

Response to Oxford City Council's plans to set up a Housing Company to ensure that new social housing stock can be assured as permanently affordable (exempt from Right to Buy)

This submission is on behalf of Homes for Oxford a newly-formed coalition of housing groups focused on creating community-led permanently affordable housing in Oxford. We specifically wish to focus on securing some of the few remaining sites within the city, to ensure the maximum proportion of permanently affordable homes is delivered. What we can offer in particular is a double lock on the right to buy by i) community land trust ownership of the land and ii) cooperatively-run social rented and affordable leasehold homes with rents linked to local median incomes. For more information, please contact me separately.

We'd like to make two main points:

First of all we welcome the City's commitment to trying to protect its existing and future stock of social rented homes from Right to Buy and in particular we welcome the setting up of a new Housing Company. We wish the council well with this and want to work in partnership with them in any way we can. However, we wish to register concern that the mechanism to prevent Right to Buy is dependent on the Secretary of State's support and we worry that this will not be forthcoming, given Brandon Lewis' commitment last year to not allow council's to avoid giving their tenants Right to Buy through a housing company.

"19. To pay for the RTB extension to housing associations, the HRA will need to pay a levy to Government based on a formula assuming the anticipated sales of high value void properties. The housing company may be able to acquire and retain these homes whilst generating the necessary receipts for the Council to pay the levy. However, at present the transfer of more than 5 properties a year to a wholly owned subsidiary company under the 1985 Housing Act and its associated general consents will need the Secretary of State's approval."

Second, we think there is room to have more than one approach to protecting permanent affordability and we ask for the council's active encouragement to try a community-led approach alongside their new Housing Company. In particular, we would like to be given the opportunity and support to develop the Rose Hill Community Centre site which is mentioned in the document, and of which there has been ongoing conversation with officers to create a zero carbon community-driven scheme for genuinely affordable rent. Significant time has been put into making a bid for this site with the sustainability charity Bioregional and local architecture practice Transition by Design CIC, who both have strong connections with the local community through a project delivering energy storage and battery power to council and housing association homes in Rose Hill, along with the primary school and new community centre. The intention is to use a new model of affordable housing called Mutual Home Ownership, which is currently in use in Leeds and is gaining support from other groups across the UK.

We believe these approaches can offer better value especially when social and community value are included as a key metric and would urge the councillors to consider further work on bringing the council company closer to community-led organisations in order to deliver genuinely affordable homes which are exempt from Right to Buy from day one.

We wish this to be minuted formally.

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