

## COMMUNITY-BASED REGENERATION AND COLLABORATION IN A NORTHERN CITY



Canopy volunteers at work

**The basics**

<b>Location:</b>	Beeston, Leeds
<b>Lead body:</b>	Canopy Housing
<b>Homes:</b>	64 rented homes in 3 inner city neighbourhoods
<b>Timescale:</b>	Started in 1996; ongoing
<b>Key Partners:</b>	Leeds City Council Leeds Community Homes

**Target audience:** Larger urban local authorities, community based organisations, local tradespeople, and funding bodies

**Key message:** Small scale hands-on initiatives tackling some of the most difficult housing problems with a focus on both homes and communities generate added benefits and pave the way for partnership and innovation.

Canopy Housing was set up in 1996. It is dedicated to the renovation of empty and often derelict properties in three inner city, multi-cultural Leeds neighbourhoods, providing homes for homeless people in the City and doing so through a strong emphasis on volunteering and self-help.

Canopy's volunteers are at the heart of the organisation's work. Most of them come from disadvantaged backgrounds and include refugees, people with learning disabilities and those that are long-term unemployed. They all work together to learn new skills and boost their confidence. Some go on to formal training and find a job; others become Canopy tenants after helping to renovate their own homes. Newly selected tenants are expected to carry out at least eight days' voluntary work helping to renovate the property that will become their home.

For some homeless people, getting involved with Canopy has been a life-changing experience...

*"I've been involved with Canopy for the past nine years. I came to Leeds as an unaccompanied 16 year old from Cameroon. I needed somewhere to live and I had to learn English. Canopy provided me with a flat and I learnt a whole lot of new basic skills as a volunteer – carpet laying, painting, plastering and joinery. They took me on as an apprentice and I now have a Diploma in Plastering from Leeds College of Building. I'm employed to do maintenance work by Canopy now and have just managed to buy my own home".*

*Patrick Canopy Housing worker*

Canopy's work has enabled it to build up a freehold asset base of over £1 million, helping it raise capital and revenue funding from a variety of sources and enabling it to maintain an annual turnover of between £500,000 and £750,000 a year. Financial support has come through the Government's Empty Homes Community Grants Programme, Leeds City Council, Big Lottery, Unity Trust Bank, the Nationwide Foundation, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and other trusts.

Canopy is well networked in both Leeds and more widely. Its Director plays a role in the housing forums in the City, whilst also maintaining close working relationships with other similar organisations in Hull and Middlesbrough. Nationally, Canopy is also represented on a number of community-led and self-help housing networks.

### Overcoming the barriers

Ready access to loan finance is often an issue for community-led housing organisations. Although some traditional lenders may have viewed Canopy's model as high risk because of its relatively low asset base, with a track record now in place, the organisation is in a good position to negotiate competitive rates with its lenders; and it has done so, particularly with those lenders that have traditionally supported community-led development. The challenge now, perhaps, is to extend this support to more mainstream lenders.

Buying and refurbishing empty homes with borrowed money alone is challenging. To increase the scale of its work, Canopy has become adept at attracting funds from grant-giving bodies, much of it used to support the capacity-building it does with its volunteers and tenants. But grant support is becoming harder to find.

*"Canopy is now a fully sustainable organisation. Our rental income is double what it was six years ago; we have a strong, experienced Board and a dedicated staff team. We are reducing our reliance on grant funding and finding new ways of financing our core business. We have a good working relationship with the City Council. It has not always been an easy journey, but the important work we do needs to continue and be expanded. That is our task for the next few years".*

Steve Hoey Director Canopy Housing Project



Canopy volunteers

## Working with a City Council: leases, loans and grants

Canopy has benefited from a particularly positive relationship with Leeds City Council. With more than 5400 empty private and public sector homes in the City, the Council has for some time recognised that the social enterprise sector has an important role to play in bringing those that are Council-owned back into use.

It has leased some of its 400 hard-to-let properties to Canopy and other social enterprises at peppercorn rents, with leases of between 5 and 25 years. Some of these leases have now been extended to 99 years enabling the social enterprise to borrow against them, providing capital to invest in more homes.

The City Council will be providing Canopy and others with 30% capital grants from its Right to Buy receipts to cover purchase and repair costs. Canopy has also recently benefited from an interest free loan of £200,000 from the City, used to refurbish seven long-term empty properties.

Bringing empty homes back into use is important for the City Council, but it is the added value that Canopy brings to these projects which seals the deal. Working with homeless and unemployed people, who then gain skills and experience through renovation work, some of whom take up job opportunities in the construction sector, is a win-win for the local authority.

*“The City Council is proud of its relationship with Canopy and other third sector housing organisations such as LATCH, Gipsil and Leeds Empties to name a few. We were keen to support them at the outset and have continued to do so by transferring empty properties, offering long leases and helping them to gain additional funding. Canopy’s focus on enabling homeless people to work on renovating empty properties to gain work skills is a great example of what the third sector can offer.*”

John Statham Head of Housing Partnerships and Growth, Leeds City Council

Canopy has been shortlisted as a World Habitat Award finalist in the 2015/16 competition.

## City-wide collaboration through Leeds Community Homes

The overall strength of the community-led housing movement in Leeds has led to a unique City-wide collaboration, one that is set to make a significant contribution to meeting housing need here over the next ten years.

Leeds Community Homes (LCH) brings together all the organisations in the City with a strong track record in providing community-led housing, including a number of social enterprises, a cohousing community and a co-operative of architects and engineers. Canopy is one of its founder members along with LILAC – a unique, award-winning ecological cohousing scheme completed in 2013, and another World Habitat Award finalist.

*“Through LCH we want to scale up the community-led housing sector in the City, building on the success stories we have here and offering many more of our low-income communities an opportunity to live in high quality, low energy homes that really meet community needs. This is increasingly difficult to achieve through large-scale housing developments that are now to be focused on home ownership”.*

Steve Hoey Canopy Housing founder member, Leeds Community Homes

Leeds Community Homes has the full backing of Leeds City Council.

*“The City Council has been supportive of the development of Leeds Community Homes, recognising the potential it has in the community and custom self-build sector. We are keen to see it succeed and will continue to offer our support”.*

John Statham Head of Housing Partnerships and Growth, Leeds City Council

LCH is still in its developmental phase, but it has plans to build or refurbish 1000 community-led affordable homes in Leeds over the next ten years. Amongst its short-term targets, it is planning to:

- Launch a community share issue with the aim of raising £500,000 to invest in the purchase and renovation of empty homes by Canopy and others, so that more homes are available for affordable rent.
- Attract other capital funding and investment to build and renovate more affordable homes, for example through Leeds City Council’s Right To Buy Fund and Big Lottery.
- Secure Social Investment Tax Relief (SITR) for the community share issue and future affordable housing schemes.
- Continue discussions with a small group of developers and landowners to identify opportunities to provide more affordable, sustainable housing – for example through building affordable homes for rent through a site-led custom build approach – with an emphasis on environmentally-sound and more affordable pre-fabricated homes.
- Support groups of people in Leeds to develop their own community-led housing projects – by piloting a support programme with three early-stage groups.
- Engage at a strategic level with key stakeholders – including the City Council and housing associations – to identify opportunities to work effectively together to develop the community-led housing sector in Leeds.



The LILAC co-housing scheme in Leeds

Although it is still early days, the Leeds Community Homes initiative is a great example of how community-led initiatives can collaborate in an urban context and work positively with local authorities, private developers, landowners and funders to deliver significant numbers of genuinely affordable, community-led homes as part of a much larger housing programme. It is an approach that should prove attractive to other major cities.

