



Sustainability Strategy

2010-2015

‘Getting the Right Balance’

Brief Summary

The planet is warming because of human activities; energy prices are soaring as a result of peak oil; and the world is going through a severe economic downturn. These present real risks to us all; yet on the other hand, they may also represent an opportunity to take a serious shift towards a more sustainable future.

Sustainability is not just about minimising our impact on the environment, it is about becoming more efficient at what we do. It lies at the heart of the delivery and maintenance of affordable homes, achieving successful tenancies and helping communities to thrive.

We are keen to help the Government achieve its targets of raising the quality standard of all housing and to significantly reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs). In the medium term, our key sustainability targets are to improve the energy efficiency and reduce the heat loss of our homes which will in turn help tenants enjoy affordable warmth. In addition, we will seek to work with others to achieve the most sustainable outcome when appropriate.

If we can all become more efficient, we can reduce our adverse impacts on the environment and we can continue to move in the direction of a sustainable future.

Introduction

The economic recession is not the only crisis threatening us today. We are being threatened with a 'triple crisis' which includes the impacts of climate change and peak oil.

The recovery from the global economic downturn is going to be slow and the Government has begun to implement the most severe public spending cuts in a generation.

Additionally, our planet is warming at a rate which will have real impacts on the way we live our lives. Climate change is already causing considerable problems across the UK and the wider world, with droughts, floods, rising sea levels and various other weather related problems.

Finally, the poor management of the world's natural resources, including oil, is now generally recognised as being unsustainable in the long run. The World Wildlife Federation (WWF) estimated in its 2008 Living Planet Report that to continue at our current rate of consumption and resource use we will need an extra two planet Earths by 2030¹.

These are without doubt major threats, however, they may also present an opportunity to make a serious shift in the direction of a truly sustainable future. As both individuals and as a business we must take into account the wider environmental, social and economic impacts of our actions. This will ensure real and lasting change which will benefit local communities for generations to come.

Our Sustainability Strategy builds on our existing Sustainability Policy and provides a five year framework for continuous improvement. It discusses the idea of sustainability and what it means to Albyn. The strategy then identifies the direction Albyn wish to take in the future and sets out our approach to the central features of the organisation: our homes, our residents, our organisation and our partners.

¹ WWF (2008) 'Living Planet Report:2008', WWF International, Switzerland.

Laying out our sustainable foundations:

Sustainability Policy

Outlining our commitment

Sustainability Strategy

Setting out our approach

Sustainability Action Plan

Helping us to implement our strategy

Sustainability

What does sustainability mean?

Sustainability is one of the most frequently used words today. It can, however, be difficult to get a clear understanding of its exact meaning and its consequences.

The most straightforward definition comes from the Cambridge Dictionary.

Sustain *verb*, Sustainability *noun*

1. able to continue over a period of time
2. causing little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time.

The most widely known definition of 'sustainable development' is '*...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*' (Bruntland Commission, 1987).

Ultimately, sustainability is an overarching idea that seeks to create a situation where humans are living within the constraints imposed by their environment but are also progressing towards higher levels of well-being.

What does sustainability mean to Albyn?

At Albyn we try to use the term 'sustainability' in the full sense of the word. It is not just a business-as-usual approach with an add-on environmental policy attached; it is about becoming more efficient at what we do.

It is also about giving equal weight to the environment, the economic and the social in our decisions and actions. Figure 1 illustrates the four main elements of sustainability which relate to Albyn – the community, the environment, the economy, and the organisation itself.



Sounds good, but what does it mean in real terms?

- *Community sustainability* means identifying the needs of individuals and maintaining and enhancing our tenant's well-being, for example by addressing anti-social behaviour we can make residents feel safer in their communities and achieve more enjoyable tenancies.
- *Environmental sustainability* means making sure that we act in a way that minimises our impact on the environment, such as removing unnecessary car travel and/or encouraging alternative forms of transport in order to reduce our carbon emissions.
- *Economic sustainability* means ensuring that local communities and economies fulfil their potential and are sustainable in the long-run, for instance helping tenants enjoy affordable warmth* by investing in energy efficient heating systems and high levels of insulation.

* **Affordable warmth** means a household that can achieve adequate heat needed to maintain health and comfort for less than 10% of their income. The lack of affordable warmth is known as **fuel poverty**, when more than 10% of a household's income is spent on heating.

