



# Start Up Support Programme

Learning Report

April 2022



**Community  
Led Homes**

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# Executive summary

The Start Up Support Programme provided successful applicants with a combination of seed-corn funding and 1:1 support over the course of a year. 103 grants were awarded to 98 projects, delivering £331,495 in Seed Corn grant funding and £243,751 in Support funding.

The findings from this report draw on the applications, six month and end of project reports from recipients of the Start Up Support Programme, as well as five semi-structured interviews with groups to develop in-depth case studies as explored in the methodology section below. At the time of the study, 67 groups had submitted their end of project reports.

Projects worked through the first three developmental stages for community led housing – the group, site, and plan stages. 52 groups reported completing the concept group stage, 11 groups reported completing the site stage and 13 reported completing the plan stage.

Groups undertook a range of exercises to develop their group structure, governance, decision making processes and membership and were supported to develop a vision, purpose and values and determine their approach to community led housing. Of the reports analysed, 60 groups plan to develop new build housing; 22 groups a combination of new build, a conversion or refurbishment; 11 groups plan to refurbish existing housing stock; and 5 groups to convert another building use to housing.

The programme supported many groups to determine the most appropriate legal structure. Of groups that reported on their legal status, 45% became incorporated as a result of support from this programme. 30% reported that they were already incorporated when they received the funding and 23% were able to explore possible legal structures to determine the right legal form for them.

Other common types of activity included volunteer training and group skill development; peer learning with existing community led housing groups; improving communications, including developing a better digital presence and undertaking community engagement; and pulling all aspects of project development together into a business plan.

At the site stage, a number of groups cited the challenges they faced in identifying and securing viable sites. The role of the local authority and enabler hubs were credited by many as being crucial to overcoming this obstacle. 22 groups reported that the search for a site had begun, 30 groups had identified what they thought was a viable site, and 9 had secured a site for development. Groups engaged with a range of professional surveys and other specialist advice as part of their site investigations.

At the plan stage groups developed more detailed proposals and wider support for their proposals such as working on planning applications and securing funding for the build

stage. 30 start-up projects are planning to deliver minor dwellings, 72 are planning small-scale major developments and just one group is planning to deliver large-scale major development<sup>1</sup>. Of the applicants who had completed final reporting at the time of research, grantees from the Start Up Support Programme are hoping that they will create a combined total of 1580 units of accommodation. 21 groups reported commencing the planning process, three groups submitted and were awaiting news about their planning application, 2 groups received outline planning permission and 3 groups achieved full planning approval during the funding window.

Approximately 75% of applicants had not received any funding for their project prior to their application to the fund, demonstrating that the fund successfully targeted community led housing projects at their very earliest stages. A number of groups reported securing further funding during the course of the Start Up support, highlighting how the programme has been a catalyst for groups, supporting them to lever further funding for their projects and into their communities.

The groups who received the 1:1 support widely credited it as being crucial to the degree of progress they were able to make. Ongoing professional advice with regular support and coaching brought extra capacity, expertise and confidence to drive their projects forward.

Covid-19 had a significant effect on project development across the board, negatively affecting community engagement and consultations, peer learning, and volunteer capacity and volunteer time. Delays were also experienced with local planning teams taking far longer to respond to enquiries, provide pre-application support and progress planning applications.

A significant number of groups reported that the pandemic also created a number of positive opportunities, including new technological possibilities such as online meetings and consultation, and more time to regroup, focus, learn and develop relationships with key partners.

## Methodology

The research examined the impact of the Seed Corn and Support grants for start-up groups within the Start Up Support Programme.

The research utilised four sources of data: the application forms submitted by groups when originally applying to the fund; the six-monthly reports, submitted by groups midway through the grant period; end of project reports submitted at the end of the grant period; and in depth interviews with five groups between May and September 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> Housing developments come in three size categories in planning law. Minor development - up to 9 dwellings; small-scale major development - 10-199 dwellings; and large-scale major development - 200+ dwellings. MHCLG Open Data: Planning Applications Decisions - Major and Minor Developments, England, District by Development Type ([opendatacommunities.org](https://communityledhomes.org.uk/opendatacommunities.org))

## Report data

Grant recipients submitted a range of data in their six -monthly and end of project grant reports including their proposed approach, number of homes planned, anticipated social impact, developmental milestones and stages achieved, details of progress made during the grant support, and the challenges experienced, and solutions developed. An outline of the report structure can be found in appendix A.

At the time of the study, 67 groups had submitted their end of project reports. As such, figures such as the projected number of houses planned are anticipated to be even higher than reported in this report.

## Case study data

In depth interviews were conducted with five groups which formed the basis of the case studies found in this report. Case studies provide information about the specific context of a group, providing insight into the challenges experienced ‘on the ground’ as well as solutions and learning developed by the group.

The groups were selected to outline the range of community led housing providers from different regions of England, at different stages of project development, utilising a range of approaches and encountering a range of challenges. York Central Co-Owned, a community benefit society known as YoCo, is a group of local residents who came together to develop a co-owned neighbourhood on a brownfield site; Halifax Opportunities Trust is a registered charity who are exploring retrofit opportunities for existing properties in Calderdale to address housing needs; Rotunda are a charity providing inclusive education services for adults in North Liverpool, who want to develop campus-style, co-housing accommodation with wrap-around support for single-parent students; It Takes a City are a group of residents who formed a community land trust to support homeless people in Cambridge; and SAP Hastings is a user-led community start-up developing a cooperative housing solution for people leaving long term mental health supported accommodation in the Hastings area.

The framework for the interviews explored the local context, the organisation and key figures driving the project forward, and progress made with support from the funding.

There were questions about social infrastructure, the local housing provision, amenities and public transport. Groups were asked qualitative questions about what is great about the area, as well as the challenges it faces.

The interview asked questions about the organisation’s history and wider work, who is involved in driving their projects forward; the skills, knowledge and experience they have; and how they are inclusive and work with diverse communities.

The five groups interviewed were asked to detail how they spent their Seed Corn and/or Support grant, what they were able to achieve with the funding, the stage the project got to, and the next steps looking forward.



The interview guide for these conversations can be found in appendix B.

## **Data analysis**

The report and interview data content were analysed by categorising and coding themes and patterns. The thematic analysis identified the key activities that groups undertook at each of the development stages, ongoing and emerging challenges that groups faced, the solutions being developed ‘on the ground’, and the factors which support groups to flourish. These themes form the structure of this report.

# **The Start Up Support Programme**

The Start Up Support Programme was open for applications from February 2019. Grantees had 12 months to spend their grant or by the end of March 2021, whichever was sooner. Due to the impact of Covid-19, it was agreed that groups could retain up to £500 Seed Corn grant and up to £500 Support grant to be spent beyond March 2021, if they explained in their end of grant report what it would be spent on.

The fund aimed to help groups of local people or existing community organisations to develop their own community led housing solutions. The grant programme was targeted to support the earliest stages of a community led housing group’s development to help them explore options for creating homes.

The programme was funded by the then Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) through the Community Housing Fund. The Community Housing Fund aims are to:

- Support an increase in housing supply in England, by increasing the number of additional homes delivered by the community led housing sector.
- To provide housing that is affordable at local income levels and remains so in perpetuity.

The Start Up Support Programme was delivered by Community Led Homes, which is a partnership of four leading community-led organisations: Community Land Trust Network, Confederation of Co-operative Housing, Locality, and UK Cohousing. The objective of the partnership is to work collaboratively to make it easier for communities to access support and build a lasting movement.

Grant funding of up to £10,000 was available to groups, to support them to progress their projects to become ready to apply for further pre-development revenue grants from other programmes.

The funding available through the Start Up Support Programme was split into two funding streams: Seed Corn grants and Support grants.

## **Seed Corn funding**

Community organisations who met the criteria were able to apply for up to £4,000 to cover the early-stage costs of getting a project off the ground. This fund covered a range of costs such as staffing, volunteer expenses, legal and other professional fees, and training.

## **Support funding**

Support funding up to £6,000 was available to cover the costs of community led housing advisors to provide 1:1 Start Up support to help groups to shape and progress their projects through the early stages. The support was aimed at areas without enabler hubs, or in areas in which the enabler hub was new and did not offer the full complement of services yet, or the group required Start Up support that fell outside the skillset of the local enabling hub.

## **Enabler hubs**

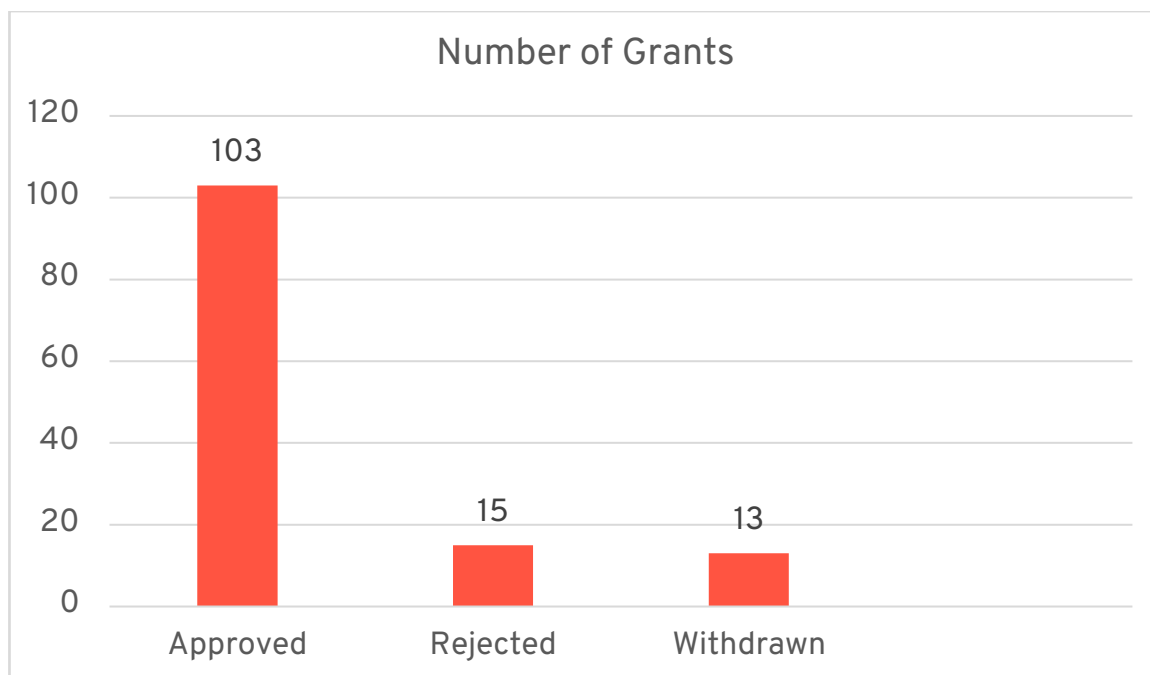
The Enabler Hub Grant Programme was funded by the then Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) through the Community Housing Fund from April 2019 until 30 September 2021. The aims were to expand the network of enabler hubs as regional organisations supporting community led housing providers to deliver projects, and to support wider stakeholder engagement to create supportive local environments and stimulate the creation of new groups and projects.

# **Who received grant funding**

## **Number of grants**

The Start Up Support Programme received 250 successful eligibility checkers. There were subsequently 131 full applications submitted by groups and 103 of these applications were successful in receiving Seed Corn funding and/or Support funding. 13 applications were withdrawn during the assessment process and 15 were unsuccessful.





*Figure 1: Start Up Support grant applicants*

The level of interest in the programme can be attributed to a burgeoning appetite for community led housing and a healthy pipeline of prospective groups who are exploring the possibility of delivering projects. It may have also been helped by the simple eligibility requirements.