More information from:

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## PRO-ACTIVE LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT



Stretham & Wilburton CLT Chairman Chairman of East Cambridgeshire District Council, and Developer Partners Laragh Homes at their development site in Stretham

### The basics

<b>Lead body:</b>	East Cambridgeshire District Council
<b>Support:</b>	CLT East
<b>Timescale:</b>	Initiated in 2013; on-going
<b>Key features:</b>	Local Plan commitments to community led development Start-up grants and loans funding package Employment of specialist advisor
<b>Main outcomes:</b>	6 Community Land Trusts

**Target audience:** Local authorities

**Key message:** Making community-led development a local authority corporate priority can transform the scale of activity, particularly in rural villages and build strong relationships with local communities

East Cambridgeshire is one of the only local authorities in England that is actively supporting community-led development in general, and Community Land Trusts in particular, through its statutory planning policies.

The Council has come a long way in just three years; active support for Community Land Trusts is now a corporate priority. As well as its commitments through the planning process, the Council also provides start-up and pre-development funding and employs a specialist adviser from regional umbrella organisation CLT East.

*“Community Land Trusts are a great way of developing new homes for local people whilst also giving them a strong say on how growth can benefit their area. We believe that they are a vital way of bringing much needed housing to our towns and villages as well as the infrastructure which is often missing in our more rural areas. The beauty of CLTs is they are the product of successful collaboration between local people and their Council.*

*In East Cambridgeshire we are encouraging them through our planning policies, providing finance to help them get started and supporting them through the development process. We are doing it because we know CLTs will bring lasting benefits to our communities for many years to come. Our approach is one that could and perhaps should be taken up by other local authorities facing the challenge of matching the need for growth with community aspirations.”*

Councillor Charles Roberts, Deputy Leader of East Cambridgeshire District Council

## Stretham and Wilburton CLT leads the way

The story of community-led development in East Cambridgeshire really starts in 2011 when the first CLT in Cambridgeshire was formed. Spurred on by the Localism Act and the National Planning Policy Framework, two rural fenland villages joined forces to find a way of providing much needed affordable homes and other amenities for local people through community leadership.

Sponsored by their parish councils and supported by a new regional umbrella organisation, CLT East, Stretham and Wilburton began the search for a suitable development site. It found 14 acres of agricultural land just outside the Stretham village envelope, with the landowner willing to sell. Unable to sell the land with planning permission to a mainstream developer and aware that the Council was prepared to make exceptions for mixed developments put forward by local communities, the landowner struck a deal with the CLT which delivered an increased land value from the change of use to housing and cross-subsidy for the affordable homes through the sale of market housing on the site.

Two years of intensive community engagement followed, supported by a grant from the Design Council/CABE.



Community engagement on the CLT's proposals underway in Stretham

With planning permission secured in 2014, the CLT has now embarked on a three-phase development project involving 75 new homes. The first phase of 26 homes started on site in June 2015 with another 24 to follow. The mixed development includes 23 affordable rented homes and 52 for market sale, with land reserved for a new doctor's surgery, workspaces to encourage local employment and a new village green. Funding for the affordable housing has come from a mix of cross-subsidy from the market homes and a commercial loan from a bank specialising in support for social enterprises.

The relationship between the CLT and the District Council has always been positive and strong. It is no coincidence that the CLT chair is a local councillor who has been a champion for community-led development within the local authority.

## Supporting CLTs through the planning process

The local authority is supporting community-led development through its Local Plan which was drafted in 2013 and formally adopted in April 2015. A key element of the Plan deals with its policy towards affordable homes development outside designated village boundaries. The following extract makes interesting reading...

The District Council is generally supportive of community-led development...the affordable housing elements may be permitted outside development envelopes as an exception to normal policies of control where:

The District Council is satisfied that (i) the scheme was initiated by a legitimate local community group, such as a Parish Council or Community Land Trust and (ii) the scheme has general community support, with evidence of meaningful public engagement.

It can be demonstrated that the scheme will be well managed and financially viable over the long term and that any benefits provided by the scheme can be retained by the local community in perpetuity.

An element of open market housing on the site will only be acceptable where it is demonstrated that it is essential to enable delivery of the affordable housing or other community benefits on the site.

A more detailed Supplementary Planning Document, approved by the Council as a draft for consultation in November 2015, includes other statements of policy in support of community-led schemes.

The Council starts with the presumption that all community-led developments will be supported, unless there are fundamental problems with a proposal...

Considerable positive weight will be given to proposals whereby it is clear the proposal is genuinely community led and genuinely has community support. If these two elements are in place, then the Council is likely to approve the proposal, even if some elements of the scheme might conflict with wider Local Plan policies.

Normally the Council charges for formal pre-application planning advice, but we are willing to waive that charge for any genuine community-led proposal.

## Providing start-up funding

Putting supportive planning policies in place has been important in East Cambridgeshire, but backing it with financial support has also been significant. A £5,000 grant is available to new CLTs to help them with startup costs. It also has in place a revolving loan fund that provides up to £30,000 of pre-development loan finance for new CLT schemes, enabling them to work up projects for planning approval.

With a combined grants and loans budget of £90,000 for 2015/16 and a strong corporate commitment to seeing more CLTs emerge across the District, East Cambridgeshire is currently able to tailor its revenue budget to fit demand.

## Building a relationship with CLT East

CLT East is an umbrella organisation working across six counties in East Anglia and Eastern England. It is part of Foundation East, a Suffolk-based social enterprise. CLT East has been directly involved in the growth of CLTs in East Cambridgeshire, helping to establish and secure funding for the Stretham and Wilburton scheme in 2011 and having had a member of staff embedded within the Council for two days a week since 2013.

The close working relationship between CLT East and the Council has been the key to the growth of CLTs here. Five new CLTs have been set up in the last two years, something that may not have happened without dedicated support from a specialist agency.

*“The differences between local authorities in this area are enormous. Some do not seem to be too interested in community-led development; others are not sure, whilst in East Cambridgeshire, the Council could not be more enthusiastic or committed. There is certainly plenty of scope for replicating the experience here in similar rural locations throughout the region”.*

Debbie Wildridge Community Land Trust Development Manager CLT East

East Cambridgeshire’s planning policies have begun to unlock a development logjam in villages where growth was needed and affordable homes are at a premium. Landowners were holding onto their land in expectation of rising values following a relaxation of planning requirements and local communities believed any new homes would not benefit local people. Rural exception site development was largely at a standstill and few affordable homes were being built. That is now beginning to change.

There is a refreshing can-do attitude in the local authority which is encouraging CLT growth...

*“The Local Plan policy is working and more CLT schemes are beginning to come through now. Our ‘Seeing is Believing’ approach is paying off. But we may need to introduce more flexibility into the Supplementary Planning Document before final approval; our viability assessment is a little restrictive and can impose additional development costs on CLTs; it is something we will be looking at in the future”.*

Emma Grima Director of Commercial and Corporate Services East Cambridgeshire District Council

The Council has recently published a useful Guidebook for Communities that are interested in community-led development, entitled *What will you build in your community?*

## Next steps

The Council is currently working up plans to establish its own trading company which it is hoping to launch in 2016. Although the details are still being finalised, it is likely to provide a range of commercial services to help CLTs deliver more housing and community assets tailoring development packages to each community. East Cambridgeshire’s unique approach to community-led development is certainly one to watch.

