

Summary

Homes for Heroes 100 marks the centenary of the 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act, known as The Addison Act after the then Minister of Health and Housing. The 1919 Act introduced the start of the first significant era of council house estates building in the UK, which was not just about building homes; it was about creating communities and changing the social fabric of the country. The programme will look at many things: council homes – their layout, how and why they were built – as well as other buildings on the city's estates, including schools, libraries and pubs, and the differences that they have made to the communities who lived there. Through community-based heritage research and hands-on activity leading to high-profile showcases in the estates involved, the city-centre and online – as well as the wider gathering and sharing of relevant memories, mementos and archival material – Homes for Heroes 100 programme will celebrate council estates and their residents.

The programme is being coordinated by Bristol Cultural Development Partnership (BCDP), who have been responsible for a number of citywide partnership programmes including Brunel200, BAC100 and Bristol2014.

Overall, the programme has been awarded £80,000 from National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund and £80,000 match funding from Bristol City Council, making it the largest group of projects to commemorate and celebrate council housing anywhere in the UK. Investment has also been received from BCDP, University of the West of England and Arts Council England. It is likely to be the only significant programme this year marking 100 years of council estates and therefore has a national role to play as well as being important locally.

Activities

The start of work on the Sea Mills estate was marked by the planting of an oak tree on 4 June 1919 (the Addison Oak), a symbolic act that will be commemorated in 2019 as part of the Homes for Heroes programme with a new tree planting. Other aspects of the extensive programme include: a new book of personal essays written by people who have grown up on council housing estates; artists engaging with estate communities in workshops led by the Knowle West Media Centre and the Architecture Centre; the story of council housing in Bristol told in comic-book style; walking tours around the estates; and a day event on the past, present and future of council housing as part of Festival of the Future City 2019. It brings together these new projects with two community projects which have already received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund: Sea Mills 100, who are using a refurbished red telephone box as a mini-museum in which to share stories from the past, among other activities, and Hillfields 100, a new community project being run by Local Learning. The programme works with, complements and promotes the Bristol Housing Festival, which will be part of Festival of the Future City.

Vision and Impact

Homes for Heroes 100 links with the Bristol Corporate Strategy plans to deliver corporate commitments to tenants in 2019 and in the years to come. This programme fits comfortably with the current recommended governance that is being considered following the recent Green Paper 'A New Deal for Social Housing': social homes are an important part of our national housing story and there is a need to eliminate the stigma of council housing. It supports the Mayor's vision for seeing cultural activity extend across the wards of the city, rather than always being city-centre focused. Activity will take place in at least four communities of Bristol, led by local organisations and involving the people of the estates' residents. It will also link in with existing city initiatives, such as Bristol Open Doors.

The programme will recover a history which is not widely known, instilling pride in communities that are frequently marginalised or portrayed negatively by others and helping present-day residents make previously unrecognised connections to the past, learning about their community roots. It would give residents the confidence to provide a much-needed voice in the ongoing housing debate and would help remove some of the barriers that have led to those in lower socio-economic groups being under-represented in heritage-based activity in the UK. The programme will be specifically working with and for people hitherto less likely to engage in heritage activities, prompting a city-wide conversation about how past generations addressed and responded to an issue that is as relevant today as it was 100 years ago. Engagement will be achieved through helping people find the personal connections that tie them to the past, giving them an opportunity to celebrate the contributions they and those who came before them have made to their community and city.

People will have learnt about heritage: through undertaking research (in official archives, in their neighbourhood, in their home and family histories); visiting exhibitions on the estates and at touring venues (including the city libraries, City Hall, Knowle West Media Centre, Architecture Centre); reading publications and online material; taking tours; taking part in workshops and debates; learning about council housing from experts; watching films. This will include learning about the heritage of their own home, street or community; learning about similar communities to their own in other parts of the city; learning about communities to which they previously had little contact or understanding; expanding learning by adding enriched and deeper layers and contexts to existing knowledge.

Housing and Landlord Service Tenants

In preparation for the programme, Bristol City Council commissioned a brief feasibility report (at zero cost) to outline costings into the possibility of converting a 1920 era council house back to the original condition and then returning it back to the current Decent Home standard of 2019, temporarily taking a house out of use for public display purposes as a way of marking the centenary of the Addison Act. A surveyor has visited 56 Briar Way, Fishponds, a two-bedroomed property in the middle of a terrace which, according to housing records, was the very first social housing unit built by Bristol City Council and completed in July 1920. Arriving at a detailed costing is problematic for housing without a detailed specification, but it is possible to arrive at a likely round figure, which would cost in the region of £50,000 to £60,000. Consideration will need to be noted that this cost is a basic estimate without any on costs i.e. removing a 2/3 bed council house for rent to an applicant and their family on the housing register, officer costs, project and contractual management costs etc.

Homes for Heroes 100 will support existing community projects in Sea Mills and Hillfields, both of which are actively engaging with Housing and Landlord Service tenants, and place an artist working directly with communities at Knowle West Media Centre. Walking tours, talks and events will take place in community spaces, including libraries and community centres.

Project Management

The Homes for Heroes 100 advisory group is led by Councillor Paul Smith. The group is made up of participating organisations, relevant members and officers of the council and local housing experts, guiding all aspects of the programme to completion. This will widen to include any historians, community groups and researchers interested in adding to the centenary. A smaller executive group, made up of the key partners and funders, will meet to oversee the programme of events, communications and budget spending. The overall programme will be managed by BCDP.

Communications

Communications for the programme will be coordinated by BCDP but will rely heavily on the other Homes for Heroes partners helping to reach their own audiences. A press release announcing the funding from Heritage Lottery Fund was recently sent out, with contributions from key partners, including Bristol City Council who helped reach the trade press. This has already resulted in coverage on BBC Radio Bristol and conversations underway for coverage over the course of the year with The Guardian and the BBC. The Bristol Times has committed to continued editorial coverage over the year. Additional press releases will be issued in advance of key moments in the programme: the planting of the ceremonial centenary tree, Bristol Open Doors and others. A full project and marketing plan is attached.

Events will be publicised and shared by all partners on their websites and social media feeds. A Facebook page for the programme has been set up and a relevant blog has been posted on the Festival of Ideas website. Communications on social media will be tracked via the hashtag #HomesForHeroes100, with #SeaMills100 and #Hillfields100 also being used for the specific community projects. The day event at Festival of the Future City will be included in the programme brochure, reaching thousands across the city, and on the festival website. A full communications report will be produced at the end of the programme.

What is Still Needed

The Homes Board can provide considerable support and involvement in this programme. We would welcome:

- 1/ Assistance in profile raising, communications;
- 2/ Links particularly to council tenants, relevant to gain wider awareness and involvement;
- 3/ Ideas for new projects that might take place as part of Homes for Heroes;
- 4/ Involvement in the day on the past, present and future of council housing in Festival of the Future City, 16 October.

Andrew Kelly/ Naomi Miller
Festival of the Future City
Bristol Cultural Development Partnership
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