

## **Annual Report 2015/2016**

**October 2016**

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UKCN is actively involved in the advocacy of cohousing principles and the development of sustainable infrastructure to help organisations and groups to develop their cohousing vision. This report illustrates some of the ways we are making progress, alongside measures the board are taking for the future of the Cohousing Network.

### **An overview of actions and success in 2015/16**

Knowledge and interest in Cohousing continues to grow, with its profile being raised through significant media coverage in particular of the Older Women's Cohousing (OWCH) group, being the first specifically senior cohousing project in the UK, and winning a prestigious Housing Design Award. Greater awareness is beginning to be translated onto the policy platform with interest highlighted in the recent London mayoral pledges. There has also been an emergence of market led products, such as The Collective, that embrace some of the cohousing principles into their co-living lifestyle approach for young city professionals.

The emerging Community Led Housing Alliance is gaining momentum to enhance UKCN's advocacy, with joint working on the £60M budget announcement to support community led housing development, and offers opportunities for collaborative working to achieve greater outputs from limited resources.

Below is an overview of our main achievements and work areas in 2015/2016:

- Membership of UKCN has more than doubled since September 2015, from 59 to 126 members. The group members have increased from 30 to 54 (12 established; 42 developing)

- A number of cohousing groups are moving closer to living in their new communities: the Older Women's Cohousing is on site and due for completion within weeks; Cannock Mill Cohousing in Colchester and Bridport Cohousing in Dorset both have sites with planning consent and have been out to tender for the works; K1 Cohousing in Cambridge and Mandorla Cohousing in Herefordshire both have sites with planning consent and are partnered with a developer; and On the Brink Cohousing community in Sheffield have planning consent for their works to their building Brincliffe House.
- A baseline data project was undertaken in late 2015 and early 2016 to update the information known about cohousing groups across the UK. This identified 60 cohousing groups in development and 19 established cohousing communities. Cohousing groups in various stages of development are geographically spread across the UK including Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and from Cornwall to Newcastle. The baseline data has been fed into a broader project facilitated by BSHF (Building and Social Housing Foundation) mapping all community led housing across the UK, which has since been published.
- UKCN held our first national conference for several years in November 2015. The feedback from attendees was very positive, finding the project based workshops and networking particularly helpful. The day resulted in a crowd sourced manifesto which placed new emphasis on: genuine affordability for all; support for rental as well as ownership forms of tenure; more inclusivity in the social and economic makeup of cohousing communities and joint working with other community housing organisations.
- A successful bid for funding from the Big Lottery Accelerating Ideas Fund for was announced in December 2015. This funding supports an action research project to enable an 'investment ready' proposal to be prepared for wider application of a structured support offer to cohousing groups across the UK. The focus of this project is the benefits of cohousing in better ageing, and incorporates both senior and intergenerational cohousing as well as retrofit being a route to achieve this. By the end of November 2016, 7 developing cohousing groups across the UK will have been visited to discuss their support requirements, with others having fed into this work through telephone interviews. We are linking this work directly with current funding opportunities including the DCLG Rural and Coastal fund, the Welsh Government Expert Group on Housing; the GLA Housing Policy; and Power to Change Community Led Housing Programme. This project is also linking with Rural Action Yorkshire to develop the Rural Enabling service as a community led housing support provider. Workshops with HACT and the Housing LIN on using cohousing principles in older people's retrofit and new developments for housing associations, local authorities and developers are planned for the new year.

