

March 2022

# URBAN DWELLING

A VISION FOR URBAN COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING IN SCOTLAND



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Community Housing

**Interreg**   
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**SHICC**  
European Regional Development Fund



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## Foreword

by Ailsa Raeburn, Chair, Community Land Scotland

Community landownership is one of Scotland's great success stories. From the early buyouts of the 1990s to the recent wave of urban community landowners, communities have successfully tackled a range of previously intractable problems such as rural depopulation and decline, vacant and derelict land and a lack of local affordable housing.

Our 2020 report, [Home Delivery – Community-led Housing in Rural Scotland](#) showed how community landowners, including many Community Land Scotland members, have been at the forefront of delivering new affordable housing across rural Scotland from Gairloch to Langholm. These projects help young people stay in their communities, attract new residents with vital skills and often bring key local buildings back into viable use.

At the same time, community ownership in urban areas has been blossoming with an impressive 19% of Scottish community assets now in towns and cities. However, we are yet to see any significant urban community-led affordable housing replicating the success of rural projects.

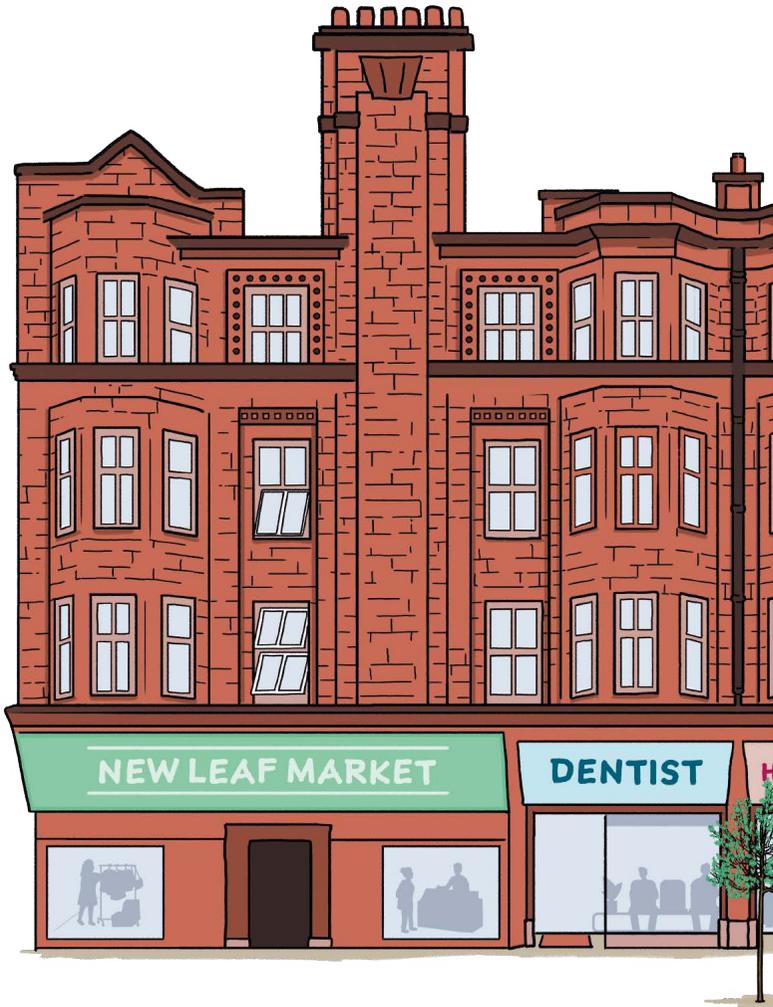
As we start to emerge from the pandemic, we are seeing changing High Streets; rising house prices; an increasing focus on tackling vacant and derelict land; the presence of new mutual aid community groups and a sense of urgency around the climate emergency. Urban housing can help to address many of these issues through communities leading on the development of new uses for old buildings and derelict sites, bringing life back into towns and cities. The opportunity for communities



to be involved in housing-led urban regeneration was recognised by the Scottish Government in the keystone Housing 2040 Strategy. Action 4 gave a commitment to **“explore how we can support more community-led housing in urban areas”**.

There are lessons to take from the rest of the UK where we have seen the blossoming of urban community-led housing - regenerating areas, restoring important local buildings, building community wealth and providing affordable housing.

In this vision document, we set out a Scottish vision for how urban community-led housing can create a more diverse housing sector, build on the proven success of community land ownership, develop community wealth, address vacant and derelict land and strengthen sustainable communities.



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# Introduction

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North-West Europe  
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## **Community Land Scotland**

Community Land Scotland is the representative body for Scotland's community landowners, with over 100 members. It works to ensure that more communities have the opportunity to reap the benefits of community ownership by: supporting rural and urban communities on their journey to ownership; working to change policy and legislation and raising awareness of the potential for, and benefits of, community landownership.

[communitylandscotland.org.uk](http://communitylandscotland.org.uk)

## **South of Scotland Community Housing**

South of Scotland Community Housing (SOSCH) is a charity providing long-term support to community organisations with the planning and delivery of community-led housing. SOSCH works with the unique and specific needs of individual communities and recognises the important role housing plays in sustaining resilient places, providing opportunities for people to live and work in southern Scotland, supporting repopulation, and tackling increased need and demand for truly affordable homes. SOSCH is currently working in partnership with approximately thirty communities across the region.

[Sosch.org](http://Sosch.org)

## **SHICC**

The North-West Europe INTERREG Sustainable Housing for Inclusive and Cohesive Cities (SHICC) programme was launched in 2017 to address the growing challenge of providing adequate, affordable housing in European cities. The network is the leading voice for the Community Land Trust movement in Europe. SOSCH is a partner in SHICC.

[nweurope.eu](http://nweurope.eu)

As community ownership grows in urban areas, Community Land Scotland and SOSCH have seen a growing interest in the potential for community-owned housing to regenerate towns and cities. These small-scale housing projects will be different to those created by other private and social developers —they will benefit from community governance and leadership, tap into alternative financial models to unlock challenging sites or vacant buildings and have the potential to support wider community-led regeneration plans.