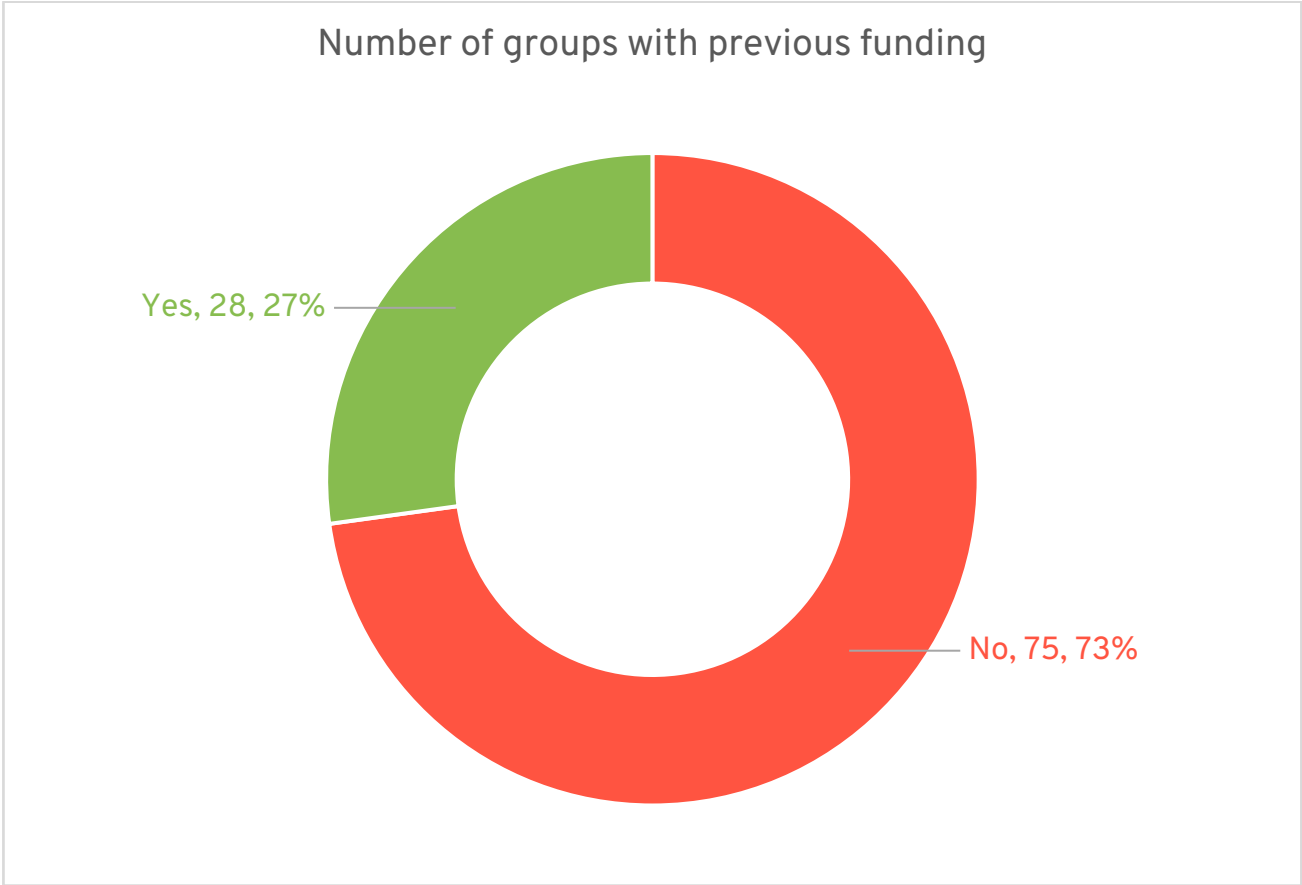
The eligibility criteria stipulated that the funding would support groups which are:

- based in England
- exploring community-led options
- looking to create some permanently affordable housing to meet local needs
- at an early stage in the project's development
- looking for revenue funding
- established for charitable, benevolent or philanthropic purposes
- a membership of five or more members
- in possession of a bank account or have another organisation to act as the fundholder.

The high rate of success of the applicants can be attributed to the support available from Community Led Homes and enabler hubs to apply, the design of the fund, with clear and well-communicated guidelines. The management of the grant process was aided by an experienced pool of assessors and an independent grants committee who sought to clarify queries and request missing information from applicants rather than simply reject them.

£331,495 of grant funding was distributed as Seed Corn grant funding and £243,751 was distributed as Support grant funding.

As reported in the successful grant applications and illustrated in Figure 2, approximately 75% of applicants had not received any funding for their project prior to their application to the fund, demonstrating that the fund was able to successfully target community led housing projects at their very earliest stages.



*Figure 2: Groups accessing funding prior to the Start Up Support Programme*

# Where were the successful groups located?

Groups were successful in securing Seed Corn funding in all regions of England and successful in securing Support funding in all regions with the exception of the Eastern and East Midlands regions<sup>i</sup>.

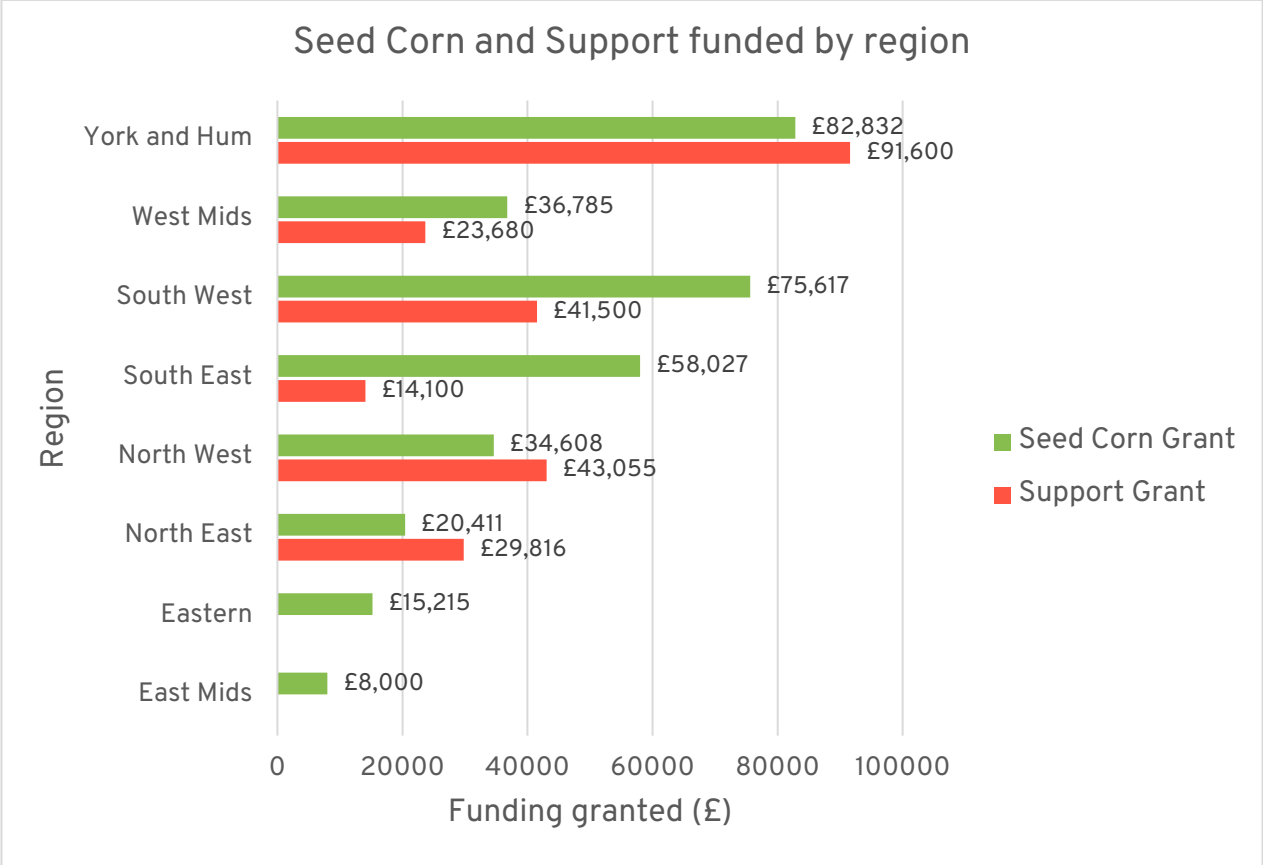


Figure 3: Seed Corn and Support grant amounts by region

The data demonstrates a fairly even geographical spread of funding across all regions of England, with a slightly higher concentration of successful groups in Yorkshire and Humber and a lower number of successful applicants in the East.

This data is broken down further in figure 4, which details the amount of funding received by groups in each local authority<sup>ii</sup>.

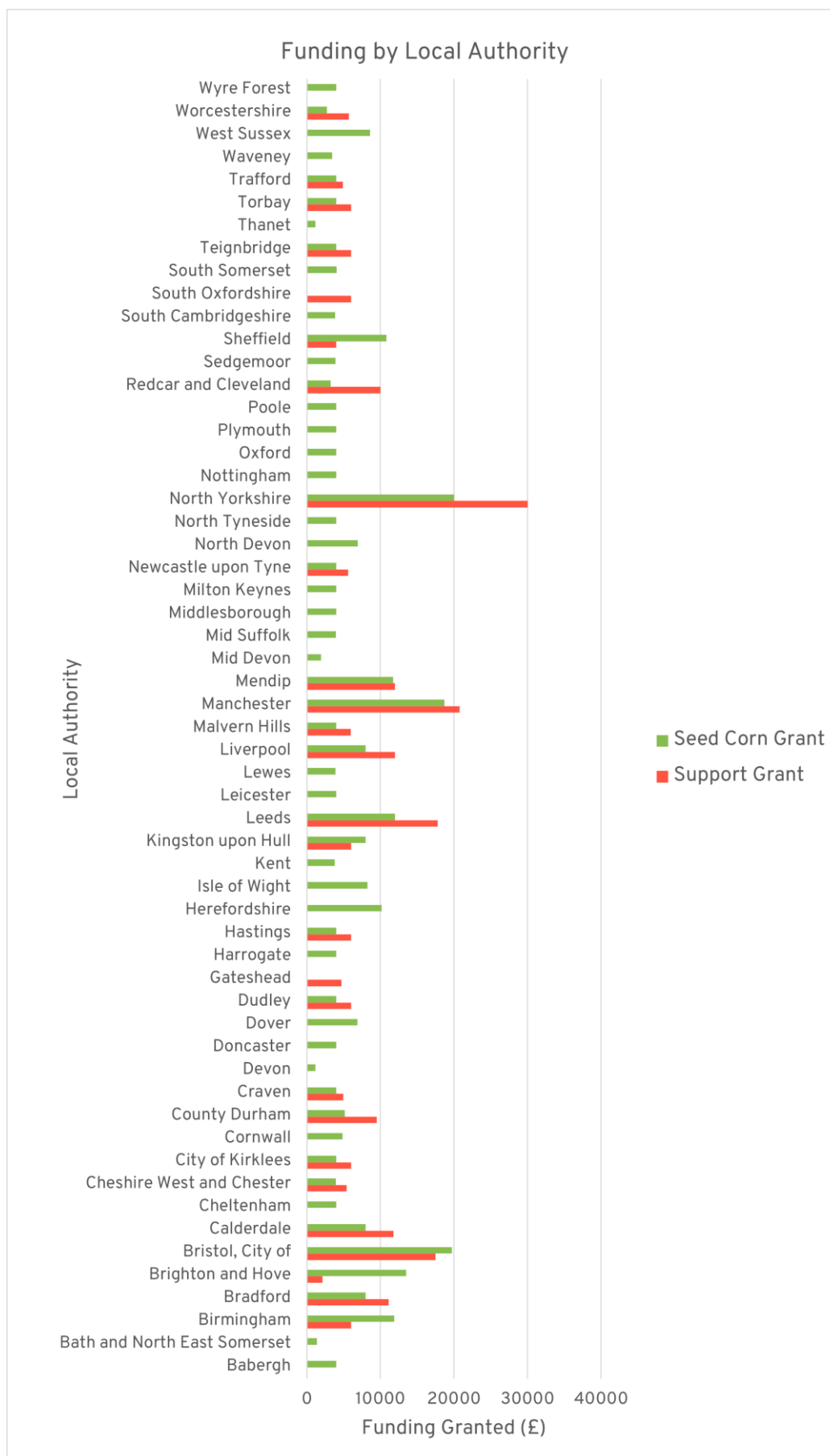


Figure 4: Funding by local authority

# What projects achieved

The 'total process' of community led housing can be set out in [five typical stages](#) of a community led housing journey: group, site, plan, build and live. Projects at an early stage usually require support to work through the early 'group stage' and 'site stage' to find and secure a suitable site. Groups who have a site already identified and secured may also require help at the 'plan stage'.

