

# Petitioner submission of 31 January 2023

## PE1985/B: Evaluate Garages to Homes Developments

### **Broad Context for Consideration**

On C4 News, 06.10.2022 Cathy Newman interviewed Kwajo Tweneboa, the prominent Housing Activist. Describing his own family's situation, he states "For a couple of years we were living in a converted garage that was our temporary accommodation, you wouldn't think that would be allowed especially in 2021 or 2022 Great Britain".

Registered Social Landlords such as Scottish Borders Housing Association (SBHA) and Berwickshire Housing Association (BHA) and emergent funding body South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE) appear to offer Garages to Homes as the solution to future housing for older adults and people with a disability. The homes being earmarked for development in the Scottish Borders are permanent accommodations for older frailer adults and people with a disability.

There are numerous pieces of evidence that substantiate this plan as being a pre-cursor to a Scotland wide roll-out. "The project has the potential to provide an opportunity for social landlords across Scotland with garage sites and for the development of homes for a range of needs beyond this study" (Chief Executive, SBHA, 2021 – UK Community Renewal Fund Bid)

Is the aspiration of the Scottish Parliament to move their citizens, specifically older adults, and people with a disability, into housing units converted from garages?

This is in direct contradiction with the Scottish Government Document "Age, home and community: a strategy for housing Scotland's older people 2012 – 2021.

I implore the Committee to consider who should oversee Housing Policy across Scotland, I believe it should be the Scottish Parliament and not left to the devices of Social Landlords, Private Companies, and Funding Bodies. This is a matter of Social Policy and should be sufficiently addressed.

## **My Reply to Scottish Government Response**

I have chosen to focus on Section 2. The response attempts to provide evidence that negates the need for there to be an independent investigation.

The Scottish Government states that:

- “a broad feasibility study took place as part of the Community Renewal Fund bid in spring 2021.”

From the information I have acquired, there is no evidence of this. There was no ‘broad feasibility study as the Community Renewal Fund Bid was to initiate and finance the sole Feasibility Study.

- The format of the CRF bid process had to be submitted under a lead Local Authority.

There was no tangible evidence that the full Scottish Borders Council supported and agreed the bid. They merely provided the access route for the bid to reach Government. In relation to consultation, support, and agreement from Scottish Borders Council, this was wholly inadequate. Email communication was sent to the Council approaching the Bid deadline requesting support from any quarter. Apparently, one letter appears to have been sent but has apparently got lost in the Bid process.

- Bid being developed in partnership with Social Care or NHS Borders

I have seen no evidence of this taking place. The only exception to this was minimal email communication or inclusion by way of ‘cc’. As evidenced within the Feasibility Study conducted by surveyors, no social factors, no identifiable local housing needs were factored in, only that of financial considerations.

- When the Scottish Government states “it did not immediately proceed at this stage”

What they are maybe attempting to avoid saying is that the UK Govt turned down the CRF bid. I requested information from the UK Govt as to why the bid was turned down, but they have so far blocked this request at the bequest of both the SBHA and Scottish Borders Council.

To give some context of the actual partnership working and oversight, that has been afforded to the Garages to Homes Concept, I have included an extract from a statement made by Mr Aikman, SBC Chief Planning and Housing Officer from 7 September 2022. Responding to an email from MP John Lamont to the Council requesting information relating to Garages to Homes. Mr Aikman stated the following “The council has been consulted informally on the principle of the project and on the suitability of a number of potential sites throughout the Borders”. That was the total of the Councils involvement from April 2021 up to September 2022.

- South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE) “continuing to be supportive”.

Minimal information has been released over the last three months in response to an FOI and further correspondence. SoSE provided SBHA £148,000 to conduct a feasibility study and pilot. Their due diligence and project oversight does not cover social issues, locally identifiable housing needs or social policy in general.

- SOSE will also neither confirm nor deny whether it is reasonable for someone to believe that BHA might in any way be benefactors of this funding.

This appears irregular since the Feasibility Study identifies both SBHA and BHA sites for development. The original CRF bid, applied for by SBHA, was done so on behalf of both SBHA and BHA. Could this possibly be linked to the fact that a current SOSE Board member is the ex-Chair of BHA and another member of the SOSE Board is the current vice Chair of BHA?