In this paper, we set out our vision for urban community-led housing in Scotland.

We believe that in 2022, with declining High Streets, rising house prices, the formation of new mutual aid groups and an increased focus on the climate emergency, there has never been a more pressing need or potential for an urban community-led housing movement in Scotland.

We believe that the urban community-led housing could:

- Create a new pipeline of affordable housing in Scotland
- Energise and build confidence in communities that have been subject to top-down development and sub-standard housing
- Support a community wealthbuilding approach
- Tackle High Street decline
- Bring vacant and derelict land and empty homes back into productive use
- Financially underpin the development of mixed-use developments
- Lead the way on low carbon housing, as has happened with rural community-led housing

# A new housing sector for Urban Scotland

With the rural community-led housing sector well established, we have the opportunity to learn from its successes and challenges. These lessons include:

- Communities understand their local areas. They are ambitious and are successfully able to bring forward viable projects
- Communities can identify and develop sites that would not be appealing to private developers or RSLs
- Local people feel empowered when they build their own houses
- Community-led housing creates community wealth by retaining skills and income within the community
- Where appropriate, successful partnership working with RSLs can deliver benefits that neither partner could deliver alone

In the 1970s, Scotland was one of the pioneers of urban community-led housing, when a number of communities in the West of Scotland purchased housing stock and established community-led Housing Associations. These organisations have all gone on to become Registered Social Landlords. See Appendix 1 for further information on this movement.



Scotland has generations of experience in delivering urban regeneration programmes, which has traditionally focused on new private or social housing. As the benefits of community ownership and community empowerment become increasingly apparent in Scotland, local people are advocating for a greater role in housing delivery. Urban communities are increasingly recognising how ownership and control of key local assets can help revitalise their areas and, in many cases, housing could be an important part of the mix - meeting community need and underpinning mixed use developments. Now is the time for a new era of community-led urban housing, sitting side by side with other forms of housing delivery.

The SHICC network provides an indicator of increasing demand for community-led housing. In 2017, SHICC partners in the UK had delivered 24 homes. As of December 2021, the network had delivered 143 homes with 504 more in the pipeline. Scotland is no exception to this positive trend, and enablers like SOSCH have observed increased need and demand for community-led housing support services in rural and urban areas.

The successful development of urban community-led housing in England and Wales shows that it has a place alongside social and private housing in towns and cities. Due to the presence of [Power to Change](#), the charitable trust that supports community businesses in England and the [Community Land Trust Network of England and Wales](#), which supported the original urban CLT pilots, there is a plethora of research and data available about the impact of community-led housing south of the border.

Research shows that the 210 urban Community Land Trusts in England and Wales have found a valuable role in:

- **Bringing forward sites that are too small or challenging for RSLs or developers**
- **Bringing vacant and derelict land and empty homes back into use**
- **Using community-led housing development to underpin mixed-use developments such as business space or health facilities**

These urban CLTs are either working independently or in partnership with RSLs, tapping into their contracts and suppliers. The Community Led Homes partnership published [a guide](#) in 2020 detailing numerous examples of diverse, productive collaborations between community-led housing organisations and Housing Associations. These projects recognise the strengths of both organisations.

# Moving Forward with urban community led housing

Scotland is on the brink of establishing a new housing sector. The role that community-led urban housing can play in providing affordable housing and successful urban regeneration has been recognised in the Housing to 2040 Strategy.

There are now three steps Scotland needs to take to kickstart a new community-led urban housing sector.

**1) Launch a pilot Urban Housing Fund.** This should fund a range of models, including High Street developments reusing existing assets, developments on vacant and derelict land, new build housing and multi-use developments. This pilot funding could sit alongside support from the Scottish Land Fund to acquire land or buildings.

**2) Provide enhanced feasibility support.** Recognising that urban areas of Scotland require a different type of housing to rural Scotland or urban England, the pioneers of urban community-led housing should be provided with enhanced feasibility support.

**3) Work with the existing enablers to provide support and capture learning:** South of Scotland Community Housing and Communities Housing Trust are already working with communities in remote small towns and have experience of urban housing through their international work

# Urban Context

In Scotland, the number of community-owned assets in towns and cities stood at 120 at the end of 2020. This growth has been supported by the extension, in 2016, of Community Right to Buy and the Scottish Land Fund to designated settlements with a population over 10,000. Assets that have been purchased include: community centres, greenspace and woodlands, high street buildings, wellbeing centres, tourist facilities, historic buildings and shops. Pioneering urban community landowners are growing in confidence and are often leading on multi-million-pound developments.

Several of the pioneering urban community landowners are now undertaking a strategic approach to spatial development in their areas. Sometimes, this includes the development of Local Place Plans. As demonstrated by Community Land Trusts in England, when communities are enabled to take a proactive approach to spatial development, they identify opportunities to deliver affordable housing that would not be attractive for private developers or social housing providers to take forward.

In **Home Delivery**, we drew attention to some of the challenges being successfully addressed by community-led housing in rural Scotland including population decline, shortage of affordable housing and access to land. The same challenges exist in a slightly different form in urban Scotland. As in rural areas, urban community landowners know what their community needs and can deliver solutions that would be difficult for a large housing builder or housing association to implement, whilst also enabling partnership delivery.

Mike Staples, Chief Executive of Scotland Community Housing, comments, "In our experience, there are more similarities than differences across urban and rural projects. We see many of the same issues – localised depopulation, disused buildings and empty homes, absentee ownership, acute housing need - and in both settings we see communities keen to take control and ownership of the solution."

# Supporting policy

The development of urban community-led housing meets several of the Scottish Government's policy aims from housing to planning to revitalising Scotland's town centres. These policies, along with the shared policy programme between the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party announced in August 2021, create a very supportive policy environment for the development of urban community-led housing.

