

WINTER 2016



HOUSING MATTERS



Plans for 2017?

Find out what six of our people hope will happen

Out of Afghanistan

Learned in the army or in-house, new skills can be the stepping stone to big things

Iron will

Staff proving their mettle in challenges from triathlons to overseeing a region

Fuel good factor

Melissa Corser visits Uganda to see how our cookstoves programme is helping communities





Charlie Scherer is chief operating officer at Willmott Partnership Homes

Let's celebrate our people

I was pleased in the previous edition of Housing Matters to be able to unveil our new business branding for Willmott Partnership Homes and our key role within the newly created Willmott Residential business.

Yet this is only part of it. I am conscious that none of the great stories we tell in Housing Matters (just see our front cover and pages 8-10 for proof!) would be possible without our people. So I wanted to dedicate this issue of the magazine to them.

The huge variety over these 16 pages hopefully tells you all you need to know about our business. From raw building site trainee to experienced site manager in just 10 years (page 13); from defusing bombs in Afghanistan to guiding health and safety across our sites (page 6); and from tearing up the Iron Man racing circuit to delivering challenging projects on time and on budget (page 12).

The recent Farmer Review into improving the construction industry highlighted the need for contractors to invest more in training and to support new industry recruits. It's fitting that this edition of Housing Matters shows how Willmott Partnership Homes has been doing precisely this for a number of years. Our people are dedicated, talented and focused on building high-quality homes.

We are determined to play our part supporting the government's plans on

increasing house building. The recent Autumn Statement outlined the importance of increasing housing supply to deliver Theresa May's aim of helping those "just about managing" households across the country. The position of housing associations and local authorities is central to the prime minister's vision.

Importantly, the government is broadening its housing focus to cover a range of housing tenures. We're primed and ready to help local authorities and housing associations to deliver this – you can read how on page 14.

There are already some great examples across the country of the impact we can help our partners to have. Westminster, Liverpool and Doncaster are just some of the local authorities we are working with to deliver thousands of homes.

The crucial factor in all these partnerships is that we have brought our development and building expertise to the table, giving local authorities the best opportunity to develop their assets and generate a share of long-term income streams. We are in discussion with a number of other local authorities on our new Partnership Regeneration Model, and we

expect to announce further new schemes in 2017.

Another area in which I know we can support the government's aims is on the use of off-site manufacturing (OSM) in house building.

Regular readers of Housing Matters will know that OSM is a core area for Willmott Partnership Homes. We have long-term supplier relationships in place and in 2017 we expect more than half of our 1,750 new home completions to be built using OSM techniques.

If the government wants to support the increased use of OSM technologies in house building (as called for in the Farmer Review), it must ensure this is on a broad basis, rather than simply focusing on a particular type of construction technique.

I would suggest the government could achieve the greatest impact by setting a goal of reducing the use of on-site resources and encouraging the construction and house building industry to respond through the use of a full range of OSM techniques. That would be a fantastic step that gives the industry impetus and liberty to improve.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

"In all these partnerships we have brought our development and building expertise to the table, giving local authorities the best opportunity to develop their assets"

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Housing Matters is the magazine for Willmott Dixon's residential construction business



Top of pops!

The accolade of being the industry's best place to work went to Willmott Partnership Homes as part of Willmott Dixon in Construction Enquirer's inaugural awards to find construction's most popular companies.

Partnership Homes took top spot in the major contractor category after nearly 1,000 votes from staff and suppliers, almost a tenth of the entire number of votes cast across all categories of the competition.

Group chief executive Rick Willmott said: "With the ongoing skills shortage affecting capacity across the industry, the ability to attract and retain good people is essential for our business, so to achieve the best place to work prize after getting so many votes from our own staff is amazing. We need to ensure we remain the company where our people think there is no better place for a rewarding career."



Group chief executive Rick Willmott is joined on stage by colleagues including Becky Morgan, standing right next to Rick, who is featured on page 11 of Housing Matters.

