

## **Community Led Housing in Hook Norton**

At a time of climate emergency when many new housing developments lack sustainable measures, the people of Hook Norton have generated an innovative community - led project of affordable homes that will have a positive impact on the environment and be fit for the future.

The opportunity arose when Hook Norton Low Carbon identified a piece of neglected and overgrown land to the east of the Sports & Social Club behind Bourne Lane, that was owned by Cherwell District Council. The council were approached and were keen to work with the community and HNLC on developing an affordable and sustainable housing project for those in need with a strong local connection.

The Low Carbon Hub in Oxford provided grant funding via the OxFutures programme for a feasibility study and an extensive round of community engagement and consultation took place from February 2018 to January 2020. Following a community wide survey in March 2018 that yielded an unusually high return and a series of open meetings, the needs of the community began to be defined. It became clear that a different way of living was popular, with homes that could be designed to increase social contact and neighbourliness with access to shared spaces and facilities such as communal gardens and allotments. The idea of a community building began to take shape where people could meet and share activities with the whole village. The sustainability element proved equally important and enthusiasm for electric vehicles and a shared car club, along with renewable energy features, was high.

The project generated considerable local interest and excitement and in August 2018 four architectural practices submitted bids to develop the next phase. Charlie Luxton Design presented the most imaginative and community based interpretation and were unanimously chosen as the project Architectural Design Team. They have since been involved in intensive consultations with the community and have brought the needs and ideas of the whole project to life. They have managed to fit as many homes as possible onto the site without compromising on design quality so that more members of the community who have shown interest in the homes may get to live in them. The most popular idea for the Community building was a Community Café which they have

skilfully combined with other amenities to make maximum use of the space.

The homes combine design and environmental merit and will be built to Passivhaus standard, which by achieving a high level of air-tightness will ensure maximum comfort with low running costs and reduced carbon emissions. The houses are positioned on the site to make the most of renewable energy features like solar photovoltaic panels with an extensive array on each roof and on the community building.

The Low Carbon Hub in Oxford are designing a micro grid for the project which could provide a decentralised system of locally generated energy and allow the community to be more energy independent and environmentally friendly.

The project aims to be a replicable example of a carbon positive project and is also striving to have a carbon neutral construction process, by using local suppliers and installers and by establishing links with local colleges to provide construction apprenticeships where possible.

Cherwell District Council agreed to transfer ownership of the land to Hook Norton Community Land Trust at a price that would enable the homes to be affordable in perpetuity. The Community Land Trust was formally set up in July 2019 with members of the local community and other practitioners with a range of knowledge and expertise to help guide the project through to the next phase.

Charlie Luxton Design have prepared the designs for a full planning application to be submitted at the end of January 2020 and the next step is to prepare for a Community Share Offer later in the year.

Cathy Ryan

Chair, Hook Norton Community Land Trust