- *Organisational sustainability* means leading by example and ensuring that the physical environment of Albyn and staff behaviour reflects the principles of sustainability. This may include activities, such as promoting the three R's (reduce, reuse, recycle) within the office in order to minimise waste and lower our environmental footprint.

These basic sustainability elements are more often than not closely linked and mutually supporting, for example the installation of energy efficient heating systems may:

1. Improve *environmental sustainability* through a reduction in CO₂ emissions.
2. Enhance *community sustainability* by reducing fuel costs for the tenant thereby increasing the opportunity of enjoying affordable warmth, and
3. Benefit *economic sustainability* via a reduction in the long term generating costs of the heating system.

Our Sustainable Future

What is Albyn's sustainable future?

Albyn's **mission** is to *'build and maintain quality housing in the Highlands and to support communities to thrive'*.

Achieving our mission and securing a sustainable future are interdependent. In order to succeed we must integrate the principles of environmental, economic and social sustainability within all our strategic objectives.

Albyn's **strategic objectives** are to:

1. Address the shortage of affordable housing within the Highlands
2. Maintain a sustainable housing stock
3. Achieve successful tenancies
4. Support communities to thrive

To help reach these objectives we are developing the following strategies which address specific issues:

- Asset Management Strategy
- Tenancy Sustainability Strategy
- Housing Energy Strategy
- Strategy for Involving Customers

Our key **sustainability aims** are to find better ways of working that are more efficient, deliver a better service to our customers and minimise our impact on the environment.

Our key **sustainability objectives** include:

- Improve the energy efficiency and reduce the heat loss of our homes.
- Help all our tenants enjoy affordable warmth in their homes.
- Continually reduce the carbon emissions from our activities and,
- Seek to work with others to achieve the most sustainable outcome when appropriate.

We have identified 10 key **sustainability themes**:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Improving energy efficiency | • Green Offices |
| • Sustainable communities | • Staff |
| • Achieving affordable warmth | • Transport |
| • Supporting tenants | • Business Partners |
| • Regeneration | • Involving Customers |

1. Our Homes

Albyn have been providing good quality, affordable housing within the Highlands for almost 40 years. In 1973 we began by building homes for the incoming workers at the smelter in Invergordon. In the 1980s we expanded our service into 6 others districts and the 1990s saw the voluntary transfer of 400 houses and its tenants from Scottish Homes to Albyn. During the first decade of the 21st century we have continued to provide new housing in areas across the Highlands which require affordable homes. We now have over 2,500 homes in over 70 communities.

Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)

We have been required to work towards meeting the new national standard for housing, the Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS) set in 2004. The aim is to ensure that all social housing meet these standards by 2015.

The SHQS requirements help us to develop our expertise in providing sustainable homes by taking into account 5 main categories. These are:

1. 'Tolerable Standard' - habitable for human occupation
2. Free from serious disrepair
3. Energy efficient
4. Healthy, safe and secure
5. Provision of modern facilities

Improving Energy Efficiency

Rising fuel prices are putting increasing pressure upon household budgets and pulling people into fuel poverty. On top of this, Scotland has taken an internationally leading position in addressing climate change, by setting a target of greenhouse gas (GHG)* emission reduction of 80% by 2050 and with an interim target of 42% by 2020.

* **Greenhouse gases (GHGs)** - gases that trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere. Human activity such as burning fossil fuels has been changing in the amount of certain GHGs and trapping more heat which is causing the planet to heat up.

The housing sector will be significantly affected by these reduction targets as it is a major contributor of GHGs, responsible for about a quarter of the UK total GHG emissions. Therefore, improving the energy performance of our homes is a key priority as it represents an achievable and sustainable solution.

Current Homes

The UK's existing housing stock represents the greatest challenge to energy efficiency. It is estimated that around 80% of existing homes will be occupied in 2050².

Much of our original stock and those houses acquired from Scottish Homes were built in the 1970s and 80s when energy efficiency was not considered as a main priority in the design. As a result, improving the energy efficiency of our homes and **maintaining a sustainable housing stock** will be a major focus of our attention.

The key areas of investment include:

1. Improving the insulation of our homes to keep heat in and cold out.
2. Enhancing the energy efficiency of our existing heating and hot water systems.
3. Introducing systems for reducing energy use and recycling natural energy.

We have identified a programme of works to ensure that our housing stock meets the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015. Within this we recognise the impact of embodied energy* and aim to design long life, durable and adaptable buildings.