No 10 advisor joins Willmott team

A former advisor to No 10 Downing Street, Richard Blakeway, has become strategic advisor to Willmott Residential, parent company of Partnership Homes.

The Greater London Authority's former deputy mayor for housing will support Willmott Residential's aim to increase development

volume across the country in partnership with local authorities and other land owners.

Blakeway was at the GLA for eight years before becoming national housing advisor to the Cameron government at No 10 early this year. His new remit will see him work with Partnership Homes to grow its

new Regeneration company, which provides development skills to local authorities to assist their house building plans (see story on page 14).

Blakeway said: "I'm looking forward to helping support Partnership Homes' plans to help local authorities create a step change in developing homes to meet housing needs."

Richard Blakeway, who has been the GLA's mayor for housing and an advisor to No 10, will advise on and support new housing development plans



Sharing is caring

Partnership Homes has broken through the £200 million mark for work in the retirement and care sector after securing a £23 million contract from the London Borough of Hounslow to build 94 extra care apartments in Blenheim Park, Hounslow.

It involves redeveloping a brownfield site in Feltham to create accommodation that meets the needs of people as they get older, especially those with physical disabilities and dementia.

It was procured under Scape Group's Major Works and is the first extra care scheme to be developed directly by Hounslow Council.

It follows another recent care project in Hounslow – 36 purpose-built flats for those over 55 years of age in a joint venture between Octavia and the council.

Talking about the growth of retirement housing, chief operating officer Charlie Scherer said: "Local authorities are investing heavily in providing homes for an ageing population, and with the country's demographic trend pointing towards a rise in people over 65 years, it's important we share ideas and resources around delivery to get this right now so we don't have a major capacity issue in 30-40 years' time."



Take aim for 2017

Next year promises much for the housing sector. Six colleagues from around Willmott Partnership Homes reveal where they are setting their sights. Stuart Macdonald reports



Lee Kenyon, 42, design manager, Islington office, London

Top aims in 2017?

The key challenge the housing sector is facing is to meet the government target of building 1 million homes by 2020. We are working on some good projects towards this though, such as one through our place on the Scape framework with the London Borough of Redbridge to build homes across five sites. An important aim for me is to get this up and running. I am also making sure I am on top of another requirement in 2017: zero carbon new homes in London. This is part of the London Plan and I am booked on a zero carbon course to ensure I am aware of the cost implications.

New year's resolution?

Willmott Partnership Homes has agreed to sponsor my son's under 11s football team, which I manage. I've been showing everyone pictures of the team in their kit. We've won all our games so far – we're hoping to keep this going for the rest of the season!



Helen Reed, 32, senior project surveyor, Sayer Court, Leamington Spa

Top aims in 2017?

One of my main aims for 2017 is to ensure my projects complete on time and within budget. I will also be aiming to gain membership into the Chartered Institute of Building, which will add another string to my bow. On a more personal note, I am really interested in the potential for off-site manufacturing (OSM) in house building. I studied this for my dissertation at university and am convinced from evidence in other countries – such as the USA and in Scandinavia – that OSM techniques give better-quality results more quickly. I think there is real potential for the UK housing sector to embrace this in 2017.

New year's resolution?

I have recently begun renovating my 1930s house and by the end of 2017 I really want it to be completed. However, being a QS will affect this as I am totally aware of how much everything is going to cost, so sometimes I have to rein myself in!



Nipun Ekanayake, 28, senior design co-ordinator, Northampton Partnership Homes project

Top aims in 2017?

The main thing for me professionally is the successful delivery of the Northampton project. It is across five different sites – low-rise to high-rise – and incorporates refurbishment and new build. It is due to hand over to the client at the end of 2017 and is on schedule for this. I would also like to become a qualified SAP assessor. This would help me upskill in my current role of managing the design team. Finally, I would really like to see the use of Building Information Modelling (BIM) becoming embedded throughout the industry. I have worked on a number of BIM projects and there are clear advantages in terms of saving time and resolving issues before you get on site.

New year's resolution?

