

Chelmsford Local Plan
**Community Led
Housing**
Planning Advice Note

November 2022



Community Led Housing: Planning Advice Note

1. Background

1.1 Community-led housing (CLH) is where local people play a leading and lasting role in building new housing or bringing existing housing back into use.

1.2 Communities may be geographically defined and/or share demographic 'communities of interest' such as older people, key workers, or people who want to share some amenities.

1.3 The benefits of CLH are typically about sub-market affordable housing. They may also include the benefits of shared neighbourly living, healthier living and more environmentally sustainable living through empowerment and greater control over housing and development.

1.4 CLH expressly sets out to achieve these benefits, while more conventional housing does not. Benefits can be legally protected within a CLH organisation, as well as from outside through mechanisms such as leases and section 106 agreements.

1.5. The community-led housing sector can offer something for everyone – people on a range of different incomes; specific groups of people; people who want to rent or buy; for groups wanting to build new homes or to refurbish existing buildings.

1.6. It comprises a wide range of ownership, occupancy and management models including (but not limited to) Community Land Trusts (CLTs), housing co-operatives, cohousing and self-help housing.

1.7. CLH can come about for several reasons as well as in different ways. CLH can be adapted and moulded to create bespoke solutions that remedy issues and factors that have led to groups forming.

1.8. Generally, there are three main routes to delivery for CLH:

1.8.1. **Group-led:** grassroots 'start-up' groups responding to housing need or demand, or people seeking to deliver their own homes.

1.8.2. **Extension of community-based activity:** existing community-based organisations with local roots deciding to provide housing in addition to their current activities, or increase their existing provision, for and on behalf of the local community.

1.8.3. **Developer-Community partnership:** a local authority, landowner, housing association or small builder wanting to provide housing that benefits the local area in perpetuity. They access community-led housing expertise to recruit 'founder members' from within the community and support them to take over ownership, stewardship and/or management of the homes, or they may support an existing housing organisation to deliver their ambition.

1.9. Community-led housing proposals are not a single form of development, but they should be able to demonstrate the following:

1.9.1. meaningful community engagement and consent occurs through the development process. The community does not necessarily have to initiate and manage the process, or build the homes themselves, though some may do;

1.9.2. the local community group or organisation owns, manages, or stewards the homes in a manner of their choosing; and

1.9.3. the benefits to the local area and/or specified community must be clearly defined and legally protected in perpetuity.

1.10. Meaningful community engagement and consent cannot be achieved by consultation alone. Community engagement and consent should be represented by:

1.10.1. Citizen control – citizen leadership in the entire process. The local community should be able to influence the strategic direction of the CLH project. Where there are professional partner groups involved, it is important to demonstrate that the local community group has influence over major decisions.

1.10.2. Delegation – citizens hold a clear majority of seats on committees with delegated powers to make decisions. Groups should be able to demonstrate that all members of the local community have been encouraged to become members and/or play an active part in their work.

1.10.3. Partnership – decisions are shared. There are clear management policies and procedures in place, particularly to deal with conflict and allocation of resources.

2. Purpose

2.1. The purpose of this Planning Advice Note is to encourage learning and understanding of CLH in the development industry and enhance the role that communities can have in influencing increased provision of CLH.

2.2. With resources at a premium, and a programme already in place for available land in the ownership of the Council, making new sites available and provision of resource to enable others to build is a key challenge. However, this does not prevent the Council playing a key role in promoting and enabling CLH to deliver positive outcomes for its citizens.

3. Support for CLH

Eastern Community Homes

3.1. The different types of support currently on offer are summarised below.

3.2. Eastern Community Homes (ECH) is an independent, not-for-profit hub for community-led housing in the East of England.

- 3.3 ECH provides tools and support for groups interested in affordable CLH including:
- 3.3.1. Help to get started – answering questions and assistance to find ways to create affordable homes through independent advice, tools and options.
 - 3.3.2. Governance – help to identify who should be involved, what formal constitution a group should take, membership and board roles.
 - 3.3.3. Business planning – identifying resource requirements, roles and responsibilities and a roadmap to achieve long term goals.
 - 3.3.4. Funding – help to review development funding options and pre-planning concept work.
 - 3.3.5. Development – support groups with carrying out Housing Needs Surveys to assess the scale of need and characteristics required in a development. Identify what skills and experience groups need and when they need them, plus help to get planning permission.
 - 3.3.6. Communication and marketing – help to develop a communications strategy to identify key stakeholders and work out how to maximise community support and involvement.
- 3.4. A CLH advisor can give you or your group bespoke support and will work closely in partnership with the Council. This service also connects groups to a network of technical advisors and housing associations.