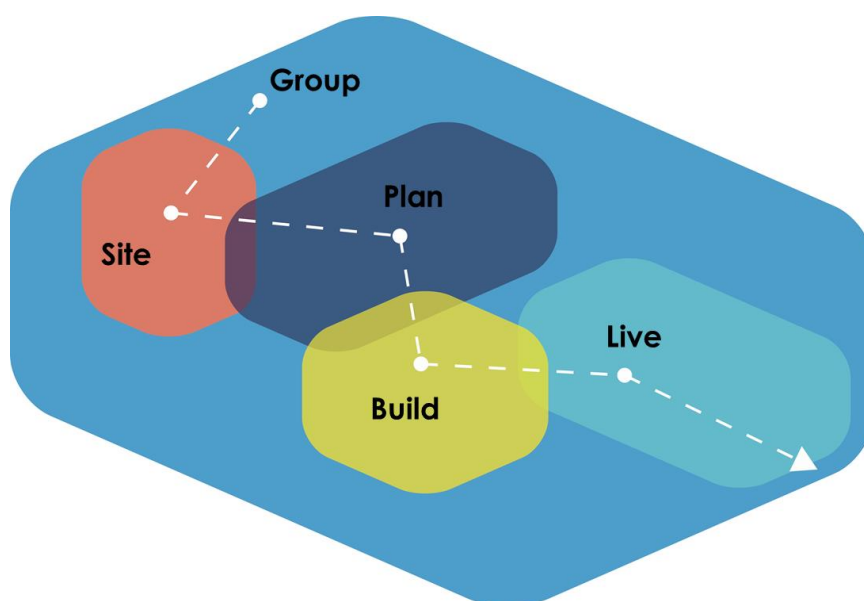


Figure 5: Total process – stages of community led housing development

At the end of the grant period 52 groups reported they were in the concept/ group stage, 11 groups in the site stage and 13 reported they were in the plan stage.

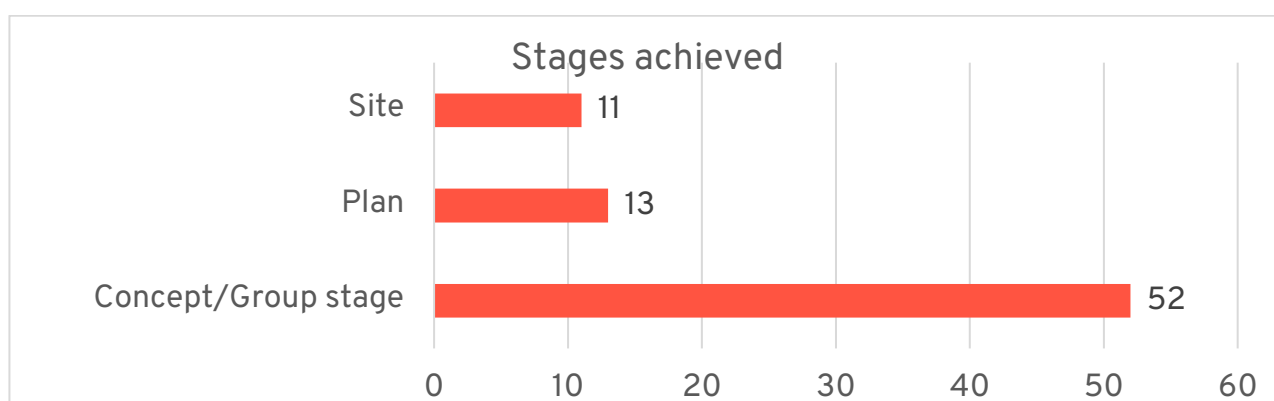


Figure 6: Community led housing developmental stages achieved

# Progress at the group stage

## Vision, purpose and values

Having a clear vision, purpose and values to guide the project forward is fundamental to the success of a group. Many of the very early stages groups applied for funding to identify and develop the ethos of the group.

“We couldn’t have got to our thinking without the funding. There’s so much to learn, so many components to wrap your head around.”

*Engage Malvern*

As is to be expected, the motivations for groups to develop community led housing varies from community to community. Applicants were asked to identify the category of social impact that their project addressed and were able to select more than one: 37 groups developed their projects to address employment, 18 to increase the number of affordable homes, 8 to bring empty properties back into use, 8 to address homelessness, 3 to free up larger family homes, and 1 to provide mutual support for residents.

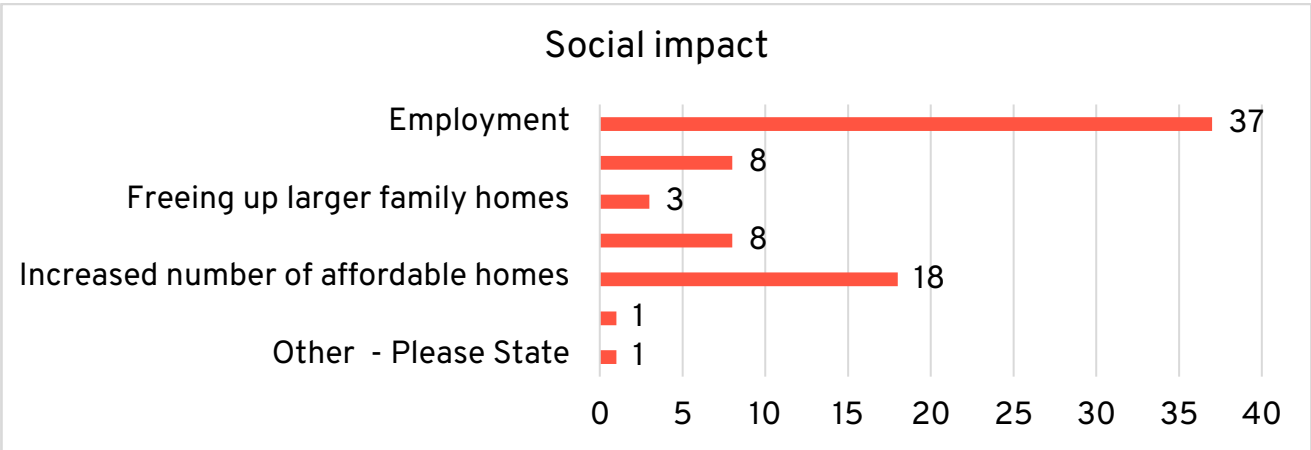


Figure 7: Identified social impact of housing project

Affordable housing is expectedly one of the main social impacts listed, addressing increasing property prices, and diminishing access to quality, affordable homes. Interestingly, employment is listed as a significant social impact, highlighting the importance of local job creation for many communities, and retaining key workers in communities.

## Housing need

The diversity of groups and projects that were able to access funding through the Start Up Support Programme is indicative of the range of circumstances that community led housing can speak to.

Project Freedom by Pride of Place Living are developing community led housing to address LGBTQ+ housing needs in Leeds; Rotunda are developing on-campus cohousing for single parents as part of their adult education programme in Liverpool; The Self-Actualisation Project are developing supported housing for people with mental health difficulties in Hastings; and Malachi Community Land Trust are developing housing for homeless families in Birmingham.

This outlines the ability of the sector to find solutions to a range of housing needs and the potential for these groups to leverage funding into communities to address these.

The programme supported start-up groups to develop specialist policies and procedures. Age UK North Tyneside were able to develop specialist policies for housing for older members of the community, and Project Freedom developed policies to support LGBTQ+ housing.

## **Approach to community led housing**

Diverse housing needs and community contexts require a range of potential approaches for community led housing groups.

Grantees were able to explore the approach they wanted to take to community led housing, as well as receive professional guidance as to which legal structure would best support their needs.

Of the reports analysed, 29 of the groups reported they were proposing to use a cohousing approach, 26 had decided a community land trust was the best form for them, 5 groups selected a co-operative approach, 4 groups a community anchor or development approach, 2 groups identified themselves as being a self-help housing project and one group as a tenant management organisation.

These approaches are not mutually exclusive and for many groups it is likely there is an overlap with more than one, with very few groups fitting purely into one category. For instance, self-help housing involves groups bringing back into use empty, existing properties<sup>2</sup> and a group can use this approach whilst also being co-operatively organised, being a community land trust and/or a community anchor organisation. Equally, cohousing communities are intentional communities, created and run by their intended residents but these groups can also be tenant management organisations.

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<sup>2</sup> [What is self-help housing?](#) | [Community Led Homes](#)



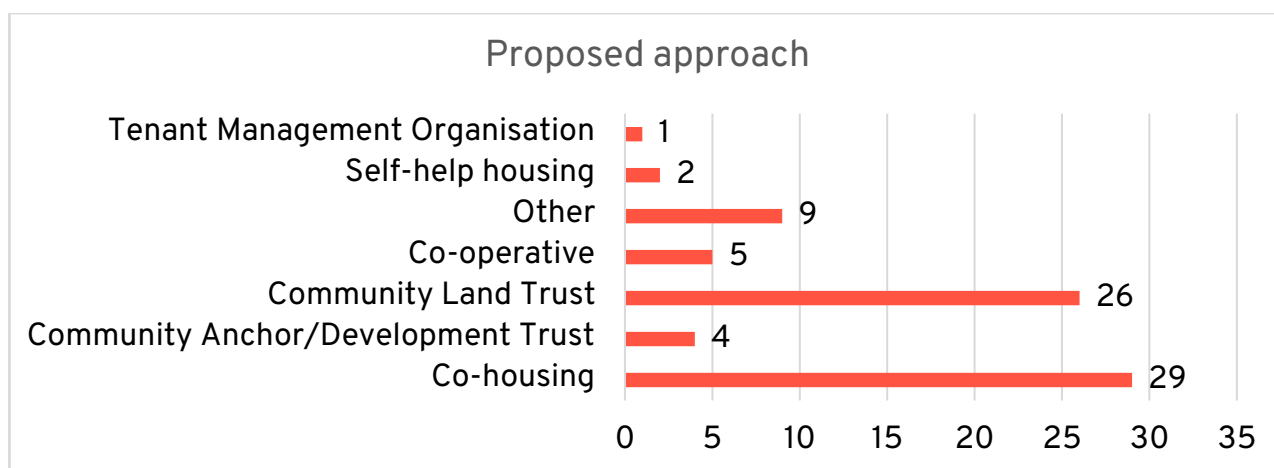


Figure 8: Proposed approach to community led housing

## Governance

The funding enabled a number of the groups to develop the governance structures that will support and guide their organisation as the project develops.

Several groups explored different decision-making processes, such as Redwing Housing Group and Holmfirth Transition Town who each undertook consensus decision making training<sup>3</sup>.

The funding enabled a number of groups to establish clear processes for electing local people to oversee the management of the project. For instance Back on the Map used some of the funding to undertake a skills audit of their board.

A number of organisations reported the positive impact of community led housing advisors on their board. Malachi's board and senior management team received "intensive governance and business planning support from a CLH adviser". Holme Valley Community Land Trust, trading as EcoHolmes, reported that they "have been extensively supported by CLT hub housing advisers, who have provided us with expert advice and training for our Management Board".

Ringmer Area Community Land Trust established good links with another local organisation and co-opted several board members to strengthen the project team. By developing this close partnership they were able to hold public meetings collaboratively and increase wider community support for the project.

A number of groups reported the challenges they faced due to interpersonal difficulties early on, before governance structures were developed to help them resolve issues.

<sup>3</sup> "Consensus decision making is a process used by groups seeking to generate widespread levels of participation and agreement." The Basics of Consensus Decision Making, Tim Hartnett Microsoft Word - The Basics of Consensus Decision Making.docx (groupfacilitation.net)

“Conflict resolution is so important for each member to learn about and it’s important that people know how to run meetings, with everyone taking turns as chair, facilitator and minute-taker”

*The Family Land Cooperative*

### Member development and volunteer recruitment

Some groups reported the challenges that arose from a high turnover of volunteers, when members would join only to leave not long after. Canopy Community developed a policy to support the joining process, encouraging members to attend a number of meetings before committing to volunteer roles, to enable people to get a good sense of the scope and scale of the project before signing up.