Future Homes

For many years energy efficiency has played an important part in our strategic objective of **delivering affordable housing in the Highlands**. We want to provide tenants with homes which are well insulated, have efficient heating systems and which will stand the test of time.

Since the early 1990s all new Albyn housing projects were designed to high levels of energy efficiency, often exceeding the requirements of the Building

² Boardman, B. (2007) '*Home Truths: A low-carbon strategy to reduce UK housing emissions by 80% by 2050*', a research report for the Cooperative Bank and Friends of the Earth.

* **Embodied energy** refers to the energy used in the whole process of making a product, i.e. the amount of energy used to resource, extract, transport and manufacture.

Regulations. However, to achieve the Governments climate change targets, much tighter Building Regulations were introduced in 2007 which called for large reductions in CO₂ emissions. Further changes in October 2010 will require additional CO₂ emissions reductions of 30%. We are aware that during the economic downturn, meeting these requirements and the SHQS will become more difficult.

Nevertheless, we want to build on the past successes of our development programme and to continue to achieve high standards on our new build projects. To ensure that key sustainability principles are addressed we are determined to remain informed of the latest technologies and best practice standards in new affordable house building. We will use this information to continually review our development processes.

The most efficient heating source in terms of cost and environmental impact is usually connecting to mains gas. However, due to the dispersed nature of providing housing within the Highlands, mains gas heating systems are often not an option. Before determining the most sustainable solution we will examine the merits of alternative heating systems.

We have been trialling different approaches in order to discover the most effective way of providing thermal comfort to residents whilst also reducing CO₂ emissions. Some of these methods include air or ground source heat pump systems and homes with more traditional heating systems will very high levels of insulation. An



Figure 2 – Glenmore Development

An example of this is our award winning housing development at Glenmore near Aviemore shown in Figure 2. Further information can be found in the appendix.

The improvements we wish to aim for include:

- Provide efficient heating systems which are straightforward to use.
- High standards of building insulation so there is less reliance on heating systems and a lower level of vulnerability of unfair tariffs.
- To take into account the entire lifecycle of materials when costing and reduce the use of high embodied energy construction materials.

2. Our Residents

The well-being of our residents is at the heart of all that we do. As a Scottish charity we are led by a committee of management comprised of volunteers from the communities we serve. We are required to maintain financial viability on an annual basis and the profits we generate are injected back into achieving our strategic objectives rather than being distributed to shareholders.

Sustainable Communities

Sustainable communities are communities which last the test of time. They are healthy places, with strong social networks and inclusive access to jobs, learning and other opportunities. They are also communities which are on their way towards living within their environmental limits.

We are committed to achieving sustainable communities because they protect the things we value:

1. The environment is preserved for future generations to enjoy.
2. The physical spaces within the community are places we are proud of and where we feel safe.
3. A community allows for diversity in housing options and modes of transportation.
4. Participation is vital to ensure that concerns are heard and acted upon.
5. Reducing traffic congestion means we have more time at home with our family.

Albyn have been helping to develop sustainable communities across the Highlands for many years. An example of this is the redevelopment of Craite Barn in Applecross, shown in Figure 3. Completed in 2004, the project has helped to preserve local heritage, provide much needed affordable housing and sustain local businesses. More details on the Craite Barn project can be found in the appendix.



Figure 3 – Craite Barn, Applecross

In our **delivery of new affordable homes throughout the Highlands** we strive to create sustainable communities. A high level of sustainable design is crucial for making new affordable housing desirable now and in many years to come. Consideration is given to elements of design including the appearance of development, the quantity and quality of green space, access to facilities and encouraging social interaction.

Addressing local community need is a vital element to our development ethos. Many of our recent projects, including Armadale, Glenmore, Kinlochewe, Poolewe, Sheildaig, Stoer and Torridon, were the result of several years of community development activities in partnership with the Highland Council, Community Councils, other community organisations and the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust in order to deliver the most appropriate housing to the communities.

Achieving Affordable Warmth

Achieving affordable warmth means our tenants can enjoy adequate heat in their homes without spending too much of their income. The Scottish Government reported in 2008 that approximately 1 in 4 households in Scotland were not achieving affordable warmth and suffering fuel poverty. The consequences of not being able to secure affordable warmth are usually associated with discomfort, ill-health, social exclusion and debt.

There are three main causes of fuel poverty:

- Low income levels
- Poor energy efficiency performance of housing, and
- High energy costs.

