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CASE STUDY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS IN THE CONTEXT OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING - CASHES GREEN (Stroud, England)

INTRODUCTION

This case study was prepared by BRASS (Centre for Business Relationships Accountability, Sustainability & Society) as part of an HCA/ESRC funded research project investigating Skills & Knowledge for Sustainable Communities. The research looked in depth at the skills and knowledge applied in a range of sustainability initiatives concerned with housing, land, food and transport.

BACKGROUND

Community Land Trusts (CLTs) can take on a variety of forms. Most comprise a democratically structured cooperative group of local members who manage and own an area of land for the benefit of the community. A key activity of CLTs involves removing the land from the open market in order to separate its value from its productive use. This is considered an important means for removing the impact of any changes in land values. The diverse benefits of CLTs are promoted as including the following : provision of affordable housing for those on low and moderate incomes; provision of secure, affordable land for workspace, food growing and conservation; control of local land use and reduction of absentee ownership and gentrification; promotion of resident ownership and control of housing; retention of the value of public investment for long-term community benefit;

and enabling a secure means for people to invest for local benefit (GLP). This case study provides a summary of Gloucestershire Land for People's (GLP) attempts to develop affordable housing in Cashes Green, Stroud.



THE PROJECT

There has been a widespread concern about the rising cost of housing in Stroud. The former Cashes Green Hospital site, owned by English Partnerships, has been derelict for 12 years and provided an opportunity to address these housing concerns by implementing the concept of CLTs and Mutual Home Ownership (MHO) whereby affordable housing would be developed and owned by a resident led Mutual Home Ownership Society (MHOS). The site is located in the parish of Cairncross, Stroud. The vision was to create 55 affordable homes, green space, community facilities and allotments. The vision was driven forward by a Stroud based CLT known as Gloucestershire Land for People (GLP) which was created by Stroud Commonwealth whose aim is to "build community wealth for social, cultural and economic renewal". The case of Cashes Green coordinated by GLP is currently one of 14 other initiatives under the CLT National Demonstration Project coordinated by Community Finance Solutions, University of Salford.

Key Words

■ Skills ■ Community ■ Housing ■ Partnership ■ Planning



The affordability of the scheme rests on using MHO which is a form of tenure where the land is taken out of the market and held as an asset for the benefit of the community by a CLT (in this case, GLP). In comparison to other forms of low cost home ownership, it is specifically designed to remain permanently affordable and never move into the open market. MHO was developed by CDS Cooperatives. The MHOS would be registered as an Industrial Provident Society and is set up to build the homes on the allocated land and local people are invited to join the society based on income eligibility criteria. Members pay for the cost of their homes (not the land) in monthly payments, again based on income. If a member wants to move they can sell their shares and still use that money for their next property. Affordability is said to be 'locked in' throughout the scheme because the transactions do not reflect the value of the land.

To date, the initiative has been subject to controversy. Following extensive community consultation, EP were said to have agreed to hand over the entire Cashes Green site in June, 2007. This decision was controversially overturned in November, 2007 (although EP claim a decision was never finalised) and there are currently discussions underway (subject to Ministerial approval) which would involve EP handing over a half or a third of the land to GLP for affordable housing. The case has received much media attention and further community consultation is taking place.

THE IMPACT

A range of generic and specific skills and knowledge was utilised for developing the initiative.

Specific detailed knowledge of the principles of CLTs, MHO, and how they operate was essential for developing the proposal for Cashes Green. For example, key actors within the initiative were involved in pioneering

and championing the idea of CLTs within the UK as well as undertaking an action research project on community farm land trusts. The aim of the research was to investigate how existing community owned farm land trusts operate, and identify best practice and compile practical experience into an action pack. This experience was consolidated through a visit to CLTs in the USA. It is through their connections to others working on CLTs that key actors came across the MHO tenure model. This knowledge base was crucial to the formation of the GLP and for developing the Cashes Green proposal.

Further knowledge required for the initiative relates to a thorough understanding of the housing market, land values and planning legislation. Linked to this is an awareness of the local and national political context, together with an understanding of the intricacies of the funding system. This is particularly important in a policy context where the benchmarks are constantly shifting. This would suggest a range of *legal* and *planning legislation skills* were required.

Equally important is the need to have sufficient *community facilitation/development skills* to engage communities and identify local needs and priorities for derelict sites. What could be termed *networking skills* and *synergy skills* were essential for bringing together the right actors to be involved with taking forward the initiative at different stages.

LESSONS LEARNED

In order for the Cashes Green initiative to progress further it was generally recognised that there was a need to appoint a full time development manager, preferably with a background in housing. This appointment addresses the need for further *project development skills*, which would ideally include communication, networking, fundraising and finance skills.

Wider issues in relation to taking forward CLTs in a variety of different contexts include:

- A significant issue raised by those actors involved in the Cashes Green scheme is the *cyclical* nature of the initiative and how *different skills are required at different stages*. An awareness of this issue needs to be maintained throughout the project development, with appropriate strategies and responses put in place to ensure progress continues to be made.
- All of the members currently on the board for the Cashes Green project are *volunteers* with other jobs and don't necessarily have all the professional skills required, or time, to further develop the initiative and fully engage with its complexity. Having a *paid position* to coordinate such an initiative is one way of addressing these gaps.
- *Re-localisation*: The Cashes Green case study demonstrates how community land trusts can potentially operate as a vehicle for communities to respond to housing and land crisis by keeping assets such as land under community control.
- Tenacity & attrition: the current policy climate is looking favourably upon CLTs as a way of empowering and engaging communities. Sometimes though, it may be necessary to wait for the right time to push certain initiatives forward.

REFERENCES

This case study was prepared by BRASS (Centre for Business Relationships Accountability, Sustainability & Society) as part of an HCA/ESRC funded research initiative investigating Skills & Knowledge for Sustainable Communities. For more information on the research, see:

http://www.brass.cf.ac.uk/projects/Sustainable_Lifestyles_and_Communities/sustainable-lifestyles--Sustainable-Communities.html

For more information on Community Land Trusts in Stroud, visit:

<http://www.gloucestershirelandforpeople.coop/>

<http://www.stroudcommonwealth.org.uk/>

For more information on Community Land Trusts in general:

<http://www.communitylandtrust.org.uk/>

<http://www.communityfinance.salford.ac.uk/>

<http://www.clt-conference.co.uk/>

<http://www.clnetwork.org/> (American website)

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