

# wessex community assets

## The motivations and aspirations of community land trust volunteers in Somerset, Dorset and Devon

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## Acknowledgements

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## Foreword

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We live in challenging times not least due to the severe shortage of local affordable housing. With successive Governments at an apparent loss over the solution albeit the 'promise' of one million new homes during the current term the key issue of affordability remains unaddressed. Housing is of no benefit if a significant proportion is not affordable and remains so in perpetuity.

Over the last five years we have seen a dramatic escalation in communities tackling the housing problem for themselves through the Community Land Trust approach. I am sure that no one involved in these CLT's would state it was easy but with the growth in numbers has come a huge amount of knowledge and experience through the National CLT Network, support networks such as Wessex CLTP, and other CLTs. The route to delivery is becoming simpler and the approach more mainstream.

The advantages of the CLT approach are significant; a tailored solution for local people, houses designed by the community for the community, occupied by local people and potentially retained in perpetuity for the community. Then add to this the wider benefits of community cohesion and sustainability. Whether rural or urban communities need to grow and expand and the CLT approach allows for control and input.

This study by Wessex Community Assets clearly demonstrates the appetite of communities and their success in delivering housing and other assets through a CLT approach.

From a personal perspective the satisfaction in handing over keys to new homeowners who without the CLT approach would never have been able to buy in my own village was immense. Find out for yourself – set up a CLT today.

**David M Graham**

Chair of National Community Land Trust Network

# Executive Summary

## Background to the study

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This research was commissioned by Wessex Community Assets to discover more about the factors that are fundamental to the success of community land trusts (CLTs) from the perspectives of CLT volunteers. The study explored the motivations, reflections and future aspirations of volunteers involved in CLT projects in Somerset, Dorset and Devon. Six CLTs participated in the study, each at different stages of development, and six board members from each CLT were interviewed. The study also surveyed the reflections and experiences of local, regional and national stakeholders that have supported CLT development.

The CLTs in the study initially formed to tackle the localised effects of the rural housing crisis, namely large discrepancies between house prices and incomes, and an insufficient supply of affordable homes. The lack of affordable homes was thought to be detrimental to the local community, affecting its social sustainability, use amenities and services, and causing it to be demographically unbalanced. As such, CLTs commonly sought to provide homes for local young people who needed to live locally for reasons of work or familial relationships, but were priced out of housing in their villages. CLTs were typically, but not exclusively, retired individuals from professional backgrounds. They were often people of long residency in communities and were motivated to volunteer for CLTs in order to maintain and enhance important aspects of their communities.



## Findings

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The project identified the following key findings:

- The CLTs in this study mobilised deep-seated emotional attachments to place. Whereas such bonds might normally express themselves as fear of change or opposition to development, through the CLTs they were channelled into leadership and advocacy. Such determined support for new homes rarely characterises other forms of housing development - quite the opposite. Counter-intuitively, it was sometimes even the neighbours of selected sites who were the most enthusiastic and active members of the CLTs; the very people who might otherwise be cast as 'NIMBYs'.
- CLTs were seen as trusted vehicles for the disposal of land by local landowners. These landowners shared the CLTs' concerns over local housing issues and wished to ensure their land would expressly benefit the local community. The community-led nature and local focus of CLTs meant that sites for housing development could be acquired that would have otherwise been unavailable; sometimes on better terms than could be obtained by a housing association or developer.
- Often, the most valuable communication between a CLT and the wider community is informal. Day-to-day conversations immeasurably enrich the set-piece consultations that take place in halls and newsletters, serving both to explain and take soundings, to discuss and debate. In this way CLTs address local sensitivities around issues such as aesthetics, environmental impact and eligibility for the homes; gradually building local acceptance and refining the 'fit' of new homes to the communities which might otherwise oppose them.

<sup>2</sup> 'NIMBY' is an acronym for the phrase 'Not in My Back Yard', used to describe local opposition to proposals for new developments that are perceived to negatively affect the community.

- Technical support was integral to the success of all schemes. Continuation of this support from the Wessex Community Land Trust Project (WCLTP) will be fundamental to increases in the scale, activities, and number of CLTs in Somerset, Devon and Dorset. The involvement of housing associations was fundamental to the efficient and successful delivery of CLT housing, absorbing and defraying the development risks to which the CLTs would otherwise have been exposed.
- Volunteers contributed a huge amount of time, energy and expertise to the initial housing scheme - all without any personal financial reward. Nonetheless, volunteers were keen to build on their success. Two of the CLTs in this study have completed shop or post office projects and all are exploring the acquisition or development of additional community assets and/or devising ways to distribute their ground rent for local benefit. A CLT may also inspire new and overlapping interest groups to pursue new activities, promoting further volunteerism in their local communities and providing broader community benefit beyond the individual occupants of their homes.



# Introduction

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The Wessex Community Land Trust Project (WCLTP) formed in 2010 to support the establishment of CLTs that wish to develop, own and protect important local assets, including affordable housing and other community amenities.

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The WCLTP operates across the counties of Somerset, Devon and Dorset, and has so far helped to establish 15 CLTs in rural communities, which together with emerging trusts, will have completed 24 affordable housing schemes and over 200 homes by the end of 2017. These affordable homes have made a vital contribution towards easing the rural housing crisis in WCLTP's area of operation, where average house prices have escalated beyond the reach of households on average incomes. In Devon, house prices are as high as 11.5 times local incomes, and a shortage of rural rental accommodation means that the nature of rural villages is changing, with young people and key workers forced to move elsewhere (National Housing Federation, 2015).