Those at most risk are:

- The elderly
- The unemployed
- The long-term sick/disabled, and
- Families with young children.

Taking actions to help residents achieve affordable warmth means that they are much more likely to have **successful tenancies**. This is because they benefit from a number of positive outcomes including:

- Greater energy efficiency in homes and more suitable payment arrangements can lower fuel bills and increase incomes.
- A sufficiently heated and well insulated home is much less likely to suffer from damp and mould which can have an impact on the structure of a house and the occupant's health.
- A warm home provides a better environment to bring up children and can have positive impacts upon their education.
- The risk of circulatory and respiratory disease is reduced, which in turn reduces the need for health care.

We are aware that the economic downturn is likely to increase the financial pressure on many of our residents and, in turn, increase the risk of fuel poverty. As a result fuel poverty is a major theme within our Sustainable Tenancy Strategy (which aims to ensure lasting tenancies) and our Housing Energy Strategy (which deals with the energy performance of our housing).

In 2008 Albyn created an award winning biomass* district heating system in Aviemore which provides sustainable heating for more 100 Albyn homes. Shown in Figure 4 it is fuelled by woodchips sourced from local sustainable forests. The system is designed to provide residents with a much greater ability of securing affordable warmth. This is because the generation of heat is not as dependent on fossil fuels which are subject to increases in international energy prices. Further details can be found in the appendix.



Figure 4 - Aviemore Biomass Heating System

Supporting Tenants

We recognise that supporting our tenants is a key aspect of achieving **successful tenancies** and **supporting communities to thrive**. By supporting residents we can help people to enjoy longer tenancies which lead

* **Biomass** - The name given to living and recently dead organic material that can be used to create energy. This includes wood and also other plant, vegetable or animal matter.

to lower turnover of properties thereby helping the community to remain stable over time.

Give our tenants the best possible start is essential. We need to take time to allocate tenants sensitively to achieve a harmonious outcome for applicants and neighbours. By working with and having good communication between our housing management team, community groups, and other external agencies we can best inform at the allocations stage.

Maximising tenant's income is a key priority for us and one which we need to continue to focus our attention. In comparison to other regions of the UK we have relatively low rates of early tenancy failures. However we are aware that a main source of difficulty for our tenants is failing to meet rent payments and getting into debt.

Supplying people with life and employment skills is a significant part of supporting our customers. This can help tenants to support themselves and live independently. It can also assist in bringing people back into work which can lead to an increase their income. For example, the New Start Bike Project in Inverness launched day in April 2010, shown in Figure 5, allows local people to gain valuable work experience, develop skills and improve their chances of securing a job. See the appendix for additional details on the project.



Figure 5 - New Start Bike Project

Early intervention is crucial for tenants who experience difficulties and tenancy problems. Through a 'multi-agency' approach we can identify vulnerable tenancies at an early stage. We can then take the appropriate actions, such as offering support and advice, to help the tenants.

Improvements to aim for include:

- We want to continue to develop our multi-agency approach and share information at a grass-roots level.
- Greater coordination between Albyn departments and with external groups and organisations, including social work and police.
- Help to develop access credit unions which offer tenants affordable finance.

Regeneration

By helping to regenerate disadvantaged areas in the Highlands we can allow **communities to thrive**. Regeneration does not just mean reinvesting in the physical environment, such as housing and parks etc, but also reinvesting in social aspects. These means broader regeneration activities include projects that support/deliver employment, training, community facilities, care, arts, youth development, economic improvement, environmental improvements, financial inclusion, and improved health.

In recent years the main areas we have worked in include the Merkinch area of Inverness and Pulteneytown in Wick. In 2003 we won a sustainability competition to redevelop MacLennan Crescent in Merkinch. We recognised the opportunity to help regenerate a part of the Highlands which has experienced a lack of investment for many years. Together with the construction of 40 affordable mixed tenure homes we also decided to locate our new support office there. Our new office allows us to be situated close to many of our customers while also redeveloping brownfield land and helping to support the local economy. The regeneration of Merkinch has been very successful in creating an atmosphere of positive growth and encouraging other economic development in the area.

In Wick, the award winning Pulteneytown People's Project (PPP) has made huge progress as a community regeneration initiative since it was established 7 years ago. Albyn have been assisting them to raise aspirations and build a renewed sense of cohesion in an area of high unemployment. The new £4m community enterprise centre will bring fresh impetus to the local economy by supporting small-scale local businesses and providing people with valuable life skills.