More information from:

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## THE CAPITAL'S FIRST COMMUNITY LAND TRUST



The St Clements Hospital site in Mile End, London

### The basics

<b>Lead body:</b>	East London Community Land Trust
<b>Partners:</b>	London Citizens (part of Citizens UK) Greater London Authority Linden Homes Oak Foundation Big Potential
<b>Timescale:</b>	CLT campaign began in 2004; first homes will be completed in 2016
<b>Key features:</b>	Former hospital owned by GLA Part of a 252 home development
<b>Main outcomes:</b>	23 shared ownership homes on CLT leased land

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Developers, local authorities, campaign groups, local trusts and community-based organisations

**KEY MESSAGE:** Truly affordable housing and genuine community involvement is possible even in the hottest of housing markets. It's hard, but worth it.

East London Community Land Trust is one of the first urban community land trusts (CLTs). It is building 23 permanently affordable homes for low cost shared ownership, as part of a 252 dwelling redevelopment of a former hospital site in Mile End. The CLT homes are due to be completed in stages by the end of 2016.

St Clements is a former hospital, closed in 2005, and before that was a Victorian workhouse. The site and buildings were transferred to English Partnerships in 2008, but initial attempts to find a development partner to regenerate the site came to nothing. A new planning brief was drawn up in 2010 and when English Partnership's assets transferred to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) in the same year, a new procurement process began.

A high level of community involvement, not just in the development process but also in the on-going management of the site post development, was a key requirement of the new planning brief. It was something that the Greater London Authority retained when it took on the HCA London Region's responsibilities in 2012.

### A successful community campaign

East London CLT was born out of a successful campaign by Citizens UK (formerly London Citizens), who were committed to finding a different way of providing homes in East London that would be both genuinely affordable and driven by local people.

Initially focused on securing permanently affordable homes on the Olympic Park in Stratford, immediate interest turned to the St Clements Hospital site when this opportunity re-emerged in 2010. The aim was to secure a stake for the emerging CLT on the site and ensure community ownership and management of the asset. One event run by Citizens UK attracted 2000 people and an array of senior national politicians during the 2010 election campaign.

Success came in 2011 when the delivery partner tender included a requirement that 23 of the 252 homes to be provided on the site should be for a community land trust, albeit for sale rather than rent. The CLT worked alongside housebuilder Linden Homes and Peabody Trust (tasked with providing 51 homes for affordable rent) to put in the winning submission.

East London CLT has been well supported by professionals, some working at risk, but the main initial financial support came through the Oak Foundation and Big Potential. The former, an international charitable body, provides grants for housing and homelessness initiatives in the UK.

The 2013 Shuffle Festival, organised by the CLT and curated by Danny Boyle, opened up St Clements for community use for the first time since 1849. It helped to strengthen the area's community spirit and did much to raise the profile of the CLT across London.



A Citizens UK campaign rally outside St Clements Hospital



The 2013 Shuffle Festival at St Clements Hospital

East London CLT now has an active Board with 14 individuals and many affiliated local groups.

*“We have brought together two important ingredients for community-led housing development in cities – a bottom up mass movement of people to apply pressure for change; and a collection of talented and committed professionals who were prepared to back us with their time and money to help turn our ideas into reality”.*

Calum Green Communities Director East London Community Land Trust

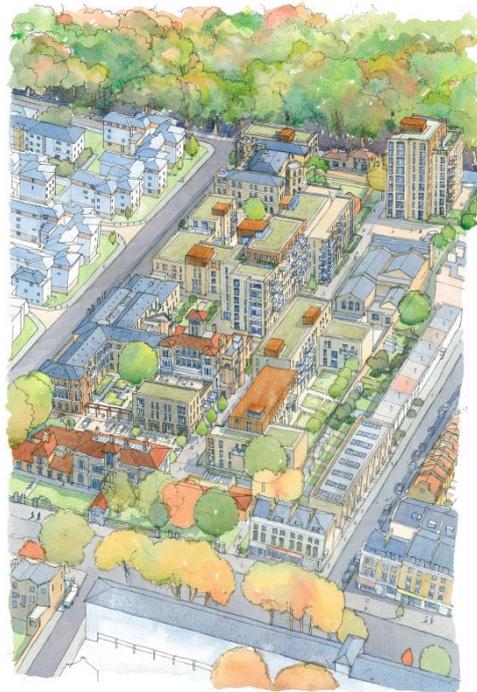
## **A complex development and management package**

The 4.5 acre St Clements Hospital site is not an easy one to redevelop. Two of its buildings are Grade 2 listed and the site sits within a Conservation Area. The requirement to include a significant element of community engagement, ownership and management has also presented a significant challenge to everyone involved.

As a result, the community element of the project extends well beyond the community land trust. Local residents have been heavily involved in the overall design process, with community architects John Thompson and Partners. 350 people have taken part in community planning workshops.



An architect's impression of the St Clements redevelopment



The mechanism for community ownership of the site has now been finalised. The freehold, currently held by the Greater London Authority, will pass initially to Linden Homes for the development phase and then on to the Ricardo Community Foundation – a charity specifically set up, with representatives from all the tenures, including the CLT. Unlike most other community land trusts, it will have a 125 year lease on its land with the Foundation, rather than freehold ownership.

The Foundation's activities are ring-fenced to the four political wards surrounding the St Clements site. It will collect ground rent and provide grants to community projects within its boundaries. It is expected to distribute between £30,000 and £40,000 a year for community benefit.

### **Permanently affordable homes**

Providing genuinely affordable homes in London and keeping them affordable in perpetuity presented a formidable challenge for the CLT and its advisors. Working alongside Linden Homes, they came up with a solution never before tried in the UK. This is how it works:

- The developer builds 23 homes for the community land trust
- The CLT buys each home as it is completed, on a 'turnkey' basis, with funding from commercial lenders, but immediately sells on to a pre-selected shared-owner and repays the loan
- The sale cost of each CLT shared home is directly linked to median incomes in Tower Hamlets, not their market value
- The 'gap' between the market value of the CLT homes and the sale price to the CLT home owners is funded by cross subsidy from the 178 homes for market sale

- An independent panel, working for the CLT, selects future home-owners, based on their housing need, local connection and ability to secure a mortgage
- Each future shared owner raises their own mortgage finance, with help from the CLT
- The CLT retains a share in the equity of each CLT home in perpetuity (the exact percentage is not determined until the point of sale)
- The CLT shared-owner can sell the property back to the CLT at any time in the future, but only at a price linked directly to rises in median incomes since they purchased it. The CLT then sells it on again at this price, retaining a percentage share.

This arrangement means that a shared-owner buying into a CLT property is trading an up-front subsidy for a diminished financial return when they sell. It removes speculation from the market and keeps all 23 homes permanently affordable by local people.

In practice, with house values rising rapidly in East London, the CLT expects that the initial sale price of its homes will be between one third and one quarter of the market sale homes on the site.

### Support from public authorities and the developer

The redevelopment of St Clements Hospital and the inclusion of a community land trust as part of the mix would not have been possible without the active support of the public authorities and the selected housebuilder, plus the community-based approach to design and development. The project won a National Housing Award in 2014.

As well as the Greater London Authority, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets has also been working closely with the CLT on the selection of its shared-owners, to ensure its own lettings and nomination arrangements are complied with.

*“The GLA have been very helpful throughout the development of the scheme. They have embraced the CLT concept despite some initial scepticism that we could make it work”*

Calum Green Communities Director East London Community Land Trust



Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, launches the CLT development in 2014

*“St Clements is a unique site and it has been such an interesting project to help deliver. The CLT aspect is something that has brought lots of interest because of the revolutionary model being adopted. As lead partner in the project, we are proud to be spearheading this venture, as it will most certainly spur others to consider this innovative way of delivering homes for local people, at a price they can afford.”*

Graham Bridgman, Land Director at Linden Homes

The St Clements Hospital scheme is a tremendous example of how public authorities, developers and a local community can work together to deliver an innovative mixed tenure scheme on a disused brownfield site. But it is much more than that; it is a development that will provide significant lasting benefits to the local Mile End community, through its permanently affordable CLT homes and long-term grant income for other community initiatives. St Clements should provide a valuable template for other large-scale development projects across the country.