I am looking to buy a summer house – location to be chosen by my wife!



Ross Taylor, 39, operations manager, Islington office, London

Top aims in 2017?

I've just taken on the role of working with the new recruits to Willmott Partnership Homes. As a company we aim to achieve zero defects in everything we do and I am going to ensure our new trainees are aware of what it takes to deliver this. But to continue to be successful, we need the ideas new blood brings. The construction industry is getting more and more technological, digital and smart. We need to embrace this new world and innovate to realise the opportunities it brings.

New year's resolution?

I want to do an Iron Man race in my 40th year. I have signed up for Holkham Hall in Norfolk on 2 July. The training has been going well. I am currently doing the 30 runs in 30 days challenge. You have to run for 30 minutes every day for November. I was out at 5am this morning – it's not easy!



Leanne Hawkes, 28, senior project surveyor, Holmes Road, London Borough of Camden

Top aims in 2017?

The main one has to be getting Holmes Road – a 59-bed homeless scheme – handed over in early 2017. Then I want to set up the next project well to ensure it is smoothly delivered for the client. I have started to see some impact of the Brexit vote with costs increasing in some areas, despite falls in others. I want to ensure that we get the right sub-contractors to work with us in the way we want to deliver the best quality.

New year's resolution?

To get better at the obstacle course races I have started doing this year. They are 12km of everything I would normally hate: lot of mud, cold rivers, climbing over and under things. But it has really improved my fitness and I want to keep going!



Wayne Green, 43, build manager, Leighton Dene, Liverpool

Top aims in 2017?

The first is to get a smooth handover of the project for Liverpool Mutual Homes. I'm working on now. It is 22 timber frame houses and a block of 12 apartments over three floors. Handover is due in November 2017 and we are on track! I also want to gain my Chartered Institute of Building accreditation in 2017. It's important to me as it's good for me personally and will hopefully help me gain promotion, but it's also good for the business. My final aim for 2017 is helping establish Willmott Partnership Homes as a standalone business. I really want to help build links with the local community – school visits, etc. I'm really happy working here – it's one of the best places I've ever worked so I want to do what I can to help it succeed.

New year's resolution?

To start a hobby outside of work. I play football once a week, but I need to start going to the gym before I fall apart!



Training and supporting staff is the number one priority at Willmott Partnership Homes. Here, four colleagues explain the role training has played in their stories to date – including one that takes in defusing bombs in Afghanistan



Andrew Stevenson, assistant H&S manager and trainee of the year finalist

I'm a health and safety manager, so I'm developing and delivering training to our site teams so we consistently improve our safety culture.

I'm 39. I only joined two years ago after 15 years in the forces, latterly commanding an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) search team in Afghanistan, where my team was responsible for finding and neutralising IEDs.

I left as I have a young family, and I wanted to get away from a war zone. I've always had an interest in construction – I was an instructor at the British Army Defence College, teaching junior soldiers skills like bricklaying. Changing to a building career seemed an obvious choice.

I applied to be a trainee on the build side but Willmott Dixon said I'd be ideally suited to an H&S role. I can see why. In the military, H&S is instilled into you from day one. When preparing for IED detection I would look at every risk.

I'm now working with our HR team on a programme aimed at attracting armed forces personnel who may be thinking of leaving.



Sam Chambers, assistant quantity surveyor and Willmott Partnership Homes trainee of the year finalist

I joined the management training scheme in 2013 when I was 23. I'd already worked for six years for smaller firms training to be a QS. A big part of my decision to join was the opportunity to study for a degree through day release and to work in a number of different departments. I've been surprised by all the support and the great atmosphere here. I thought I might get lost in a bigger firm but it's very close knit.

I've already graduated from the programme and am an assistant quantity surveyor based in the East Midlands and also the QS in charge of the refurbishment and extension of a care home in Leicester.

It can be a high-pressured environment dealing with the money – but that's not a bad thing. I love it. You also get to meet such a variety of people. And with new technology the industry is constantly developing.

