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# CASE STUDY FISHPONDS BY BRISTOL CLT

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## INTRODUCTION

Bristol CLT is a Community Land Trust that works to bring on sites for community led housing, involving future residents in the design and build process. Its first project, Fishponds Road, received initial support from the local authority, and is now completed. Further projects included the Shaldon Road site, with plans for more.

## QUOTE

“For the council, and also for Bristol CLT, running a pilot project was a great way to establish what works in practice, providing a foundation for future activity and policy. Bristol City Council have built on this start and worked with Bristol CLT to create a land disposal policy for community led housing. 11 sites have been brought forward so far, many of which will draw on the lessons learnt and best practice established at Fishponds Road.”  
Stephen Dale, CEO Bristol CLT

## KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Initial support by the council was vital to the creation of the CLT
- There was strong demand for the homes (150 people joined the CLT on its launch), and all residents are eligible for social housing
- The process of securing a site, obtaining planning permission and building to budget was difficult and time consuming. Determination and flexibility are key qualities for delivering community led projects.
- Working with a supportive housing association will help community groups understand the technical processes, funding and skills needed to deliver larger projects.
- Recruiting a committed and enthusiastic development officer underpinned the success at Fishponds

## ABOUT THE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Bristol City Council helped set up the Community Land Trust to deliver affordable homes for rent and the intermediate market on a shared ownership basis. CLTs are local organisations set up and run by ordinary people to develop and manage affordable homes (as well as other assets important to that community, like community enterprises or workspaces). Affordability is usually locked in in perpetuity and they work to build communities, as opposed to housing estates.

While not a distinct legal structure in themselves, CLTs are defined in law, so activity must be framed within this context, such as being not-for-private-profit. They can, and should, make a surplus as a community business, but this must be used to benefit the community or manage the asset. For more visit the National CLT Network ([www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk](http://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk)) or Community Led Homes. (<https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/>)

Bristol CLT (BCLT) was founded in 2011 as an umbrella organisation to bring on housing, initially with 150 members who all bought a £1 share. Bristol City Council (BCC) granted the CLT the money to appoint a Development Officer for 18 months for its pilot scheme, which the council allocated £300,000 funding for.

Bristol CLT was supported by United Communities housing association <https://www.unitedcommunities.org.uk/> to develop the first scheme, with the understanding that anyone self-finishing their home would get a discount of up to £5,000 in return for the work they put in, either through additional equity, or reduced rent.

## FISHPONDS



### SITE DETAILS

After a long search of ‘hard to develop’ council-owned sites, the council agreed to transfer an urban site on the edge of a Victorian park. The land included a derelict school building and had access problems, and BCC supported the project by selling the land at £1 and ‘unlocking’ the site by parcelling it with adjacent council-owned land and a car park. The open market valuation was £286,000, but the council felt that the self-finish and affordable homes offered better ‘value’ than the straight capital receipt.

The council recognised the positive value in the model:

- Receiving nomination rights in perpetuity for three of the affordably rented dwellings
- The residents would develop useful skills through the self-finishing process
- The project would regenerate a deteriorating site that had involved maintenance and security costs
- Piloting a new form of community led housing, in line with city housing objectives, would diversify housing supply
- The new site’s asset value would facilitate funding for further projects

### ABOUT PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The scheme would create 12 new homes, with the school building converted into six studio apartments, while six new homes would be built in the playground. Prospective residents would undertake 12 weeks of self finishing work before sale and rental agreements were completed.

### PLANNING CONTEXT AND PROCESS

Planning reference for BS5 6QG: 13/01844/F. The trust applied for planning in July 2012, and broke ground in 2015. Initially, BCC did not have specific policies related to community led housing but post completion of Fishponds, Bristol CLT members and colleagues fed their experiences into the council to support the growth of CLH in the city. This added to the debate, which ultimately led to the inclusion of supportive policy for alternative housing models, including Community Land Trusts, in Bristol City Council’s Housing Delivery Plan 2017-2020 <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s12110/8c%20Appendix%201%20Housing%20Delivery%20Plan.pdf> BCC went on to develop other initiatives to support activity, including a ground breaking *Community Led Housing Land Disposal Policy 2020* and *Self Build Housing Land Disposal Policy 2020*.

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s45692/Appendix%20A1.pdf>  
<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s45693/Appendix%20A2.pdf>

and

Planning conditions restricted access to the rear of the site, away from the main road at the front, and BCLT had to move a toilet block on the rear council-owned depot to create this access. This unforeseen work added £101,000 to the overall costs of the development, which posed a serious issue for the group in terms of viability.