More information from:

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## SUPPORTING INNOVATION AND DELIVERY: THE NORTH EAST COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT NETWORK



North East Community Led Development Network Steering Group meeting, planning 2016 Network meetings and activities

### The basics

<b>Location:</b>	Gateshead, Tyne and Wear
<b>Sponsoring body:</b>	Homes and Communities Agency (North East)
<b>Timescale:</b>	Initiated in 2011; on-going
<b>Key stakeholders:</b>	Community-led housing groups Local authorities Housing associations Financial lenders National support organisations Local academics Housing and community consultants

**Target audience:** New networks; existing community-led organisations; regional Homes and Communities Agency bodies

**Key message:** Proactive peer-to-peer learning helps create fertile ground for community-led initiatives and helps to deliver growth in the sector

The North East is the only region in England that has an active network bringing together a wide range of organisations and individuals involved in community-led housing development. It is proving to be a valuable asset and one that could be replicated elsewhere.

### Getting started

It was the launch of the Homes and Communities Agency's 2011-2015 Affordable Homes Programme that kick-started the Network. The Agency had ring fenced a small part of its capital investment for community-led housing development, and the North East region was keen to build on the success of a community development trust scheme on Holy Island in Northumberland, completed in 2010.

Unsure about the appetite amongst communities and its stakeholders, the Gateshead-based regional office of the Agency ran a full day workshop to explain the new national guidance on community-led housing development and find out who might be approaching the Agency for capital funding. 30 participants came from across the region, each completing a simple proforma explaining their interest. It proved to be the catalyst for a strategic commitment in the region.

The success of this event, coupled with a personal interest in community-led housing development amongst some senior HCA staff in the region, encouraged the agency to establish a database and invite those interested to attend regular Network meetings. Much discussion followed about what this new group might look like and what its remit should be. HCA staff took the lead on organising and hosting the meetings, keeping the database updated and drafting a suitable terms of reference.

Quarterly Network meetings have been held since 2012, usually attended by between 15 and 25 people. The 2013 Community Led Project Support Fund, administered by the Homes and Communities Agency, encouraged a new raft of interest and injected momentum into the Network. Peer-to-peer learning became a key aspect of Network meetings.

Guest speakers have covered a wide range of community-led housing topics, including collaborative working between housing associations and community land trusts; ecological co-housing in Leeds and community self-build in Newcastle.

The Network has also run two half-day Finance Seminars, in 2013 and 2015, the latter bringing together more than 50 people to discuss new opportunities for financing community-led housing development. These followed work with Newcastle City Council on organising a self-build event in 2012. There are plans to host similar events for town and parish councils in the region, to encourage them to support or initiate community-led housing projects through their work on parish and neighbourhood plans.

### **Towards independence and sustainability**

Four years on, the North East Network is now well established. There are 168 members on the HCA's database, 42 of whom can be considered 'active' participants – those who come to the quarterly meetings and/or events. Of these, twelve are community organisations directly involved in housing development projects, five are national 'umbrella' bodies working in this field, six are local authorities, three are housing associations, five are voluntary sector organisations, alongside two academic institutions and a handful of individuals.

The Network has been particularly useful for local authorities that have often found it difficult to kick-start community-led housing initiatives in their areas.

*"I joined the North East Community Led Development Network in April 2014, and am one of two local authority representatives on the Steering Group, as well as attending the quarterly Network meetings.*

*Part of my role at Newcastle is to develop the Council's approach to self-build and community-led housing, and provide a contact point for queries and activity in the City. I recognised that the Network was a rich source of information, and it provided an opportunity to share and discuss plans for Newcastle.*

*The wide range of knowledge within the Network is helping to inform the development of our policies and identify barriers that need to be addressed, and we have contributed to information sharing events which have benefited residents and organisations in Newcastle. It has also generated a regular meeting between North East local authorities to consider national developments and best practice, and to work towards a consistent and accessible approach to self-build and community-led housing in our region".*

Cath Scaith Housing Delivery Officer Investment & Development Directorate Newcastle City Council

The Network has now moved away from being driven and facilitated by the Homes and Communities Agency, towards something more independent and sustainable. A small Steering Group of Network members now plans each agenda and rotates the chair. Meetings are hosted by a variety of organisations around the region.

The lack of any revenue support remains a challenge, however. Whilst the Homes and Communities Agency is happy to continue providing the secretariat role, the scope for moving the Network up to the next level – running more seminars, bringing in guest speakers, peer-to-peer learning visits – requires a small revenue budget that is currently not available.

## Spreading the word

In 2013, the Homes and Communities Agency's Yorkshire and Humberside region explored the possibility of setting up a similar network. Although it was perhaps too early then, the idea is now back on the agenda for 2016, with a number of community-led development initiatives already supporting each other across the region. Regional staff there are likely to use a similar approach to kick starting a network, by running an event bringing together active organisations and their support agencies, focusing on what works in the region and sharing learning.

Elsewhere, although there is regular dialogue centrally and between HCA regions about community-led housing, nothing similar to the North East Network has yet emerged.

Bill Carr, Head of Area for the HCA's North East Region explains how the Network has helped to empower communities to tackle housing issues...

*"The North East Network began life as a collection of land trusts, individuals, cooperatives, academics and others all interested in doing something about providing decent, affordable homes in their home towns and villages across North East England.*

*From its beginnings in 2011 the Network has shared information and engaged with lenders, planners, the Homes and Communities Agency, local authorities, housing associations and housing experts to build a substantial base of knowledge with a view to supporting local communities to realise their dreams of building homes in their own communities.*

*Though the Network is relatively small, successes have been substantial. New homes have been provided in the Tyne Valley, North Northumberland, Gateshead and South East Northumberland. Empty homes and commercial premises have been brought back into use across the region. Community trusts have bought land, issued bonds and raised funding to support new homes being built. Further homes are planned across other parts of the North East. Three new registered providers of affordable housing have been established and grant funding has been awarded from the Government's Affordable Homes Programme. Network members have given their time to advise emerging networks across other parts of Northern England in support of replicating this good practice.*

*All of this has been achieved with no revenue funding to support the Network. If ever there was an example of the 'Big Society' in action this is it. I congratulate them and wish them all good luck for the future".*

Bill Carr Head of Area Homes and Communities Agency North East Region

The North East Community-Led Development Network was set up to stimulate peer-to-peer learning and influence. Two of its founder members were Stocksfield Community Association Trading Arm (SCATA) and Glendale Gateway Trust. Both have pioneered some of the fundamental mechanisms that have led to successful community-led development in the region. Their willingness to share with others has undoubtedly helped to grow the sector here.

More information from:

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## BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING ASSOCIATION PARTNERSHIP



SCATA Directors Ineke Gjisber and Pete Duncan with Keith Loraine, Chief Executive, Isos Housing

### The basics

<b>Location:</b>	Stocksfield, Northumberland
<b>Lead body:</b>	Stocksfield Community Association Trading Arm (SCATA)
<b>Homes:</b>	4 flats and 3 bungalows new build
<b>Tenure mix:</b>	Affordable rent
<b>Capital funding:</b>	£930,000
<b>Revenue funding:</b>	£5,300
<b>Timescale:</b>	Completed July 2015
<b>Key partners:</b>	Isos Housing Homes and Communities Agency Northumberland County Council Broomley and Stocksfield Parish Council

**Target audience:** Housing associations and supportive local authorities

**Key message:** Positive partnerships with community organisations can deliver broad support amongst stakeholders for community-led development

Development partnerships between community groups and housing associations are a rarity in the north of England. An award-winning community-led initiative in a commuter village just 15 miles from Newcastle upon Tyne, where no affordable homes have been built for nearly 30 years, shows how a 'partnership of equals' can produce multiple benefits.

