

# **The wider benefits of cohousing: The case of Bridport**



***An LSE London research project for Bridport Cohousing***

***Final report***  
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**Cover: Members of Bridport Cohousing celebrate receiving planning permission, February 2016.**

# Introduction

This report sets out the ways in which a new cohousing scheme can be expected to benefit its wider neighbourhood and community, as well the residents themselves. It is based on a case study of Bridport Cohousing in Dorset, but many of the lessons will also be relevant to prospective developments elsewhere in the UK.

## ***Bridport Cohousing and this report***

Bridport Cohousing is an established cohousing group in Dorset that plans to build a new cohousing scheme consisting of 53 all-affordable units (26 at affordable rent, 27 shared ownership; all at 80% of market price/rent or less). The development will be structured as a community benefit society with an asset lock to preserve affordability indefinitely. The project is well underway: the group has identified and purchased a site and has received planning permission for their scheme.

The group sought partial funding for the development phase from CAF Venturesome, a funder set up by the Charities Aid Foundation to support social enterprises and charities. According to the CAF Venturesome webpage, its mission is ‘to provide social enterprises and charities with the affordable, repayable finance they need to sustain and grow their social impact.’ The original funding bid was rejected, as the funder felt the project would not be genuinely affordable to lower-income households, and that there was insufficient evidence of the wider social benefits of cohousing.

Bridport Cohousing submitted a revised bid to another fund operated by the Charities Aid Foundation, and asked LSE London to carry out this piece of research to assist in preparation of that bid.

## ***Research questions and methodology***

Our research questions are

- What is the existing evidence from the UK and abroad about the social benefits of cohousing for residents and for the wider communities in which the schemes are situated, and what are the mechanisms through which benefits are transmitted?
- How can these mechanisms be expected to operate in the Bridport Cohousing scheme, and what benefits are likely to be generated?

### *Methodology*

We conducted a short review of the literature on the benefits of cohousing and other forms of community-led housing, focusing on the principal mechanisms seen to produce social benefits. We looked at both peer-reviewed academic articles from a range of relevant social science disciplines including sociology and social policy, urban planning, geography, anthropology, gerontology and health, and at grey literature from relevant specialist organisations and housing networks in the UK and internationally. We focused on material published since 2000, when the first experiments with the model appeared in the UK.

The main element of the research was an intensive case study of Bridport Cohousing. We reviewed documentation about the planned scheme and its architectural and governance

features. Hudson spent several days in Bridport, interviewing Bridport Cohousing group members, neighbours of the development site, local-authority planners and representatives of the local community (e.g. elected council members), and taking part in group meetings and social events. The research team discussed interim findings in late September with a round table of cohousing residents and professionals and experts in related fields. The results of the round table have fed into this final report.

## Cohousing and its benefits

### *What cohousing is*

Cohousing is a somewhat loose term that denotes a collaborative form of living. It does not denote a specific tenure, financial or legal framework but rather is generally accepted to have the following characteristics:

- **intentionality** – residents commit explicitly to living as a community and often share common values, goals, or vision. These can be loose or more formally expressed through spiritual or ecological values.
- **size** – cohousing communities usually range from about 6 to 50 households. Smaller numbers do not achieve critical mass; with higher ones, relationships can become too diffuse.
- **shared facilities** – the schemes are usually based around a common house. Shared facilities and spaces are often open to the wider community.
- **resident participation in design** – an element of co-design and co-production of the homes, through planning of new build and/or through resident control as aspects are modified.
- **self governance** – many groups use formal tools for direct democracy such as consensus decision making.
- **ritual and tradition** – groups often take part in regular community-wide events such as shared meals, social activities and team-based work days that build community glue, social capital and trust.

Although an accepted housing choice in the USA and some European countries, cohousing is still a niche model in the UK, with only 21 completed (listed) cohousing schemes, and another 48 developing or forming according to the UK Cohousing Network. However the model is poised to grow: there is growing public awareness of cohousing as an option (the opening of Older Women's Co-housing [OWCH] in late 2016 generated a lot of national publicity), as well as interest in policy circles about the potential benefits of collaborative housing in general and cohousing specifically to attenuate social isolation and loneliness (Bolton 2012; Best and Porteus 2012; 2017; CIH and Housing LIN 2014; DCLG 2009). Senior co-housing in particular has the potential to improve well-being by introducing a bottom-up non-institutional model that fosters collaborative living, with informal forms of mutual aid (Durrett 2009; Glass 2013; Grinde et al 2018).

Recent policy interest has led to the introduction of dedicated funding pots to encourage these innovative developments (e.g. the Community Housing Fund operated by the MHCLG

and the GLA; Power to Change's Homes in Community Hands programme) and institutional support mechanisms (e.g., the Community Housing Hubs now operating across the country, which advise groups on how to access land and funding, as well as offering technical and informational support.) Policy makers in other fields including ageing, health and wellbeing have also shown interest in the potential of this housing alternative, and MHCLG recently commissioned a major piece of research into the potential of cohousing to reduce loneliness amongst older people.

### *Benefits to the wider society*

According to the existing literature, cohousing has the potential to benefit neighbourhoods and the wider society in several ways. These include:

1. ***Providing affordable housing, and adding to local housing supply*** Many cohousing groups share a social vision that includes a commitment to affordable housing. Depending on the legal and financial structures chosen, and on the characteristics of the local housing market, cohousing developments can include an element of affordable housing or indeed be entirely affordable. Sharing facilities, appliances and meals—common practice in cohousing—also effectively reduces overall housing costs.

In seeking to provide affordable housing, creators of cohousing communities operate within much the same financial and planning framework as commercial developers. Producing genuinely affordable housing, especially in areas of high land value, requires some type of subsidy (explicit or implicit) and often involves partnerships. With established developers (Lang et al 2018; Mullins & Moore 2018). Garciano (2011), looking at the US system, describes the production of affordable cohousing using the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. Others like Chatterton (2016) have described resident-led forms of mutual finance designed to maintain mixed tenures and affordability in perpetuity.

2. ***Offering amenities and facilities for the local community*** Many cohousing developments actively engage with their wider communities and neighbourhoods, inviting local residents to use their resources (e.g opening their gardens to the community or hosting a children's nursery in the cohousing) or offering services such as fitness classes. These can also help integrate residents with the wider community.
3. ***Contributing to neighbourhood cohesion and civil society*** Cohousing communities serve as models of active citizenship and local decision-making, and may contribute to neighbourhood cohesion and pride. Collective ownership, control and management by residents are principles embedded in the structure of cohousing communities. Putting these principles in practice enables members to develop team building and leadership skills, and appears to contribute to greater democratic participation at the wider level: American research has found evidence that residents of cohousing communities are more involved in civil society and electoral politics than residents of conventional homes (Berggren 2011). Research in the UK and Italy came to similar conclusions, finding that residents 'are very active in the wider neighbourhood both trying to involve external people in common activities within communities, and participating in neighbourhood social life' (Ruiu 2016). Looking at cohousing communities located in neighbourhoods undergoing transition, Fromm

(2012) found that they ‘encourage residents to socialise, care and interact with each other as well as caring, interacting, and modelling community within the neighbourhood; a finding that was similarly echoed in Hamiduddin and Gallent’s (2016) research on cohousing residents’ interaction with adjoining neighbourhoods in Germany.