## **Housing to 2040**

Housing to 2040, launched in March 2021, provides a strong platform for community-led housing, including in urban areas. We welcome the following commitments and believe the time is right for them to be explored and implemented:

- **Explore how we can support more community-led housing in urban areas.**
- **The Rural and Islands Housing Fund helps support community-led housing in rural and island communities and we will continue to offer the Fund in these areas. Separately, we will explore how a similar model could be used in urban areas where there are gaps that a community anchor organisation could fill, where viable, to support delivery of community-led housing and community wealth building.**

Housing to 2040 outlines investment in “demonstrator locations” that will illustrate Town Centre Living and 20-minute neighbourhoods. The Government's commitment to matched funding, resources, and expertise for this Town Centre Living Programme is timely and would provide an important catalyst to Covid-19 recovery in hard-hit urban communities.

In the same publication, the Scottish Government confirms the establishment of a Knowledge Exchange Network to encourage community participation in placemaking, share learnings and experiences, and allow access to professional expertise relating to local regeneration. We welcome this investment into peer learning and enabling support.

Finally, Housing to 2040 contains a number of recommendations around bringing Empty Homes into use. There are around 43,000 empty homes in Scotland (Scottish Empty Homes Partnership 2022). Many of these are in urban areas. There is potential for communities in towns and cities to be closely involved in bringing these homes into use, as they have done in rural Scotland and urban England.

### **Place-based Investment Programme**

Another welcome commitment is the Scottish Government's pledge to establish a new Place-based Investment Programme worth £325m. Included in the programme is the continuation of the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund, which the Government will open up to community-led housing for the first time, when it is part of a mixed-use development. This fund will be essential for encouraging community regeneration, community wealth building, and town centre recovery through housing provision.

### **Scottish Land Commission: Land for Housing**

In August 2021, the Scottish Land Commission published their report into Land for Housing, following an extended period of research. The report presents a series of policy recommendations to Scottish Ministers, including funding to establish a network of "place pioneers" as "an ambitious programme of affordable housing delivery utilising repurposed publicly owned property assets in town centres", and the establishment of a new Land Agency, ensuring new land supply for housing is brought forward at an appropriate rate and scale, and inclusive of access to land for community organisations. In referencing these recommendations, the report cites the community-owned, town centre Midsteeples Quarter project as an exemplar model.

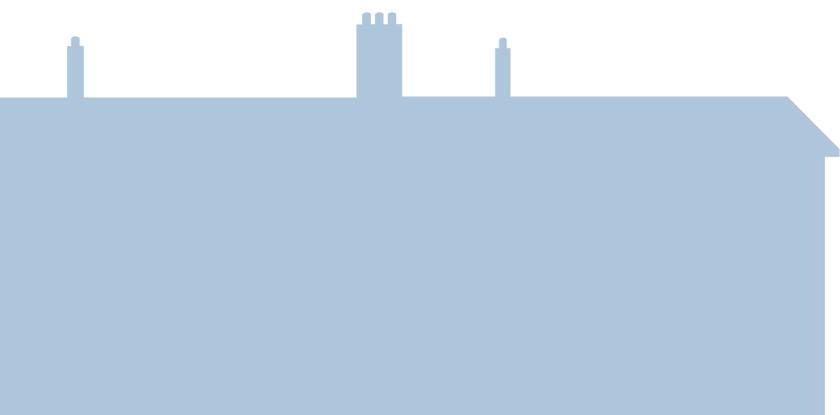
### **Planning policy**

In its recent draft National Planning Framework 4 and Programme for Government 2021-2022, the Scottish Government sets out its commitments to addressing urban housing needs in a sustainable way, such as through a "town centre first" policy, as well as the use of "20-minute neighbourhoods". The provision of housing needs to be a key part of remaking our cities, and communities should have the tools to do this on their own terms.

Local Place Plans, introduced via legislation in 2021, encourage a community-led spatial planning approach to ensure neighbourhoods are "inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe". Designed to support Local Development Plans, communities are encouraged to bring forward their own Local Place Plans. Currently, however, there is no sup-

port for communities to build community-led housing identified in local place plans.

The vision set out in the reform of the Scottish Planning system over recent years, including with the new National Planning Framework and with Local Place Plans, now needs to be delivered. To fulfil the aspiration of these changes, delivery mechanisms need to be put in place. The supports for urban community housing we've set out in this paper are a key next delivery step.



## Case Study: Midsteeple Quarter, Dumfries, Scotland



*projection of mixed -use building 'The Oven' after redevelopment*

© ARPL Architects

South of Scotland Community Housing's participation in the European SHICC programme is underpinned by its housing support to Scotland's first community-led town centre regeneration initiative, the Midsteeple Quarter project. This comprehensive redevelopment of Dumfries High Street provides an excellent example of the role for urban community-led housing within larger, mixed-use projects. However, without accessible urban housing grants, Midsteeple Quarter faces challenges implementing its Masterplan for community-owned homes, which has been adopted by Dumfries and Galloway Council. Their experience likely foreshadows similar struggles in town centres elsewhere. To readily benefit from the power and potential of communities leading on development, we must urgently implement the urban programmes introduced in Housing to 2040.

Like many regions across Scotland, Dumfries faces town centre decline, long-term vacancies, absentee ownership, and significant disrepair of once attractive and historically important buildings. In the absence of adequate market responses to these problems, the local community decided to take control of the situation and, as a result, the community benefit society 'Dumfries High Street Limited' was born.

The plan begins with the acquisition and redevelopment of eight empty High Street properties into ground floor businesses, and, on the upper floors, flexible spaces to live, work, and create. The £30 million Masterplan also includes approximately 70 homes that are affordable, inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and intergenerational. A portion of these homes will be in community ownership — a strategy supported by South of Scotland Community Housing and Dumfries and Galloway Council that is central to the wider project's viability.