Although the focus tends to be on urban areas, Albyn are also involved in regenerating rural communities. By reinvesting in rural areas we can lift the community and improve the quality of life for the residents. In Milton of Kildray, for example, we recently completed the development of a number new homes, shown in Figure 6, to help boost the local area.



Figure 6 - New homes at Kildary.

3. Our Organisation

Starting with only a handful of staff, Albyn Housing Society Ltd now has over 70 employees and operates out of two main offices. From an organisational point of view, we want to lead by example and ensure that our own physical environment and staff behaviour reflects the principles of sustainability.

Greener Offices

Office environments offer great potential for improving environmental performance. Since the redevelopment of our existing building in Invergordon and opening our new support office in Inverness we have been able to adopt much more environmentally friendly ways of working.

In the design and construction of our new offices a main focus was on reducing our carbon emissions. Our greener offices include:

- Investment in new computers and electronic equipment which has improved energy efficiency,
- Movement sensors on lights to reduce energy consumption,
- Recycling facilities such as bins for plastic, paper and glass to reduce waste going to landfill.
- Secure bike lock-up and a shower to encourage staff to cycle to work.

Furthermore, instead of moving away to a business park we decided to keep our main office in the heart of the Invergordon. One of the main factors in this decision was to continue our proud history of working with and supporting local businesses. Figure 7 shows the front of our Invergordon office where we redeveloped our existing office and extended to an adjoining vacant property.



Figure 7 - Our Invergordon office

Staff

Our staff are our greatest resource and their individual decisions, actions and services they provide will have a major impact on the effectiveness of our Sustainability Strategy. We continue to promote sustainable principles and ensure that all staff are mindful of and support our Sustainability Strategy as they go about their daily business.

Raising awareness and training Albyn's front line staff on issues of sustainability provides them with an improved understanding on subjects such as energy efficiency. This can then allow our staff to provide better advice and assistance to tenants and other stakeholders. In recent years, for example, we have trained 5 members of staff as accredited Domestic Energy Assessors and more are awaiting formal training. This means we can undertake surveys and produce Energy Performance Certificates in-house.

Transport

Transportation represents a major challenge for us. It is the second largest source of carbon emissions in the UK, accounting for around 20%³. Albyn operates across a wide geographical area and it means that the use of public transport and cycling are rarely feasible forms of transport. We are, however, aware that with over 70 employees minimising travel represents a real opportunity to reduce CO₂ emissions while also reducing our financial costs.

Albyn have a long standing commitment to flexible working which is associated with higher levels of productivity, motivation, and reducing the need to travel. If, for example, a member of staff from our Invergordon office was attending a meeting in Inverness they could more often than not complete their working day in the Inverness office instead of travelling back. This could cut down on travelling time and reduces CO₂ emissions. We are also investigating other opportunities, including a number of staff are currently 'homeworking' under a pilot project.

Improvements to aim for include:

- Review our current approach to business travel. This includes carrying out travel surveys to identify travel patterns and investigate ways of reducing our environmental impact and becoming more efficient.
- Establish a system to help reduce our car dependency and encourage staff to take more sustainable forms of transport.

³ Department For Transport, DFT, (2009) 'Fact Sheet: UK Transport Data and Climate Change', DFT, London.

4. Our Partners

To create a more sustainable future we are aware that in many cases there is scope for working with others. This can provide us with ways of working that are more efficient, deliver a better service to our customers and minimise our impact on the environment. In these situations it is in the interests of our current and future residents that there is a need for us to pool our knowledge, share and learn from our experiences and lend our support to other organisations and agencies which share our values.

Business Partners

Working with other businesses and organisations has been a central part of our work for almost 40 years. We have pursued our mission of **delivering and maintaining quality housing and helping communities to thrive** in agreement and partnership with a range of local authorities, public bodies, the private sector and non-governmental and voluntary organisations. Albyn are now a key partner for agencies such as the Highland Council, the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust, the Highland Housing Alliance, NHS Highland and various community groups.

We have recently developed a partnership agreement with Cairn Housing Association for our customers in Caithness. Figure 8 shows the Chairpersons and Chief Executives of Albyn Housing Society and Cairn Housing Association. For more details please refer to the appendix.



