

Accord Housing Creating communities – something more housing associations could be doing





At a glance

- **Accord Housing Association owns or manages 13,000 affordable homes in the West Midlands and provides health and social care to 80,000 people**
 - **In the 1990s, Accord's culture of tenant engagement was significantly enhanced by its partnership with Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services (BCHS) – the secondary housing co-op providing support to the West Midlands network of housing co-ops**
 - **BCHS and Accord facilitated the development of numerous tenant management organisations and self-build schemes from the 1990s onwards**
 - **Accord sponsored and played a leading role in the Commission for**
- Co-operative and Mutual Housing, publishing Bringing Democracy Home in 2008, the most recent extensive qualitative research into the community led housing sector**
- **Accord has continued to support the development of community led housing, including housing co-operatives, tenant management, community development trusts and other approaches**
 - **Accord was a founder member of West Midlands Urban Community Housing (the West Midlands community led housing hub)**
 - **Accord plays various strategic roles in West Midlands housing and owns the LoCal Homes factory, producing timber framed modular systems**



Photos





Overview

Accord Housing Association may appear to be a relatively traditional housing association. It is one of the largest housing and social care organisations in the Midlands, providing 13,000 affordable homes and health and social care to 80,000 people and employing nearly 4,000 people.

However, enabling tenants to take control is an Accord core value and community led housing is part of its DNA. A culture of tenant leadership was brought to Accord in the 1980s from Parklands Housing Society, a predecessor housing association set up in the 1960s to develop co-ownership societies. At the time, this manifested itself in support for Paddock Housing Co-op in Walsall, but the culture equipped Accord to successfully tender to become the parent for Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services (BCHS) secondary housing co-op. BCHS had successfully provided development and management services to West Midlands housing co-ops in the 1980s, but as national funding programmes dried up, the co-ops that owned BCHS sought a housing association partner.

BCHS became a part of Accord in 1991, and Accord both facilitated it to continue to operate as a stand-alone organisation within the Accord structure for many years and encouraged it to support new co-operative housing initiatives. But the reciprocal involvement of BCHS's tenant leaders and senior staff within the Accord family also had an ongoing impact on Accord's zeitgeist – strengthening its commitment to community led housing and bringing it into the national co-operative community.

In the early days of the BCHS Accord partnership in the 1990s, having stabilised BCHS's business structure enabling it to continue providing quality services to the network of Registered Provider housing co-ops in Birmingham and Walsall, BCHS focussed on supporting the development of

tenant management organisations (TMOs) in council homes, particularly in Walsall, where the TMOs, with BCHS's ongoing assistance, went on to form WATMOS Community Homes which took transfer of the homes the TMOs managed in 2003. Working through Accord, BCHS also developed a significant self-build and community self-build programme in the 1990s.

In the early 2000s, Redditch Borough Council wished to explore a local co-operative housing strategy – partly because of the lack of housing associations based in the town and partly because they wish to use fully mutual housing co-ops' exemption from Right to Buy to ensure that new affordable homes built in the town would remain available to low income Redditch residents in perpetuity. Seeing the success of the Accord BCHS partnership, Redditch chose to work with Accord to develop Redditch Co-operative Homes which supported the development of five neighbourhood co-ops now owning just under 750 homes through leasehold and with around 240 more homes in development.

In the late 2000s, firmly convinced that community led housing benefitted both people and communities and the housing associations that facilitate them, Accord sponsored and played a leading role in establishing the Commission for Co-operative and Mutual Housing, which in 2008 published "Bringing Democracy Home", the most recent piece of extensive quality assessment of the community led housing sector based on research carried out by the University of Birmingham. The

research showed what Accord already knew – that community led housing produces a wide range of social and community benefits for individuals and communities as well as generally operating effectively as businesses. The research earned all party-political support and contributed positively to the environment in which community led housing has enjoyed subsequent Governmental and other support.

Accord has continued to put its principles into practice since the Commission, supporting the development of a range of community-led housing organisations – ranging from supporting development schemes for Stirchley Co-operative Developments, Stourbridge Powerhaus, Selly Oak Community Development Trust, and 20/20 Housing Co-operative, to enabling further development in Redditch Co-operative Homes and supporting further tenant management schemes in its own stock.

Accord's support for community led housing has meant that it was well placed to be an important founding member of West Midlands Urban Community Homes (the West Midlands community led housing hub). With Accord playing a key strategic role in West Midlands housing (for example participating in the West Midlands Combined Authority's Advanced Manufacture in Construction group) and with Accord's LoCal Homes factory creating timber framed modular systems making homes more cost effective and environmentally more sustainable, Accord will be in a position to support a new wave of community led housing in the West Midlands.



Quotes

“People from BCHS and the co-ops were arguing at a senior level in Accord for tenant leadership in a very articulate and passionate way influencing from the inside the Accord attitude. Although we were a traditional housing association, we felt part of the co-operative movement and that was a really important part of our journey.”

“We found that co-ops are really connected to local communities and have political power at a local level. They do a lot of the hard work to persuade local people or politicians about the need for a scheme. The local intelligence of the people who live there is vital to housing associations.”

“If people are pre-selected to live in homes developed, then people can see the process right the way through. They know where they are going to live and who their neighbours will be. It creates a community. This is something more housing associations could be doing. Working with people and seeing their excitement and helping them to realise their dreams is really exciting.”

“We learnt early on that there were better outcomes if tenants made their own decisions. You are going to have lower rent arrears, more people in work and connected to local networks, an engaged community, less anti-social behaviour, fewer complaints – we have substantial evidence of that. Housing associations get a fantastic deal if they do this.”

Dr Chris Handy OBE

Chief Executive – the Accord Group



Learning points

- **There are multiple benefits to both community led housing organisations and housing associations of them working together to develop community led housing schemes**
- **Housing associations particularly benefit from the cultural input brought by community led housing organisations**
- **Community led housing organisations particularly benefit from the strategic role housing associations can play in regional housing policy and financial and other support associations can provide (including in Accord’s case, access to their LoCal factor for modular systems)**
- **Housing associations can support both independent community led housing organisations as well as developing community led housing organisations in their own stock**
- **Housing associations are often values based and community orientated. Some are enthusiastic to develop community led housing organisations**