

***Community-Led Housing: Opportunities and Innovation***

**Network Event Summary**

**Introduction**

1. Planning Aid Wales is a charity that supports community engagement in the planning system in Wales. The community-led housing event was delivered as part of its annual programme of network events, which are designed to bring planners, developers and communities together to debate relevant planning topics.
2. Held on Tuesday 23rd January 2018 in Cardiff, the event explored alternative and innovative approaches to housing delivery, how local communities have delivered their own initiatives and what the planning system can do to encourage more community-led examples of home building.
3. The event was attended by 47 delegates, which included representatives of Community and Town Councils, community groups, local planning authorities, the housing sector and the development industry.
4. A summary of speakers’ presentations, audience feedback and recommendations discussed during the event is provided below.

**Housing in the UK over recent decades**

1. Planning Aid Wales contextualised with an overview of contributing factors to the housing crisis. Key points included:

* An over-emphasis on the supply of housing, emphasis on property as an asset and land and property market practices have all contributed to the housing crisis. The market has been a major source of speculative and therefore high-risk investment strategies. This has led to cyclical investment in property which have been correlated to economic ‘booms’ and ‘busts’.
* The financialisation of the housing sector and the failure of personal incomes to grow as fast as economic output or consumption since the 1970s is key. Salary decline in proportion to social product has resulted in greater dependence on private debt, yet investment in land and property as assets has increased disproportionately.
* There has been a significant increase in house prices and the values of land since the 1990s. Land has natural scarcity compounded by human interventions and is susceptible to fictitious valuations derived from expectations of future rent. This leads to a development model where developers attempt to secure profitability by juggling:
  + the costs of acquiring or controlling development sites with or without permissions;
  + the requirements of planning authorities; and,
  + the prices paid by different categories of buyers in the market.
* When these conditions are amplified by financialisation, it results in land values rising rapidly over time. This has resulted in a dilemma wherein people want decent and affordable homes but at the same time want value growth in order to offset the debt required to provide them. One solution is to deliver housing in a more meaningful way using alternative models that rely on different motivations.

**Co-operative housing – an alternative to the housing crisis in Wales**

1. The Wales Co-operative Centre presented their work on co-operative housing. Key points included:

* Co-operative housing is housing controlled and maintained through a democratic community group. There are different co-operative housing models, all of which could meet the definition of affordable housing as set out in Section 106 Agreements.
* The role of the Wales Co-operative Centre is to advocate and support more co-operative housing schemes in Wales. There is increasing encouragement for this type of housing model from Welsh Government and there are roughly 25 projects up and running across the country.
* The benefits that co-operative housing can offer to residents were presented alongside the benefits to Local Planning Authorities when seeking innovative ways of meeting social infrastructure needs. Local Development Plans should include community-led housing options to help meet housing targets and act as a useful way to help identify sites for community-led housing developments.
* Few community groups know what co-operative housing means and what benefits it offers. A lack of knowledge for this type of housing model could also mean that some policy-makers are more hesitant or less enthusiastic to support such initiatives.
* Co-operative housing is a broad discipline and there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach. Many communities support new housing developments when they are community-led initiatives with stronger links being established or reinforced between local authorities, housing providers and communities; there is great potential for this type of housing provision in the future.

**Community Land Trusts in Wales**

7. The National Community Land Trust Network provided a summary of the history and current initiatives of Community Land Trusts (CLTs):

