

Report Title:	Affordable Housing, Windsor
Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	Yes – Main report Part I, Appendix A – Part II - ‘Not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.’
Lead Member:	Councillor Johnson, Lead Member for Business, Economic Development and Property.
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet – 29 th April 2021
Responsible Officer(s):	Duncan Sharkey – Managing Director
Wards affected:	All

REPORT SUMMARY

The council have been approached by Abri Housing Group (formerly Radian Group and Yarlinton Housing Group), who are the owners of an ex council housing estate in Windsor, known as Sawyers Close. Sawyers Close was originally constructed in 1961 and was used for council housing, until it was transferred as part of a local authority stock transfer in 1995.

The estate consists of 192 properties, housing over 400 residents. 189 of the existing properties are let under a tenancy, and 3 are leaseholders under the right to buy scheme that was promoted by central government in the 1980's. 173 properties are let at a social rent level, and 16 are let at an affordable rent level.

Abri Housing Group own and manage over 35,000 homes across 37 different local authority areas, of which 5,000 are within Windsor. Windsor is a key area for them in terms of assets, comprising over 14% of their overall stock, and they have strong aspirations for future growth and development.

Abri Housing Group are looking at either a substantial refurbishment of these assets, or the potential for a complete redevelopment of the estate. The preferred option will be determined post a full public consultation with existing residents, and local key stakeholders.

If the latter is approved by their board, they will need additional land to create a sustainable transition of new build and facilitate the decanting of existing tenants. The council is the key landowner surrounding this estate.

1. DETAILS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

RECOMMENDATION: That Cabinet notes the report and:

- i) Approves the disposal of land identified in appendix A to Abri Housing Group, at nil value for the sole use as affordable housing, subject to planning being achieved and the scheme progressing.**
- ii) Delegates authority to the Managing Director in consultation with the Lead Member for Business, Economic Development and Property to enter into a contract for the sale of the land, subject to obtaining a s.123 report, confirming the value.**

- iii) **Delegates authority to the Managing Director in consultation with the Lead Member for Business, Economic Development and Property to consider any objections to the proposed disposal of land following publication of the Notice required under section 123(2A) of the Local Government Act 1972.**
- iv) **Delegates authority to the Managing Director in consultation with the Lead Member for Business, Economic Development and Property to dispose of the land identified at appendix A – subject to satisfactory planning restrictive to affordable housing.**

2. REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S) AND OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Options

Table 1: Options arising from this report

Option	Comments
To dispose of land identified in appendix A – for the use as affordable housing. This is the recommended option	The disposal of this land would be required to enable a completed redevelopment of this estate, for the benefit of both existing residents, and future residents of the borough.
Do Nothing	A decanting strategy off site, would put pressure on both the council housing team, and the existing residents of the estate and would put at risk refurbishment and redevelopment options.

- 2.1 If the decision is for a major refurbishment, this is likely to require the decanting of existing residents into temporary accommodation whilst major works are being undertaken. Whilst the finished product would be substantially beneficial for the residents, the decanting process would be extremely disruptive, expensive, and put pressure on the council housing team. This would also put a financial burden on the 3 existing leaseholders, who would be required to make a proportionate share of the refurbishment cost through a s.20 notice to leaseholders.
- 2.2 If the decision for a complete redevelopment is taken, this will also require a decanting strategy, however, this decanting process is likely to be for a longer period and would probably require more than one move for each household. Once to move them from the existing estate into temporary accommodation, and another to move them back into the completed new development.
- 2.3 If Abri Housing Group had the benefit of additional land, they could build out new housing, decant residents from existing blocks into the new housing, so only one decanting process, and with no implications or pressure on temporary

accommodation, or the council's housing team. The additional land would also allow for a much-improved community environment, for the residents.

- 2.4 The additional land, would also have the extra benefit, of Abri Housing Group investing in the borough, and creating more affordable homes, as it would give them the opportunity to increase the number of properties available to the residents of the borough through the redevelopment of the existing estate and the new build element on the additional land.

