

Headlines from Community Led Housing Think Tank

6th -7th February 2018 at Trafford Hall

1. **There are many different models of community led housing.** There is a general agreement on the need for a clear, **legal framework** for community led housing that is fluid, enough to pioneer micro-projects that inspires other people to take action.
2. Keeping **access to community led housing open** to reach low income groups is a very important principle. There is a danger of creating ‘little ghettos of likeminded people’ as some participants described it. It is fundamentally important to stay open to the wider community and make sure that all groups are inclusive. This requires real commitment. If there is wider community involvement and support, it reduces local opposition and NIMBYism. It broadens the focus away from the narrow interests of the group to include those who most need housing.
3. The government has announced a **Community led Housing Fund of £60 million per annum**, of which £20m is reserved for the creation of regional hubs to support new groups; the rest will be used for grants for small housing organisations to help them gain planning permission and to build. Will it be spent well? Will the drive for numbers and speed undermine the principle of community led housing? There is a fear that larger, stronger social landlords may secure most of the money.
4. **Current housing provision is failing many groups**, making it attractive to “do something yourself”, which can set off a virtuous circle – help others, involve community and reduce costs. **Many active groups form out of frustration with the failures of the existing system.** Private housing is no longer seen as the only answer. Community led housing, either renting or part owning, offers an alternative route and the new fund is supposed to help these groups. It taps community energy and on a small scale it can work in small areas where big providers aren’t interested.
5. **Community Led Housing is similar to most small Housing Associations in their origins, with a small, community based focus which listens to residents and responds to local needs.** There are still many community-based housing associations that operate at grassroots. It is important to include these within the community led housing field.
6. **Community led housing can be very useful in offering support to vulnerable people.** Community led housing helps to mix the caring and carers with those who need care. It can also encourage intergenerational contact. “Co-housing is a lovely patient ideal” which can do

this. Community housing promotes mutual aid, which ensures support. The Camphill model of housing and care, where carers and cared for share a community on equal footing is a model that is much admired.

7. On the other hand, **shared living in a co-operative house can become difficult** where people want or need their own space. There can be problems if one 'unbearable, uncooperative character' prevents harmonious living arrangements. Sometimes it is unnecessary to ensure more individual space within a shared structure.
8. Giving people a **limited equity stake can prevent the breakup of co-operatives** while giving members some autonomy. It's important to not fully own your 'share' of a community housing scheme, as it then becomes unaffordable for the next generation to secure access. By holding some equity collectively for the long-term, it becomes possible to sell your share back to the organisation and the next person can buy the minimum equity.
9. **Community led housing can evolve from community campaigning** e.g. against some threat such as the demolition of low cost homes. Charteris Road in Finsbury Park is an early example of this (1976); West Kensington and Gibbs Green, London, are current examples. They illustrate that **community led housing can involve a whole area where everyone's homes are affected** and the situation requires joint action. Both of these examples of community led housing stem from Council demolition plans. Community led housing can have much wider benefit for the whole community, even if only a small minority are actively involved.
10. **Community led housing relies on volunteers, but also on professionals.** It is important for professionals not to forget that people on low incomes in low paid jobs may have less capacity or time for close involvement than professionals, who often have more flexible working arrangements. It is also important to recognise that **professional skills are necessary for building work, finances, legal structures, and planning.** Professionals who offer to put in free time can make community led housing affordable. Sometimes groups are formed with professionals involved from the start; sometimes groups need to find professionals to help them deliver on their ambitions. **Most people just want a home and a large majority don't get directly involved,** but there are ways of getting more people active in the community e.g. through fun, family events. Training is key to sharing knowledge, involving more people and ensuring that succession within the community can happen.
11. **Community led housing organisations need to work with council officials and civil servants,** as they are often a key to progress and they can provide the help groups need. There are many examples of achieving collaborative progress through solid efforts to work with officials.

12. Old, **low value terraced housing** in low value areas can be made attractive – Giroscope, based in Hull, has shown how this can work over 30 years. Restoring low value, semi-derelict housing saves energy, helps improve low income areas and provides low cost housing for people who need a home and want to live in the area. This approach rescues housing that might otherwise disappear. It is **not gentrification**.

13. Community led housing can be a charity, with their **main reason for existing being to help house people with the greatest need, offering wraparound support and making it pay in a low cost market**. This type of group often relies on Housing Benefit. Giroscope, for example, both helps people with high dependency and keeps the rents low enough to be affordable for tenants who are in work and not in receipt of Housing Benefit. Under this model, it is possible to borrow on assets and pay back through rents. **This “helping” model does dictate the need for a strong business sense and strict but supportive management**.

14. Resource depletion and climate change are huge problems so **saving energy whilst improving the local environment by reclaiming buildings and materials are intrinsic to community led housing**. Upgrading can cost up to £40,000 with the purchase of a house, but this is still cheaper than acquiring a new site, demolition and new build. Eight percent of existing homes will still be here in 2050 so it is vital to upgrade existing properties. People can be educated to make retrofit successful. One key to the success of retrofit is the need to ventilate properties which have been made airtight for energy efficiency reasons. A whole house approach works improving all components at once but it can be done incrementally.

Ways Forward

- Build strong collaboration between leading organisations that attended
- Work hard to partner with the Community Land Trust Network, Confederation of Cooperative Housing, etc. on follow-up with the Community Housing Fund
- Liaise with Nationwide Foundation on follow through actions
- Pool learning and experience between groups so that knowledge, examples of different models, and professional know-how and skills can be shared
- Keep up to date with information about the new Community Housing Fund so it can be utilised in the best way