WCLTP operates under the auspices of Wessex Community Assets, which supports and promotes the development of community asset ownership and social enterprise. The WCLTP operates as an intermediary (sometimes referred to as an 'umbrella') in the CLT sector and exists to support communities in overcoming barriers to CLT delivery. These barriers may include explanation and promotion of the CLT concept, which is still relatively new in England, access to specialist skills and experience required for organisational formation and housing development, and knowledge required to expedite resource acquisition and housing delivery. The value of intermediaries in the CLT sector has been widely acknowledged for many years; as far back as 2005, research conducted for the Countryside Agency highlighted the need for a network of specialist CLT support that could "disseminate good practice and promote public understanding and acceptance of this mutual approach to ownership of land and property" (Countryside Agency, 2005). Recent studies have argued

that CLT intermediaries have played an important role in the expansion of CLTs in England, as their provision of technical support and promotion of CLTs within local, regional and national policy networks has helped to expand CLT activity in areas where intermediaries are active (Moore and Mullins, 2013; Moore, 2014). Initially funded by grant provided by the Department of Communities and Local Government and administered by the Carnegie UK Trust, in addition to contributing grants from local authorities in Somerset, Dorset and Devon, WCLTP now recovers its costs from successfully completed housing schemes.

While some CLTs in WCLTP's area of operation have independently developed affordable housing schemes, the approach taken by WCLTP and the CLTs it supports involves partnering with a housing association. Under this form of partnership, the CLT is the freehold owner of the land and has a long-term lease – usually of 125 years – with a housing association partner. More recently, partners have been selected by the CLT from a small group of associations keen to engage in such relationships. The housing association owns the properties, while the CLT owns and leases the land to the housing association in exchange for an index-linked ground rent of £4 per week/home. Under this model, the housing association takes the risks and responsibilities involved in developing, financing and managing the scheme, while the CLT leads on key issues such as the choice of site, design of homes, allocation criteria, and community consultation. WCLTP oversees the process, its support including advice on legal structures and legal advisers, on the planning of capital



funding, advice on the choice of HA partner, facilitation of public meetings and steering group meetings, provision of model documentation, co-ordination of grant applications, timescale and risk planning, training for CLT board members, and facilitating networking with other CLTs.

CLT developments in Somerset, Dorset and Devon are part of the broader expansion of CLTs nationally. According to the National CLT Network, there are now over 170 CLTs in England, which it is thought will cumulatively deliver up to 3,000 homes by 2020 (National CLT Network, 2015). The majority of CLTs are based in rural locations and respond to the localised effects of the rural housing crisis. There are severe shortages of affordable housing throughout England, but evidence from a recent review of rural housing

policy shows that rural areas are particularly affected by issues of housing supply and affordability. On average, rural house prices are 26% higher than in urban areas, local earnings are consistently lower on average than in urban areas, and stocks of affordable rental housing are diminishing: 12% of rural housing stock is social housing, compared with 19% in urban areas (Rural Housing Policy Review Group, 2015). In the South West, where WCLTP operate, average earnings in the region are amongst the lowest in the country, meaning house prices across the South West are on average nearly ten times annual incomes (National Housing Federation, 2015). The impact of this is that housing options for those on medium and lower incomes are limited. The provision of affordable housing by CLTs therefore contributes to easing the local effects of the rural housing crisis.



# Research Background and Methods

The research upon which this report is based was undertaken from January to April 2015, approaching the fifth anniversary of the WCLTP's formation. The study aimed to discover more about the factors that are fundamental to the success of community-led housing projects from the perspectives of the volunteers who establish and direct CLTs. There were two key objectives that directed the research:

- To explore the motivations, reflections, and future aspirations of volunteers involved in CLT projects in Somerset, Dorset and Devon;
- To explore the reflections, attitudes and perceptions that external stakeholders have of current and future CLT activity in Somerset, Dorset and Devon.

- Six CLTs participated in the study, based in villages of varying sizes in Somerset, Dorset and Devon, and each at different stages of development, ranging from completed projects to schemes that were set to apply for planning permission. All CLTs in the study had received support from WCLTP and were involved in partnerships with housing associations. Each CLT was primarily developing affordable housing, but some had also undertaken additional community asset projects, meaning that a diversity of CLT activity was captured in the sample. In total, 36 face-to-face interviews were conducted with volunteers, six from each CLT board. The author visited each CLT for a period of time, providing the opportunity to develop an appreciation of the personal and physical contexts in which CLTs were operating. Information on the participating CLTs is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Case Study CLTs

CLT (& location)	Approx. local population	Assets developed/under construction	Housing association partner	Landscape Designation*
Christow CLT (Christow, Teignbridge, Devon)	800	18 affordable homes under construction, 14 for rent and 4 for low cost ownership under a resale covenant. All homes built to full Passivhaus standards.	Teign Housing	National Park
Corry Valley CLT (Dalwood, East Devon)	499	2 shared ownership homes and 4 affordable rent completed and occupied in June 2015. The village is also home to a community-owned shop managed by a separate group.	Yarlington Housing Group	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
Upper Culm CLT (Hemyock and Clayhidon, Mid-Devon)	1500	9 affordable homes for rent and 3 for shared ownership completed and occupied in March 2013.	Hastoe Housing Association	AONB
Norton-sub-Hamdon CLT (South Somerset)	800	8 for affordable rent and 2 for shared ownership completed and occupied in Sept 2014. The CLT also runs the village shop, acquiring it on a leasehold basis in late 2014.	Yarlington Housing Group	Edge of Conservation Area
Toller Porcorum CLT (West Dorset)	300	6 affordable homes for rent under construction, along with a new village post office.	Aster Homes	AONB
Powerstock & District CLT (West Dorset)	350	A planning application for 8 affordable rented properties was submitted in March 2015.	Hastoe Housing Association	AONB and Conservation Area

\* Landscape designations refer to areas where development is constrained, through legislation and the planning system, in order to conserve and enhance their natural environment. All CLTs in the study were based in areas subject to landscape designations and, consequently, areas in which development is limited.

In addition, a survey of external stakeholders involved in CLT development was undertaken. 11 organisations responded to the survey, including national funding agencies, district councils, housing association partners, and technical experts such as surveyors, builders, and solicitors. The survey asked respondents to give their views on the role of CLTs in their local area, their opinions on how the current and future development

of CLT affects their organisation, and their perspectives on the evolution of CLTs and their relationships with supporting organisations. The following section summarises the findings of the interviews and surveys undertaken and describes the drivers and aspirations that underpin the formation, activity, and evolution of CLTs in Somerset, Dorset and Devon.

