



**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 13 November 2019  
**Report of:** Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)  
**Title of Report:** Community Led Housing Delivery and Approval to dispose of land for housing

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Housing Panel recommendations concerning the Community Led Housing Delivery and approval to dispose of land for housing
<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers, Chair of the Housing Panel
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Meeting Housing Needs
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018 - 2021
<b>Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.</b>	

<b>Appendices</b>
None

## Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 07 November 2019, the Housing Panel considered the report on Community Led Housing delivery and approval to dispose of land for housing.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, for attending the meeting to answer questions. The Committee would also like to thank Dave Scholes, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager, for supporting the

meeting and compiling the report, and Charlie Fisher of Transition by Design for supporting the meeting.

### **Summary and recommendation**

3. The Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Councillor Mike Rowley, introduced the report. It was explained to the Panel that the report sought to do two things: to provide an update on the progress made against the actions recommended in a previously commissioned report on how Community Led Housing could be delivered in Oxford, and to consider a land disposal by way of a long lease of a plot containing seven garages and a forecourt at Champion Way in Littlemore.
4. Regarding the actions recommended to support the delivery of Community Led Housing it was noted that the majority of major actions had already been taken forward. The one area which had not progressed was the suggestion that s.106 agreements be used to require provision of community led housing sites on larger developments. The rationale behind the decision not to progress this was due to the negative implications on scheme viability and therefore the overall number of social housing projects developed.
5. Charlie Fisher of Transition by Design, one of the authors of the previously commissioned report on how Community Led Housing could be delivered in Oxford, presented to the Panel regarding the definition of Community Led Housing, which covered multiple models but all had in common a shared and communal approach regarding finance, risk and management of a scheme. The progress made by the Council against the recommended actions of the previous report were commended, and four key issues were identified as particularly important in continuing to drive the delivery of Community Led Housing forward:
  - a. Continued political support
  - b. Continued officer support, particularly with regards to the upcoming application for funding from the Oxfordshire Growth Deal in March 2020, but also in the development and contribution to the work of the Community Led Housing regional hub and its work of ensuring a pipeline of land for projects, and matchmaking suitable stakeholders to projects.
  - c. Developing a mechanism for shortlisting suitable prospective tenants from the housing register who actively wished to be involved in a housing environment with a cooperative element to it.
  - d. Ensuring that land values included social and environmental factors of potential developments. Bristol was held up as an exemplar in this regard.
6. The challenges of the proposed disposal site were explained to the Panel: its small size, proximity to the ring road, difficult access arrangements and protected trees. It was suggested that in the absence of any other developers wishing to work on the site, it would offer the opportunity to demonstrate proof of concept should it prove possible to develop through Community Led Housing.
7. In response to the report presented, the Panel commended the progress made against previous recommendations, welcomed the concept of Community Led Housing as a means of increasing social housing in the city, and endorsed the proposals regarding

the disposal of the land at Champion Way. The Panel's particular areas of discussion focused on two key areas:

- Publicity and awareness of the opportunities for involvement in Community Led Housing
- Questions regarding housing allocation and tenant-identification, bearing in mind the particular importance of having a cohesive and cooperative group to any such scheme.

8. The Committee makes two recommendations.

### **Publicity and Awareness**

9. In discussing the degree of community engagement the Champion Road project had had to date, the Panel's questioning led to discussions about wider issues around publicity and awareness of the opportunities afforded by Community Led Housing, particularly amongst those outside 'co-op receptive' demographics.
10. In regards to the level of consultation on the Champion Road project, none had been undertaken to date. However, it was noted that it was still early in the process; discussions were being held about the provision of land, and that just because there had not been discussion to date, did not mean there would not be in the future. Additionally, it was noted that the location of the site meant that it was more remote, so the need for community consultation on this particular site was lower than on other sites, for example other garage sites. It was expected, with funding available to back it, that community consultation on other sites would be significantly beyond the simple statutory consultation arising from participating in the Planning process.
11. Though the Panel welcomed the news that an event was planned in January 2020 to raise the profile of and publicise Community Led Housing, it was recognised that actually the concepts of cooperative housing had been around for a long time, but that it had tended to be popular within a relatively narrow demographic. For those outside that grouping, particularly social housing tenants, the ideas and concepts of communal housing were novel to the point of being actively counter-cultural. This was a recognised area of challenge for the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust and the sector more generally. Funding of £15,000 had been received by the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust from the Cohesive Communities Fund to look at the means of engaging under-represented demographics and recruitment of a worker was due shortly.
12. It is the view of the Panel that the benefits of Community Led Housing are relevant beyond the demographic groups who are already familiar with its concepts, yet due to its novelty those who are less acquainted with the idea are unlikely to commit to it. Social housing tenants, in particular, are felt to be at risk of not engaging with the idea and therefore missing out on its benefits. It is felt that simple information-sharing is insufficient to address this issue, but must be backed up with consideration of the barriers that those encountering information about community living for the first time might encounter. Likewise, it should be recognised that those who are unfamiliar with communal living already are unlikely to attend talks at the Council on the subject, and that to ensure the message is shared to those groups it will be necessary to go out to where potential beneficiaries are to raise awareness.