4. ***Acting as a ‘social laboratory’*** Cohousing schemes often serve as testbeds for promising new approaches to architectural design, urban planning and social governance, as well as new ways of ageing together (Palmer and Tummers 2019; Fromm 2012). Society as a whole can benefit from innovations first trialed in these cohousing ‘laboratories.’
5. ***Promoting environmental sustainability and contributing to climate resilience*** Many cohousing schemes serve as exemplars for people wanting to move towards a low-carbon lifestyle. LILAC, for example, a high-profile scheme in Leeds, incorporated features such as photovoltaic panels, straw bale construction and mechanical ventilation systems (Chatterton 2013) through a co-production model that enabled the reproduction of individual and community learning over time (Stevenson, Barborska-Narozny and Chatterton 2016). A 2017 systematic review of research into 23 cohousing communities found evidence that they had smaller ecological and carbon footprints than traditional housing, and tended to encourage sustainable lifestyles amongst residents (Daly 2017). The shared spaces of cohousing were found to reduce energy consumption and carpooling reduced carbon emissions. Many schemes also feature shared energy supply (Nelson 2018). A Japanese study of cohousing showed that units consumed less energy than traditional dwellings (Kido & Nakajima 2012).
6. ***Reducing demand for public services*** To the extent that residents enjoy better health and wellbeing than their counterparts in conventional housing, they may place lower demands on local health and social care services. A recent parliamentary report on housing for older people recognised the link between homes and health and social care (House of Commons 2018). Disabled people and others with special needs might also make less call on public services if they lived in cohousing schemes. In the USA, the cohousing model has been adapted to house low-income single mothers, with the intention of giving them the tools to achieve independence and economic self-sufficiency (Graber & Wolfe, 2004). Recognising this type of contribution, the HACT social value calculator helps local authorities quantify the benefits of their land disposals and talks about social welfare outcomes and disabled people.
7. ***Creating a sense of place*** Many purpose-built cohousing developments have very strong design messages, in contrast to the often bland output of volume house builders. The pioneering Older Women’s Cohousing (OWCH) community in north London, co-designed with its eventual residents, has won a string of design awards in 2017 including *Small Housing Project of the Year* and the *European Collaborative Housing Award*. Such schemes can enhance their neighbourhoods visually and contribute to a sense of place (Devlin, Douglas and Reynolds 2015).

## *Benefits to residents*

Most of what has been written about the benefits of cohousing focuses on impacts on residents themselves. These include:

- ***Better mental and physical wellbeing*** Advocates have for some time argued that living in the convivial, supportive environment of a cohousing community may improve the mental and physical wellbeing of residents (Field 2004; Heath et al 2018; Taylor 2018; Choi 2004 a, b; Choi & Paulsson 2011). Researchers from across some European countries, the US and Australia have been particularly interested in the benefits to older residents in terms of greater socialization and physical activity, and the possibility of mutual support and care that would supplant or complement family or institutional support (Bamford 2005; Choi 2004; Droste 2015; Hudson 2017; Labit 2015; Labit & Dubost 2016; Borgloh & Westerheide, 2012; Forbes 2002; Glass 2009; 2013; Glass & Vander Plaats 2013; Markle et al 2015; Stevens 2016), but there are also potential benefits for younger households, including the opportunity to share childcare responsibilities.
- ***Inclusive and supportive communities*** Canadian research has found that cohousing communities are seen by parents to be safe environments in which to raise children, especially because they are normally traffic-free (Tchoukaleyska 2011). Co-housing has also been found to enhance residents' connections to community and nature (Sanguinetti 2014), and to enhance or enrich their political lives (Jarvis 2015b; Jones 2017) and social capital (Ruiu 2016). It is further argued that because of their utopic and communitarian histories, as well as feminist visions and practices regarding gender equality, cohousing can be less patriarchal than standard residential choices (Horelli & Vepsä 1994; Sargisson 2012; 2014; Sangregorio 1995; 2010; Toker 2010; Michelson 1993; Sargisson 2012; Williams 2005; Vestbro 1997; 2010; Vestbro & Horelli 2012 ). Most recently, cohousing advocates in a number of countries have been working on expanding commitments to social justice (Communities 2018) and the principles of inclusion and diversity to include even more heterogeneity in terms of gender and sexual orientation, disability, migration experiences, religious practices, relationships, family forms, and more (Droste & Komorek 2017: 28; LaFond & Tsvetkova, 2017).
- ***Spaces designed for social interaction*** Many cohousing groups co-design their schemes in a participatory way with architects, aiming to minimise their homes' resource use and reduce carbon and energy in construction. But the participatory process itself has benefits: it tends to foster greater cooperation amongst group members during the development phase, as well as producing better spaces for social interaction and more age-friendly physical environments in the eventual completed schemes (Cooper Marcus 2000; Fenster 1999; Fernández Arrigoitia & Scanlon 2015, 2017; Ruiu 2017 ; Sargisson 2014; Williams 2005).
- ***Residents exercise control*** Finally, residents of cohousing communities make all decisions about their homes and social spaces and the way they are run. Compared to residents of most types of multi-unit housing (from conventional blocks of flats to retirement and care homes) they enjoy a high degree of agency. This greater degree of agency has knock-on benefits for the individuals concerned; there is anecdotal evidence, for example, that it helps older people retain mental capacity.

## The case study: Bridport Cohousing

This section of the report examines the potential social benefits of Bridport Cohousing, which arise from its physical design and from the social infrastructure that underpins the cohousing concept.

The findings draw on data gathered through August and early September 2019 through

- Six interviews with members (audio recorded)
- Seven interviews with planners, local council members and others involved with the project (audio recorded)
- Attendance at two group meetings (soul circle, soil circle)
- Attendance at two group open events
- Various documents provided by Charles Couzens, as well as a survey of data available online, including registered company returns, policy documents linked from the website, and the group's social media.

### ***Details of the scheme***

Bridport Cohousing CLT's *Hazelmead* development will be the first cohousing project in the Bridport area but also looks set to be the largest so far in the UK (although there are bigger examples in other countries). First conceived in 2008, Bridport Cohousing<sup>1</sup> is led by its members, who since its founding have identified sites, sought funding and supporting partners and appointed consultants, but always maintaining the primary aims of the project as affordability, eco-design and creating a community.