Neighbourhood Planning

- 3.5. Neighbourhood planning provides an opportunity for communities to include CLH and other kinds of community-led development as part of the Neighbourhood Plan for their area.
- 3.6. Town and parish councils, or other organisations can take the lead in creating neighbourhood development plans, community plans and orders for planning in their area. Neighbourhood development plans and other community plans or orders can become part of the Local Plan, with equal legal status.
- 3.7. A Neighbourhood Plan helps communities make decisions on what type of housing they need, where it should be built and who should occupy it. CLH can be a natural outcome from a Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.8. The Council supports communities to create these plans and make decisions at key stages.
- 3.9. There are currently **six neighbourhood plans in development and two made in the Chelmsford** area.

Planning Policy

- 3.10. We adopted the **Chelmsford Local Plan 2013-2036** in May 2020. In it we include planning policies we use to decide planning applications.

3.11. Policy DM1 C states that within all developments of more than 100 dwellings the Council will require 5% self-build homes.

3.12. Section 4 of the **Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document**, includes CLH within the types of self-build and custom build projects listed in paragraph 4.11.

3.13. Policy DM2 B allows development on sites that would not normally be used for housing where it meets a need for local affordable housing in perpetuity. The resulting low site values and the practice of developing these schemes with the full engagement of the community means they lend themselves to CLH.

3.14. The Council has started a **review of the adopted Local Plan**. At the time of publication of this note, the Issues and Options consultation has concluded. This consultation highlights four areas we may explore for new or significantly altered local policies that could incorporate a stronger planning policy platform for CLH. These include:

3.14.1. Considering whether it is appropriate to include a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas – National Planning Policy requires strategic policy-making authorities such as Chelmsford City Council to establish a housing requirement figure for their whole area, which shows the extent to which their identified housing need can be met over the plan period. Within this overall requirement, strategic policies should also set out a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas which reflect the overall strategy for the pattern and scale of development and any relevant allocations.

3.14.2. Considering allocating more smaller sites to meet the need to identify land to accommodate at least 10% of the overall housing requirement on sites no larger than one hectare – CLH can add to the diversity of the housing offer which this National Policy requirement is designed to achieve.

3.14.3. Consider allocating new affordable housing sites adjacent to defined settlement boundaries if this would enable the delivery of more affordable housing – as with Policy DM2 B currently, the resulting low site values may lend themselves to CLH.

3.14.4. Considering whether the threshold for affordable housing needs to be the same as the national standard (10 dwellings). In some instances this might only generate a very small on-site affordable housing requirement that could be more attractive to a CLH group (if established) than a Registered Provider, depending also on wider considerations of the latest assessments of housing need and the Council's statutory housing duties.

3.15. In addition, the methodology for the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment for 2022 which we use to assess sites nominated by landowners, promoters and developers when developing/reviewing Local Plans, has been amended to assess the sustainability of a site in terms of its proximity to established amenities rather than in relation to Defined Settlement Boundaries and Urban Areas.

Chelmsford Garden Community

3.16. Chelmsford Garden Community is a key part of our Local Plan. The site will create a community of around 10,000 new homes and include new employment opportunities in north-east Chelmsford.

3.17. The Garden Community is made up of three key areas, Beaulieu, Channels and north-east Chelmsford (Strategic Growth Site 6 identified in the Local Plan). The Beaulieu and Channels neighbourhoods are consented for 4,350 new homes and already under construction. The further Strategic Site Allocation (north-east Chelmsford) in the Local Plan is for around 5,500 new homes with 3,000 homes for delivery in the plan period, with the potential for a further 2,500 post-2036.

3.18. **Chelmsford Garden Community** will meet one of the key Garden City Principles of community ownership of land and long-term stewardship of assets. A Community Stewardship Assessment will support the planning and development of Chelmsford Garden Community by maximising the opportunities to deliver sustainable growth whilst creating a well-connected community.

3.19. Beaulieu has Land Management arrangements in place with the Land Trust, a national Land Management Trust charity, which is responsible for managing open green spaces at Beaulieu (including Sustainable Drainage Systems SUDs). Once developed and in acceptable condition, they safeguard and maintain those on behalf of and in partnership with the local community.

3.20. There is also the Beaulieu Community Centre located in the neighbourhood centre. Managed by the Beaulieu Community Trust, consisting of representatives from the Parish council, Beaulieu church and local residents. The Land Trust has a dedicated community engagement officer based on site who acts as the main point of contact for resident engagement and works alongside business and community groups.

3.21. The site promoter for Channels is also formally setting up the Channels Community Interest Company which will offer a structure intended to allow residents to have greater involvement in the management of the spaces within this area of the development.

3.22. Long-term stewardship can go beyond the management of green space to cover a wide range of community assets, including the active and positive management of everything from arts provision to commercial estates and utility companies, as well as housing.

3.23. A comprehensive single Stewardship Management Body will be established for the area covered by the Strategic Site Allocation in the Local Plan to develop these principles and projects further. This will include opportunities for existing management arrangements at Beaulieu and Channels to be assessed in the round with future arrangements.