**Recommendation 1: *That the Council will, when publicising and raising awareness of Community Led Housing, take steps to ensure that the barriers to demographic groups with less exposure to the concepts of communal living (particularly social housing tenants) are identified and addressed, and to ensure that these groups are equally equipped to understand the benefits of and to participate in the opportunities afforded by Community Led Housing.***

## **Housing Allocation and Tenant Identification**

13. Building on conversations regarding accessibility, the Panel also sought clarification around how the particular needs of Community Led Housing schemes would interact with housing allocation, and how that might fit within the Council's broader housing provision mechanisms and obligations.
14. It was made very clear to the Panel that cooperative living can be an extremely strong model for developing resilient communities, but that realising that potential is heavily dependent on ensuring there is a shared commitment amongst members to work with one another to make the model work. Experience from the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust's six years of developing the Dean Court development in Botley showed the benefits of proactively sifting tenants to ensure they had the right mix of values, skills and motivations for the particular scheme they were seeking to join.
15. Through questioning, a number of the challenges in developing a fair and workable system within the Council's existing housing provision system were identified: balancing the demands of those in priority need with the need to ensure the best 'fit' within any particular development, the wish to involve and collaborate with as many prospective tenants as early as possible whilst ensuring the delivery retained momentum, and the implications for those people on the housing register who did not want to live in community led housing. Overall it was recognised that there was no existing plan for managing these issues and a system would need to be developed. However, there was clarity that community led housing availability was to provide more options to those on the waiting list; it would not act as a replacement for other provision, those who did not want to live communally would not be pressured into doing so, nor would they be penalised for not doing so.
16. It is recognised by the Panel that Community Led Housing can engender more engaged and resilient communities, but the creation of a community has to be proactively managed from the earliest stages to ensure that each person living communally is suited to both their neighbours and the particular needs of the scheme they are living in. Whilst it is clear that due to its responsibilities as a housing authority the Council will have an involvement in the process of allocating places in forthcoming Community Led Housing schemes, it is also recognised that the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust has expertise in understanding the workings of different schemes and community led housing models. It is felt that there is value in drawing on their learning to inform the choice of members, regardless of the system through which allocations are managed.

**Recommendation 2: *That the Council will, in identifying tenants with the values, skills and motivations suited to community living, give the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust a formal role in the selection process.***

## Further Consideration

17. On the basis that the Champion Road site is a 'proof of concept' which may, if successful, be extended to other Council-owned garage sites the Panel may wish to incorporate an update on the current project in a future work plan when the Council considers whether to make available further sites.

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**Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 07/11/2019 concerning Community Led Housing and approval to dispose of land at Champion Way.**

**Provided by the Cabinet member for Affordable Housing, Councillor Mike Rowley**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Agree?</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<p><b>1) That the Council will, when publicising and raising awareness of Community Led Housing, take steps to ensure that the barriers to demographic groups with less exposure to the concepts of communal living, particularly social housing tenants, are identified and addressed, and to ensure that these groups are equally equipped to understand the benefits of and to participate in the opportunities afforded by Community Led Housing.</b></p>	Agreed	In the nature of the projects being “community led”, we must let the hub and CLH groups take the lead on this, i.e. we will promote interest in their model(s) by highlighting and distributing their publicity.
<p><b>2) That the Council will, in identifying tenants with the values, skills and motivations suited to community living, give the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust a formal role in the selection process.</b></p>	Partial	As a Council we have a duty to ensure housing needs are met, and we will not give any provider a role in selection that could risk the “cherry-picking” of prospective tenants. I expect, however, that agreement can be reached on the CLH groups having an important advisory role.

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