### Getting started

The roots of Stocksfield Community Association's Trading Arm (SCATA) go back to 2009 when the local Parish Plan made the case for creating a not-for-profit body that could do things for the village that could not be done by the Parish Council, and to do them in a way that recycled any surplus for direct community benefit. A Steering Group of local residents was established, holding its first meeting in 2011.

After much discussion, it was agreed that the local Community Association, which owns and runs the community centre in the village, should form a trading company. SCATA was registered in 2012 as a not-for-profit wholly owned subsidiary, operating as a Community Land Trust. With six Directors – all local residents – and a mix of skills and experience, SCATA then began looking for funding and opportunities for a first project.

Supported by a start-up grant from Northumberland County Council and on-going business mentoring from the Council's Social Enterprise unit, it was quickly agreed that the initial focus should be on affordable housing – a key Parish Plan priority. Two potential development sites emerged to give impetus to the project, both with unused buildings on overgrown land; one publicly owned and the other in the hands of a dormant charitable trust. Part of the deal with the latter was that all of the £100,000 land purchase money would be re-invested in sports facilities in the village.

## Making it happen

Lacking the experience to go it alone on their first project, SCATA turned to Isos, one of the North East's largest associations and proposed a community-led partnership. Isos had a good track record on community investment and, crucially, already managed around 45 affordable homes in the village – stemming from a council housing stock transfer in 1999. But they had not yet worked in partnership on a community-led housing scheme.

SCATA was supported by the County Council and the Homes and Communities Agency with ring fenced funding for community-led housing developments within its Affordable Homes programme.

With initial development proposals worked up and agreed, SCATA and Isos then embarked on a lengthy community engagement programme in the village. Whilst there was some resistance, many in the community showed strong support before the County Council's Planning Committee gave the scheme its unanimous backing.

The development was completed in July 2015. Nearly one hundred people applied for the seven tenancies through the County Council's Homefinder service. The SCATA development won the 2015 National Housing Award for Best Partnership.



Representatives of SCATA and Isos at the 2015 National Housing Awards presentation

## Key partners

SCATA has benefited from strong and sustained support from three key partners – Isos Housing, Northumberland County Council and the Homes and Communities Agency. Each has played a crucial role in helping to bring this project to fruition. They all recognise the huge added value that community-led initiatives like SCATA can bring to housing development in places like Stocksfield. Indeed, without community leadership and a genuine partnership, this scheme would never have happened.

*“This has been a really rewarding project to be involved with. There are so many villages across the North East that could benefit from this model of developing affordable homes and Stocksfield is lucky to have such committed people as the SCATA Directors to make this project happen”.*

Vince Walsh Development and Regeneration Manager Isos Housing

*“The completion of these homes is great news for local residents and I am really pleased that through our investment, Isos have managed to help the Community Land Trust achieve its ambitions. Seven new homes will make a real difference to the residents of a community like Stocksfield and will ensure that local people can afford to stay in their communities”.*

Karen Anderson Area Manager Homes and Communities Agency

This is a highly replicable project; indeed it took its inspiration from similar successful partnerships in South West England. SCATA now has plans for a second affordable housing scheme in the village.

More information from:

Norman Hooks SCATA and Stocksfield Community Association [njchooks@talktalk.net](mailto:njchooks@talktalk.net)

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## AN INNOVATIVE COCKTAIL OF FUNDING TO TACKLE RURAL EMPTY PROPERTIES



New Glendale Development Trust tenants of Roddam Dene House, Wooler

### The basics

<b>Location:</b>	Wooler, Northumberland
<b>Lead body:</b>	Glendale Gateway Development Trust
<b>Homes:</b>	9 flats
<b>Tenure mix:</b>	Affordable rent
<b>Capital funding:</b>	£799,000
<b>Timescale:</b>	Completed February 2015
<b>Key partners:</b>	Homes and Communities Agency Unity Trust Bank Wooler Parish Council Quaker Housing Trust Vinson Trust Clothworkers Foundation Northumberland County Council

**Target audience:** Local authorities and councils, financial lenders, private landowners and investors

**Key message:** Community-led housing developments are often able to lever in funding and support from a wider range of local organisations and individuals than mainstream schemes.

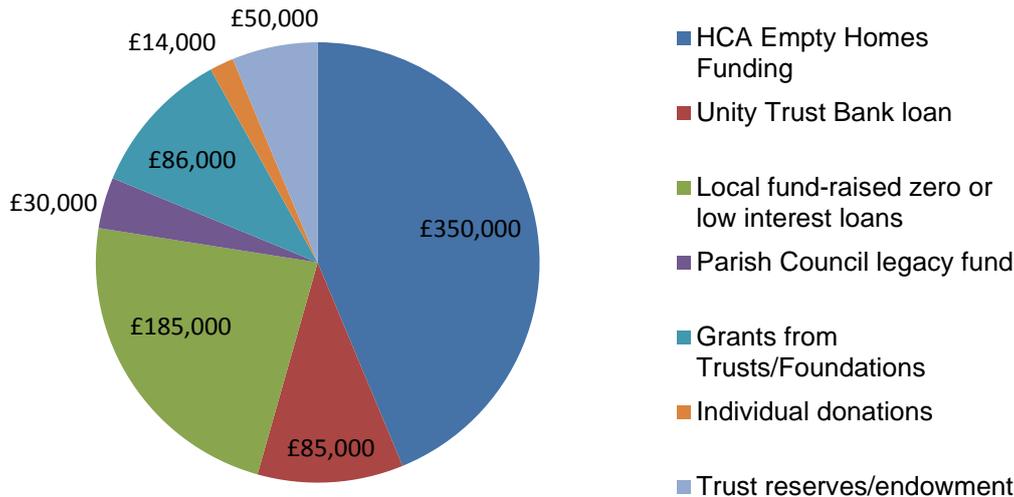
Glendale Gateway Development Trust began operating in 1996, focussed initially on the development and management of a community resource centre. It was supported initially by an asset transfer from Berwick Borough Council and European LEADER funding. Its direct interest in housing began in 2003.

Facing a significant problem of empty properties in Wooler town centre and inspired by the success of the community-led housing scheme on Holy Island, the locally-based Trust saw an opportunity to combine its interest in building up its capital asset base with tackling a major issue for the local community.

Keen to make as much use as possible of locally-generated finance, Glendale has since pioneered a cocktail of funding for its five community-led housing projects which has been both innovative and entrepreneurial. The Trust's latest project, an £800,000 conversion of two large buildings in Wooler town centre into nine affordable rented flats, includes:

- Empty Homes Programme funding from the Homes and Communities Agency
- A loan from Unity Trust Bank
- A contribution from a Parish Council legacy fund
- A community bond issue
- Grants from four trusts and foundations
- Local donations from individuals
- Glendale Trust's own reserves and an endowment fund

## The funding cocktail for Glendale's latest community-led housing scheme



### Launching a Community Bond

Glendale had seen an opportunity for raising capital finance locally before embarking on this development and had launched an innovative Community Bond issue. It wanted to show local people that future housing development depended on the Trust's ability to obtain interest-free loans. It was a significant success; offering £1000 bonds for three years with no interest payable and hoping to raise £100,000, the Trust actually pulled in £128,500 in six months.

Two local estate landowners bought up half the bonds, with the remainder taken up by the Trust's main target – individual local residents.

