

gentoo

Great homes
Strong communities
Inspired people
for Sunderland

**Annual Report
for tenants and
leaseholders**

**21
2021**



Welcome

I am delighted to introduce your tenant and leaseholder annual report for 2021/22.

This is the third annual report since I joined Gentoo as Chief Executive Officer in 2019, and what a three years they have been. I wanted to take this opportunity to reflect on the last year and provide you with some important messages, as well as an overview of our performance and achievements as your landlord.

Cost of living crisis

This time last year, I was writing to you about the challenges we faced because of COVID-19. This year, we are faced with an equally challenging crisis.

As I write this, UK inflation has hit its highest level in 20 years. Inflation is the term used to describe a rise in prices for goods and services. It impacts everything. The cost of food, gas, electric, furniture and clothing have all increased.

I am deeply concerned about the cost of living crisis and the impact this may be having on our tenants and colleagues. We know the worst is still to come, as winter approaches.

Nigel Wilson
Chief Executive Officer

But, I want you to know that Gentoo is here to assist any tenant or leaseholder that needs us. There's a large feature in this report which covers all the support we can offer. I'd urge anyone struggling to reach out to us and we will help in any way we can.

We will also be lobbying the government on behalf of our tenants and other residents in Sunderland, to ensure support is given to those in need.

Gentoo is here to assist any tenant or leaseholder that needs us.

Improving our services

This September we kicked off our Tenant Services Transformation Programme. This is a massive 5-year plan to improve and modernise our tenant services.

It's Gentoo's biggest improvement project in over 10 years, it involves every part of the business. Some of the benefits the project will bring you are:

- allowing you to choose how we contact you
- keeping you up to date so you don't have to chase us
- putting you in touch with real people who can help you
- giving you easy access to your tenancy information

We are putting you at the heart of this redesign. There will be lots of opportunities throughout the programme to be involved in shaping how the services will work.

We will share regular programme updates through the website gentoogroup.com, social media and other channels.

City Hall

I'm delighted that our new City Hall office, in the city centre of Sunderland is now open.

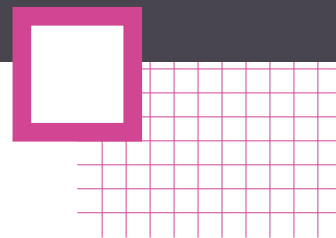
The move to City Hall, for our Athenaeum and Havelock offices, has placed us under the same roof as several other public sector partners including Sunderland City Council, Sunderland College, DWP Job Centre and DWP Medical Assessment Centre. Working under the same roof will strengthen our relationship with these partners, resulting in an even better service for tenants.

The new office provides the same tenancy services as the previous two offices. This includes a reception area with internet access for all general housing enquiries, interview rooms for tenants to speak privately with Neighbourhood Coordinators and weekly advertising of available properties to rent.

It's great to see tenants already visiting us in this new office, and I look forward to welcoming more in the coming months.

I hope everything included in this year's report reassures you that I am committed to making sure Gentoo continues to be an excellent landlord.

During these difficult times, we will support our tenants, neighbourhoods and the community and voluntary groups in Sunderland, which offer vital support to many. Gentoo is Sunderland through and through, and over the past few years, it has been brilliant to see how everyone in the city has pulled together. Partnerships are so vital in ensuring help is given to those who need it most, and this year will certainly be no different.



Providing support through the cost of living

Across the country prices are going up. We know many people are worried about making their money stretch to cover the basics.

Earlier this year, the government announced **£37 billion** of support which includes:

£400 non repayable grants to every domestic energy customer

£650 cost of living payment for those on benefits (paid in two parts)

£300 payment to help cover the rising energy costs this winter (for those who receive Winter Fuel Payment)

But, we want you to know that Gentoo is also here to support any tenant or resident who needs us. We have specially trained, dedicated teams and grant schemes available to anyone who may need them.

