

## HOUSING



Social Partnership



Enterprise and  
social economy



New models of  
meeting priority  
needs



Innovation

## Birmingham City Council

### Stirchley Co-operative Development

Stirchley Cooperative Development (SCD), is a pioneering mixed-use project poised to significantly enhance the cooperative landscape of Stirchley, Birmingham ([www.stirchley.coop](http://www.stirchley.coop)). This community-led initiative will provide 39 affordable rental homes, purpose-built premises for three established local cooperative businesses and a valuable new community space. The development demonstrates a powerful model for strengthening local cooperative economies and provides a framework for similar projects elsewhere.

SCD was established in 2016 through the collective vision of local housing and worker cooperatives. The primary impetus behind its formation was a shared concern for the increasing unaffordability of housing and commercial rents in Stirchley, which threatened the viability of local cooperative businesses and the housing security of residents.

SCD is strategically located on the main high street of Stirchley, a central location intended to contribute to the ongoing regeneration of the area. Key milestones in the project's journey include planning approval in 2021, purchase of the land in August 2022 and commencement of construction in June 2023. The project will be completed by September 2025. Notably, the development will include a community urban space, featuring a pedestrian passageway, seating areas, a shared courtyard garden, and cycle parking facilities, designed to foster social interaction and create a central hub for both residents and the wider Stirchley community, blending public space with co-operatively owned housing.

A central and innovative aspect of SCD is the integration of three existing cooperative businesses into the ground floor retail units: Loaf Bakery and Cookery School, Birmingham Bike Foundry, and Artefact Projects. These businesses have already established themselves as integral parts of the



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Stirchley community. The purpose-built premises within SCD will provide them with stability and enhanced opportunities for growth and expansion.

SCD operates under a democratic governance structure, with regular meetings of its members where vital decisions are made. A crucial partnership was formed with GreenSquareAccord, an experienced housing association that has provided invaluable expertise in affordable housing development and management throughout the project.

SCD has successfully secured funding through a diverse range of sources, showcasing a resilient and strategic approach. A significant portion of the funding has come from Homes England. The project has also secured a mortgage from an ethical lender, aligning with its values-driven approach. In the early stages of development, SCD received crucial funding from Power to Change, through The Big Lottery Fund, which supported capacity building, training, and facilitation for the newly formed cooperative.



The way common ownership is embedded within the co-operative's structure guarantees that these homes will remain affordable in perpetuity, resisting the pressures of market speculation that often erode the availability of social housing over time. This commitment to long-term affordability aligns strongly with the Government's manifesto pledge to tackle the housing crisis by increasing the supply of social and affordable housing through a "new generation of council and social housing" and support for community-led housing initiatives. SCD serves as a practical demonstration of how this can be achieved through collaborative partnerships, innovative funding, and a focus on community ownership.

SCD is working with Little Ships CIC (<https://www.little-ships.org/>), an architecture practice, to develop a plan for future co-operatives in the area based on the innovation of lease developments

created by the co-operative housing movement in Catalunya, where disused areas of land are leased by councils for 75 years in order to stabilise and create new co-operatives. They propose to use an innovative deck access technology that can be built above underused resources such as car parks with minimal impact and have developed an outline sketch for a second SCD site in Stirchley as an example (<https://www.little-ships.org/locations/birmingham/rea-way/>).

With CCIN, we want to explore the collaboration with Little Ships and also the general model of SCD as potential avenues for future co-operatives on high streets, using transferable principles and strategies and collaborations with councils and other anchor institutions. Drawing upon the experiences and successes of SCD, the CCIN can play a pivotal role in enabling the replication of this model and fostering similar initiatives across its network.

To facilitate community-led housing, councils should develop clear policies and guidance to streamline the planning process for such projects, recognising their unique community benefits. Establishing dedicated support teams or "enablers" within local authorities (or Combined Authorities) could provide crucial expertise and guidance to community groups navigating the complexities of development. Identifying suitable public land and assets that could be transferred to community land trusts or leased to cooperative housing organisations at favourable terms would provide a vital resource for these initiatives.

To actively support cooperative development, the CCIN could promote awareness and understanding of the co-operative housing model among local businesses and residents through workshops, information campaigns, and showcasing successful examples like SCD.

There is also an unmet need for resources and support for the formation and growth of worker and housing cooperatives, including access to business advice and potential seed funding. Encouraging collaboration and networking between existing cooperatives within council areas through regular forums and shared resource platforms can strengthen the local cooperative ecosystem.

The SCD has the potential to serve as a powerful and tangible example of the numerous benefits and inherent viability of cooperative development.

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