A strong membership base and network of supporters are invaluable to spread the load of a long-term project and maintain momentum, provide pro bono support and further resources, and advocate widely in the search for potential sites.

### Legal status

16 groups reported that they were already incorporated when they received the funding, 24 groups were able to become incorporated due to the funding, and 13 groups were able to explore the right legal structure for their group<sup>iii</sup>.

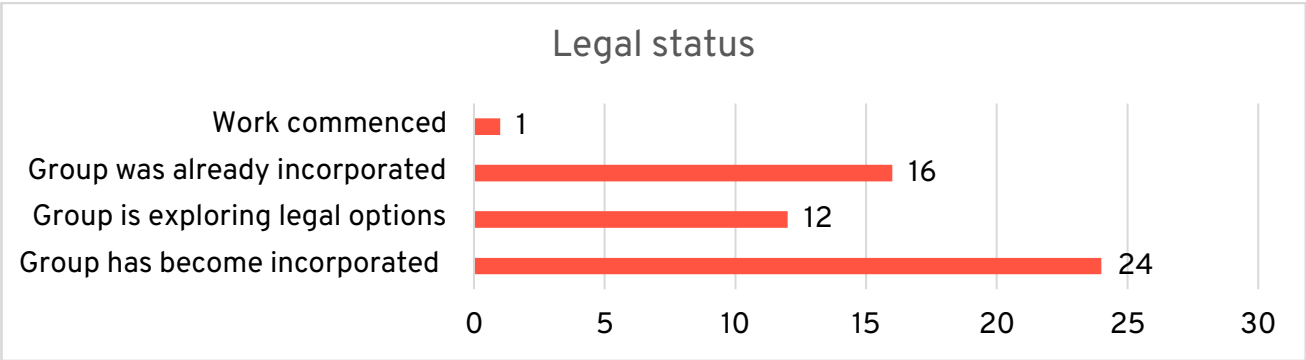


Figure 9: Legal status of groups

Identifying a legal structure is often a crucial step for early-stage groups, giving them an ideological, administrative and legal foundation for later development stages including being able to apply for funding. A majority of groups were able to make progress on this with support from the Start Up Programme. 45% of the groups that reported on their legal status became incorporated with support and funding from this programme.

## Case study: YoCo, York

### First steps

In 2018, proposals for 2500 homes with business and commercial use on a dormant brownfield site north of York train station, came under criticism from local people that it wasn't inclusive, instead being developed 'top-down'. At York Design week, a workshop for local people who live on the neighbouring site, germinated the nucleus of a group who started YoCo to lead the future of community housing on this potential development site. They want to create a co-owned neighbourhood in York, addressing environmental, social and economic concerns.

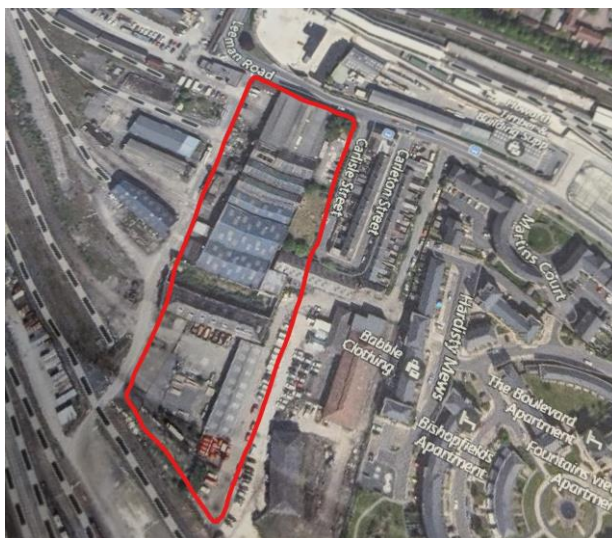


Figure 10: Image of the site

The result was eight big ideas:

- Housing for living, not investment: York Central should address York's housing inequalities, make a mixed community and build homes not holiday lets.
- Exploit the benefits of high density: walkable access to shops, gyms, culture, entertainment, public transport and incredible roof top views. Identify these benefits collaboratively and design for them.
- Build in low running costs through high standards: link low fuel bills and environmental sustainability through high building standards.
- People, not more cars: York Central cannot add 2,500+ more cars to York's roads. York Central should provide livable streets and safe neighbourhoods for children to grow up, keep cars to the periphery, plan for quick and reliable public transport and prioritise direct routes for those on foot, bikes and with mobility aids.
- Beyond zoning: work is changing. Work and life are often no longer zoned into 9am-5pm so why should our cities be? Plan for creative vibrant urban space by mixing up work, living and cultural buildings and spaces.

- A community made through exchange: York has enormous wealth, socially, culturally and financially. Use York Central to build a community that can build links between people to address inequalities through sharing and exchange.
- A hub that catalyses York's creativity and innovation: develop a showcase from media, science, technology and heritage, a learning hub that challenges perceptions and fuels new ideas and networks.

### How the funding helped

The Community Led Homes Start Up Support grant helped YoCo to develop these eight aims into something more tangible. They spoke to Liverpool-based Homebaked CLT about their experience regenerating Anfield and spoke to Coin St in London. YoCo's goals are to explore ideas of community wealth building, regeneration of neighbourhoods and co-operative models that finance and support communities.

They sought legal advice from Wrigleys Solicitors and decided to temporarily set up as company limited by guarantee (not for profit). This allowed them to quickly become an entity that can open a bank account and hold funding.



*Figure 11: YoCo consultation*

They became a community benefit society which affords them flexibility and the opportunity to change their governance structure should they need to later on. Members accessed training in governance, decision-making, community ownership and accountability and invested in website design and a logo. They hosted workshops and a York 'Festival of Ideas' which explored a number of issues including what a neighbourhood should look like post Covid-19. They held one outdoor event, a picnic, which people could also join online to ensure it was inclusive to everybody. A poet hosted an event with the poem 'If ever there was a home'.



*Figure 12: YoCo picnic*

## **Existing groups – strengths and challenges**

Existing community organisations are well placed to undertake community led housing. They commonly have the trust of the community and established methods for outreach, engagement and co-production. They can also draw on an experienced board and established governance processes and benefit from existing partnerships with a range of local partners such as the local authority, funders, and other key stakeholders in the area. They often already possess or have access to land, or have assets against which they can borrow.

EngageMalvern reported that they found that it was a huge benefit being an existing organisation with a membership base whom they could draw on to lend a hand:

“Having an established community charity was a good base for developing the CLT. We already had a group of supporters who were engaged, supported our vision and were willing to help out. And because we were delivering other projects alongside developing the housing project, people didn’t fatigue by only focusing on the housing.”

*EngageMalvern*

A number of existing and established organisations reported that they found it to be more challenging than they expected to turn their hand to housing. Halesworth Campus for instance, reported that they found the legal options and constraints on the land made it ‘a minefield’ and a significant strain on the staff team.



## **Training and group skill development**

One of the fundamental elements of community led housing is local people developing their skills as part of the project process. The funding supported a significant number of groups to invest in training and skill development within their core team and wider membership.

Manchester Student Housing Co-op and SAP Hastings each accessed training in how to set-up a co-op. Three board members from Harbour Ambition Community Led Housing attended Governance Training Sessions with Wessex Community Assets.

“We attended a Money Life course which supported the group with planning for eventual home ownership.”

*Home Time*

Other training undertaken by funded groups included website building, design sketching, report-writing, facilitation skills, work-planning, administration, policy writing, financial oversight, public relations, volunteer recruitment and support, social media, models for decision-making, and Confederation of Cooperative Housing training in governance and housing management.

The breadth of skill building facilitated by the funding is likely to have wider spin off impacts including groups using transferable skills to help develop complimentary community projects.

## **Peer learning**

Peer learning was reported by a number of groups as being integral to their development providing real-world inspiration, valuable tips and insight, and a wider network with the potential for ongoing, informal and cost-free guidance. A number of groups, such as Grassroots Enterprise for Social Inclusion and Poverty Relief, OpHouse, East Durham Community Initiatives, and Home Time lamented that Covid-19 had restricted them from visiting and learning from other community led home groups as they ordinarily would.

## **Developing community support**

Developing support within the community is imperative to the success of community led housing at all stages of development and needs to begin at the very beginning.

The methods are as wide-ranging and innovative as the shape of the projects themselves. For instance, Holmfirth Transition Town developed an intranet site to provide a resource hub for members to develop their knowledge of the sector and a library of literature about community led housing, to facilitate learning in their wider community and encourage engagement. Ringmer Area Community Land Trust were able to hold a community engagement event in the village spread over the course of 8 hours to be Covid-19-safe,

which engaged over 50% of the households in the community. YoCo hosted a festival of ideas which included a picnic, workshops on housing and housing-themed poetry.

Many groups emphasised the importance of developing regular communications, creating publicity and delivering awareness-raising campaigns in order to counter the potential for misunderstanding or misinformation around the project.

For instance, Harbour Ambition Community Led Housing reported that “our community rightly has a mistrust of developers and we have been seen as a developer” due to being a newly formed organisation and the community benefit society model being a less commonly known type of structure. The community’s negative experiences from a previous development made it challenging for the group to gain the trust of some local residents. Covid-19 compounded the problem by preventing in-person information sessions and relationship building going ahead as planned. Targeted communications and engagement are underway to address this issue.

A number of groups reported the reputational challenges they faced when developing specialist housing for particular target demographics. For instance, ‘It Takes a City’ in Cambridgeshire reported that they had experienced opposition from some members of the community to develop housing to address the homelessness situation in Cambridge. A number of the sites they considered were opposed by some local residents who didn’t want housing for homeless people in their area.

“Housing for the homeless is considered a very worthy cause by all concerned, but not all wish the solution to be in their area.”

*It Takes a City*

EngageMalvern reported the challenges they experienced in their rural community when a small but vocal number of people opposed building more houses.

“The difficulty is that some people with housing don’t want more housing to be built because they think it will lower the value of their existing homes.”

*EngageMalvern*

Many of the Start Up Support Programme groups were able to invest in a range of methods to improve communications, raise their profile and increase community knowledge and understanding about their project. They did so, in order to connect more with their membership, increase local support and reduce any opposition.

## **Improving communication**

Digital platforms have become more important than ever during Covid-19 and 23 groups reported developing a website and their social media presence with the funding.



Groups such as the Neighbourhood Services Company developed videos to bring to life the essence and aspirations of their project.

“The use of a video on the website promoted further understanding and participation by encouraging people to complete a questionnaire on a specific housing proposal.”

*Thanet Community Land Trust Steering Group*

## **Community consultation**

Formal consultation methods such as surveys and questionnaires provide important opportunities for engagement to the wider community, empowering local residents to use their voices and take an active role in shaping the project and housing provision locally.

“Through consultation we were able to engage with 126 residents ,38 young people and 11 community groups and faith organisations to help us to understand their aspirations for the site. Consultation also enabled us to build a stronger relationship between the ABC Church and the local community who had previously had very little communication with each other.”

*Malachi Community Land Trust*

Consultations capture crucial data about the needs of stakeholders, provide direction as to how the project should be developed and creates a strong evidence base for community led housing more generally.

“An extensive community consultation has recently been completed led by PEMB and indicating 83% of local people are in favour of the proposals. The consultation included a gatefold leaflet delivered to 500 addresses, a purpose-built website, a short promo video and a dedicated Facebook page. There was also coverage in the local press.”

*Pembroke St Estate Management Board Ltd*

Housing needs surveys provide a clear mandate for community led housing. Thame CLT undertook an independent housing needs analysis to demonstrate the benefit that the CLT could bring as a delivery partner for affordable housing. The information showed the community’s need for affordable housing. This proved to be an invaluable tool to convince local authority to support Thame CLT. Project Freedom (Pride of Place Living) undertook an online housing need survey run by volunteers to establish the need for LGBTQ+ housing in Leeds.