The group registered formally as a community benefit society in 2012, at around the time it began negotiating on possible sites; the location eventually chosen is a greenfield site on the northern edge of the town adjoining Bridport's community hospital, in an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB). The site was previously owned by a family who supported the group's social and community aims and were willing to sell the plot at a below-market price to ensure the development could go ahead. For reasons beyond BC's control, it was necessary to purchase the site in two halves, with the first sale completed in March 2018 and the second in early September 2019. Planning permission was as a consequence also sought as two separate applications, with the second phase receiving consent in July 2019. The site is a sensitive one at the edge of the built-up area. Our interviewees felt that residential development would not normally have been allowed in such a location, and said this scheme was permitted because of the nature of the group, and because it would provide affordable housing in perpetuity.

Synergy Housing (now Aster) acted for several years as BC's development partner. They were followed in 2016 by Hastoe Housing Association, but since September 2018 the development partner has been Bournemouth Churches Housing Association. The architect

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<sup>1</sup> Bridport Cohousing CLT is referred to in this report simply as 'BC', adopted by the group to avoid confusion with the adjoining Bridport Community Hospital (BCH) or with the group's partner Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA).



for the whole site since 2014 has been Barefoot Architects. Construction is due to begin by the end of 2019.

The development will provide 53 eco-homes with a mix of one-bedroom flats and two-, three- and four-bedroom houses, with a significant part of the site to the north left open, intended as shared growing and permaculture resource. A portion of the site was considered by the group for individual self-build homes, but this was not ultimately pursued due to the sensitivity of that part of the site in planning terms. The planning of the site reflects the aims of cohousing: while parking is relegated to the site perimeter, the centre of the development features a large open space – ‘the green’ – and a common house that as well as a large event space and kitchen for community events, there are smaller community and office spaces, storage for shared items such as gardening equipment, and a shared laundry. There will also be two self-contained guest rooms / apartments (located elsewhere within the housing development), and other plans for shared resources include use of a car club and e-bikes, with allocated space for vehicle(s), charging points etc. allowed for.

As cohousing, the community will be entirely responsible for running and maintaining Hazelmead, liaising with BCHA as appropriate for their 26 homes; the result is a greater obligation than a normal tenancy or lease; in joining the group all members make a commitment to this principle, and to the community’s consent decision-making process, run on *sociocratic* principles. While a few of the group’s members are supporters only, most intend to become Hazelmead residents.

At the time of publication, BC has 45 members who wish to become residents, and who have applied for 17 homes as ‘full’ buyers, 8 as varying proportions of shared ownership, and 12 renting (a total of 37 households). 11 of the households include children of school age (19 children in all), while 21 households comprise members 60+ (24 adults in total). While there is a mix of couples and singles, the residents currently comprise 13 men and 32 women.

## ***The social benefits***

This section examines the degree to which Bridport Cohousing can be expected to produce the social benefits claimed for cohousing in general (discussed above), and how these benefits will be manifested.

### ***1. Providing affordable housing and adding to local housing supply***

Although the legal-financial model chosen to create the project is a community land trust (constituted as a Community Benefit Society in law), the ambition for affordable housing for local people long predates the adoption of this model, and was a founding principle of the group. All of the homes in the scheme will be affordable, and the group has adopted a household income ceiling of £50,000 per annum (which would be low for a two-income household in the London context but not in Bridport).

Of the 53 homes, 27 will be for leasehold sale. Some 13 will be sold at 80% of open market value, which meets the government’s definition of affordable housing. The affordability is locked in, with subsequent resale prices limited to a maximum of 80% of current local open-market values. The other 14 for-sale units will be offered for (grant funded) shared ownership ranging from 25% to 75% of open market value, with the possibility of ‘staircasing’

up to 80%. The remaining minimum 20% of each home will remain with Bridport Cohousing CLT – who will also own the freehold of the whole site – to ensure that these homes cannot be sold on the open market and that they continue to be affordable in the future. The affordable housing scheme submitted as part of the Phase 1 planning application is included as Appendix 2.

Since 2018, BC has worked in partnership with Bournemouth Churches Housing Association, who will own the leasehold of the remaining 26 homes and be responsible for their upkeep as any other leaseholder, to be let at social rents to tenants who will be full members of the cohousing. Of these, six homes will be allocated to staff from Bridport Community Hospital – agreed as part of the negotiation over access land rights to the Hazelmead site – who similarly will need to be both eligible as social renters and members of the cohousing group. All 26 households will need to have explicitly opted to live in a cohousing community, and sign up to BC's set of principles for Hazelmead.

The scheme will thus offer housing for a range of incomes, from social rent to 80% of market value for buyers. While the latter definition of affordable housing has been criticised elsewhere as not 'truly' affordable, in practice Hazelmead is an affordable option for several of the prospective 'full owner' residents where no other properties of comparable size in the area were; one described how: '*... we could just about buy on the open market, but we'd struggle. So yep, it's not just the social renters that it's affordable for.*'

The less directly quantifiable savings through shared resources were also a notable when residents discussed their motivations, especially for those whose existing housing equity might allow them to buy their home but who would remain on relatively low incomes. The eco-design and consequent lower fuel bills were the aspect most referred to, but all of the members spoken to said that in addition to saving money individually they were committed to living 'more lightly'. There was enthusiasm among prospective residents for reducing car use – through lift sharing and potentially the use of a car club scheme – as well as storage space for shared DIY and gardening tools, as well as a laundry. But perhaps most striking was the extent to which growing food on site also held a strong appeal, emphasised as a realistic intent by the impressive level of individual and community gardening that already exists in the group (discussed below).

Although equally difficult to measure, Hazelmead will have two small guest flats for visitors, meaning that some households may notionally have saved costs by choosing a smaller home than might have otherwise been the case. Anecdotal evidence from two completed cohousing schemes in London suggests that in any case, members might also evolve an informal sharing of rooms in their own houses for each other's guests.

As noted earlier, Bridport Cohousing was conceived of first and foremost around the concept of a cohousing project that also responded to the housing affordability crisis for local people, and it remains rooted in the local 'political' sphere with links to and support from local and regional councillors and others. While several of those involved with the development of the project described the difficulties of the social concept of cohousing fitting with the narrow constraints of the planning system, Hazelmead's architect noted that, while this was true:

*... it did meet the political and social agenda of the local council, who overwhelmingly supported it, and I think the engagements the group has had with their MP, [Oliver Letwin] and their principally Lib Dem council.. to the extent that when it finally went through, Stella Jones MBE [a prominent local*

*politician] said she had no doubt that “this was the future for housing in the United Kingdom” and commended it as being an exceptional way to deliver sustainable new housing.*

BC’s local lettings policy<sup>2</sup> reflects the group’s roots in responding to local need, and, given the anticipated over-subscription for the scheme, sets out selection criteria that prioritise living or working in the local area, but also aim to maintain a diverse community in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and household type.