Scott Mackay, Executive Director of Midsteeple Quarter, underlines the urban project's distinct complexity. He says,

*"We have Victorian buildings set into a Medieval layout. We have a programme which encompasses demolition, newbuild and refurbishment, all within a conservation area with neighbouring properties. We have a plan for mixed use – retail, residential,*

*office, community space, etc. In terms of the housing component, we are designing affordable rented accommodation for a range of households including families, young professionals, students, entrepreneurs, and inter-generational living. And then finally, we have a very complex package of funding stitched together from a wide range of sources.”*

The Midsteeple Quarter project suggests urban initiatives face unique redevelopment challenges that require cohesive and flexible support. Despite its relevance to other Scottish towns, the Midsteeple Quarter project’s success to-date falls short of replicability without an immediate and comprehensive urban community housing fund. Housing to 2040’s place-based investment programme presents a pivotal opportunity for projects like the Midsteeple Quarter. This programme, alongside an established urban variant of the Rural Housing Fund, would provide lifelines to communities with struggling town centres.

# Learning from beyond our borders

Community landowners' achievements in creating affordable housing in Scotland's rural areas is well documented. To see how community-led housing could operate in towns and cities, we can look at the many successful projects in other countries.

South of Scotland Community Housing is a member of the North-West Europe INTERREG Sustainable Housing for Inclusive and Cohesive Cities (SHICC) programme, which shares learning about the wider Community Land Trust (CLT) sector. See Appendix 2 for more information about SHICC.

While Scotland's much-envied community land sector was developing in rural Scotland, the Community Land Trust movement was emerging in the rural south of the USA. The model originally grew out of the civil rights movement, with the aim of creating economic and housing opportunities for African Americans. The first rural CLT was established in 1969 and the first urban CLT was set up in Cincinnati in 1981. The movement which focuses on affordable housing provision, began to truly flourish in the 1990s and then spread widely. CLTs are found in the USA, Canada, Australia, Europe, Africa, and South America. According to 2022 data from the [Centre for CLT Innovation](#), a North American charity dedicated to supporting and promoting community-led housing, there are at least 519 CLTs around the world. The CLT model for housing development can't easily be transposed onto the Scottish legal model or our community land culture, but there is still much to be learned from CLTs.

## England and Wales

The rapid growth of urban community landownership in England and Wales in the past decade provides many useful lessons. In 2014, the Community Land Trusts Network set up a project to support emerging urban CLTs. A 2018 academic [review of this project](#), which included 19 CLTs in towns and cities, found that the communities had focused on places where housing affordability and gentrification were issues. The majority of the housing had been developed for affordable rent, with 72 homes completed; 76 granted planning permission and a further 461 at the pre-development

stage. In some cases, communities were working alongside smaller housing associations to tap into their contracts or relationships with suppliers. Since 2018, the number of urban community land trusts in England has rocketed.

Tom Chance, Chief Executive of Community Land Trust Network of England and Wales, nicely summarises the impact and potential of community-led housing for urban communities:

*“In the last six years, government policy and community action has seen the potential pipeline of community led homes in England almost quadruple to 23,000. National funding for pre-development stages, and growing support from local councils, are creating the conditions for scaling up. Community land trusts are the largest part of this pipeline and having previously been mostly rural they are now building and renovating homes in towns and cities, deprived and prosperous, in projects large and small. Independent research is finding that these don’t just add to the housing supply. They are also reducing loneliness, increasing social cohesion and driving up environmental standards. There’s huge potential for this to scale further, and for community ownership to be commonplace in urban housebuilding and regeneration.”*

## Europe

While England and Wales provide examples close to home, we also see Community Land Trusts delivering permanently affordable housing across North-West Europe. In most of Europe, Community Land Trusts were set up in urban areas to combat a sharp increase in housing costs and lack of adequate homes. Our European neighbours demonstrate the transferable, flexible nature of community-led housing. They show us that community-led models are successful in diverse and populous areas. Community land trusts currently exist or are emerging in Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany.

## Case Study: Granby, Liverpool, England



Granby Street  
© Ronnie Hughes

Liverpool's Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust is a great example of residents' unique ability to repurpose abandoned and derelict buildings and breathe life into cities when no one else will. Decades of economic decline and austerity in Granby, one of the UK's earliest multicultural neighbourhoods, led to severe neglect and depopulation. The council marked streets for demolition and by 2010 more than half of Granby's 200 terraced homes were empty and deteriorating. Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust mobilised to reclaim their neighbourhood and its full potential for the benefit of the community. Taking advantage of Liverpool's ['Homes for a Pound'](#) scheme, Granby CLT acquired 11 destitute buildings in four streets, five of which have been sold and six of which are now rented properties. Granby CLT partnered with the architecture firm Assemble to repurpose the vacant buildings into beautiful and bespoke homes, community spaces, and an artisan workshop that supports neighbourhood professionals. The homes are priced and rented below market rates and tied to Liverpool median income to allow local people to return home and build futures.

Granby Four Streets CLT exemplifies community-led housing's ability to create permanently affordable homes for middle and lower-income households where others cannot. Hazel Tilley, CLT Granby Co-founder and Vice Chair says, *"What was deemed to be one of the least desirable areas of Liverpool to live in, has been much sought after."* Granby remains one of the most ethnically diverse communities in Liverpool, highlighting the project's transformation of a decaying neighbourhood into a multi-cultural and architecturally rich community for all.

## Case study: Galeri Caernarfon, Wales



*Galeri Creative Enterprise Centre*  
© Andy Marshal

Galeri Caernarfon Cyf. was formed in 1992 to buy vacant and derelict properties in the walled town and heritage site of Caernarfon, North Wales. Galeri is an award-winning development trust. It owns over 20 previously unused buildings which it now rents out as affordable homes and for commercial enterprises.

An initial £100,000 government capital grant for urban programming allowed the community to redress derelict eyesores and build quality housing to encourage people to remain and return to the area. The rental income accruing from renovated properties contributed to financing the restoration of each subsequent property.