Figure 8 – Caithness partnership agreement

Since 2008, the six main providers of rented accommodation in the Highlands joined together to create the Highland Housing Register (HHR). The register is a single housing list of people seeking social housing in the Highlands. It makes it much simpler for applicants by allowing them to fill in one application for all landlords rather than separate forms for each.

Albyn have also been involved in the development of the new Framework Agreement. This agreement intends to cut bureaucracy and guarantee a

reliable and quality service with an emphasis on the local businesses by creating a pool of short-listed contractors for local housing associations.

Involving Customers

We are committed to creating sustainable communities and getting our customers involved is a crucial part. We want to encourage resident participation in the decisions about the services they receive and keep them fully informed about our policies and performance.

The Resident Satisfaction Survey is one way we get our customers involved. Carried out at least every 3 years, the survey is intended to identify the aspects of our service which we are successful in and areas we can improve on. Addressing these concerns allows us to maintain the high standard of service we provide to our customers.

The results of the 2010 survey have been positive with continuous improvements in overall customer satisfaction and levels of customer involvement. Albyn have also compared very well with the other 40 Scottish housing associations. In particular, in taking account of tenants' views over matters which concern them, Albyn scored nearly 20% higher than the norm.

The surveys also help us concentrate on issues which need further and continued attention. Some of the main concerns among our tenants is that of energy efficiency and anti-social behaviour.

Some of the other ways in which Albyn get residents involved include:

- Helping people to form tenant / resident groups and providing them with the relevant support.
- Our recently developed register for interested tenants allows us to get people involved in the areas they are interested in.
- We conduct area forums which local tenants are encouraged to attend.
- Our community development team which work with resident associations and other groups to deliver programmes tailored to each community.
- The Customer Services Project Group which was recently set up to help improve our customer service, discuss equality issues and increase customer involvement. This is made up of staff members from our Housing, Maintenance and Corporate services as well as two tenants.

Improvements to aim for include:

- Continue to develop a range of opportunities for residents to examine and challenge the services they receive.
- Enable residents to participate in decision making, setting targets and agreeing service outcomes.
- Decide with residents the methods of involvement which best suit their local needs and circumstances and provide support for the tenants to ensure they are properly equipped for this role.

Appendix

Case Study - Aviemore Biomass Plant

Community biomass heating systems offer one of the most sustainable forms of heating available. This is because burning wood releases the CO₂ that trees have absorbed during their lifetime, thus having very little environmental impact.

In 2008, Albyn developed one of Scotland's most progressive and innovative biomass district heating systems. It is fuelled by wood chips from local sustainable forests and supplies heating for 100 Albyn homes in Aviemore. The project was awarded a Building Research Establishment (BRE) eco-home accreditation in recognition of the innovation involved, leading to the development of new biomass technologies.



The district heating system provides an affordable alternative to traditional heating systems which are subject to increases in international energy prices. The new homes were also built to a high sustainability standard with high insulation, south facing lounge windows and low impact decorative materials.

During 2009, the plant used 811 tonnes of woodfuel which produced 1,956,900 kw hours of heat, resulting in a saving of an estimated 500 tonnes of CO₂.

Being on the sharp edge of innovation and technology the Aviemore community biomass provides an invaluable contribution to renewable energy in Scotland. As a progressive system the heating system was not without risks and problems. However, we intend to learn from our experiences and continue to develop high level sustainability projects in the future.

Case Study – Old High School Drumnadrochit

In April 2010, Albyn completed the redevelopment of the former High School in Drumnadrochit into 13 affordable homes for rent. It was an important project which enhanced the sustainability of the communities in several ways. Firstly, it provides affordable housing in a community where it is desperately needed. Secondly, the reuse of an existing brownfield site not only relieves pressure on the countryside around Drumnadrochit but it also brings an important local heritage building back into use. Finally, the homes were designed to be energy efficient which minimises the fuel bills of the tenants. Other former public sector assets in Strathpeffer and Tain have been developed and two former police houses in Bonar Bridge.



Case Study – Caithness Partnership

In 2009 we formed a partnership agreement with Cairn Housing Association to combine our services in Caithness. The first of its type in Scotland the agreement means over 300 households across Caithness have both a housing officer and a maintenance officer based locally. This makes both economic and environmental sense as it removes unnecessary travel and duplication of work. Cairn's full time Housing Officer and Local Services Assistants work across Albyn's properties. They carry out estate management visits, deal with reports of anti-social behaviour, allocate empty properties, manage rent accounts and respond to housing benefit enquiries. Albyn's Maintenance Officer carries out the routine and cyclical maintenance requirements for both organisations across Caithness and North Sutherland.