3. KEY IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 To achieve a successful redevelopment of the existing estate, and increase the provision of affordable housing in Windsor, Abri will need to undertake substantial consultation with existing residents and key stakeholders.
- 3.2 They will also then need a commitment from their Board, to invest substantial funds for the development, which would include a mix of private finance and public grant funding.
- 3.3 These will both need to be backed with the ability to achieve planning permission for a new development and redevelopment of the existing estate, including the additional land required, which is currently in the ownership of the council.
- 3.4 The land in questions is currently designated as open space. The planners would have to be sure that the benefits of the development of this area, outweigh any harm to the loss of open space.
- 3.5 The council as landowner would need to support this application and support any application or bid made by Abri Housing Group, for public sector grant.
- 3.6 The council as adjacent landowner, would therefore be acting in an enabling role, to assist with these matters, in order for the scheme to come to a successful conclusion for the benefit of the existing residents and also the future benefit of residents in the borough.
- 3.7 The council would need a s.123 report to support the disposal of land to another party, to confirm the value of the land. In the case of the sole use as affordable housing, this valuation is likely to generate a nil value. Therefore, the council would get in return nominations to additional homes created, thereby assisting with housing need in the borough and reducing the need for the extensive use of temporary accommodation.

Table 2: Key Implications for Abri Housing Group

Outcome	Unmet	Met	Exceeded	Significantly Exceeded	Date of delivery
Consultation undertaken	31 st August 2021	31 st May 2021	N/A	N/A	31 st May 2021
Private finance approved	31 st October 2021	30 th June 2021	31 st May 2020	N/A	30 th June 2021
Public sector grant funding approved	31 st October 2021	30 th June 2022	31 st January 2022	31 st December 2021	30 th June 2022

Outcome	Unmet	Met	Exceeded	Significantly Exceeded	Date of delivery
Submission of planning	30 th June 2022	31 st Dec 2021	30 th November 2021	31 st October 2021	31 st December 2021
Resolution to grant Planning permission	31 st Dec 2022	30 th June 2022	31 st May 2022	30 th April 2022	30 th June 2022
Disposal of adjacent land owned by the council	31 st October 2022	30 th June 2022	N/A	N/A	30 th June 2022

4. FINANCIAL DETAILS / VALUE FOR MONEY

- 4.1 The disposal and value of the land owned by the council will be confirmed by way of a s.123 report, demonstrating best value and consideration. Delegation is sought in this report to dispose of the land, at the value confirmed in the valuation.
- 4.2 The cost of valuation, and legal fees for the council will be met by Abri Housing Group.
- 4.3 There will be no financial cost to the council as part of the approval of this project. All project costs, development costs will be borne by Abri Housing Group, as part of their investment into affordable homes in the borough.
- 4.4 The creation of additional affordable homes in the borough will however, have potential savings for the council, as this will relieve pressure on the use of temporary accommodation by the housing team, and create a new sustainable community that the residents of the borough will be able to enjoy.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Section 123 Local Government Act 1972 (the **1972 Act**) provides the Council with the power to dispose of land held by them in any manner that they wish; the restriction on this being that, except with consent from the Secretary of State, a Council shall not dispose of land (otherwise than by way of a short tenancy), for consideration less than the best that can reasonably be obtained.
- 5.2 It has been recognised that there may be circumstances where local authorities consider it appropriate to dispose of land or property at an under-value and general consent has been granted by the Local Government Act 1972; General Disposal Consent 2003 (the **2003 Consent**). The general consent applies where the disposal of any interest in land is considered by the local authority to help secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social, or environmental well-being of its area.
- 5.3 It is assumed, that once the formal valuation has been undertaken to determine the market value of the land, Secretary of State approval will be sought if necessary, to transfer the land at nil value. It is highly likely that the value of the land will be restrained due to its restrictive use as affordable housing.

