

## PLANNING

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17 December 2004

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Dear Ian

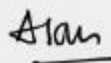
### ATRIUM HOMES: NETHER ROBERTLAND STEWARTON

I refer to our previous correspondence and meeting regarding the above and am pleased to enclose, for your information and attention, two copies of the Nether Robertland Development Proposals Report. The Report has been submitted to Atrium Homes and East Ayrshire Council.

Should there be any areas where you feel that additional information may be helpful, or should you feel that a meeting would be beneficial, please do not hesitate to contact me. In the meantime I would be grateful if the enclosed report could be considered as a submission in respect of the Draft Structure Plan and acknowledge accordingly.

Finally could I please ask that you acknowledge receipt of the Report and at the same time wish you and your staff all the best for the festive season.

Yours sincerely



Alan Montgomery Dip TP MRTPI MCMl  
Director

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- 5 JAN 2005

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**ATRIUM HOMES in partnership with East Ayrshire Council  
And Communities Scotland**

**NETHER ROBERTLAND DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS**

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December 2004

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## 1.0 Executive Summary

This masterplan aims to provide a framework for the following objectives for Atrium Homes:

- To work in partnership with East Ayrshire Council Housing Department to assist with the delivery of the objectives of the Community Plan and Local Housing Strategy 2004-09;
- To ensure that the site at Nether Robertland is accepted for housing land release in the Joint Ayrshire Structure Plan, which is currently under review;
- To ensure that the site at Nether Robertland is identified for residential purposes in the current review of the East Ayrshire Local Plan;
- To ensure that the site is developed to the appropriate standards, providing the necessary balance of houses in respect of tenure, type, size and density to meet the requirements of the citizens of Stewarton and the local authority;
- To create a high quality sustainable living environment in Stewarton;
- To promote a sustainable approach to transport by creating the necessary infrastructure to encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport;
- To implement environmental improvements and to encourage biodiversity alongside the Annick Water and in the adjoining rural area; and
- To assist in the regeneration of the community and to redefine key links with the community including Wider Action.

## 2.0 Introduction

2.1 Atrium Homes is a Registered Social Landlord (and housing association) and a recognised Scottish Charity, with its registered offices at 39/41 John Finnie Street, Kilmarnock. Atrium was established in 1998 and it registered with Communities Scotland in April 1999. Atrium is a non-profit distributing organisation and surpluses made on a year to year basis are re-invested in its housing accommodation and services to its tenants. At present Atrium employs 20 staff at its Kilmarnock office and is effectively run by a committee of local people in the interests of the local communities.

2.2 The Vision Statement of Atrium Homes is:

*"To be an enterprising, effective organisation, providing quality housing services, addressing social exclusion and contributing to area regeneration in partnership with communities, individuals, and other agencies."*

Atrium is quite clear that the provision and procurement of new housing and contributing to community regeneration remain key objectives of the organisation. It is also aware of its responsibilities to its existing tenants. In September 2000, Atrium purchased 907 flats and houses, plus 99 lock-up garages in Kilmarnock, Stewarton, Crosshouse and Galston from Scottish Homes. At present Atrium is delivering a quality housing service and has recently embarked on the first five year programme of major repair and improvement works to its current housing stock.

2.3 Atrium Homes is now seeking to ensure that the land at Nether Robertland, which is in its ownership, is developed for affordable housing and related purposes in accordance with Council policy. The site lies immediately to the east of the housing estate that forms part of the Atrium Homes portfolio.

- 2.4 The intention is that the site will provide the necessary mix of houses to satisfy the known requirements of the residents of Stewarton. This should ensure that existing residents could be offered a choice of house of a type and tenure to suit changing requirements over their lifetime, within the settlement of Stewarton.
- 2.5 2.5 The aim is to develop the site in a manner which ties in with the existing community and which relates to the surrounding rural area, to the overall benefit of the settlement. This document follows on from the writer's initial contact with the East Ayrshire Council and the Joint Ayrshire Structure Plan Team in August 2004.
- 2.6 Atrium Homes believes that the site has the potential to be developed as an attractive residential environment, which will link easily with existing and proposed developments, will enhance the setting of the settlement and which will provide benefits to the whole community.
- 2.7 In assessing the potential for developing the site consideration has been given to the requirements of the statutory services, existing local facilities, transport issues, environmental issues including conservation and biodiversity, housing needs, opportunities for enhancing existing community facilities and the need to provide a development site of high quality and design.