* The Community Land Trust Network had been established to support the growing CLT movement in the UK and advocate on behalf of CLTs. However, ideas behind CLTs are not new. There is a history of community ownership and management of housing and assets in the UK e.g. Garden Cities had a community trust that owned and managed the assets on the behalf of the community.
* The CLT model originated in the United States during the civil rights movement, where many activists wanted to create long-term opportunities for economic and residential independence for African Americans; CLTs, where land is held by the community in trust, became widely recognised as a method of delivering permanently affordable housing.
* CLTs are a form of community-led housing, set up and run by ordinary people to develop and manage homes as well as other assets. CLTs take a long term view to ensure housing remains genuinely affordable, based on what people actually earn in their area. For England and Wales, the number of CLTs has increased to over 170.
* Local authorities can support CLTs as a means to improve the supply of affordable housing. There are several examples of where local authorities have empowered local communities by involving local people to help resolve housing issues and also to make new development more popular.
* Working with a local housing association (North Wales Housing), West Rhyl CLT helped to develop a scheme comprising 7 three-bed homes, retail units on the ground floor and 4 flats. These homes were allocated to people living in the local area according to housing need and community commitment. All new residents to the scheme are able to become members of the CLT. East London CLT came out of the legacy work linked to the Olympic Park, which currently comprises a requirement for at least 20 CLT homes. Lyvennet CLT have built 12 rented and shared ownership properties.
* The National CLT Network offers a range of services to help communities set up CLTs by providing advice, support, and access to a network of technical experts. Support was also available to local authorities and members of the development industry.

**Loftus Garden Village Co-operative – Lessons learned**

8. Charter Housing introduced an example of their work on co-operative housing; the Loftus Garden Village Co-operative:

* The co-operative housing element being offered as part of the wider Loftus Garden Village scheme on the former Pirelli Cable Factory site in Newport will comprise 250 new homes. Charter Housing, which is part of the Seren Group, had worked with Welsh Government and local residents to bring forward 19 co-operative homes located in a single street in the garden village.
* Charter emphasised the shared ethos with the Garden City Movement (notably the control and management of land held in common) as exemplified by developments like Letchworth Garden City and Rhiwbina Garden Suburb). There is growing support by Welsh Government for more co-operative housing in Wales, and this has helped encourage the scheme.
* However, given the limited examples of co-operative housing in Wales, there were still many (new residents in the scheme and policy-makers) that were unsure of the benefits of such schemes.
* The Loftus Village Association Housing Co-operative is legally responsible for the day to day running of the homes (not the housing association) and is managed by a committee of up to 12 residents. The collection of rent, drafting of policies and schedules and organising the creation of a community vegetable garden all fall within its remit, with Charter Housing and the Wales Co-operative Centre providing the training where necessary.
* Residents of the co-operative comprised a mix of backgrounds and income groups. Benefits include community aspects (shared interests in the governance of the place and management of spaces), and the environmental standards that the scheme delivers. Occasional disputes do occur, although these can be limited if people respect co-operative values
* There is a need for organisational buy-in from the beginning (by the housing deliverer) and it needs to be recognised that involvement with the co-operative does not end with its setting up.

**The Bristol Community Land Trust**

9. The Bristol Community Land Trust introduced their recent work:

* There are many examples of rural-based CLTs involving small schemes that are of a scale that a non-professional could handle. The Bristol CLT is an urban example subject to a more varied political landscape, higher housing needs and no ‘exception sites’ to develop. Bristol CLT benefitted from the opportunities brought about by the energy of many younger people looking for decent and affordable housing.
* Responding to the city-wide housing challenges, Bristol CLT formed in 2011 to open up opportunities for acquiring and developing land for its members. Each member made a payment of £1, which entitled them to a single vote in the company. There are now over 500 members. £1 is the limit of their personal liability. The management board is made up of local housing activists, professional consultants, local councillors, future residents and housing association officers elected by members.
* The Fishponds Road development was the Trust’s first project comprising 12 homes. The Trust found a rundown school building as a potential development site. The Council’s help was needed to unlock the site by allowing access through adjoining land owned by the Council. Bristol City Council also supported it with funding and planning officer time. The open market valuation of the site once planning permission had been obtained was £286k, however the site was sold to the Trust for £1 on the condition that it would refund the full market value if the land was ever sold for purposes other than housing. This enabled the Trust to use the asset value of the land to attract finance and produce other homes on additional sites without further financial aid.
* Part of the site consisted of ‘self-finish’ homes – where the future resident is provided with a shell to complete. The Trust produced information factsheets to help interested members understand the proposal and the self-finish process, and ran some public events to ensure people had an opportunity to engage and comment.
* As a registered housing provider, the CLT could also access funding from the Homes and Communities Agency. A further loan was made from the Community Land & Finance Community Interest Company for the installation of solar panels and the provision of rented and shared ownership housing.
* The next project being developed at Shaldon Road by BCLT in partnership with United Communities Housing Association is for a proposal to develop 49 homes. The development would offer a mix of family homes and apartments, to match the housing needs within Bristol, built to Passivhaus design and comprising self-build and co-housing projects. Planning permission has now been granted. The CLT is encouraging Council planners to adopt community-led housing as a recognised and acceptable housing model in planning policy terms.