5.4 The land is designated as open space and therefore section 123(2A) of the 1972 Act requires the Council to advertise its intention to dispose of the land for two consecutive weeks in a newspaper circulating in the area in which the land is situated and to consider any objections made in respect of the disposal of the land.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 There is no risk for the council in the disposal of the land identified at appendix A. All planning, development and financial risk sits with Abri Housing Group.
- 6.2 There may be reputational risk for the council, if they dispose of their land as part of the redevelopment of this estate, and then Abri Housing Group, does not deliver a scheme that meets with their resident’s expectations, once constructed.
- 6.3 Should planning and funding not be achieved by Abri Housing Group, then the council would not transfer its land.
- 6.4 RBWM Property Company Ltd, would work closely with Abri Housing Group, to protect the reputational position of the council, both as landowner, and under its responsibilities to its residents in the borough, and identify any potential risks associated with the options and the proposed course of action.

Table 3: Impact of risk and mitigation

Risk	Level of uncontrolled risk	Controls	Level of controlled risk
Reputational risk for the council	Medium	RBWM Prop Co, would work alongside Abri Housing Group, during the consultation, planning, and grant bidding process. To support and enable the project, and to report progress of the development to the council.	Low

7. POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- 7.1 Equalities. Equality Impact Assessments are published on the [council’s website](#) this does not require a full assessment, a screen assessment only has been completed.
- 7.2 Climate change/sustainability – as part of the agreement to release land for the development of this estate, and the improve residents and community offer, the council would be expecting Abri Housing Group to comply with the elements of its Environmental and Climate Change Strategy that relate to new developments.

7.3 Data Protection/GDPR. – no personal data will be stored by the council as part of the public consultation, planning, or decanting process for this project. All personal data will be stored by Abri Housing Group. We can confirm that Abri Housing Group have due regard to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation. On this basis no Data Protection Impact Assessment has been carried out by the council.

8. CONSULTATION

8.1 Abri Housing Group has started the engagement and consultation process with existing residents and stakeholders. A copy of their engagement strategy is attached at appendix B.

8.2 Initial consultation has also taken place with local ward councillors.

9. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

9.1 Implementation date if not called in: Immediately. The full implementation stages are set out in table 4.

Table 4: Implementation timetable

Date	Details
Consultation	Already commenced, but due to be summarised by 31 st May 2021
Private Finance approved	30 th June 2021
Public Sector Grant Funding approved	30 th June 2022
Submission of Planning	31 st December 2021
Resolution to grant Planning Permission	30 th June 2022
Disposal of adjacent land owned by the council	30 th June 2022

10. APPENDICES

10.1 This report is supported by two appendices:

- Appendix A – Site Plan – Council owned Land for disposal -- Part II (**Not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972**)
- Appendix B – Abri Housing Group – Engagement Strategy

11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

11.1 This report is supported by one background documents:

- EQIA – Equality Impact Assessment [council's website](#)

12. CONSULTATION (MANDATORY)

Name of consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
Cllr Andrew Johnson	Lead Member for Business, Economic Development and Property	05/03/21	09/03/21
Duncan Sharkey	Managing Director	05/03/21	05/03/21
Adele Taylor	Director of Resources/S151 Officer	05/03/21	15/03/21
Andrew Durrant	Director of Place	05/03/21	
Kevin McDaniel	Director of Children's Services	05/03/21	05/03/21
Hilary Hall	Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning	05/03/21	05/03/21
Andrew Vallance	Head of Finance	05/03/21	
Elaine Browne	Head of Law	05/03/21	11/03/21
Emma Duncan	Deputy Director of Law and Strategy / Monitoring Officer	05/03/21	
Nikki Craig	Head of HR Corporate Projects and IT	05/03/21	08/03/21
Louisa Dean	Communications	05/03/21	
Karen Shepherd	Head of Governance	05/03/21	05/03/21

REPORT HISTORY

Decision type:	Urgency item?	To follow item?
Key Decision	No	No

Report Author: Barbara Richardson – Managing Director – RBWM Property Company Ltd. 01628-796791



Sawyers Close: Regeneration Engagement strategy

Presented by
Newgate Communications
January 2021

Introduction

This note sets out a community engagement strategy in support of the regeneration of Sawyers Close. It includes both a timeline and a stage-by-stage plan, as well as recommendations for project management and risk mitigation. It assumes that our engagement will be remote rather than in person, making use of digital channels and videoconferencing, while still providing hard copies of materials for those who prefer to engage this way. Should public health guidelines allow, we may be able to switch to in-person engagement at some stage during 2021.

