

Community-led Housing in England

What is community-led housing?

Community-led housing is where people and communities play a leading role in making their own housing solutions – creating sustainable, affordable and lasting homes, building resilient and confident local communities, helping people to develop skills they never knew they had.¹

Unlike most other forms of housing supply, community-led housing is born from the demand side of the picture – where people shape their own environments, rather than having those environments imposed upon them. In the complex, challenging and highly competitive context of housing, ***the community-led housing sector supports people to decide how they want to live, and make it happen.***

Community-led housing provides a solution of creating permanently affordable housing based on the needs of local people. It can do this through improving the quality of the housing stock, by giving communities ownership of assets, and supporting local supply chains to improve the skills and employability of local people. Ultimately community-led housing can strengthen communities with increased confidence, capacity and control over their futures.

In England, community-led housing has grown as a collection of fragmented, grass-roots movements which by definition has not had a coordinated approach to defining or promoting the sector². Joint working is carried out where opportunities are identified, but the resources available to identify synergies are limited and considerable duplication can occur³. This scenario presents a complex, confusing and potentially off-putting picture to new entrants (individuals, communities or organisations).

¹ This definition has been derived from a document produced by the Mutual Housing Group, made up of a number of different community-led housing sector representatives

² As testament to this, the term 'community-led housing' is itself contested as lacking sufficient clarity to describe the principles and spectrum of activity it represents.

³ This issue has been identified by a number of observers and re-emerged during BSHF's consultation in May 2014.

Figure 1 Broad operating context for community-led housing (indicative)



Figure 2 Middlesbrough Community Land Trust: A real life community-led housing project



- Providing permanently affordable homes
- Bringing empty property back into use
- Demonstrating and encouraging community leadership
- Accessing investment which could not otherwise have been attracted
- Community asset ownership
- Increasing confidence in and commitment to the area
- Contributing towards the sustainability of the neighbourhood
- Using local builders and sub-contractors keeping money in the area
- CLT members develop skills and expertise in project management, finance, partnership working, lettings, management and maintenance

For more information visit <http://www.middlesbroughclt.org.uk/>

Community-Led Housing Models⁴

Community engagement in housing, while not considered mainstream in England, has a significant history⁵. Over time a number of established models of provision have developed their own niches. Whilst these models all have specific characteristics, they overlap to the extent that the distinctions between them are becoming increasingly academic. Community groups can and do choose to mix combinations of different models in order to address their own specific needs⁶.

- [Cohousing](#); an approach where households each have a self-contained home but residents come together to manage their community and share activities. Cohousing developments generally have an element of shared space.
- [Community Land Trusts](#); community organisations that develop housing, community facilities or other assets that meet the needs of the community. They are owned and controlled by the community and are made available at permanently affordable levels.
- [Community self-build](#); groups of households working together to build their own homes. Different models exist but the emphasis is always on supporting one another through the process.
- [Housing cooperatives](#); housing organisations where members (residents) democratically control and manage their homes. Many housing cooperatives also own their properties collectively.
- [Self-help housing](#); an approach which brings empty properties back into use for the benefit of communities.
- [Tenant Management Organisations](#); where communities manage existing homes owned by local authorities or housing associations.

Collaboration in the community-led housing sector in England – A Very Short History

In 2009 the Commission on Cooperative and Mutual Housing published '[Bringing Democracy Home](#)', which proposed a more joined up approach to address the fragmentation they had identified within the community-led housing sector.

"[T]he co-operative and mutual housing sector needs to recognise its importance, its success, its unique identity and believe in itself. It needs to come together to get its message across and be much more outward facing through comprehensive and professional sector leadership through representative bodies. It needs to build and maintain strong open, transparent and accountable democratic governance and the support structures necessary to make this possible."

Bringing Democracy Home, Executive Summary, p.6

A Mutual Housing Group was formed in 2011 as the start of a sector-wide cross-working initiative. Direct support was provided by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) through a whole sector strategic planning event in 2011 involving Mutual Housing Group member organisations, front line community housing projects, and the Department for Communities and Local Government⁷.

⁴ Affordability is a key feature of many projects, but not all community-led housing is affordable by default.

⁵ For more information please see the background paper to the BSHF Consultation in May 2014, available at www.bshf.org

⁶ For example, the Lilac Project in Leeds is a cohousing community, a cooperative, and a community land trust.

⁷ Support for community-led housing is outlined in The Land and Society Commission Report (2011), available online at <http://www.sentpressrelease.com>

Mutual Housing Group Membership

Up to 2 nominated members from each of the following mutual housing sectors:

Sector	Nominating body
Cohousing	Cohousing Network
Community Gateways	Arranged by Preston CGA
Community Land Trusts	Community Land Trust Network
Development Trusts	Development Trusts Association
Housing co-operatives	Confederation of Co-operative Housing
Self-Build	National Self-Build Association & Community Self-Build Association
TMOs	National Federation of TMOs