## The drivers and aspirations behind CLT formation

### Tackling the rural housing crisis

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The CLTs that participated in this study were all based in villages that, to varying degrees and with local nuance, suffered from common housing issues that affect rural communities, including large discrepancies between house prices and incomes, as a result of low supply and high demand for local homes, and an insufficient supply of affordable housing. This situation was described by a CLT board member in Christow, who highlighted the exclusion of lower income households from local housing as a driver for the CLT's formation:

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Obviously I'm interested in the CLT, because there is a lack of affordable housing. This valley is a very expensive place to live. Housing is ridiculously expensive. It's become a sought-after area, so people on lower incomes find it very difficult to find accommodation. So I think there was a real need, or there is a real need, for affordable housing full stop.

Christow CLT Volunteer

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As local residents themselves, CLT volunteers often spoke of the impacts they had observed of the rural housing crisis, particularly on local young people who found themselves priced out of accessing housing in the village.

This would result in the displacement of lower income households, often moving to neighbouring parishes or urban areas where more affordable accommodation could be found – even if it was not to their satisfaction; or resulting in people living locally in unsatisfactory housing arrangements in order to remain resident in the village, often for reasons of work or familial relationships:

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We hope to have] made it possible for local people to actually stay, if they wish to do so, to stay within their community. Because a lot of the people that we know are on the housing register and – we know this through word of mouth – are sleeping on their parents' floors and all this kind of thing, you know. They have one room in their parents' home and can't start their family or, if they've got a family, it's very difficult for everybody. So, when we see people that we know are having problems are getting housed, knowing that we've been a catalyst for that, that'd be a great satisfaction.

Christow CLT Volunteer

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Local knowledge of these issues was consequently reflected in the allocation criteria used by CLTs, which always prioritise people with a local connection to the CLT's defined area of benefit and who lack the income or capital to adequately resolve their housing needs locally. Local connection can be defined in a number of ways; for instance, Upper Culm CLT set an order of preference based on permutations of local connection and housing need, cascading out from the core parishes of Hemyock and Clayhidon to adjacent parishes as necessary. Indeed, the definition developed by Upper Culm CLT has since become the template for all rural exception sites in the district of Mid Devon.

The history and context of housing in each village varied. CLT formation and development was often motivated by the perceived inability or inaction of other organisations in delivering housing. Communities such as Norton-Sub-Hamdon had for many years, via the Parish Council, unsuccessfully lobbied the District Council and local housing associations to develop new homes. As described by a board member, this meant that younger, lower income households who wished to live in the community found their housing opportunities restricted due to the combination of affordable housing shortages and the expense of existing housing stock:

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It's an elderly village, so they all sort of pass on, shall we say, and we get new people in. But it's mostly the big houses, they're quite expensive houses, so by definition they will be older people who have them and that's why the affordable housing has been so good, really, to bring the young ones in. Otherwise, it's an old village really.

Norton-Sub-Hamdon CLT Volunteer

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A similar situation was observed in Powerstock, where there had been no recent development of affordable properties and the village population was increasingly made up of more affluent older people, often coming to the village to retire.

In places such as Hemyock and Christow, there was concern with the type of private executive housing that had been built recently and could be built again in the future. In contrast, the CLT's focus is on affordability:



## Retaining village character and diversity

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There's certainly been more housing built, only a very small percentage of which is affordable. My perception is that there are more youngsters growing up from village families who can't stay in the village. I also feel that the age profile of the village is getting older. I think it is becoming an older population and what people on the CLT and others in the village desperately want to do is to keep the mix, we want to continue to be diverse in every way.

Christow CLT Volunteer

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This quotation highlights the broader reasons that many volunteers wanted to create, maintain and secure a base of local affordable housing. Volunteers were keen to ensure that their villages retained a diverse population, in terms of age, family type, and incomes, in order to ensure that village amenities would continue to be used, including schools, pubs, shops, and recreational facilities. There was recognition that the lack of affordable housing was having particular implications for younger and lower income households unable to remain resident locally, and that this would eventually affect the facilities and services of the village:

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I just think if you don't have something like this then there won't be a good mix of people. You need the mix of people to keep a village viable really. You can have the village, but it wouldn't be a proper village would it, if you don't have different ages and, not being funny, different incomes, everything really.

Norton-sub-Hamdon CLT Volunteer

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This was reinforced by another volunteer from Christow, who observed the closure of facilities and services as a result of local people on lower incomes being unable to find the housing they need in the area:

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Local amenities, shops, all closing. So there's, you know, a reduction in the amount of services. There used to be three village shops, or four I think, effectively there's one now. It's still vibrant, still productive and active, but just that I would imagine it's fairly typical demographic social change. Because it's a National Park ... you're talking about gentrification in parts of the estates in towns [and] exactly the same thing is happening, whereby I guess local people who are on lower incomes aren't able to find the housing that they need, particularly rented housing.

Christow CLT Volunteer

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CLT housing was therefore seen as a mechanism that could help to counter the social trends and changes that were perceived to have arisen partly due to the changing nature and expense of local housing stock. By providing housing that was more affordable in relation to local incomes, and prioritised for local households on lower incomes, CLT volunteers saw their organisation as providing dual benefits: personal, for the household that would occupy and benefit from more secure and affordable accommodation, and collective, as the arrival of new permanently resident households would contribute to the sustainability of local services and facilities.

## Acquiring and utilising land for community benefit

Concerns over the inadequacy of local housing stock were also reflected amongst some landowners whose land was used for CLT housing. In Toller Porcorum, the land used for the development of their new housing and Post Office was bequeathed to the Village Hall Trust by a local resident who passed away. The CLT purchased this land from the Trust in order to provide community benefit, as per the person's wishes, in the form of new affordable homes and a village facility. Similarly, in Powerstock, the local landowner is proposing to sell land to the CLT at a nominal rate on the proviso that it is used for affordable housing:

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He is very keen that his workers should live locally, he is very keen that they should have homes, that the community should be self-generating, that it shouldn't be sold to incomers and all that. And he made the plot of land available for a pound.