To anyone contemplating a career in construction I would say, "just do it" – there's a place for everyone.



Christopher Lloyd-Evans, assistant build manager and trainee of the year finalist

My dad refurbished properties in Cardiff and I had an interest in construction from an early age.

I joined Willmott Partnership Homes in October 2014, working in the London office. It has a reputation for offering one of the best management trainee programmes in the industry. I began in the planning department, which gave me a firm grounding.

Within two years I'd become an assistant build manager – I'm in charge of running day-to-day activities on the Royal Holloway University of London New Student Residences project in Egham, Surrey, providing 621 new student bedrooms and energy centre. I am responsible for my own phase of the works, consisting of seven three-storey townhouses, totalling 63 bedrooms.

It's a big responsibility, but I'm enjoying it. I love being part of the site team and seeing the progress of the building at the end of each day.

The highlight so far has been the nomination for the trainee of the year and running the London Marathon through the Willmott Dixon Foundation.



Jo Weston, business support director

I've been at Willmott Dixon and now Willmott Partnership Homes for 24 years and I wouldn't change a moment of it. I think my experience illustrates the diversity of roles there are in construction and the wealth of opportunity for progression in the firm. I joined after my A levels in September 1992 as a management trainee in quantity surveying. I'd decided that sitting in an office doing VAT returns as an accountant – my original career choice – would be just too boring. I'm now business support director for Willmott Partnership Homes, using all I've learnt on the journey to help others achieve excellence

in the housing business.

I've always been keen to develop myself and learn new things. My first job combined site work and day release to get my degree. Being out on site really helped me understand the industry and the culture. Although it wasn't a technical role, I still had to understand construction processes so I could procure the work.

After I returned from maternity leave in 2001 I moved into post-contract surveying and rose to finance manager in January 2005. The company was wonderful at accommodating my family and I was able to do spells working part time after I had both my children.

“When I worked with Jo, she was knowledgeable, approachable and provided a very good bridge between the technical team and the client side. She strongly contributed to our feeling that Willmott Partnership Homes cared about us as a client. What you don't want is someone who tries to wriggle out of a situation, or says you don't have a problem when you know you do. She was a natural at finding the best solution for us and our projects.”

Julia Moulder, executive development director, Catalyst Housing Association

It was a big step up for me when I became head of customer service in January 2006. That broadened my commercial role to encompass managing client relationships, resolving technical issues after handover and heading up a team of 15.

One of my clients said to me once: “If every contractor treated customers like Willmott Dixon does, we wouldn't have any problems.” That was certainly a career highlight.

I joined the Business Support Team in 2014 to help set up this new department, and took on the leadership of that team in 2016. As part of this work I've set up Willmott Dixon's new Housing Quality Academy in Aston, Birmingham.

In simple terms, what we do as a team of four is a compliance health check of the scheme six to eight weeks into a project to make sure it is getting off on a sound footing and then following up. I enjoy the training and coaching and passing on my experience.

In my time with Willmott Dixon, I've overcome lots of challenges and made a few mistakes too – sometimes it's the best way to learn.





Keep the home fires burning

Melissa Corser, Willmott Dixon's first sustainability champion, went to Uganda to see how the company's carbon offsetting scheme is helping communities there. Caroline Thorpe reports

Next time you fill a glass from the tap, spare a thought for some of the residents of Kampala. "It takes 45 minutes to an hour for them just to prepare a clean drink of water," says Melissa Corser, environmental manager for Willmott Partnership Homes.

Melissa should know. In October she swapped her office in Coleshill, near Birmingham, for the Ugandan capital to see first hand how Willmott Dixon's investment in a carbon offsetting project there is paying off. The trip was Melissa's reward for being named the firm's inaugural sustainability champion earlier in the year, following her work promoting eco-friendly practices on schemes in the Midlands.