Money Matters Team

Gentoo's Money Matters Team work with a wide range of partners to offer practical tips, advice and information to help you make the most of your money.

This includes benefit checks, claims and appeals support, debt advice, energy saving and fuel switching advice. Last year the team brought an extra **£1.57 million** to tenants who contact them.

If you are unable to pay your rent, or have any financial worries, you can call 0300 123 2004 or email moneymatters@gentoo.com

Crisis Fund

Life is unpredictable. We understand that sometimes our tenants find themselves in financial crisis, through no fault of their own. An unexpected bill, job loss or a household appliance breaking can leave someone unable to pay for food or household bills.

If you find yourself in financial crisis or need help with day to day living costs because you are having difficulties, please contact your Neighbourhood Coordinator.

Our crisis fund can help pay for:

- food
- gas
- electric
- essential travel (such as a bus pass to get to work)

All applications are considered on a case by case basis. Your Neighbourhood Coordinator can help you access the fund. You can find out who your Neighbourhood Coordinator is by searching 'Neighbourhood Coordinators' on our website gentoogroup.com or by calling 0191 525 5000.

Aspire Community Grant Programme

Aspire grants are for local volunteers and community groups in Gentoo neighbourhoods. They are for projects or activities that will help Gentoo tenants.

The grants, of up to £500, fund projects that support the environment, activities for young people, health and wellbeing and projects that tackle unemployment.

Aspire grants have been awarded for:

- art, music and drama clubs
- children and young people's clubs
- clubs for older people
- local football clubs
- parent and toddler playgroups
- volunteer groups



Members of St Andrews Stitchers who received an Aspire Grant for new sewing machines

If you know a group or organisation that would benefit from an Aspire grant please encourage them to apply for one. Application forms can be downloaded directly from gentoogroup.com or you can call us on 0191 525 5000 and ask to speak to a member of the Tenant Voice Team to have one posted to you.

Empower Sunderland Local Community Fund

This fund grants money to energy and environmental projects in Sunderland that will help the local community. They are given to projects that are looking to reduce how much energy they use or extend existing energy efficiency schemes.

Empower grants have been awarded to:

- fit solar photovoltaic (PV) panels to a community centre
- install double glazing and new heating systems in community centres

- install LED lighting in a library and an equestrian centre
- install a new boiler to replace an old boiler and complete any needed work

If you know a group or organisation that would benefit from an Empower grant please encourage them to apply for one. Application forms can be downloaded directly from gentoogroup.com or you can call us on 0191 525 5000 and ask to speak to a member of the Property Investment Team to have one posted to you.

Our performance

We have developed a clear dashboard to demonstrate our performance as your landlord. This was done in partnership with our involved tenants, who told us what information was important to them.

