

# The “Mower Store” Story – 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sustainable Low Cost Housing

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# Introduction

- John Prescott and the “£60,000 Home”
- The Decent Homes Standard
- The Mower Store
- Next Steps in Low Cost Sustainable Living

# John Prescott and the “£60,000 Home”: 1

- In 2005 the then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott announced the government’s £60,000 sustainable house build challenge
  - *“Let me tell you, that I’ve had enough of rising construction costs. Over the last few years they have gone up well above inflation. In fact, construction costs have risen by 47 per cent compared with 18 per cent for inflation. And for social [affordable] housing, the figure is 63 per cent. That’s scandalous.”* (The Rt. Hon John Prescott MP, May 2005)
- The challenge for developers was to put forward plans to build a home for £60,000 if the value of the land, which is half the usual price of a property, is excluded
- Barratt’s and Wimpey were selected (Nov 2005) with Prescott stating the winning bids were of the:
  - *“highest calibre in terms of design, cost efficiency and environmental standards”.*
- Barratt’s were to build 151 homes in Yorkshire and 165 in Northampton whilst Wimpey worked with government urban adviser, Lord Rogers to build 145 homes in Oxley Park, Milton Keynes.

# John Prescott and the “£60,000 Home”: 2

- However, by 2014 the 122 pre-built homes in Milton Keynes were experiencing by problems such as water leakage, which is causing timber frames to rot, (Daily Telegraph May 2014).
- 16 residents lodged formal claims with the National House Building Council, which approved the development and insures the site (known locally as “Lego land”).
- Lord Prescott dismissed the claims as “absolutely bloody rubbish”.
- A report on the scheme, commissioned by Taylor Wimpey (the builders), cited “poor workmanship and practice throughout”. It also referred to “poor detailing and construction with regards to drainage of the roofs”, adding that this led to “water saturation in certain areas, which is then causing rot to occur within the supporting timbers”.
- However, even then (2014) several of the homes were for sale on the property website Rightmove with an asking price of c£225,000.

# The Decent Homes Standard

- Launched in 2000 by the Government it aimed to provide a baseline for the quality of all publically owned (council and housing association) homes in the UK must:
  - meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing
  - be in a reasonable state of repair
  - have reasonably modern facilities
  - provide reasonable degree of thermal comfort
- However, by August 2010 over 10% of council owned properties still failed to meet the standard and in London the figure was over 25%

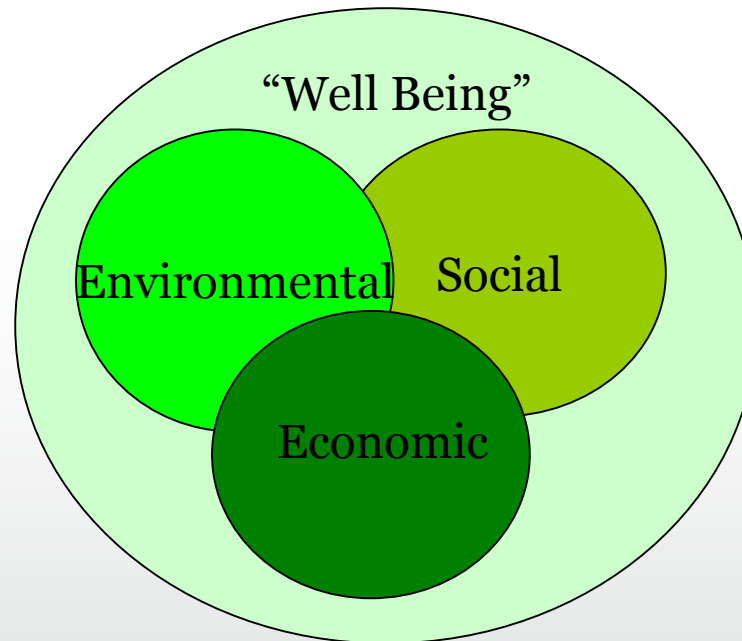
# The “Mower Store”: 1

- Following the 2014 Telegraph Report The Department of Energy and Climate Change at Southampton University postulated the question, “*Where are low cost sustainable homes today?*”
- It was decided to try and emulate the 2005 Prescott Challenge in Southampton in 2014 based upon the same criteria of excluding land costs and building a “Decent Homes Standard+” unit of accommodation using standard materials, local labour and traditional design

## The “Mower Store” :2

- The challenge was to adopt the approach of social, economic and environmental “Well Being”
- This focuses upon the use of local materials, labour and design to deliver environmentally and socially beneficial and sustainable outcomes
- The aim was to position the unit as near to the “centre” of the “Well Being” framework as possible