The main item on her itinerary was checking in with the project, which reduces Willmott Dixon's carbon emissions by subsidising fuel-efficient "cookstoves". These are the small cooking appliances commonly used to heat food and water in many Ugandan households and businesses (see box, overleaf: "In numbers"). Next up was thinking about how her Kampala experience could help with the day job: making sure the firm follows environmental rules and helping colleagues achieve the goal of halving its carbon emissions in the decade to 2020.



The visit took in the cookstove factories, retailers and – most memorably, says Melissa – some of the households benefiting from the improved stoves. It was in the latter that she received her drinking water lesson. "One house was just a concrete room with no paint on the walls, no light, and one bed which was for the mother and four children. The father wasn't around. They had no washing or toilet facilities – they had to use a neighbour's. For clean water they had to walk to the local spring, carry the water back, boil it for 20 minutes, then wait for it to cool. It was a bit of a shock. There are just no resources."

Environmental benefits aside, she adds, lack of resources is why the improved cookstoves are so badly needed. Since they require less charcoal than traditional stoves, according to Willmott Dixon offset partners Natural Capital Partners, they are cheaper to run (see box, overleaf: "In numbers"). "One householder said she was so pleased with the stove she'd told her friends and neighbours about it and that it was good because of the cost savings; it leaves them more money to buy food to cook with," says Melissa.

Less fuel also means fewer fumes, which is not only better for the planet, but for the health of those using the stoves and their



"For clean water they had to walk to the local spring, carry the water back, boil it for 20 minutes, then wait for it to cool. It was a bit of a shock. There are just no resources"

Above left: Clean water, and fuel, are scarce resources in Uganda's capital Kampala

Above: Willmott Dixon's carbon offsetting project helps to fund cookstoves like these, seen here at the factory where they are made



“Investing in offsetting our unavoidable carbon emissions helps mitigate our impact on the environment, while making a real difference to people’s lives”

Rick Willmott, group chief executive

families too. “In one home there was a lot of smoke damage on the ceiling,” recalls Melissa. “I asked, ‘Is that from cooking [with the old stove]?’ She said she had never noticed it before. If it was doing that to the ceiling, what was it doing to the family’s lungs?”

Witnessing such harsh realities has made Melissa determined to put the hard lessons learned in Uganda to work towards furthering Willmott Dixon’s environmental efforts in the UK. “Since I’ve been back everyone’s been asking me how the trip was, and there’s been a piece about it on the company intranet – it definitely helps raise the profile of what I do and the bigger picture of climate change and how we can all play a part in minimising its impacts,” she says. “It is changing behaviour and mindsets.”

Just talking about her Ugandan experiences and sharing photographs from the trip is a great educational tool, she adds. “I don’t think many people, including myself, fully understood the whole carbon offsetting process so it’s definitely improved my knowledge, but also the knowledge of other people within the business.”

Working for a company conscious of its carbon footprint – Willmott Dixon has been carbon neutral since 2012 – has been key to her achievements to date, reckons Melissa. “It’s good to work for a company that actually does something about the environment, rather than just says it does. I am very much supported, which makes my job easier when you’ve got buy-in from the senior management team.”

That buy-in comes from the very top. “While we have robust carbon and energy management measures in place, it is not possible for us to stop using energy altogether,” says Rick Willmott, group chief executive. “Investing in offsetting our unavoidable carbon emissions helps mitigate our impact on the environment, while making a real difference to people’s lives.”

So what’s next on the agenda for the company’s sustainability champ? “I really want to continue trying to make a difference and supporting the company in meeting its sustainability objectives, and having a positive impact,” says Melissa. “And I would love to go back to Uganda – one day.”



Top: Melissa (right) and Sarah Bromley with one of the families she met

Left: The fuel-efficient cookstoves reduce energy costs for households



In numbers: cookstoves

36%

the reduction in fuel needed to cook with an “improved cookstove”, compared with traditional cooking methods

\$105

the amount a family using an improved cookstove can save on their annual fuel costs

45%

the financial saving per meal schools can make by using an industrial-sized improved cookstove

281

the number of jobs created by the cookstove project to date

5,597

tonnes of CO2 offset by Willmott Dixon through the Ugandan Cookstove Project in 2015



Becky Morgan is principal customer service manager at Willmott Partnership Homes

“Don’t hide – talk to people!”

