Housing LIN
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Case Study 175

Hazelmead, Bridport Cohousing: More affordable, more sustainable and more neighbourly homes for Dorset

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Written for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by **Sam Goss**, Founding Director at Barefoot Architects

Introduction

This Housing LIN case study highlights Hazelmead, Bridport Cohousing, the largest cohousing development in the UK so far. There are 53 affordable homes that address multiple crises of our time – housing, the environment, loneliness. It's a project that takes different values and creates a multicultural, multigenerational community where people and nature are thriving.

Background

Bridport Cohousing CLT was established in 2008 by a group of Bridport residents with the shared aim of addressing the critical shortage of affordable, sustainable, and community-oriented housing in Bridport, Dorset. Sixteen years later, in collaboration with Barefoot Architects, Hazelmead is an award-winning community housing project that provides good quality homes at affordable prices. It also has a *'powerful and palpable community spirit'* (Rowan Moore, the Observer).

Cohousing is a community-led approach to housing that has multiple benefits. Read on to learn more about:

- How the focus on neighbourliness, through the design of Hazelmead and the sociocratic approach has been successful in creating a cohesive multigenerational community
- How providing affordable, sustainable homes in perpetuity has enhanced housing and energy security
- How decisions made through codesign with the residents have resulted in higher quality homes and helped the community to come together.

Affordability for all

In a region where average house prices exceed 11 times the average local income, Hazelmead provides a practical solution by delivering 53 affordable homes secured in perpetuity through the Bridport Cohousing Community Land Trust (CLT).

National studies highlight the links between housing affordability, security, and mental health, emphasising the importance of stable tenancies and community support in fostering wellbeing and simultaneously addressing the loneliness epidemic.

Hazelmead is made up of 14 one-bedroom flats within two low-rise apartment blocks and 39 terraced houses, offering two, three, and four bedrooms. Fourteen homes are available through shared equity at 80% of market value, supported by Bridport Cohousing. An additional 13 flats and houses are available for shared ownership at starting shares of 25% of market value, delivered by Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) with Homes England funding. The remaining 26 flats and houses are reserved for social affordable rent, with 10-year tenancies and no right-to-buy, ensuring community stability. Ownership of the freehold remains with the CLT, safeguarding affordability in perpetuity.

Achieving net zero operational carbon, the homes meet the AECB Carbon-lite standard ensuring low-energy, all-electric living with extremely low energy bills for residents. They are highly insulated, powered by electricity with hot water from ASHPs, fresh filtered air from MVHR, and require minimal heating. Overheating in summer is mitigated by roof overhangs and recessed windows. A network of rooftop solar panels feeds into a huge Tesla battery store managed by a CLT energy company.

Emily and her son Herbie were the first people to move into Hazelmead:

> *"Compared to my old house, it's so warm, and there are no draughts. There is no damp. It feels like a healthy place to live."*

A location that supports healthy living

Nestled on the edge of Bridport, Hazelmead integrates seamlessly into its Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The project balances integration with the natural landscape and access to local services via a 5 minute cycle, 1 mile walk or bus ride into Bridport.

Careful attention was paid to blending the homes into the landscape. Short terraces follow the natural contours of the hill, offering framed vistas. A third of the site is dedicated to wild spaces, including a small orchard, fostering biodiversity and creating a soft transition to the surrounding countryside.

The green spaces promote physical activity, mental well-being, and biodiversity. Karen has a long term health condition:

> *"We have these absolutely huge windows with this beautiful view of the wildflower meadow and trees behind at the back. So even if I'm stuck in bed, that's the view I've got. And it is completely health giving and joy giving."*

Codesign for flourishing communities

The scheme was co-designed with the CLT to align with their goals of building a community-focused neighbourhood. Recognising loneliness as a significant risk to mental and physical health, the design prioritised intergenerational connection and social interaction, with 40% of residents aged over 60.

Design elements were integrated that encourage interaction and collective wellbeing. Hazelmead is a car-free development, with parking located at the edges of the site to prioritise pedestrian spaces. Open front gardens and natural surveillance through long sight lines bring safety as well as casual encounters among residents. Each of the terraced homes has a front bench built into the south facing front façade, turning the streets into a social extension of the homes. Nick is in his late 20s and lives in a one bedroom flat with his partner:

> *"I really like just seeing these moments between someone older, having a laugh with someone who's you know, totally different from them."*

Children play freely, fostering trust and intergenerational support among neighbours. H says:

> *"I love it when I'm washing up and looking out of the window and seeing the kids running along, and I know who they are, and, I can 'shoot' one of them and, wave to another and have what I feel is a sense of community."*

A place to grow

From the beginning, the CLT's vision was for a "place to grow". Shared allotments and growing spaces weave through the site, offering opportunities for communal gardening and collaboration, as well as to connect with nature.