“We found that identifying housing need is tricky. The questionnaires that were sent out through the parish system ended up reaching the wrong people: the people answering were the people who had houses. So we did our own survey with the funding. We developed a dozen questions and reached people through the popular community magazine. People could return them by post or could complete them online. 16,000 questionnaires went out to about 4-5 parishes and a town council, we tried to make it as wide and flexible as possible.”

*EngageMalvern*

## Developing a business plan

A number of groups utilised the funding to develop the business case for their projects, a central document outlining their aspirations and proposals to bring the project to fruition.

“We were able to supply the CHF with an outline business plan and development appraisal on a site for 31 homes and have a clear route forward. Without the technical guidance this grant financed our progress would not have been so rapid nor successful.”

*Thame CLT*

The business plan pulls together the details of the vision, aims and values, gives some context for the project, and outlines the organisational structure, objectives, tenure mix, proposed finances and actions.

“Our board and senior management team received intensive governance and business planning support from a CLH adviser. Through business planning support she provided us with options for tenure, initial financial modelling and finance options. With this support we were able to create a plan to deliver this project, appoint a project team, apply for funding and build stronger community and stakeholder partnerships.”

*Malachi Community Land Trust*



*Figure 13: Site plan, Malachi Community Land Trust*

A business plan becomes a tool which a group can evolve as it moves through the development stages, adding more granular information as it is established, outlining the unique circumstances of the project.

The central document enables the group to analyse viability and to produce a plan which will guide the group moving forward and communicate the strategy to external partners

and other stakeholders such as funders: “A business plan was an essential requirement for almost all lenders”, *Toranj Tuition*.

## Case study: Halifax Opportunities Trust

Halifax Opportunities Trust (HOT) is a registered charity based in the borough of Calderdale, West Yorkshire. HOT’s purpose is to create vibrant, multicultural and sustainable communities. This is achieved by providing training; helping people to find work; providing childcare and family support; encouraging community activities and healthier lifestyles; supporting migrants; and running business centres.

Prior to the Start Up Support grant, HOT had noticed a requirement for more and better-quality local housing. Quite a few people they were supporting had housing problems, either not being able to find suitable accommodation, living in poor quality housing or struggling to pay private sector rents. They had also discovered there were plenty of local empty homes falling into disrepair and not serving the local community, especially in the Park ward area to the west of Halifax town centre. This is the area with the densest housing in the borough and the highest concentration of empty homes.



Figure 14: Halifax Opportunities Trust

### First steps

In 2019 they tentatively started to investigate empty homes in the area. They liaised with Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council and the designated empty homes officer who sent out flyers asking owners of empty property whether they would be interested in either selling or leasing the property to HOT or other local charities. They were working in partnership with two other local charities: HappyDays, a homeless charity and Women Centre, helping women with debts, benefits, victims of domestic violence and more.

In addition, HOT also researched whether it would be viable to invest in a new build housing project. There was an underused brownfield site close to their business centre which was a possible site for development.

### How the funding helped

The funding they were awarded allowed their local enabler hub Leeds Community Homes to conduct a feasibility study. The feasibility study concluded that a new build on this site would be too risky for the charity and not viable. Instead, they should focus on empty homes to help solve a local housing need.

Leeds Community Homes also supported HOT to draft a business case for the empty homes, establishing whether it should work with a registered provider partner or not. The business case included financial projections of the houses' value, how much they would need to borrow to buy or lease and renovate, and whether they should use the charity's reserves.

### The future

HOT now have a robust business plan to approach owners of empty homes and start purchasing. They are looking to employ a dedicated skilled member of staff to undertake this work and project manage the acquisition and refurbishment of properties.



*Figure 15: Prospective housing options, Halifax Opportunities Trust*

The Start Up Support grant has enabled HOT to learn more about the complexities of developing new-build housing. It has helped it understand the sequencing of developing housing and the practical steps to take to create new local homes. It has helped to decide they should work independently instead of working with a partner organisation to acquire empty properties. The support from Leeds Community Homes has been invaluable, as has advice and support from other local housing providers such as Calder Valley Community Land Trust.

## Progress at the site stage

### Type of scheme

60 groups plan to develop new build housing; 22 groups a combination of a new build, a conversion or refurbishment; 11 groups plan to refurbish existing housing stock; and 5 groups to convert another building use to housing<sup>iv</sup>.

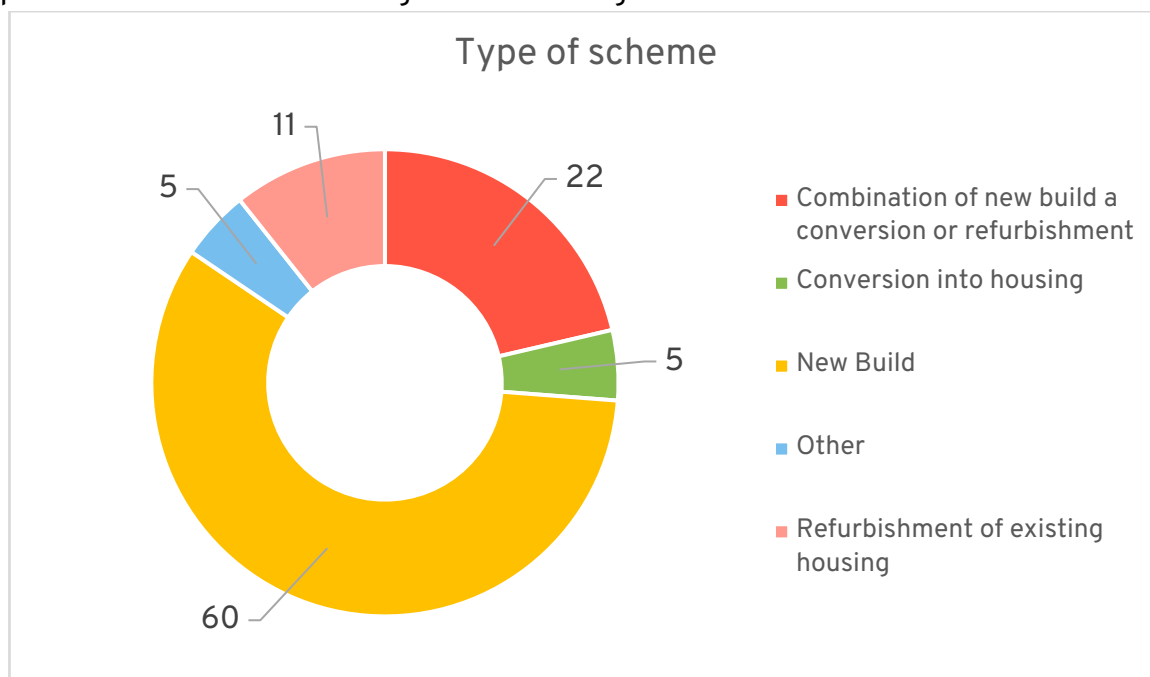


Figure 16: Type of scheme

For many groups, such as Age UK North Tyneside, new-build housing provides an opportunity to ensure that the space is custom-designed to cater for a range of mobility needs and can represent a more cost-effective process by enabling groups to maximise space and cost efficiencies at each stage of development.

For other groups, such as Halifax Opportunities Trust, a feasibility study revealed the opposite:

“This has led us to the conclusion that we will progress the empty homes project and put on hold our plans for new build houses, as this looked financially very difficult and there were legal and governance complications that we decided were too complex to tackle at the moment. We now have a strong plan to build on for the next stage of the project, which is about the identification and acquisition of properties and liaison with potential funders of the refurb of these properties. We are also much clearer and have a plan about working in partnership with an existing social landlord to support our project. The grant money has been absolutely crucial in buying in expertise and also providing us with a focus to push forward the project.”

*Halifax Opportunities Trust*



## Identifying and securing a site

Identifying and securing viable sites continues to be the most challenging task for the majority of groups.

Challenges include rising property and land prices, scarcity of viable options, competition from local and national developers, nimbyism and ‘image’ problems of community led housing groups.

“We found it very difficult to secure an available house due to Covid-19 and gentrification of the housing market. We found that properties that satisfy the standard of what we would like to provide for our tenants have been scarce, or out of budget.

We have also faced a lot of stigma from estate agents due to the client group we want to house, which are predominately people on the journey to mental health recovery. To combat this, we have brought on board allies that are well respected in the property world, who have helped us get our foot in the door.”

*The Self Actualisation Project - SAP Hastings*

Many groups will explore a number of sites in the process of identifying a viable option which can be resource hungry but can also have positive consequences such as helping to clarify their vision, distilling the key characteristics of a site, and developing skills within the group. For instance, Horizon Cohousing in Gloucestershire learned how to reject ‘long shot’ sites more quickly over the course of evaluating about 40 potential sites, by developing strategies for screening problematic and undesirable characteristic - like flooding or insurmountable planning challenges - to save time.

A significant challenge faced by groups is when a site that has been invested in experiences setbacks or falls through.

With support from the fund, 22 groups reported that the search for a site had begun, 30 groups had identified a viable site, and 9 had secured a site for development”

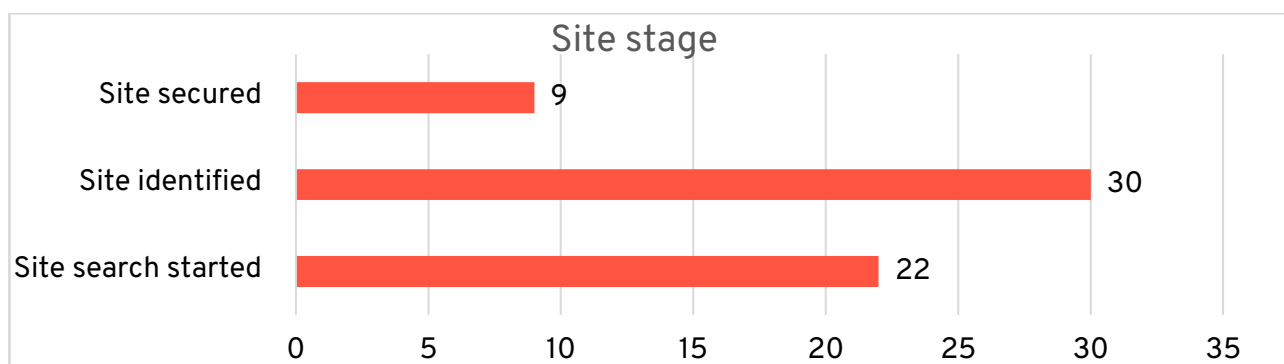


Figure 17: Count of groups searching, identifying and securing a site

## Role of the local authority

The role of the local authority can be significant and a supportive local authority who has a good understanding of community led housing significantly improves the likelihood of success for groups. For many groups, the local authority was crucial in helping them to identify and explore the viability of potential sites.

“We have focused on trying to identify genuinely viable sites. This has involved some gentle lobbying of key councilor’s (that sometimes worked well), building relationships with planning and housing officers, local landowners and small-scale developers. But you have to be relentless in chasing them.”

*Horizon Cohousing – Gloucestershire*

“Working in partnership with city council and county councilors as well as officers from the County Council is essential. Identifying other stakeholders and working with them is also essential. In our case this has included Hereford College of Arts, Hereford BID and local businesses wishing to create a lively artists/creative quarter in the city centre.”

*Hereford Community Land Trust*

“The search for land was, to say the least, difficult and it was fortunate that the support of the local council enabled a call for CLT sites as part of the new Thame Neighbourhood Plan process. One came forward and that is the subject of our current efforts. Most of the land around Thame is secured by developers' option agreements. Unless community led housing groups are allowed a share of the affordable units portion of general development in the future this struggle will continue. I see no reason why CLH groups cannot access these opportunities, especially if supported by a detailed housing needs analysis.”

*Thame CLT*

Equally, groups who reported that their local authority were not supportive of community led housing, for a range of reasons, reported that progress was slower. One group reported that their local council didn’t feel able to fulfil their duties to help with land, due to the council’s own financially precarious position. Another group reported that a change in council administration slowed progress as they lost the connections they’d developed with the cabinet and had to invest time in relationship development all over again.