### 3.0 History and Existing Site Conditions

3.1 **Stewarton:** The settlement of Stewarton (known as the 'Bonnet Toun') is located on the Annick Water in the northern part of rural Ayrshire. It lies on the A735 and is approximately 10 minutes drive time from Kilmarnock and 30 minutes drive time from Glasgow. Access to Glasgow is likely to be improved with the completion of the M77 next year.

3.2 The town has a historical background dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. Circa 1650 the town became renowned for its knitted bonnets that were made in farmhouse and cottages in the locality. Following the industrial revolution towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century machinery became available and was installed in Stewarton's first bonnet factory at Robertland Mill in 1820. This virtually put an end to the cottage industry and gradually production expanded to include stockings, underwear, jumpers and ski-caps.

- 3.3 In the 1930s there were 25 knitwear factories in the town. In the mid-1950s nearly 800 operatives were employed in 17 factories, but this had reduced to 3 firms by 1988 and today there is no commercial knitwear manufacturing in Stewarton. The population of the town has shown gradual, but continuous, growth over the years testifying to the town's ability to adapt to changing conditions.
- 1811 - population 3049
  - 1831 - population 4503
  - 1841 - population 4654
  - 1983 - population 6331
  - 2001 - population 6582
- 3.4 Significant landmarks in the history of the town include the installation of the library (1810), the introduction of gas (1832), the granting of Police Burgh Status (1868) and the completion of the Glasgow-Kilmarnock Railway Line (1873). In terms of the growth of the town the use of part of the Robertland Estate for the Glasgow 'Overspill Project' had a significant effect on the settlement, as hundreds of new houses were built by the Council and the Scottish Special Housing Association (SSHA) at Lainshaw, Rigghead, and Nether Robertland. During this period new sewage works were installed at Lainshaw and were opened in October 1973 at a cost of £450,000. At the time it was felt that these sewage works would have a design capacity to cope with a population of up to 14,000. However, it is believed that some further re-investment in the treatment works is currently planned.
- 3.5 In April 1975 the last meeting of Stewarton Town Council was held, as the town then became part of Kilmarnock & Loudon District Council. A new Health Centre was opened in 1978. At local government re-organisation in 1996 East Ayrshire Council was formed and it has been responsible for the administration of the area since. There is little doubt that the town has

been subject to considerable change in its long and interesting history, but as local historian Alistair Barclay stated *"It is a better town today than the unattractive and drab place it once was with crumbling buildings and ugly gap sites on its main streets."*

- 3.6 **Location:** The site, which is the subject of this paper, is bounded to the north by the Annick Water, to the east by agricultural land, to the south by Stewarton Academy and agricultural land and to the west by residential properties. The area immediately adjacent to the existing housing and the Academy is reasonably flat, although the ground dips down to the Annick Water in the north and rises up towards the adjoining farmland in the east. The site covers an area of approximately 57 acres (23.06 hectares) in total and although it lies within the rural area it is no longer in active agricultural use.
- 3.7 New private housing has recently been constructed to the southeast of the site and planning permission was recently granted to Dickie Homes for 32 units on the north side of the Annick Water. This latter development is now under construction.
- 3.8 From the site the main vehicular link into the town is via the bus terminus and through the existing housing estate. This provides the opportunity for a vehicular, pedestrian and cycle link into the proposed residential area.
- 3.9 **Planning History:** Unlike many settlements in East Ayrshire, the village of Stewarton has experienced continued population growth and, in recent years, this is best illustrated by the number of private housing developments which have been granted planning permission, some of which are highlighted below.
- 3.10 Robertland Mill: Dean Street: 24 units (9 town houses, 14 flats, 1 detached house) on a site of 0.60 hectares - development by Springfield Homes Ltd.

- 3.11 Cocklebie Road: 32 flats on a site of 0.76 hectares - development by BMJ Ltd.
- 3.12 Draffen Farm, Cutstraw Road: 15 detached houses on a site of 1.76 hectares - development by John Dickie Homes.
- 3.13 Old Glasgow Road: 32 units (30 detached houses and 2 plots) on a site of 3.3 hectares - development by John Dickie Homes.
- 3.14 There is no record of planning applications having been granted by, or submitted to, East Ayrshire Council for the Nether Robertland site itself.
- 3.15 **Existing Facilities:** The Local Plan describes Stewarton as "*a thriving small commuter town*" which is strategically located within easy reach of Kilmarnock and Irvine and with excellent rail links to Glasgow. In addition, the town is within reasonable drive of these major settlements and the completion of the M77 next year will ensure that the overall transport links are enhanced.