Project Management

Regeneration of an existing community requires a quite different engagement strategy, compared to that for a vacant site. While the latter can often be seen as little more than a matter of complying with policy and tweaking proposals in a nod to local residents, community regeneration needs to be driven by the aspirations of those who live there and whose lives will be altered significantly as a result: it is the residents/customers who inform stakeholders of their priorities, rather than the other way around.

In the case of Sawyers Close, there is the added dimension of neighbouring residents who are not Abri's customers yet will demand a voice and also the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead (RBWM), landowner and presumed lobbyist for the additional homes that could be built on its land.

There will be a host of competing groups, for whom the consultation process will need to be seen as fair and balanced if the outcome is to be accepted.

At the macro level, we could seek to achieve this by establishing a Community Liaison Group with its membership drawn from Abri, RBWM (ward councillors and possibly an officer), Sawyers Close Residents Association and wider residents and community groups. One of the newly formed Community Steering Groups could possibly fulfil this role which, in many ways, would be similar to a parish council: opinions would be sought prior to consultation; feedback shared; strategy hammered out. The CLG would then continue through the (arguably more contentious) construction phase.

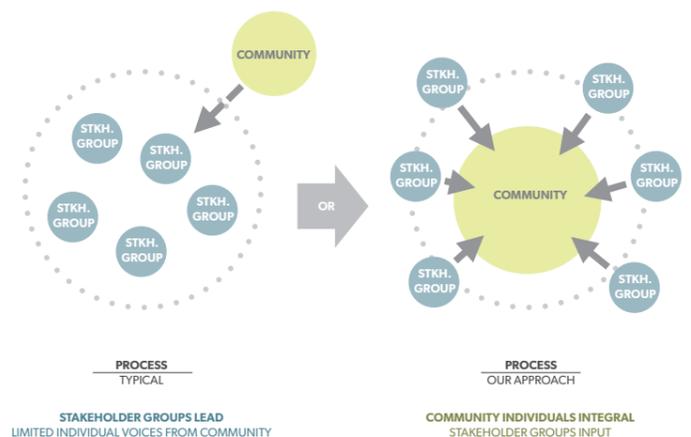
At a micro level, a detailed community audit will reveal all the groups and individuals that make the community tick. The project team needs to ensure that, at the outset, all of them are given the opportunity to participate. Through them, we can speak to people directly; with their backing, we can help to make residents feel comfortable that it is easy to get involved. Over time, these groups will either maintain their interest or step back, both of which are valid but need to be carefully managed.

Finally, the engagement needs to recognise that, for customers, the face of Abri is the frontline team. Their knowledge and advice, and the trust the community has in them, cannot be over-estimated: they need to be an integral part of the engagement process, fully briefed at every step. They are our eyes and ears.

Abri is already delivering significant investment into Clewer and Dedworth via the Community Development Plan and is progressing engagement via the Community Steering Groups. Community empowerment is at the heart of these initiatives and it should also lead the engagement programme. Drawing customers and local residents into the design process will inspire residents to take an active role in the planning of its their neighbourhood.

By delivering a transparent consultation strategy, Abri can:

- Create a better place, informed by local knowledge and opinion;
- Deliver a masterplan that speaks to the community's priorities;
- Create a sense of ownership and pride in the final scheme;
- Empower the local community.