For all properties, priority is given to local connection, firstly to those who live or work in the immediate Bridport area, followed by West Dorset, and then the wider county. For the 80% ownership properties, there will be a fourth tier, ‘beyond Dorset’; for the housing association (social rental) properties, priority is given to those households with the highest priority rating on the Housing Register. However, households with strong local connections (eg born and raised in the town, but living at a distance because they cannot afford Bridport rents and house prices) will also be considered. Preference will also be given to those on the Dorset Home Choice Housing Register (administered by Dorset Council liaising with Bournemouth Churches HA), and residents’ household income cannot exceed £50,000 per annum when they move in.

In terms of age, the group recognises that cohousing projects tend to be driven forward by those in late career or retirement (who arguably have more time to commit), an issue likely accentuated by the older demographic of the region. It is clear however that there is a will within the group to address this: firstly there has been a significant influx in the last two years of younger members – many with young families – the result of a renewed promotion of the group, in tandem with the ‘natural’ effect of interest in the housing offer as the project approaches its start on site. But secondly, and despite potential disappointment among some long-term members, the group plans to cap the proportion of households aged over 60 at 33% (a restriction of 17 households, against 21 current applications). Further, in recognition that parents of young families find it the hardest to make time commitments, 20% of units in the project (and possibly more) will be prioritised for families with at least one child living at home in full-time education or younger. The lettings policy document also notes that by necessity, priority may also be given ‘dependent on skills that might be to achieve the sustainability, wider community benefits, and educational aims of the project’, and a minimum time commitment to the community is also required.

Finally the project will add 53 dwellings to a pressured housing market. These homes can be regarded as genuinely additional: our interviewees agreed that a typical speculative development would probably not have received planning consent. Apart from the additionality in terms of numbers, the scheme represents a different *type* of housing, and will enhance the diversity and choice available in the local housing market now and into the future.

## **2. Offering amenities and facilities for the local community**

Perhaps the most tangible amenity for the wider community is the formal agreement with the adjoining Bridport Community Hospital, which (via Bournemouth Churches Housing

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<sup>2</sup> Despite its name, the policy covers all tenure types at Hazelmead, reflecting the fact that there are no ‘outright’ owners. See Appendix 1.

Association) provides six homes for NHS staff, as well as a parking allocation for hospital staff. But a further potential relationship with the hospital is currently being explored: the provision of a one-bedroom flat as a 'halfway house' for post-op patients (assumed to be older) who would remain under the care of the hospital but as a way of testing the possibility of a patients returning home, but within reach of the hospital staff if required, allowing the person a degree of independence, especially if also supported in the flat by a partner or family member. Several group members are enthusiastic about this idea but we were told that negotiations with the NHS had not been straightforward because of the many levels of bureaucracy involved.

BC has ambitions to grow and maintain strong links with the wider community in other ways, primarily through sharing its spaces and resources. Although a planned community market garden was vetoed by the planning authority, the group plans to open up a variety of its spaces to the community including its studio and therapy rooms, co-working office space, and potentially the main meeting room for regular events, workshops, playgroups and so on. Use of the upper part of the site for food growing, and for use by the wider community remains an aspiration that the group hopes to revisit at a future point. There will be a catering kitchen in the common house, available at many other times than the anticipated three evenings a week it will be used for a shared meal for residents. The group also sees potential to engage wider community with activities such as an on-site food co-op/bulk-buying scheme, cookery workshops, lunch clubs etc. The planned car club also becomes more viable with a greater number of users, thus making sense to extend to other local residents.

### **3. Contributing to neighbourhood cohesion and civil society**

There is perhaps a risk that Hazelmead's edge location might hinder contact with the rest of the town. However, it is quickly apparent during the fieldwork for this report that the Bridport Cohousing group is interlinked with a wide local network of supporters and overlapping groups – notable were links with local businesses, key individuals involved in multiple other community-led housing projects in the region, local campaign groups. At the time of writing, the group was promoting itself through a Transtion Town Bridport 'open house' initiative for individual eco homes in the area; more than one BC member felt that Hazelmead's community facilities might become the natural hub for such activity. We heard at the round table from residents of other cohousing communities, who said that at an individual level they were committed to 'giving back' to their community by volunteering for and organising various charitable and educational activities.

Many group members have been hugely supported in developing their skills and growing in the confidence to participate, both in the planning and management of Hazelmead, but also more widely. One highly active member said:

*I'd been a bit isolated for a few years. But I really, really believe, it's given me the confidence to go back to work. I did stuff I didn't think I'd ever be able to do. [...] Some useful skills, sure, but for me it's been getting back the confidence to work with people, to be around people again, with a purpose.*

Key to this has been the group's very serious commitment to consent-based decision making through sociocracy; all new members are asked to read Rau and Koch-Gonzalez'

key book on the subject<sup>3</sup>, and decisions made through a series of non-hierarchical ‘circles’, each focussed on different tasks or aspects of the group (two of which were visited as preparation for this report). What was apparent was that despite many admitting that decisions might take longer, there were unexpected positives that suggest political control has been opened up in a relatively large group that might otherwise risk being dominated by ‘the usual suspects’. In addition to the acquisition of skills and confidence previously noted, these positives have included: a strong feeling among newer members that their voices are heard, which in turn has widened the membership base, and encouraged deeper involvement to the extent that several of the most active members are not the longest standing; and also that nominations for key roles are encouraged in a way that, in one member’s words, are *‘not always the names you might expect, or the reasons you might expect. Some people are surprised to be nominated, but have always stepped up to the job, and grown with it.’*

There are however risks around the continuation of this process into the ‘settled’ life of the community; some longstanding members feel that through the very busy recent period as the scheme moves into its construction phase, there has been insufficient time to properly train the new tranche of membership in sociocracy, and the principles may be lost to some extent. However, according to interviewees, the current restructuring process – designed to generate more small groups during the period of the build – aims to ensure that all members have the opportunity to engage with smaller circles and sub-circles, allowing for more effective ongoing training and effective groups.

Finally, the group plans eventually to offer open events to provide interested people with an opportunity to experience life in such a community. In addition, it sees a role in offering training in sociocracy; one member commented that ‘it is probably easier to appreciate when experienced, rather than simply from reading.’ Opportunities to learn about it in a realistic context are few and far between in the UK.

#### **4. Acting as a ‘social laboratory’**

Cohousing is a powerful social innovation, and as currently the largest cohousing scheme underway in the UK, Hazelmead has the potential to serve as a laboratory for such schemes done at scale in terms of both its physical design and innovative governance. The project strongly reflects the multiple aspirations of cohousing: to create an environmentally sustainable community that shares assets but also creates a mutually supportive social environment, but at the same time achieves this at prices affordable to the existing local community.

As a tangible example of cohousing, the scheme will enhance public understanding of what cohousing is (and is not). Several members described their own initial prejudices and misunderstandings on first hearing of Bridport Cohousing – ‘a hippy commune?’ being a typical response. Notably, the group has dropped the word ‘Community’ from its title, in a conscious effort to overcome this misperception. A completed scheme on the scale of

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<sup>3</sup> Rau, T.J. and Koch-Gonzalez, J., 2018. *Many voices one song: Shared power with sociocracy. Sociocracy for All.*

Hazelmead – with its broad demographic from the local community, mix of ages and incomes – will demonstrate powerfully that the ‘social concept’ is not a niche one, but an attempt to build an affordable, green neighbourhood.