3.16 For a town of its size Stewarton is well served with facilities such as a secondary school, primary schools, shops, supermarkets, banks, bars, restaurants, a hotel, clubs, churches, library, police station, fire station, a railway station, recreational ground and open space. Part of the Town Centre itself is identified as a Conservation Area reflecting the historical background of the settlement.

- 3.17 Although historically the site has been used for agricultural purposes it is no longer in agricultural use. A strip of ground, on the western boundary of the site and to the north of the Academy, is used informally as a kick-about and play area. This site, which is identified in the local plan as open space, falls within the ownership of Atrium Homes. It is included within the development site under consideration in this paper.
- 3.18 **Site Constraints:** Given the history of the site, as agricultural land, it is not surprising that there are no known physical constraints to its development. It is noted that electricity pylons traverse the southwest corner of the site, but this does not affect the development proposals. More details in this regard are shown in Chapter Four.

## 4.0 Planning Policy Considerations

- 4.1 **East Ayrshire Local Plan:** In terms of the existing East Ayrshire Local Plan the site falls outwith the settlement boundary and, as such, is not identified for development purposes. The site falls to be considered by the following local plan policies:
- **SD3:** land lying in the **Rural Protection Area** and where development would only be acceptable if it complies with five specific criteria, including operational requirements.
  - **RES13 Housing in the Countryside:** this policy states that residential development would be deemed as contrary to policy unless a specific locational need can be demonstrated.
- 4.2 These policies are currently under review and through the development of this site Atrium Homes is seeking to make a contribution to the physical and economic growth of the settlement of Stewarton.
- 4.3 **Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan:** The structure plan is currently being updated and a Consultative Draft is being prepared for public consultation. The draft document identifies Stewarton as being a 'Service Centre' within the 'Glasgow Link Investment Corridor'. The document recognises that there is limited opportunity for development on brownfield sites and that to accommodate the anticipated growth there will need to be 'greenfield' boundary adjustments. Over the next 20 years there will be anticipated requirement for 1,200 houses in the Stewarton Investment Corridor and, although a percentage of these may be provided in and around Dunlop and Kilmaurs, the majority will be located around Stewarton itself.
- 4.4 **Government Policy:** In developing the site Atrium wishes to ensure that best practice is adopted throughout and the highest quality of design is achieved. To secure a quality finish full consideration will be paid to the appropriate government advice and planning guidance, as highlighted below:

- **SPP1 'The Planning System': Para 12 Social Justice:** "Strong, vibrant and healthy communities, in rural and urban areas, are an essential part of the vision for a socially just Scotland. Regeneration of the physical environment alone cannot deal with poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Co-ordinated economic, social and physical action is the best way to address these deep-rooted problems."
- **SPP1 'The Planning System': Para 17 Design:** "Good design should be the aim of everyone in the planning and development process, and it is important at all scales of development. Ill conceived and poorly designed development is not in the public interest, as mistakes cannot be easily or cheaply rectified."
- **SPP1 'The Planning System': Para 25 Development Plans:** "Plans are not end in themselves; they are a tool for promoting future development of the right quality in the right places. To be effective plans must contain relevant and realistic policies which can be implemented."
- **SPP3 'Planning for Housing': Para 1 General Principles:** "Good housing in the right locations makes an important contribution to achieving Scottish Executive policy objectives. It supports economic competitiveness, social justice and sustainable development. New housing can also act as a catalyst for urban and rural regeneration."
- **SPP3 'Planning for Housing': Para 7 Design, Layout and Architecture:** "The overall design of development should be fully addressed, particularly matters such as microclimate; layout of roads, cycle routes and footpaths; the separation and collection of waste; links with local centres; and the relationship to existing development nearby."