Powerstock & District CLT Volunteer

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Housing association partners also acknowledged the value of CLTs in land acquisition, as their community-led nature meant that sites for development could be acquired that would be otherwise unavailable. In this sense, CLTs were perceived by others to be organisations that could provide community benefit over the long-term, and ensure that local needs and priorities were reflected in the use of land. CLTs also formed in response to particular land purchase opportunities that arose; in Hemyock, the site used for Upper Culm CLT's development was one of the only suitable parcels of land that was not already subject to a purchase option by a private developer, allowing the CLT to form and capitalise on the opportunity to provide affordable housing. In Christow, the availability of land for sale at a nominal rate from the District Council, coupled with interest from a housing association, provoked the CLT to form in order to ensure that a vehicle for the involvement and influence of local residents over new development was in place.



# Individual Motivations for CLT voluntarism

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## Who volunteers?

While it is possible to identify the broad reasons and concerns that provoked the formation of CLTs and brought a collective body of volunteers together, individual motivations for participating in CLTs varied, ranging from personal beliefs in, and commitment to, local democratic decision-making and community ownership, attachment to place, a willingness to contribute particular skills, and aesthetic and environmental concerns.

CLT volunteers were usually, but not exclusively, retired individuals from professional backgrounds. They were often people of long residency in communities who had been resident long enough to observe social trends and changes, such as the closure or decline of village facilities, the inability of young households to access housing, and the increasing expense of local housing. However, participation in CLTs was not simply determined by the historic ties and connections of individuals. Corry Valley CLT was led by a relative newcomer to the village, who had developed strong attachment to the community and was eager to be involved in enhancing village life through community work. It was common that CLT volunteers had a background in other community or voluntary activities, including crossovers between CLT and Parish Council members and participation in the management of existing community amenities, for instance the crossover in management groups between Corry Valley CLT and its existing community shop. Volunteers were also occasionally people with backgrounds in housing, community, or political activity, who were motivated by altruistic and benevolent concerns.

## The value of local democratic community ownership

Community land trusts typically aim to extend power to local residents, who are given opportunities to influence local development through structures of collective ownership and decision-making. Volunteers highly

valued the democratic nature of the CLT structure, with an open membership model and strong commitment to ensuring that the CLT's work reflected the needs and concerns articulated by local residents. The CLT structure was seen as a platform for collaborative decision-making, local input and guidance as to the work that the CLT would undertake. As such, while housing issues were the initial driver for the formation of the CLT organisation, many people volunteered their time to the CLT board on the basis that the organisational structure and processes chimed with their own values and beliefs:

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I'm a huge believer in involving the entire community in decision-making processes, not leaving it to one or two people to sort of run the whole damned thing. And here there are, I would think there's 50 or 60 people in this village who really put in quite a lot of time into various enterprises, it's really remarkable.

Christow CLT Volunteer

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The value placed on bottom-up community-led processes, as enshrined in the aims and objectives of CLTs, was routinely seen across each CLT in the study. Regular public meetings were held for local residents to learn more about the organisation, its objectives, its development plans, and each CLT had a strong commitment to involving its wider community in shaping design and delivery of housing schemes. Every CLT put an emphasis on self-determination, guided by community desires and priorities. The value of this was articulated by another volunteer in Christow, who described the importance of their in-depth community engagement processes in gaining acceptance of their Passivhaus housing scheme. To achieve Passivhaus status, homes had to be positioned in terraces and in certain locations on the site, which may initially have been viewed sceptically by local residents. When asked how the community had been involved in shaping

and influencing the scheme, the volunteer indicated that there are both formal and informal methods of consultation that take place, due to the local residency of those responsible for managing the CLT:

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Very much in both formal and informal ways. A lot of people stop all of us and say “what’s happening with it, how’s it going?” You talk to them about it, you discuss, they ask you lots of questions, it has been the focus of conversation in the village for the last two or three years I suppose. But also formally, we have held a number of meetings that have been reasonably attended and the plans are all laid out and we have listened very hard to what people have said about design, about everything else really, and the positioning and how it all works. We’ve been able to explain why the houses have to be as they are in order to achieve Passivhaus status. And people have accepted that quite well once it’s explained properly by someone they trust.

Christow CLT Volunteer

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This view was echoed in other communities, where the CLT was thought to have succeeded by simultaneously providing leadership and focus to housing schemes and ensuring that the knowledge and views of wider residents were incorporated into planning processes. The importance of local management that was attuned to community concerns and priorities was cited as important by a volunteer in Norton-sub-Hamdon, particularly as the CLT had faced some vocal opposition from a small minority of local residents. Referring to the value of CLTs as opposed to affordable housing delivery through larger, less local organisations, the volunteer emphasised the value of having a localised body that could both engage people in determining the CLT’s work and safeguard community interests:



They’re local aren’t they, you know. If there’s any problem I expect they will come to us about it rather than go to the housing association, but, I think it does make a difference if it is local. Keeps it more personal really, gives you an interest doesn’t it, a personal interest if it’s people you know who are on the CLT. Otherwise if it was, sort of, just run by the Somerset District Council, you wouldn’t have any interest at all really, would you?

Norton-Sub-Hamdon CLT Volunteer

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In addition to community control and leadership, the role of the CLT was often perceived as one that provided scrutiny of, and community representation in, partnerships with housing associations, particularly in relation to decision-making. There has been some debate as to whether partnerships between housing associations and community-led housing organisations may detract from the ethos and focus that underpins the latter, as decision-making may be removed from its local base (as detailed in Moore and Mullins, 2013). However, in this study all CLTs valued their partnerships with housing associations, particularly the important technical work their partners had done in securing funding and pushing forward development. Yet, while housing associations assume the responsibility for housing delivery in partnerships, the CLT plays an important role in guiding and leading the process. As the previous quotation describes, the local ethos of CLTs helps to assuage any concerns that residents may have over development, while in Hemyock a volunteer stated that the partnership approach helped to provide a recognised structure for the CLT to deliver housing in a way that allowed strong community influence:

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I'm not a great one for believing that people have something done at them, you know, I'd much rather think that you know the community guides things. But I think sometimes the community operates better within a broad structure, and this seemed to offer the best of both worlds. It seemed to say the community can head this up, it can be a powerful force here, but there is a recognised structure within which you can do this, and I find that quite attractive really.