Timeline: Overview

Month	Activity
January 2021	Undertake community audit, including building a calendar of community events and a consultation zone Brief Sawyers Resident Association on the surveys/photo competition launch Finalise customer survey questions and agree distribution channels Dedicated email/postal address & phone line? Purchase domain name
February 2021	Launch customer survey & review findings Launch customer photo competition & assess feedback Research local schools that could deliver video work (potentially Windsor Boys School due to media facilities/proximity) and define project requirements Share survey findings and release photos – key stakeholders Consult RBWM on regeneration engagement strategy: officers, followed by ward councillors Appoint customer panel Commission website design
March 2021	Formalise high level design concepts with customer panel Commence preparations for consultation launch Sign off media release (consultation launch) Initial sign off – website design
April 2021	High level design concept complete and signed off with the customer panel Final prep for consultation launch Pre engagement programme prep: Finalising website, webinar prep, website/social media content, press release, community newsletter
May 2021	Launch engagement programme with community groups/stakeholders: Website, social media, school and community webinars ('come and learn more...'), video, photo competition, community newsletter Brief local media Pre-Consultation engagement: Stakeholder meetings and resident workshops. School engagement. Establish Community Liaison Group (CLG): Reps from Abri, RBWM, Sawyers Residents Association, wider residents, and community groups Prep first consultation event: Key principles
June 2021	First consultation event: Key Principles Consultation event feedback review Prep for second consultation event: Details of key areas and elevations
July 2021	Prep for second consultation: Details of key areas and elevations
August 2021	Attend community events
September 2021	Second Consultation event: Details of key areas and elevations Second Consultation event feedback review
October 2021	Stakeholder engagement
November 2021	Stakeholder engagement Draft Statement of Community Involvement
December 2021	Submit application

Timeline: Step by Step

Customer survey

It will be important to evidence support among customers for Abri's approach to the regeneration of Sawyers Close and for that evidence to be quantitative and qualitative, rather than anecdotal. We are therefore proposing an early survey of customer opinion.

As well as gathering formal evidence, we want customers to own the outcome, to take pride in the new homes and facilities, to grow along the way, to feel that they have contributed to what is delivered and, ultimately, to re-build a resilient and sustainable community. We also need their support while we temporarily disrupt what they know and love [hate?] and we need their trust that we will build back better. We also need them to tell others – councillors, Homes England, the media – that they like what we are looking to achieve, thereby helping us secure the planning consents we need. This requires us to be open and honest along the way as we design a new future, delivering transparent engagement and consultation, with regular temperature checks. It also means that we need to know from the outset if they are ready for the journey.

An initial letter, informing customers of the possibility of wholesale regeneration, was issued in October. It encouraged people to respond and a limited amount of feedback was received. We recommend that we are now more explicit and ask the questions to which we need answers: i.e. 'would you like to see new homes and facilities delivered and would you support demolition and rebuild as the best solution?'

We are proposing an initial customer survey (suggested questions at Appendix), using a mix of multiple choice and free text answers to encourage participation. We would issue this to all customers via email (Dotmailer) and also by post, providing a Freepost envelope for hard copy responses. We would ask the Sawyers Close RA to support the exercise and we would brief Abri housing officers to push the survey as well. To give context for the exercise, we would introduce into the survey the concept of regeneration and of long-term improvements to customers' accommodation, to be achieved either by refurb or rebuild. A briefing for the RA on broad principles would be valuable, as well as for ward councillors, and we would provide a Q&A briefing for Abri colleagues.