These shared vegetable patches have become hubs for social interaction and resilience, offering opportunities to grow both food and friendships. Produce from the allotments is shared freely between all residents, and many of the shared meals feature freshly picked veg.

Building a community

Generous design choices, including large windows, high ceilings and vaulted roof spaces create a sense of light and spaciousness. These features, driven by resident input, belie their affordability.

The Common House and central green are pivotal to the ethos of cohousing. The straw bale Common House, currently being self-built by residents, will host shared meals, members' meetings, and social events. But even while the space has been in development, the community has come together, supporting social interaction and intergenerational connections. Neighbours regularly share 'pot luck' dinners, meet around the fire circle in the meadow, and finding ways to help each other, through serendipitous conversations or the lively WhatsApp group.

Emily recalls having Covid, and coming downstairs to find medicine, soup, and a dog walking rota:

> *"I think our community is about sharing, and a level of care that we don't necessarily come across very readily anymore. I like that."*

Consent, not consensus

Governance follows sociocratic principles, with decisions made collectively through work circles. The idea is that decision making is by consent rather than consensus. Judith Griffies is a resident and Director of the CLT: *"There's an opportunity for everyone to have a say. Not everyone wants that, that's fine, but the decision-making process is transparent. People know who makes the decisions and that the power is shared."* Every resident contributes time and effort to ensure the smooth functioning of the community, fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility and playing to their strengths in supporting the greater whole.

Stronger together

New residents must first join the CLT, so not all members of the CLT actually live at Hazelmead. When a home becomes available, those who have expressed interest in living at Hazelmead are cross-checked against the council housing list. New residents must attend a minimum number of meetings or events, so by the time they move in, they will already know many of the residents. New residents are given a buddy, and new relationships blossom easily, across generations.

Lin is in her early seventies and remarks that she watched her own parents' world shrinking at this age. Instead, Lin is an active member of the cohousing community. She says *"I'm looking forward to having a future"*.

By integrating health-promoting design features, prioritising community-building activities, and establishing cooperative governance, Hazelmead ensures long-term well-being for its residents while demonstrating the power of participatory development across the generations.

Judith moved to Hazelmead from a rented stone cottage with no central heating in rural Dorset:

> *"I feel like my life here is more balanced: between solitude and people, between town and country, between generations."*

Project data

Address	Hospital Lane, Bridport, DT6 5FQ
Project schedule	Project Start 2008 Barefoot Architects appointed Jan 2014 Phase 1 Planning permission Feb 2016 Phase 2 Planning permission Nov 2018 Start on site July 2020 Residents first moved in Aug 2022
Contract cost	£9.5m
Cost per m^2	£2460/m
GIA	3779m^2
Client	Bridport Cohousing CLT
Architect	Barefoot Architects
Microgrid Design	CEPRO
AECB Consultant	Delta Q
Structural Engineer	JDL Consultants
Civil Engineer	IMA
Principal Designer	Welling Partnership
Landscape Architect Landscape Design	LT Studio, Land Products, Aileen Shackel
Common House Architect	Common Practice
Main Contractor	C G Fry
Photography	Rebecca Noakes

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

About the Author

Sam Goss is the Founding Director at Barefoot Architects. He contributed to the Housing LIN's recent HAPPI Hour webinar on international and national intergenerational living, sharing his insights from Bridport Cohousing on living multigenerationally at Hazelmead. A recording of the session is at: https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Events/HAPPI-Hour-Webinar-International-and-National-perspectives-on-Intergenerational-Living/

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 20,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently in a home of their choice
- provide insight and intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice to support sector learning and improvement
- showcase what's best in specialist/supported housing and feature innovative projects and services that demonstrate how lives of people have been transformed, and
- support commissioners and providers to review their existing provision and develop, test out and deliver solutions so that they are best placed to respond to their customers' changing needs and aspirations.

Access a selection of related resources on the Housing LIN's dedicated cohousing page at: https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Housing/HousingforOlderPeople/Cohousing/

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