Upper Culm CLT Volunteer

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Housing associations tended to view partnerships as a logical extension of their existing working practices. Many had previously developed homes in small rural communities and as such felt that supporting CLT development was a reflection of their organisational

ethos, differentiating them from other associations thought to have outgrown their community roots and large-scale housing developers. In some respects, CLTs were seen as adding an extra layer of complexity to schemes, given the involvement of an additional organisation as compared to a scheme solely led by a housing association, but there was also acknowledgement and acceptance that these schemes may not have happened without the CLT's leadership, involvement, and ability to generate local support. One housing association respondent commented on the benefits of delivering a scheme in partnership with a CLT:

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The sense of really delivering something that is wanted and needed by a community, rather than any sense of imposing something or delivering something which divides opinion. There is always local opposition to any development but CLT involvement does reduce this by a significant margin.

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This was supported by another housing association, who argued that the deep-rooted involvement of a CLT in a scheme was beneficial in ensuring schemes gained planning approval with fewer objections than conventional proposals may have faced:

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In general we believe that the involvement of a CLT has speeded up the planning and development process. It is difficult to quantify this, but based on the pilot projects we estimate that they have been delivered at least 30 per cent earlier than projects led by us alone.

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It is clear, therefore, that the partnerships undertaken in this case study did not dilute the influence or control that communities – under the auspices of a CLT – had over key aspects of housing schemes, including location, design, and allocations, and that CLTs and housing associations engaged in a mutually beneficial partnership.



## The value of CLT ownership structures

While the delivery of their first scheme was the focus for most CLTs, many volunteers were aware of the potential future role, legacy, and longevity of the organisation that they have formed. For many, the CLT's work was not just about delivering a tranche of affordable homes for the benefit of local people, but to have a structure of collective ownership in place that could support and maintain additional village facilities and infrastructure in the future. The ownership structures of CLTs, with their local leadership and focus, were thought to enhance the resilience of the village through their focus on asset ownership and management. One volunteer in Norton-sub-Hamdon described it as a logical extension of the democratic role of Parish Councils, adding an additional democratically-managed organisation to the village whose mission and focus was to own and manage assets for community benefit. Others saw it as a vehicle that could take responsibility for safeguarding key community assets, particularly in the context of the threats that difficult economic contexts may pose to local businesses:

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[The CLT is] actually protecting the environment that makes the village work. I think they are going to be that sort of, in a way a Parish Council can't be or in fact no other organisation really can be, that defender of the rights of the community, in whatever sense that may be. So, yeah, wherever the next attack comes from, and you can never be too sure, then I think the CLT needs to be there as the vehicle that will maintain the community. It's about accepting rights and responsibilities from the bottom-up.

Christow CLT Volunteer

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Volunteers placed a high value on the structure of collective ownership that a CLT provides, allowing board members and local residents to control, shape and determine the nature of local housing developments in accordance with local needs and priorities. They also identified the potential future role of CLTs, in that

it acts a mechanism which may help local residents to safeguard valued community assets and amenities..

## The place-based attachment of volunteers

Individual motivations that related to the perceived need for collective ownership structures were often complemented by strong attachments to place. Much has been written about the importance of place attachment in community and social organisations. It is argued that strong levels of place attachment can result in more socially sustainable working practices, but that place attachment can also differ between instrumental forms of attachment, where rational decisions are made, often for reasons of cost efficiency or business logics, and emotional place attachment, where people care intrinsically about the place in which they are operating (Kibler et al, 2015).

CLT volunteers tended to show high levels of emotional attachment to place and desires for their community to thrive. They were strongly concerned with helping a localised, identifiable community with their housing needs, as articulated in their housing allocation policies, with a hope that this would then in turn produce benefits for the wider community. While the focus of CLTs is on producing local benefit, the definition of 'localness' varies between communities and often transcends administrative definitions and boundaries. The Powerstock & District CLT defined its area of benefit



to incorporate three adjacent settlements to reflect local understandings of community and to incorporate other geographical populations that the CLT believed to be in housing need and wished to benefit. This was summarised by a board member, who described the creation of a new local organisation as being one that could complement and enhance the work of existing and longstanding social institutions in the village:

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I was very aware that in setting up an institution which, to an interesting extent, replaces the Church, the Parish Council and all sorts of things, one had the liberty to redefine geographically what the community might amount to. It reflected what we, the steering group, thought were the people who would regard themselves as Powerstock, and Powerstock consists of three little settlements: Powerstock, Nettlecombe, and West Milton. We drew it with considerable care but on the grounds, along the lines, of 'this is what we regard as Powerstock and District', because it's slightly more than the Parish.

Powerstock & District CLT Volunteer

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This was also the case with Upper Culm CLT, where the larger parish of Hemyock incorporated the smaller parish of Clayhidon into their allocation prioritisation criteria, reflecting the 'natural' geography and connection between the two parishes, such as shared facilities and amenities.

The emotional attachment of volunteers was also provoked by their long-term residency in communities or, in the case of relative 'newcomers', a strong attachment and fondness for the community they had elected to reside in. Both groups had often experienced the effects of the housing crisis personally, for instance having young family members who were unable to access suitable affordable housing, or long-term residents who had observed the increasing housing difficulties and

displacement of local households on lower incomes. As such, the acceptance by some volunteers of – as one respondent put it – "rights and responsibilities from the bottom-up" was provoked not necessarily by a political edge, but by feelings of benevolence and desire to contribute time and effort to enhance the living environment of others:

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From a social equality point of view, I just like things to be fair, I don't like the fact that people are disadvantaged and I don't want to see the fact that money speaks for everything. So an opportunity to perhaps provide something or help to provide something in perpetuity that can help, sort of, to balance out some of those inequalities, was the main driving force.

Christow CLT Volunteer

I've got lots of time, you know, I'm time-rich, and so I'm able to give that time to community schemes and enjoy doing it. I thoroughly enjoy doing it.