In addition to housing, the Galeri Creative Enterprise Centre, completed in 2005, has provided creative spaces for makers to support local industry. The Centre accommodates 15 resident companies in 28 work units. In addition, the Centre programmes and hosts over 400 events a year and is central to Caernarfon's economy. It also houses several informal social spaces, a 400-seat theatre, two cinema screens, two rehearsal studios, three large meeting rooms, a bar/café, and a visual art and creative space. Galeri Caernarfon Cyf. recently completed their latest capital project by opening a previously derelict industrial site to provide three housing units and 19 commercial units specifically for artisan crafts enterprises.

The organisation describes their vision as, [to] "implement sustainable projects in a creative way to realise the cultural, economic and environmental potential of the local community and its environs." Over the past 30 years, they have done just that and Galeri has been central to the revitalisation of the town by renovating abandoned buildings to provide shops, social spaces, homes, and business/art workspaces. A recent economic impact study concludes that the Galeri Creative Enterprise Centre development created an additional 80 jobs in the community. Furthermore, every £1 of grant funding for the project generated an additional £9.65 in the local economy. Galeri's multi-use redevelopment efforts have played a major part in reversing the trajectory of a neglected seaside town into a place with a thriving arts economy - popular with residents and tourists alike.

## Case study: Leeds, England



© Leeds Community Housing, Community Land Trust Network website

CLT, Leeds Community Homes provides an excellent example of bringing disused land back into productive use as affordable housing in cities. This project highlights the ability of urban communities to address inequality through housing.

Armley is in the top 10% most deprived areas of the city and its steep topography makes it undesirable to most developers. Although the land was once home to Council flats, these were demolished in the early 2000s and the space remained empty. Leeds Community Homes recognised an opportunity to repurpose the land via community ownership and engaged local people to bring much-needed housing to the community. According to the Council's 2014 Core Strategy assessment, Leeds needs 70,000 new homes. Leeds Community Homes' Mistress Lane project will develop six family homes and 28 apartments (1 and 2 beds), through a mixture of affordable rents and shared ownership schemes on land that would otherwise remain disused.

Beyond just housing, CLT Leeds Community Homes also sees an opportunity to include new community spaces in the development plan and instigate wider community-led regeneration of the previously derelict land. All homes will be built to a high environmental standard. The project received planning consent in May 2021 and is expected to be onsite in April 2022.

## Case study: Brussels, Belgium



© Image of Arc-en-Ciel homes in Vandenpeereboom is reprinted with permission from CLTB

The first of its kind in continental Europe, Community Land Trust Brussels (CLTB) is the initiator of North-West Europe's Interreg Sustainable Housing for Inclusive and Cohesive Cities (SHICC) project. CLTB was founded in 2012 and serves the 19 municipalities of the Brussels Capital Region (population over 1 million) and has, to date, supported 10 projects providing over 200 homes. CLTB grew out of grassroots neighbourhood collectives redressing anti-immigrant and racist housing practices. All projects are rooted in public participation to meet the specific needs and aspirations of Brussels's most under-served residents. With a waiting list upwards of 500 households and no signs of slowing, CLTB has shown the essential role alternative housing models can play in diverse and densely populated spaces.

The regional government's capital grants, comprehensive public regeneration framework, and publicly subsidised housing financiers have allowed CLTB to consistently deliver high-quality housing outwith traditional speculative markets for over a decade. Since community-led housing is embedded in the government's housing policy, CLTB receives an operational budget and €2 million in annual subsidy grants. This is seen as a good investment for the government in terms of providing decent housing at scale for lower-income people. In CLTB's view, residents and their wider communities benefit extensively from the community-led experience, in what has been described as an emancipatory participatory process. CLTB highlights the potential for community-led housing to provide safe, affordable homes while also building community cohesion, local wealth, and urban inclusion.

# Land supply

Community landowners are known for their ingenuity and, in rural areas, have been able to find a range of ways of identifying land for housing developments. There are different challenges in urban areas, with high land prices and greater rates of vacancy and dereliction. Absentee landownership is a common challenge across rural and urban Scotland and is a particular problem in Scotland's town centres.

In England and Wales, Community Land Trusts have taken a considered approach to land acquisition and most have used the following routes:

- **Developing sites that are too small for a private developer or RSL but too large for a single house. Where communities have developed spatial plans, they have been able to take a strategic approach to identifying small sites.**
- **Working with public bodies to take a community wealthbuilding approach to land, which allows publicly owned land to be released to community landowners below market value.**
- **Bringing empty homes or vacant and derelict land back into use.**

Rather than competing with private developers and social landlords, communities have been able to fill a gap in the housing supply.

Communities in Scotland have additional tools that are not available in England and Wales, in the form of Community Right to Buy and Asset Transfer legislation.

Community Land Scotland is also seeing rising interest from communities that want to protect much-valued greenspace. One way to balance the books on this type of project would be to build a small amount of affordable and sympathetic housing.

## How local authorities have assisted with supply

1) Dumfries and Galloway Council. Only one of the buildings purchased for the Midsteeples Quarter project in Dumfries was previously publicly owned, however, the positive approach taken by Dumfries and Galloway Council and the supporting Asset Transfer legislation, ensured that this building was the first to pass into the ownership of the community organisation - kick-starting the wider project. Dumfries and Galloway Council also provided seed funding for the project from the Town Centre Living Fund, which is generated through Council Tax on second homes.

2) Bristol City Council. In Bristol in 2016, organisations involved in the community-led housing sector came together to look at how they could get more projects off the ground. One of the main barriers they faced was access to land and their request to Bristol City Council was simple - give communities access to unused land around the city to build the houses they need.

The Council's approach to this discussion was 'what do you need to make it work?' and by the summer of 2020, Councillor Paul Smith, Bristol City Council's former cabinet member for housing, was describing community-led housing as one of three planks of the council's housing strategy.

The Council has developed a [Community-Led Housing Land Disposal policy](#). This includes offering sites for community-led housing at a discounted rate using a methodology developed by the Social Value Portal.

In Bristol, community land trusts have been focusing on the development of niche sites that are too small for housing associations or developers but too large for a single house.