There are 27 enabling hubs in England which provide full national coverage except Worcestershire, Staffordshire and parts of Lancashire. Almost all enabler hubs offer a full range of community led housing services.

As well as supporting community housing groups, enabler hubs are also able to provide assistance to local authorities. For instance, supporting them to develop and implement community led housing policies and frameworks, assisting with potential site identification, relationship brokering, and specialist advice.



In many instances, enabler hubs act as a strategic partner facilitating partnerships across the community, statutory and private sectors.

## **Commissioning professional surveys**

Some groups are fortunate to have specialist skillsets within their core membership, but the majority of groups need to engage a range of professionals to move the project forward, for which funding is crucial.

Site surveys provide much needed information to understand the nature of the site, determine viability and inform the design of the intended housing. Surveys undertaken by groups in the programme were wide ranging and included: preliminary ecology surveys, geotechnical and topographical surveys, geo-environmental assessments, arboricultural impact assessments, habitat and bat surveys, telephone and other services surveys, buildings surveys, and site valuation reports.

Other professional expertise engaged by recipients of the Start Up Support Programme include planning consultants, land agents, feasibility consultants, architects to develop concept drawings and cost proposals, legal advisors to support with heads of terms, as well as enlisting support from housing providers.

“The grant has helped us to access excellent professional services and support which has allowed us to engage with contacts we would have probably struggled to access. Without the support of these professionals, their contacts and their knowledge, working together to look at ranges of solutions and opportunities available to us going forward, we wouldn’t have been able to establish the feasibility of the site.

Funding has helped to draw up initial architect drawings and cost consultant proposals as well as adjusting the plans and cost proposals as revisions were required. We were also able to take the proposal to Durham County Council for Outline Pre-Application Advice.”

*East Durham Community Initiatives*

“The other issue has been the changing nature of the design options as a result of sometimes conflicting survey information. At every stage of the feasibility process, we have had to change and adapt plans owing to last minute changes e.g. the uncertainty about the path of an underground sewer pipe, the discovery that the ground conditions could only support pile foundations and the latest news that there is a BT telephone cabinet to reroute. This has meant not being able to confidently process with the preferred design option, but we remain reasonably confident that the scheme will go ahead.”

*Pembroke St Estate Management Board Ltd*

For many groups, when a particular site is discovered to be or becomes no longer a viable option, the money that has been invested in technical surveys or the development of site-specific plans will be needed again for the next potential site. In addition to financial resources being finite, so too are the volunteer resources.

## Case study: Rotunda, Liverpool

Rotunda is an anchor charity providing accessible and inclusive college education for adults from a Grade 2 listed Georgian terrace in Kirkdale, North Liverpool. Alongside the career progression courses and community education programmes in the arts, humanities, and vocational and functional skills, the college also provides a range of supportive services. From free counselling, welfare and legal advice, community events, and skills workshops to a garden bistro, wellbeing garden, on-site nursery, IT suite and a range of spaces for desk hire, events, meetings and filming, Rotunda aim to provide a holistic approach to service delivery.



*Figure 18: Rotunda*

“Kirkdale is a lovely area, the people are fantastic. The area was part of slum clearance in the 70s and nothing had changed much in the last 20 years. There’d been a lack of investment in infrastructure – the nearest supermarket was in town or a bus ride away. The quality of housing hadn’t been improved and the green spaces were desolate.”

*Maxine Ennis, CEO Rotunda*

Amenities in the community have improved in the last 5 years due to investment, particularly around housing, which has also improved use of green spaces. But there’s still a lot of poverty and people still struggle to find accommodation they would like in the area.

“New houses have been built by developers which are supposed to be affordable for local people, but they become student accommodation or houses of multiple occupancy. Local people who were born and bred here want babies but can’t find accommodation that suits. It’s meant we end up having a transient population which affects the whole community.”

*Maxine Ennis, CEO Rotunda*



*Figure 19: Rotunda*

### **First steps**

The vision is to develop a campus which provides affordable housing for single parents participating in adult learning, addressing a range of needs in the community. Rather than student or supported accommodation in the traditional sense, it will be a place of change, for safe and purposeful homes which bring together living and education into one unique package. A place where they have a modern, affordable comfortable home, and have access to pastoral care and support (childcare, advice, and guidance), supporting their participation and attainment. By integrating the ownership and management of housing into that offer they will provide a full wrap around service for learners from the community.

The goal is to support a pipeline of individuals ready to take the next step in their education, working with universities to make referrals as a specialist provider for single parents looking to re-engage with higher and further education.

### **How the funding helped**

The grant helped the group to shape their vision for a co-housing scheme - as a natural extension to the work already undertaken. They used the funding to explore the rationale of community led housing and to explore options around land, stakeholders, what a scheme would look like, ownership and management options. 1:1 support was provided by a combination from the local enabler hub and specialist advice from Locality and enabled the group to proceed through a pre-feasibility stage, engaging with other professionals to develop the details in line with the core vision.

### *Wider support*

Maxine credits their progress to the tenacity of the staff team, a supportive board of trustees and the support of a number of key partners in the area.

In particular, Rotunda acknowledges Liverpool City Combined Authority for being supportive of the project from the start, arranging several meetings with key members of the council, identifying potential funding opportunities and supporting the group towards making their aspirations a reality.

“A key part of the support was helping us to have consultations with landowners, and the local and combined authorities. Engagement of stakeholders during the Covid-19 situation was tricky but not insurmountable. We were able to do most meetings over digital channels. We found that it was easier than anticipated in engaging the landowner in meaningful conversations regarding the scheme ideas and they were fully on board from day one.”

*Maxine Ennis, CEO Rotunda*

Maxine also reached out to a number of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) operating locally, such as Regenda Homes, who happily provided practical advice about becoming an Registered Provider: what the process entails and how long it would take. Maxine notes that Local MP Kim Johnson was also incredibly supportive of the project.

The support was practical and helped them understand the landscape and process, but it also gave Rotunda reassurance and confidence.

“It was encouraging to know this is actually something people want Rotunda to deliver, that there was that faith in the organisation, that we had the support and backing of those ‘in the know’.”

*Maxine Ennis, CEO Rotunda*

### *The future*

Despite the good progress made, negotiations over the land stalled when the owners were unwilling to sell the land unless the owners were allowed to be the developer of the site. This arrangement ultimately didn't suit the needs of Rotunda and they are currently exploring other sites and the likelihood of the land coming back into public ownership. They are looking for further funding to navigate the next stages of land purchase and development.

Despite the obstacles, Maxine is looking to the future.

“We were able to have conversations with the community about what people really wanted to see locally. We have been in conversation with the sector as a whole, sharing stories and experiences. There's a will for community led housing in the area, and although it has yet to come to fruition, there's a strong commitment.



You've got to ask yourself, have you got the capacity in the organisation to do housing? Don't bite off more than you can chew and do things gradually, step by step. It's a lot: understanding the political landscape, understanding the funding and how long it can take. You've got to bring together your aspirations and the realisation that you can't do everything at once. But there are fantastic people out there with knowledge and resources that can support if you can listen and ask for help".

*Maxine Ennis, CEO Rotunda*



*Figure 20: Rotunda wellbeing garden*

## **Progress at the plan stage**

### **Determining the scale and tenure mix of the scheme**

Figure 12 shows the range in scale of proposed community led housing projects, who received funding from the Start Up Programme<sup>vi</sup>.

Housing developments come in three size categories in planning law. Minor development - up to nine dwellings; small-scale major development - 10-199 dwellings; and large-scale major development - 200+ dwellings. 30 Start Up Support Programme projects are planning to deliver minor dwellings, 72 are planning small-scale major developments and just one group is planning to deliver a large-scale major development.

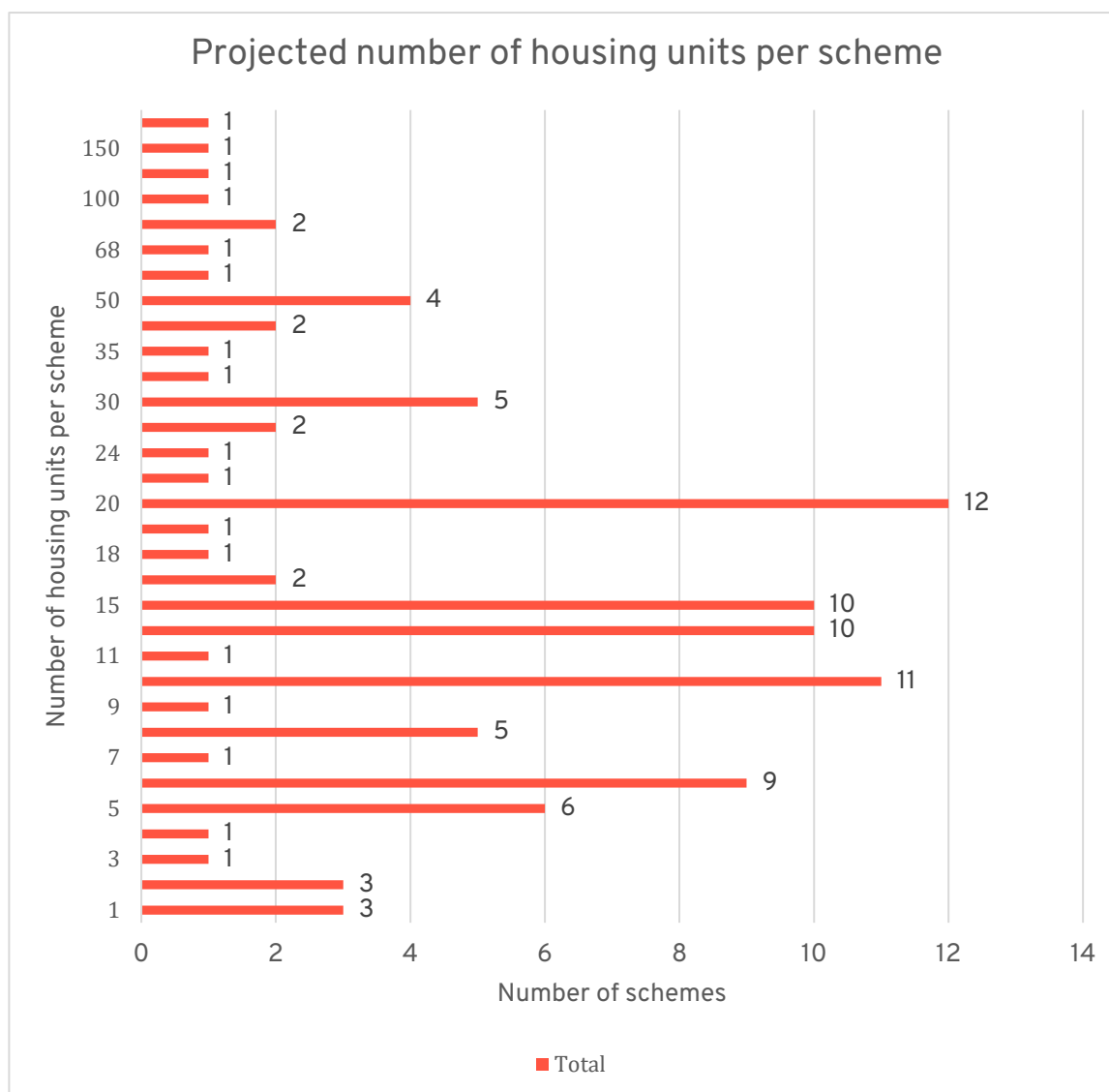
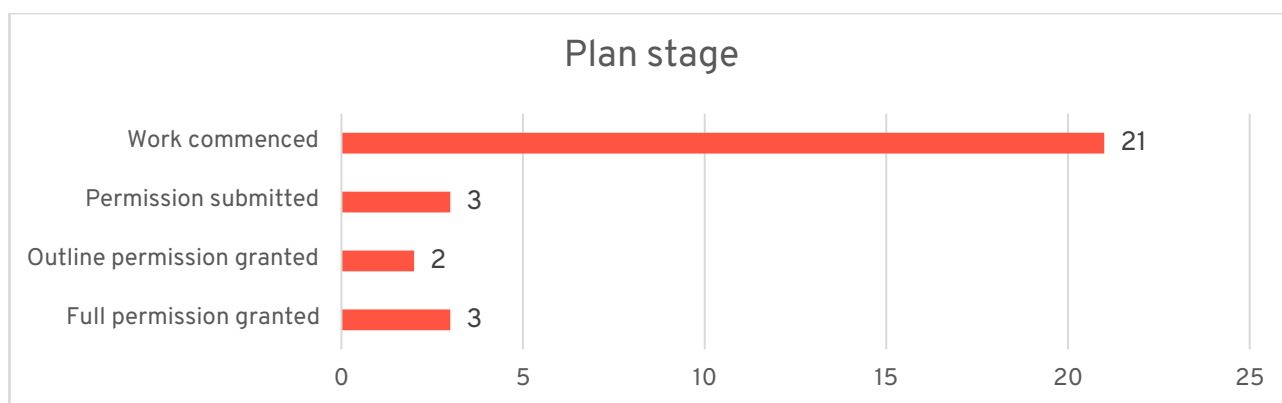


Figure 21: Size of proposed housing scheme – number of homes in a project

For groups at the earlier stages of pre-development, these projections are based more on aspiration and prediction rather than detailed viability assessments or modelling. However, they provide a rough indication of how many houses could be developed and for groups in the plan stage, projections become more concrete. Of the reports analysed, grantees from the Start Up Support Programme project that they will create a combined total of 1,580 units of housing, though it is anticipated this figure will be considerably higher when considering the full cohort of Start Up Support Programme projects.