Toller Porcorum CLT Volunteer

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Motivations that focused on the importance of place were also articulated in relation to the sociability of the local community. This was especially profound in Norton-sub-Hamdon, where the CLT had played an active role in saving the village shop from potential closure. The CLT had already successfully overseen a housing project when the opportunity to manage the shop on a leasehold basis arose. The shop is managed and run on a voluntary basis, with dozens of people in the village working shifts in the shop throughout the week to keep it staffed. One volunteer commented that the shop provided a social hub for the village and had contributed to a sense of community, while another highlighted the importance of facilities such as a shop and a Post Office to rural villages:

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At the most basic level there are members of the CLT who I did not know previously, so I now know them, you know, and I have a social contact with them, and that is community-building.

Norton-sub-Hamdon CLT Volunteer

Well, the shop is the centre of the social life, it's the hub of the village really, like the pub and school. I think if you lose that – because there is a Post Office as well – so I think if you lose that then something will go, you see.

Norton-sub-Hamdon CLT Volunteer

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Similar views were expressed in Toller Porcorum, where the Post Office had been operating out of a local resident's home. The construction of a new Post Office was highly valued in the community, for the sociability it provided, its function as a community facility and service, and for the village's identity as one of the few remaining amenities in the village.

The motivation that volunteers held for participation in CLTs were often strongly linked to emotional attachments to place and desires to maintain and enhance important aspects of their communities. Individuals were often people who had historically participated in community activities and saw the CLT as a logical activity, perhaps best illustrated by the recent award of a British Empire Medal to a volunteer of Corry Valley CLT in Dalwood, honouring several years of community work. However, there were also people who did not previously volunteer for the Parish Council, Church, or other village organisations, but were motivated to participate in the CLT in order to improve the housing situations of others and the social conditions of the village.

## **Aesthetic and environmental motivations**

While many CLT members volunteered on the basis of their emotional attachments and regard for place, the

participation of some volunteers was also provoked by more instrumental concerns, particularly in relation to the aesthetic and environmental implications of proposed new housing developments in their village. Many of the most active CLT board members were those who were keen to influence the design and look of new homes. This was especially the case for two board members in Powerstock whose homes overlooked the proposed site for the new homes. Opposition to rural housing is often found from those who live next to new developments and who will therefore be most directly affected day-to-day, yet in this instance those who may otherwise find themselves cast as NIMBYs<sup>2</sup> provided support and leadership for CLT development. This was commonly attributed to the strong involvement that the CLT had in the design process; rather than being merely consulted on the design, the CLT actively led the process, determining the look, feel and quality of the new homes. One local authority official commented that the community-led nature of CLTs added value to local schemes as they brokered local acceptance of housing that may have otherwise been opposed:

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Initially I could not see what the involvement of a CLT could offer that a responsible housing association with a track record of delivering housing in a rural setting could not. However, experience shows that the involvement of a local CLT brokers a lot which otherwise might have taken longer for the 'traditional' route to navigate, not least the opposition to development plans arising from certain parts of the community itself.

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Aesthetic considerations were also evident in the motivations of another board member in Powerstock who had an architectural background, and commented that he was partly motivated to take part as he was "keen to see something that would be good quality" built in the village.

The location of new housing in rural villages can often be contentious, but in most cases CLTs faced little

opposition related to the actual site of their schemes, partly due to sites sometimes being the most logical and suitable place for development, but mainly due to the active involvement of the CLT and its wider community in site selection and the design of the dwellings that were to be built. There are often many potential sites for local development and the CLT's commitment to community consultation, coupled with the input of technical experts, usually filters these options by suitability, availability, cost, and local popularity. While the CLTs faced little opposition to the actual site of their development, this was accomplished through intensive and challenging selection processes with their local communities and partnering housing associations.

Environmental concerns were also at the heart of other individual motivations. One volunteer in Christow stated that he was keen to establish the green credentials of the new housing in order to ensure that the new housing would be environmentally friendly. The CLT and its housing association partner had already formed plans to develop Passivhaus schemes, one of the most ecologically friendly and energy efficient standards for new homes:

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The real drive, I think for me over this particular scheme, was that I was part of Green Teign, which is a sort of eco-group along this valley, and we were very keen when the notion of the new housing came up that they would be as green as they possibly could be.

Christow CLT Volunteer

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Aesthetic and environmental issues were at the heart of most CLTs and volunteers reported that these issues were common concerns in consultation processes with local residents. This is unsurprising given all but one of the CLTs in this study were located in places such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park and a Conservation Area. With the advent of Government grants to take forward planning applications<sup>3</sup>, CLTs such as Powerstock and District have begun to employ their own design teams, allowing them to design and shape new developments in accordance with local wishes, provided they fit within the budgetary framework of

the development. The quotation above also highlights the crossover that CLT boards often have with other community and voluntary groups in their areas of operation. CLTs are able to tap into the credentials of other groups in order to boost their management committees and to benefit from existing expertise.

## Voluntary provision of specialist skills and expertise

A key challenge for many community-based organisations is to source and recruit a number of board members who have the time and expertise to contribute to organisational management. The CLTs in this study ordinarily had the same management committee since their formation, with occasionally individuals stepping down or new members joining due to an interest in particular aspects of CLT activity. For instance, in Norton-sub-Hamdon, a new resident to the village joined the board to contribute his financial nous to the account management and running of the village shop, having not been involved in the progression of the local housing scheme.

Similarly, when asked for his personal motivations for getting involved, a board member in Christow commented that he felt he had specialist skills and expertise to offer which may benefit the CLT:

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I suppose I had that little bit of background in terms of understanding planning policy, town and country planning in simple terms, which I guess not everybody is potentially interested in understanding the technical side, you know, such as 106 agreements, what are they for? So I thought, well, I may be able to help. I've got a Masters in surveying, and that's in the real estate side of surveying, so again understanding the legal side of property law and all that kind of stuff, I thought it would be useful to have somebody on the CLT who had that kind of background.

Christow CLT Volunteer

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<sup>3</sup> The Community Buildings Grant is administered by the Department for Communities and Local Government; formerly known as the Community-Led Project Support Grant.