The negotiations with public authorities have been a learning process for all concerned, and the planning and development phases – so prolonged in the BC case – may be faster for future schemes, since those involved in the process have become more familiar with the cohousing concept. Paul Derrien, Head of Housing Strategy at West Dorset District Council, described his own learning process around the cohousing concept and added that other parties had also struggled to understand the motivations of the project’s supporters. He observed, for instance, that lawyers acting on behalf of the NHS had significantly slowed the process by initially demanding around £600,000 from land access rights, on the assumption that there was ‘a cynical developer looking to turn a serious profit, whereas in fact it was just local people building housing at cost’.

Discussions with the group also influenced the views of planners and the police about what constitutes ‘safe design’. Initially the public officials felt cars should be parked next to the houses (per the ‘Secured by Design’ standard) but in the end the approved Hazelmead scheme intentionally locates the car park at some distance from the homes. There is a value in exposing public authorities to alternative design thinking and practices.

Community Land Trusts are now so well established as a concept in the south west as to be almost mainstream – with more than twenty built examples nearby – due in large part to the streamlining of the process by Wessex Community Assets who act as a regional hub supporting such schemes (and several of whose key players are also linked to BC). Might cohousing take a similar path? Scheme architect Sam Goss thinks so, and that as a concept cohousing is not a difficult one; he views the greater challenge as the variety of tenures and financial diversity of the membership. He emphasised the importance of working with a development partner, ideally a housing association (although other interviewees observed that there are also risks, as the organisations’ interests may not always be aligned).

A further potential benefit of the ‘normalisation’ of such schemes is highlighted by the challenges BC has experienced in trying to meet its green design aims. As one key member explained, that given the size of the scheme, compromises have had to be made to allow for local builders’ resources and skills, primarily in terms of the embodied energy of building materials. Sam Goss takes a positive view however, noting that each additional project like this makes incremental gains as builders become more familiar with cohousing’s ecological aims, each project ‘raising the bar’ for the next.

Building ecologically demanding cohousing schemes thus can improve the skills base of SMEs. Similarly, the growth of the cohousing movement has created a new type of professional, the cohousing facilitator (see also Fernández Arrigoitia and Tummers 2019).

## ***5. Promoting environmental sustainability and contributing to climate resilience***

Minimising the project’s environmental impact through ecological design and the sharing of resources has been a central tenet of the group’s thinking since its inception; according to

the project's architect, the members' commitment to these aspects throughout the design process has been the main driver for what's been achieved, naturally far beyond what a commercial developer might consider, but also – in his experience – that are not necessarily a fundamental of other community-led projects such as CLTs.

Sustainability was an underlying principle from the beginning. The houses respond to the contours of the site with careful south-facing orientation to maximise both passive solar gain and for photo-voltaic panels on roofs. While the group initially aspired to *Passivhaus* standard, in fact the houses will comply with the AECB Silver Standard (the same performance standard as Passivhaus less the certification). The design includes a 'fabric first' approach to solar orientation, high levels of insulation and ventilation management.

Equally, the members – aware of issues around flooding and the nature of the clay ground in the neighbourhood – have driven a careful approach to water management, with a sustainable urban drainage (SUDS) scheme that includes rainwater management and storage. Residents worked with the architect to develop a series of drainage 'swales' to the fronts of the houses that also help define the private and semi-public division of space.

Bridport Town Council have declared a climate emergency and pledged to make the town carbon neutral by 2030. The group is currently looking at tools to measure individuals' carbon footprints. They plan to take baseline readings for members one year prior to moving on site, and aim to achieve a 40% carbon-footprint reduction in year 1—thus demonstrating to other town residents what can be achieved.

Photovoltaic panels supplying a part of the site's electricity will feed into a 'microgrid' that better manages the storage and use of the electricity generated (at present to be run by an external supply company, but potentially to be taken over by the community at a later date). BC will have no gas supply, and is an advanced response to the likely withdrawal of gas to new housing developments in the next five years. As the scheme's architect, Sam Goss, talking of his experience with BC put it:

*The ability for [cohousing] residents to have such control over the design of their homes is huge... to force higher standards of design, and fabric performance. It's overwhelmingly the best way to procure and manage housing, if what you care about is the end product, in terms of quality of life for residents.*

The group's aims regarding permaculture and the importance of food growing are also strongly reflected in the plans, with a large part of the site to be retained for community planting and food growing; BC's existing allotment in the town will be retained and used primarily for fruit growing. It is also hoped that work can begin in parallel with the main contractor's building work, as the two parts of the site are easily separable. Several members noted not just the importance of the ability to grow food for themselves, but the role the plans will play in teaching children about the connection between food and its source.

### *Sharing resources*

Sharing of resources is an intrinsic part of reducing the residents' living costs, but it is equally a part of the aim to significantly reduce the community's carbon footprint. Again, the project architect notes that this has been a strongly resident-driven aspect of the project, for

whom affordability and sustainability in perpetuity remains the goal. The concept of cohousing already encourages the shared use of gardening and DIY tools, as well as, for BC, a shared laundry, but is also evident in less obviously apparent ways; shared guest accommodation for instance, while appearing a luxury, allows for residents perhaps needing a smaller home than might have otherwise been the case.

A significant aspect though is likely to be transport. Bridport has no train station, and limited bus services (more than one member is involved in a local campaign to protect the latter) and so responding to a largely car-based local culture is seen by the group as vital in terms of reducing carbon emissions. Car ownership – and parking – is strictly limited to one per household, although many members of the group already cycle for very local journeys, and the inclusion of an e-bike scheme in the design will further support this (as well as being charged from the micro-grid). Membership of a car club scheme is under negotiation with a local company (Exeter-based Co Car, which would see electric and/or hybrid vehicles available to the community and to the wider neighbourhood. But several members also mentioned the potential for informal car and lift sharing among the group as more possible than elsewhere through being an intentional community, with suggestions that a localised social media network might help manage this.

In addition, the group believes that by disseminating the ethos and practice of sharing (especially food preparation and meals), it can contribute powerfully to the wellbeing of the surrounding community. As one member said,

‘Sharing is a difficult concept for many people and food can be a great ‘opener’ when people experience the joy of bringing and sharing a plate of food. It can be a life saver for elderly single people living alone, who miss the joy of social exchange at mealtimes, as well as providing a healthier (and cheaper) option than a takeaway meal or a ready meal for busy working families. Children can also gain great benefit from being in this sort of social environment at mealtimes, and can be exposed to a greater range of foodstuffs than they may get at home.’

## **6. *Improving patterns of demand for public services***

While reducing demand for social and healthcare services is not an overt aim of the group, a reduction in such demand is an incidental – albeit very important – corollary of the group’s aim to create a strong, mutually supportive community.