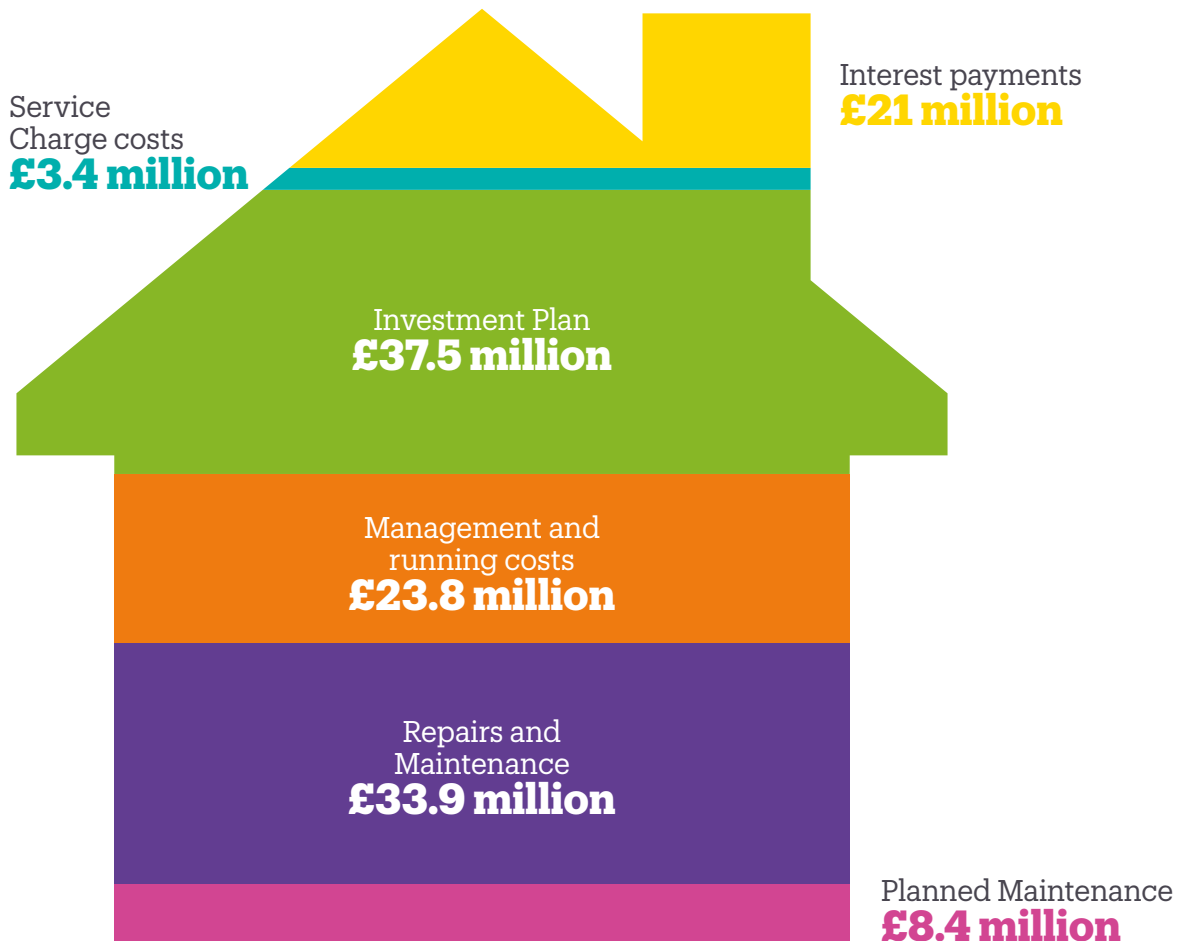
The data shows how we have performed for the 2021/22 financial year, compared to the previous year.

	2020/21	2021/22
Current rent arrears including housing benefit recovery	£1.58m	£1.8m
Average time to re-let a property	81 days	70.13 days
£ invested to tenant's homes through planned investment work	£30.9m	£39.1m
Number of properties improved due to planned investment work	5,633	11,000
Overall satisfaction with planned improvement work	96%	97%
Number of repairs and safety inspections	153,310	159,621
Repairs completed right first time	88%	97.8%
Number of formal complaints received	218	466
Number of complaints resolved in timescales	100%	100%

How we spend your rent

The Regulator of Social Housing grades us as 'G1' for governance, the highest rating a registered provider can get. Our grade is because we are well governed, well ran and financially viable and we:

- follow all laws, regulations and requirements
- manage our resources effectively and efficiently and invest wisely
- are responsible and avoid any unnecessary risks



Tenant feedback by IFF Research



We need your feedback to help us improve our services for all our tenants. We are working with IFF Research who are doing surveys for us so you can share your opinions and views on our services.

IFF Research will be contacting some tenants from October by either:

- **email from myopinions@iffresearch.com**
- **reminder email from myopinions@iffresearch-dm.com**
- **phone call from 020 3148 7635**

If IFF Research contact you, we would appreciate it if you could answer their questions about our services and give them feedback about us.

The feedback collected from the surveys will be used to improve our services and processes.