Case Study – New Start Bike Project

In April 2010 Albyn Housing Society and local charity New Start Highland joined forces to launch the New Start Bike Project. The bike building and maintenance scheme provides training and personal development for vulnerable individuals in Inverness. It encourages people to access experience, training and in turn adopt a healthier lifestyle.

The project, which helps vulnerable individuals realise their potential, offers six-week training courses in building and maintaining a bike. At the end of the six weeks, the participant has learned new skills, is more prepared to enter the working world and has a new bike to keep. Any surplus bikes produced from the project are made available to the wider community, so the charity can gain a small income to put back into future courses.



Case Study – South Lodge, Invergordon

We have planned an extension to the gas central heating network at South Lodge in Invergordon. This would see – homes move from electric to gas

Case Study – Sustainable Design Award for Glenmore Development

Albyn Housing Society was awarded one of the top prizes in the UK Sustainable Housing Awards in 2009. We won the award for best Sustainable Smaller Housing Project of the Year, for the development of two homes in Glenmore, on the former site of the Forestry Commission camp-site shower block. Nestled amid the pines of the Cairngorm National Park, these attractive homes will weather over time and blend with their surroundings.



The scheme was aimed to be thoughtful towards who will be living in the homes, where they are, with good design and technologies added accordingly.

The main green features of the development included local sourcing of building materials such as structural and cladding timber, extremely well insulated walls, floor and roof, producing carbon savings of around 48% in comparison to the building standards. This has been augmented by the provision of wood burning stoves as well as water recycling and minimisation measures.

The competition judges commented: “This is not just environmental box ticking; it’s sensitive and interesting. You’d want to live there. It has design quality as well as locally-based sustainability.”

Case Study – Redevelopment of Craite Barn, Applecross

Albyn's long standing commitment to building sustainable communities is reflected by the Craite Barn conversion in Applecross. Completed in 2004 Albyn successfully adapted the Grade B listed barn and former slaughterhouse into 8 affordable homes.



The aim of the project was to address the needs of the local community and incorporate the values of sustainable communities. The popular remote village in Wester Ross suffered from a lack of available land, high house prices and a prevalence of holiday homes. This put significant pressure on the ability, particularly of young people, to find decent, affordable homes in their area. Therefore the provision of affordable housing for locals residents on lower incomes was welcomed.

Other important aspects of helping to sustain the community include

- The conversion helped to preserve the local community's heritage by converting an old derelict building.
- Helped to sustain local businesses
- The development also included a waste water treatment centre.
- We wanted to local people to be empowered in the development process.
- Quality and innovation in design and construction with the choice of different materials and structures including the use of local resources.

Definitions

Affordable warmth – Affordable warmth means a household is able to afford to heat their home to the level required for their comfort and health on less than 10% of their incomes. The lack of affordable warmth is known as **fuel poverty**.

Biomass - Biomass is the name given to living and recently dead organic material that can be used to create energy. This includes wood and also other plant, vegetable or animal matter. Biomass is also sometimes called 'bioenergy' or 'biofuel'.

Brownfield Land - Brownfield land is land that is or was formerly occupied by a permanent building that has become derelict or vacant and now has the aptitude for redevelopment.

Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 – An act, passed by the Scottish Parliament in June 2009, setting out targets of greenhouse gas reduction of 80% by 2050 and an interim target of 42% by 2030. The act is often regarded to be one of the most ambitious strategies for addressing climate change in the world.

Embodied energy - The energy used in the whole process of making a product, i.e. the amount of energy used to resource, extract, transport and manufacture.

Fuel poverty - A situation where at least 10% of a household's disposable income is spent on fuel bills.

Greenhouse gases (GHGs) - Gases in the Earth's atmosphere that produce the greenhouse effect. Changes in the amount of certain greenhouse gases, due to human activity such as burning fossil fuels, increase the risk of global climate change.

Highland Housing Register (HHR) - HHR is a single Housing List which enables anyone seeking social rented housing in Highland to apply for housing from any of the partner social landlords by completing a single shared application form.

Housing tenure - The financial arrangements under which someone has the right to live in a house or apartment. The most frequent forms are tenancy, in which rent is paid to a landlord, and owner occupancy.