GETTING YOUR GROUP READY

community led housing
london
resource and advice hub

WHAT IS COMMUNITY LED HOUSING?

When communities and future residents are at the centre of housing development and management, their creativity and inherent interest in long term value helps achieve more successful, more affordable places for us all.

Community led housing is where people and communities play a leading role in addressing their own housing needs. It comprises the following three principles:

1. **Meaningful community engagement and consent occurs throughout the development process. Communities do not necessarily have to initiate the conversation, or build homes themselves, though many do;**

2. **There is a presumption that the community group or organisation will take a long-term formal role in the ownership, stewardship, or management of the homes; and**

3. **The benefits to the local area and/or specified community are clearly defined and legally protected in perpetuity.**

CLH can be delivered in a number of ways, including through:

- start-up groups responding to housing need or demand, or groups of people seeking to deliver their own homes;
- the extension of existing community-based organisations to provide housing in addition to their existing activities, for and on behalf of the community;
- partnerships with developers and housing associations supporting a community group to deliver their ambition.

This document provides tips for start-up groups whether they are looking to provide housing primarily for themselves as a community, or to address a wider community need.

WHERE TO START

Londoners are increasingly interested in coming together to start new community led housing projects and groups. Groups come together for many reasons, for example as residents looking for affordable homes in their area or a group looking to live in an intentional community.

Be inspired

There are some great examples of community led housing to be inspired by. Reading case studies and learning about the experience of others from forming and managing a group, finding a site and building homes.

Joining a Group

There may be groups who share the same values as you and are looking for new members. If you want to contribute to early stage thinking, it's important to note that decisions about the group's principles may have already been made.

Starting a Group

When starting a group, it's best to have a small core group of people that work well together and can make decisions. When you want to grow your membership, you can begin to invite people to events, publicise online or post an ad in the local paper. If people are unsure, they can come on board later.

Projects in London

We map and list all existing and emerging CLH projects in London on our website from emerging groups to fully built schemes.

Our case studies are a good place to start learning how others came together, financed and developed a project.

communityledhousing.london/projects

Workshops and Events

As the hub, we run training and networking events which are all listed on our website.

We also list all CLH events in London, whether they are hosted by a group, national body or organisation.

SHARED VISION AND VALUES

Establishing your vision and values will begin to steer the group and help in making decisions as it becomes clearer what needs prioritising and where compromises can be made.

Defining your community

A key decision will be whether this project is primarily for yourselves as a community or for your wider community. This will help clarify how you incorporate and govern a group.

Projects for the wider community are often geographically specific and membership should be open to anyone who lives or works in your area. Holding public meetings will inform the wider community of your vision and ensure that it reflects local opinion.

If the project is for yourselves, you will be living and making decisions together. Getting to know each other and sharing your values is important. Your group might be organised around a common interest or demographic and not geographically specific. Considering some locations will frame your search for any potential property or land. It will also allow you to build a relationship with local authorities. You will need to define what the benefits are to the local area and/or specified community and how these are protected in the long term.

Financial Values and Affordability

As a group, you will need to make financial decisions on budgeting, expenditure, savings and investments. It's important to establish financial values at an early stage but especially when you build and manage the homes.

Speaking about money can be difficult as people have different levels of income and savings. Some people might need a certain level of savings to feel secure, others might purchase based on price rather than quality.

A simple exercise may to anonymously share how much each member can afford to contribute to the project. By grouping similar answers together, it can become clear where the project is pitched in terms of affordability. Sometimes working as a group with anonymous answers opens people up to sharing their own information.

It is also important to consider how you define 'affordability' in terms of housing. This could be in relation to a mixture of tenures such as social rent, shared ownership, or discounted sale. You may consider savings and deposits, incomes, ongoing costs. Whilst there may be small savings to be made, significant affordability will come from a subsidy of some sort, whether that's through grants, securing land at a discount, or cross-subsidising the value of market housing.

Document and Share your vision and values

It is important that everybody in the group shares the same vision and values for what you are looking to achieve. If some people are not aligned, it might be that the group is not for them.

Collectively document your vision and values and make them accessible to others - you could post these on a website or create a leaflet.

WORKING TOGETHER

As you begin to work together and make decisions, it is important that a collaborative working ethic is established that recognises people's contribution and commitment. Housing development will take time and it is good to be clear from the beginning that it requires everyone to pool their resources and hard work.