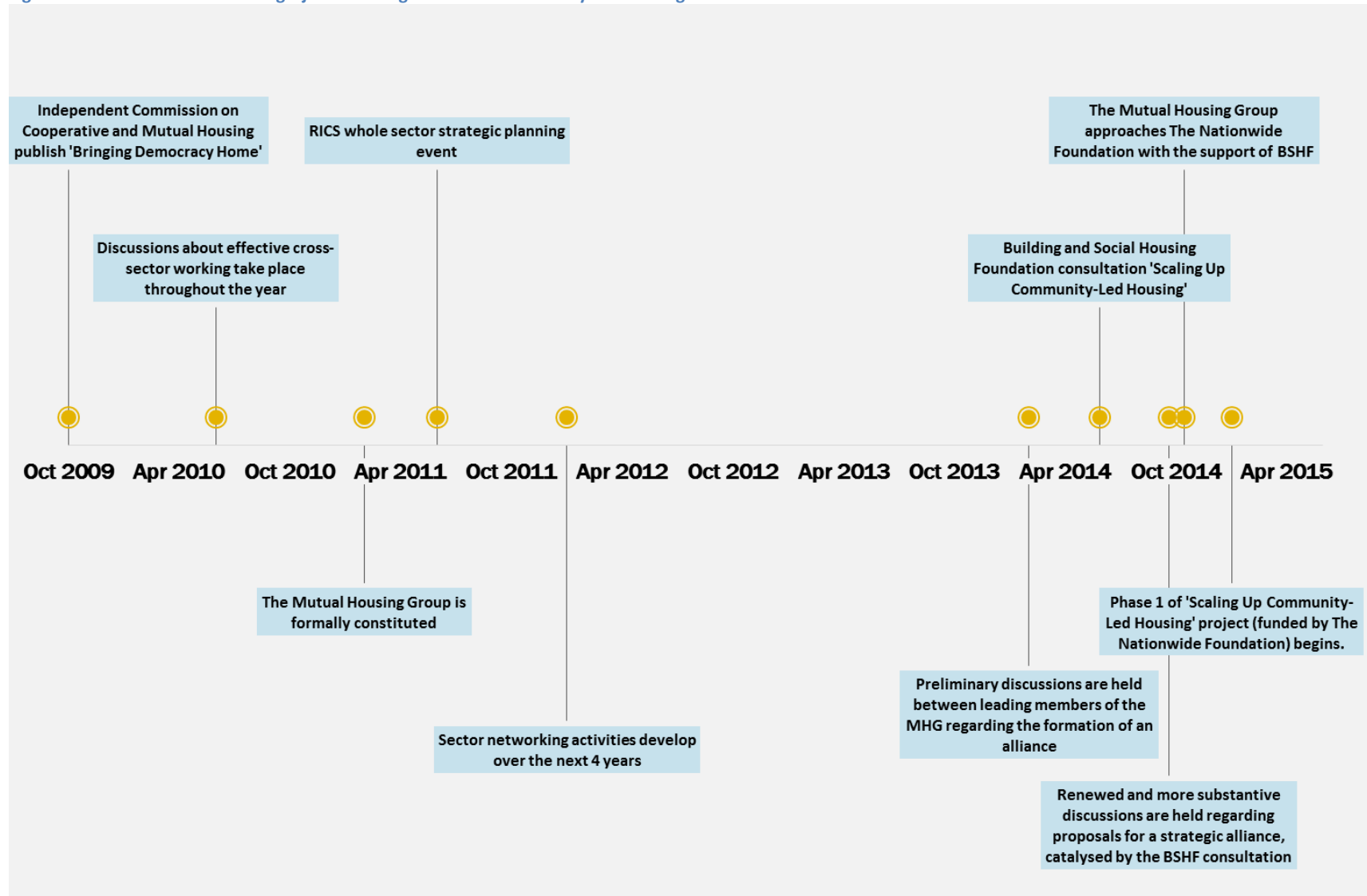
In addition to this membership, the following national representative, support and/or enabling organisations were asked to nominate a member to the Mutual Housing Group:

- Association of Retained Council Housing
- Chartered Institute of Housing
- Co-operatives UK
- Local Government Association
- National Federation of ALMOs
- National Housing Federation
- Radical Routes
- Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
- Self-Help Housing Network
- Appropriate private house builder representatives

After 2011, partly as a result of the establishment of the Mutual Housing Group, but also as a result of other developments, there was a significant increase in networking across the sector and in joint and collaborative working. However, over time it became apparent that while the Mutual Housing Group - with its broad and open membership - had provided a useful forum for discussing the development of the sector and for exerting a degree of influence, it was not constructed in a way that would allow the sector as a whole to become a more significant and forceful player in the development of the UK housing market.

The BSHF Consultation in May 2014 therefore came at a very opportune time to stimulate renewed discussions about a more formal and targeted approach with a clear and mutually agreed agenda, to support a collective push to bring community-led housing from the margins to the mainstream.

Figure 3 Broad evolution of strategic joint working across the community-led housing sector



Community-led housing in a broader context

Wider professional support for the concept of community-led housing already exists. The principles of community ownership or stewardship are strongly supported by the [Town and Country Planning Association](#) (TCPA) through their work on Garden Cities, the New Communities Group and other topics. [Architecture Sans Frontières UK](#) practise a working methodology grounded in community engagement. A growing number of financial organisations are interested in investments with a social impact (for example [Charity Bank](#), [The Social Investment Business Group](#), [Triodos Bank](#) etc.).