This is the customer service mantra of Becky Morgan. She tells Denise Chevin how it has stood her in good stead since moving from a housing association to Willmott Partnership Homes

E mails, phone calls, texts – all may have their purpose but nothing beats meeting people face to face. That’s the philosophy of Becky Morgan, principal customer service manager at Willmott Partnership Homes. “We’re very much the client face of the company. I tell my team ‘Don’t hide behind emails; go out and talk to people.’”

Covering the Midlands and the North, Morgan and her incredibly busy team of three juggle 10-15 clients at any one time, building relationships and smoothing out any issues that arise during the defect periods of new residential development to ensure maximum customer satisfaction (see box: “Problem? Solved!”).

She also spends a lot of time cultivating good working relationships with consultants and supply chain partners.

Clients are mainly housing associations, but can also include colleges developing their student accommodation – “which can be interesting during freshers’ week!”

Morgan has been onboard for just over two years, having been approached to move to Willmott Partnership Homes because of her long experience in housing maintenance for social housing providers.

At the time she was the minor works manager at Viridian Housing, where she’d



Problem? Solved!

If problems arise, they’re usually in the first couple of months – simple queries mostly, like people not being able to use the dual flush toilet. For the elderly, moving into a new house can be daunting. The customer services team have recently undertaken dementia training to ensure they can provide as much help as possible when dealing with more vulnerable residents.

worked for eight years. In her long career managing frontline teams she’s overseen direct labour organisations, set up call centres, developed a complaints process and dealt with empty properties.

Moving to the other side of the fence has been “a huge learning curve”, says the 47-year old mother of three, “but it’s been thoroughly enjoyable. It’s been a real eye opener seeing how hard the site teams work and the pressure they are under to meet tight deadlines, whatever the weather. They are great teams and very good to work with.”

The attention to detail and consideration for housing associations and their residents has won Willmott Partnership Homes many plaudits. “Surveys show 98% of our clients would recommend us,” says Morgan proudly.

Jacqui Page, housing strategy manager, Corby Borough Council, is one of those satisfied clients. Willmott Partnership Homes is currently delivering three new-build schemes for Corby, and Page says: “Becky is very professional, keeps track of our needs and the work that has been done and still needs to be done, and is really very good with our tenants.

“I would certainly recommend this approach and I don’t know other contractors that offer it.”



People power

Our projects are only ever as good as the sum of their parts – and our people are the key ingredient. Simon Brandon meets three Willmott Partnership Homes staff with impressive stories to tell



Stephen Hosty, commercial manager

I do triathlons – that's where you do a swim, a bike ride and a run. I started off doing shorter ones, called sprints, with a 750m swim, a 20km bike ride and a 5km run. Now I do the full Ironman distance, which is a 3.8km swim, 180km bike and then a full marathon. It's bloody hard work.

My personal best for Ironman is 11 hours and 2 minutes. I've got a twin brother who does the same thing – unfortunately he's got the best time at the moment, but we are very close!

I do training every day, first thing. This morning I did 120 lengths in the pool; yesterday I got up at 4.30 and did an hour and a half on the bike. I'm by far the fittest I have ever been. You have to be.

It's quite hard to get up, but once you've done it you feel great, ready for the day. If you've got difficult meetings or challenging subcontractors, you'd rather deal with that after some exercise. And it means I can eat as much as I want!

I've had some bad days: I was seasick in a big swell in Wales one year; another time I tore a calf muscle during a marathon. And punctures – I had four in one race, but I only carry two spare tubes.

At the end of each race I've said to my wife, "I'll never do another one". And then, inevitably, after a couple of days I've signed up for another. Our next race is in Germany; it's called Challenge Roth. It's supposedly the flattest and quickest course, so I'm hoping to go under 10 and a half hours there. That's achievable I think.

