

Bristol City 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:** South West
- **New build and refurbished homes. Examples given:** CLT new-build self-finish; community self-build
- **Partners:** Bristol Community Land Trust, United Communities HA, Bristol Community HUB - in development - (supporting a number of community led housing organisations)

Key message: To meet the Mayoral objective of delivering annually 2000 homes, of which 800 are affordable homes, from 2020 will require all housing delivery routes to contribute - including CLTs and other community-led housing organisations.

1. *The story: what was the problem that needed addressing?*

Bristol is an urban area with high housing demand. Bristol City Council (BCC) retains its housing stock and is actively building new council homes (17 in 2016/17 and 56 projected in 2017/18). In addition Registered Providers are currently delivering 200 affordable homes a year, significantly lower than levels of 550 plus affordable homes achieved in 2008/9 and 2009/10.

The top three local housing market challenges are:

- Rising house prices and rents
- Reduction in numbers of affordable homes being built
- Affordability for first time home buyers

2. *Why is Bristol City Council supporting CLH?*

CLH gives local residents the opportunity to get involved in addressing the housing needs in their area and assisting the council to bring forward new market and affordable housing schemes.

BCC believes that decent affordable homes are the foundation of a successful city and the most effective way of addressing inequalities in the city. Its Business Plan 2017-18 commits to building 2,000 new homes – 800 affordable – a year by 2020. One of the measures to achieve this is to support CLTs, Community Development Trusts, local builders and self-builders on identified Council and private sites, to build more homes appropriate to the neighbourhood, creating more mixed and balanced communities.

3. *Who is benefitting from CLH schemes in Bristol?*

Affordable homes to rent have been allocated to people on Homes Choice Bristol, BCC's housing register, who are able to demonstrate the greatest housing need, mainly as a result of their vulnerability, health, hardship, overcrowding, household circumstances and unsanitary living conditions. It is therefore very difficult for a single person or a couple under 50 without specific housing needs to access the 2000 council and housing association homes that are available for letting each year.

BCC has launched its self-build register for individuals and associations (of named individuals), who identify as having an aspiration to build their own homes in Bristol. To date over 350 individual households have registered but no organisations have registered.

4. How does Bristol City Council enable CLH schemes to develop?

Bristol City Council helped to establish Bristol Community Land Trust in 2011 and provided capacity funding for a development worker and seed corn finance to assist with the establishment of BCLT. In March 2014 the Council agreed to make available a surplus Council site at a discounted value to assist BCLT to acquire its first site in Fishponds, Bristol.

BCC supports new CLH groups by providing capacity funding

To facilitate future housing development by CLH groups, Bristol has entered into two 12 month exclusive options to purchase land from the Council at market value to Ambition Lawrence Weston (ALW) and Southmead Trust. This has permitted the local community to demonstrate funders the availability of land and secure additional finances to develop new accommodation. The ALW planning group aspires to develop 40 new market and affordable homes by this approach. The council is in early discussions similar arrangements with other CLH groups to progress disposal of surplus Council properties and infill land between Council houses on an inter-war estate.

The valuation of Council land for CLH groups is proving a major issue as currently there is no adequate legislation or credible guidance from an organisation such as the RICS on the valuation methodology to be used when selling land to CLH - where there are demonstrable social, economic or environmental benefits to the Council and its citizens. This means that the Council is currently having to sell at full market value unless the Council can demonstrate that the value of the nomination rights can be discounted from the disposal price, as has been done on the second site sold to BCLT. This is an area that urgently needs to be addressed at a national level so that councils are empowered to take a much more proactive role in promoting the CLH sector.

5. Partnership work in Bristol to support CLH.

BCC works with a range of partners to support the development of CLH, including a CLT umbrella group, development trust, community groups, co-ops and self-build collectives:

- [Ashley Vale Action Group](#) – a self-build collective that developed an award winning private housing scheme
- Bristol Community Land Trust (Bristolclt.org.uk) an umbrella group for neighbourhood CLTs. As a registered provider BCLT can be a conduit for grants from the HCA or the Council to other CLH groups, if required. BCLT after their first scheme in Eastville have recently submitted planning on a 50 unit scheme on a Council site in Lockleaze and have plans to acquire a further site from the Council next year. BCLT also plans to become a member of Homes West Partnership which would give it access to significant enabling funds from BCC to build new affordable homes to rent.
- Community Self-Build Association is working with Knightstone HA (funded by HCA) on two train and build schemes on private sites for armed forces disabled returnees