Your answers will be confidential but we may share feedback with our contractors if it is about their service.

It is optional to take part in the survey. If you do not want to take part, you can let IFF Research know when they contact you or let us know and we will remove your details from the contact list.

If you have any questions about these surveys, please call us on 0191 525 5000.

Social Housing Quality Panel

We are delighted to announce that two Gentoo tenants have been selected to be part of the government's Social Housing Quality Resident Panel.

The Panel is made up of 250 social housing tenants from across the country. The members will meet regularly and act as a collective 'voice' for tenants. They will share their views with government and ministers on their approach to improving the quality of social housing.

It is incredibly important to Gentoo to listen to tenants. In the last 12 months, we have consulted with tenants and leaseholders



The Chairs of Gentoo's Tenant and Community Voice groups

on critical business changes, as well as make improvements to our processes from tenant feedback. This is made possible through our Tenant and Community Voice (TCV) groups and our digital engagement platform Your Gentoo Voice.

We are proud to have two tenants representing Gentoo at a national level and look forward to hearing the outcomes of the Panel's meetings.

Our social impact summary 21/22

£5,914,763 total social value generated

Place

4,012
properties fitted
with double glazing


137
affordable
homes built

£68 million

invested in works
and improvements
on our properties

92%

of tenants satisfied
with their neighbourhood
as a place to live

People

£1.57 million
additional income for tenants


120
people supported
by Wise Steps job
coaches


216
domestic abuse and
antisocial behaviour cases

Perform

£1.7 million

surplus reinvested
back into Gentoo

97% 

of tenants satisfied with
the work carried out during
upgrades to their home

Partner

200

families received
VIP treatment at
the pantomime

£309,182

in social value generated through
partners and principal contractors



61

adults and families
provided with
emergency temporary
accommodation

Pride

£22,000

fundraised by our colleagues
for our corporate charities

81

veterans
rehoused

313

families
benefited from
Easter hampers



Making homes more energy efficient

We have committed to invest £300 million to improve our existing homes and neighbourhoods from 2019 to 2024.

Last year, we invested **£37.4 million** into 10,000 of our properties. This included:



£10.6 million invested replacing roofs to 695 properties



£2.56 million invested replacing heating systems in 1114 properties



£2.1 million invested in environmental work to 1060 properties. (This included improvements to garages, porches, canopies and balconies)



Finished investment work to properties in Houghton-le-Spring



£807,000 invested externally decorating 1995 properties



£760,000 invested replacing kitchens, bathrooms and/or full rewires in 75 properties



Finished investment work to properties in Southwick

We are also committed to ensuring all properties have a minimum EPC rating of C by 2030 (except those that are exempt). An EPC, or Energy Performance Certificate rating is a review of a property's energy efficiency. Properties are rated on a scale of A to G, with A awarded for the most energy efficient properties, and G awarded for the lowest performing.

Improving the EPC ratings of our properties is hugely important to us, as it means our tenants will need less energy to heat and fuel their homes. It also ensures we are supporting the carbon reduction targets set out by the Government and Sunderland City Council.

£580,000
invested **internally**
decorating
7 high-rise
buildings

£400,000
invested **internally**
decorating
97 low-rise
buildings

£3.5 million invested
in **fire risk assessments** to
185 low-rise buildings

£11.3 million
invested **replacing**
windows in 4012
properties

52% of properties
brought up to EPC rating
of **C or above**

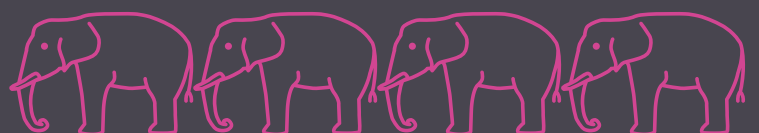
£300,000 invested
refurbishing lifts in 2
high-rise buildings and 1
sheltered accommodation