- We would allow 21 days for responses, prior to feedback analysis.
- we would seek to also make the process fun and enjoyable, by launching a photo competition at the same time, in which we ask customers to send us their photos of the estate: what they like/dislike; what could be improved and what needs to go; think big or small. We would offer a prize for the best idea and best photo and we would commit to sharing submissions. Photos would be sent to a new, dedicated 'futuresawyersclose' email account, which would start to introduce a project brand. This could be managed either by Abri or Newgate.
- We would then share the results of the survey with customers, the RA and ward councillors. We anticipate that it would show backing for our plans, or that at the very least a preferred option would emerge.
- The survey findings, supplemented by the visual clues submitted by customers, would enable us to pick up on common themes, problems and solutions and attempt to address them in the high level design concepts presented to our customer panel.
- To help inform the survey work, we could arrange a video conference with the RA and also offer a Zoom webinar with customers to run them through the feedback and how that has influenced the emerging options. This would be a presentation by the project team, with questions submitted via text only; any unanswered questions could be responded to individually after the event and posted by the RA on its Facebook page.
- The feedback from this work, again shared with the ward councillors, should provide a clear guide to the aspirations of Sawyers Close customers to the Board to enable it to take a decision.

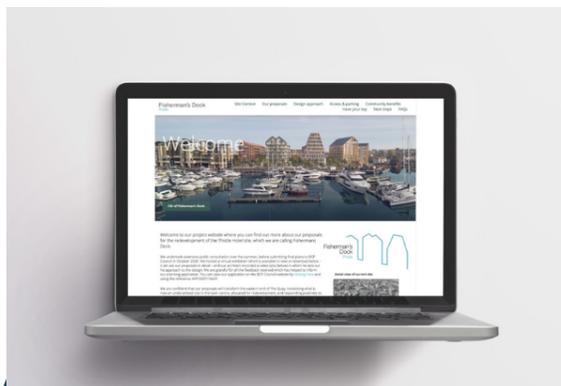
To inform our project team through the design process, we propose to establish a customer panel. Comprising Sawyers Close residents, it would review and comment on our emerging proposals, helping us to ensure that our approach is in line with customers' aspirations. We would look to set this up after the survey work is complete.

We would recommend that there be no pro-active media engagement up to this point, although we would prepare a reactive statement, in case customer choose to speak to local papers about Abri's survey work.

Engagement launch: preparatory work

We would prepare for the masterplan consultation launch. Having conducted the survey, the master planning process should not come as a shock to customers; however, formal consultation is a big step and this will now involve many more local residents and community groups.

- Placing customers at the heart has to mean more than glib words: the engagement process needs to be on their terms and territory. Abri's housing officers, the RA and ward councillors can guide us on the key sources of influence and interest locally, and the seldom heard groups, but we would also conduct our own community audit of key groups: the organisations that support and influence the neighbourhood, from schools to religious institutions to charities. We need to build a comprehensive database to ensure that we capture sentiment from every angle. Once complete, we would consult with Abri's housing officers and ward councillors to rank these groups in terms of importance and influence to ensure that they are - engaged appropriately as part of our launch.
- The audit will also help us to build a diary of community events. We want to make sure that we have a presence, or at least ask if we can have one, within the community outside of formal consultation. Abri's housing officers will provide good intelligence and can help us plan for local sports events, Christmas fairs, social events, possibly attending just with a banner and a couple of people ready to talk.
- We would also agree a consultation area beyond the estate to ensure a fair and inclusive approach.
- Pandemic or not, a project website will be an essential resource, not least as a reference tool for the media and interested parties by which key messages can be delivered. Its functionality can be determined at a later stage but it should be able to host: videos (inspiring shorts from key members of the team (architect, Abri) and the community video which we intend to commission from the local school – see below); image galleries; virtual exhibitions; a feedback facility; appointment booking (121 conversations with customers); etc.



- A popular platform used by local authorities is

Commonplace which can include an interactive map feature, enabling the user to drop a pin and cite an issue. It hosts an open forum, allowing users to contribute their thoughts on any aspect of the evolving proposals, to see what others are saying and to comment. In this way, you can build trust in an open and transparent process. While this can encourage negativity as people read others' posts, it can also stimulate debate; plus, we know that those discussions will be taking place offline, so it can help for them to be seen on the website.

- These sites can typically take 2-3 weeks to build. Initial content might include: project overview; vision; history; photo competition entries; FAQs; feedback; contact; news; upcoming events; how to get involved. Over time, we would add: recordings of workshops; events; virtual exhibitions.