While partnerships with housing associations tend to reduce the need for CLTs to have specialist understanding of such technicalities, having access to these skills is useful for CLTs in understanding the possibilities and potentialities of their desired schemes, and the limitations or constraints that legislation may pose. Furthermore, as legal entities CLTs must ensure they comply with rules and regulations that may govern their activities. These may include restrictions on the ways in which funds and surpluses are distributed, restrictions on the type of activities undertaken by the CLT, and maintaining open democratic governance structures. As such, awareness of the financial and organisational behaviours expected of CLTs is an important part of their ongoing management.

The CLTs in this study did not necessarily feel they lacked specialist skills and expertise, partly due to the support given to them by WCLTP, which acted as an important source of knowledge and guidance, and partly due to the involvement of housing associations which defrayed some of the responsibilities and risks that CLTs were exposed to. However, most CLTs did identify difficulties in recruiting new board members, as described by one volunteer:

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I would have to say that we don't have enough members on the board, you can't get people to come on the board. So it is down to the ones that are on the board to do the donkey work really, but hopefully, you know, we will get somebody, perhaps they will join. I don't know but people have a fear of joining things don't they really?

Norton-Sub-Hamdon CLT Volunteer

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Each CLT tended to be headed up by 1-2 leaders, who were the driving force behind projects. The demographics of these people varied, ranging from long-term residents who also chaired the Parish Council, as in Hemyock & Clayhidon, to individuals with no historic ties to the village who had become resident locally, developed a strong attachment to the place, and had valuable skills and experience to offer. CLT leaders were not always technical experts but exhibited

high levels of emotional attachment for the community and passion for the CLT's role, particularly in relation to the development of affordable housing. As one CLT Secretary put it, she felt "duty bound to care for the community" through the auspices of the CLT. CLT leaders usually, but not always, assumed the role of Chair within CLT boards. Other active CLT members often joined in order to provide bespoke skills or support for the organisation, or due to interests in particular aspects of the CLT's work or development. One volunteer in Norton-sub-Hamdon described the important role of their Secretary in leading the CLT board:

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She came on board, she's the organiser, she's the steam engine of it all. And then she sort of gathered a board around her and I came on at the last minute really when it was really sort of getting going, that's when I came on, just to give what experience I had about running the shop.

Norton-sub-Hamdon CLT Volunteer

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There were no discernible differences in motivations between figureheads and other active CLT members, with each often articulating their motivations in terms of attachment to place or concern for affordable housing provision. Some CLTs were concerned as to the future recruitment of board members. As noted, most CLTs were managed by older, retired professionals, and volunteers emphasised the need for generational succession in CLT boards, hoping that new, younger residents would become involved with the CLT in the future.. In many cases board succession may only be a significant concern or issue if the CLT decides to pursue future projects. Some CLTs, such as those in Norton-sub-Hamdon and Toller Porcorum, will necessarily be active due to their acquisition or ownership of community assets in addition to housing. Upon completion of their initial affordable housing schemes, other CLTs may become more dormant and less active, depending on local opportunities for additional CLT activity and on the appetite to pursue and manage these amongst CLT volunteers.

# Future Aspirations and Challenges

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A common theme in interviews with CLT volunteers was the potential longevity of the CLT as a local institution. The CLTs in this study had all agreed 125-year leasehold arrangements with housing associations, meaning that for the next 125 years – subject to a break clause which allows the CLT to buy-out the association – the CLT would receive an annual ground rent payment from the housing association. Given the longevity of this arrangement and the CLT's ability to acquire and own other community assets within its legal framework, many respondents were keen to see CLTs become involved in other community activities.

These ranged in scale, size, and scope, and were often contingent on local opportunities for additional asset management or acquisition. For instance, the CLT in Norton-sub-Hamdon had already undertaken a second project by taking over the running and management of the village shop, while in Dalwood (where Corry Valley CLT operated) another community group had acquired the village shop prior to the formation of the CLT. Some volunteers spoke of pursuing local community-based energy projects, perhaps as a spin-off of CLT activity rather than under the existing structure. Most CLTs had not determined a way in which to spend their annual ground rent, largely as homes had either not yet been completed or only recently completed. Some spoke of establishing local community funds to which local residents could apply, a policy which has been devised in Christow for the distribution of some of its ground rent, while others spoke of using it to enhance woodland and green space management in the village, while some CLTs stated that they would meet with local residents to determine how it should be used. The impact of the CLT, therefore, may extend beyond the initial development of affordable housing. It may give rise to further activities in villages, which may either be taken on by the CLT or by new or overlapping interest groups which may be inspired by its success.

There were differences in the future aspirations of CLT volunteers, and these were discernible within and between CLT boards. While many were keen for CLTs to continue their activity, other volunteers spoke of the CLT entering a period of dormancy, often related either

to a perceived lack of local opportunities for the CLT, or to individual preferences and interests. There was also diversity in opinion as to the type of assets that CLTs should acquire; some saw the CLT's role as to safeguard the affordable housing in partnership with the housing association and to distribute the nominal ground rent locally, with an emphasis on the CLT not becoming 'too big' or even potentially removed from its very local focus. Others stated an interest in pursuing new forms of community enterprise under the auspices of the CLT, which may involve more intensive financial processes and management. One volunteer commented that the management board had been so focused on learning the mechanics of affordable housing delivery that both CLT volunteers and the wider community had perhaps not yet recognised the potential scope of the CLT in the future:

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I think people are very supportive of affordable housing and therefore have not thought or needed to think that there might be other ways in which ... I don't think many people realise how unique and independent the CLT institution is for the long-term.

Powerstock & District CLT Volunteer

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The 'unique and independent' nature of CLTs related both to its ability to acquire, own, and safeguard local community assets, but also to its mere existence as something that could respond to other local threats or opportunities if they arose. While some were sceptical as to whether they personally wished to push forward new projects, they saw the CLT as becoming a highly valued part of the village's fabric and a strength for the community to draw upon:

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If the village shop went bust then obviously we would look to take it on, but I don't think any of us would want to run a shop. But there would be people in the village who would run the shop and have to be under the auspices of the CLT. It's not necessary for the directors themselves to be the agents of change in other areas. Hopefully the CLT will evolve and move forwards and come up with other things.