- **SPP3 'Planning for Housing': Para 24 Mixed Communities:** "To create mixed communities, a range of housing types is needed, providing for the needs of all in the community, and all segments of the market, from affordable housing and starter homes to executive housing, and including homes for families, older people, and people with special housing needs."
- **SPP3 'Planning for Housing': Para 27 Sustainable Settlement Strategies:** "Key considerations should be: efficient use of the land, energy and infrastructure; improvements to infrastructure including transport and educational investment; ensuring that all sections of the community have good access to jobs and services; and the protection and enhancement of the environment."
- **SPP3 'Planning for Housing': Para 72 Links with Local Housing Strategies:** "Housing and planning departments should work together to ensure consistency between the development plan and the local housing strategy in identifying housing needs."
- **NPPG11 'Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space': Para 40 Open Space:** "New development often provides opportunities for developers and the council to work together voluntarily to alleviate deficiencies. New local provision should also be served by footpaths to enable safe access for pedestrians, especially the elderly and children."
- **NPPG14 'Natural Heritage': Para 56 Lochs, Ponds, Watercourses and Wetlands:** "Developers should be encouraged to incorporate existing ponds, watercourses or wetlands as positive environmental features in development schemes, and to identify suitable opportunities for creating new water or wetland features."
- **SPP15 'Planning for Rural Development' - Draft: Para 7 The Planning Vision:** "The overarching policy aim is to have a prosperous rural economy, with a stable or increasing population which is balanced in terms of age structure and where rural communities have reasonable access to good quality services."

- **PAN44 'Fitting New Housing Development into the Landscape': Para 36 The Need for Site Planning:** "The process of design must begin with an acknowledgement of the elements of the existing landscape in order to establish opportunities for enhancement and requirements for conservation. Some sites are inherently scenic and may require minimum intervention while others may already be degraded and invite improvement and alteration."
- **PAN60 'Planning for Natural Heritage': Para 51 Opportunities to Improve the Environment:** "Almost all significant development projects will offer opportunities to contribute positively to the environment."
- **PAN61: 'Planning and Sustainable Urban Drainage': Para 10 Principles of SUDS:** "The overall objective is to return excess surface water to the natural water cycle with minimal adverse impact on people and the environment. The means by which this can be achieved can be designed as an attractive integral feature within the development and can achieve significant ecological enhancement compared to conventional drainage options."
- **PAN67: 'Housing Quality': Para 1 Layout:** "Developers should think about the qualities and characteristics of places and not consider sites in isolation. New housing should take account of the wider neighbourhood. Vehicle and pedestrian routes should connect the housing with facilities and spaces within the development, to the local area and more widely."
- **PAN67: 'Housing Quality': Para 2 Landscape:** "Developers should consider landscape as a part of the design and layout from the outset of the development process. The character and appearance of the land including its shape, form, ecology, natural features, and the way they combine, is a key to designing housing that makes the most of its setting."
- **PAN67: 'Housing Quality': Para 3 Scale and Mix:** "A development's mix of housing types and uses and its three-dimensional physical form are important in determining what sort of place is to be created."

4.5 Atrium Homes wishes to work with the local authority, and the local community, throughout the development process. By doing so it believes that it can provide a comprehensive development and regeneration package that will contribute to the settlement of Stewarton, making it a more attractive place to both live and work. By following the appropriate guidance and by adopting a pro-active approach to community involvement, Atrium Homes would contend that by including the site for housing purposes through the local plan review, and through its subsequent development, the following objectives could be attained:

- The provision of much needed affordable rented housing and low cost housing for sale
- Improvements to the quality of the environment and to the treatment of the urban/rural interface
- Provision of a better range, mix and quality of houses for the settlement to meet local requirements and demands
- Creation of a quality residential development that reflects well on the rural setting and the existing, adjoining, residential properties and has a functional relationship with the existing settlement
- Promotion of economic growth within the larger community
- Encouragement of the efficient use of resources
- Provision of appropriate facilities deemed necessary to enhance the community
- Implementation of a residential development which, through the detailing, siting, density, layout, massing and use of materials, provides a quality of finish that enhances the environment of the whole settlement

- 4.6 Owing to its topography and riverside setting the site lends itself to be developed in a manner which respects the existing built environment such as the school and houses and yet, at the same time, does not detract from the rural setting. The existing residential development at Nether Robertland presents a stark end to the settlement boundary; there is no gradual decrease in housing density or form; there is no ribboning out of development from the estate; and there is no effective landscape screening. Instead there is an immediate change from development to open land, whilst at the same time the road pattern invites the thought that further development is already anticipated. To achieve the quality of design and finish that Atrium Homes is seeking, and to ensure that the development 'fits with the landscape' Atrium Homes intends to be as inclusive as possible throughout the process.
- 4.7 It is the aim of Atrium Homes that on completion, both of the statutory process and the finalised development, the site will be regarded as a model good practice/quality development 'exemplar' for future developments.
- 4.8 As part of this exercise contact was made with the appropriate statutory consultees and other information obtained, as deemed necessary. The responses received to date are shown below:
- **Transco** - no lp mains shown on site, although locations of those mains within existing housing estate are noted
  - **Power Systems** - appropriate information received in respect of the location of cables and pipes etc.
  - **Scottish Water** - no apparatus running through site
  - **SEPA** - no response received
  - **Mining Reports Office** - the property is not within the zone of likely physical influence from any past or present underground coal workings