- To make the launch interesting, Abri could commission a community 'vox pop' video, working with a local school to identify and share local residents' aspirations in a compelling manner. This could be an on-going project, with follow-up videos recorded at the workshops and main events and showing individuals' personal journeys over the lifetime of the master plan process. We have noted that Windsor Boys School (one mile from the site), a comprehensive state school, runs a media, film and TV studies course and could be a good candidate; we will also investigate other options.
- The pre-launch edition would ask local people what is great about Clewer & Sawyers Close: what it's like living locally; what they love about the area and what they would like to change if they had the chance. The students would interview a demographic range and a geographic mix, both individuals and community groups.
- This would serve as an important signal that it is the community which is driving the masterplan. The video would be available to view on the website, could be shared with political stakeholders and the local media and played at our consultation events. It could be updated at regular intervals in order to get honest feedback throughout the engagement process.

Engagement launch

For the launch, we will need to have ready:

- Website, live and with content
- Vox pop video, uploaded to website
- Media release
- Tailored stakeholder letters, offering initial meetings to community groups and follow ups with ward members

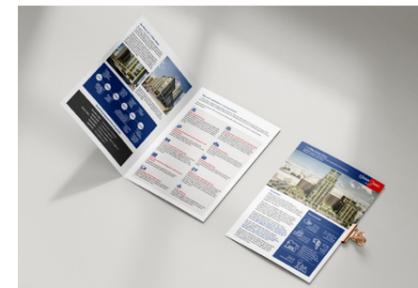
For customers and other local residents, we would propose to issue a community newsletter – probably a 4-page A4 leaflet, which would set out the background to the project, including the survey findings; would provide information on the project team (including contact details); might include a 'customer/resident charter' (commitments by Abri as to how it will conduct the consultation); would detail upcoming 'log on and learn' online sessions and would finish with a big call to action to visit the website and register for all updates.

At this stage, it will be important to differentiate for customers between queries about the masterplan, the future decant and current repairs/other issues. The dedicated project email address and phonenumber would go live now.

Pre-consultation engagement

There are two strands: stakeholder meetings and resident 'log on and learn' online sessions

The stakeholder meetings would be conducted via Zoom, depending on the health guidelines in operation at the time. We would seek to introduce the project team, explain the vision and how the consultation programme is going to work; check how they would like to participate when the time comes; encourage them to get involved and to respond with feedback at the appropriate time. We would invite them and their members to come to the 'log on and learn' online sessions. In this, it is important to remember that we go to them, we do not make them come to us. We attend one of their regular meetings, either of their officers or the members themselves.



The online sessions are to prepare the community for the main events, noting that Abri's customers may not be familiar with the consultation/planning process and may find the experience daunting. They also serve a dual purpose of empowering individuals with useful life skills. We could theme them by both topic and group. Topics might include: What is masterplanning? How to make your point? What's actually possible: constraints & opportunities? Group sessions could be devoted to finding out what particular demographics are looking to get out of the masterplanning process: young people, the elderly, those with disabilities. These would be 30-minute sessions, pre-booked, via Zoom. At each event, we would have a mechanism by which participants could stick Post-it notes with their thoughts on anything they would like to raise.

In the past, Newgate has found that a great way to engage younger children (9-11) is to run a workshop in school, using Minecraft, which enables the pupils to use their imagination to design a play area or a community space. Newgate has worked with an agency on this with great results: the students focused on the provision of recycling facilities; bike stands; parks; fountains. The resulting video delivered positive PR coverage. Dedworth Green First School, half a mile from the site, might be a good candidate for this initiative, public health guidelines dependent.

The online sessions are empowering for the community and for the project team. Abri will likely get to see the true community leaders, those with real insight, and also the naysayers. We will harvest plenty of ideas and feedback that will inform the emerging plans and enable us to develop our messaging.