The potential social benefits to older members are well established in the literature, and several older members of BC spoke of how living sociably in a community in later life had been a very real motivation, especially for those whose family members and close friends were widely geographically spread. This pattern is relatively common in this region of the southwest where there is a significantly higher proportion of retirees than other parts of the country. However, while all homes in the development will follow Lifetime Homes principles, the group recognises the need to maintain a mix of ages so as to avoid the risk of being as a retirement community. As one older member put it:

‘I think people are happier when they’ve got younger people around them and older people around them... and they are challenged as well, we all need our



values and our thinking challenged now and again, it keeps my brain active. I don't want to be in a place where everybody's the same.'

Discussions with older members suggested that their focus was generally more on the success of the group and the housing delivery process; it was the younger members who spoke of more potentially tangible benefits, such as sharing childcare duties, or of children being able to play in the neighbourhood unsupervised but watched over by many. One particular example stood out though: a member whose son has severe learning difficulties and requires full-time care was able to express the importance of the group to her and her son even before Hazelmead has been built:

'I absolutely love it. It's done the things, even before we live there, that I was hoping for, which is to have a greater sense of belonging, to the town and the people around me. We've got loads of support, if anything happens, you know, people will contact me and say "can I help, can I bring you food?" Just... to be held in people's minds, it feels really lovely to know that people are thinking about you.'

'For my son there could come a point when the only people who will know him will be people who will be paid to know him, respite carers and things, and that's not enough. I want people to know who he is, and care about him.'

'And the important thing about it for me is that it's reciprocal. It's a horrible feeling never to be able to repay people's help... you will have got someone's shopping, you will have taken someone to the station... For me, you can't put a price on it, those simple things.'

Of course, there is no absolute guarantee that this or any cohousing community will live in practice as sociably and mutually as they aspire to before moving in, especially given the relatively large size of this project. Certainly, the community proposes structured social activity that includes eating together at the common house up to three times a week, and extensive plans for permaculture and food growing on the northern part of the site, which are intended to be a strong focus for many in the community.

These ambitions however are given more weight when considering what BC already does: even the brief period spent with the group through this research saw the group hosting multiple social events both members-only and open to the wider public, including walks and social nights, in addition to the many regular structured internal meetings necessary at this critical stage for the project. Gardening especially has clearly been a strong focus: although one member had previously made their own garden available, for the last two years the group has shared an allotment in the town, and grows a range of produce. Members turn out for specific tasks, but a monthly gardening afternoon have become particularly successful recently as social events, especially for children. Many in the group already have their own individual allotments, and there are strong links with individual members and Bridport's Community Orchard Group.

Perhaps most important are the social connections – particularly among newer members – that have been made, and how some of the support spoken of, such as sharing childcare, has already begun to happen. There is a healthy dose of realism among members about the work that the community will entail (a restructuring of the group's sociocratic management

circles is currently underway to prepare for this) as well as its social relationships. As one resident noted:

*Cohousing is about how we forge relationships... that aren't necessarily about your best friend. I don't want to live with all of my best friends. I've learned here that communities don't work just because everybody likes each other, they work because there's a reciprocal, give and take. But yeah, it's also about people who share a common sense of community, who are interested in the world, who inspire you a bit...*

Finally, cohousing communities can also *increase* demand for some public services in a beneficial way. We heard at the round table about the case of Laughton Lodge, an intergenerational community in East Sussex whose families have many school-age children. These children had helped populate the rolls of the small local school.

## **7. Creating a sense of place**

The concept of cohousing – a neighbourhood focused around shared facilities and spaces – means that the design of such developments is already quite different from speculative housing. But it is clear from talking to the future Hazelmead residents that a sense of creating a *place* comes from the residents themselves being at the centre of the design process. While this is clearly a world away from speculative housing development, it is also notable that it is not necessarily inherent in other forms of community-led housing; one individual who has played a key role in supporting BC but was also instrumental in developing multiple community land trusts in the region admitted that the designs themselves are often unremarkable, and that it is the cohousing approach that creates a sense of place.

Barefoot Architects have worked closely with members, using an approach called *Planning for Real*, through which residents were involved in the design of the scheme from first principles, e.g. the massing and arrangement of the housing, and the location of the common house and open areas. Project architect Sam Goss noted that – despite the process being longer than non-community led housing projects – the co-design approach ‘... clearly added massive social value to the development, because there's a great sense of ownership, through [the residents] having guided and steered the design right from the start.’ Indeed, the members themselves are the single element of continuity, having created the concept, identified sites, appointed development partners and so on, and this clearly underpins the sense of ownership of Hazelmead by its future residents.

When asked about how they envisage life at Hazelmead, members often refer to the site as having a physical centre in the common house, with the ‘green’ (the main open space at the heart of the site) as a social focus. The overall planning of the site and the role of landscaping was also clearly important to the residents, with two key ideas prominent in conversations: firstly the extensive space given over to food growing and community gardening (discussed below); but most strongly the design of the road layout and parking, which restricts vehicles to the south and eastern edges of the site, leaving the rest of the development car free and pedestrian friendly. More than one resident talked at length about how this might mean their children could play more safely while also roaming the site freely.

The common house design also goes much further than simply being a single shared space; as well as the common room and kitchen facilities, there is a separate activity space, a playroom, office facilities and a laundry. Although mentioned by residents in the context of sharing resources, it is interesting that in other cohousing projects (such as New Ground in north London) the laundry has unexpectedly become a location for serendipitous meetings, and often a more relaxed place for social interaction than the main common space.

Finally, while BC's affordable housing model made the scheme possible in this location (see above), it could also be argued that the members' tenacity enabled them to achieve something that a speculative developer could not have.

## Conclusions

Inevitably the effects of the new scheme will be experienced most profoundly by those who live there, and our research suggests that Bridport Cohousing, when built, can be expected to offer to its residents the benefits claimed for cohousing: mutual support, individual agency and ownership over process and decision-making.

But we also anticipate a range of benefits to the surrounding neighbourhood and community. These are still mostly in the category of 'expected' rather than 'confirmed' – necessarily, as the scheme is not yet built and indeed some residents of surrounding areas are still unaware of it. Confirming the range of expected social benefits and, more challengingly, quantifying them, must await a proper evaluation. This should be undertaken when the scheme has been operating for a few years. Based on our research so far, the benefits we can expect to see at that point include

- A development of affordable, mixed-tenure housing for local people, including hospital key workers, that serves as a hub for the wider neighbourhood
- A testbed for environmentally and socially progressive innovation, with an ecologically pioneering design and sharing of resources
- A caring community whose members support each other, reducing their call on public resources

In addition, there is the possibility of providing a 'halfway house' space for patient recovery. This would represent a meaningful form of care and neighbourhood interaction that could serve as a model for the wider role of cohousing in society.