Funding

3.24. Funding is available to groups at every stage of the community-led housing journey up to when a project is complete. See the funding page of **Community Led Homes** for a range of possible grants and lenders at different stages of a project.

3.25. CLH schemes do have a different financial viability profile to conventional housing delivery. If providing affordable housing they will have lower income levels and their limited asset base pushes up the cost of borrowing, resulting in higher costs. Where multiple community benefits are proposed on a site, this will also contribute to higher development costs.

Site Identification

3.26. Land is at a premium in Chelmsford and the need to maximise its potential to support a programme of affordable housing for rent provision is of utmost priority. Therefore, the Council cannot be a provider of discounted land regarding its role in supporting CLH.

3.27. There are instances where the Council can identify its own land as surplus and suitable for disposal and this can be accessed by organisations for CLH schemes.

3.28. There are key statutory requirements that need to be considered where the Council dispose of land. In all cases disposals will need to follow the appropriate legislation and the Councils constitutional and financial regulation and executive decision-making processes.

3.29. The review of the Local Plan offers an opportunity to strengthen the role of CLH adjacent to defined settlement boundaries, through smaller site allocations and potentially include a Housing Requirement for designated neighbourhood areas.

4. Concepts

4.1. The community group or organisation can own, manage, or steward the homes in whichever way they decide to. Some of the different approaches are summarised below.

Community Land Trusts (CLTs)

4.2. CLTs are legal entities set up by communities to provide and protect assets of community values like affordable housing.

4.3. They range in size, can be rural and urban and provide a variety of housing tenures as well as other community facilities.

4.4. A CLT is a not-for-profit organisation - any profits go back into the organisation to be used for a new project for the CLT.

4.5. There is more information available from the [National Community Land Trust Network](#).

Housing Co-operatives

4.6. A housing co-operative is a housing organisation that is controlled, managed and owned by its members.

4.7. Co-operative housing organisations may own and/or manage their homes; can be large or small; can be developments where people live together or a close group of separate homes; may have a variety of different ways of achieving their objectives.

4.8. There is more information available from [The Confederation of Co-operative Housing](#).

Cohousing

4.9. Cohousing is a design methodology used by intentional communities to create spaces that promote connectivity and togetherness. Each household has a private home as well as a shared community space. Residents come together to manage their community, share activities, and eat together.

4.10. Cohousing groups can welcome people or families of all ages and backgrounds. However, they may cater to certain groups of people with a common interest.

4.11. There is more information available from the [UK Cohousing Network](#).

Self-build and Custom build, Self-Finish and Self-help housing

4.12. Many community-led projects are self-build, as locals often do the organising and some of the building on their own.

4.13. Self-build projects are where someone directly organises the design and building of their own home. It may include choosing a design and doing most of the building work themselves or arranging for someone to build a home for you.

4.14. Self-help housing is where empty properties are refurbished and brought back into use, creating opportunities for training and volunteering.

5. Delivery Methods

5.1. When it comes to the building or renovation, CLH can be secured through different methods.

Community self-build

5.2. This is where groups of ordinary people learn new skills and construction methods to build homes.

Self-finish

5.3. Self-finish is where residents are provided with the shell of a home to complete themselves. This process gives residents the chance to learn new skills and save on the cost of the property as their hours of labour are taken into account and used as a discount from the final price.

Hire contractors

5.4. CLH groups have the option to hire a contractor to carry out the build of their homes.

Housing Associations

5.5. Some CLH groups partner with a Housing Association (also known as Registered Providers). Housing Associations have expertise in housing development and long-standing relationships with contractors.

6. Examples

6.1. There are several examples of CLH nationally and in the Eastern region. Further information can be obtained from the below links:

Lavenham Community Land Trust
Stretham & Wilburton CLT, Cambridgeshire
Boadhempston CLT, Devon
Cannock Mill Cohousing, Essex
New Ground Co-housing, High Barnet
Yorspace Cohousing, York
Bunker Coop, Brighton

7. Key Documents

Chelmsford Local Plan (2020)

7.1. Policy DM1 C sets out that within all development of more than 100 dwellings the Council will require 5% self-build homes.

7.2. Paragraph 8.5 of the Local Plan acknowledges that the development of self-build properties by individuals or community groups can contribute to the need for additional housing and provide a more diverse housing stock.

Planning Obligations SPD (2021)

7.3. Paragraph 4.11 of the Planning Obligation SPD recognises that CLH projects can be delivered in a variety of ways.

Chelmsford Housing Strategy 2022-2027

7.4. The Strategy includes an action to develop community-led housing partnership working with Eastern Community Homes to meet the housing needs of specific local groups who may otherwise be marginalised by more conventional developments.

8. Key Contacts

8.1. For more information on CLH, please contact:

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