

Nailsworth Community Land Trust

What is Nailsworth Community Land Trust?

It is a community led organisation, established to provide new rentable housing for the town, which gives priority to those on the Gloucestershire Homeseekers housing list with a Nailsworth connection. Our aim is to create new housing for local people. We are using the Community Right to Build Order as this allows local people to vote in a referendum to remove the "Right to Buy" and ensure that the homes will be for rent in perpetuity.

To form a Community Land Trust you need an active town or parish council, a person with good knowledge of Community Land Trusts and planning and some willing volunteers.

In 2012 Nailsworth Town Council commissioned Gloucestershire Rural Community Council to carry out a housing needs survey in the town.

The Nailsworth Community Partnership was formed, carried out the survey and identified that 52 households in Nailsworth expressed a need for affordable housing, mostly with one or two bedrooms.

There were no plans for Stroud District Council, Housing Associations or private builders to provide these homes.

Stroud District Council Executive agreed that small sites owned by the council could be considered for use by a CLT.

With this information, Nailsworth Town Council co-opted that person with good knowledge and understanding of Community Land Trusts and organised public consultations in October 2013 on whether Nailsworth residents wished to create a Community Land Trust.

No town (as distinct from rural village) had previously looked into a Community Land Trust as a way of providing affordable homes.

At one of the meetings I became a member of the Community Land Trust and expressed an interest in joining the Steering Group.

The Steering Group

The Steering Group of some 12 volunteers started to meet in December 2013.

We immediately started looking at sites that Stroud District Council had put forward for consideration.

One site, that straddled a quiet road with a number of derelict, disused or destroyed garages at Lawnside, Forest Green, appeared to allow the development of 10 one or two bedroom properties.

The Steering Group included people who lived in rented or privately owned properties near the site, who were extremely valuable in delivering letters to explain what the Community Land Trust was about and being available to answer queries.

Otherwise we included a local architect, an economist, a person with their own company, a programme manager etc. My background is a degree in architecture, planning and building and social work, including experience of developing housing options for people with mental ill health.

Our role was to represent and speak for the Nailsworth community as ideas developed.

Stroud District Council eventually agreed that the freehold of the land would be transferred to the Community Land Trust for £1 once we had completed all preparative procedures satisfactorily.

Terms of Reference

We agreed:

To set up a Community Land Trust to contribute to the stock of affordable homes and provide community facilities for local people in the town of Nailsworth.

To work with providers of affordable housing; statutory authorities; advisory and voluntary bodies; builders and local businesses; local groups and individuals who support the cause.

To consult with and represent the wider community.

To secure the permanent protection of the Trust's affordable housing so that it cannot be lost to the commercial market.

To include sustainability in the design and building of affordable housing and a whole life cost approach to minimise annual energy and maintenance costs.

To deliver value for money in construction, maintenance and operations.

We quickly determined that rather than undertaking the development and taking all the risk ourselves (we had no money!) we would seek a partnership with a Housing Association on the basis of the Housing Association funding and developing the site and the Community Land Trust providing the land.

We researched and located a Housing Association with experience of Community Land Trusts and contacted those Community Land Trusts to ensure that the Housing Association was open to working within our Terms of Reference.

We located, shortlisted and interviewed a number of architects and appointed a firm that we hoped would assist us in building according to our principles, prepare an imaginative scheme, work with the Housing Association, lead on the

various consultations and prepare the documentation required for the Community Right to Build Order.

We researched lawyers with at least some experience of Community Land Trusts to assist us with the business plan.

We would have liked to instruct local specialists but there were none.

We prepared a range of publicity material, set up a website, completed a parking survey to ensure that the development of the site would not result in unmanageable on road parking near the site and worked our way through the preparation and adoption of lots of reports, policies and codes of practice to prepare.

Consultations

We began with informal community consultations in July 2015 on the basis of presenting “ideas not proposals”.

Having had a public meeting to advise on progress in December 2014, we were ready to move to an AGM in October 2015 by which time we were a Community Benefit Society. At the AGM we agreed a Chair, Secretary and 6 Directors to the Board of Management, of which I am one.

The architect produced a more developed scheme, on which the board had input and this was taken to the Community for consultation in October / November. I have brought examples of the material used in that consultation.

In the background

While all of this was going on the government started to seek changes so that Housing Association tenants would enjoy the same right to buy as local authority tenants.

It is still not clear whether Housing Associations that are also charitable trusts will be exempt from this, but in any event our partner Housing Association is not a charitable trust and is likely to be affected by any change in legislation.

The Housing Association is reliant on borrowing money for the scheme and is finding that sources of funding that they have approached do not currently like the “no sale” condition, required by Stroud District Council as a result of the transfer arrangements.

Housing Associations are also being encouraged by the government to build starter homes for first time buyers rather than for rent.

This has resulted in our partner Housing Association becoming less interested in working with Community Land Trusts in the future and currently not wanting to engage in future projects with us.

Concerns were raised that the building plot could have or have had a badger set and / or an underground hole within its sloping site.
We have had to hold our breath while the environmental survey is completed.

What now

Our architect provided a scheme that the board supported but the Housing Association sought to change the site layout and the construction materials. The board succeeded in achieving a further change with which we, on behalf of what we have learned from the community, are satisfied and this has formed the basis of the statutory consultation and the application for the Community Right to Build Order.

We are about to plan the referendum that will take place in August. We aim to involve as many people who live and or work in Nailsworth as possible in supporting the removal of the Right to Buy and the ongoing availability of these properties for rent. We think this is important for residents and employees of Nailsworth who live on a low income.

We hope that the 6 one bedroom flats and 4 two bedroom houses will be completed in 2017 and available to rent in perpetuity.

But we remain adaptable and hope that at the very least we will have ensured that 10 new, well-designed, attractive, sustainable dwellings will be built in Nailsworth and that their presence and townscape will enhance and add interest to their corner of the town.

What in the future

We will work to make an ongoing success of the tenancies of the Lawnside development.

We are looking at other sites.

We have been approached to watch over the affordable homes that form part of a contentious private development in Nailsworth.

Two other Community Land Trusts have been set up in Stroud District following the Nailsworth initiative.