Christow CLT Volunteer

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This highlights that many CLTs felt a responsibility towards their communities, particularly if other valued local assets were threatened, and that aspirations for future CLT activity are evident. A crucial point in the quotation above is that the boards of CLTs may change; new people may join based on their desires to pursue particular projects or activities. While some volunteers were anxious about the future sustainability and competence of their management boards, it may be that new people within the community join to pursue other projects having not previously been motivated by affordable housing development. However, it also highlights that lofty expectations of CLTs should be tempered. Local operating conditions, opportunities, and appetite of current management groups vary within and between communities. CLTs face a number of challenges in acquiring and developing assets, not least the personal reputational risk if schemes do not succeed. In Dalwood, the development of six homes faced significant challenges due to the topography of the site and absence of scale economies; common challenges for rural communities. In other communities, vocal minorities sometimes opposed schemes, creating personal stress and anxiety for CLT board members. In these communities, the determination and commitment of volunteers, coupled with support from the wider community, meant that the CLT remained resolute and successfully completed their projects, but the reputational risk presented a challenge for CLT boards. There may also be historic resistance to change in rural communities and ongoing debates as to the required level of growth. The outcome of such debates, which occur even within CLT boards, may influence the extent to which CLTs remain active or become dormant.



# Concluding Remarks

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Individuals are motivated to volunteer for CLTs for a variety of reasons, ranging from personal values and concerns to collective goals and ambitions. Delivering housing that is affordable for, and accessible by, local people in perpetuity underpinned all CLTs in this study. CLTs were perceived to be important institutions for the social and physical maintenance and improvement of their local communities, through the delivery of affordable housing and management and acquisition of other community assets. They are trusted vehicles; both for local landowners wishing to ensure their land is used for community benefit rather than private gain, and for local people seeking reassurance about the impact of a new development. They can overcome local opposition to housing through extensive community engagement in site selection, design processes, and deciding upon allocation priorities. Different conditions and opportunities have influenced the success and development of the CLTs featured in this study, including the willingness of landowners to sell land at nominal rates, the threats posed to existing community amenities, and the active involvement of key individuals able to dedicate time, commitment, and specialist expertise to CLT management. Local context will also influence the future aspirations and activities of CLTs, including the extent to which new threats are posed to valued community resources or amenities, the recruitment of new board members, and the outcome of local debates as to whether further affordable housing or new amenities are required.

There are a number of key factors which will be integral to the fulfilment of future CLT aspirations. Support from the WCLTP was integral to the success of all schemes. Volunteers regularly commented on the vital role of WCLTP assistance in legal and organisational formation, partnership brokerage with housing associations, and promotion and explanation of the CLT concept to local residents. Most volunteers had not heard of the CLT concept until coming into contact with WCLTP advisors. Continuation of WCLTP support will be fundamental to increases in both the scale and number of CLTs in Somerset, Dorset and Devon. In 2015 Wessex Community Assets was awarded funding by the Friends Provident Foundation in order to explore

how communities can become more resilient through the development of CLTs, and how best the acquisition of further community assets by CLTs may be achieved and supported by a catalyst organisation such as a CLT support project. This aims to support the scaling-out of CLT activity for those that wish to acquire new assets in their communities, as well as to contribute to the creation and maintenance of local economic resilience in these communities, enabling localities to create local economic growth and retain its value. WCLTP also played an important role in brokering peer-to-peer support networks between CLTs in the Somerset, Dorset and Devon. A small number of CLTs had developed working relationships with CLTs in other communities, often providing advice and support to each other during developmental processes.

The involvement of housing associations was also fundamental to the efficient and successful delivery of CLT housing. While partnerships were sometimes perceived by housing associations to add complexity to schemes, CLTs were also seen as 'natural freeholders' and as a vital ingredient to schemes that would have otherwise been opposed by local residents. This was attributed to the local legitimacy that CLTs held and the value of their processes of local engagement, meaning that those who may ordinarily oppose new housing developments in the village were often the people who were actively engaged in leading CLT proposals. National policy developments indicate that the principle of CLT and housing association partnerships is likely to become more common place. A recent review of Community Rights by the Communities and Local Government committee argued that housing associations will play an increasingly important role in building capacities and skills of CLTs and other community-led housing organisations, though it also tempered this by stating that not all organisations would wish to partner or would have access to appropriate partners (DCLG Select Committee, 2015: 21). It is clear from this study that CLTs in Somerset, Dorset and Devon have access to appropriate housing association partners, who are willing to enter into partnerships where CLTs are absolved of financial risk but still able to lead, influence and benefit from local affordable housing developments.

National policy developments, however, may also have an influence on such partnerships. The Budget of July 2015 introduced cuts to affordable housing rents and a reduction in the overall benefits caps; changes likely to result in a contraction in the development of rented homes by housing associations, possibly at the expense of support for CLT projects. Affordable rented housing is sorely needed in rural communities where nearly all such homes have been lost through the Right to Buy for local authority tenants. The application of the 'Right to Buy to housing association tenants will only exacerbate this shortfall, potentially affecting the very homes CLTs have strived to build. Whilst projects such as the ones in this study may continue to be protected by statutory exemptions, a growing number of CLTs in Somerset, Dorset and Devon - and nationally - are in urban areas. Reconciliation of national policy developments with the needs and aspirations of CLTs and their local communities will be fundamental to the continued growth, expansion and success of the CLT sector.

The need for rural affordable housing in England is widely acknowledged, given the nature and scale of affordability problems, undersupply, and their detrimental effects on local communities. Yet, its delivery often faces a number of challenges, including access to, and purchase of, land, concerns as to its location, environmental implications, its design, tenure, and allocation. This study suggests that CLTs mobilise support for and leadership of these projects from within the very communities where they stand to have most impact. Contrary to the cliché of 'not-in-my-back-yard', they express a deep-seated desire for affordable homes, overcoming considerable barriers to provide them. The motivations and aspirations of local residents, including desires to ensure the delivery of housing is informed by local knowledge, is locally beneficial, is aesthetically appealing, and is ecologically friendly, are articulated through the vehicle of a CLT. As such, CLTs succeed in accessing suitable land and in leading the delivery of housing that is more affordable and accessible for local residents on lower incomes, ensuring that local housing and other assets are safeguarded to provide benefit for their wider communities.



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