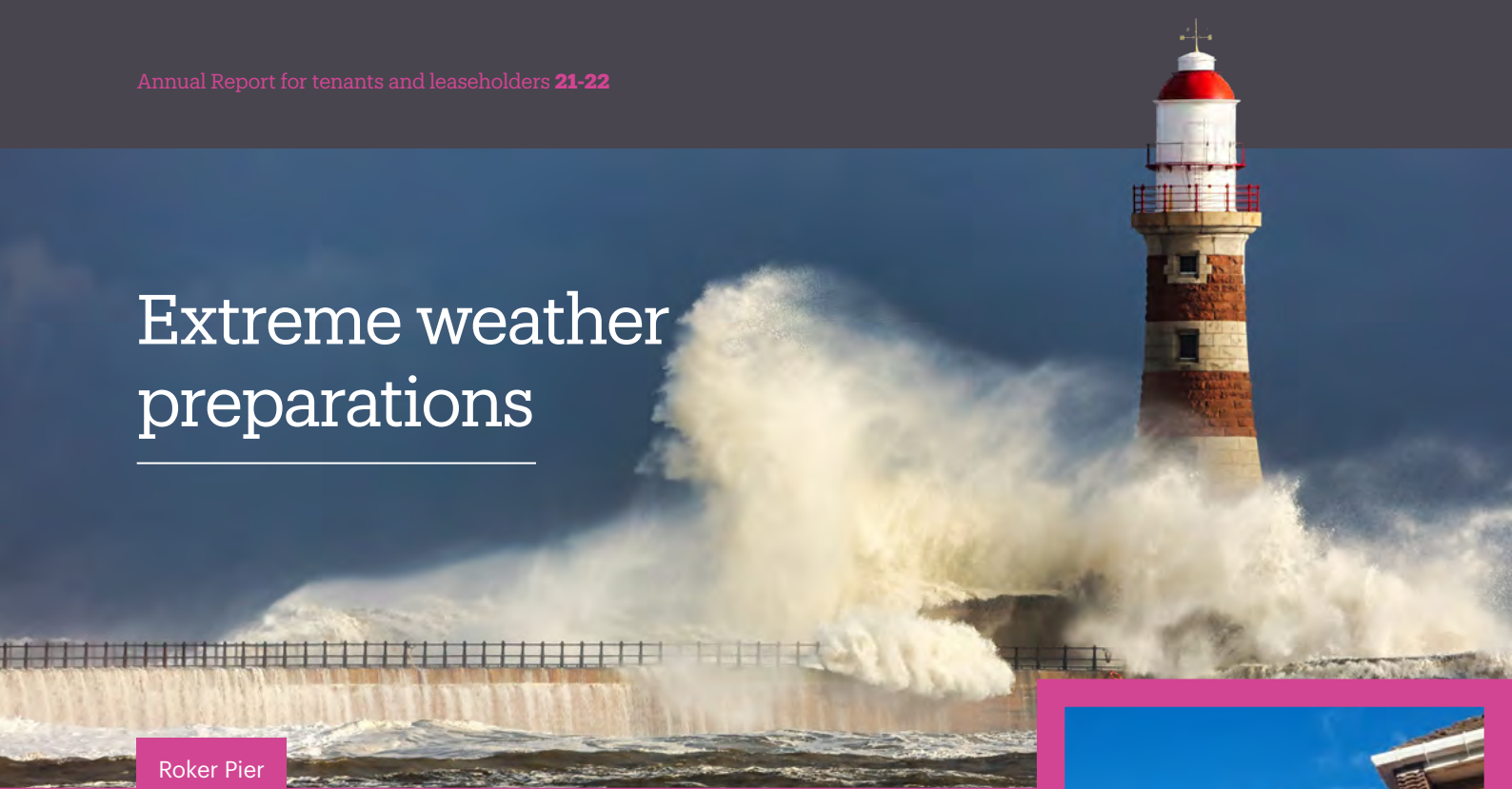
High-rise buildings in Monkwearmouth

The 2021/22 planned investment works have collectively reduced the carbon footprint of Gentoo houses by more than **1,248 tCO²/year**

This is the same weight as **250 elephants!**



Extreme weather preparations



Roker Pier

We're sure you will remember Storm Arwen which hit the UK in November, and the 6 other storms that followed. The severe weather caused a huge amount of damage to roofs, fences, gable ends and trees.