Achieving these aims and benefits is not necessarily straightforward. In trying to achieve multiple goals at once, BC (like other groups) is finding that it can be difficult to balance 'practical' build and delivery tasks with those related to social construction and learning. Members of the group are learning about the kinds of compromises that can be required during the development phase, especially in the case of a niche model like cohousing. The members have found that the desired distribution of power and responsibility amongst all of the membership (whether new or longstanding) is not always achievable in practice. But by adapting their structures and practices with care and consideration for individual agency, participation and learning, Bridport Cohousing is well placed to adapt to inevitable future changes.

The evidence collected from the field, and the reviewed literature, suggests that as Bridport Cohousing continues its path to delivery, it will join other successful cohousing schemes in the UK while also innovating on a number of fronts that will set a model for future groups.

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# Appendix 1: Local Lettings Policy

## BRIDPORT COHOUSING CLT

## LOCAL LETTINGS POLICY

Issue 12 – May 2017

### Introduction

Bridport Cohousing Community Land Trust (BC) aims to create a cohousing neighbourhood which offers an affordable, sustainable, mutually supportive community to local people, and which provides benefits and facilities for the wider locality. In selecting potential residents and allocating units, the aim is to operate a process which is transparent, fair, unbiased, and applies as far as possible to all tenure types.

It is recognised that the allocation and selection policy for this project must meet the needs of the local authority, the potential residents who have already invested much time in the project, and the housing association, and must be agreed by all of them. This Policy is also intended to fulfil Government objectives to create mixed communities and provide a range of affordable housing as defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF:

*Social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Affordable housing should include provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.*

### 1. Tenure Types

A primary aim of BC is to help meet local affordable housing needs. To achieve this, a range of tenures are proposed:

- a. Affordable Rented and, possibly, Shared Ownership housing: this term is used to describe:
  - Affordable rental units owned and managed by a registered provider (housing association) and rented at 80% of open market level
  - Shared ownership with the retained equity owned and rented by a registered provider.

Tenancies would be for 5 year periods and the right to buy or acquire will not apply to these homes.

- b. Intermediate Affordable Housing: high level of local house prices relative to local pay means that there is a substantial need for intermediate affordable housing. The intention is to offer two types of tenure.
  - The BC 80% shared leasehold: for intermediate units, occupiers would buy an 80% share of the open market value with the Community Land Trust holding 20%, on which rent will be charged. Subsequent sales will be at 85% of OMV in perpetuity.
  - Other affordable rental: some of the BC 80% shared leasehold properties may be purchased by Bridport Cohousing CLT and then let out by BC at 80/85% of the open market rents.

## **2. Resident obligations and resale restrictions.**

BC will require a number of special provisions to be included in all lease/rental agreements, on similar lines to other cohousing projects. These are intended to help ensure that the project continues to deliver key aims, including mutual support, affordable living, high levels of sustainability, and benefits to the local community. Key provisions have already been agreed in principle by all Members, and detailed proposals would be agreed by Members. The key provisions are:

- An equality and diversity policy to ensure that the opportunity to live in the cohousing community is open to all.
- Every adult resident must give four hours unpaid time per week to help run/maintain shared facilities.
- All residents must consent to contribute to agreed costs of shared sustainable transport facilities, e.g. a pool car. However, the personal economic circumstances of some residents may require this obligation to be waived or the contribution to be reduced in certain cases.
- All resident households must consent to pay an agreed proportion of costs for the shared facilities with an agreed allocation based on the floor area of the home.
- Policies on pets, noise, antisocial behaviour, recycling etc.
- Commitment to attend at least one half day meeting per month for all adult residents.
- Binding disputes procedure which could ultimately result in termination of lease/rental.
- When a resident leaves, the Resident Group has three months (for affordable market units) or six weeks (for Housing Association units) to nominate a preferred replacement resident. Any new resident, whether nominated by this process or not, will be subject to the same selection process and lease/rental commitments as the original residents.
- To maintain affordability, residents of any tenure type who own part of the equity in their property can only resell for the same percentage of market value at the time of the sale. For example, someone who purchased 80% of the equity in 2017 market value, selling the house in 2019 would receive 80% of 2019 market value, using an agreed valuation process.

## **3. Membership requirements during the development phase**

All potential residents are required to become Members of Bridport Cohousing: this applies regardless of tenure. A basic principle of cohousing is that potential residents are actively involved and consulted in the development stage, and thus become a community even before moving in. Hence a key step in the selection process is the requirement that all potential residents become a Member of Bridport Cohousing. The criteria and process for membership are agreed by all Members, and are set out in a written policy document to make the process as transparent as possible. Key requirements of membership are:

- Any prospective Member must attend at least two BC open meetings or events: this is to ensure some demonstration of commitment and willingness to spend time with other members on the project.
- An undertaking to spend eight hours of unpaid time per month working with other Members to help create the project. This may be reduced in specific circumstances.
- Support for the aims of the project: this is important to avoid future disputes on key principles such as sustainability, which will form part of planning commitments.
- An undertaking to maintain confidentiality for sensitive matters, e.g. other Members' personal information etc.

- Agreement to attend monthly meetings and group process training (e.g. consent decision making) where possible.

A condition of becoming a Member of BC is signing a written commitment covering the main points above.

BC Members have put substantial effort into ensuring that local people in and around Bridport, and especially local people on the Housing Register, are aware of this project and have the opportunity to become Members. This has included several open meetings in Bridport, contact with Bridport Town Council, Transition Town Bridport, and other local organisations, several surveys and a mailshot funded by Weymouth and Portland Housing to local households on the Housing Register.

#### 4. Selection policy

The term **selection** is being used for the process by which households are designated as eligible for a unit within the cohousing project.

The **allocation** policy, in section 5, covers allocation of specific dwellings to specific households within the scheme.

An important principle of Bridport Cohousing CLT is to be diverse and inclusive, so it is worth reviewing why any selection process is necessary. The main reasons are:

- a) It is likely that there will be more households wishing to live in BC than there are units available, hence some rationing of demand may be inevitable.
- b) Some selection process is needed to deliver the local authority's and our primary aim of prioritising local people, since the project has already received many enquiries from potential residents all over the UK, as well as many who already live locally.
- c) Experience in many cohousing groups has shown that some degree of selection is crucial to achieve the level of skills and household diversity needed to achieve their aims. For example, allocating on a first-come, first-served basis is likely to exclude families: many of those initially interested are older single people; families do not have time to offer in the early stages, and often apply much later.

BC Members are committed to making the selection process fair and transparent, hence the policy documents and procedures will be published, and records of decisions will be documented and maintained. It is also important to emphasise that the housing association partner and the local Parish and District, will be involved in selection decisions for all units, see details later.

During the early phases of the project, there will be no limit set on the number of potential residents accepted for membership, providing they meet the Membership criteria. Members are warned that acceptance into Membership of BC can in no sense mean a guarantee of a unit allocation. The reason for keeping membership unrestricted at this stage is to give as many people as possible the opportunity to explore actively whether the project will suit them or not. Experience within BC and other projects have shown that there is a significant natural turnover of people during these earlier stages.

