

ISSUE:  
05

# Beyond Homes

NATIONAL  
HOUSING  
FEDERATION

south east  
south west

Housing associations delivering  
better neighbourhoods

SPRING 2008



## The social enterprise edition:

How community businesses are transforming neighbourhoods by offering residents jobs, training and a direct say in how they're run.

**NEWS:** PIGS TROTTERS, NEW HOMES AND FREE CASH MACHINES

**FEATURES:** CLEANING UP THE HOOD IN OXFORDSHIRE  
HOW A COMMUNITY CAFE IN HAMPSHIRE TRUMPED JAMIE OLIVER  
AND RUBBISH-FUELLED REGENERATION IN KENT

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 business for neighbourhoods

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BEYOND HOMES

SPRING 2008



## Feature story 06-07

DIY - The story of how a community cleaned-up their once notorious neighbourhood and helped create a thriving business.

## Welcome to Beyond Homes

**Housing associations - often working with partners - commit both financial and human resources to a wide range of social enterprise projects, which offer local people the chance to learn new skills, develop self-esteem and find work.**

After new Housing Minister Caroline Flint expressed her views on the desirability of social housing tenants obtaining paid employment, this edition illustrates some of the wide range of work housing associations have already embraced in these areas as

key stakeholders and investors in their neighbourhoods.

As independent organisations, housing associations have the freedom to invest in activities which strengthen communities and raise the aspirations of those who live in them. The Housing and Regeneration Bill currently making its way through the legislative process potentially puts these added value projects at risk.

The current drafting of the Bill would allow ministers to exert so much

control over associations that they could be reclassified as public sector bodies, limiting their ability to raise money privately, and extending regulation to non-housing activities. The Federation is currently lobbying hard to ensure that the unique role that housing associations play in delivering new homes and investing in communities is preserved.

**Stuart Ropke**  
South West Regional Manager



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**Social Enterprise is the buzz word of the moment. The Government has a social enterprise action plan and social enterprise agencies are springing up all over the country. Voluntary sector bodies and charities are being encouraged to get with the programme but what does it mean? Cynics see it as a back door way of saying, "Sorry no more grants".**

The national body, the Social Enterprise Coalition, states that "social enterprises are profit-making businesses set up to tackle social or environmental issues which reinvest the majority of their profits for the benefit of their community." In the voluntary sector the test of a social enterprise is often: Does it earn the majority of its income from trading rather than from grants?

For example a charity shop attached to a hospice could be considered a social enterprise - because it trades to raise profit for a charity, even though the hospice is not a social enterprise. Voluntary sector organisations running local authority contracts could be considered social enterprises even if a proportion of their income (below 50%) came from grants.

**"social enterprises are profit-making businesses set up to tackle social or environmental issues which reinvest the majority of their profits for the benefit of their community."**

# The Federation's guide to: Social Enterprise

Paul Smith, chief executive of the Furniture Re-use Network, explains what exactly social enterprise means....



In the environmental field the largest social enterprise is the ECT group (once Ealing Community Transport) which runs the waste contract for a number of councils, operates a couple of railway lines and even a medical surgery. One of the more famous homelessness social enterprises is the Big Issue which survives from the sales and advertising of its magazine.

Social enterprise is not a legal form, although the Community Interest Company (CIC) has been established as a vehicle for individuals or organisations wishing to set up social enterprises. Social enterprises can be companies limited by guarantee, co-operatives or even registered charities. A private company that invests its profits back into social benefit can also call itself a social enterprise.

So where does this leave housing associations? Clearly as rent is a form of trading, housing associations can use the social enterprise badge. Associations may also create social enterprise activities outside their core either as part of group structures or as independent bodies or part of partnerships.

Left: Workers maintaining gardens in their community

# Cleaning up the neighbourhood



It's one of the most deprived areas in South Oxfordshire, but the once unloved village of Berinsfield is now gaining a reputation for a pioneering project, which has helped boost community pride and provide work for local residents.

Image: Local residents Marc Holmes and Gavin Andrews who maintain 110 gardens a month in the area for Soha

Despite being surrounded by affluent villages in the Oxford commuter belt, Berinsfield, by the late 90s, was suffering from high unemployment and poor housing. Morale on the so called sink estate had hit rock bottom.

In 1997, Soha Housing took over the management of 5000 local authority homes, including 320 in the village, and set its sights on improving both the physical appearance and the social cohesion of Berinsfield.

Four years later, it established the Berinsfield Community Business (BCB), a social enterprise, which was to provide the much needed kick-start to the area's regeneration.

The new organisation was handed the task of providing housing services to all of Soha's properties in Berinsfield - but was to do so by employing local people to carry out the work.

This gave residents a direct stake in their community, and a new sense of pride quickly developed in the village's improved appearance.

Local people were suddenly presented with an opportunity on their own doorstep to not only get a job, but to help improve their environment and play their part in making the village a better place to live.

**... the once notorious village appears to have rediscovered its confidence and is no longer weighed down by the negativity and hostility it once attracted.**



Above: The bad old days

In the same year, Soha started work on a major rural regeneration project as undesirable flats were demolished and new homes built. Berinsfield underwent a transformation, both in terms of its buildings and community involvement.

Unused garages and storage areas were also knocked down and replaced by 16 new flats for affordable rent, six of which were earmarked for key workers. Since "going live" in 2002, the business has gone from strength-to-strength, and has expanded both its range of services and its client base.

Spurred on from its initial success in maintaining Soha homes in the village, BCB went on to provide grass-cutting and litter picking services in the village on land owned by Sovereign Housing and the parish, district and county councils.

Three years later, BCB won contracts with eight parish councils as well as retaining their existing customers. And in 2006, it secured a major contract to provide Soha with grounds services for over 40 sheltered and general needs sites, and another to provide cleaning

services to 18 sites in and around Didcot.

It has also started ground maintenance work and cleaning services for the Vale Housing Association.

The business employs nine people - eight of whom live in the village - and has provided work experience opportunities for a number of local teenagers.

Five temporary staff also help out at peak times. Jobs are advertised in local shops and by word of mouth.

BCB's Business Director, Mark Williams, said the project demonstrated how local communities could play a key role in tackling the problems it faced, rather than relying solely on outside intervention and support.

"It is about people taking ownership of their community's problems, but you also have to have support from within the community and from the police, local authorities and the housing association itself.

"Soha provides us with all sorts of ongoing support and advice in running the business - IT, finance, HR - so housing associations need to act as an ongoing mentor".

BCB, which achieved Investors in People accreditation in 2005, has been profitable for the past three years and now gives away 10% of profits to village organisations.

The company is overseen by a board of seven people - five from the village, and two business experts who live nearby, with day-to-day management and business development the responsibility of a full-time Business Director.

As well as undertaking contracted work, BCB also provides a free grass cutting service for 21 elderly or disabled residents, and within communal areas in the village.

In a survey commissioned last year, 84% of residents described Berinsfield as a good place to live, compared to 64% in 2002.

It may have taken several years, but the once notorious village appears to have rediscovered its confidence and is no longer weighed down by the negativity and hostility it once attracted.

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Above: New homes and new hope

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