**Addressing Cardiff’s housing need: Council’s new build programme**

10. Cardiff Council introduced their New Build Programme:

* The programme is one approach the Council is using to intervene in the housing market to help address the significant housing pressures facing the city; reflected by roughly 8,000 households on the waiting list.
* The Council had wanted to provide an alternative model to the delivery of new homes because it was clear the current model was not working in terms of the number of new properties being built and sometimes in the quality of the homes. In response, the Council was committed to building 1,000 new homes in the next 5 years. This required identifying sites for new development, securing planning consent and overseeing their construction.
* The Council’s approach involved a joint venture with Wates to deliver 1,500 homes comprising 60% market homes and 40% council homes over 9 years. Through the joint venture, the Council could afford to fund the council house programme and ensure that the unviable sites were cross subsidised by more viable sites. It was also hoped that the housing standards employed by the Council in its developments would help raise the game overall in Cardiff for new market housing. In particular, energy efficiency standards were being adopted as part of its ‘Cardiff Specification’.
* The location of the Phase 1 sites across Cardiff were illustrated and the Council is in the process of land assembly for the next phases of development. In addition, the Council was also undertaking a development for temporary accommodation to support and house homeless people in Cardiff. The scheme would comprise demountable units, 14 in all to be erected on Bute Street. The scheme would last 5 years before being dismantled and moved to another site in Cardiff.
* The new council house programme would increase the supply of affordable and high quality homes much needed by residents of Cardiff. Recognising the challenges that a programme of this scale would raise, the Council was building a new delivery team that would have the experiences and skills to match the challenge.

**Audience feedback**

11. The event was welcomed by the audience and many participants felt the event was excellent at illustrating various community-led housing models. Numerous delegates cited a general interest in community led housing as being the main reason why they attended this event, with particular interest expressed in learning about the diverse range of community-led housing models available and current initiatives in this area.

12. Interest was also expressed in learning about Community Land Trusts, co-operative housing, and the support available for community-led housing initiatives. Many highlighted the opportunity presented to share knowledge, learn from others’ experiences and hear the perspectives of other stakeholders. For many delegates, the event was an opportunity to learn about, and engage in, the empowerment of local communities and take inspiration for community-led housing initiatives in their local area. Delegates said that they were inspired by the discussions held, and that they valued being able to learn about what they felt was an important issue.

13. Several delegates expressed a desire to hear from certain other perspectives on the topic, particularly that of Welsh Government, but also from community groups catering to particular sections of society, such as BME people and disabled people.

14. Through a panel discussion at the end of the event, delegates proposed that there should be greater collaboration between local planning authorities, other local authority teams, housing associations and communities interested in developing sites. It was also agreed that strong emphasis should be made through planning legislation, policy and guidance to encourage and support community-led housing as a strong and viable alternative to housing delivery.

**Copies of all presentations are available on the Planning Aid Wales website:**

[**http://www.planningaidwales.org.uk/community-led-housing-opportunities-and-innovation/**](http://www.planningaidwales.org.uk/community-led-housing-opportunities-and-innovation/)