



**GROUP WIDE  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
STRATEGY  
2006-2010**

## 1 Introduction

1.1 The overall goal of this strategy is:

**To achieve good practice environmental management throughout Somer Housing Group in a way that harmonises with our wider business aims and objectives.**

1.2 In every aspect of the work that we engage in we make decisions that will have positive or negative environmental impacts. As a socially responsible organisation Somer Housing Group accepts our obligation to reduce negative environmental impacts and to contribute to preserving and enhancing our environment for future generations.

1.3 European Union and UK government concerns about such issues as climate change, increased energy consumption and the loss of finite resources are increasingly being reflected in legislation, regulation and guidance. Just a few examples are:

- Amended Building Regulations introduced in April 2006 that are designed to raise energy efficiency standards in new and refurbished buildings;
- The European Union directive that by 2010, 35% of biodegradable waste must be diverted from land-fill;
- Part L of the Building Regulations 2005 (which sets out standards for conserving fuel and power);
- The 2007 Code for Sustainable Homes (which aims “to promote more sustainable building practices so that today's best practice becomes tomorrow's standard practice”);
- More locally, Bristol City Council has introduced its own Code for Sustainable Construction;
- All publicly funded new housing developments must achieve the EcoHomes “Very Good” rating or Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes.

Many of these requirements already impact on how we operate and others are likely to require further changes in strategy, policy and action. For example, the Urban Task Force report “Towards a Strong Urban Renaissance”, November 2005, concludes that:

“...environmental standards in refurbishment and new building are still not respected and need enforcement.”

1.4 The Housing Corporation is also leading housing associations towards responsible environmental management. This is a key part of a wider concern to achieve sustainable development while improving services and living conditions for residents. We fully accept the need for all of our new

homes to achieve at least the EcoHomes “very good” standard in order to qualify for grant funding but we also need to prepare for the possibility of further challenging requirements such as the application of the EcoHomes XB standard to refurbishment programmes.

- 1.5 We recognise that although an externally-shaped agenda imposes restrictions, that same agenda also provides opportunities. Full implementation of the strategy will ensure that we are compliant with legislation and regulation. Focussing on reducing our consumption of resources and minimising negative environmental impacts can directly contribute to the efficiency agenda while avoiding reductions in service standards. In addition, maintaining an awareness of forthcoming developments will enable us to prepare for change in an effective way, participate in pilot programmes and maximise associated grant funding.
- 1.6 Good environmental management is the responsibility of each group member and this strategy will drive group-wide action.
- 1.7 This strategy has been developed following a review of Somer Community Housing Trust’s Environmental Strategy. It is the result of detailed consultation with Board members, staff, residents, other housing associations and external agencies. Representatives of all Group members participated in the review and agreed that the relevant strategic drivers apply, with some variations, to all Somer Housing Group members. It is appropriate that a commitment to achieving good practice is shared across Group members and that duplication of effort and resources is avoided.
- 1.8 A rolling Environmental Action Plan has been developed, incorporating action plans and targets for each theme, in order to ensure that the strategic aims and objectives are achieved.

## **2 Principles for environmental management**

- 2.1 The Environmental Strategy is based upon the following guiding principles:
  - To work to achieve good environmental practice across all areas of Somer Housing Group activity through continuous improvement and incremental change;
  - To ensure the harmonisation of strategic objectives across all members of Somer Housing Group;
  - To achieve an appropriate balance between environmental, social and economic considerations;

- To achieve good environmental practice while maintaining or enhancing standards of service and promoting the interests of our residents;
- To ensure that environmental factors are fully considered alongside value for money, efficiency, quality of service and social impacts in strategy and policy setting, action planning and decision-making;
- To remain responsive to emerging global, national and local environmental developments and to prepare for potential future increases in energy prices;
- To exceed mandatory minimum standards where there is a clear business case for so doing;
- To achieve operational efficiencies by prioritising those actions that will produce environmental gains without incurring additional cost;
- To identify, manage and reduce environmental risks and liabilities while securing value for money and avoiding detrimental impacts on other business priorities;
- To develop a system for monitoring, targeting and reporting our environmental impacts and performance based on the overall global warming potential of our actions;
- To benchmark our environmental performance with housing associations and other external organisations;
- To work with the Sustainability Forum and Green Action Team to promote an awareness and understanding of the strategy and of environmental impacts and issues among all of our stakeholders;
- To respond effectively to rising environmental expectations from residents;
- To work in partnership to deliver our strategic aims and objectives and to act as an agent of positive change in our community.

### **3 Review**

- 3.1 The Environmental Strategy will be reviewed annually. Feedback from residents, staff and other key stakeholders will form part of the review process and will influence the development and content of rolling action plans.

### **4 Strategic objectives**

- 4.1 The Environmental Strategy establishes a framework for achieving good environmental practice in a way that complements Somer Housing Group's wider business priorities.

- (1) To encourage the responsible consumption of water by Somer Housing Group, our contractors and residents.**

- Developing practical methods of reducing water consumption and making more effective use of waste water
- Developing our knowledge of water conservation and waste water management
- Investigating and assessing water management technologies and adopting those technologies that meet environmental and economic objectives
- Playing our part in securing the affordable supply of water to our residents
- Encouraging all residents to find the most appropriate tariff for water supply and sewerage services
- Working in partnership with local water agencies to ensure that water is used wisely and not wasted.