*"It's hard to put into words the admiration we have for what the Glendale Gateway Trust has achieved. The flats look to be of a very high standard and we are very pleased to have been able to support this affordable housing initiative through the Ford & Etal Estates' subscription to the Community Bond issue".*

James Joicey Ford and Etal Estates

### Overcoming barriers

Glendale's trustees had a cautious attitude to risk and were not keen to borrow money in the early days of their housing work. But they were willing to make use of their reserves, much of it generated by a capital receipt from the sale of a piece of land. In 2003 the Trust had bought a block of empty properties on the high street that included a large piece of developable land at the rear. This was largely achieved through a grant from the Northumberland Strategic Partnership but also made use of an interest free loan from one of the local landowner estates.

The initial reluctance to borrow began to change as the Trust's first housing schemes proved a success and confidence amongst Trustees grew. The Trust now has assets of nearly £2.5 million in Wooler and outstanding loans of just £285,000.

*"Our involvement in housing has really been a story of ups and down. Because of our deliberate focus on tackling privately owned empty properties, things haven't always gone according to plan, but we have now provided 18 much needed affordable homes in the town with what must be a unique mix of funding. We have had tremendous support throughout from the Homes and Communities Agency and Northumberland County Council."*

Tom Johnston, Glendale' Trust's Director and Founder Member

Positive support from the County Council has helped to underpin the Trust's work.

*“The County Council positively supports Community Land Trusts such as Glendale Gateway Trust. They provide much needed affordable housing tailored to meet the specific needs of the communities in which they are based. Wooler is a key market town and service centre within the County Council's Core Strategy.*

*We provided support and advice to the Trust to help them develop nine new homes in redundant buildings in the town. Lead officers in Planning and Housing and Housing Enablers bought into the vision and were able to work with the Trust from an early stage, contributing to the passage through planning, providing housing and financial advice and support and effectively providing a reference for the Trust in their bid to acquire a public house and hotel”.*

Ian Stanners Affordable Housing Officer Northumberland County Council

More information from:

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[www.wooler.org.uk/glendale-gateway-trust](http://www.wooler.org.uk/glendale-gateway-trust)

## A REGIONAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION WITH A STRONG ON-GOING COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT



Co-operative housing development underway in Redditch

### The basics

<b>Lead body:</b>	Redditch Co-operative Homes (part of the Accord Group)
<b>Active partner:</b>	Redditch Borough Council
<b>Timescale:</b>	Initiated in 2000; on-going
<b>Key features:</b>	5 independent, mainly new build neighbourhood co-operatives
<b>Main outcomes:</b>	More than 500 co-operative homes in management and development Emphasis on eco/sustainable schemes

**Target audience:** Large housing associations and local authorities

**Key message:** Community-led housing providers have a strong local focus and support the local economy, dovetailing with most local authority's corporate priorities.

New build development schemes for housing co-operatives are now a rarity in England, but not in the West Midlands Borough of Redditch. One of the region's largest housing association groups has been promoting co-operative housing development here for the past fifteen years, through one of its subsidiaries, Redditch Co-operative Homes (RCH).

*"The Accord Group has 13,000 homes across the West Midlands and a key part of our role has always been to promote, develop and support independent housing co-operatives, through two of our subsidiaries. Our on-going investment in co-operative housing development in Redditch has been one of our big success stories. We would like to see other housing associations following our lead and offering communities a real opportunity to provide and manage their own homes"*

Chris Handy Chief Executive Accord Group

The story behind Redditch Co-operative Homes is one of successful partnership between a local authority and a major housing association – not just to provide affordable homes, but to do so in a way that maximised local accountability and control.

## Getting started

Redditch is a former new town in the West Midlands, with a population of 85,000. Back in 1998, the Borough Council was becoming frustrated by its inability to build more council housing to meet local needs. Although housing associations had already built 800 homes in the Borough, none of these providers were locally based. Councillors felt that something different was needed.

The Council therefore took the highly unusual and unique step of running a competition to find a provider who would not only supply more affordable homes, but would also do it from a local base, on a democratic and accountable basis.

Following this process, it selected Accord as its development partner and secured agreement that it would set up a dedicated local organisation to support co-op development in the Borough – Redditch Co-operative Homes (RCH). Crucially, it also agreed to the transfer of four sites for co-operative development for a competitive price in different neighbourhoods.

This pioneering approach has since delivered approaching 450 co-operative homes across five neighbourhoods in the Borough, with a further 77 in the development pipeline. With a turnover of £2 million a year and just five staff, RCH operates within the Accord Group structure as a company limited by guarantee and has its own Board, on which each of the five neighbourhood co-ops are represented.

*“RCH has its own housing management staff and its own policies, but we buy in a range of central services from Accord, including their housing management IT systems, human resources advice and regeneration services. It’s a good model, giving us access to everything we need to ensure that our co-ops operate effectively, are able to provide new homes and get the best possible support and advice”*

*RCH is a thriving example of how giving local people the power to shape their communities can create safe and friendly neighbourhoods where people want to live”.*

*Carl Taylor Director Redditch Co-operative Homes*

## The Redditch co-op way

The five neighbourhood co-operatives are self-managing, fully-mutual co-ops – all tenants are members and all members are either existing or future tenants. They are also all registered providers with the Homes and Communities Agency. Between them they deliver a wide range of co-op housing provision – for older people, families and young people, with an increasing focus on eco and sustainable new homes.

New developments are financed by Accord Group, through Redditch Co-operative Homes, usually with finance from the Homes and Communities Agency and corporate funders, although some new homes have been financed by RCH surpluses and Section 106 funding through developers.

RCH has placed a special emphasis on low carbon, environmentally sustainable housing and, in 2015, an £8 million environmentally friendly co-op development of 79 homes won a national housing award. It was the largest closed panel low carbon timber frame housing scheme in the UK.



RCH Board members, staff and members of the Co-operative at the UKHA 2015 awards ceremony

Each neighbourhood co-op has a seven year lease on its properties which is long enough for the co-ops to grant a tenancy and get people to become tenant members, but short enough to avoid Homes and Communities Agency rules on disposal of housing association assets. All housing co-op properties are currently exempt from Right to Buy legislation.

RCH manages to maintain a high level of resident involvement, with more than half of co-operators active within their own co-ops. They have considerable influence over their housing schemes, from selecting contractors and consultants to shaping the design through 'Planning for Real' events and visits to other developments. They are also able to make detailed design choices to customise individual properties.



Award winning eco homes for Riverside Housing Co-op in Redditch

But the Redditch housing co-ops are not just about providing good quality, energy efficient homes with a high degree of tenant control. Over time, residents have been able to pass on their knowledge and experience to others and some have gained enough confidence to take on responsible roles in non-housing bodies such as becoming a school governor.

The co-ops have also made a commitment to use small local contractors for all of their repairs and maintenance work, to maintain and hopefully help create local jobs, whilst keeping money circulating in the local economy and minimising the amount leaking out into the wider region.

## A close working relationship with the local authority

Seventeen years after the initial competition, councillors in Redditch remain very supportive and enthusiastic about housing co-ops. They like the fact that people in their town are providing homes for themselves, making use of a locally-based support agency, backed by a strong housing provider. It is a model that works well for them. The Leader of the Council is also the current chair of RCH and a founder member of the organisation; it has clearly been important to have a co-op champion in the local authority.

That said, the Council does not particularly promote co-ops or other forms of community-led development within its housing strategy; it has yet to see co-operatives emerge in its own 6000-strong council housing stock. The Council does not provide any funding – capital or revenue – for the development of affordable housing or for co-ops. However it still supports development through releasing land at a significant discount for affordable housing, but now has very little land left in its ownership that is suitable for new housing.