## DEVELOPMENT MODEL

The project incorporates two forms of tenure – shared ownership and affordable rent, which both included an element of self finish. By increasing the amount of ‘sweat equity’, shared ownership buyers could increase their stake in their home, while renters could reduce their rental cost.

## MARKETING

Bristol CLT produced factsheets to explain the project to would-be members, and became a registered housing provider to enable it to apply for funding from the Homes and Communities Agency. Members were assessed for housing need and eligibility, and all applicants had to be CLT members. Those wishing to rent had to be signed up to the council’s housing register via Home Choice Bristol, which then banded them by need. The council retained nomination rights on three of the five affordable rented properties, which were allocated through Home Choice Bristol.

## DESIGN

Architect practice Stride Treglown <https://stridetreglown.com/> was appointed by the BCLT board to design the scheme, retaining and converting the existing period school hall building. Information days and publicity events helped facilitate community engagement and inform the overall design of the scheme.

## DELIVERY

The project experienced considerable delays, including a bat survey, which resulted in higher build costs than had been anticipated, with tender prices coming in at £1,800 per sq m, as opposed to the budgeted £1,500. This resulted in the need to secure cost savings which were achieved by simplifying the design. The delays also meant that surveys became out of date and had to be repeated, further adding to the costs. Unforeseen planning issues, such as the £101k cost for a new site access affected the project’s viability.



Bristol CLT recruited a self-build manager with a background in construction to supervise the self finishers, and calculate the value of 'sweat equity' on the project. The contract was awarded on the basis that the main contractor would supply materials to the residents as well as provide the nearly completed buildings. For example, internal and external doors, architraves, kitchen carcasses and sanitary ware was left un-fitted in the dwellings when the contractor left site.

A schedule of self finishing works to be undertaken by prospective residents was developed by the self-build manager, based on all residents pooling their skills. The work included fitting kitchens, decorating, creating communal gardens and building bike sheds. These works were removed from the main contractor's responsibility.



The Trust generated around £790k through equity sales and a further £50k through sweat equity across the scheme. It also budgeted to generate income from the extensive solar panel installation, using government incentives for generating renewable energy and sales to residents.

Development cost around £1.9million, including a build cost of £1.3million, with Bristol City Council providing a grant of £45,000 and separate capital grant of £300,000. By becoming a registered provider BCLT was able to secure a Homes and Communities Agency grant of £425,000.

The sweat equity element was calculated to be equivalent to a £50,000 saving but was offset by the administration costs of the self-finish programme. Any community group working with sweat equity needs to strike a balance in appraising the likely value of self-builder input – both in terms of potential for reducing the costs of the scheme, and in terms of 'reward' to the individual self-builder for their efforts. However, self finish also helps the community forge its identity before people move in, which has social value.

After practical completion of all construction work and move-in by residents, the development loans were paid off and the freehold of the land was transferred to the CLT.

## TIMEFRAME/CURRENT STATUS

Bristol CLT was set up in January 2011, with planning applied for in July 2012. The project stalled in 2013, before resuming in 2014, with tenders completed by December. In Oct 2015 the self finishers began training, including around skills and health and safety, while work on site continued, with contractors finishing in March 2016. The project was completed by the close of the year.

## SHORT DISCUSSION

Fishponds and Bristol CLT emerged from Bristol City Council's willingness to have an open dialogue about different types of housing. Disposal of the site at an 'under value' was instrumental in getting the CLT set up initially. With this, the council was able to justify the disposal by accounting for 'well-being value' generated by the project, the nomination rights received and progress against its policy objective of diversifying Bristol's housing market. BCLT went on to work on a further site, Shaldon Road, which United Communities (now renamed as Brighter Places) is now bringing on. It also hosts Community Led Homes West, which promotes and supports community led housing projects in the region.

## TASK FORCE STATEMENT

While having policy sets a context for any community led or custom or self build activity, there are several other ways that councils can support projects in coming forward. These can include helping with the provision or permissioning of land, supporting pilot projects, capacity building and more. Read the Task Force's Advice Note *Enabling Schemes to Come Forward*.

[https://righttobuild.org.uk/resources/advicenotes/enabling\\_schemes](https://righttobuild.org.uk/resources/advicenotes/enabling_schemes)