

Honeysuckle Close Development Consultation & Outcome Summary

Background

Merthyr Valleys Homes is Wales' first tenant and employee owned mutual. We have a unique and democratic structure of governance and mutual accountability - this runs through everything we do as a social business.

Being a mutual, we engage with our members, tenants, employees and communities (including stakeholders) when making key decisions and encourage and allow them to 'have a say' by having an open, two-way dialogue. By opening up opportunities for people to engage we give people the option to work in partnership with us and the power to influence our decision-making.

Our approach to development is modelled in line with our structure and our mutual values. We want to work together to collectively create pride in our homes and our communities, and to develop new accessible and affordable homes that people want and need. Our Homes and Places Strategy, talks about our aspirations and plans for development,

"We will build high quality, well insulated, energy efficient homes that are affordable to build and live in",

and our governance arrangements include for comprehensive consultation. For each and every new development or major refurbishment project, we will plan and hold a consultation appropriate to the scale and complexity of the project and the potential impacts on and sensitivities of the community.

Honeysuckle Close

Honeysuckle Close is a development site situated in the Gurnos area of the Borough. The site is situated between the existing Honeysuckle Close and Bramble Close in the 'new' Gurnos area (within a well-established existing community) and is within a very short walking distance of Prince Charles Hospital. The site could potentially house six new PassivHaus homes, suitable for either single people or couples - a total of 6 units. This includes a 'Haus4Care' unit to assist with hospital discharge, for which we have been awarded Innovative Care Funding.

The timing of the consultation with the community co-incided with us being in a state of national lockdown due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, we continued with a mutual, inclusive approach to consultation using a mix of traditional and digital methods, being mindful of people's digital capabilities (both in terms of access and skills) we were conscious of not excluding anyone that wanted to get involved.

We determined that a two-stage approach was necessary:

1. Initial Engagement

We contacted all key stakeholders in the vicinity*, to inform them that we were undertaking a site survey to determine as to whether or not the land would be suitable for a small development of eco-friendly homes.

We met with the local Ward Councillors, and 127 tenants and residents were contacted by letter.

We explained the reasoning behind this potential new development – that we are playing our part in addressing the need for additional homes in Merthyr Tydfil - ones that are suitable, energy efficient and affordable and meet local housing needs.

We informed everyone that we would return to undertake a full community consultation, should the land be deemed suitable for development.

*Streets included were:

Bramble Close
Clover Road
Honeysuckle Close
Jasmine Close
Marigold Close

2. Consultation

We returned to the community in February 2021, to inform them that the land was suitable for development, and that we were proposing to undertake a development of 6 new homes – a new style of home called a 'PassivHaus'.

We met with the local Ward Councillors and wrote out to each of the tenants and residents in the vicinity. It was important to again reiterate the reason for the proposal – that there is currently a shortage of smaller accommodation that would suit single people or couples in Merthyr Tydfil, and we are aiming to play a part in addressing this by creating additional homes. We explained the benefits to both this style of home, and to this type of development project, explaining that these are manufactured off site and delivered, placed and connected to utilities, so there would be less disruption within the community than with a more traditional development approach.

We invited everyone to take a look at the plan of the development (a copy was enclosed with the letter) and shared a link to be able to view a PassivHaus ahead of the consultation.

<https://bit.ly/2ZSQ3tp>

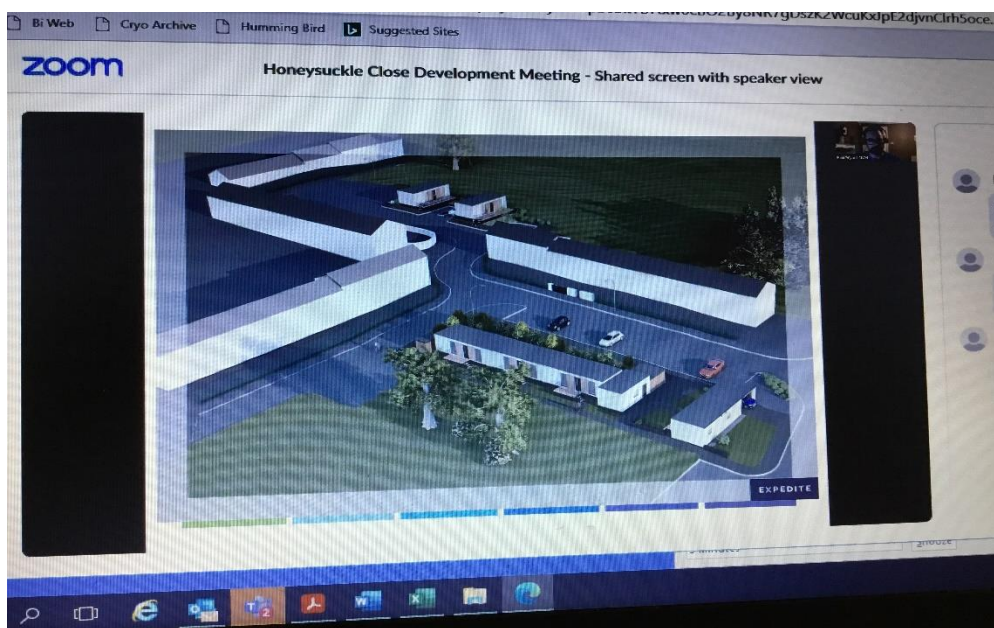
We opened up a range of ways in which people could communicate with us – allowing everyone the opportunity to have a say using their preferred communication methods. This included:

- Contacting us via letter
- Contacting us via telephone (including via a freephone number)
- Contacting us via a dedicated text number
- Contacting us via a dedicated email
- By joining our Facebook page – 'MVH Honeysuckle Close Development'
- By joining us at an online Community Consultation Event via Zoom on 25th February

Online Community Consultation Event

A 'live' digital Community Consultation Event was held on Thursday 25th February at 5.30pm. This was held on Zoom and provided an opportunity to listen to and view a virtual presentation of the development proposal by our Director of Homes and Places and our Development Manager. It provided an opportunity to ask questions and to have a say – both physically and by using the chat function.

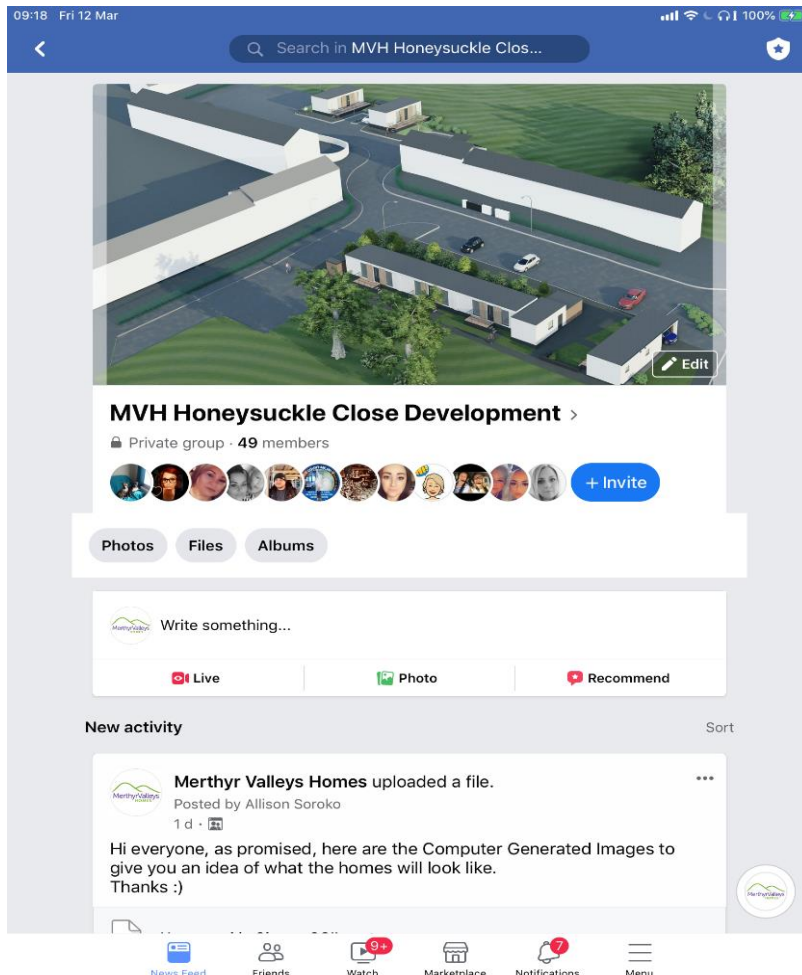
Whilst we would have liked to have had a wider engagement on this platform, the meeting was very successful, and attendance included tenants / residents and two local Ward Councillors. It was recorded so it could be shared and viewed at a later time for those unable to attend due to other commitments, and a summary report was presented to the members of the closed Facebook Group.



Closed Facebook Group

Our MVH Facebook page is a very popular way to engage with our tenants across the Borough, and we have over 2,500 followers. Based on this and on the success of using other 'closed' Facebook groups for other projects and developments, we established a closed Facebook group for this proposed development. The group is freely available to find, and there are no restrictions on who can join, it just means that the page is 'closed' in the sense that you have to become a member of the group in order to engage in discussion and to view information.

