



Community Led Housing: How to Guides

Introduction

Community-led housing (CLH) is a growing movement across the UK and the world, where people at a grass-roots level are looking to take control of theirs and their communities housing.

Community-led housing takes many forms, and because it is by definition led by those on the ground, they are able to respond effectively to their natural, physical, and social environment to provide housing that best benefits communities.



Marmalade Lane Cohousing, Cambridge ↑

This guide is aimed at:

→ Community-led housing organisations

→ Individuals interested in forming a CLH organisation

→ Existing organisations looking to deliver housing, using a community-led approach

What is community-led housing?

Community-led housing is housing where communities play a leading role in its development and management, whether this is building new housing, or renovating other buildings, or taking over management of existing housing.

Although a clear definition is hard, the criteria provided by the [UK Government for defining CLH](#) is a good starting point.

Community-led housing is where:

1. There is meaningful community engagement and consent occurs throughout the development process. The community does not necessarily have to initiate and manage the process, or build the homes themselves, though some may do;
2. The local community group or organisation owns, manages or stewards the homes in a manner of their choosing. This may be done through a mutually supported arrangement with a Registered Provider (RP) that owns the freehold or leasehold for the property; and
3. The benefits to the local area and/or specified community must be clearly defined and legally protected in perpetuity

CLH covers a broad range of models, with no two projects the same. It could be a group of people wanting to create secure housing only for themselves, or local people aiming to create housing for those in-need in their communities, and everything in between. What unites those involved however is that they are led by everyday people wanting to work together to make theirs and their communities' environment a better place to live.

Creating solutions with community-led housing

It is widely accepted that the UK's current model for creating new housing needs improvement. We have a housing crisis, which is pushing home ownership out of reach of more and more people, and rent rises are far outstripping rises in wages.

Alongside this we are facing a climate emergency, which requires us to dramatically reduce our carbon emissions. Buildings account for 34% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, in their construction and operation, so reducing this by creating more sustainable housing, through new-builds or renovations, is crucial to our goal of becoming carbon neutral.

Housing in the UK is actually quite unusual within Europe, in that it is almost completely developer-led, with only 7% of new housing being designed and/or built by the people who are going to live in them. This contrasts with other countries such as Germany, where 60% of new houses are self-built and Austria with a whopping 80%!

In much of the UK's current housing delivery, the focus often

leans more towards meeting targets and financial returns rather than prioritising the long-term wellbeing of residents or the environment. This means housing in the UK is generally more expensive, poorer quality and more standardised, than other European nations. Developer-led housing means that:

- Location of the housing isn't often where it needs to be.
- The scale of the developments can lessen community cohesion.

New housing developments in the UK often spark strong debate, partly due to concerns about the quality, design and location of new homes. This can lead to tensions between different groups, such as existing residents and those in urgent need of housing. Moving beyond these divisions is essential to creating well-designed, inclusive communities that work for everyone

Community-led housing reverses these negative trends, and proposes an alternative route to delivering housing, where communities are at the heart of the whole process, from the concept to the construction, and eventually in the management of housing. This inevitably leads to better quality, more affordable and more visually appealing housing, where communities want it.

Why is community-led housing so great?

Housing is more affordable to live in – CLH groups tend to focus on delivering affordable housing for people in housing need. In general CLH groups far exceed the required number of affordable homes in a development, with many choosing to provide 100% affordable housing. Housing is also often more affordable than other forms of ‘affordable’ housing, with groups setting levels of rent or shared-ownership at genuinely affordable levels (see [chapter 5. Tenure Models](#)).

Housing that communities want – Communities usually know what housing they want and need, so putting them in the driving seat means housing is often better designed to meet the needs of the community. It can also reduce local opposition to a new development.

Stimulates innovation – A lot of the innovation in the house building industry was developed and tested out in small scale self-build or community-led schemes. Providing diversity in the delivery of housing, can help push forward new ideas and ways of working across the entire sector.

Empowers communities – Communities who work together, are stronger and more resilient in the face of challenges. Communities have often formed CLH organisations originally for the purpose of delivering affordable housing, but have then gone on to tackle a much wider range of challenges, utilizing the capacity and organisational structure they have built together. For example creating community owned renewable energy schemes, and services and businesses such as shops, buses and pubs.

Housing is more sustainable – CLH groups almost always choose to build housing which has environmental sustainability at its heart. Research by the Community Land Trust (CLT) Network showed that housing delivered by CLTs consistently exceeded standards in terms of buildings performance, compared to the required standards, and housing delivered by developers.

The political landscape

There has been strong, if at times inconsistent, support for CLH at a government level over the last two decades, as governments look for ways to promote both alternative routes of delivering affordable housing, and foster resilience at a community level. This has been backed by several large grant funding programmes in England, which led to the creation of many new affordable homes, mainly delivered by the Community Land Trusts. There have also been several third sector grant funds, which have funded specific community groups, as well as the creation of support organisations, both at a national level (Community-led homes.org & the CLT Network), and at a local level with CLH enabling hubs.

