



Research to inform policy from the University of York

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING

Policy implications for local and combined authorities under devolution

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Summary

- Driven by non-profit organisations and managed by residents themselves, the development and continuation of community-led housing (CLH) require **intensive input of land, financial, intellectual, social, and human resources**.
- **Land acquisition, access to financial support, and residents' knowledge and skill set for managing a housing project** are prerequisites, but also ongoing challenges, for creating and sustaining CLH projects.
- Local authorities and umbrella organisations such as housing associations can enable access to the resources required for CLH development through **catalysing land policy changes, facilitating networking and knowledge exchange opportunities between stakeholders, and encouraging banks to make favourable loan offers**.

Recommendations for policy

1. Facilitate the acquisition of land for CLH schemes by:
 - Designating specific areas of land exclusively for CLH schemes and/or
 - Offering land at reduced rates whenever possible, including partnering with anchor organisations that possess land, making it more affordable for CLH schemes to acquire and develop property.
2. Collaborate with local and national umbrella organisations to:
 - Facilitate networking and knowledge exchange opportunities between CLH groups, not-for-profit organisations (e.g., housing associations) and local businesses.
 - Offer technical support, providing essential assistance in architecture, finance, and project management
3. Encourage banks to offer more loans by serving as a secure backup for CLH schemes, guaranteeing loan safety, making lending a more attractive venture for banks.
4. Ensure clear communications about the rationale, objectives, required commitments, and potential drawbacks of community-led housing project to potential residents to:
 - Set and manage expectations
 - Ensure that ethos aligns with project goals
 - Ensure that group governance structures can support project goals
5. Highlight the importance of paid roles, particularly human resources support in terms of creating paid roles, bringing in knowledge of staff, and identifying areas for skills development.

Context

Community-led housing has been experimented and launched across the world as an alternative to public housing and private housing to meet local housing needs. The potential benefits to residents and local communities are vast and include greater affordability and promoting an environmentally sustainable ways of living. Despite this, Community-led housing remains a niche concept in the UK. With the devolution of housing responsibilities, however, newly installed mayors can make realising the benefits of community-led housing a policy priority within their region.

Methods

We conducted a rapid evidence synthesis of research published since 2010 in OECD countries, to identify factors influencing the development and continuation of community-led housing projects. The review focused on empirical research that examined meso-level factors (e.g., resources, market, organizational factors) affecting community-led housing and identified barriers and enablers to project development and sustainability.

From Idea to Implementation

We identified 7 meso-level factors that can have a significant impact on the development and continuation of community-led housing schemes:

1. Resident attitudes and motivations: Community-led housing uniquely depends upon residents working together to facilitate the project's day-to-day running and expansion, and build a sense of togetherness. Accordingly, the success of projects can be contingent on residents' commitment to the project's values and associated undertakings on a long-term scale

2. Project planning: A clear business plan for a community-led housing project with financial and administrative details, and based upon consultation with the local community, can be essential to securing political and local buy-in at the beginning of the project.

3. Group governance: Governance structures which represent a range of voices and prevent decision-making burnout is crucial to the viability of housing projects. The formal governance structure may vary according to the group's ethos, however, positive examples include: boards comprising residents and local experts; paid staff; and resident-led working groups.

4. Resident knowledge and skills: The development and continuation of community-led housing projects requires a range of skills: 'softer' skills such as project management and communication; technical knowledge on relevant legal and financial matters; and, practical skills including repairs and website development. Each can readily support different aspects of the project and keep costs low. Where there are capability-gaps, knowledge-sharing with local experts is vital and can be provided externally by local authorities and umbrella organisations.



5. Financial support: Access to financial support was a particularly significant meso-level factor, supporting: the initial acquisition of land; resident training; house costs to remain at an affordable level; ongoing expansion. Financial support can be granted by loans, subsidies, grants from banks or local authorities, and are immaterial to maintaining the project's security.

6. Resources: Developing community-led housing projects requires three main resources: first, land, on which projects can be physically developed, which can be supported by collaboration with local authorities or other non-profit organisations; second, people, who can plan projects, manage decisions, and share skills; third, time, which is used managing staff and decisions. The latter two may be supported by umbrella organisations, who can provide training, knowledge-sharing, and guidance to maximise efficiency and collaboration.

7. Land policy: Policies can be supportive to community-led housing through zoning, promoting 'social sustainability' in new property developments, and allowing collective living. Conversely, UK land regulations can be particularly complicated and difficult to navigate, reaffirming the importance of guidance or legal knowledge.

Conclusion

This rapid evidence synthesis shows that the viability of community-led housing depends on a range of meso-level factors, which relate to both the internal workings of a housing scheme and the external environment in which it is situated. Local authorities, alongside umbrella organisations such as housing associations, can accelerate and mitigate these factors and enable community-led housing project development by facilitating access to land, financial, intellectual, social, and human resources.

Further information

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