

Stirchley Cooperative Development – Case Study

Stirchley Cooperative Development (SCD) is a grassroots community organisation made of members of local housing and worker cooperatives in and around Stirchley, Birmingham.

There is a rich cooperative tradition in the area. There are now three worker co-ops on Stirchley high street – a bakery, a bike shop, and a café.

Responding to Community Need

The group wanted to apply their co-operative approach to address housing and retail issues in Stirchley. There have been significant land and property purchases by developers in recent years. Although much of it is still waiting to be developed and remains poor quality, rental charges for housing and commercial properties have subsequently increased.

The priority was to create a housing co-op which delivers versatile housing options to support people in different stages of life. It needed to be a space that could provide tenants with security in the long term. SCD is committed to creating an asset that will be collectively owned by the community in perpetuity.

“I moved out of a co-op as it didn’t have accommodation for families. Now I’m living in private accommodation again, the thing I miss most is security. It’s really life-affirming to know that you have housing security; it affects your whole life, knowing that you won’t suddenly have to move or take your kids out of school.”

Nancy (founding member)



The Project

The ambitious project will develop housing and business elements alongside one another. The site runs along the high street and at three stories high will contain businesses along the bottom, and housing on top.

The project will comprise 39 homes of 1–3-bedroom units, with a mixture of private and shared elements. There will be communal laundry, kitchen and living areas on each floor, as well as a shared roof garden and community hall. Several houses have been developed specifically for disabled users and there’s a lift to ensure all facilities are accessible to everyone.

The group chose a ‘pre-fab’, modular building process to ensure the high environmental standards of the build. The building will produce CO2 emissions 27% lower per year than an equivalent brick-built property. As well as the benefits to the environment, it will ensure energy costs remain low for tenants.



Stirchley has good public transport links however parking is a point of friction within the community. It was important to the group that the development will support tenants to live car-free where possible and include a secure shared bike storage space, as well as electric car points and disabled parking spaces.

Who is involved?

Although it will be a fully mutual co-op, the group are working with local housing association Accord during the construction phase. Accord provides technical advice, support with the land purchase and funding to keep the project moving forward. The turn-key contract provides the SCD with cash-flow support whilst the build is in process and before income can be generated. The SCD will assume control of the finances when the build is complete.

The housing association also helped to identify and manage the tendering for key consultants and specialists for the project including the architect, an employer's agent, and consultants for site investigations.

The project is funded through a mixture of grant and loan finance. Funding through Homes in Community Hands, from Power to Change enabled the trust to invest in a paid administrator to progress the project and apply to become a registered provider (RP) for social housing. The current agreement allocates 35% of houses to those on the Local Authority's housing list, though the Coop retain ultimate control over the housing allocation and every tenant will be a member of the Coop. All rents will be equal, meaning 100% of the houses will be affordable. Becoming a RP will enable the group to access further funding from Homes England.

“When you live in housing that's fully mutual, there's great connection and solidarity with those you are living with. It's not necessarily about being best friends, but you work together to build something, and it develops really positive relationships and can transform your day-to-day life.”

Nancy (founding member)



Looking ahead

The project has recently been granted planning permission by Birmingham City Council. The next step will be to purchase the land, with a view to starting to build later in 2021.

“There will always be a cooperative presence in Stirchley, which is amazing – we want to use the assets to kick-start more projects like this.” – Stu (founding member)



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