- The Network continues to be the primary source of information on cohousing. The website attracts around 4,000 visits every month and generates a regular stream of enquiries. Both our Facebook page with over 800 likes and 2,500 Twitter followers, continue to attract interest and discussion on current issues and news stories. We have received agreement from the Big Lottery to use some of the Accelerating Ideas funding to up date and improve the functionality of the website, and will include a specific area to collate research.
- The ESRC seminar series has run throughout 2015 to June 2016, with a report 'Cohousing: Shared Futures' being produced from the outcomes from all six seminars. A very well attended Parliamentary Launch of the report was held on 22nd June, further raising our profile with good discussion on the key policy issues.
- In February 2016 an event hosted by BSHF set up the foundations for an emerging Community Led Housing Alliance, supported by the Nationwide Foundation focusing on increasing wider knowledge of Community Led Housing and its various forms alongside a proposal to create a single point of contact for all queries about community led housing. Many conversations were held at this event which are now developing into fledgling collaborative working amongst some of the organisations involved.
- There were significant staff changes in 2015 with Sarah Hewitt the Communications and Membership Officer leaving in September and Jo Gooding Executive Director leaving in December. Anna Kear was successfully recruited to the to the post of Executive Director in February 2016, bringing a background of significant affordable housing development and working with community led groups.
- In April 2016 a new support services arrangement was put in place, working in partnership with other community led housing organisations. Finance and membership administrative support is being provided through a service level agreement with the National Community Land Trust Network. Communications support is being provided through a service level agreement with CDS Cooperatives. The gap period in staffing highlighted some weaknesses in the systems being heavily reliant on individuals, and this new arrangement seeks to give a consistency of service to strengthen the organisation's resilience. Through this partnership working we are also finding and exploring other areas of commonality for future work.
- There have been some changes of the Directors of the Board in 2015/16, but with the consistency of some Directors to successfully maintain the momentum.

## **Delivery of and development of UKCN core functions**

Key to supporting the growth of cohousing in the UK is having a structured support system of advice, information and tools available nationally and locally to make the routes to cohousing much easier, with less personal risk and therefore more accessible to more people.

The website development project will provide the functionality necessary to support the services and information paths to make it effective. This will enable a better membership offer to both established and developing group members, and help to manage the volume of general enquiries which it is no longer sustainable to answer individually as interest grows. It will remain a key part of our front line communications and the go to place for anyone looking to find out about cohousing.

Through the Big Lottery Accelerating Ideas project the central website resource will aim to be complemented by developing regional provision of structured support and project management to groups delivered through partnership working with other community led housing organisations, rural housing enablers, local housing associations and cooperatives as well as through professional associates and peer to peer services. An accreditation of the professional services is being looked at as part of this structured support arrangement.

Despite the successes, it is clear that there are still significant issues and barriers to bring cohousing projects into existence. The identified issues and support gaps include project & financial management; development financial appraisals; risk management; feasibility funding; site purchase mechanisms and skills to acquire sites; development funding; affordable housing understanding and options for provision; access to information about model forms for group structure and longer term stewardship arrangements; Local Authority and Housing Association understanding & partnership working. In addition a better understanding of both the capital and whole life costs of the shared facilities would be of huge benefit to facilitating cohousing development.

The support structure being developed will ensure that it is not reliant on a singular resource or individuals, but rather built on an information base and exchange network via the web alongside a self-sustaining regional business support model. This approach will seek to foster investor/lender confidence for the developments to be realised.

An increasing amount of the UKCN's Director time is spent on promoting the public benefit of cohousing principles in working with other organisations to address loneliness and isolation, encouraging sustainability and lifetime affordability. These functions better sit with the aims of the Cohousing Trust going forward.

## **UKCN Sustainability post Tudor Trust funding from 2017 onwards**

The core funding from the Tudor Trust since 2012, has provided a significant boost to seeding cohousing in the UK, but it is due to come to an end in March 2017. UKCN is currently in discussions with a range of funders about potential funding for post 2017. UKCN will also be investigating the potential of funding from sponsorship.

Developing on our previous work, the focus on creating a sustainable business model for the future of UKCN is based upon keeping costs and overheads to a minimum, with effective systems in place to provide organisational resilience.

Developing a new web platform to include a members zone, to access specific tools, and a market place for members and associates to self manage advertising and information, is intended to both be more effective and to demonstrate the benefits of membership and therefore increase take up of this.

Building on the successful provision of support services to UKCN by the National Community Land Trust Network and CDS Cooperatives, further joint working will aim to achieve greater efficiencies and resilience for all involved.

As the Accelerating Ideas project evolves the self sustainability of each of the support functions will be essential elements to achieve a long term growth plan for cohousing across the UK. Much of the direct support to groups, particularly in respect of development, will need to be available on a local basis across the UK. Through joint working with other community led organisations this 'market gap' is receiving interest from funders.

The application to the Charities Commission continues to be a slow process. Following feedback from the Charity Commission, on the evidence provided, a new application is being prepared supported by specialist legal advice that is clear on the distinctive roles of the public benefit of a charitable Cohousing Trust and the private benefit of the Cohousing Network, and the relationship between the two.

UKCN has a challenging five months ahead, but we are confident in the many benefits cohousing has to offer to both wider society and cohousing community groups.