

Redditch Borough Council Case Study

The story of the local authority's approach to community-led housing

Basic summary

- **Local housing market characteristics**
 - Urban
 - High housing demand
- **Region: West Midlands**
- **New build homes. Examples given:** housing co-ops
- **Partners:** Accord Housing Association, Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services
- **Main outcome:** five local neighbourhood housing co-operatives have been developed in Redditch managing nearly 500 homes between them

Key message: Redditch BC provides an example of a local authority adopting a 'top down meets bottom up' approach to develop co-operative housing

Redditch, a former new town in the West Midlands, has a population of about 85,000. Within commuting distance of Birmingham, with access to local rural areas but with a comparatively young population, Redditch combines areas of affluence with pockets of deprivation and unemployment.

With a long tradition of successfully managed council housing from when the town came into existence, Redditch Borough Council's preferred option had always been that social housing would be provided through its own housing stock. As that option ceased to be viable, about 800 homes were built in the borough by housing associations in the 1990s. However, with none of those associations providing local service delivery, the Council ran a competition in 1998 to recruit a housing association partner that would offer higher levels of local democratic accountability through locally provided services and a local office base.

Accord Housing, a Black Country based housing association with a subsidiary partner - Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services – which provides services to West Midlands housing co-operatives – was the obvious partner chosen by Redditch Council. They could bring the Council their development expertise and their financing capacity alongside the skills and knowledge to develop co-operative housing groups from BCHS.

Since then, five local neighbourhood housing co-operatives have been developed in Redditch managing nearly 500 homes between them. Initially benefitting from competitively priced local authority land, developing the co-ops demonstrated that it was possible to develop community-led housing where there was no pre-existing interest or knowledge of co-operative housing in the local population. With all member residents nominated to their homes by the Council, initially half were pre-allocated to enable development of the co-operative housing groups during the scheme development period, supported by Accord through BCHS, an approach replicated when further new schemes have been initiated. This meant that the fledgling co-ops were able to input into scheme

design and to customise individual homes. Once the co-ops have been initially established, the Council uses a more conventional approach to its nominations to the co-op.

The co-ops have recurring 7 year leases with Accord, enabling them to issue tenancies to their member tenants, and the co-ops have management arrangements with Accord to provide services to them through a local office set up in the borough. Initially all of the co-ops' homes were socially rented, but the flexibility of the model has subsequently enabled the development of some shared ownership homes in some co-ops.

With more than half of the members involved in each of the co-ops, the Redditch approach has generated considerable benefits. Service provision statistics compare favourably against local benchmarks, and satisfaction statistics are high (an average of 93.5%). However, more importantly, the Redditch co-ops have been about developing mutually supportive local communities, particularly in Breedon Co-op, established two schemes for the over 60s. Co-operative, mutual self-help in the co-operative has enabled older people to stay independent for longer, while in the family housing mutual self-help provides support to victims of domestic violence. By creating co-operative communities, structures are put in place that enable people to offer mutual support, relieving the pressure on the state for some service provision.

For the younger residents, the Redditch co-ops have enabled several to build their skills and confidence, with several younger members getting into work as a result of their co-op membership. The co-ops' desire for energy efficiency has also led to code level 6 build standards, achieved using Accord's in-house build factory insulative materials, resulting in energy costs 50% cheaper than traditional housing, and solar panels reducing service charges.

Speaking about the most recent 79 home development in the Marfield area of Redditch, Ian Clements, Riverside Housing Co-op committee member from Marfield said "it's great that we get to control how our housing works, but actually Marfield is more about our local community – we have developed our own Facebook Group – which covers everything from lost clothes and parcels to bigger questions about our homes. We run a local holiday club and we hold big parties on our square in the summer. It's a fantastic place to live and its ours!"

Matthew Bough, Housing Strategy and Enabling Team Leader at Bromsgrove and Redditch Borough Council commented that "we strongly support housing co-ops and because of this, Accord has been one of preferred development partners. We were the driving force behind setting up the co-ops in Redditch because we wanted a locally based approach that delivered sustainable communities. Our experiences with the co-ops and the Accord Group has been very positive – they have been excellent partners".

Contact

Matthew Bough, Housing Strategy & Enabling Team Leader
Bromsgrove District & Redditch Borough Councils
matthew.bough@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
(01527) 64252 Ext:3120