## Planning

21 groups reported commencing the planning process, 3 groups submitted and were awaiting news about their planning application during the funding window, 2 groups received outline planning permission and 3 groups achieved full planning approval during the funding window with support from the Start Up Support Programme<sup>vii</sup>.



*Figure 22: Progress with planning permission*

The funding enabled groups to access professional planning and architectural support to move their projects through the planning process.

“We have worked with a local planning consultancy and eco building group called Terra Perma Geo and have been given a great deal of very insightful information and support from them regarding planning policy in our locality as well as an ‘experiential day’, looking in more detail at site criteria and low impact living.”

*Oakwood Community*

Neighbourhood Services Company Limited were able to prepare drawings and submit a planning application for 3 sites in Langley Close, Landford Avenue and St Swithins over the 12 months grant period.

Many groups reported that the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in far longer waiting times to receive pre-application planning advice from local planning teams with some councils freezing their pre-application advice service.

## Securing funding

The availability of revenue funding for community led housing is consistently reported by Start Up Support Programme groups as an ongoing challenge.

“The biggest problem is lack of funding to provide for everyday funding costs such as a website, association membership, postage and stationery, insurance, training etc. Especially at this time when most trust funds and charities are only considering direct Covid-19 related expenditures. Trustees have been having to fund much of this. We have managed to use some cost-free publicity such as articles in a free newspaper and community Ad Magazine articles to widen knowledge of the Trust to the public and in addition recruit members, volunteers and Trustees and encourage people to look at our website.”

*Thanet Community Land Trust Steering Group*



A number of groups reported securing further revenue funding during the course of the Start Up support, highlighting how the programme has been a catalyst to leverage further funding for their projects and into their communities.

A number of groups received support from their local authority, local enabler hub or community led housing advisor to identify potential sources of capital funds and develop viable funding plans.

Creating a model in which housing is affordable, and that prospective tenants or residents aren't expected to bring significant capital investment to the project, is a challenge and requires funding from elsewhere.

For some groups, such as It Takes a City, community share offers can provide an additional source of investment. Such share offers enable members of the community and supporters from further afield to pool their resources and help get projects to where they need to be financially. There are a number of platforms available to groups, such as the Community Shares Unit, Crowdfunder and Ethex, some of which offer development and match funding grants to groups<sup>4</sup>.

Cohousing West Midlands reported the challenges of securing large group mortgages in the current climate.

“Buildstore does a great job brokering flexible development-driven mortgages, but these are all for individuals. Banks like Triodos will provide the large loans required, but these are at commercial loan rates, rather than mortgage loan rates. We've discovered that Ecology Building Society has increased the amount of money it can lend, to account for co-operative types of housing projects. So funding should be less of an issue than we originally thought. We'll put together a patchwork of little bits and pieces of financing around the edges (e.g. a community share issue for the solar panels on our roofs), but it seems more do-able and we may not have to take out the commercial loan.”

*Cohousing West Midlands*

Some groups were able to access funding directly from local government, for instance East Durham Community Initiatives were supported to submit a S106 planning gain commuted sums bid submitted with Durham County Council.

For some groups, the Start Up funding was a catalyst for reputation-building more generally, such as Hereford Community Land Trust who established themselves as a key delivery partner in the area.

“The completed survey has enabled Hereford CLT (HCLT) to identify potential sites for affordable housing within the city centre and begin the process of approaching owners regarding a sale. The report was also widely circulated amongst city organisations and has helped show HCLT is a useful collaborator in other city regeneration projects which are

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<sup>4</sup> [Community Share Issues](#) | [Community Led Homes](#)

coming on stream including cultural regeneration as part of the Towns Fund. HCLT is now actively engaged in assessing viability of a city centre site to include accommodation on the top floor, workshops on middle floor, and gallery/retail space on the ground floor.”

*Hereford Community Land Trust*

## **Case study: It Takes a City, Cambridge**

Chris Jenkin is one of a group of local residents who came together to address the high numbers of homeless people in Cambridge, having learned about their circumstances through church outreach work.

Following an inspirational meeting with Andy Burnham about the non-partisan, cross party approach to addressing homelessness in Manchester, Chris and the group developed the idea of a summit on homelessness in 2018. There were 150 attendees including many people with lived experience and the event was sponsored by Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury.

“Hostel dwellers are low on the housing priority list and rough sleepers don’t want to go into a hostel situation, they want their own front door and somewhere to call home”.

*Chris Jenkin, Trustee, It Takes a City*

Ideas from the summit were shaped into action groups and It Takes a City was formed as a charitable company which acts as an umbrella organisation for a number of smaller projects.

One of the main conversations was around housing and they began to develop a strategic approach, identifying what the barriers are, such as the increasing cost of land.

### **First steps**

In January 2020 a parcel of land with a willing landowner was identified, on which to develop a supported housing scheme for the homeless, both rough sleepers and those in hostels struggling to move on to independent accommodation.

The landowner then commissioned a local agent to help prepare a pre-application planning enquiry for an initial 20 home scheme.

### *How the funding helped*

The Start Up funding enabled It Takes a City to explore the feasibility of the site and community led housing more generally. With support from solicitors Anthony Collins, they applied for registration as a charitable community benefit society, and It Takes a City CLT was formed in July 2020.

The Start Up funding also enabled the group to commission project management support and submit a pre-application planning enquiry. Following a period of negotiation with planners who were not favourable to the scheme, the group concluded that they should consider other sites, and, building on existing good relationships with local authorities and major (non-commercial) landowners, the project manager developed outline proposals for about twelve sites around Greater Cambridge.

“Housing for the homeless is considered a very worthy cause by all concerned, but not all wish the solution to be in their area. We have also found that some planners, at the present time, seem very concerned to fit our project into a particular box into which it will not fit.”

*Chris Jenkin, Trustee, It Takes a City*

The group narrowed the long list of sites to two viable options, one owned by Cambridge City Council and one by the University of Cambridge.

### *Wider support*

The group developed a share scheme, which raised nearly £50,000 for planning and project management costs. The group are now committing these funds for detailed proposals, planning applications and professional fees.



*Figure 23: Artist's impression of the modular housing proposed for the university site*

The group also developed relationships with two social investors who have committed to buying, for lease to the CLT, the first six modular homes which will be installed on the two sites.

To increase the social impact of the project, the modular homes are being built by a partner organisation who are providing a training environment for disadvantaged young people.

### The future

The group have committed funds to the development of a marketing and fund-raising campaign to finance the two sites, one short-term campaign requiring modest additional funding, and one longer-term funding campaign requiring another share offer which will be marketed via the online investment platform Ethex.



Figure 24: Proposed site plan for the university scheme

A key learning, one the group believes they share with many community led housing projects, is the importance of mounting a significant publicity, engagement and awareness campaign, which is the next item on the agenda for It Takes a City.

# 1:1 support from a CLH advisor and enabler hubs

The groups who received the 1:1 support stream of the Start Up Support Programme widely credited it as being crucial to the degree of progress they were able to make.

“Vital face to face meetings with community enabler Mark Read, who was a guiding light throughout, allowed us to survive to begin afresh after lockdown.

We have been able to identify buildings and think innovatively out of the box.

Mark Read has confirmed the completion of an initial proposal for further funding with Groundwork, Locality and/or Unlimited. This is probably the most important and final step as this proposal was co-created with the community. The Council has co-operated with Mark in finding a piece of land to start construction, though this has been obstructed by the lockdown and we may need to look for a new plot.”

*ECOmodulor CIC*

The support provided was tailored to the individual groups’ needs: supporting them to understand and move through the ‘standardised’ development steps but with an understanding that each group’s needs and their operational context requires vastly different approaches and solutions.

“The grant has enabled us to carry out a full and thorough feasibility study, supported by expertise from Leeds Community Homes. It was difficult sometimes to envisage the various stages of development and get the sequencing correct. However, the support from Leeds Community Homes was hugely helpful in clarifying this and we have also been provided with a 'route map' towards development of our empty homes scheme which sets out the steps in chronological order and the resources/skills required.”

*Halifax Opportunities Trust*

By drawing on the lived experience and existing network of community led housing advisors and enabler hubs, groups were granted further resources and expertise to negotiate and mitigate the myriad challenges.

“The grant has allowed us to receive excellent advice which was able to set our needs and thinking into an integrated framework of business planning, fundraising and legal considerations. In the end the setting up a CLT for a charity primarily focused on sport provision was a step too far in terms of land use and the complexity of the process. However the learning will not be lost.”

*Halesworth Campus*

The specialist support brings ‘whole-process’ insight, providing strategic advice to maximise the potential for success and improve efficiencies.

“Pre-lockdown, the group attended three all-day workshops with our Enabler (Thomas Beale, Ecomotive) to get a foundation for visioning and focusing the project. This resulted in a clear vision document which has guided the groups development and supported communication of our aims with key stakeholders e.g. Bristol City Council. We commissioned our Enabler Thomas Beale at Ecomotive to develop a detailed financial model to suit our group. This has been completed and has demonstrated the early-stage viability of the scheme. The model will be updated with more detailed figures for construction and management as we progress the design stage, enabling the group to make informed decisions with a clear understanding of the financial implications.”

*Home Time*

## Case study: SAP Hastings



## SELF ACTUALISATION PROJECT HASTINGS

### First Steps

The Self Actualisation Project Hastings (SAP Hastings) was formed by Sharon and Lily in response to the rising need for housing in their community.

“There isn’t enough social housing locally and there are lots of people in temporary accommodation. There is a higher level of people on the list with mental health difficulties than the national average and they’re in dire need.”

*Sharon Rhodes, Founder and Director*

Sharon is bringing her 20 years lived experience of bipolar to developing a housing project that puts residents’ mental health needs at the heart of the development.

“Over the last 20 years I realised I’ve been poorly housed for my needs. Many people need a second bedroom for their support workers, but they aren’t allocated them. I was in a terrible state living on my own and I was having to try and find carers who could support me. A few years ago I was staying in a hostel with other backpackers, and I realised how important it was to have people around you, how much of a difference it makes. And that’s when I realised how much cooperative housing could be of benefit to me and others experiencing mental health challenges, that a cooperative could really feel like a home.”



*Sharon Rhodes, Founder and Director*

### **Vision for the project**

SAP Hastings aims to provide a cooperative housing solution to people leaving long term mental health supported accommodation in the Hastings area. Leaving supported accommodation into a one-bedroom flat or bedsit can be detrimental to recovery. Their aim is to alleviate these problems for the tenants with co-housing and enabling cooperative living values.

“The name – Self-Actualisation Project – is about living life to the fullest potential”.

