

**Report to Cottenham Community Land Trust Steering Group**  
**- Setting up a Community Land Trust**

*Concept Note arising from scoping meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2017*

## **1 Background**

Cottenham is a Fen Edge village approximately 6 miles north of Cambridge. It is a large village of around 2500 households and a population of 6400, which has developed along what is now the B1049. This road links Wilburton and villages along the A142 and Ely in the north and with Histon & Impington, the A14 and the city of Cambridge in the south.

The village has been working on a Cottenham Neighbourhood Development Plan since early 2015 and had their Neighbourhood area designated in November 2015. The plan is currently in pre-submission draft and identifies several sites, particularly for affordable housing for the next generation of residents of Cottenham. The Neighbourhood Plan Survey, carried out by Enventure for the Plan, identified provision of affordable homes within the village as important and the Plan lists "shortage of homes that are truly affordable for local people" as one of the two key issues it seeks to address. An up-to-date Housing Needs Assessment has recently been commissioned from AECOM.

In attendance on the scoping day

- Frank Morris (chair), chartered engineer and chair of parish council
- Linda Morris, chartered accountant
- Simon Ward, analyst with some experience in property and financial management
- Kevin Gawtreay, building surveyor with property and project management experience
- Rex Collinson, semi-retired teacher and parish councillor
- Mary Kidston, retired planner with knowledge of planning, policy and development control
- Norman Kidston, retired planner/ surveyor and housing association development director
- Colin Coe, interest in building materials and particularly environmentally friendly techniques

Additional members of steering group

- Stephen Casey, property management
- Robert Clarke, contract farmer
- Christine Ward, market research

Advisers

- Debbie Wildridge, Head of CLT at CLT East
- Emily Mulvaney, CLT Adviser at CLT East

### 3 Delivery of Affordable Housing

The CLT would like to deliver up to half of the required affordable housing in the village. They expressed a preference for smaller developments of mixed tenure rather than large, solely affordable developments. The group feel that it is important that affordable homes are well integrated into the village by:

- Being within easy walking distance of the village centre and bus stops
- Being appropriately designed for the existing character and vernacular of the village
- Facilitating working from home
- 'Pepper-potting' affordable homes with open market homes

There have recently been several delegated planning approvals in the village, forced by the absence of a 5-year land supply in South Cambridgeshire. The permissions include a scheme of 126 new homes and a scheme of up to 200 new homes (of which up to 40% will be affordable) and 70 apartments with care, both of which the Parish Council resisted.

The CLT are aware of several potential sites in the village and there are probable sites stated in the draft Neighbourhood Plan. In order to ensure an open, inclusive and transparent process and full use of any opportunities it is recommended that the CLT undertake a public 'call for sites'. This will give the opportunity for landowners that the group are already aware of to formally put their land forward and may also uncover new land opportunities.

The CLT – ideally with the assistance of local planning officers – can then assess the sites for suitability for delivery of affordable homes. By going through this process the CLT, in partnership with other key stakeholders such as South Cambs. District Council and Cottenham Parish Council, can arrive at selecting a preferred site or sites for a development of affordable housing. Involving planners at this stage has two key benefits: firstly when the site goes forward for planning permission there are less likely to be any 'hidden surprises' in particular in planning terms; secondly it enables an early discussion on acceptable numbers, type and mix for the site given the high level of identified housing need.

There is scope within planning policy, both nationally and locally, for the group to develop outside the village development boundary – sites that would not normally be granted planning permission. This is called a Rural Exception site and allows affordable housing for local people to be constructed on land outside of, but adjacent to, the village development boundary. Such developments do, however, need to recognise the need for proximity to local facilities (bus route, schools etc.) and to meet normal planning considerations (e.g. flooding). Where such development is proposed the financial viability of the scheme can be difficult to achieve and therefore a small number of market houses can cross-subsidise the cost of building the affordable units. Under these circumstances the market housing would not be used to increase the profit for the landowner or developer. The current lack of '5 year land supply' by South Cambs. District Council increases potential competition faced by the CLT for sites outside the village development boundary, and may affect the cost at which the group can acquire such land.

#### 4 Forming a CLT

There is an existing group of people who are interested in setting up a CLT for Cottenham. A key feature of a CLT is that it is open and accountable to the community that it serves. Therefore it is recommended that the concept of a CLT for Cottenham is publicly floated and that there is the opportunity for other members of the public to get involved.

A method that has successfully been used by emerging CLTs elsewhere is to hold a public meeting. The meeting can be used to explain the concept of a CLT, set the affordable housing context, and explain that the initial purpose of the CLT will be to address that need and to seek ordinary members of the CLT. Cottenham has the advantage of having a large group of 250+ local people who are already actively engaged in the Neighbourhood Planning process. It is likely that many of these people will extend an interest in the Community Land Trust and that additional people who have not yet engaged with the Neighbourhood Plan may show an interest. CLT East can work with the CLT steering group to structure and deliver these types of community engagement activities.

To establish a CLT for Cottenham, the steering group will have the task of choosing a legal constitution and structure. Considerable discussion was given to this at the scoping day and it is clear that more in-depth thought is required to ensure the most suitable legal structure is chosen. A CLT could be formed with wide objectives in order to progress the affordable housing aim but leave scope for developing other aims as they may arise. The main forms of incorporation that can fulfil the definition of a CLT are:

- Company Ltd by Guarantee/ Charity
- Community Interest Company
- Community Benefit Society

Choosing the most appropriate legal structure will have implications on what activities the CLT can undertake, available loan and grant funding, taxation, public perception, regulatory requirements and governance among other things. Some of the key features of each legal structure are illustrated below in order to assist the CLT with this decision:

- Cottenham Parish Council
- South Cambridgeshire District Council
- Various community groups (potentially the primary and/ or secondary schools, sports clubs, youth clubs, church groups etc.)
- Community of Rampton, who rely on Cottenham for amenities and may constitute a 'secondary' village for the allocation of affordable homes
- Landowners in the village
- Other CLTs, in order to learn from their experiences
- Neighbours to any preferred sites

## 5 Support

Practical and financial support is available to the CLT steering group in order to progress the formation of a CLT and to progress an affordable housing development. The scoping meeting is timely as South Cambs. District Council currently has funding under the Community Housing Fund which can be made available to community-led housing groups in the District. As part of this programme CLT East is also offering expert guidance and support to both the Local Authority and community-led housing groups in South Cambs.

### *Community engagement*

It may be beneficial to run local events and workshops, stimulate a local conversation and define a clear sense of purpose for the organisation around which to build local support. This is an essential part of the CLT journey. CLT East can assist in the organization and execution of such events.

### *CLT set-up*

Once the group decides that it wants a CLT, CLT East can help speed up the legal process and guide you through the various choices. A grant may be available from South Cambs. District Council to help pay for this. There are also grant funds available from the National CLT Network.

### *Business planning*

A CLT project needs to be commercially viable and able to attract financial investment. To do this the proposal must be robust and meet an identified need. The CLT East support team can help to build a strong business case and identify the key issues that need to be tackled before the project gets underway.

### *Development services*

Once the business plan has been established and the CLT is set up, the detailed work of acquiring, developing and managing land and property assets begins. CLT East is well placed to advise on these issues. In addition, as part of a national network of Community-led Development advisers, CLT East has access to a wide range of specialists who can help you to make the right decisions.