Hazel Martin, senior building manager

I did a degree in design management. While I was at university I had to do some modules in strategy and design. I had a friend with a small plumbing company so I did some of the coursework with his company.

I spent some time with him and his business and that's where I got interested in construction – I liked being on site, being around people, the practical side of things. So in 2005 I applied for a job with Willmott Dixon on its graduate trainee programme.

Last year I took charge of the first project that I've managed from start to finish. It's a 12-home site in Corringham, Essex, called Bracelet Close, and it has been the most difficult thing I've done.

We finished a couple of weeks ago. I feel we have achieved so much – it seems strange to look at it now and imagine how it was when we were putting the foundations in. It's unrecognisable.

I'm really proud of the quality and the fact that we have met the project completion date as well. And we've made money! It has been a really successful project.

The best day I've had at work was getting the practical completion; I don't think anyone believed it was going to happen. Even two weeks before people were saying "you'll never make that date" – but we did it.

I have definitely learned an incredible amount in my first 10 years here. I have developed into a manager from a trainee, for one thing. And I've definitely got more wrinkles!

There has never been a dull day. It's been a big challenge from start to end. I feel I could work another 10 years here and still be learning every day.



Bill Kingwill, deputy managing director, London and the South

I'm a 30-year Mansell Homes and Balfour Beatty guy, with lots of experience in affordable housing and mainline construction. Willmott Partnership Homes has brought me in due to my operational background in regional contracting.

I'm looking after the business in London and the South – around a dozen and a half live projects – supporting the managing director by looking after the day-to-day running of things to allow him to have more time to look at strategic issues. That's the game plan going forward, but it's early days – I've only been here five or six weeks.

Willmott Partnership Homes has a lot of similarities to where I spent most of my past – it is an established, traditional business with a strong family representation. It comes across as a very caring, honourable and supportive company that looks after its staff. It's got a good feel.

It's difficult for a lot of the staff because they have had three or four years working in a very tough environment. In terms of our business at Willmott Partnership Homes, though, it is an area where there is a lot of pent-up demand that we can exploit. The business going forward is very strong. The future is bright.

To do my job you've got to have good people skills and determination. You need to be technically aware, tenacious and methodical. But at the end of the day I'm not the guy who does nuts and bolts – you have to be able to inspire others to do those jobs, and be supportive to them. It's a team effort.





Seizing the opportunities

Housing providers need to be more creative to continue to deliver new homes. Willmott Partnership Homes is offering its development expertise to help, reports Stuart Macdonald

Guy Cope is excited: "We've just heard that a large regeneration deal with a local authority in London is going ahead – 1,500 homes over a number of years. It's great!" This is no normal story of a contractor winning a big job. While Willmott Partnership Homes does build more than 2,000 homes a year for housing provider clients, the deal Guy has been working on is different.

"There is not much funding available to local authorities at the moment," says the head of regeneration at Willmott Partnership Homes. "They need to be more creative in what they do and this is where we come in. My previous role was on the development side at Willmott Dixon's Prime Place private rented business, so I and my colleagues have 30 years of experience bringing sites forward for development.

"We are a one-stop-shop for councils and housing associations to help them develop their land assets and ensure they get a long-term income stream and new assets. A key focus for us is the re-provision of assets such as homes or leisure facilities at no extra cost," Guy adds.

Richard Sterling, Guy's colleague in the Midlands and North, says that Willmott Partnership Homes has already been able to work well with a number of housing providers to maximise the benefit from development opportunities (see box: "Come together").

"In Doncaster we are pulling together more than 200 homes across three sites in partnership with Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council. Also, in Liverpool we are a housing delivery partner on the Liverpool Housing Partnership with Liverpool City Council. This is a major development programme that will see 5,000 homes built and 1,000 empty homes brought back into use.

Richard adds: "The cornerstone of what we do is helping clients – especially local authorities – maximise the value of existing assets. These projects are hopefully just the start of what we can help housing providers to do."

