

**Greater Norwich HMA Launch – 7 September 2007**  
**The King's Centre, Norwich**  
(Attended by 52 Sub-Regional Stakeholders)

**Questions & Answers**

Members of the audience put questions and comments to the panel, consisting of Martin Aust (Chair), Graham Connolly (Project Manager), Keith Mitchell (South Norfolk Council) and Alison McErlain (Norfolk County Council)

**Q: Is it right to say that as outgoings for a Shared Ownership property are similar to private rented properties, that we are delivering what people want rather than what they need?**

Panel: Yes the ORS showed that if you can afford one then you can afford the other. It's about supply as owner occupation is a preferred tenure as it provides investment opportunities and gets you into the tenure.

**Q: What impact does the problem of empty homes have in the area- will a specific strategy be formulated?**

Panel: Compared to our neighbouring sub-regions we have relatively low incidences of empty homes at 3% or less according to the census, whereas North Norfolk is closer to 7 or 8%. There are always a small percentage of empty homes at any one time, 3% is not extraordinary.

(Project Managers Note – The 2001 Census records 3.7% of the sub-regions homes (household spaces) as un-occupied. Of these homes 0.6% are second residences/holiday accommodation. For comparison in North Norfolk the 2001 Census record 10% of homes as un-occupied of which, 7.1% are second residences/holiday accommodation.)

**Q: Are young people moving into the City because there are cheap flats? If these were built in market towns would they move here – is it about availability or choice?**

Panel: The availability of properties is not the only issue; social activities, employment etc are also important issues.

**Q: The large number of one- bedroomed flats in the city are not meeting the needs of the physically disabled and their partners/ families. Will provision be made in the future?**

Panel: Agree that adequate provision is not being made- the difficulties in achieving funding from the Housing Corporation are key here, as is the sharp increase in demand. The findings of the HMA will shape decision making processes in the future. Breckland District Council are leading on a Norfolk-wide strategy which should produce evidence to support future bids.

**Q: The 'surplus' 4000 properties in the HMA does not tie up with what house builders are suggesting, how robust is this figure?**

Panel: When you look at the full report there are caveats that are not in the presentation. The surplus figure is something which surprised the group but the figure is based on discussions between the Planning departments and developers it is not spin. Planners have to try and plan up until 2026 so it is difficult to predict and it is therefore important to keep this research rolling forward and up to date - this report only looks five years ahead.

Delivery speed is dependent on selling ability and so it can be assumed developers will not build houses they cannot sell or this would drive down prices. The HMA is not independent it is tied into to the South East and so if people migrate this allows for properties to be sold outside the sub region and there will not be a surplus.

**Q: The housing market is driven by migration and high levels of employment depend on the stability of the financial sector and retaining large employers in the city**

Panel: Agree that if any big employers left this would create issues. This has not been modelled but we'll be monitoring the situation for emerging trends in employment.

**Q: There is migration to this region from London but what about Eastern Europe and the Common Markets, is this having an effect?**

Panel: Evidence suggests there are a lot of migrant workers in Norfolk but mainly outside our sub-region. There is some migration into Norwich but it is not so significant here.

**Q: There's concern about the ratio of incomes to rents in the city. What is affordable?**

Panel: Findings are based on the ORS report (see graph in chapter 5). Affordable rent does need to be on the political agenda. We know that high cost housing results in more debt and that substantially less affordable housing than is needed has been built. Right to Buy and Right to Acquire have contributed to the falling number of affordable housing stock available in the past but since 2003 we have turned a corner and stock levels have risen.

**Q: Is the 4000 surplus for market housing only?**

Panel: Yes, the shortage is with affordable units.

**Is there nothing we can do to fill the gap?**

Panel: The house builders will only deliver if they are selling; we need to be careful about the wording of 'surplus' as there is not really a surplus as if they are built they will be lived in. ***Migration will have an impact and so the 4000***

***is just a technical figure to show what level will be filled by migration, it is not an actual surplus.***

**Q: The proportion and style of flats in the Riverside, Norwich is correct for the area. There is a need for 3 and 4 bed houses which can be made up in other parts of the city. We need agreement of how to deliver the large scale growth in the area.**

Panel: The next stage of this process is to influence policy. More housing sites are about to be allocated via the Local Development Framework. A consultation will begin soon on housing requirement.

**Q: If you show a figure which shows a surplus you will worry everyone – the word ‘surplus’ is worrying.**

Panel: Noted – we will look to change the wording in the report.

**Q: What impact does the increasing number of students have on housing in Norwich?**

Panel: There is an expected increase in students predicted for the near future, with students moving into general needs housing. Alison Spalding has carried out research on ‘studentification’ within the city and has been working closely with the UEA, Students Union, ASB officers, Police and the private sector, resulting in a recent conference. The presence of students in the Golden Triangle area helps the economy and keeps it vibrant. Work is on-going.

**Comment: More and more landlords are getting involved in the student market, setting up agencies as there is a clearly a market for this and increases in students are expected.**

**Q: How do you see sheltered housing and affordability in the public sector – this could release larger properties?**

Panel: We see far less demand for traditional sheltered housing as people want to stay in their own home for as long as they can. Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council are producing a Norfolk-wide strategy for this specific sector of the market.

**Q: The location of sheltered housing is the issue- accommodation needs to be closer to services.**

Panel: Our findings will affect planning policy. Our focus is on building communities, not just homes.

**Q: We need to look at sustainability within developments.**

Panel: All issues can be looked at and again, our findings will influence planning policy.