The selection policy will be activated when the number of dwellings, in total, by tenure, by size and cost is known. It is also at this stage that financial contributions would be sought from all prospective residents. For affordable shared ownership and shared leasehold ownership (affordable market units), this would be a purchase deposit, for renters it would be a small deposit to be returned when occupancy begins. The aim at this stage would be to match the mix of tenure types and unit sizes as closely as possible with the needs of those Members wanting a unit. This may be subject to some provisos, e.g. setting a minimum quota on units prioritised for families with children in

full-time education or younger. In effect, units would be pre-allocated at this stage for all tenure types, including the affordable rental units.

### **Selection criteria:**

The criteria for selecting residents for Bridport Cohousing CLT are:

#### **1) Local connection:**

##### **For those wishing to live in a housing association home**

- First priority will be given to local residents who live or work in Bridport or nearby: this area comprises the following parishes: Allington; Askerswell; Bothenhampston & Walditch; Bradpole; Broadwindsor; Chideock; Burton Bradstock; Litton Cheney; Loders; Netherbury; Powerstock; Symondsbury; Shipton Gorge.
- Second priority will be those who live or work within the boundaries of West Dorset District Council;
- The third priority will be residents in the County of Dorset.

In all cases, this means people living for at least 2 years OR having close family living in the area for 5 years, OR working within the designated area for at least 6 months (with a permanent contract of 16 or more hours).

The housing associate might also have additional criteria.  
Properties will be advertised on the Dorset for you website.

#### **2) Housing Register Priority**

Preference will be given to those households with the highest priority rating for housing need on the Housing Register.

##### **For those wishing to lease an 80% shared leasehold home or live in a BC owned home**

These households will not have to be on the housing register and, while selection for housing will prioritise in succession, in the same session, those in the three areas described above, there will be a fourth tier, beyond Dorset.

Properties will be advertised by Bridport Cohousing.

- 3) Skills.** In order to maintain and manage the shared facilities and operate as an informal community, Bridport Cohousing requires a suitable skills mix to achieve the sustainability, wider community benefits, and educational aims of the project. We will therefore prioritise achieving a mix of the required skills in selecting households for units.
- 4) Diversity.** Bridport Cohousing aims to create and maintain a diverse community in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and household type (families, couples, and single people), etc. We will therefore prioritise allocation of units to households to help achieve such diversity.
- 5) Families.** 20% of units in the project will be prioritised for families with at least one child living at home in full-time education or younger. The reason for this is to achieve a good level of diversity in household type and age - feedback from families interested in Bridport Cohousing, and experience in other cohousing projects, has shown that adults with children at home have difficulty meeting the time commitments requested of Members hence many can only join late in the project. This allocation of units for families will be spread across the different tenure types, but would focus on larger units, i.e. 3-4 bedrooms. This reserve allocation will be

retained until the start of construction for leasehold ownership units, and until 12 months before completion for other tenure types. After this time, the units would be offered to other households meeting the other criteria.

- 6) **Time commitment.** Priority will be given to households which have already invested a substantial amount of unpaid time in helping to create the project.

In addition, all prospective households must have a gross annual income not exceeding £80,000. Residents of the housing association homes will have provided evidence of this to the West Dorset District Council Housing Register. The residents of shared leasehold homes will be required to make a statutory declaration to BC that they meet the income criteria.

The housing association will accept prospective residents of their housing, who have become members of BC, nominated by WDDC from the Housing Register, and the Allocations Sub-committee will screen **all** prospective residents on the basis of policies.

Assessments using these six criteria will be made by the Allocations Sub-committee; the members of which, and their roles, are defined by the legal constitution of the Society;<sup>1</sup> with 50% external membership: this includes representatives of the parish council, district council and housing association, and 50% of the sub-committee being cohousing residents. Those not accepted for an offer of a unit will be given a priority listing and the opportunity of a place on a waiting list.

## **5. Allocations policy**

This covers the allocation of a specific unit within the scheme. For example, the 3-bedroom homes vary in characteristics, such as orientation, size of plot etc. Since different households will have varying preferences, the first stage will be to ask all households selected for a given unit size and tenure type their housing criteria and then match up these criteria with the properties and then meet together to see if they can agree between them an allocation which fits all their needs. Where this is not possible, allocation priority will be based upon the amount of time commitment which each household has already put into the project.

## **6. Ratification**

These policies have been discussed and agreed by a full meeting of BC Members.

### **Footnote**

1. Bridport Cohousing Ltd is a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, using the Wessex Community Assets model rules which ensure that all the society's assets are held for the benefit of the community, generally referred to as an 'asset lock'.

## **Appendix 2: Bridport Cohousing, Phase 1 Affordable Housing Scheme**

**Bridport Cohousing Phase 1 - Affordable Housing Scheme pertaining to Section 106 Agreement dated 18 May 2016 relating to Land to the west of Bridport Community Hospital, Hospital Lane, Bridport.**

**The Affordable Housing Scheme sets out the following:**

- a) Map showing the distribution and tenure of housing
- b) Schedule of accommodation
- c) Allocation scheme
- d) Details of Affordable Housing that are neither affordable rent nor shared ownership
- e) Ground rent and service charge

### **Distribution and Tenure of Housing**

The enclosed plan at Appendix 1 shows the following:

Seventeen Affordable Rent units owned and managed by a Registered Housing Provider – highlighted in Pink

Seventeen Intermediate Affordable Housing Units owned and managed by Bridport Cohousing Ltd – highlighted in Blue

### **Schedule of Accommodation**

	<b>Size in sq m</b>	<b>Affordable rent</b>	<b>Intermediate Affordable</b>	<b>total</b>
<b>1 bed 1 person flat</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1 bed 2 person flat</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>4</b>
<b>2 bed house</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>3 bed house</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4 bed house</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>34</b>

### **Allocation Scheme**

The allocation will be governed by the Local Lettings Policy Version 12 set out at Appendix 2.

### **Details of Intermediate Affordable Housing**

These units will be leasehold properties sold at 80% of Open Market Value with the unsold portion retained by Bridport Cohousing Ltd a community Benefit Society which is asset locked and so ensures that these properties remain affordable in perpetuity. This complies with the definition of affordable housing as set out by national government in the National Planning Policy Framework.

### **Ground rent and Service charges**

The service charge is set out in the table below. The charges will be reviewed annually and be revised up or down by agreement by the members of Bridport Cohousing.

	<b>Ground Rent</b>	<b>Service charge.</b>
<b>1 bed 1 person flat</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>250</b>
<b>1 bed 2 person flat</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>317</b>
<b>2 bed house</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>441</b>
<b>3 bed house</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>580</b>
<b>4 bed house</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>736</b>
<b>Total</b>		



Plan showing Distribution of Tenure

Pink = Affordable rental

Blue = Intermediate Affordable Housing

