

Oxford Times 'Voluntary Voice' column article v23.12.19

Collaborative Housing – community-led solutions to local housing need

The UK housing system is in crisis. Not nearly enough affordable homes are being built. In Oxfordshire, there are thousands of people on social housing registers, 3000 + in Oxford alone. Rents are high, and the average house price in Oxfordshire is 11 times average earnings. Community-led housing (CLH) is a way to meet housing needs that the system isn't adequately responding to.

Collaborative Housing is a new support service for community-led housing groups across the Thames Valley. CLH is a new concept to a lot of people. Here we outline what community Housing is and why more and more communities are looking to CLH to meet their housing needs.

Community-led housing is when a community group is involved throughout a housing development and then owns or manages the homes afterwards. CLH is led by volunteers, delivering housing solutions to meet local needs. Truly and permanently affordable housing is often a driving principle of a CLH project.

There are four main types of CLH: cohousing, Community Land Trusts, co-operatives and self-help housing. With cohousing, households have a self-contained home but residents come together to manage their community and share some facilities. Community Land Trusts are usually set up to deliver affordable, locally-managed homes, but sometimes oversee workspaces and green spaces as well. With cooperative housing, residents democratically control and manage their homes. Self-help housing often involves a group of people repairing and bringing empty properties back into use.

There are many other benefits that come from working with others on a CLH project, such as improved neighbourliness and well-being. Isolation can be reduced, with living environments created where people are in frequent contact and look out for each other. This allows people to live healthy, happy lives in their own communities. Tackling the climate emergency through zero-carbon homes is an aspiration for many groups, while other projects can form part of a strategy to tackle homelessness.

There are almost 300 Community land Trusts in England. About 1% of housing is community-led. In Germany it's 80%. So why not in the UK? There are several CLTs, cohousing and cooperative housing groups in Oxfordshire already and recent research by Collaborative Housing for Oxford City Council showed that much more is achievable. We are also working with around 30 other groups across the Thames Valley. The interest is growing.

Collaborative Housing will be officially launched at a Celebration of Community-Led Housing event at Oxford Town Hall on 16th January at 6.30pm. Come along and talk to us about how we can help you to set up a CLH group and support you all the way from an initial vision to spades in the ground. Local CLH groups will also be on hand

to share their success stories and offer advice. You can also visit our website at collaborativehousing.org.uk or email fiona@cohohub.org.uk for more information.

This article was developed in partnership with the Volunteer Centre at OCVA and Tom McCulloch from Collaborative Housing. If you would like a feature about a particular issue or theme or about your **community group, charity or social enterprise** in the Voluntary Voice section of the Oxford Times please email: vol@ocva.org.uk