

SHEPHERDSWELL WITH COLDRED COMMUNITY LAND TRUST – A CASE STUDY

In Partnership with English Rural Housing Association

This project originated from the results of a Parish Plan in 2013 showing that residents felt there was a need for more affordable housing locally. In response, a Housing Group was set up and a decision was made to undertake a [Housing Needs Survey](#) to establish what the local need was. Tessa O’Sullivan, formally the Rural Housing Enabler (RHE) at Action with Communities in Rural Kent began working with the group by initially undertaking the housing needs survey followed by a site search and other enabling work. The Housing Group included members of the Parish Council (PC). Dover District Council (DDC) funded the housing needs survey.

Despite an extensive site search, a suitable and available [rural exception site](#) could not be found, at which point the project stalled. In late 2015 the re-formed Housing Group attended a seminar organised by the RHE on the Community Land Trust/Housing Association partnership model. Consequently, the group decided to set up a CLT in the hope it would invigorate interest in the housing project and bring forward land. In June 2016 they held a public presentation in the village hall to explain what they wanted to achieve and set up a steering group. Wessex CLT Project (now Middlemarch) attended to explain how the model works and to showcase rural local needs affordable housing CLT developments they had successfully completed across the southwest of England.

The Shepherdswell with Coldred CLT incorporated as a Community Benefit Society in 2017 and partnered with [English Rural Housing Association](#) to develop and manage the homes. Working together, the CLT, RHE and English Rural resumed the site search; two new sites were identified, and a feasibility study was undertaken on one; there were now a total of 18 sites. Sites originally identified were reviewed and landowners were contacted. One of the original sites identified was owned by the Church Commissioners who, when previously approached, did not want sell, but now they were interested in the stronger community aspect through the CLT and ultimately agreed. Had it not been for this land, the project would have likely failed as there was no other suitable and available land in the parish as evidenced by the extensive site search.



CLT Board members on the site

The site is adjacent to the village hall; there were several issues to address including access, for which the CLT commissioned a feasibility study using funding from Dover District Council's community housing grant. During this time, the CLT contacted residents living opposite the site and the nursery school based in the village hall, ensuring everyone was kept informed and their views and concerns were heard and addressed.

CLT members and other parish residents were updated on progress through reports to the Parish Council, local social media, the Parish Magazine and open public events including Annual General Meetings. In January 2020, a residents' drop-in consultation event was held in the village hall, also attended by English Rural and Kent based OSG Architecture, showing the proposed plans, layout and design. The event was also used to promote the second housing needs survey which was in circulation and had been commissioned by the CLT (Shepherdswell Parish Council contributed towards the cost). The survey was organised, conducted and analysed independently by the RHE. This updated the mix of accommodation required to satisfy current local needs and the results were publicised to the community.

During the plan stage, the CLT had meetings with the Local Planning Authority, regular meetings with English Rural and updates to the Parish Council. Work undertaken included agreeing the allocation policy for the homes with English Rural.



Community engagement event Jan 2020



Flyer to update community during Covid-19 2021



Celebratory stone laying event, on site in 2023

In this partnership model the Housing Association sells the land to the CLT for a nominal sum and take responsibility for securing the finance and contracts to build the houses and provide the skills and experience to manage allocations and tenancies. They then lease the land from the CLT. By retaining the freehold, the CLT has stewardship and is committed to ensuring that the homes remain affordable for local people in perpetuity.

The planning application for the development of 10 affordable rented homes and 3 open market bungalows was submitted in December 2020. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, communication with the wider community was impaired, but leaflets were delivered by the CLT to all households in the parish in March 2021 to update and inform everyone of progress. The CLT, RHE and English Rural worked with the planning department to address issues raised by them and in January 2022 the application was unanimously approved. WW Martin, a local construction company from Thanet was contracted to build the homes and Betteridge and Milsom also local, were the contract administrators.

In March 2024 residents moved into their new homes in Carpenters Yard. There are 2 x 1 bed flats, 2 x 2 bed flats, 4 x 2 bed houses and 2 x 3 bed houses. They are all rented at lower than private market rates (affordable rent).

This partnership between the CLT and the housing association has meant that real community involvement has been possible alongside the expertise of a specialist rural housing provider to deliver secure homes that local people in housing need can afford to live in. It is the first of its kind in Kent.



New residents outside their home



Aerial view of Carpenters Yard courtesy of WW Martin



Carpenters Yard

Lessons learned:

- A CLT can bring land forward where other attempts have failed because the project is seen as truly 'community-led', and the landowner has confidence that the homes will remain affordable for local people in perpetuity.
- A CLT Board is consistently supportive and exists to drive a housing scheme forward, whereas sometimes Parish Councils can change opinion/level of support over time, as Councillors leave, and new ones are elected.
- Financial support for CLTs is essential e.g. for incorporation costs, publicity/promotion/community engagement, legal fees, planning work.
- Enabling work is crucial to advise and support CLTs through the process and provide connection and liaison with other partners and stakeholders.
- CLT Board/Steering Groups need a variety of skills (and be prepared to seek them externally when required) including marketing and confidence in self-promotion, getting members and dealing with objections.
- The project worked because of the partnerships created to take it forward – the CLT/RHE/HA/PC along with funds to support the CLT from the Parish Council, Local Authority and the Community Housing Fund (formerly from MHCLG). Kent firms, OSG Architecture, WW Martin (construction) and Betteridge and Milsom (contract administrators) all played their part with understanding of community needs, to bring the project to a successful outcome.
- Not everyone in the community will necessarily support the provision of these types of homes – effective community engagement is essential.
- It is important to keep a strong 'paper trail' of meetings with planning officers and advice given on sites, so any new officers are aware of what has previously been said. Also to evidence the site search and reasons for some sites not being suitable or available.
- It is critical that local authorities understand and support CLTs e.g. through supportive policies, grants and loans, land disposal and leases and staff with knowledge and expertise. This will strengthen the partnership and remove some of the barriers.

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