

CORK ON TARGET TO DELIVER ON SOCIAL HOUSING

A comprehensive programme by Cork City Council to fast-track solutions to social housing needs is having the most significant impact on housing provision for over ten years, and will see over 400 new units under construction on 18 sites throughout the city by early May.

The level of housing activity under various City Council initiatives has assumed greater significance since the publication of the Government's 'Rebuilding Ireland – An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness Programme' last July.

Led by Brian Geaney, Programme Manager, Cork City Council an action plan in place is now that will see more than 400 new units under construction on 18 sites throughout Cork City by early May, through a variety of mechanisms, at a total budget cost of approximately €97 million.

The immediate focus of this action plan is to:

1. Accelerate and restart the supply of social housing on its own land banks and
2. Collaborate with the private sector to unlock schemes and sites to provide housing solutions ranging from apartment blocks to housing estates within the limited space available in the city, typically on brownfield sites.

In total, over 1,300 homes are being provided through new construction, house purchases, social leasing and collaborative activity with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) and through the restoration of vacant housing units.

Cork City Council has purchased 131 housing units to meet social housing needs and a further 840 vacant housing units were returned to use in the past two years. A total of 150 units were provided by AHBs during the same period.

In addition, a further 361 units are being advanced with AHBs for the delivery of additional housing by late 2018/early 2019. A planning application for a total of 153 units at Boherboy Road is up for decision shortly, for a mixed tenure scheme of private and social housing.

In late February, the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Simon Coveney, who is the Minister responsible for delivering on the Government Programme, visited one of the recently completed schemes at Sheridan Park, Tramore Road.

Praising Cork City Council for its innovative work on social housing in the city, Minister Coveney added that he is delighted to see his native city taking "a pioneering role in relation to the construction of social housing and its willingness to take a multi-faceted approach to finding solutions".



Pictured (l-r): Cllr John Buttimer, Ann Doherty, Cork City Council Chief Executive, Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr Des Cahill, Simon Coveney T.D., Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, and Senator Jerry Buttimer.

The Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr Des Cahill, said it was a long time since the city council had been in a position to add to its housing stock. "These homes and the hundreds of others either under construction, purchased, repaired or in planning are a tangible example of what the Housing Directorate can do, and how quickly it can do it, when funding and autonomy become available," he said.

Much of the impetus for the current construction programme of social housing in the city arises from the intensive and creative use of the EU Competitive Dialogue Procedure. According to Ann Doherty, Cork City Council Chief Executive, this EU procedure has allowed the council to bring together developers, landowners and builders in a transparent way to identify potential sites and to suggest collaborations to achieve significant results.

"This allowed us to identify and unlock urban sites which previously might not have been considered and to progress social housing in very sustainable locations where there is heavy demand," she added.

Brian Geaney has plans for a series of further innovative solution including a LIHAF scheme for up to 600 houses on a council-owned site on the Old Whitechurch Road. "Busy times are ahead now in Cork with planning, building and handing over keys of new homes," he said.