans to expel moist air outside

INVEST in a good-quality dehumidifier

SEAL gaps and cracks in walls, floors, and ceilings

INSULATE windows and doors to prevent drafts and moisture

WIPE down windows, mirrors, and other surfaces to prevent moisture build-up

USE moisture-absorbing materials like silica gel or moisture-absorbing packs in damp areas

REGULATE your heating, don't crank it up
DON'T block radiators with furniture or curtains

DON'T use your roof for storage

DON'T hang wet laundry indoors

DON'T place clothes on radiators to dry

DON'T ignore leaks as they can lead to structural damage

DON'T delay on reporting gutter problems, or damaged window seals

DON'T use humidifiers in the winter unless your home is excessively dry, as they can add unnecessary moisture to the air



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