



Looking for land in Leeds

An interview with Steve Hoey – co-founder and CLT
director at Leeds Community Homes



Why is finding land such a challenging issue in Yorkshire?

In much of Yorkshire land prices are very high compared to house values and incomes because the cities are vibrant and growing, and the rural areas are desirable for second home owners and holiday lets, so competition is strong for land and there is not much of it available for purchase for building homes due to planning constraints or site suitability.

What are the best things that groups can do to find land?

Strike a deal with the local authority and/or work in partnership with a Housing Association on a development. In rural areas, finding a sympathetic landowner to your cause can release land at a good price for affordable homes.

What types of land are suitable for community led housing projects?

Almost any if the planning authority will agree and there is enough subsidy to make the scheme viable. In practice the caps on grants and borrowing, as well as difficulties involved in remediating land or getting services in, means that some sites are too difficult. Of course, empty homes and vacant commercial property are also good routes for groups in some cases.

How can community led housing groups compete with developers for land?

Generally, they can't unless they are well capitalised and can pay cash at an auction for example. A land bank for the community led housing sector would be brilliant - that is, a body that could buy land on the market for groups then release it to them when they are able to finance the purchase. Otherwise another option is to do a deal with the landowner before the site goes to market, for example with a Local Authority or other owner.

What do groups need to have in place to buy land?

Cash obviously, but also robust governance and a good deal of group and business plan development. Viability assessment is important for example. They need support if they don't have skills, experience and capacity within their group. They can get that support from an enabling hub if there is one in their area.

What help is available for groups wanting land?

Around 50% of England is now covered by enabling hub services, so groups in these areas will benefit from the knowledge and contacts of the hub staff and associates. You can find your



local hub [here](#). In other areas they should contact other groups, nearby hubs and the [national infrastructure organisations](#) for advice.

“The hub can help with every stage of the process”

How can a community led housing hub help with this?

The hub can help with every stage of the process. They also have knowledge and relationships that make deals possible and help schemes progress.

How can community led housing groups pay for their land?

Finance options include: the group's own cash, raising loan stock or share issue capital, loans, subsidy from their Local Authority and/or Homes England.

Is there any financial help available to buy land?

Yes, the current Community Housing Fund (CHF) has a capital element, though timescales are unrealistically tight to access this, so there is a campaign to get it extended beyond March 2020. Groups could approach their Local authority to see if there is capital funding available, or consider becoming a Registered Provider to access the pre-existing Homes England capital funding programmes.

What advice can you give to groups negotiating a land purchase?

Get professional help unless you have this within your group.

What experts will community led housing groups need to hire for this stage, and how will they pay for the experts?

They need people experienced in the pre-development phase of a housing project. This can be accessed through their hub or [Community Led Homes](#). There is also advice about funding options for this phase on the Community Led Homes website [here](#). They include Power to Change's Homes in Community Hands programme and phase 1 of the CHF.

What would you say to groups that are looking for land?

Make sure you have done all the prerequisite work first. Get help. Have a method of paying for the land ready first, and have fun shopping!

Is there anything else you would like to add on the topic of finding land?

The recent report [Land for the Many](#) is interesting. There's also the recent book [Rethinking the Economics of Land and Housing](#) which is very good on the subject.



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