Although it certainly sees Redditch Co-operative Homes as one of its preferred partners, no particular priority is given to it when deciding whether or not to support proposals coming forward from housing associations operating in the Borough.

Nevertheless, the Council's on-going support for co-operatives in general and RCH in particular has provided the platform for a significant investment in this form of community-led development and on a scale which is hard to find elsewhere in England.

*“The Borough Council strongly supports housing co-ops and Redditch Co-operative Homes is one of our preferred development partners. We were the driving force behind the establishment of RCH because we wanted a locally-based organisation that could deliver sustainable communities; community-led and local are both very important for this Council.*

*“Our experience with Redditch Co-operative Homes and Accord Group has been very positive – they are excellent partners. Although the requirement for tenants to take an active role in their co-ops can be problematic for some people, overall the co-op way has proved to be extremely popular. It's a definite plus-point for the Borough.*

Matthew Bough Housing Strategy and Enabling Team Leader Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Council

More information from:

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[www.rch.coop](http://www.rch.coop)

## THE PARTNERSHIP ROUTE TO COHOUSING



The Threshold Centre co-housing development

### The basics

<b>Lead body:</b>	The Threshold Centre, North Dorset
<b>Partners:</b>	Synergy Housing (part of Aster Group)
<b>Timescale:</b>	2004 - present
<b>Key features:</b>	A pioneering cohousing community created from refurbished farm buildings
<b>Main outcomes:</b>	7 owner occupied cottages, 2 shared ownership and 5 affordable rented flats + a common house and community market garden

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Housing associations, local authorities

**KEY MESSAGE:** Partnership working can deliver schemes that would otherwise never happen. Housing developments built around intentional communities have added value in generating high levels of self-sufficiency, and lead to high quality developments.

Cohousing schemes bring together like-minded individuals who collectively run their own housing. Each household has its own self-contained home, but residents come together to manage their community and share activities. It is a form of housing which helps to tackle alienation and isolation through a strong emphasis on neighbourliness.

The Threshold Centre was the first co-housing scheme in England to involve a partnership between a group of residents and a housing association, providing a mix of owner occupied, shared ownership and social rented homes.

### Getting started

The Threshold story started in 2004 when six single people came together to look for a place in Dorset where they could build a spiritual and environmentally sustainable community. They found a farmhouse with seven holiday cottages and two unused barns and agreed a purchase, using the sale of their own properties and mortgage finance to raise the £800,000 asking price.

Living together in the farmhouse initially, the group worked up proposals for providing 12 eco-homes from the existing buildings on the site, plus a learning centre - a reflection of all six having a background in education.

Securing planning approval proved a difficult task initially. The site lay outside the planning envelope of Gillingham in North Dorset and the local authority was not minded to approve an application that did not include a substantial social housing element.

The Group then embarked on a lengthy period of networking, lobbying and open days that helped to raise the co-ownership profile and secure important local support. It was a long haul. With help from a local councillor, it became clear that the group's initial proposals would have to change; social housing would need to be part of the mix and the farmhouse would better used as a communal building rather than a learning centre.

Five years after the group came together, planning permission was achieved.



A Threshold Co-Housing Open Day

## Partnering up

The key to securing planning approval lay in the group's direct approach to a local housing association. Synergy (now part of the Aster Group) had prior experience of working with local communities, particularly on supported housing and was attracted by the unusual nature of the group's proposals.

Working together, Synergy and Threshold brought forward new plans for 14 homes, including 5 for affordable rent and 2 for shared ownership, plus a common house and a community garden.

North Dorset Council not only approved them, but also provided £20,000 of capital to help fund the scheme. They also supported Synergy and Threshold by lobbying the Homes and Communities Agency to provide a higher than normal grant rate to cover abnormal scheme costs.

*"The standard HCA approach to schemes had to be amended to fit with a mixed development of co-owners, shared owners and tenants. The inclusion of various communal features and the cohousing model itself, presented additional complexities to standard HCA leases and tenancy agreements.*

*In some of the affordable units, the small footprint and other constraints of the existing building envelope, required compromises to achieve thermal performance, without loss of useable living space. Once funding was secured, there was a relatively short programme for scheme delivery in order to comply with the funding timetable. Various other factors associated with location, existing features and absence of mains services certainly upped the total scheme costs, all of which made this a challenging project to pull off.*

*The Threshold group was, however, very easy to work with. We set up a project team with them at an early stage and our Development Director joined their Board. Although none of the group had any building or technical experience they quickly got their heads around the key issues and were involved at every stage of the design and development process. We helped them secure a design and build contract for the whole scheme, even though Synergy was ultimately only to be directly involved in half of it".*

The development partnership has also enabled the Threshold Centre to achieve many of its environmental sustainability aims – particularly reducing waste and lowering its environmental footprint. The scheme includes a bio-mass heating system, a bio-digester, solar photovoltaics and a recycling system for water and waste.

The Centre runs regular courses on cohousing, community building and sustainable living, attracting individuals and groups from across the UK; they hold regular retreats for meditation and ‘gardening weekends’ on their one-acre community vegetable plot. They also have a car-sharing scheme.



Threshold members working in their community garden

## Managing a mixed tenure cohousing scheme

The success of the partnership with Synergy has extended well beyond the development phase into management. Tenancy selection for the affordable homes is a joint responsibility between Threshold and the housing association. Interested individuals who are registered with the Council’s Home Choice scheme usually spend a weekend at Threshold to see how it works and, if selected, their tenancy agreements with Synergy require a commitment to be involved in certain communal activities.

There were some initial concerns about how a cohesive group of co-owners would ‘fit’ with people coming into the Synergy properties, but these have proved to be unfounded.

*“Threshold is a very low maintenance scheme for Synergy. Everyone there works well together; they are a very self-sufficient group. The ethos is very important for everyone. We put in less management time on this scheme than we do on most of our others”.*

Hannah Trussler Neighbourhood Manager Synergy Housing (part of Aster Group)

The association’s role on Threshold’s board has been particularly valuable – something it has now stepped down from. It has combined protecting the landlord’s interest and those of its tenants, acting as an honest broker around changes to the shared ownership leases and service charges and explaining to senior staff in Aster Group how the project works.

*“The partnership with Synergy has been very successful. They have provided us with a lot of support and understood what we were trying to achieve. Having a senior officer on our Board was particularly valuable –it helped to iron out any misunderstandings and quickly resolve any problems”.*

Jane Stott Threshold Centre founder member



Co-owned housing at the Threshold Centre

The Threshold Centre is clearly a highly successful scheme that would not have come to fruition without a successful housing association partnership. In many ways it is unique, but that does not mean it is not replicable. The group is currently looking at a second co-housing scheme on a site adjacent to their successful development.

*“The earlier we get involved with communities that are interested, the easier and more cost effective it is for us, since we can help to streamline the processes from the outset. Recent changes to housing association funding and the switch of emphasis from affordable rent to low cost home ownership will certainly not make it easier to deliver schemes like this in the future.*

*Most of Aster’s development programme is comprised of much larger projects, which can deliver significant economies of scale. Despite the relatively small scale and high project management resource costs associated with these types of community-led developments, Aster remains very positive about supporting them. Not least this is because it is often the only way of providing much needed affordable homes in rural areas.”*

Chris Moglia Development Manager Synergy Housing (part of Aster Group)

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## CREATING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY-LED PARTNERSHIPS IN THE SOUTH WEST



Bradworthy Community Land Trust opening ceremony, Devon

**The basics**

<b>Lead body:</b>	Wessex Community Land Trust Project (WCLTP)
<b>Partners:</b>	Rural communities across Somerset, Devon and Dorset Housing associations Local authorities Parish Councils
<b>Timescale:</b>	Started in 2010; ongoing
<b>Key features:</b>	Support agency for more than 20 community land trusts
<b>Main outcomes:</b>	200 affordable homes at various stages of development

**Target audience:** Local authorities, housing associations, parish and town councils

**Key message:** Scaling up community-led development is not just about finance; it also depends on having strong support systems in place

The south west of England is something of a hot-bed of community-led development activity, with a strong focus on community land trusts. It is also a region that has led the way in developing a support infrastructure; ‘umbrella’ organisations that promote and sustain local initiatives and broker deals with interested housing associations and local authorities.