# The “Mower Store”: 3





# The “Mower Store”: 4

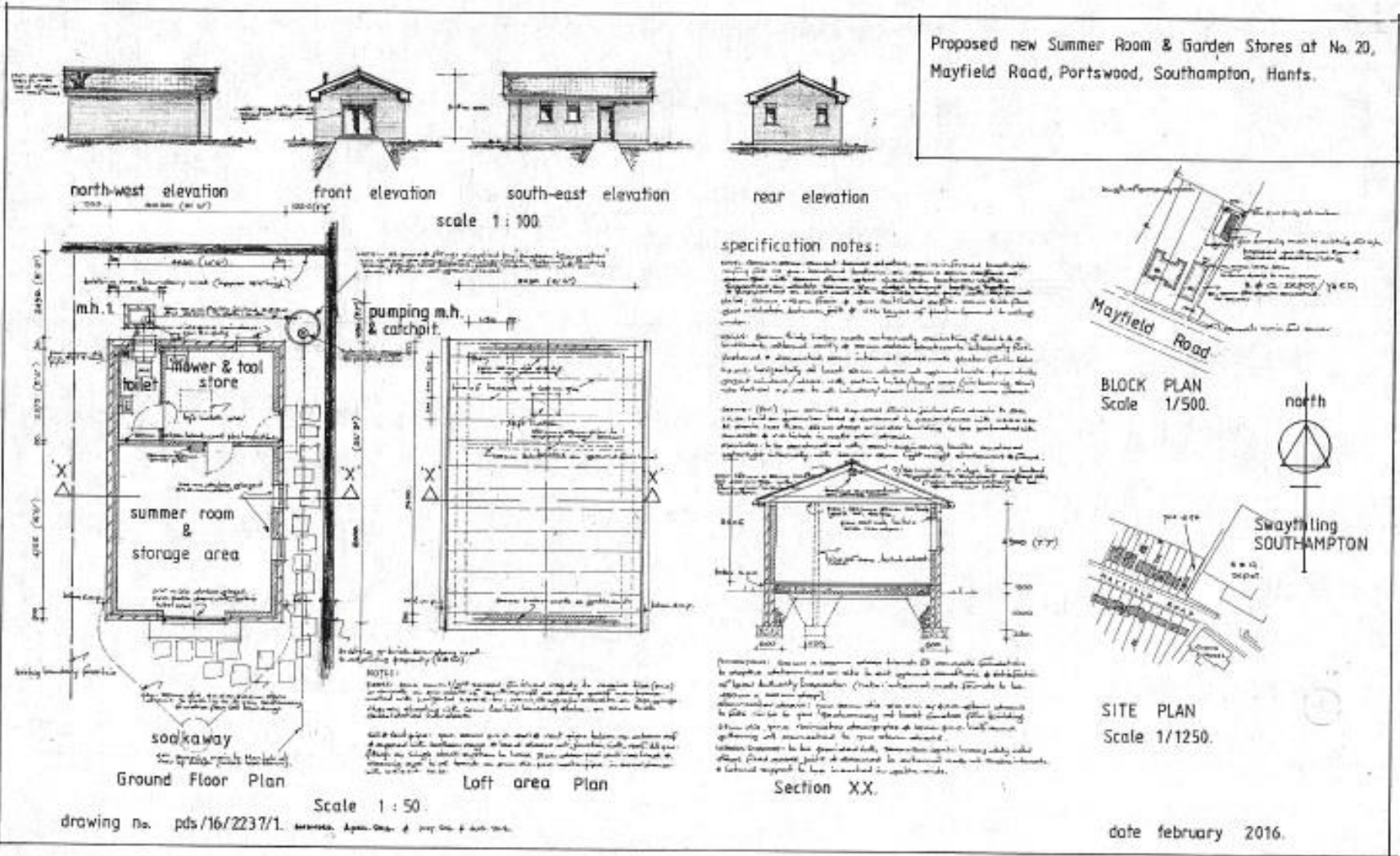
- A “back land” site in Swaythling was chosen for the project, which has been a House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) for over 20 years
- The site itself had not been maintained well by the tenants for almost all of the 20+ years the house had been an HMO
- In fact one might describe it more as a jungle than a back garden!



# The “Mower Store”: 5

- Plans had to be defined and drawn up using standard building materials and capable of being used / built by local (ideally SME) builders (no Passivhaus or other technical stuff!)
- Sustainable elements were to be included to reduce environmental impacts and energy saving / generation where possible
- Plans were then drawn up by a local architect and submitted to the Council for planning approval
- Given planning constraints these plans could not be for an official unit of accommodation as “back land” development is strongly discouraged, even in such a site as the one in Swaythling
- As a result an application to build a “Mower Store” was submitted!

# The "Mower Store": 6



# The “Mower Store”: 7

- Approval was received in May and quotes obtained immediately
- A local building firm from North Baddesley was chosen who quoted £51,000 + VAT for the work
- Construction started in July 2016
- Amendments to the plans were required due the proximity of the build to the rear retaining wall
- Approval to move the unit c1m towards the main home were obtained in October 2016



# The “Mower Store”: 8

- Separate quotes for PV were obtained to power the unit (via the roof of the main house). Including boost water heating for the main house a cost of £5500 (inc VAT) was chosen for a 3kW system
- Two light tubes were also purchased for the unit at an extra cost of £575 (inc VAT)



# The “Mower Store”: 9



# Next Steps In Low Cost Sustainable Living: 1

- Completion was achieved in December 2016
- Compliance with Decent Homes Standard will be validated with Shelter
- A separate EPC for the unit will be produced
- Medium term net energy use (electricity) is targeted to be zero / near zero and will be fully monitored by the Department (along with CO<sub>2</sub> performance)

## Next Steps In Low Cost Sustainable Living: 2

- Southampton City Council's Cabinet have been actively engaged with the development with a view to the template becoming a Council policy element for sustainable low cost housing
- Could many more sites be identified? (the Department has GIS information available and an initial scoping piece of research is underway to assess site potential within the city)
- Could a Development Co-operative be set up to deliver such units?
- Could the sites be made available to the private sector / housing associations?



## Next Steps In Low Cost Sustainable Living: 3

- The capacity of the Mower Store to monitor all energy use also enables valuable data on occupant actions to be obtained allowing analysis and understanding of how better use and management of energy in buildings can be developed
- Discussions are ongoing with housing charities to enable “hard to home” individuals to access such accommodation options, embedding energy use awareness into independent living
- Could such opportunities include an “energy included” rent with “top up” charges (along the lines of mobile phone usage) to improve energy use awareness?