

**Notes from the meeting of the
Longhope Community Land Trust Steering Group
held on Wednesday 5th February 2020**

PRESENT: Mike Phelps, Andrew Maliphant, Sarah Turner, Bill Reay, Clive Scott, Chris Phelps, Mark Ling, Gary Nicholas, Lenette Isko and Ian Crawley (National CLT Network)

1. Apologies for absence were received from Peter Johnson, John Jeffries, Ian MacFarlane and Lois Taylor (Publica Group).
2. Ian Crawley covered a number of points in his presentation, including:

- PARTNERSHIP WITH A HOUSING ASSOCIATION

A CLT will hold the freehold of the land, usually giving the housing association a long management and maintenance lease. The housing association can initially acquire the land on the CLT's behalf until the scheme is signed off, which can be sensible as the CLT then doesn't take any responsibility for the site until it has to. The CLT need never have responsibility for managing the land / site / unadopted road (if highway authority will not adopt) and/or common external planted areas, as the partnering housing association will be responsible on completion for managing and maintaining the entire development.

There can be an exchange of formal letters to start with rather than an actual contract, so that the housing association confirms in writing that it will acquire the site and confirms on what basis the site will be transferred. The letters should also confirm the nature of the future lease, and that it will exclude any right to buy as well as including provision for a nominal ground rent. Ian is happy to be involved in looking at a draft lease.

- DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The housing association manages the site until they take on a building contractor, and will sign off the finished construction, as will the District Council's building control officer. The housing association will also employ a clerk of works to oversee construction, usually a qualified quantity surveyor.

Housing associations can have call-off contractors, which is an advantage, not least over the current topographic survey for the Longhope site. The CLT should be involved in the choice of architect, not least as the architect will front the community consultation. The architect should also be open around local vernacular design. It can be good to show that any local architects have been considered, and it also important to show different design options at public consultation.

The initial feasibility study is essentially around overall costing, then issues from the housing needs survey can be brought in, for example one end of a terrace could be a maisonette. A feasibility study costs £6-8k, and getting a project of ten-plus homes to planning permission stage typically costs £35-40k. There are other surveys as part of this stage – traffic and highways, ecology, ground conditions – all separate consultants co-ordinated through the architect. The project may not proceed if the infrastructure costs are found to be too high. A decision will need to be made about going for a separate infrastructure grant via the District Council if the anticipated infrastructure costs are high, as that may be a more sensible approach than building more homes to deliver the required value for money.

Once planning permission is granted, there will be a build contract and a fit-out contract. Most construction is done on a design and build basis, which means the building contractor can change the design to something cheaper – care is needed that little but important things are not changed. The housing association will want to keep management and maintenance costs down, which can mean uniform fittings and floorings, but care is also needed that the build cost is not too expensive or Homes England may not give a grant.

The business case that goes to Homes England is informed by the design, so it will be important to include any disability or mobility issues. If build costs are expensive, the level of Homes England grant will not fully fund (along with the housing association's bank borrowing) the full cost of the scheme. The CLT, with the housing association, would then need to reduce costs through a Value Engineering Review or seek to fund the gap in other ways - say through aiming to sell off one property as a freehold to cross-subsidize the rest or through one or more of the new homes being for shared ownership where say 50% of the value of the home is paid for up front by the part owner. Nailsworth were granted £67k per home from Homes England, the housing association covered the rest of the costs, except for £40k for carpeting and garden sheds which was covered by a grant from the housing association's charity.

Planning officers will also have a view on the design. Most developers carry out one consultation before the proposal goes to planning for consultation, CLT projects usually do three – the first on the site, looking at different things to build, road access options and different finishes, the second on the actual proposed scheme (with maybe a second option), and the third for sign-off before the scheme goes to planning - all taking time but giving the opportunity to respond to any objections.

The choice of contractor follows on from planning permission, housing associations will have a list of preferred contractors. It will be important to have an experienced steering group member for regular site meetings, and circulating written reports, so that any site issues can be resolved informally.

For the Nailsworth sign-off, all the board members visited every property, but there were then issues with site management and plant watering by the landscaping sub-contractor over the following 12 months, as it is cheaper to replace plants than care for them. There is also typically a 12-month period for “snagging” – dealing with any small construction issues – and it is important to involve tenants in the review at the end of that first year.

- HOUSING MANAGEMENT

It is usual to offer tenants a 12-month introductory tenancy, which gives the housing association time to ensure that the tenant understands their responsibilities for paying the rent and looking after their new home.

It will be important for the CLT to get involved in the local lettings plan, starting with discussions with the District Council around giving priority to people with local connections. It is also important to ensure that subsequent re-lettings also conform to the plan, as local authorities are under pressure for high occupancy levels and have been known to want greater freedom to recommend tenants from outside the area – a critical point is how quickly would vacant tenancies cascade to other parishes. Lettings plans are signed off as part of the Section 106 agreement at the planning permission stage, and care needs to be taken as these matters can be decided by the planning committee. Both Ian and ST have access to lettings plan examples, and it will be important to cover the issue of young people having had to leave the area and now wanting to return.

When the houses are under construction, it will be important to make the local connection criteria clear, and encourage local people to apply via the District Council waiting list. In due course the District Council will do financial and local connection checks before passing names to the housing association for tenant interviews and final decision. It is best that the housing association does this, to avoid the CLT being accused of any bias! It will be good to invite the allocations team leader to discuss the draft lettings plan.

- OTHER LOCAL SCHEMES

Nailsworth CLT now has ten local people living in 6 flats and 4 two-bed terrace houses. Eastington CLT have just started building 23 houses on site, three and a half years after the initial scoping study, and after a £400k infrastructure grant from Homes England via Stroud District Council. Ian would be happy to arrange a Nailsworth site visit, but of course it will be down to the tenants to decide whether they allow people inside their homes.

Ian was thanked for the detail of his presentation, in addition to all his continuing advice to the project, which is much appreciated

3. After discussion, it was unanimously agreed to write to Mark Harper MP asking for his support for the extension of the Government's Community Housing Fund. **ACTION: AM**
4. The minutes of the meeting on 15th January were agreed as an accurate record.
5. AM reported that 668 housing survey forms had been sent out, of which over 100 had already been returned. GN suggested that people could be reminded about the forms via the parish council's Facebook page.
6. AM presented the agreed constitution and accompanying registration form for signature by the six members who had agreed to be the initial "subscribers" to the community benefit society, i.e. the first trustees. All signed with the exception of IM who was not present and would be asked to sign at the next meeting on February 12th.
7. AM added that the new board would have a number of administrative forms and procedures to confirm and approve, including:
 - The policy for approving new CLT members (over 18, live or work in Longhope)
 - Procedure for electing board members and officers
 - Code of conduct for board members, including disclosure of interests
 - The CLT's financial systems
 - Risk management
 - Insurance

AM would gather model forms for circulation.

8. MP, ML, CS, GN and AM signed the application form for opening a Lloyds Bank treasurers account.
9. The next step after the meeting with the Aster Group on February 12th would be a pre-application meeting with District Council planning officers on Wednesday 11th March from 2pm. It was agreed that BR, ST and AM would attend, plus either MP, GN or CS.
10. The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 12th February from 7pm in the downstairs meeting space of the Latchen Room.