The objective was to create an open platform to provide an opportunity for two-way dialogue to enable our tenants and residents in the area to ask questions and express views. It also provides MVH with a platform to provide information (using a range of communication methods) so we can provide regular updates as the project progresses.



Members of the group have been encouraged to post their views and comments on the development, and we have ensured that everyone has had an individual response, as well as providing generic information for the group.

The page was created and launched on 18th February, shortly before the Zoom event, and membership has grown organically and quickly, with the page having 49 members at present (3 MVH administrators, so 46 active members of the community).

Post, Telephone and Email Communication

Whilst we wanted to ensure that everyone who wished to be involved in the consultation had the opportunity to do so, and offered the use of more traditional methods of communication as a supplement to digital platforms, the small number of people who initially engaged in this way have opted to join the closed Facebook group.

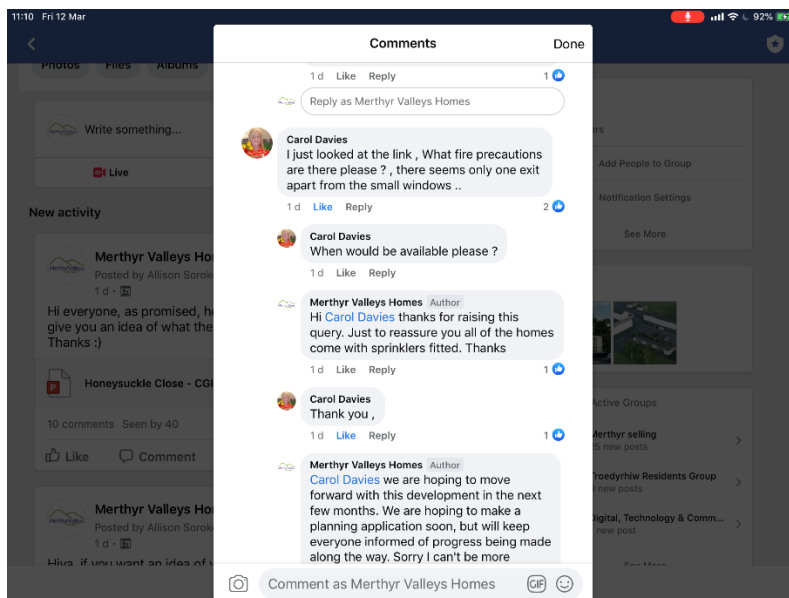
In Conclusion

The concerns and queries from the community can be grouped into two key themes:

1. Homes and Tenancies
2. Use of Green Space

Homes and Tenancies

There have been some queries as to the type of home being proposed, in terms of the longevity, size and style and design. This of course, is a new style of home, so lots of questions were expected. These concerns were raised via Facebook group and at the Zoom meeting. All queries have been addressed to the satisfaction of the individual. For example, H&S concerns around fire safety, to which we have been able to reassure the community that the homes come with sprinklers fitted, and queries around laundry facilities (due to the size of the homes), to which we have been able to demonstrate that a collective laundry facility is part of the design.



Comment from a resident on the style of home:

Very nice I take back my posh potocabin remark ,, any chance u could rehouse my daughter and son in law and move me in to one hahahahahahaha

MVH Response:

Thanks Kathryn. They are very nice - we have one at the back of our office in Gellideg that we were hoping to use as a 'showhome'. Unfortunately we've been unable to use it due to Covid restrictions. It would have been great to have had the opportunity to offer people to come along and view it! Such a shame. But if you'd like to take a look inside - click on this link: <https://bit.ly/2ZSQ3tp>

There have also been some queries around the type of tenancy that will be attributed to the development, and some questions around the allocation of tenancies. We have been open and transparent with the community in that this development is designed to provide a home for individuals that are already living in some form of temporary accommodation, already managing their lives successfully. We are looking to provide homes for individuals who are in need and want to work towards addressing the homelessness issues in Merthyr. Some assurance that tenancies would be well managed with dedicated support from officers within MVH has been provided and accepted.

Use of Green Space

Several members of the community raised concerns over the loss of a green space area which is used as a local meeting point for the community, parents and children. These concerns were raised via Facebook group and at the Zoom meeting.

Whilst we are not taking up the whole of the green spaces area with this development (about a third of the area will be affected), we have committed to replacing some of what will be lost with this development with something else, and will work with the local community to do this together.

Some discussions took place within the Zoom meeting on potential areas that could be utilised and some ideas as to what facilities could potentially be introduced. However, a separate consultation with the community will need to be carried out so that we can get the views and ideas of the whole community so that we can work together to invest and maintain. This will take place over the next few months and following subsequent conversations with Ward Councillors and MTCBC officers, we will this in partnership with the community, Local Ward Councillors and MTCBC.