Political support is also (currently) in place. The UK government has committed in policy and funding terms. Supportive policy includes a requirement within the National Planning Policy Framework (introduced by the Coalition Government in 2010) for local authorities to account for those people who want to deliver their own homes in development plans; the developing Right to Build Bill⁸, and the (related and also developing) Self Build and Custom Housebuilding Bill⁹. Funding support has been provided primarily through the [Homes and Communities Agency](#) and [Locality](#). While this support has been welcomed by the sector, numerous organisations and community groups considered it unfit for purpose based on the experience of communities in accessing it.¹⁰ The report on Community Rights by the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (January 2015) provides very clear recommendations for a process which simplifies the route for communities to develop skills, capacity and access funding¹¹.

Within the academic community, both in the UK and internationally, there is a culture of partnership working across the community-led housing field giving a strong capacity both to identify existing knowledge and specify research gaps.

There is growing recognition that the UK housing market is failing. Public dissatisfaction and protest around housing shortages and costs is growing¹². In considering how to tackle market failure, some observers have looked at housing markets in other European countries and in North America. In these markets there is much greater emphasis on the role of smaller housing providers, which supports and enables many forms of community-led housing. It has been shown that in these more diverse and localised housing markets both demand and supply issues are addressed much better than in the UK.

Homes that are provided owned or managed¹³ by communities, for communities bring with them an inherent added value. Community-led homes can deliver what people want, need and can afford, avoiding many of the negative prospects so often attributed to today's housing market¹⁴.

⁸ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/right-to-build-supporting-custom-and-self-build>

⁹ See <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2014-15/selfbuildandcustomhousebuilding.html>

¹⁰ See for example House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, Community Rights, Sixth Report of Session 2014-15 (20 January 2015) available at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmcomloc/262/262.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid

¹² For example in the form of groups like [Generation Rent](#) and the growing number of local groups protesting about gentrification, particularly within London

¹³ or any combination of these

¹⁴ For example deliberate supply constraints, 'buy to leave', gentrification, poor space, environmental and design standards, lack of public participation and support in the planning process (etc.)

Why is community-led housing worth investing in?

The potential of direct investment in community-led housing can be seen through the impacts of the Empty Homes Community Grants programme (EHCGP). Over the last 2-3 years around £50 million of grant funding has gone into the activity of [Self Help housing](#) via EHCGP, and over 100 locally based organisations will have brought around 2,000 homes into use, many of them as long term assets in community ownership. A cohort of organisations previously not involved in empty homes refurbishment have acquired experience and skills and are ready to undertake more.

Case studies undertaken in January 2015 indicate impressive leverage. In one case £1.3 million of EHCGP funding attracted almost £8.5 million to bring 125 empty homes into use by 2018, supporting a social enterprise workforce with 5 tradesmen, 6 trainees and apprenticeship opportunities. In another, investment of less than £1million will bring 56 leased and 5 owned local properties into use to house people in housing need, transform the appearance of a local village centre in a deprived area and provide 16 traineeships, 4 apprenticeships and 5 permanent trades jobs. Wider social benefits also arise from a locally based approach: Impact on the local economy through contracts with SMEs; street level regeneration; employment and training; safe and secure places to live; and meaningful change in individual lives.¹⁵

Numerous other examples of community-led housing have identified benefits such as:

- Provision of permanently affordable housing and other bespoke housing solutions which cater specifically to the needs of local people
- Improved quality of housing stock through the renovation and reuse of existing buildings
- Improved affordability through low carbon housing, reducing utility and energy costs as well as lessening the impact on climate change
- Community ownership of assets and retention of local wealth enabling access to further funding
- Support for local supply chains and improving the skills and employability of local people
- Strengthened communities with increased confidence, capacity and control

As well as the potential to address social challenges like:

- Supporting an ageing population (including tackling loneliness and isolation), for example the [Older Women's Cohousing Group](#) in Barnet
- Homelessness, for example the [Canopy Housing Project](#) in Leeds
- Skills Development (e.g. project management; financial planning; construction etc.). Building skills are only one example (see the Donaldson Court, Banbury Project with [Sanctuary](#) and partners, a self-build project which enlisted and trained young people from the local community)
- Support for minority and marginalised groups, for example the Zenzele Project in Bristol, or [Fusions Jameen](#) in Lewisham
- Community cohesion; building new communities and rebuilding old ones. For example [Walters Way](#), Lewisham; [K1 Cohousing](#), Cambridge; [Homebaked](#) Cooperative Bakery and CLT, Liverpool; [Granby4Streets](#) CLT, Liverpool

¹⁵ For more information see [Evaluation of the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme – Midlands](#) (2014), accessible on the BSHF website and forthcoming report assessing the impact of the programme in the North East and Yorkshire.

Links and Further Reading

There is lots of activity around community-led housing. The [BSHF website](#) contains links to some useful starting points, resources and bits and pieces of research.

If you would like to explore community-led housing further, please get in touch.

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