- **EAC Roads and Transportation** - a new distributor road would be required linking the site to Cutstraw Road to the south. These comments were based on the assumption that the entire site was to be developed for residential purposes; this matter is mentioned in more detail in Section 5.
- **EAC Education** - no response received

4.9 It should also be noted that the site has been subject to detailed Mineral Stability and Ground Contamination Reports, Reports on Risk of Damage by Subsidence due to Underground Mining, and Drilling and Geotechnical Reports. No major problems have been identified and the site has been found to be satisfactory.

## 5.0 Other Considerations and Proposals

- 5.1 **Community Plan, Local Housing Strategy and SSP3 (Planning for Housing):** Atrium wishes to achieve a quality residential development through working in partnership with the local community and with East Ayrshire Council. The Community Plan and the Local Housing Strategy lend considerable support to the principle of providing affordable housing designed to meet the needs and aspirations of residents living in local communities such as Stewarton.
- 5.2 The aims of the Council's **Community Plan** are clear and precise and Atrium Homes will take these aims into consideration through this development to ensure that it:
- *promotes social justice and social inclusion;*
  - *builds sustainability;*
  - *succeeds in joint working and involving people;*
  - *ensures quality and accessibility; and*
  - *delivers continuous improvement and best value.*
- 5.3 The Community Plan also highlights a number of issues that Atrium Homes would intend to address through this development, namely:
- *the most important partnership is the one between the partners and the people living in our communities*
  - *tackling the links between poverty, poor housing and ill health*
  - *working to make sure that we meet the housing needs of everyone who lives in our community*
  - *developing and maintaining open spaces, footpath networks and children's facilities*

5.4 The objectives of Community Plan can only be achieved through working in partnership with associations such as Atrium Homes and through supporting major developments such as this at Nether Robertland. Through this development one can help to make The Vision that "East Ayrshire will be a place with strong, vibrant communities where everyone has a quality of life and access to opportunities, choices and high quality services which are sustainable, accessible and meet people's needs" into a reality.

5.5 Many of these points are re-enforced in the East Ayrshire **Local Housing Strategy 2004-2009** and the aims of the strategy are noted thus:

- *Aim One: Support the Community Planning Partnership to regenerate disadvantaged areas and develop sustainable communities (e.g. new developments to meet local needs and protect the future sustainability of the area)*
- *Aim Two: Improve residents' satisfaction with their homes and surrounding environment (e.g. people's homes are of a high quality and that no one in East Ayrshire suffers the effects of fuel poverty)*
- *Aim Three: Ensure equal access to an adequate supply of good quality affordable accommodation (e.g. that there are enough houses available in areas where people want to live)*
- *Aim Four: Ensure that individuals requiring support to live independently in the community are enabled to do so (e.g. people have access to a home that is specifically adopted to meet their needs)*

5.6 As part of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework of the document the Council states:

- *It will work with RSLs to strengthen their wider role;*
- *Encourage housing organisations to increase their role in any community planning regeneration activities;*

- *It will work in partnership with internal and external agencies to encourage the provision of appropriate amenities / facilities to support housing developments;*
- *It will encourage the provision of an integrated range of houses and types;*
- *It will deliver additional affordable properties; and*
- *It will develop planning / housing protocol to support developments in East Ayrshire.*

5.7 Atrium Homes fully supports these statements and through the implementation of the proposed residential development at Nether Robertland believes that both it, and the Council, would be going some considerable way to achieving these aims. It has to be stressed that the aims and ambitions of Atrium Homes cannot be compared to those of other commercial house builders. Even after the construction of the housing development Atrium Homes will have a presence in, and on-going commitment to, the area thus ensuring that any development is constructed and maintained to the highest possible standard. In addition, it should be noted that Atrium Homes, through both its landlord and its factoring roles, already works closely with local residents to manage and maintain the existing housing estate that adjoins the development site.