Guy Cope (left) and Richard Sterling, along with some of the over 120 homes Willmott Partnership Homes is building in Doncaster



Come together

Westminster City Council:

Willmott Partnership Homes is renewing two leisure centres at no cost to the tax payer, providing a net contribution to council revenue by developing housing on both sites.

Ealing Council:

Leading the delivery of London's fourth 50m pool and leisure complex with build for rent and sale homes on an adjacent site.

Cheshunt School, Hertfordshire:

Creating a modern technology block for science, design & technology and creative arts with 88 homes on a nearby site.

Reading Borough Council:

Partner for the council's eight-year regeneration of Dee Park, providing skills for creating homes for affordable rent and private sale.

Nottingham City Council:

Creating 45 homes at Wainwright House and retail units by leading the commercial element, including sourcing a commercial investment partner and securing pre-sales on all three commercial units.

Warwick District Council:

Providing development management services to accelerate an affordable extra care scheme of 81 apartments and five bungalows by assembling public and private land assets.



Liz Matthews, retiring head of HR at Willmott Dixon

A good time all around

Liz Matthews has overseen huge changes in her role as head of HR. Now she is retiring, she tells Simon Brandon about the highs and lows at Willmott Dixon

Q: Congratulations on your retirement!

A: Thank you. It's been a momentous year – Brexit, Trump, me leaving Willmott Dixon...

Q: How did you end up at Willmott Dixon?

A: I accepted voluntary redundancy from an insurance company to allow me to spend more time with my son, Christopher, who was one year old at the time. My plan was to work as a temp. My first temp job was with Willmott Dixon Property Services in 1992, and I am now retiring after 24 years!

Q: What was your first day like? How did you feel?

A: I remember being offered 11 cups of tea on my first day. I also remember the managing director came and introduced himself by pulling up a chair and plonking his feet on my desk.

Q: What has changed since then?

A: I have seen and been involved in numerous changes within the Willmott Dixon Group and seen how employment law has developed significantly over the years. The increase in the size of the group has been amazing.

Q: What has stayed the same?

A: The company's values and all that it stands for.

Q: What are you most proud of during your time with Willmott Dixon?

A: My proudest moment was being asked to speak at the 10 Year Club dinner by our chief executive, Rick Willmott, in front of more than 250 people at the Landmark London hotel. I am also proud to have achieved Investors in People Gold for Willmott Partnership Homes just before leaving – a great accolade to underline our investment in people.

Q: What was your worst day at work?

A: The hardest times for me have always been having to close a business and make people redundant. You never get used to having to deliver that message.

Q: What will you miss most?

A: All the friends I have made over the years.

Q: What won't you miss?

A: Getting up in the dark in the winter.

Q: How do you think you'll be remembered?

A: For my commitment, straight talking and practical solutions to problems.

Q: What advice would you give to someone starting out in your job?

A: Stay true to your beliefs, and remember that a business is only as good as the people within it.

Q: How do you plan to spend your retirement?

A: Working on my fitness, playing golf and spending time with friends and family. I'd like to do more travelling, and spend time on arts and crafts.

Q: How would you sum up your time at Willmott Dixon?

A: I have loved every minute of it. I was lucky enough to meet my husband at work – we've been together now for more than 17 years and got married seven years ago – I'm sure that he would say the same! I am also very proud that my son and stepson have joined the business and are starting out on their Willmott Dixon journeys.

"My proudest moment was being asked to speak at the 10 Year Club dinner by Rick Willmott in front of more than 250 people at the Landmark London hotel"



Willmott Partnership Homes: Regions



Midlands and the North

New business director:
Frances McConnell
Central Office
Bromwich Court
Gorsey Lane
Coleshill
Birmingham B46 1JU
Tel: 01675 461700



London and the South

New business director:
Steve Skuse
Central Office
Willmott Dixon House
80 Wilbury Way
Hitchin
Hertfordshire SG4 0TP
Tel: 01462 814455



For further information on Willmott Partnership Homes in your area, please contact the relevant office above.