Fairness and Transparency

Everyone should feel their time and effort into the group is either equal to everyone else's or if they are taking on more of the work, that this is recognised.

All members of the group should understand how the organisation works and how it is run, and decision making should happen efficiently and fairly.

Meetings and Communication

Meetings will move the project along as you delegate tasks and set deadlines. There should be a reason for every meeting, so everyone knows what they are coming to discuss.

Using different formats for your meetings can encourage people to take part as people feel comfortable in different situations. Consider having a different chair, try a new location or work in small groups and come together. Structured activities are a good way to get everyone to focus. Consider how everyone can have their voice heard, and meetings are not dominated by a few individuals.

Making an agenda for the meeting and sharing minutes will record what was discussed and agreed. You might want to set up a group email or online app to schedule these and communicate decisions with everyone.

Evolution of Groups

As the group work out what their objectives are and how they are organised, some might feel that they no longer want to be part of the group. Equally, you might find new members that align with the group's vision and want to join. A core group of people who are committed to the project will become apparent as things evolve.

Socials and celebrations

It's important that people enjoy coming together as a group and want to stay involved. Meeting socially will allow people to get to know each other, build trust and share their ideas. Some groups organise shared meals, meet for drinks or organise trips.

It's also important that people feel positive about the group's progress. Celebrating successes are a great reason to get together and make people will feel empowered.

ROBUST ORGANISATION

When groups have defined their objectives it's important that they choose a legal and organisational structure that suits them, and prepare to seek funding.

Legal incorporation

When it comes to choosing a legal structure, it's important to think about how the organisation wants to operate, who can become a member of your organisation and who will make decisions.

Choose a legal structure that suits your organisation's vision and values. Don't be tempted to take on a legal structure because you think it may be more attractive to certain funders. You also need to think how decisions are going to made, either by directors or a wider membership.

The most suitable basic legal forms are likely to be a Community Benefit Society (CBS), Co-operative Society or Company Limited by Guarantee. If you want to give yourself flexibility for the future, you may start with a simple structure that's easier to change or add to later.

After choosing a legal structure, the group should function as the constitution says it should for example, you might need to hold AGMs, elect a board or appoint a treasurer.

Early Stage Funding

When starting out, ancillary costs such as printing, travel, and room hire, are often fundraised within the group. You may charge a small membership fee to cover these.

Early stage grants are available to help groups with feasibility and facilitation work. Funders are looking for an organised group with clear objectives and an estimated break down of where the grant will be spent. Any money you have fundraised already will show your commitment, whether that is your own money or other small grants. This gives confidence to other funders.

Banking

Your organisation should have a bank account and financial policy in place.

Whether the money is raised by the group or awarded through a grant, keep a record of all transactions and file receipts correctly from the beginning. Report on how much money you have and how you are spending it, both for transparency with group members and for potential funders who might want to see previous statements.

It is good practice to have at least two unrelated people managing the bank account.

Documentation

Make sure everything is documented and accessible to others. Key policies, annual accounts and meeting minutes will assure members of the group and external funders that your organisation is trustworthy and robust. Most groups upload these to a central drive online with shared access.

RESOURCES

National Resources

Community Led Homes	www.communityledhomes.org.uk
National CLT Network	www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk
UK Cohousing	cohousing.org.uk
Confederation of Cooperative Housing	www.cch.coop

Resources and support we offer

Directory of all CLH projects in London	communityledhousing.london/projects
Latest news and events	www.communityledhousing.london/news
Apply for Advisers and/or Funding	communityledhousing.london/our-support

Online Resources

Sociocracy	Online resource for group governance and organisation	www.sociocracy.info
Loomio	Owned by a worker-owner cooperative, this online software helps groups stay in touch, make decisions and schedule meetings	www.loomio.org

Other Early Stage Guidance

New Cooperative and Community Led Homes	Confederation of Cooperative Housing	Covers the different approaches to community led housing: grassroots, developer partnerships and local authority led	Download
Guide to Legal Structures	Wrigleys Solicitors	Covers the basics of the different legal forms community led housing groups are likely to take.	Download
Opening a Bank Account	Resource Centre	General guidance for community and voluntary groups on bank accounts and financial policies	Read Online
A Consensus Handbook	Seeds for Change	Co-operative decision making and reaching consensus	Download
How to Set Up a Housing Cooperative	Radical Routes	Guidance for fully-mutual co-ops aligned with radical routes values	Download