We believe similar potential is available to Scotland's urban areas and would welcome creative local authority support to community-led housing across the country.

# Opportunities for Scotland



## 1. Tackling High Street decline

According to recent figures from the Scottish Retail Consortium, nearly one in six shops now lie empty. In our high streets, it is also increasingly common to see the floors above shops - once used as flats - now sitting unused. These worrying trends have accelerated because of the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to Scott Mackay, Executive Director of Midsteeples Quarter in Dumfries, "Right from the start we recognised the benefits of bringing housing back into our empty high street, not just the economic benefits from having potential customers living above the shops, but also the social benefits from creating a vibrant town centre community."

Midsteeples Quarter grew out of a project led by the Stove Network, an artist-led development trust. They began a conversation with the people of Dumfries about their hopes and aspirations for the town - their number one concern was the decline of the High Street. In the wake of the pandemic, we are seeing this concern reflected across almost every town and city in Scotland. Dumfries shows that when communities are involved in creating and delivering the solution, they can sometimes achieve what others thought was impossible.

## 2. Wider Urban Regeneration

Not all urban community-led housing projects are focused on high streets or town centres. Many of Scotland's deprived urban communities in areas with fewer resources have been subject to top-down, housing-led regeneration. In the 21st century, we need to be looking at different models that support community empowerment. Communities know the type of housing that's needed in their area and community-led housing developments could be used to underpin mixed use developments, creating more amenities in deprived communities, as seen with the English and Welsh example in this report. Community owned houses and shops could be a game changer in some of Scotland's urban housing estates—but without the dedicated support, there is no opportunity for these types of projects to take off.

People who live in places suffering from deprivation see the potential in community-led and owned development. For example, the Scottish Government's 2020 [Evaluation of Asset Transfer Requests](#) showed that the number of asset transfer requests were higher from the three most deprived SIMD deciles compared with the three least deprived.

A 2021 survey into [Attitudes to Land Reform](#) by the Scottish Government, found that survey respondents living in the most deprived areas were half as likely to have been involved in decision-making around land use, despite being just as interested in being involved (p.51).

As our case studies show, community-led housing has been successful in resourcing deprived urban communities in many other countries. It needs to be an option available to Scottish urban communities.

### 3. Land and building reuse

Community-led housing has the potential to bring both vacant and derelict land and empty homes back into use.

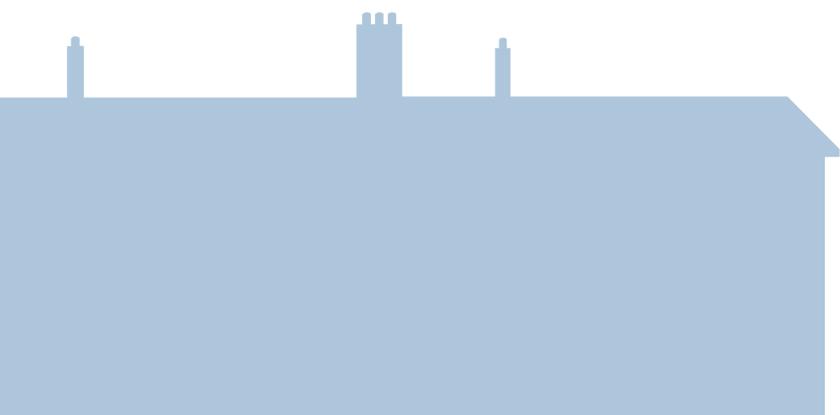
A 2019 review, commissioned by the Scottish Land Commission, *Assessing the Impact of Vacant and Derelict Land on Communities*, found evidence of a wide range of potential harms from land lying vacant or derelict, including:

- **Negative impacts on community wellbeing;**
- **Increased incidence of crime and antisocial behaviours;**
- **Loss of community green spaces following redevelopment;**
- **Legacy effects where older residents are aware of the sites' previous use and have seen them decline over time.**

Community Land Scotland is increasingly working with urban communities with aspirations for housing on vacant or derelict land. Intervention to bring empty homes back into use, either one house at a time or in clusters, is another way that community-led housing creates additionality to the housing mix. Tackling empty homes may be a good 'starter project' for communities as they would receive support from the Empty Homes Partnership and Local Authority Empty Homes Officers, alongside Scotland's community-led housing enablers.

Shaheena Din, National Project Manager at Scottish Empty Homes Partnership adds:

*“Community-led housing has been a successful mechanism for bringing empty homes back into use in rural towns and SEHP feel it could have a similar impact in larger settlements if properly supported.”*



## Case study: Maryhill, Glasgow, Scotland

To take an example of communities' demand for transforming vacant land into community housing, we can look to Glasgow. In Maryhill, a group of residents has come together to find a solution for vacant land which has lain empty since poor quality social housing was demolished some 14 years ago. The site which is owned by Glasgow City Council is being marketed for private housing development.

A group of local people has a different vision for the future of this land. They are frustrated with seeing housing land lying derelict for so long and see a continued need for social rather than private housing. One of the group's founders, Nick Durie, explains "The site is being marketed to private house builders. But we don't want to build just houses, we want to build a community".

The group is currently developing its own vision of a sustainable community, with input from local residents. Outline plans include: community-owned, affordable, carbon-neutral houses, local social and commercial facilities, open spaces, support and encouragement for local jobs and enterprise, and effective transport links. They are in the process of Registering an Interest in the land using Community Right to Buy legislation.

Norman Cunningham, another founding member of the local group, admits that trying to develop an effective community-led housing proposal during a pandemic with the clock ticking on a closing date for the sale of the land has been challenging:

"We have been occupying the site since early January 2021 and established a community garden on it in March. In the summer of 2021, we managed to hold our first public meeting, open air of course." Norman has reached out to existing funders for community ownership, and only to be told that urban housing is not supported.