**(2) To achieve good energy management in all aspects of our business through reducing overall energy consumption, increasing energy efficiency and adopting a practical commitment to renewable energy technologies**

- Developing an Energy Policy together with a clear structure and responsibilities for energy management throughout the Group.
- Auditing and monitoring energy consumption and efficiency on all Somer Housing Group buildings, offices and homes
- Implementing the Our Big Energy Challenge energy efficiency project in partnership with Bath and North East Somerset Council and the Local Strategic Partnership
- Promoting energy awareness among Somer Housing Group staff, contractors, suppliers and residents
- Developing and implementing an action plan that provides affordable warmth and security of energy supply for Somer Housing Group residents into the long-term
- Investigating and assessing renewable energy technologies and adopting those technologies that meet environmental and economic objectives
- Introducing a renewable energy pilot project.
- Maximising grant income and reviewing budget allocation for energy efficiency measures and renewable energy technologies
- Investigating ways of recovering capital costs and securing long-term funding through partnerships with energy companies
- Assessing the costs and benefits associated with the new EcoHomes XB standard

**(3) To address the negative environmental and social impacts associated with travel to work and business-related travel**

- Promoting the efficient use of motor vehicles in business related travel

- Reducing fleet vehicle emissions and improving fleet vehicle fuel consumption
- Ensuring that environmental and social impacts and the use of alternative fuels are fully considered in reviews of fleet procurement
- Encouraging the use of public transport and environmentally-friendly motor vehicles
- Providing locally-based services to our residents
- Promoting the local procurement of goods and services
- Working in partnership to develop and implement practices that will deliver our strategic aims
- Reviewing the Green Travel Plan

**(4) To achieve environmental, social and economic gains by purchasing only what we need and increasingly purchasing resources and materials that can be reused or recycled or come from well-managed sustainable sources**

- Developing a requirement for recycled material or products from sustainable sources in contract and purchasing specifications
- Ensuring that the new materials specification group fully considers environmental sustainability factors in making purchasing recommendations
- Investigating and assessing the long-term costs and benefits of switching to environmentally sustainable products, materials and practices
- Encouraging the purchase of environmentally sustainable stationery and office equipment
- Maintaining and developing our commitment to purchasing fair trade products

**(5) To manage the process of waste disposal through minimising the amount of waste produced, increasing opportunities for recycling, reusing waste and removing the barriers to effective waste management**

- Developing a Waste Management Policy
- Establishing procedures for measuring and monitoring the disposal and recycling of waste
- Partnering with other agencies and groups in developing our approach to waste management
- Raising awareness among staff and residents of the opportunities to reduce waste and increase recycling
- Developing recycling facilities in Somer Housing Group offices, community locations and individual homes
- Working with our contractors to minimise waste in the production and distribution processes

- Working towards an overall reduction in the costs associated with the disposal of fly-tipping and bulk waste.

**(6) To manage our natural environment in a way that benefits existing and future communities, protects and enhances green spaces and promotes local bio-diversity**

- Ensuring the high quality management and maintenance of green spaces, trees and plants
- Carrying out environmental and social impact assessments before any open land is developed
- Working in partnership to promote awareness of, and practical encouragement for, local bio-diversity
- Promoting the health and social benefits of using green spaces
- Promoting the 'ownership' of green spaces by local communities

**5 The Longer Term Perspective**

- 5.1 Somer Housing Group needs to recognise fully that environmental management is becoming an increasingly important issue for all businesses and that legislation, regulation and expectations are likely to change and develop quickly.
- 5.2 The increasing affordability and improved performance of environmentally sustainable products, technologies, methods and practices will reduce associated budgetary pressures and the risk of technological failure.
- 5.3 We need to incorporate the principles identified in this strategy into all aspects of our operation so that in the longer term we are in a position to respond positively to the new challenges and opportunities that we will encounter. By doing this, commitment to good practice environmental management as part of the sustainable development of the Group will be established as a cultural norm.

## 6 Glossary of terms

TERM	DEFINITION
Bio-degradable waste	Waste that is capable of undergoing decomposition in the presence of oxygen, such as food, garden waste, paper and cardboard.
Bio-diversity	The number and variety of living organisms within an area.
Decent Homes standard	The Government expects all social housing to be brought up to a 'decent standard' by 2010. A decent home is one that is wind and weather tight, warm and has modern facilities.
EcoHomes	An independent environmental assessment method for homes. The environmental performance is expressed on a scale of Pass to Excellent.
Environmental impact	The effect an action may have on the surroundings in which people live or the natural world of land, sea, air, plants or animals.
Environmental management	Operating in a way that takes into consideration the environmental impacts of decisions and actions.
Fair trade	A partnership that seeks greater fairness in international trade. Producers of certified fair trade goods receive a minimum price that covers the cost of production and an extra premium that is invested in the local community.
Green Action Team	A group of people from different teams across Somer Housing Group looking for practical ways of reducing our environmental impact and using our resources wisely.
Sustainability Forum	A partnership between residents and Somer Community Housing Trust that carries out practical projects to bring communities together and promote green living.
Thermal comfort	A comfortable living temperature.