The Welsh Government has been slower to put pen to paper and write this support into policy, which has meant CLH in Wales has fallen behind England and Scotland, however this seems to be changing as Planning Policy Wales has been updated to include CLH, and grant funding is being provided directly to groups for delivery of affordable housing.

At a local authority level, support is less consistent, with some councils enthusiastically supporting CLH, and others offering limited engagement or prioritising more conventional development approaches. It is always a tougher job to be the first project within a local authority as there are often no established processes and limited knowledge to support new approaches. Inevitably though, once a successful project is pushed through, others soon follow as people see the huge benefits, demonstrated by the clustering of CLH development within certain local authorities, as seen in Cornwall and Brighton and Hove.

CLH, in general, relies on nurturing from above, and with the political landscape constantly moving, it is important to keep abreast of what is going on, and how you can align your project with current government or local authority priorities (which thankfully CLH groups usually do in spade). Local and national support organisations can be great for helping with this.

Purpose of these guides

These guides are intended to be used as handy reference documents, rather than reading cover to cover (unless you are very keen). Each chapter is standalone and focuses on a particular topic area. The idea is to arm the reader with enough information that they can engage meaningfully in the development process, make informed decisions and forge great working relationships with the professional team you create around you. The idea is not that you will be a fully-qualified housing professional at the end of your reading (although that might come later), and you will certainly need to make the most of all the other amazing support on offer for CLH groups out there.

This guide is aimed at CLH groups in Wales and England, where planning policies, government approaches, and opportunities and challenges are broadly aligned. Including Scotland and Northern Ireland, with their very different policy landscapes, would be beyond the scope of this guide, although would make for very interesting reading.