At this point, we would look to establish a Community Liaison Group. Made up of representatives from Abri, RBWM, Sawyers Residents Association, wider residents and community groups, it would act as a broader community feedback mechanism, focusing on the impact of regeneration beyond the confines of Sawyers Close. It could meet monthly, with a fixed agenda that would include updates from the project team and a Q&A session. The CLG would remain active throughout the construction period which can, traditionally, prove a more contentious time for resident/developer relations.



Consultation events

We recommend two events as a minimum: i) key principles and then, if possible and depending on the type of application to be submitted, ii) details of key areas and elevations. This might include the proposed public open space or apartment interiors (with rooms mocked up to assist people imagining themselves living there, so they can then feedback on what they think will work and what will not).

We would anticipate that, by summer, these events could be held in person. In addition to a traditional set of exhibition panels, more creative ideas might include:

- A 3D model;
- video screens showing (on a loop): vox pop video; fly-through of scheme; Minecraft video;
- photo competition wall;
- ideas wall, where key themes are illustrated and attendees place simple stickers to indicate like/dislike.

Depending on budget, we could introduce an element of 'community design', where we would encourage attendees to 'build their neighbourhood'. We could tackle storey heights; open space configuration and facilities; parking areas; play facilities; etc. This could be achieved in a number of ways:

- Placing building blocks on a large, flat-mounted plan (take a photo after each arrangement);
- Drawing on A1 plans with coloured pens;
- Designing on iPads, with designs submitted digitally.

Newgate has worked with all these options before:

- iPads have been used at masterplan events for Gatwick Airport;
- Minecraft has been used by school children to design a pocket park in London;
- Building blocks have been used to design the features of a park in Plympton;
- Stickers have been used to seek agreement to key principles of estate regeneration in North Prospect, Plymouth.

Risks & Mitigation

1. Disillusionment: project gets pulled/stalled after it has been announced to customers. Mistrust develops and confidence in Abri dips.

Mitigate: ensure proposals and engagement programme are not announced until risk of 'no go' is minimal.

2. Politics: RBWM is a Conservative administration but ward councillors form part of the opposition. Turf wars over kudos leads to strained relations with leadership.

Mitigate: ensure that Abri leadership continues to engage at a strategic level while the project team builds relationships on the ground.

3. Call for a ballot: taking their cue from bigger regeneration schemes, customers may demand a ballot to demonstrate support exists for the project.

Mitigate: the upfront survey work should reveal whether there is support for the plans. Abri staff should also engage the residents' association and ward councillors to ensure that the community sentiment is properly understood before embarking on this exercise.

4. Community divided: the focus on Abri customers' needs at the expense of other local residents leads to resentment and accusation of bias.

Mitigate: ensure that a step is built into the sign off process so that activities are reviewed for fairness.

5. Lack of support: true sentiment is misjudged and there is lack of support among customers for the regeneration plans.

Mitigate: report back on the survey findings, giving dissenters the opportunity to speak up. Hold dialogue with ward councillors, Residents' Association and key community groups to make sure the survey results ring true.

6. Abri under the microscope: the shortcomings of Sawyers Close and lack of recent investment could be highlighted and reflect poorly on Abri's performance.

Mitigate: control the messaging carefully and the media agenda to ensure this is minimised.

7. Misinformation: rumours about topics such as decanting and right to return spread, causing discontent among customers.

Mitigate: provide open channels of communication; brief trusted community stakeholders and front-line colleagues.



1. RAISE AWARENESS
IDENTIFY WITH PROCESS
ASK QUESTIONS
START CONVERSATIONS
CONTENT GENERATING

2. COMMUNITY PRESENT
DISCUSS ISSUES
EMPOWERING PEOPLE
FINDING CHAMPIONS

3. PLANNING DEVELOPMENT
DETAIL CONSTRAINTS
CHALLENGES SHARED
CONSULT/RESOLVE ISSUES

4. DELIVERY CONSTRUCTION PERIOD
TRAINING SKILLS
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

5. FEEDBACK GOOD & BAD
LESSONS LEARNT
IMPROVEMENTS FOR FUTURE PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT