

Tai Tarian Storyboard: Sustainable Planet

December 2022



**SUSTAINABLE
PLANET**

Introduction

Throughout the year we assess our performance and the difference we are making, not only for our tenants but for our communities too.

Our Storyboards have 4 key themes:

- Sustainable Homes
- Sustainable Communities
- Sustainable Planet and
- Our Business

All align closely to our Corporate Plan. For each theme, local outcomes have been developed with key stakeholders, including our staff and tenants, which also fit with the expectations set out by Welsh Government.

We work with an independent group of tenants and associate members known as the Academy to review the outcomes of our work and provide feedback through several storyboards.

The local outcomes for all four themes, as decided by the group are:

1. We deliver value for money to make the best use of our resources
2. We are accountable to our customers
3. Customers have opportunities to make a choice
4. We act on our customers' feedback and are committed to continuously improving our services
5. We understand our customers and deliver services that meet their needs
6. Our tenants and members are able to influence decision making and shape our services

The Academy felt these local outcomes should be a 'golden thread' throughout all Storyboards and be visually prominent within each.

Sustainable Planet

- ✓ We make the best use of our assets
- ✓ We work to become carbon neutral
- ✓ We use local resources in our activities where possible



1. We make the best use of our assets

Introduction

As a business one of our priorities is ensuring we invest in our homes and open spaces. Our development team play a key role in driving this forward, especially recently with the redevelopment of County Flats where making our homes sustainable is key.

In the last 12 months, we have also strived to create a more biodiverse environment with a range of projects such as altering our maintenance cycles to encourage and attract wildlife.

Academy evaluation

The Academy were happy to see that their recommendation for regular communication throughout key stages of the County Flats development was implemented and were impressed at how tenants, residents and the wider community had been kept informed.

They were particularly pleased with the development's progress and would like a site visit to see the work for themselves.

The Academy were also complimentary of the key role we are taking on biodiversity work in the Borough and pleased with the partnership approach planned for the year ahead. They were also happy to see the trialling of biodiversity initiatives so we can learn and improve ways of working in the future.

County Flats development

County Flats is our largest redevelopment to date and will see us transform 72 flats in Sandfields and build 55 new homes. All of these properties will have an EPC A rating once the development is completed.

Instead of installing traditional gas boilers in new properties we will use air source heat pumps. However, existing properties will retain their gas heating systems until they come to the end of their life span, in line with our 'reduce, reuse and recycle' initiative.

Communication with tenants, residents and the local community has been key. We have a dedicated Community Liaison Officer, who carries out regular check-in's with the community plus the sites main contractor, Hale Construction, have their own Community Liaison Officer on site twice weekly to answer

any queries or concerns local residents or tenants may have.

This has been a real positive, the consistent level of communication has allowed us to build positive relationships with residents and address any concerns in a timely manner.

In addition, our newsletter 'In The Loop' is sent to local residents, updating them on the development, sharing key milestones, community benefit projects and any disruptions they need to be made aware of.



All of this ensures local residents are kept as up to date and as informed as possible.



Biodiversity

In the last 12 months, our neighbourhood team have changed how they work to improve biodiversity in the borough.

Our grass has been cut less, encouraging native flowers to spring up.

Allowing these flowers to flourish not only brings lots of vibrant colour to an area, it plays a far more important role in attracting bees and other pollinators, searching for food, nutrients and nectar. Letting our verges and grasslands grow freely has really given nature a boost.

Regularly cut and weeded areas quickly become biodiversity wastelands, with all potential diversity suppressed. When allowed to 're-wild', these areas can provide vital food for insects. In fact, in areas we haven't cut we have seen some plants such as the common vetch, cowslip and primrose begin to emerge, self-seeded trees, alongside the abundance of wildlife that are attracted to the area.

By working with partner organisations such as NPTCBC and their ecology teams we have quickly learned that if you want to improve biodiversity then you must first get the vegetation right. The more species of plant life we have, the more species of animals we will attract and that will be our focus moving forward.

Why let the grass grow?


- 1.** We are living in a climate and biodiversity emergency, we want to do all we can to protect the planet.
- 2.** Welsh Government is encouraging all of us to let it grow. Reduced grass cutting on our land is allowing wild flowers to grow and bees, butterflies and other pollinators to thrive.
- 3.** Not everything was left to 're-wild' as we cut the borders of verges and some areas for recreational purposes. Areas were then cut back once the wild flowers had naturally died, usually during late summer.
- 4.** It's not about saving money but about saving the planet and changing our approach to things that will make a big difference.
- 5.** Leaving areas uncut will allow more natural flowers to take hold year on year. By next year, there'll be more and more pockets of colour to be seen on our land and even more pollinators buzzing around.



Biodiversity


This work allowed us to understand what areas thrived with plants and trees self-seeding and what areas needed a helping hand to improve biodiversity.

One of the key take aways from this exercise is that there is a need for us to keep well maintained areas for the public to use and enjoy. We will aim to do this by using:



50% open spaces for biodiversity
50% open spaces kept family friendly

In addition to this, any trees that are cut because they are diseased, dying or dangerous - we commit to planting two more in its place, potentially using our self-seeding trees and considering the best location for them to thrive.



Self-seeding definition:
Self-seeding means that a tree or plant produces seeds which can be collected or allowed to fall to the ground naturally and replant themselves.

The future of biodiversity

Going forward, we will continue to build on the partnership work undertaken with NPTCBC, who are one of the largest landowners in the borough and develop a joint standard and criteria for encouraging biodiversity.

We have also been successful in obtaining grant funding for cut and collect equipment, which will allow us to:

- create diverse meadow areas on our land in a much more efficient manner.
- plant pollinating shrubs on some of our verges which will not only look great but will improve habitats for wildlife and be planted in a way that will reduce maintenance.

Neighbourhood Officer Kristian Church said:

“We left an area for nature in Cwmllynfell and as a result march thistle, common birds foot trefoil and 30 alder trees had the chance to grow. This attracted bees, butterflies, birds and lots of other wildlife. Several of the alder trees will now be moved to other areas for us to create more woodland habitats in the borough.”



2. We work to become carbon neutral

Introduction

We are committed to becoming carbon neutral (net zero) by 2030. We are one of the largest housing associations in Wales and want to use our influence to bring change, reflecting our ambition of ‘changing our behaviours today, for the generations of tomorrow’.

Academy evaluation

The Academy were pleased to see we are moving forward with our carbon literacy training.

They felt our approach to behaviour change was important and were pleased that tenant involvement was part of the plan.

The Academy welcomed our decision to turn our fleet electric after trialling different options, and were happy that we have already purchased 5 electric cars and 2 electric vans, with 14 more electric vans due for arrival this year. They felt reassured that we are being cautious with our decisions, recognising the importance of our green agenda while ensuring tenant services remain a top priority.

The Academy were impressed with the work carried out by our capital investment team and felt we go above and beyond what is required of us. They were pleased this had been recognised on a national and regional level and within publications. They believed this was well deserved and demonstrated the innovation within the organisation.



Optimised Retrofit Programme

The Optimised Retrofit Programme (also known as ORP) is a Welsh Government initiative where funding is provided to help registered social landlords, and local authorities, to make properties energy efficient.

We are using this funding to trial some of the initiatives to retrofit existing homes to achieve the lowest possible carbon footprint. We will be fitting intelligent energy systems in all homes involved in this trial to monitor energy usage to give us an indication of how successful the scheme is.

We will also be taking the opportunity to carry out extensive decarbonisation work to 45 of our empty homes before new tenants move in.



£3.5M
funding so far

ORP improvement methods include:



Solar panels



Battery storage



Heat pumps



Making Greenacres greener!

As part of this funding we've carried out work to a row of three cottages at Greenacres in Margam with 50% of the work being funded through ORP grants, and the other 50% being funded by us. We determined that we wanted to make best use of our homes by carrying out improvement work and increase the EPC rating of the properties.

Improved from

EPC D to EPC A 

The houses were not only in need of renovation but were clad in tin without any insulation.

These properties benefitted from:

- External Wall Insulation system
- Rendering
- New roofs
- Solar panels
- Kitchens
- Bathrooms
- Battery storage
- Bat hotel

One tenant who benefitted from the work said:

“

“We are really happy with the work that has been done. We've lived here a long time and the houses look so much better, it's such an improvement.”

”



Landlord of the Year for energy efficiency

Our efforts to decarbonise our properties and help to create a sustainable planet have been recognised at a regional and national level.

We won the Landlord of the Year category at the Wales Energy Efficiency Awards in 2021 and this year we came second in the National Energy Efficiency Awards for Housing Association/Landlord of the Year.

We were complimented on our environmentally friendly initiatives, including:

- adding several new electric vehicles to our fleet
- planting over 2000 trees
- using renewable energy on all new build properties
- taking part in the Optimised Retrofit Programme to retrofit our existing homes with the latest energy saving measures

We were also praised on the latest environmentally friendly insulation methods being used at our County Flats development including natural fibres such as sheep wool and mycelium. This, together with other measures, will see the creation of one of the most environmentally friendly communities in Wales.



Mycelium: Mycelium is a natural fungi material with industrial-level strength that when dried can be used as a water, mould and fire resistant building material.



Sustainable planet strategy

Our sustainable planet strategy was developed to set out how we will achieve the planet commitments set out in the Corporate Plan, which include:

- becoming net zero by 2030
- recognising the impact of our wider choices by adopting the principles of the circular and foundational economy.

In order to achieve our sustainable planet strategy, we face 3 key challenges:

- Technical
- Behavioural
- Financial

While the Welsh Government is assisting us with some short-term funding to help us achieve our sustainable planet strategy, it is important we make the right investment decisions to find a solution to a challenge that everyone is facing.

We aim to achieve this by collaborating with tenants, communities, colleagues and partners so we can help change how people live and how we work.



Circular Economy: A circular economy is a system that aims to reduce and eventually eliminate waste and the continual use of finite resources, such as fossil fuels. As well as the obvious environmental benefits, a circular economy also brings financial savings and helps to make us more efficient in the way we do things.



Foundational Economy: The foundational economy is made up of basic services and products that all people and communities rely upon to survive, thrive and stay safe. These include housing, energy, construction and health and care services, the food we eat, the homes we live in, the energy we use and the care we receive.

To overcome the technical challenges we will look at planet commitments:

- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Reducing emissions
- ✓ Our energy usage
- ✓ Our fleet
- ✓ Carbon offsetting
- ✓ Generating energy



Sustainable Planet

2021 → 2025

Llys Wern III development

Our Llys Wern development in Neath was one of our first steps on our carbon neutral journey, and we recently completed the third phase where 5 new homes were built all achieving the highest level of energy efficiency, EPC A.

The site was originally a grassed area, that had been left unattended for many years, we took the decision to build bungalows as they are in high demand.

In order to ensure the new homes are as energy efficient as possible we targeted a number of key areas of the new build including:

- Making sure the fabric of the building is right
- Using appropriate insulation
- The right level of ventilation
- Eliminating air leakage through gaps or cracks

We have received positive feedback from the residents of the new homes in relation to energy efficiency and affordability.



Carbon literacy training

To become net zero by 2030, we know that our staff have a significant role to play.

As a result we have implemented a training programme to give them key knowledge on the subject which can help them carry out their day to day work and share their learning with colleagues and tenants.

Helping staff increase their knowledge encourages them to be empowered to take action and help eliminate fear and misconceptions surrounding the issues of climate change. Our next step will be to encourage the **50 trained staff members** to roll out and deliver the training to their colleagues.

We plan to extend the training so that our Board members and members of our Academy, will have a good level of understanding on topics including climate change, carbon footprints, housing, and taking action. The Carbon Literacy Trust has approved the training being delivered and will provide certification to all those who attend.

Tai Tarian Development Assistant, Zoey Jones has taken part in the training. She said:

“The course was fantastic. I learnt so much which I can use both in work and at home to do my bit to help save our planet.

“Reducing carbon emissions is a complex issue but one that I’m fully committed to. If we all work together our small, individual changes will snowball and begin to have a positive impact on the environment.”

The road to electric

A large part of our ‘Carbon Neutral by 2030’ pledge is the way in which we use and manage our fleet of vans. We commit to regularly reviewing how we work to ensure transport is as sustainable as possible.

- **2020-2023:** Reduce our mileage and trial alternative vehicles
- **2023-2025:** Transition to an electric fleet
- **2025-2030:** Continue learning and keep up to date with any further advancements

We are currently in the ‘reduce and trial’ stage of our electrification plan, where we have been assessing what options are available to us and we are determined that the best option for us in the long term is electric vehicles.

Our current aims are to:

- Ensure that all our vehicles are to the minimum of a Euro 6 standard. This is the standard set to help reduce the level of harmful pollutants produced by new vehicles.
- Ensure electric vehicle driver education and training is completed
- Electrify 10% of our fleet
- Commit to not purchase any new internal combustion vehicles

We recognise that to reach the transition stage of turning our full fleet electric will come with some challenges, however we are committed to ensuring that we are being cautious and realistic with our approach to make sure all of our decisions are justified.

Achievements:

- ✓ In 2020, we introduced 5 electric pool cars for all staff to use
- ✓ 2 electric vans arrived in September 2022
- ✓ 14 additional electric vans are due to arrive December 2022
- ✓ We have signed up to ‘Route to Net Zero’ – which helps organisations measure and manage their emissions, inform carbon reduction strategies, and align targets for the future
- ✓ All our diesel vans meet the Euro 6 standard strategies, and align targets for the future

Challenges:

- Only 4 public electric fast chargers across Neath Port Talbot
- 52 week wait time for some electric vehicles
- Electric vehicles are 25% more expensive to buy than their diesel equivalent

Solutions:

- We are looking to **collaborate** with partners to utilise access to public charging
- Our maintenance costs will **be decreased** for electric vehicles
- We will extend our current leases to allow for **improvements** in vans on the market and infrastructure



Inside Housing article

In September 2022, our work to become carbon neutral was recognised in an Inside Housing magazine article, “How many energy-efficient homes are housing associations building?”.

This article identified that between 2021-2022, we were the biggest housing association builder of EPC A rated homes in Wales, and the second biggest builder of EPC A rated homes in the UK.

Out of the 61 properties we built in that period, all were built to an EPC A standard. These homes were designed before the Welsh government reviewed the requirements for all new homes attracting social housing grant to be built to EPC A.

100% of the properties we develop are built to EPC A.



3. We use local resources in our activities where possible

Introduction

By applying the principles of the Foundational Economy, we can ensure the benefits of our investments stay local, one of which will be to reduce local unemployment. We can achieve this by investing in local communities, skills and training.

We support contractors by developing and understanding the local supply chain; buying local products and materials, where possible. We also endeavour where possible, to employ local contractors and consultants to utilise and develop local skills and knowledge.

Academy evaluation

The Academy were pleased to see that the Copper Foundation initiative has just recruited for the 6th year despite this originally being a five year programme. They were also impressed by how we are utilising local resources throughout the County Flats development project and working in partnership with Neath based Seven Oaks Modular to construct modular pods offsite before they are transported to Sandfields.

Milestone for Copper Foundation

We have welcomed our 10th cohort of recruits on our ground-breaking employment initiative, the Copper Foundation. The scheme, which was launched in 2017, aims to give people who may struggle to find work, a route back into employment.

People enrolling on the scheme are given a 12-month contract to work with us, during this time they receive training, skills and experience that will help them go on to find further employment. Despite only being committed to complete this scheme for 5 years, we are currently in our 6th year of new recruits.

One of the latest recruits for the Copper Foundation is Rhys Bowen. He said:

“

“I’m really looking forward to getting stuck into working with the Copper Foundation. It’s a great opportunity to further myself, learn new skills and gain valuable experience.

“I’ll mainly be working in the area where I live and helping to enhance its appearance, so it is something I’m really looking forward to.

“We’ve already done some initial training and it’s been a great experience so far, working with a great bunch of people and learning loads.”

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In the last two years,

29 new starters

22 have gone in to further employment

76% gone in to further employment

Since the scheme launched:

75 people have been given opportunities by the foundation.

600 properties have seen their appearance and security enhanced through our external improvement programme.

County Flats keeping things local

As part of our County Flats development, we are not only making the best use of our assets, but we also use local resources where possible.

We are working with local construction company, Hale Construction, along with their sister company Seven Oaks Modular. These Neath based companies ensure we are using local resources and suppliers, alongside local employees.

We are also insulating these properties mainly with sheep’s wool, which is being sourced from a local farm in Crynant, and mycelium which is being grown in the Seven Oaks Modular factory in Neath.

Contractor commitment:

100% of the contract value will be reinvested in Wales through wages and business investment

Factory built homes

Seven Oaks Modular are the timber frame manufacturer we have partnered with for our County Flats development, and as part of the partnership they are providing modular pods as part of the development of existing homes.



Modular construction:

Modular construction is a process where buildings are able to be constructed off site, in the Seven Oaks Modular factory for this project, and will cut construction time on site in around half. This is greener-quality housing which matches customer expectations and market requirements. They will provide better energy efficiency, and also structural strength.

Our first modular construction pods arrived in August 2022, each section was slotted together to create a full property, which took around a day to put together. The modular pod process is much more efficient saving both time and energy.

Action Plan

The Academy would like to be kept updated on when they will receive carbon literacy training.

The Academy also felt that they would benefit from a visit to the County Flats development site, so they are able to see first-hand the extensive work we are carrying out.



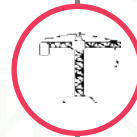
1. Pod construction carried out at Seven Oaks Modular factory – including all first and second fix works



2. Concrete foundation - laid prior to pod arrival



3. Pod arrival



4. Cranes lift pods into position



5. Pods come together to make a full property



6. Internal works finalised



7. Services installed, e.g. utilities



8. Tests and certification



9. Completion