The group appreciates the challenges ahead, not least securing expert advice and raising funds for the site acquisition and redevelopment. Undaunted, they remain

enthusiastic about the potential for community-led housing to build and empower urban communities and are fully committed to making their vision a reality. Maryhill is one of an increasing number of urban Scottish communities keenly interested in community-led housing opportunities. The vision and the demand is there from communities, as are the vacant and derelict sites but there is a gap in the funding and support infrastructure.

#### 4. Tackling the climate emergency

Creating low carbon housing is high on the priority list for many community landowners. As highlighted in Community Land Scotland's recent report [Community landowners and the climate emergency](#), the sector is punching well above its weight when it comes to actions to save the planet from climate change. The report finds that climate goals, such as a carbon neutral Scotland by 2045, are "embedded in and intimately bound up with the delivery of other outcomes for local people. As a result, community owners are well-placed to lead on – and partner in – the delivery of a just transition where they are located (pg. 60)."

The evidence from rural areas shows that community landowners are likely to go the extra mile on developing environmentally friendly housing. Examples include the Passivhooses developed by Nith Valley Leaf Trust; affordable housing developed by Mull and Iona Community Trust in Ulva Ferry, which met the Passivhaus standard, and new eco-homes developed by the Isle of Rum Community Trust. There are also many examples of buildings being reused.

Urban community landowners also have the potential to be trailblazers when it comes to the design and delivery of eco-housing. We are seeing an increasing number of communities delivering Climate Action Plans or being involved in initiatives such as Climate Action Towns. The ability to develop low carbon housing must be an option that is open to these communities.

# Enabling support

Rural communities are well-versed in dealing with technically complex projects, often bringing forward difficult sites in challenging locations. Urban housing presents a different type of complexity. In England, the need for additional support for these developments was recognised in 2014/15 through the Community Land Trusts Network's Urban Community Land Trust (CLT) project. The project provided technical support to early urban CLTs, kickstarting a movement that has grown to 210 urban CLTs in England alone.

Support to urban CLTs has since been mainstreamed in England through the development of an Enabling Hub network, partly funded through the Power to Change programme. This network provides technical support to CLTs; brokers relationships with professional advisers and liaises with landowners and local authorities.

Scotland already has a well-developed community-led housing enabling support network in the form of the existing Community Housing Trusts. This network has developed a strong track record in enabling the delivery of complex mixed-use projects and possesses the skills, knowledge and expertise to support community organisations through the process of assessing, planning and delivering housing projects. Since 2017, South of Scotland Community Housing has supported the community-led housing aspirations of the Midsteeple Quarter project, leading to their engagement with the SHICC project and knowledge exchange with urban enablers across a range of other countries. Strategic partnership between Communities Housing Trust and South of Scotland Community Housing provides the opportunity to extend expert support to urban communities across the country.

To mirror the success of England's Enabling Hubs, the existing network could easily be extended to support urban communities but would require appropriate resourcing to support a broader range of projects.

# Next Steps

The potential offered by community-led housing in Scotland's urban areas is yet to be realised, but we have a legislative and policy context that can enable rapid progress.

Projects such as those in Dumfries and the other examples shown above demonstrate what is possible when a community looks for and leads on a different solution. The future of town centres and vacant and derelict land are already being re-imagined by communities in ways which include housing, but without specific funding or support, these projects face an uncertain future. This paper demonstrates the potential for community-led housing to empower communities, contribute additionality to the current portfolio of affordable housing, and support changing townscapes in the Covid-19 recovery agenda.

There are now three steps Scotland needs to take to kickstart a new community-led urban housing sector.

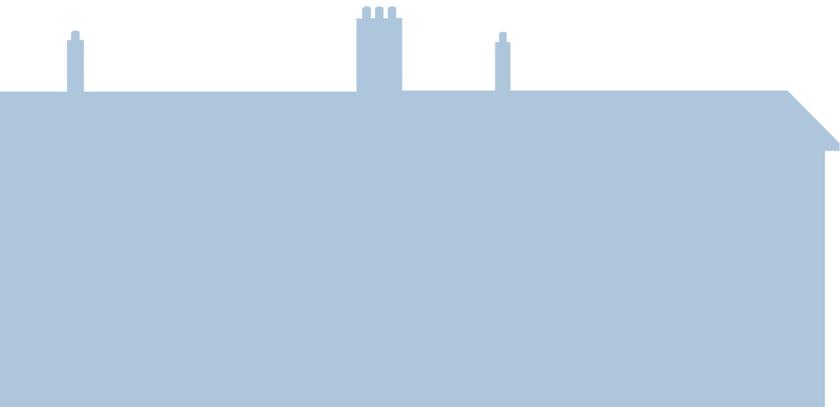
**1) Launch a pilot Urban Housing Fund.** This should fund a range of models, including High Street developments reusing existing assets, developments on vacant and derelict land, new build housing and multi-use developments. This pilot funding could sit alongside support from the Scottish Land Fund to acquire land or buildings.

**2) Provide enhanced feasibility support.** Recognising that urban areas of Scotland require a different type of housing to rural Scotland or urban England, the pioneers of urban community-led housing should be provided with enhanced feasibility support.

**3) Work with the existing enablers** to provide support and capture learning: South of Scotland Community Housing and Communities Housing Trust are already working with communities in remote small towns and have experience of urban housing through their international work

As Scotland moves to deliver on the national **Housing to 2040** strategy and plan its

recovery from the devastating impact of Covid-19, we need to think differently about housing and its place within communities. We also need to think differently about the place of communities within our housing sector. Having a well-supported and well-resourced community-led housing model available to all communities across Scotland, regardless of setting, is instrumental to this.



## Appendix 1:

# Community-led Housing Associations

The community-led housing movement that started in Glasgow in the 1970s is one of Scotland's success stories. In 1965, 20% of Glasgow's housing stock had no toilet and 40% had no fixed bath or shower. Glasgow Corporation (a predecessor of Glasgow City Council) resolved to tackle the issue. Its planned solution was to move the people from the worst areas of housing using compulsory purchase. The residents would go to new schemes which would be built on the periphery of the city.

