

COMMUNITY LED HOUSING

DEFINITION AND CLH LONDON INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This note aims to clarify CLH London's interpretation of the definition of community led housing to help in the conception of CLH projects and indicate what is likely to be eligible for support.

What is community led housing?

The following definition for Community-led housing (CLH) has been agreed by the sector and is also used by MHCLG, the London Housing Strategy, and the London Plan. Community-led housing shares the following principles:

1. Meaningful community engagement and consent occurs throughout the development process. Communities do not necessarily have to initiate a scheme, 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 of the scheme to the local area and/or specified community group are clearly defined and legally protected in perpetuity.

Common approaches to community led housing

Community led housing can take several forms including housing co-operatives, Community Land Trusts (CLTs), cohousing, and self-help housing. These approaches are not mutually exclusive, and in many cases a mixture of approaches may be employed in the setup and running of community led homes to suit specific circumstances.

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

The "benefits" of a CLH scheme are typically about sub-market affordable housing. They may also include the benefits of shared neighbourly living, democratic empowerment or greater control over housing and development. These benefits can be present in CLH even if the housing is at market values. CLH will expressly set out to achieve such benefits, while conventional housing will not. The benefits can be legally protected within a CLH organisation, as well as from outside through mechanisms such as leases, section 106 agreements, or grant conditions.

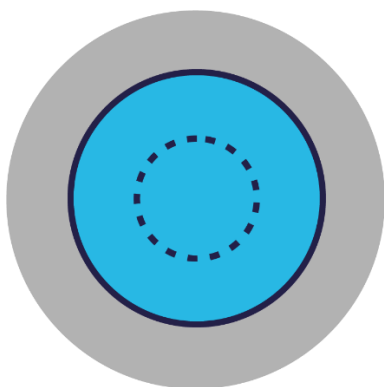
Community led housing projects can be delivered in a number of ways, including through:

- start-up community led housing organisations 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, housing associations, and councils supporting a community group to deliver their ambition.

The following describes typical Community Led Housing organisational arrangements (1), and how other organisations may be involved in delivering Community Led Housing projects (2).

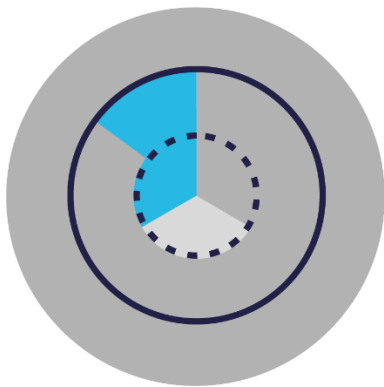
1. TYPICAL CLH ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Community Led Housing organisational arrangements will almost always involve the residents of the housing in governing the housing. 'Organisational arrangements' include a single organisation, or series of nested organisations or contractual relationships. The following diagrams illustrate the role of residents within typical organisational arrangements for CLH.



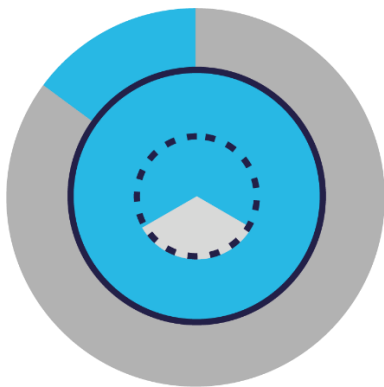
Mutual arrangements typically used by co-ops and cohousing

- Here, all residents are members of the organisation that governs their homes. They democratically control the organisation.
- Smaller organisations may operate direct control, while larger organisations will have elections to boards or committees.
- People from the wider community who do not live in the organisation's homes are not part of the organisation or run it. Although prospective residents can be involved in some activities.



Non-mutual arrangements typically used by CLTs

- Some CLH organisations allow non-residents from the wider community to become members.
- In these cases, there should be an equal balance between residents and the wider community in governing the organisation, even if there are more members from the wider community than there are residents of the organisation's homes.
- The board can also include co-opted external experts or stakeholders, who may not be part of the wider community.
- However typically residents make up at least 1/3 of the board, and all residents must be members of the organisation.



Non-mutual arrangements typically used with existing housing

- Some CLH organisations allow residents to choose to be members or not.
- Residents who choose not to become members do not have a role in democratically running the organisation.
- These organisations may also include co-opted external experts or stakeholders and are unlikely to allow non-residents to become members.

Organisational arrangements which do not include residents in governing their housing or empowering residents any more than conventional housing arrangements are unlikely to be supported.

2. DELIVERING COMMUNITY LED HOUSING PROJECTS

2A. CLH ORGANISATIONS

Start-up or existing CLH organisations, may:

- initiate the project, acquire the land, and carry the development risk themselves, or
- initiate the project and find other organisations* to acquire or provide land and/or carry the development risk.

* Other organisations may include housing associations, professional developers, community centres and organisations, or churches, but are not usually considered to be CLH organisations:

Housing Associations with a nominal / historic link to a community, but with limited resident or community control, would not be considered a Community Led Housing organisation. Although many existing CLH organisations are Registered Providers. The Housing Associations Charitable Trust (HACT) [guidance on the role of housing associations in CLH](#), makes clear: *“Community-led housing associations are generally defined in two ways. Firstly, they have a membership that is open to all their residents and sometimes to members of a defined wider community. Secondly, residents and community representatives are either a majority on their board or they make up the largest group. Around a dozen housing associations meet these criteria.”*

Professional developers or consultancies would not be considered Community Led Housing organisations themselves, even if they are start-up developers with innovative ideas;

Community organisations, churches etc may or may not be considered Community Led Housing organisations, depending on the nature of their organisational arrangements (see 1 on previous page). They may also be engaged in housing projects, which may or may not be considered community led housing development projects (see 2B below).

2B. OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Housing Associations, councils, community organisations, churches, professional developers, or consultancies may initiate or deliver CLH projects by:

- finding community led housing organisations to work with (including to sell or transfer land),
- promoting the formation of new independent community led housing organisations to work with, or
- reviewing their organisational structure to include (prospective) residents in governing the organisation, or part of the organisational arrangements responsible for the housing.

This should involve an identified community (including prospective residents) at near the outset of the development process (once a site is identified and/or secured) with the scope to control or make joint decisions about the development process, ownership, management etc, in a fully informed way (see 3 ‘Meaningful community engagement and consent’ below).

It is unlikely a community can be put in place with a pre-conceived or pre-determined notion of what they will want in terms of the development process, ownership, management etc, without the community having a fully informed and genuine ability to choose.

Developing housing without passing significant control to prospective residents (and wider community where relevant) is unlikely to be supported by CLH London.

A community organisation or church choosing to sell land or work with a developer or housing association, without the above, is unlikely to be supported by CLH London, even if it provides housing.

Clearly, this is not relevant where a CLH organisation is acquiring existing housing.

3. MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSENT

Meaningful community engagement and consent in community-led housing would be represented by the top three rungs of Sherry Arnstein's 'Ladder of Citizen Participation' (Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 1969, illustrated below).

Consultation by itself is not enough. Community consent means they are at least an equal partner in decision making throughout the development process (particularly once a site is identified and/or secured).