5.8 In SPP3 (Planning for Housing) affordable housing is defined as *"Housing of a reasonable quality that is affordable to people on modest incomes. In some places the market can provide some or all of the affordable housing that is needed, but in other places it is necessary to make housing available at a cost below market value, to meet an identified need. The main ways through which this achieved are:*

- *Social rented accommodation*
- *Low cost housing for sale, for example shared ownership, self build or other subsidised or discounted housing for sale; and*
- *Some private sector rented accommodation, available at lower cost than market rents and provided either by local landlords or commercial landlords."*

- 5.9 The SPP recognises the role to be played by Housing Associations in supplying affordable housing, but notes that *"...even where subsidy is available, housing associations can have difficulty in obtaining land at an affordable price."* In this particular case the local authority is perhaps fortunate, as Atrium Homes owns this considerable area of land, adjacent to its existing houses, which it now wishes to make available for development purposes.
- 5.10 Through the local plan the local authority now has an opportunity to address the imbalance of affordable housing need and supply. The SPP does suggest that:
- *"Development plans should allocate sufficient land overall to ensure land is available to meet requirements including affordable housing needs. As with market led housing development, the requirement for affordable housing should where possible be met within the housing market area where the need has been identified."* and that:
  - *"The planned release of a substantial area of land for housing can provide the opportunity to create a development with a diversity of house types and tenures. Planning authorities should ensure that the local plan contains a policy seeking a range of house types to encourage creation of mixed communities."*
- 5.11 The local authority has an obligation to address the issue of affordable housing through planned release of land for development purposes. The site at Nether Robertland is not only suitable for residential purposes, but the owner, Atrium Homes, is determined that the site shall be developed in a manner that gives priority to affordable housing whilst, at the same time, ensuring that a reasonable mix of types and tenures will also be provided.
- 5.12 Given the site's setting at the urban/rural interface it would be intended that the layout, mix, density and design of houses would reflect well on the setting. The housing density would be at its highest closest to the existing houses and the density would gradually reduce towards the edges of the site.

5.13 **Housing Need:** Atrium Homes is working in partnership with EAC Housing Department to ensure that the appropriate mix of housing is provided, and can be provided in the future, in the Stewarton area. The local authority has 50% nomination rights to all Atrium Homes stock.

5.14 Atrium already owns 69 properties in the Nether Robertland and Lainshaw areas of Stewarton, all of which are currently occupied. The demand for Atrium Homes' housing stock in the Stewarton area (Nether Robertland and Lainshaw) far outstrips the stock available and this is highlighted in the housing list figures for September 2004, shown below:

- Two apartment flats - 25 applicants
- Three apartment flats - 103 applicants
- Three apartment cottages - 111 applicants
- Four apartment cottages - 89 applicants
- Total stock of cottages - 45 units
- Total stock of flats - 24 units

5.15 Information received from EAC as Housing Authority also shows that there is considerable demand for rented housing accommodation in Stewarton. Recent figures show the waiting list for Lainshaw is 235 (32%): for Ravenscraig is 256 (34.5%): for Robertland is 251 (33.5%), giving a total of 742 (100%). In terms of current supply EAC has 539 rented houses in Stewarton and at the time of writing this report only 12 of these are vacant (2.2%): the Council's Housing Department, which supplied the figures, also confirmed that there are no long term vacancies of property in Stewarton. It is accepted that there may be some duplication on the waiting lists, but nonetheless the figures confirm the demand for rented

accommodation in Stewarton. Interestingly the EAC waiting list shows that the vast majority of people seeking accommodation in Stewarton already reside in the town (64%).

There is growing demand for bespoke housing for the elderly: over 20% of the authority's population is 60+ years old and some 15% of households are occupied by a single pensioner. There is also growing need for other specialist provision such as community care and supported housing, which is rarely met through the speculative private sector housing market.

- 5.16 The stock of rented accommodation in Stewarton has diminished and will continue to diminish every year as the remaining housing stock, of both the Council and Atrium Homes, is still subject to the right to buy legislation. The lack of availability is compounded by the fact that since Stewarton is such a popular area to stay there is minimal turnover. All this works against the Council's aims for the town as highlighted in the Community Plan and the Local Housing Strategy. A major investment in affordable housing, including rented accommodation, housing for the elderly, and community care housing is essential in Stewarton if these important issues are to be genuinely tackled.
- 5.17 The only realistic way that affordable housing need at this scale can be satisfied within the Stewarton area is through the proposal tabled by Atrium Homes: as a Registered Social Landlord Atrium Homes is willing to work with the Council to deliver innovative housing properties which will be designed to meet the requirements of today's residents. This will be geared to meet their aspirations for housing both in terms of the standard of quality and the functionality of the accommodation. Only through joint working can one hope to obtain the value for money that is required if one is to achieve a sustainable housing solution within this community.