Unfortunately, with every storm, properties suffered new damage and regretfully existing damage caused by earlier storms was made worse.

We know that some people are waiting for these repairs to be completed. A global shortage of building materials and limited contractor availability has impacted how quickly we can complete some repairs. However, with a new fencing contractor now in place, repairs are starting to be fixed.

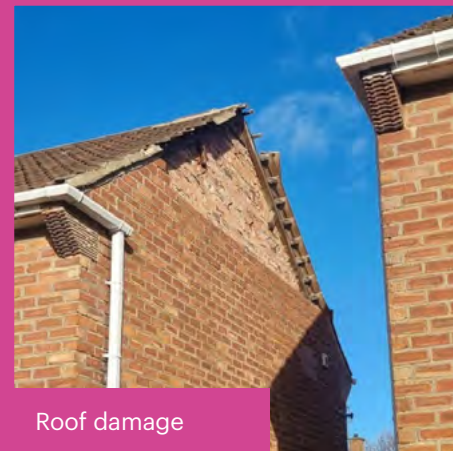
Lessons learned

We have listened to tenants who were impacted by last year's storms as well as colleagues who were responsible for repairing properties and answering concerned telephone calls from tenants.

We have learned from these events and are putting plans in place to ensure we can support tenants quicker if we are faced with severe weather this winter. This includes:

- creating partnerships with new contractors. These contractors will be on hand to support us with repair demands should bad weather hit again
- planning. Managers and senior leaders across Gentoo are already looking at resources and planning for this winter

As the cooler weather starts to approach, there are things you can do to ensure your home is 'winter ready' now.



Roof damage

Practical tips for inside your home

- test your heating now, before you need it. Turn your heating on for a short time to ensure it is working. That way, you can report any repairs before you need it
- bleed your radiators. After the warm summer months, you might find that your radiators are cold at the top and warm at the bottom. Bleed your radiators to ensure you're getting the maximum benefit from your heating system at the lowest cost
- check if you are eligible for help with your energy costs. Our Money Matters Team can give advice about government funding for energy bills. This includes Cold Weather Payment, Warm Home Discount Scheme and Winter Fuel Payment
- locate your stopcock. If there is a burst pipe, do you know where your stopcock is, to turn your water system off to limit the damage?



Large tree fallen in a garden

Prepare the outside of your home for a storm

Preparing your home before a storm can help prevent structural damage and keep you safe. Before a storm, you can:

- remove any loose or weak branches from trees in your garden
- secure garden fences, sheds and other things like trampolines and benches in your garden
- put away or secure outdoor furniture
- park your vehicle somewhere safe and make sure there are no loose items around it

Boundary wall collapsed



Remember: tampering with a gas meter or trying to bypass the gas meter completely is illegal and extremely dangerous.

Gas is explosive and highly flammable; you are putting yourself and your neighbours lives in danger if you tamper with your gas meter or appliances.

Complaint performance

We have been on a journey to transform the way we engage with our tenants and handle complaints.



Lewis Walmsley, Gentoo Tenant Voice Partner with a tenant

In line with the recommendations in the Government’s Social Housing White Paper, we have put our tenants voice at the centre of the organisation.

In the last 12 months, we have campaigned to raise the profile of our complaints process to tenants. We have encouraged you to provide feedback, positive or negative, through a new feedback@gentoo.com email address, and a new Gentoo Official Complaints Facebook group.