### Reidvale Housing Association

News arrived in Dennistoun late in 1973 that bulldozers would be moving in to clear all the Victorian tenements running south from Duke Street. Residents would be moved to Easterhouse.

Residents decided they had to act. A meeting was called with "all people interested in the future of this community" invited to attend. That meeting represented the first step to founding the Reidvale Housing Association. This in turn helped lay the foundations for the creation of almost 80 community-based housing associations and co-operatives in Glasgow.

It had a huge impact. Since 1975 Reidvale, for example, refurbished over 1,000 tenement flats and built 180 new flats. It now owns 914 flats and provides factoring services to around 200 owner occupiers.

The community-based housing associations had the vision that high standard housing could be created whilst also ensuring that families, friends and communities weren't separated. They also had the energy and determination to see it through.

Those early community-based housing associations were able to provide a solution that was not otherwise being delivered. They continue to provide thousands of high-quality homes and often act as the local community anchor organisation, particularly in the Glasgow and Clyde area where most of them are based. Although still community-led and owned, these organisations had to become Registered Social Landlords to access funding.

Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations represents these community-led housing associations.

Further information can be found at: <https://gwsf.org.uk/>

## Appendix 2:

# SHICC

South of Scotland is a partner in the North-West Europe INTERREG Sustainable Housing for Inclusive and Cohesive Cities (SHICC) programme, which was launched in 2017 to address the growing challenge of providing adequate, affordable housing in European cities. In 2020, South of Scotland Community Housing (SOSCH) joined partners in France, Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands, Ireland and England to build a community-led housing network and collaborative knowledge exchange. SHICC establishes urban community-led housing as an innovative and economically sustainable way to provide genuinely and permanently affordable homes. SOSCH is the sole Scottish partner in SHICC and contributes meaningfully through its support to Dumfries' Midsteeple Quarter town centre regeneration pilot project. More broadly, Community Land Scotland's leadership on collective ownership will continue to place Scotland firmly within the SHICC network's agenda on just and responsible development. Each SHICC project measures its wider impact. The collective findings to date suggest that community-led approaches are effective in cities in multiple ways, e.g.:

- **Tackling land speculation and the financialisation of the housing market.**
- **Combatting housing discrimination;**
- **Providing quality homes for specific needs and underserved populations.**
- **Building local capacity and supporting participatory governance; and**
- **Responding to concerns about climate and environmental degradation.**

SOSCH's Project Coordinator, Annabel Pidgeon, describes SHICC's significance to Scotland's community-led housing programming when she says, "As our partners in Europe have been developing and applying community-led housing successfully in cities for years, it's important that Scotland continues to learn from the rich existing experience. This network provides an expert sounding board, fresh insights, and tried and tested best practices to support Scotland's own expression of an urban model. It is very much to our advantage to continue the close connections and stay plugged into the expanding network of practitioners on the continent."

Comparison with our peers highlights that Scotland is an outlier in our restricted availability of community-led housing funds only to rural regions. The Scottish Government's implementation of an urban Housing Fund would help place Scotland more in line with our continental peers. The success of community-led housing projects across the various urban contexts and cultures within SHICC demonstrates that with appropriate government support and sufficient investment, community-led housing is for everyone, everywhere.

## Appendix 3:

### Additional case studies



© Dinnington

## Dinnington, England

Dinnington is a recovering ex-mining town undergoing the gradual regeneration of its high street. However, the latest housing developments are too expensive for local incomes and the community felt that Dinnington's town centre redevelopment had left people behind.

In 2016, community members formed Dinnington CLT to lead a new Neighbourhood Plan focused on including affordable housing alongside new sport, leisure, and green spaces in town centre. The project includes 30 affordable rented homes built to very high environmental standards. Like some of the other community-led housing projects featured in this report, CLT Dinnington's homes will be built on disused land. In this case, land that has been vacant for more than 20 years.

A new community hub will create health, education, and sporting facilities. A new Indoor Market will include play space for young people and public events, with some market stalls and business space throughout the year. Housing and retail will be integrated to bring back city centre life and build a permanent sense of community, a strategy being pursued in struggling town centres around the UK.

This project places affordable, sustainable housing at the centre of Dinnington's community-led Neighbourhood Plan to regenerate the town centre. In addition to various business, play, social, green spaces and health centres, Dinnington high street's community-led housing will develop a lively, long-term community. (Photo: Dinnington CLT, Community Land Trust Network website)

## Appendix 3:

# Additional case studies



© Hugh Webster Development, Goodwin Development Trust, CLTN website

## Hull, England

The Goodwin Development Trust was created in 1994 by the people of Thornton Estate in Hull. The Trust wanted to use the many empty properties in Hull city centre to help solve the growing problem of expensive housing. They did just that. In the early 2000s, Goodwin Development Trust repurposed 60 empty properties (1,2 and 3-bedroom homes) into high-quality homes for locals and attracted new people to the area.

More recently, in 2015, the community built another 5 modular Passivhaus standard 3-bedroom family homes. In the community's words, their homes demonstrate that "affordable homes don't mean generic and poor-quality design." Their homes creatively introduce a communal rainwater harvesting tank and water recycling system which collects bath/shower water and filters it for toilets and washing machines between the 5 houses. Their energy efficiency reduces fuel poverty—a common issue plaguing much of the UK.

The community organisation intends to expand their delivery by another 40 homes by upscaling their modular build project. Goodwin Development Trust highlights how communities are successfully renovating empty properties into new family homes that are affordable, beautiful, sustainable, and greatly needed in cities around the UK.

# COMMUNITY\* LAND SCOTLAND

info@communitylandscotland.org.uk  
www.communitylandscotland.org.uk  
07884 314297

 @CommunityLandScotland

 @CommunityLandSc

# sosch.

mike.sosch@outlook.com  
www.sosch.org  
07775 957702

 @SoSCommunityHousing

 @SoSCommHousing

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Registered address: c/o RA Clements, Argyll Square, Oban, Scotland, PA34 4AZ