- Ambition Lawrence Weston – a community group with a planning sub group – planning housing developments to meet local housing needs and aspirations
- Southmead Development Trust- a community group with a planning sub group - planning housing developments (including commercial units) to meet local housing needs and aspirations
- Knowle West Media Centre acting as the community group to harness local energy through the initiative: *Can we make* to build on private and Council infill plots up to 500 homes to meet local housing needs and aspirations. The proposal is to provide the landowner with ground rent income rather than a capital receipt.
- [Alternatives to Empty Office Buildings \(AEOB\)](#) – a community share issue which raised over £400,000 delivered their first affordable housing scheme, without public subsidy.
- Bright Green Futures – a community interest company that has produced its first housing scheme including a shared equity unit and is currently working on a scheme of 20 mixed tenure homes on a private site
- Bristol Co-housing – a self-build scheme based on a former farmhouse acquired at market value from the Council. The group is currently seeking planning permission to build further homes within the grounds
- Somewhere Housing Co-op – refurbishing existing properties to bring them back into use as private housing
- BBRC – Bristol & Bath Regional Capital – a financial agency able to assist CLH groups to raise private finance. The Council has contracted with United Communities and HAB who are working with BBRC on a major mixed tenure housing scheme in Southmead where UC will provide rented homes at significantly below market levels – supported by institutional finance.
- Walter Segal train and build scheme for young people in Bedminster

6. Examples of homes produced by CLH schemes in Bristol:

Self-finish, new-build homes have been developed by Bristol Community Land Trust. Their first scheme, at 325 Fishponds Road, created 12 homes for shared ownership and affordable rent on with discounted land provided by BCC, which also provided capacity and seed corn funding. Having become a RP, BCLT received HCA funding. A second BCLT project will be for 50 homes for shared ownership and affordable rent, developed in partnership with United Communities HA. For a case study on this scheme click [here](#).

Ashley Vale Action Group (AVAG) is an example of a successful self-build and self-finish housing scheme incorporating affordable housing, work and leisure areas. AVAG was formed as a limited company by local people concerned about a volume developer building on a scaffolding yard site and redundant office block. It bought the site for £605k and provided space to develop 20 individual self-build plots and six self-finish bungalows. The office building was converted into work and art space and an additional floor housed six flats and a community room. The £35k plot price included installation of site infrastructure and services, meaning that it was possible to build a family home for £70,000 including the land. For a case study on this scheme click [here](#).

Ex-council homes have been purchased by BCC and refurbished for onward sale through [RESTORE Trust](#), a not-for-profit company by providing training to the long termed unemployed and ex-offenders

The affordability of homes is a priority for the Council. BCC will require any CLH to respond to the Local Plan requirement on affordable housing, to ensure an appropriate proportion is retained as affordable housing in perpetuity. When BCC is able to dispose of its own land it will wish to work with the CLH groups to achieve affordable housing whilst recognising the importance for the group to hold a future stake in the land, e.g. through retaining a golden share in a shared equity scheme.

7. *Lessons learnt and what the Bristol City Council will do next:*

The Bristol Mayor has ambitious aspirations for CLH to start developing 300-500 community led homes over the next five years. Bristol's Local Plan has allocated 226 hectares of land for mixed use housing development, which can accommodate over 8,000 homes. BCC owns about half of this land, enough for 3,000 homes. BCC's [Housing Delivery Plan 2017-20](#), approved in March 2017, sets out how it will deliver 2,000 homes a year (including 800 affordable) by 2020 through working with various partners including CLHGs, local communities and registered providers.

BCC has created a single, multi-disciplinary delivery team to work with all partners, including CLTs and self-builders, as well as delivering BCC's own projects. Its focus will include preparing major sites for disposal, negotiating s106 agreements, working with the HCA on joint grant funding, policy and guidance, and land assembly. It is actively working with its partners to identify and remove barriers by providing a single point of contact and avoid conflicting messages about policy and priorities.

The new delivery team engaged with CLHs and SMEs through a Small Build is Beautiful Conference in June 2017 to see what policy changes and guidance were needed to enable them to deliver housing more effectively. A policy is in preparation to make land available for community-led development at scale (including CLTs, co-ops and community development trusts). This new affordable housing policy in the Local Plan, to be consulted on in 2018, may include a provision to allow a developer to offer a percentage of plots for shared equity affordable housing to CLH, in lieu of making on-site provision for intermediate affordable housing. These plots may be offered en-bloc to community led housing groups.

Power to Change charitable trust is assisting all CLHs in Bristol by funding a Community HUB to support the development of CLH in Bristol. This will act as resource centre for CLH and as a single conduit in negotiations with Council on areas like policy development.

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