5.18 **Environmental Enhancement:** At present the site is devoid of any substantial landscape interest. However, the natural features of the site can help to shape the development and integrate it into the wider area giving a proper sense of place. In particular detailed consideration has to be given to the site's natural features such as the Annick Water, the plateau adjacent to the school playing fields and the setting created by the fields that rise gradually to the south and west of the site. Many of these natural features will be conserved to enable a positive relationship to be created between the new development and its environment.

5.19 The opportunity will be taken to incorporate these features into the development and to ensure that appropriate access can be provided to them. In addition, care will be taken to ensure that any wildlife habitats are suitably protected. It is acknowledged that the site lies in a rural setting and that detailed information on a range of environmental issues may be required to support proposals for the development of the site, including:

- Landscape Assessment
- Visual Impact Assessment
- Ecology and Natural Conservation and
- Surface Water and Hydrology Studies

Whilst these detailed appraisals may have to be implemented, the early indications are that the opportunity exists, through the development of the site, to provide enhancement to the environment and to provide improved pedestrian access to the countryside for all those in the wider residential area. Details of all supporting documents will be prepared in conjunction with the advice of officials from Scottish Natural Heritage, SEPA, East Ayrshire Council and other interested parties.

5.20 The landscape analysis has a key role to play in the development of the site. A landscape structure will be considered at an early stage of the project, having a major input into layout, design and circulation. The detailed layout of the site will take into consideration

the open space standards of the Local Authority as indicated in Schedule 3 and Schedule 4 of the East Ayrshire Local Plan. In addition considerable new planting around the periphery of the site, with an effective landscape pattern being established would complement the development.

- 5.21 **Access and Transport:** The development will seek to embrace a sustainable approach to transport and will be designed in a manner to encourage walking and cycling to local facilities.
- 5.22 The centre of Stewarton, the Conservation Area, lies within a reasonable walking distance (approximately 1 km) of the core of the development site. All necessary facilities are located in the centre of the settlement including shops, banks, pharmacies and the local library. Pedestrian and cycle routes will be opened up to connect with existing residential areas and to provide access to the countryside.
- 5.23 The site is also well served by public transport with the bus terminus currently located at the entrance to the site, off Jubilee Road. The railway station is a short walk from the town centre itself and has a park-and-ride facility. The site is particularly well located in respect to the schools. Stewarton Academy abuts the south-eastern boundary of the site, whilst Nether Robertland Primary School abuts the Academy. Both are easily accessible from the site by foot and cycle.
- 5.24 For the car user the settlement of Stewarton offers ready access to the A77 and construction on the M77 is due to be complete in 2005, making commuting to most destinations within Glasgow's Conurbation easy. In addition links to both Irvine and Ayr are readily accessible. The car parking provision and overall layout of the vehicular access within the development will comply fully with the requirements of East Ayrshire Council as Roads Authority.

- 5.25 The Road and Transportation Department of EAC stated that it considers the site cannot be accessed through the abutting residential road network. Discussions with Council officials at that time indicated that this response was on the basis that the whole of the site (23.06 hectares) was being developed for residential purposes and when the position was clarified it was felt that there could be some scope for residential development being accessed off the existing residential network, although this would have to be strictly limited in numbers.
- 5.26 A more extensive development would have to be linked through to and accessed from Cutstraw Road. Clearly such a proposal requires a comprehensive approach that would involve the Council and adjoining landowners. The access and roads issue is crucial to the proper development of the site, to this edge of Stewarton and, indeed, to the proper planning of the settlement of Stewarton. It would be hoped that a pro-active response from the Council would ensure that these matters can be more fully addressed and a long-term solution provided to overcome the access problems in this locale.

## 6.0 Masterplan Proposals

6.1 The development of Stewarton has gradually moved out from the centre in an eastward direction as the following developments illustrate:

1. Nether Robertland
2. Glasgow Road
3. Stewarton Academy
4. Cutstraw Road
5. Draffen

Yet in each case the development has ignored its relationship with the rural area, presenting a stark edge to the settlement. This development provides the opportunity to 'round-off' the settlement, creating a definitive eastern boundary, establishing a soft landscape edge to the town and providing a sense of enclosure that is lacking at present.