Wessex Community Assets, a social enterprise specialising in community ownership hosts the Wessex Community Land Trust Project (WCLTP). Covering mainly rural communities in Somerset, Devon and Dorset, its two self-employed associates have supported the development of 11 community land trusts over the past five years, with all but one of them providing affordable homes for rent in partnership with housing associations. A further ten schemes are currently in the pipeline.

**The umbrella role**

Small, community-led development organisations usually need support, particularly in their early stages. Without it, many potentially good projects never get off the ground or can spend many years struggling to reach their objective. Dedicated support agencies, or umbrellas, are an important way of providing this.

*“WCLTP began life in 2010 and since then the interest in community land trusts across Wessex has grown steadily, with strong support from local authorities and housing associations.*

*It was not an easy process in the early days; newly emerged Community Land Trusts found it very difficult to go it alone so we developed a partnership approach with housing associations to take the heavy lifting off them. It has proved to be an attractive option, with most of the CLTs we support going down this route.*

*As an umbrella organisation supporting CLTs we have needed to cover a large geographical area to be financially viable. Working across three counties is just about right for us. We have been keen to see other CLT umbrellas develop elsewhere. We have helped set one up in Lincolnshire and have close links with others that are now up and running in Cumbria, East Anglia and in Cornwall, which was the first”.*

Steve Watson Wessex Community Land Trust Project

CLT umbrellas like Wessex need pump-priming financial and organisational support from a variety of sources in their early days. In WCLTP’s case this came initially from central Government funding (via Carnegie UK) and then, for a year, from a number of local authorities and a national charity (the Tudor Trust). Once fully established, however, the aim is that they are self-financing through costs recovered on the successful CLT developments themselves.

## **The Partnership model**

The approach to community land trust development in Wessex is deliberately low-risk. Although each CLT finds the land and is then involved in the design and the tenancy allocation criteria, the responsibility for purchasing the site, developing, financing and managing the scheme lies with a housing association partner. The CLT has an option to buy the housing association out of its 125 year lease at any point in the future, assuming it can raise the funding.

WCLTP’s role is to help the CLT with set up, usually in conjunction with the local Parish Council and District Council, identifying a suitable site and negotiating a purchase, finding appropriate funding sources and matching the CLT to an appropriate housing association partner. The role also includes providing business planning and legal framework advice and training for CLT members. The umbrella’s costs are recouped from the housing association partner if the scheme goes ahead – most do.

Aster Group is one of four housing associations currently working with WCLTP on community land trust development. The others are Hastoe, Yarlington and Teign Housing. Although all of them follow the partnership model, each has a slightly different approach.

Aster manages 27,000 homes across central southern and south west England, employing 1500 staff and holding assets of over £1 billion.

*“As part of Aster’s commitment to building stronger communities we have been working in partnership with a number of community land trusts across the region to deliver affordable housing for local people. Within our development team we employ a project manager with specific responsibility for community-led development. Aster is committed to continue supporting Community Land Trusts, particularly in the more rural parts of the region where small scale, community-led development can often be the key to meeting local needs.”*

Amanda Williams Development Director Aster Homes

The partnership model seems to work very well. Aster has a collaboration agreement with WCLTP which currently runs until 2018 and despite the many problems facing housing associations at present, they will continue to support CLT development through this approach. Although it is not an income generator – most schemes only just about break-even - it is often the only way of providing affordable housing in rural communities and establishes a vehicle that is then ready to take on other assets if needed.



Briony Falch, a leading member of Christow CLT in Devon which is working with Teign Housing on land donated by Teignbridge District Council within the Dartmoor National Park, to develop 18 affordable homes to full passivhaus accreditation standards.

## Supportive local authorities

A number of local authorities have been particularly supportive of Community Land Trusts in the Wessex area, providing start-up funding to cover their legal costs, gifting land in some cases and adopting a flexible approach to tenancy allocations criteria. They know from experience that the community leadership of CLTs can often unlock small sites for affordable homes that would otherwise never be developed and some are now keen to see CLTs emerge in their larger towns, not just in rural villages.

They all recognise the importance of having a support agency in place to facilitate delivery. Rural Housing Enabling Officers, often employed jointly by neighbouring local authorities, have also helped to oil the wheels.

*“The work being done by the Wessex CLT Project has been absolutely key to delivering West Dorset Council’s commitment to providing affordable homes in rural communities. There is a huge interest in CLTs amongst councilors here and it is growing.*

*Although Wessex CLT is not funded by the Council - something that is hugely beneficial for us - we have done what we can to help with start-up grants through our Housing Initiative Funding pot and have made a capital contribution to one CLT’s passive house scheme.*

*Although our resources are limited and we don’t have any land to gift, what we have been able to do is be flexible in the way we make use of Section 106 agreements and by enabling CLTs to draw up and implement their own tenancy allocations policies around local residency requirements”.*

Catherine Bonnett former Rural Housing Enabling Officer West Dorset and Weymouth Councils



Members of Toller Porcorum CLT who worked with Aster Homes to build 6 affordable homes for rent and a Post Office. The scheme is in West Dorset and was supported by a startup grant from the Council. The CLT owns the land and will operate the Post Office.

## Emerging issues

Although the Homes and Communities Agency has been very supportive of CLT development in the South West to date, most CLTs here are not interested in becoming Registered Providers and going it alone without a housing association partner. Indeed some CLTs have put their developments on hold until firm decisions are made nationally by the Government and the housing association sector about extending the Right to Buy. They are only likely to go ahead if CLTs are given an exemption, enabling them to honour their commitment to providing affordable homes for local people in perpetuity.

Wessex expects reassurance to come in three ways:

- Section 106 Agreements on exceptions sites (to which the CLTs are parties) requiring the homes to be affordable in perpetuity;
- A clause in the lease with the housing association to prevent tenants being offered the Right to Buy their homes;
- 'CLT-held schemes' being identified by the Government and the National Housing Federation as being amongst those where tenants would be offered an alternative property to one on the scheme itself.

Changes to the way affordable homes are funded in future and a much reduced emphasis on rented provision also means that future CLT development is likely to require shared ownership and market-led housing in the mix to make affordable rented homes viable. While this is likely to be problematic on very small sites, cross-subsidy schemes are already appearing in Wessex's pipeline.

CLTs in Wessex have acquired some land from local authorities, but most sites have come from private landowners and have been treated as greenfield rural exception sites by planning authorities. Some of these sites have been in areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or a National Park where any form of development is highly sensitive.

*"Sometimes CLTs have aspirations, relating to the design of the homes, which are not financially viable. Wessex CLT is particularly useful as an honest broker in these situations. The association shares most information on an open-book basis and we also run sessions with CLTs to explain why some costly features can be impossible to include in the final design. To date we have always managed to reach a compromise which works for both the CLT and Aster."*

Karl Hine Project Manager (Community Housing) Aster Homes

Housing association support for Community Land Trust development in general and the Wessex CLT Project in particular is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. They are often the only way of providing much-needed new homes in many rural communities.

More information from:

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