*Sharon Rhodes, Founder and Director*

Their vision is that each tenant will receive weekly or daily support (depending on their needs) from a member of the SAP team. This could be help with cooking, engagement in the community, bill paying, being a good neighbour, technology training, employment support, life skills, help with shopping, tenancy sustainability, attending appointments and much more.

“It will be about ownership and empowerment: how to take control but without losing the support. Residents will be supported to develop their entrepreneurial skills and take on part-time work.”

*Sharon Rhodes, Founder and Director*

The lettings process is being designed to allow people to get to know the housing community at their own pace with as little pressure as possible. The focus will be on creating a warm atmosphere and holding welcoming, informal events, so people feel safe and unjudged.

“We want it to be a sanctuary. I’ve based so much of the design on my best experiences from supported living.”

*Sharon Rhodes, Founder and Director*

### **How the funding helped**

Sharon credits the support as being transformative for their project development. They split the Start Up funding for this between weekly coaching sessions and training sessions where a need was identified.

“Through the support grant we have had weekly 1-2-1 sessions with Jess Steele, from Jericho Roads solutions, to refine our processes. We’ve had incredible support from Jess – it’s felt like we had her undivided attention. Knowing that we had that weekly meeting in gave us structure.”

*Sharon Rhodes, Founder and Director*



With support from the housing advisor and the Seed Corn grant funding staff time, the fledgling group were able to significantly drive their project forward. In just a year, the group were able to:

- form as a Community Interest Company, formalise their co-operative agreement and undertake Housing Co-op training
- develop their governance including indemnity insurance, proof of alignment with the mental health act, risk assessments, policies and processes, and the lettings plan
- develop relationships with a range of stakeholders, including communities of mental health, Hastings Borough Council, East Sussex County Council, local councilors, the mayor, locally aligned community groups, local co-ops, mental health nurses, local developers, and local businesses
- engage with a number of potential sites.

The grant enabled SAP Hastings to scope the feasibility of a site and make an offer for purchase. Ultimately that option didn't work out, but the group are currently in conversation about a new site with a local developer and philanthropist, following a chance encounter.

"I saw him out in Hastings one day and I thought, 'let's just go for it!' I introduced myself and I pitched him the project in 5 minutes. I told him about my personal experiences and our aspirations and since then we've built up the relationship. We're in discussion to turn an office block into residential housing. He's been fantastic!"

*Sharon Rhodes, Founder and Director*

### **Challenges and Learning**

Despite the successes, there have been challenges along the way.

"We found it very difficult to secure an available house due to Covid-19 and Gentrification of the housing market. We found that properties that satisfy the standard of what we would like to provide for our tenants have been scarce, or out of budget."

*Sharon Rhodes, Founder and Director*

Responsively, SAP Hastings approached private investors and have tried to make alliances with other community groups who share the same vision that may be able to partner with or match-fund the project.

"But we also faced a lot of Stigma from estate agents due to the client group we want to house, which are predominately people on the journey to Mental Health Recovery. To combat this we have brought on board allies that are well respected in the property world, who have helped us get our foot in the door."

*Sharon Rhodes, Founder and Director*

Having an advisor to turn to when challenges arose made a big difference:

“Jess knows the people we needed to talk to, it’s her world, but she also knew what our needs were too. She helped us to operate confidently, we couldn’t have done it without her by our side. Having the grant meant that we were taken seriously by Hastings Borough Council. We’ve since secured further funding from them for the next steps.”

*Sharon Rhodes, Founder and Director*

### The Future

As well as looking inwards at resident support, SAP Hastings are committed to place-based development and plan to hold a series of workshops for awareness raising about mental health within the wider community. Their hope is to develop a discount system to support local businesses who have received training in mental health awareness.

“We want tenants to be integrated with the wider community – building up those connections. This way, people in the community will know how to react and who to call if people need support when they’re out and about. We want to support the wider to community to be mental-health orientated as well.”

*Sharon Rhodes, Founder and Director*

## The impact of Covid-19

The majority of fund-holders cited the impact of Covid-19 on their plans. Most notably, the pandemic prevented groups from undertaking face to face consultations and community engagement.

Negative impacts on projects reported included: difficulties with community engagement; reduced opportunity for peer-learning and project visits; delays in planning processes; difficulties reaching staff in the relevant statutory bodies; reduced volunteer and staff time and increased workloads; challenges with digital communications, such as reduced ability to develop inter-personal connections and ‘team spirit’, as well as the digital divide and people not being digitally connected.

A large number of groups also acknowledged that the pandemic also created a number of positive opportunities.

Positive impacts on projects reported included:

- more time to develop relationships with the council and other stakeholders
- the development of technology and the opportunity these can present
- more focused time on the project
- more time to expand skillset and learning
- more volunteers available.

“The current pandemic has delayed our planning application. However, we have taken the time to build our relationship with the local authority, secure their support and work with them to explore how we address issues of homelessness in Birmingham and how we can best support homeless families. We have also been able to work with the council and our CLH adviser to explore financial options to ensure that we deliver an ethically funded and sustainable project.

This time has also given us the opportunity to develop relationships with local stakeholders and residents. We had already consulted with them and presented our plans at community events before the pandemic and over the ensuing months have worked with them to identify, understand and find solutions to issues that our currently effecting the lives of local communities and to consider how we can best continue to provide support through the ‘Family First’ centre when it is built.”

*Malachi Community Land Trust*



*Figure 25: Malcolm Locker community hub, Malachi*

“At first this was a problem but early in the process we decided to have weekly meetings for one hour a week. This focused our thinking and made us concentrate our work. Looking back at the year we probably moved the project further on by all being able to meet weekly online than we would have done by having longer monthly meetings in person. Where we think that we struggled is with the creative process. It is much harder doing visualisation and group-building activities online and we are looking forward to an away day in person later in the year.”

*Community of Grace – GraceWorks Gardens Ltd*

“Getting going in a pandemic has obviously been challenging. Everything is taking longer to coordinate and make happen due to reduced staffing in organisations and increased workloads. Technology has been a saviour, and has enabled us to incorporate, hold our Facilitated Purpose and Mission work. I only met one Founding Director in the flesh this week when signing papers!

Normally, socials would be an integral part of our community work, as it improves team bonding and interpersonal relationships, therefore making our working relationships stronger. This has been greatly missed, and we look forward to being able to meet as a Board of Directors in real life soon.

The process of working through a pandemic, with a change in Administration immediately after completing on the site purchase, and as Harbour Ambition incorporates, has given us a time to get together as a team, and grow as individuals in our expanding our skillset and experience.”

*Harbour Ambition Community Led Housing*

“Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, its restrictions and lockdown, the project was challenged in coordinating with other community led housing groups and visitations. Our pool of volunteers also reduced due to Covid-19 infections, social isolation and shielding. We were also challenged in facilitating community engagement meetings following the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health, livelihood and financial circumstances of the community and its people.

Through other support services provided by the organization, we have been able to provide needed support activities for our volunteers and community to reduce social isolation, improve their mental health and reduce food poverty. In addition, we adopted online sessions to host our community engagement activities and recruit more members.”

*Grassroots Enterprise for Social Inclusion and Poverty Relief*

“The pandemic made it impossible to hold community engagement events 2020-2021. But this situation actually seems to have been beneficial in helping to maintain a clearly-controlled EngageMalvern priorities-focus/aim via the on-line working group meetings.”

*EngageMalvern*

“Engagement of stakeholders during the Covid-19 situation was tricky but not insurmountable. We were able to do most meetings over digital channels. However, finding the right person to speak to within the combined authority during lockdown proved a challenge.”

*Rotunda Ltd*

“Covid-19 has been challenging! We have a large number of residents that are not online - perhaps unfamiliar, technophobic, without computer access or with no desire to go online. Other households are very adept at using social media and other tools. This creates a big disparity in community engagement. Our grant enabled us to look at improving communication with a large range of demographics by using old school paper publicity, combined with modern communication methods.”

*Coldean Community Organisation Ltd*

An interesting outcome was that a number of groups were well placed to utilise their skills, time and network to deliver crisis response to the community during the peak of the crisis. In this sense the Start Up Support Programme has contributed to strengthening the social

infrastructure that so many communities came to rely on, and which continue to operate for the wider benefit of the community beyond the end of the funding period.

“There was a short delay at the start of the pandemic while some of our principals became heavily engaged in working to provide emergency accommodation and support for rough sleepers under the ‘Everybody In’ programme.”

*It Takes a City*

A number of groups reported that the flexibility of the Start Up Support Programme and grantees’ ability to amend their project on account of Covid-19, was very helpful and enabled them to be agile and responsive.

## Conclusion

Community led housing continues to be a diverse and innovative field, with groups addressing a wide range of housing needs and social situations with creative and community-focused solutions. They achieve this by utilising a range of approaches from co-housing, co-operatives, tenant management organisations, existing community anchors, and new start-up groups.

By developing their governance structures, incorporating, providing training and skill development opportunities, increasing community engagement, and employing clear communications, groups were able to develop themselves into successful conduits of social change and progress much needed housing projects. Of the reports analysed, groups project that they will create a combined total of 1,580 units of housing, a figure likely much higher when accounting for the groups not included in the analysis.

The Start Up Support Programme was a catalyst for many groups, enabling projects to access financial resources and expertise which helped to propel their projects forward. Limitations on available funding continue to be a significant challenge for many groups, particularly when prospective sites don’t come to fruition or fall through in later stages of pre-development. Although innovative funding methods such as community shares are being developed in many areas, there remains a very real funding need for pre-development groups.

Despite a range of structural challenges, including access to and the increasing cost of land and buildings, and funding restraints, groups were able to progress their projects through the group, site, and plan stages by accessing a range of professional and peer support with support from the Start Up Support Programme.

Local authorities continue to be pivotal to many groups success and have a key role to play. Delivery of this support varies widely between authorities, though the ongoing

development of a network of enabler hubs is a key factor in encouraging many local authorities to be more supportive of local group's ambitions.

The impact of Covid-19 brought challenges but also opportunities. Projects were slowed in some instances, due to process delays with consultants and statutory authorities, but were provided more time to focus and develop projects in other instances. Digital networking opportunities presented themselves but meant that some people were excluded from engagement. A few groups demonstrated they could also achieve a wider purpose for their communities, providing vital social infrastructure during the peak of the crisis.

The flexible delivery of the Start Up Support Programme enabled groups to be agile during the pandemic and responsive during a period of significant upheaval, learning which can shape future grant delivery.

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<sup>i</sup> Application data.

<sup>ii</sup> Application data.

<sup>iii</sup> Report data.

<sup>iv</sup> Report data.

<sup>v</sup> Report data.

<sup>vi</sup> Report data.

<sup>vii</sup> Report data.

# Appendix A

## Project report structure

Organisation Name	
Seed Corn grant approved	
Support grant Approved	
End of grant date: Seed Corn grant spent	
Seed corn grant returned	
End of grant: Support grant spent	
Support grant returned	
End of Grant Approved date	
Actual Grant End Date	
Revised Project End Date (if applicable)	
Proposed approach	
No of homes planned	
Community Asset	
Social impact	
Stage working on	
Site Stage	
Plan Stage	
Concept Stage	
Progress through grant	Longer text
Issues and solutions	Longer text



# Appendix B

## Interview guide for case studies

- What is the area around the proposed site like? What kind of housing, amenities, public transport? What is great about living in the area, what are the drawbacks?
- Could you tell me a little bit about your group/organisation, its history and any other work it does?
- How did you utilise the Seed Corn grant? What were you able to achieve with the funding? What stage in the project have you got to?
- Did you access the Support grant? Has the support been helpful? In what ways?
- Who is involved (board/staff/volunteers), what skills, knowledge and experience do they have? How have you been inclusive and worked with diverse communities? What partners do you work with?
- Next steps – what is next for the project?



Community led housing is a way that people and communities can come together to solve their own housing challenges and provide high quality and affordable homes. The homes are managed or owned by the community in the way they want.

Community Led Homes is run by four leading community led housing organisations: Confederation of Co-operative Housing, Locality, Community Land Trust Network and UK Cohousing.

We have come together to make it easier for communities to access support and build a lasting movement.

Register to hear all the news about events, training and funding:

[communityledhomes.org.uk](https://communityledhomes.org.uk)



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