As a result, the number of formal complaints Gentoo received from 2020/21 to 2021/22 more than doubled. With the help of tenant feedback, we can learn from our mistakes and make changes to our services to fix what is going wrong.

We are honest in acknowledging that there are times we don’t get issues right

	2020/21	2021/22
Number of formal complaints received at stage one	218	466
Number of complaints that progressed to stage two	52	103
Number of Housing Ombudsman cases	3	11

The three service areas to receive the most formal complaints were:

Property Maintenance

197

dampness and
repair timescales



Property Investment

81

window replacements
and Washington
District Heating



Housing

109

allocation of
properties and
handling of anti-social
behaviour



Housing Ombudsman complaints

Our handling of work in a property and our decision not to install sound proofing

The Ombudsman found that Gentoo had made a reasonable offer of redress to the tenant regarding the complaint

Our handling of reports of repairs to electrics

The Ombudsman found no maladministration as Gentoo took into consideration the tenant's circumstances and concerns. Gentoo also took prompt actions to try and resolve the issues

Our response to a tenant's concerns about a repair visit to their property and delays in complaint response

The Ombudsman found that there was a service failure by Gentoo in respect of our response to the tenant's concerns. However, there was no maladministration in respect of its complaint handling



Nigel Wilson, Gentoo Chief Executive Officer with Bridget Phillipson, MP and Joanne Gordon, Gentoo Development Director

Our Affordable Homes Programme

Our Affordable Homes Programme significantly picked up pace last year and we have been delighted to see the bricks and mortar transforming into new homes at 5 developments.

These developments are located right across the city to ensure we are delivering new affordable homes for tenants and residents in all corners of Sunderland, including:

- **Austin Place**, Pennywell
- **Bellmen Green**, Silksworth
- **Brockwell Green**, Fencehouses
- **Keelman Rise**, Downhill
- **Liberty Grange**, Hylton Castle

These developments have delivered a total of 137 new high-quality homes, which have been made available for affordable rent and are already fully occupied by tenants.

The most recent of these schemes to complete, Liberty Grange and Bellmen Green, mark the start of a new and exciting era of affordable housing in Sunderland as they are the first developments where our bespoke, modern, and newly designed house types have been completed. Initial feedback from tenants living in these houses have described them as nothing short of life changing.

Nigel Davey and his two teenage daughters were one of the first residents to move into the homes in September 2021. Nigel, who suffers with health conditions, was offered the larger home after he applied last summer and now, he and his daughters have their own bedrooms.

Speaking of his new home, Mr Davey, said:

“I’m over the moon with my new home and living here has really changed my family’s life.

“My health has improved massively since moving in and the house is really affordable too which is brilliant. We have lots more space to live and I feel very lucky to live in these new homes.”



Joanne Gordon, Gentoo Development Director with Nigel Davey, tenant

Claire Lopez, a Gentoo tenant now living at Liberty Grange said: “Living here has already changed my family’s life. I think the rent is really good value for money as the house is state of the art, I’m now set for the future.

“The heating system is fabulous, and Gentoo has given me information to make sure it’s really easy for me to understand. I’m glad I was able to move in when I did so I can take advantage of the savings on my fuel bills when everyone else’s bills are going up.”



New affordable homes at Liberty Grange

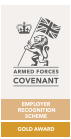
Each home has been designed to have minimal energy costs for tenants through renewable and low carbon technology.

The 14 new house types in our Affordable Homes Programme include:

- **enhanced full filled external cavity walls**
- **high performance window casements**
- **air source heat pumps**
- **electric vehicle car charging**
- **thermal battery storage**
- **electric vehicle charging**
- **smart metering**

gentoo

Great homes
Strong communities
Inspired people
for Sunderland



Gentoo Group Limited
Emperor House
2 Emperor Way
Doxford International Business Park
Sunderland, SR3 3XR.

www.gentoo.com

Gentoo Group Limited is a charitable community benefit society, registration number 7302

Annual Report
for tenants and
leaseholders

21
22.