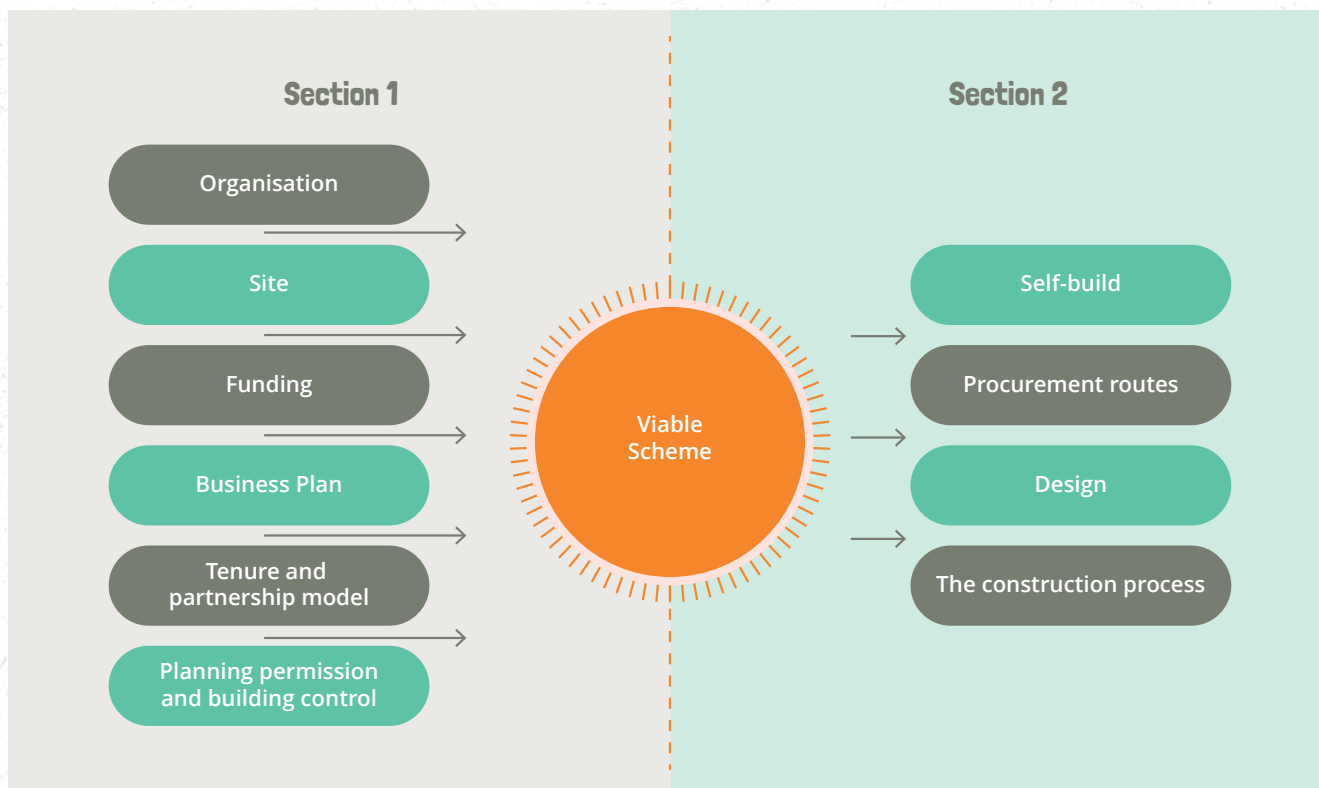
How to use this guide

Layout – The CLH Journey

Most community-led housing projects can be roughly thought of in two stages. The first stage is where your group is forming and creating a vision, getting organised and putting together a proposal. Once you have done your research, carved out your aims and vision, secured a site, identified funding and put together a robust business plan, you will have a viable scheme on your hands. The start of this second stage is the point you will need to commit, and invest time and money into the project, and you will likely need support of more professionals, being able to pass on a lot of the technical work to them. The chapters have therefore been split into two sections.

The first section aims to outline the elements you will need to assemble to get a viable scheme together, with each chapter representing one element. CLH projects are rarely linear and straight forward, so many of these elements can be pushed forward at the same time. For example, don't wait until you have fully incorporated, have all your policies written and have fully grown your membership, before starting to scope out sites and funding opportunities, this can all be done simultaneously. In this initial period, you will likely need to do a lot of things yourself, as funding is tight and you need to hold onto your vision, hence why these chapters have quite a high level of detail.

The second stage, once you have a viable scheme, is when you will likely be working with many different professionals who will have a high level of skill and knowledge. The chapters in the second section therefore intend to give only a broad overview and attempts to decode the process, so



you can engage with it proactively (and not get bamboozled by all the acronyms).

Some of the chapters contain extra resources which are linked in the document, feel free to use these, or adapt them for your own needs if they aren't right. We have tried to avoid using too many acronyms and jargon, but where these are necessary these are defined in info boxes within the chapter. There are lots of resources out there already, so where these exist in enough detail, they are signposted rather than reproduced here.

Pick the fights that are really important to you, and try to find compromises the rest of the time

A few tips for the road

Set a realistic time commitment - The CLH journey can be a long bumpy one (although undoubtedly worth it). Setting an amount of time that you can give each week over a long period can help keep up the stamina. It can be easy to get excited at the beginning, and put in lots of time, and then burn out, which isn't good for anyone.

Pick your battles - It's good to think about when to listen to perceived wisdom, and when not to. There will always be people telling you that CLH can't be done, or your ideas are too pie-in-the-sky, and you will need to hold your belief in your project. However on the flip side, there is a lot of experience out there, and you don't need to totally reinvent the wheel. It can get tiring constantly swimming up river. Pick the fights that are really important to you, and try to find compromises the rest of the time.

Visit and talk to lots of CLH projects - It's really inspiring visiting other CLH groups who have been through the journey, and share their learning. People are usually very happy to talk to you about their project, how they got there and often how it could have been better! The world of CLH is a community in itself!

Who are Down to Earth?

Down to Earth is a group of social enterprises using an inclusive person-centered approach to empower communities through meaningful engagement with their physical spaces and the outdoors. Over 20 years we have worked with a diverse range of community groups throughout the development process, from the concept, consultation & design to the practical construction on site, to create stunning, sustainable buildings.

We believe communities can be at the heart of the design and creation of genuinely life-changing community infrastructure: houses, education buildings (schools, community centres) and health care buildings (hospitals, health charity facilities). From social housing to large scale commercial training spaces to outdoor classrooms, Down to Earth has an excellent track record in accessible, accredited training programmes resulting in remarkable buildings.

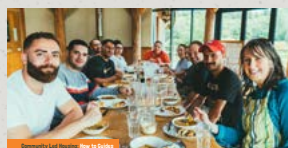


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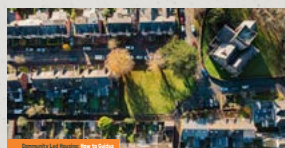
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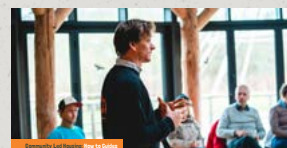
Introduction



1. Organisation



2. Site



3. Funding



4. Business Plan



5. Tenure Model



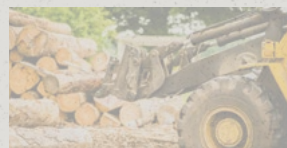
6. Planning Permission and Building Control



7. Self-build



8. Design



9. Procurement Routes



10. Construction



Tel: 01792 232 439

Email: info@downtoearthproject.org.uk

downtoearthproject.org.uk