6.2 The landscape strategy strengthens the key links with the community and establishes a proper edge for the settlement. This is achieved through:

1. Accepting that only part of the site is suitable for development purposes, if the settlement is to be contained within the existing valley and if the development is to comply with good design and planning principles by avoiding the skyline
2. Creating a community woodland on part of the undeveloped land and along the development boundary
3. Ensuring that the land adjacent to the Annick Water is kept free from development, but that pedestrian access can be provided to it: this follows best planning practice by ensuring that development does not take place on the flood plain of the Annick Water
4. Providing landscape screening, as appropriate, between the site and some of the existing developments, thus helping to merge the old with the new
5. Reinforcing the internal primary routes as green corridors
6. Providing the necessary public and private open space within the development to meet the requirements of the local authority
7. Establishing an agreed maintenance regime for all areas of public open space

6.3 The primary access strategy is largely influenced by the availability of existing routes. Only one road provides a suitable vehicular access to the site in the short to medium term future. This consideration, the existing topography, the Annick Water flood plain and the aforementioned landscape strategy will all have an influence on the site's development.

1. Primary access provided through Jubilee Road, which itself can be accessed from either the west or south. The route runs past the existing bus terminus. Minimal disturbance will be caused to existing residents.

2. Within the site the distributor road will be centrally located to ensure that development is kept away from the Annick Water and to ensure that the potential of the site is fully realised.
  3. The possibility of a secondary access from the south - to Cutstraw Road - could be looked at in the longer term should a compatible development be located in that area. This would involve detailed negotiations with EAC and adjoining landowners.
- 6.4 The secondary access and pedestrian access follows on from the defining of the primary access and ties in to the landscape strategy.
1. Clear distribution routes through the site can be provided
  2. Secondary roads, footpaths and cycleway to serve the emerging pockets of development can be identified
  3. This also highlights the secondary layer of landscaping which not only interlinks with the primary landscaping, but also enables new links to be created within the development
  4. The hierarchy of circulation is established for pedestrian and vehicular traffic, as is the general definition between public and private open space
- 6.5 As stated earlier the total area is 23.06 hectares (57 acres) and yet considerably less than 50% of the total site area is being considered for development purposes. The development site extends to 8.7 ha (21.5 acres) and even within that site a large area of land is earmarked for greenspace and other recreational activities.
- 6.6 The minimum proposed density of the site would be approximately 24 houses per hectare (10 per acre). This should give a minimum gross capacity of approximately 200 units. The density itself will vary from area to area depending on the nature and type of housing that is being provided. The development parcels closest to the existing houses will be at a higher density; with the density decreasing the further one develops into the site. However it should be

stressed that the actual density itself will depend largely on the type and nature of housing to be provided on site. It is anticipated that the more special needs housing provided on site, the higher the density will be.

- 6.7 The layout will maximise the relationship with the adjoining school playing fields and with the surrounding open countryside. It should be emphasised that the total site will be developed over a number of years, in accordance with a phased programme that meets the requirements of Atrium Homes, EAC and the demands of the housing market.
- 6.8 Through this process a sustainable masterplan emerges. This should enable a quality residential development to be provided, with associated walkways, cycle ways and landscaping. The generous improvements and the increased accesses resulting from the development should benefit the whole community and do much to improve the environmental quality and setting of this part of Stewarton.

## 7.0 Summary and Conclusions

- 7.1 The site offers an excellent location for the residential expansion of the settlement of Stewarton. It provides an opportunity to improve both the townscape and the landscape setting for this part of Stewarton and to provide a softer planned edge to the settlement boundary.
- 7.2 Through the consultation process the only major issue that emerged has related to accessing the site. EAC Roads and Transportation Division indicated that a distributor road linking to Cutstraw Road should be provided, if the site is to be developed as a major residential development. This matter is still being discussed with the various parties involved.
- 7.3 Notwithstanding these comments it is felt that there is still scope for the site to be considered for housing land release in a comprehensive and phased manner.
- 7.4 Atrium Homes believes that the proposals contained in this document clearly show that the potential for the development of the site to satisfy the following aims:
- Provision of a level of affordable housing that will assist in meeting a high proportion of the existing local demand
  - Continued investment in the local community and the up grading of the existing housing environment in Nether Robertland
  - Improved access to the countryside and recognition of the role played by the 'flood plain' adjacent to the Annick Water
  - Quality landscaping, both within and outwith the development site, which will enhance the setting of the settlement in this part of Stewarton
  - Improved links for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians

A recognised mix of high quality housing will be located on the site and this will compliment the existing settlement and ensure its continued growth in a proper planned manner.

- 7.5 The proposals for developing this site tie in with policies of the Council as stated in the Community Plan and the Local Housing Strategy; Atrium Homes will work in partnership with the community and the Council to achieve these aims.