



See the wood for the trees

Bristol Community Land Trust
Report of a review into the development at
325 Fishponds Road

“A dance between the possible and the aspirational”

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1. Introduction:

1.1. Aims of the work

The aim of this review was to look at the process of developing Bristol Community Land Trust's (BCLT) first scheme at 325 Fishponds Road with a focus on the lessons learned. The review focused on a discussion about

- What worked well
- What lessons can be derived from BCLT's first scheme for future schemes
- How BCLT can apply this learning to its future schemes

Generic learning pointsThe BCLT Board wanted to carry out this review to inform the future development of the Community Land Trust.

1.1. Methods

Information was gathered for the review through a series of interviews with members of BCLT. [See Appendix 1] In addition, the reviewer attended a Focus Group of residents living at Fishponds Road. At the same time as this review was taking place, NatCen, a national social research organisation, was commissioned by Power to Change to carry out some research into success factors for community businesses, with part of its focus on Community Land Trusts. NatCen interviewed four members of BCLT, and generously shared the transcripts of these interviews with the reviewer. The residents' focus group was jointly run with the NatCen researcher.

A great deal of detailed information was gathered through the interviews, focus groups and from the NatCen data. This report summarises the key lessons with a focus on the future. It will not discuss the details about the development of 325 Fishponds Road, other than where the detail illustrates learning points for BCLT's future as a developer and as an innovative housing provider.

Report Structure:

- **Section 3** looks at the aspects of BCLT's delivery that were highlighted as its main **successes**.
- **Section 4** considers the **challenges** associated with the development of 325 Fishponds Road, and issues that BCLT should consider in relation to the development of its next scheme at Shaldon Road. Where possible, we identify solutions; however, the data often raised more questions than answers. Where this is the case, we will highlight questions that we recommend BCLT addresses in the next phase of its development.
- **Section 5** raises some issues that are overarching rather than scheme-specific, with a focus on the **development of BCLT**, and factors to consider as the organisation grows to deliver its mission.

2. Success Points: What people said is great about BCLT

2.1. Providing quality homes and building a community

Residents said that the scheme at Fishponds Road provided

“a home I would not otherwise have had... affordability and security... a home for good...”

The scheme was described as well designed. The smaller, rented, units were described as “generous, human and creating space to live in.” The location, next to the large open space of Eastville Park, meant that the scheme could be designed to a higher density than might be the case in a different location.

For all residents, but especially the shared owners, the homes overcome the insecurity of private renting, and enable them to have a sense of permanence and a stake in where they are living. The self-finish element of the housing increased this, enabling “us to have a say in how the building was going to be.” BCLT interviewees discussed how the process of involvement with the development enabled the delivery of good housing with a personal feel.

“What I love about people’s involvement in their homes is the quirky individuality of each one. If there are standard or limited choices, you would lose such a characterful community. If we want to give people a sense of their own homes, they need wider choices.” (Jackson Moulding)

This has given people a sense of ownership not only of their homes, but also of the wider space and of the community at Fishponds Road. The properties look out to a shared garden. The residents group has been involved with landscaping the shared space, and this has also contributed to the sense of community. Residents said this

“I see friendly faces every day when I come home. In the summer, the doors are always open. The kids are flourishing in this environment, and we all look out for each other, and for all the children.... It’s like a world that we’ve lost, living in most parts of the city.” (Residents)

Many of the residents said that living at Fishponds Road exceeded their expectations, and that it was easier to build the community than they had thought it would be. A factor that contributed to this success is the model of self-contained units in a community, which gave residents their own personal space along with a shared garden area.

2.2. Gaining skills

One of the factors that contributed to the building of homes and a community was the practice of self-finishing. Residents worked together on their homes, and got to know each other (sometimes in adversity) through this process. Through this process, they gained practical skills.

“There is an agreement with people that if we help them, they will put back into their communities. And this helps BCLT to grow, so while we are growing communities, our communities are helping us to grow more schemes.” (Keith Cowling)

Co-production is not a straightforward process. The challenges of co-production and self-finish will be discussed in Section 3.1.

2.3. Commitment of members and volunteers

The scheme at Fishponds Road was developed through the efforts of a skilled and experienced board, with architectural, planning and housing skills, and good relationships with BCC. It must be recorded that this effort was predominantly volunteer led and delivered. In addition, the degree of co-production required a level of commitment which residents defined as ‘high’.

This level of voluntary input drove the scheme to a successful conclusion. However, it gives rise to learning points about the sustainability of BCLT, and the need for a more robust organisational infrastructure. These issues will be discussed in Section 3.2.1.

2.4. Role of United Communities

Every contributor to this review recognised the “invaluable” role that United Communities Housing Association played in the successful development of 325 Fishponds Road. This included hosting BCLT’s part time staff member, and providing ongoing support to the post-holder; offering development expertise and very active support throughout the development process; financial support including “guaranteeing” BCLT’s income while the scheme is established; providing allocations processes, housing management advice, and tenancy support where there are problems. At times throughout the build process, United Communities development staff streamlined processes and acted as the main channel for communication between the different stakeholders in the development of the scheme.

It is clear that very small organisations benefit from support of a larger organisation to both host and nurture its aspirations. There is agreement that a sole member of staff could not have seen the development of an ambitious housing scheme through to fruition, even with the support of a voluntary committee. Being embedded in United Communities was a vital component of the success of BCLT’s first development – and continues to be a critical success factor.

2.5. Overarching

Interviewees described how the development of Fishponds Road has enabled BCLT to broker considerable goodwill locally and nationally. The success of the scheme has created a platform of credibility for the organisation, and this will put it in a good position to continue to grow, to develop the next scheme, and to work to deliver housing differently.

And, on a day-to-day basis

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“when the going gets tough, we go to 325 and remember why we are doing it.”

3. Challenges

Inevitably, the development of BCLT’s first scheme has thrown up a wide range of challenges. This review aims to address these issues, so the organisation can apply the lessons learned to the development of its next scheme at Shaldon Road, and to its longer-term development. We want to focus on lessons to be applied to future schemes. This raises a number of questions, as well as giving recommendations that address the challenges.

3.1. Co-production

To date, BCLT schemes have used self-finish as a mechanism for building communities and as a means for co-production. What are the implications of this approach? What are the realistic expectations about co-production, and what are its limitations? What can residents co-design? The section below discusses issues that arose through the development of Fishponds Road, and the learning from this.

3.1.1. Decision making and the extent of choice

Throughout this review, interviewees and residents raised concerns about how decisions had been made, and how they were communicated, about the aspects of the development of Fishponds Road. There is a degree of inevitability about this. BCLT aims to deliver housing differently, by a largely voluntary-run organisation. BCLT was learning as it developed, and to an extent was working out how to solve the problems of a complicated development as each problem presented itself.

What can future residents realistically make decisions about? Can each person choose their own kitchen, or own flooring? And how can this level of choice be accommodated by the scheme contractors? These complicated issues were expressed by interviewees and residents.

There is a need for realism about the extent of resident influence. This includes accepting that the decision making is different for the different tenures, because of the different allocations processes and time-scales for this. For example, United Communities made many of the decisions about the rented properties, while the shared owners had greater scope in their decision making. Realism extends to an acknowledgement that neither tenure has a completely “blank sheet” choice: shared owners part own their homes. Therefore, BCLT also has a stake in, and involvement in the decisions about, the quality standards of the self-finish elements.

3.1.1. Recommendations and discussion points: Decision making

BCLT needs to agree clear and realistic processes that set boundaries around this potentially fraught approach to the development of its schemes. There must be good channels for communication about this complex element of its work.

- a) Limiting options? Some providers who offer choices about scheme design/finish will offer a basic design with three internal options, rather than a wider range of options. This is an approach that BCLT should consider for Shaldon Road.
- b) Mechanisms for involvement: BCLT's project manager and architect should offer design workshops at an early stage, so future residents can feed into the design of the internal elements. The limits of influence must be clearly spelled out through this process.
- c) Who is the decision maker? BCLT must be the overall decision maker, setting the degree of choice that residents have over the design of the properties. This needs to be communicated clearly to future residents.

It was noted that in any build scheme, there are time constraints to decision making: decisions have to be made in a timely way, so that the build can proceed. However, the lessons from Fishponds Road are that constraints need to be communicated clearly and effectively to everyone affected, and especially to future residents of the scheme. While

3.1.1. Constraints in decision making:

The Board needs to decide

- e) where the responsibility communicating for this rests: is it with the project manager for the scheme, or with the self-finish manager?
- f) who is responsible for enabling consensus decisions to be made, including communicating the constraints and time-scales for decision making?
- g) who is then responsible for communicating about the decisions to the relevant people in the project and delivery teams?

this is already being addressed, it is an issue that needs constant attention.

3.1.2. Project roles

A key lesson from 325 Fishponds Road is that BCLT must be very clear about who is responsible for communicating the wide range of decisions throughout the project, design and development teams for any scheme. (See Communications: Section 3.5)

3.1.3. Sweat Equity

The principle of 'sweat equity' is an important tool in BCLT's vision of building homes that are affordable, in communities in which everyone plays a part. Residents spoke of the difficulties and the gains from the self-finish process.

"When you do a self-build process, you have to account for the level of stress – of buying your first home, raising a family, holding down a job, and then the build tasks on top of all that." (Oona Goldsworthy)

At the same time, people gain a range of skills that will help with the management and maintenance of their homes; and working together on this builds the community.

Concerns were expressed about whether the requirements for sweat equity will limit the range of people who can be housed in BCLT schemes. If someone does not have the physical ability to contribute to the build process, can they become a resident? Will this lead to homogenous communities of young, able-bodied people? Some interviewees acknowledged that the self-build or self-finish requirement could have this impact. Some described the reality that there were gender divides on the site: "women with paint brushes, and men with power drills..." Some discussed the range of skills needed across the scheme, from co-ordinating orders and deliveries, sorting tools, washing brushes, sewing curtains: "self-finish involves a lot more than the more physical tasks". There was agreement that giving equal value to the different roles will help to overcome some of these issues.

3.1.3. Sweat Equity

- a) BCLT needs to set out what is counted within the sweat equity equation, and to be clear about the values given to the whole range of tasks required across the scheme. Will United Communities residents have the same expectations?
- b) The decisions made about sweat equity contributions must also be communicated clearly, along with the reasoning behind these decisions

3.1.4. Resourcing co-production

While some of the people allocated housing at Fishponds Road had a range of building skills when they started working on their houses, many did not. It was vitally important to offer training and support so that everyone was able to make a contribution to the self-finish elements. This review identified a range of resourcing issues that should be addressed as BCLT develops.

1) Self-Finish Manager

This role was essential at Fishponds Road, and a post-holder with this brief should be in post as soon as is possible, and before there is an expectation of resident involvement at Shaldon Road.

During the Fishponds Road development, the self-finish manager was on site regularly. He was, therefore, in regular contact with the contractor, and was often the first person to pick up on defects in the work. His role involved working with, and often advocating for, the residents, often “sweet talking” the contractors to sort out problems. In developing the roles for the successful development of BCLT’s next scheme, it is important that this role, and that of project manager, are carefully drawn. Given the self-finish manager’s role in liaising between residents and contractors, it could be that this post-holder plays the role of “good cop” to the project manager’s role of “bad cop” as a way to manage the development relationships.

3.1.4. Resourcing co-production: (1) Site roles

- a) The role of Self-Finish Manager needs a clear remit, including the extent of authority and decision making of the post holder. There should be a clear budget for the post holder. There should be a clear role differentiation between this post and the post of the project manager for Shaldon Road. This needs to include decision making protocols.
- b) Other on-site roles need to be addressed including First Aiders, and a person responsible for residents’ Health and Safety on site.

(2) Training and Tools

Successful self-finish projects need a range of resources. These include a good tools budget, so there is a common tool store for the scheme. There is also a need for a good training budget, and the ability to offer training before people start to work on real homes on the real site. A training facility was suggested, so that people could, for example, learn how to install a kitchen worktop, before being let loose on the expensive worktops purchased for the scheme.

3.1.4. Resourcing co-production: (2) Training and Tools

BCLT should set a realistic budget to resource it’s method of co-production.

3.2. BCLT: a volunteer run organisation delivering a professional product

The ethos of co-production fits with BCLT being a largely volunteer-run organisation.

“While the input from United Communities is invaluable, the energy and passion comes from the CLT board. That’s what makes it what it is...” (Residents)

However, this creates its own challenges. BCLT is run by a volunteer board supported by one part time member of staff. It is also now a landlord, and it is developing its second scheme. It needs to balance being a grassroots, community led organisation which aims to “deliver housing differently” with the day-to-day business of managing and developing housing. Some of the broader, strategic issues that this gives rise to will be discussed in

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section 4. The focus of this part of the review is on pragmatic delivery issues which BCLT needs to address.

3.2.1. Organisation Infrastructure - staffing & organisation needs

BCLT's infrastructure is much smaller than its ambitions. The organisation is maintained and manages to be successful because of the energy of its staff member(s), the commitment of its Board members, and the input from United Communities. If it is to grow, it will need to look at its own infrastructure and resources.

BCLT delivers on three levels:

- a) Managing the housing at 325 Fishponds Road
- b) Developing schemes
- c) Planning for the future, including developing a more active membership.

The Development Officer looks after existing projects supported by housing management expertise bought in from United Communities, and participates in developing the new scheme. Part of the role is also to service the Board. Active Board members are involved with driving the business forward. As this is done on a voluntary basis, it can be an under-developed area of work.

Another aspect of BCLT's development that needs to be addressed is the greater involvement of its membership. (See Section 4.3). At present, a Board member has the lead responsibility for this. A newly appointed administrator will also be involved in this key area of work for BCLT.

3.2.1. Increasing the size of the staff team

BCLT should consider how other CLTs fund larger staff teams. This would enable the organisation to consider employing a 'CEO' role, who could lead on the development of the organisation, and on fundraising.

BCLT also needs the capacity to employ people for specific posts to enable the delivery of schemes, such as a project manager for Shaldon road, and a self-finish manager when this is needed for Shaldon Road. The need for, and importance of, a project manager for each scheme was stated by most of the people we spoke with as part of this review.

Project Manager role

A key learning point for future schemes is the need for a project manager for each development. Aspects of the role were identified by interviewees:

- Clerk of Works role, including oversight of the build, inspecting the construction and quality of work; oversight of health and safety on site
- liaison and reporting to the client (project team and BCLT Board)
- management of the relationships between all stakeholders, including future residents

- managing the decision making to ensure that the right decisions are made at the right time; and then communicating about the decisions that have been made, including the rationale for each decision
- managing the information flow and ensuring effective communication about all aspects of the development
- Where necessary, to deliver the “bad news” to all stakeholders as is needed.

3.2.1. Project Manager role for Shaldon Road

- a) A clear brief and role description should be developed for this position. The project manager role should be a paid role, to ensure that the post-holder is available as contracted, during working hours; and is fully accountable to the Project Team and the BCLT Board.
- b) The relationship between this post and the Self-Finish Manager, including the extent and limits of responsibilities of both, should be part of the role description.
- c) The relationship of the post-holder to the United Communities Development Manager needs to be clearly set out.
- d) The relationship between the Project Manager and Employer’s Agent needs to be clearly defined. The Project Manager will be responsible for ensuring and communicating that agreed actions are followed through to completion.
- e) The Project Manager must have experience of delivering building contracts on this scale. Part of this work will involve management of a changing budget, and ensuring that funds can be directed to support the self-finish approach of BCLT.

Role of United Communities

In addition to the ongoing dialogue and support which comes from being embedded within United Communities, BCLT has a Service Level Agreement with the Association. This includes for Housing Management support, and would include seeking possession or dealing with anti-social behaviour, if this was needed. United Communities have helped to set out appropriate terms for and levels of service charges for the shared owners at Fishponds Road.

The relationship between United Communities and BCLT at Shaldon Road will be more complex, because it will be a joint scheme.

Clear communication about the roles and responsibilities on the site, and about the ongoing management of the scheme will be vital, and must be understood by all Board members.

These issues will need further exploration in any future, larger projects. Lessons learned from each scheme should be recorded throughout and at the end of the development process.

3.3. Commissioning and contract management

Everyone who contributed to this review discussed the difficulties that BCLT had with the contractors. Instead of detailing the problems that occurred with the first scheme, we will consider the learning for the next, and subsequent schemes.

It is important not to underestimate the challenges placed on volunteers in relation to commissioning and managing contracts. It is also important to acknowledge that different

3.3. Managing the contract

- a) BCLT needs to be very clear about the client role, and who can make decisions as the client. Also, about the timescales for decision making. This needs to be clearly communicated to the future residents of the site.
- b) Decisions need to be recorded clearly, and made accessible to the Project Board, staff team, BCLT Board and relevant staff at United Communities.
- c) There is a need for a Project Manager with a clear role. See above, 4.2.1
- d) There must be clear communications protocols which cover the roles of the BCLT Project Manager, United Communities Development Manager, BCLT Self-Finish Manager, the Employer's Agent, with the contractor. It is vital that everyone on the client side communicates the same messages to the contractor.
- e) The contractor must have a commitment to self-finish, and to the values of BCLT. They need to be flexible in their approach, including being willing to work with resident self-finishers on site.

skill sets are needed at different stages of a development: the skills needed to secure planning permission are different from those needed to get a scheme on site, and then to manage the build.

On self-finish schemes, it was recommended that BCLT should agree the self-finish elements when it draws up the contracts. These should be taken out of the contract, so the contract is let without these items. However, the contractor can be asked to price up these elements as "potentially optional extras". This is an area to explore.

3.3. Contracting for self-finish

- a) Pricing for the self-finish elements must be clear and transparent, to enable effective decision making by the Project Board and/or residents (as appropriate).
- b) Decision making processes by residents about the self-finish elements must be clearly set out and communicated: do they need to make unanimous decisions? Decisions have to be made within a set time-table. This will enable easier management of a build contract with self-finish elements. This process should be managed by the Self-Finish manager.

If significant problems occur, BCLT should consider whether there is justification for re-tendering contracts. And whether the costs and risks make this a viable option.

3.4. Allocations

There is a broad consensus that the process for allocating properties could have been better. It must be recognised that members of the BCLT Board were volunteers who were inexperienced in this process, and who were juggling the myriad demands of the scheme. But for BCLT members seeking housing, the process was unclear and unsettling. This was in large measure due to the problems with the build, which lead to a constantly changing timetable. However, they felt that the expectations were not clear about what they should put in, and the process was not transparent. This relates to issues about communication within BCLT. (See Section 3.5)

There are particularly complex issues about allocations to the rented properties, because potential tenants need to be on the Housing Register. But the schemes are developed over longer periods of time than allocations based on housing need. For Shaldon Road, we believe that most of the rented properties will be allocated by United Communities, which might overcome some of the challenges that BCLT faced in allocating the rented units at Fishponds Road. The allocations process will be embedded within the long-established processes at the Housing Association.

At the same time, BCLT's use of sweat equity has implications for rent levels. If shared owners have their equity recognised in the price of their housing, should renters have their stake recognised through lower rents: "time equity"? Should "time equity" be a factor that gives a prospective tenant extra "points" on the allocations register? The practice needs to be communicated clearly to renters. Building this into a traditional tenancy presents real challenges for BCLT, and United Communities.

It was reported that work is under way to align the BCLT and United Communities allocations policies. United Communities has a simple process for rent reviews, which is widely accepted in the HA sector; and the Housing Association routinely engages people in pre-tenancy work. United Communities housing staff also offer tenancy sustainment

support where this is needed. This is a challenge for BCLT, which does not have the resources for this work. Dave Bull (Housing Manager at United Communities) commented that aligning the two approaches is a challenge: traditional HA allocations are deficit based, whereas BCLT's allocations policy aims to build on people's strengths and skills.

Finally, allocating property 12 – 18 months ahead of a moving date is a challenge for both organisations. Keith Cowling described it as being "a bit like shooting at a moving target". In the circumstances, it is important to record the processes and decisions that are being made (and, no doubt, changed), so that both organisations, and others, can learn about how this is being addressed now, and might be addressed in the future.

3.4.

Allocations

a) Several interviewees said that the most important thing that BCLT can do, within this complex aspect of its work, is to be highly transparent about its allocations system.

With partnership schemes:

b) BCLT and United Communities (or a different development partner) need to discuss the extent to which their processes can, and should, be streamlined or made the same.

c) BCLT should have clear protocols for delegating authority for allocations, so that decisions can be made quickly when this is needed.

Residents express the view that BCLT should develop clear information about expectations for people living in BCLT schemes. This should include:

- What is expected of me
- What I can expect of others
- What I can expect of the CLT

3.4. Allocations: Expectations of scheme residents

A "task and finish" group of Fishponds Road residents could lead and work with BCLT to co-produce a document setting out the expectations of people living in BCLT schemes.

Moving on

An issue that will need attention in the future is the form of the re-letting process when someone moves on from Fishponds Road (or Shaldon Road) . We can only pose questions about this issue:

- How can new people be brought into the communities that are developing within BCLT housing?
- Should there be "values statements" about the community, or will this be too excluding of people who might be in housing need?
- Should residents be on interview panels? Would this slow down the process of allocating properties, to the financial detriment of BCLT? Would this open BCLT to accusations of nepotism, or leave residents open to accusations of choosing people "just like themselves"?

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- Should BCLT residents develop a “buddying system” once an allocation has been made to an existing scheme.

Interviewees suggested that residents are involved in setting site specific allocations criteria, within BCLT and United Communities’ existing systems. This needs to be considered very carefully in the future. What is essential now is that allocations policies and criteria are transparent and robust and will carry into the future.

3.5. Communications

There is a need for better communication with BCLT residents, at all stages of the development. Residents felt that they “only met people from the CLT when there were problems”, which was not conducive to building constructive relationships with the organisation. They appreciated that BCLT is largely volunteer run, and so communication was challenging in terms of time. Interviewees commented that BCLT lacked time for information sharing. But this meant that residents were not clear who was responsible for what, particularly before Jackson Moulding was appointed as self-finish manager. They also wanted to get to know people in BCLT in a positive way.

It was suggested that BCLT develops a reporting mechanism that can be shared with residents, Board members, Project Team, Contractor, etc. This would set out the decisions which have been made and enable easy access to a decision log. The decision log would be updated when necessary. Throughout the review, people spoke about the need for better communication about BCLT decisions. It is likely that decisions were communicated, but that people didn’t remember the details of this.

3.5. Communication with residents

a) BCLT should develop a “people map” to explain who’s who, and who can be contacted about what issues, and at what times. BCLT and residents should agree realistic mechanisms for finding out more about each other. If there is an expectation that residents will play an active role in the organisation, they need to be given ways to get to know the organisation. United Communities has a track record of tenant involvement which could be explored by BCLT.

b) BCLT should consider whether a members or residents “portal” would help to overcome some of the communications issues and concerns that have been raised. This would put the onus on members/residents to check information before raising concerns.

This suggestion has implications for BCLT’s infrastructure and organisational resourcing. Any decisions taken about its implementation must take into account staff capacity and Board roles.

4. BCLT moving forward

The review identified a number of overarching issues that need to be addressed as BCLT grows as an organisation. Although these are outside the scope of this Review, we have included them to ensure they are recorded.

4.1. “Doing housing differently” – BCLT’s mission

Interviewees discussed the need for clarity about BCLT’s mission and core offer. What is the balance between building houses, and “doing housing differently”? Should BCLT focus on developing housing in ways that mainstream providers are not, and demonstrating the potential for this change?

Interviewees raised questions about **what** BCLT wants to be, and **how** it wants to be this: *is there a different model of being a landlord?* For example, housing associations typically offer standardised designs, built to a set of quality standards. BCLT offers a set of “personal touches” in its houses, and more involvement in the design. Housing Associations are also now required to offer 5 year tenancies, whereas BCLT wants to offer homes for life. Can this be resolved?

It should be noted that during the period of this review, BCLT held a Strategic Visioning workshop. We have not seen the report from the workshop; and this report considers the practical issues from the development at Fishponds Road, that inform the development of Shaldon Road. Nevertheless, the report from the Visioning Workshop should be aligned with the lessons learned through this review.

Interviewees also raised questions about how BCLT can become financially sustainable in the long-term. Will this come from developing more housing or different kinds of schemes? Should BCLT develop partnerships with a wider range of groups who are also developing different models of housing? As well as developing housing similar to Fishponds Road and Shaldon Road, does BCLT want to partner with other groups, to develop schemes such as an Older Women’s Co-Housing scheme for Bristol, or other interest-group specific projects?

4.1 BCLT Vision

- a) BCLT needs to define its mission and core offer. What does it mean to “do housing differently”? How will BCLT achieve this?
- b) The report from the Visioning workshop and the lessons from this review should be aligned with each other.
- d) While the responsibility for setting the strategic direction of the organisation lies with the Board, the views of residents, members and other key stakeholders should be considered as part of this process.

4.2. Governance

All developing organisations have to address their governance arrangements, especially after a period of organisational growth (such as the development of BCLT’s first scheme), or before a new organisational growth or change (such as the development of its second

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scheme). We are aware that Board membership has changed recently, and that new members have been brought on to the Board with specific skill sets, and allocated roles on the Board. However, we summarise some issues that we believe that the Board should address.

4.2 Governance issues:

a) All Board members need to understand their strategic and operational roles and responsibilities; and the responsibilities that they have as Board members of an organisation that is a landlord and a developer.

b) BCLT should refresh the Board Skills Audit to identify whether there are gaps, with no-one to fulfil certain Board functions.

Housing management services are bought in (on an SLA) from UC. However, the Board should assess whether it needs further skills and capacity on the Board to enable the organisation to carry out its responsibilities as a housing manager.

c) Board members need to have in place effective and transparent decision making protocols; and must ensure that Board decisions and the reasons for them are communicated clearly. This reporting structure will enable all members of the Board to be accountable for its work.

d) It is good practice for Boards to develop an induction pack for new members, which can be part of a Board members “handbook”. This can set out policies, procedures, job descriptions, expectations about levels of participation, decision making structures, etc., as well as the organisation vision. We recommend that BCLT develops such a set of documents, and that it keeps them updated.

Succession planning

This is an issue that the Board needs to address, particularly in relation to the Chair. One of the challenges, however, is how to maintain the organisational memory, to avoid the risk of constant re-tracing of the CLT journey. For an organisation experiencing constant change and development, changes to key personnel can be particularly unsettling. This must be recognised.

4.2 Succession planning

A Board information and induction pack would help to ensure consistency and would be an asset with recruiting new people to the Board. It would also help with succession planning.

4.3. Membership

The issue of membership raised a very large number of questions throughout this review.

BCLT has a large membership, although the majority of members are not active in the organisation. Interviewees questioned how their energy, skills and commitment might be harnessed.

- Should there be different membership ‘categories’? For example, ‘active’ members who play a variety of roles in the development of the organisation, and ‘passive’ members, who pay a fee and receive information. They might act as ambassadors, promoting the work and ambition of BCLT, but will play no other active role.

- How do organisational members contribute to the development of BCLT?
- Is there a specific set of roles for resident members? It must be recorded that one resident (and one prospective resident) is on the BCLT Board. Overall, what is viable, given that many of them will be investing their time in making their homes good to live in?
- Should the fee be increased? Should it be collected annually, with subscriptions being used to support member activities?
- BCLT does not know why people join, what they wish to gain from their membership, or what skills they might be able to offer.

Defining the offer

Critical to engaging members more actively is being clear about the offer to them: what is the vision of BCLT? How can members be involved in shaping this? What is the offer to members who will probably never be housed by BCLT?

Is it viable to set up a series of working groups for members? A great deal of information already exists about similar schemes, and from people with similar aspirations, so BCLT does not (always) have to re-invent the wheel. How can this be gathered? What role would Board members play in this process? And critically, how can it be resourced?

Interviewees made the following suggestions for working groups or areas of work:

- New sites – recognising the limitations of capacity to develop
- Events planning and coordinating to bring CLT members together
- Fundraising
- Promotion, Newsletter: Think pieces about CLT philosophy and the CLT sector
- Sharing information with other CLTs
- Issues that might be relevant to members who are not housed by CLT, e.g. designing or retrofitting energy efficiency measures, or local energy schemes
- Other networks with similar values, e.g. Transition Movement; etc.

This is not an exhaustive list.

Supporting the membership is a resource intensive activity. Can members be engaged to coordinate this activity without support? What are the risks for BCLT should this happen? Are these aspirations realistic without organisational support?

A simpler suggestion was to run social activities for members, such as

- Gardening Days
- Visits to other CLTs
- Member events that are not about sites

This would take less resource for BCLT, but could lead to wider engagement than at present.

Effective communication across the organisation and to all stakeholders requires effective resourcing. When this review was being conducted, BCLT was in the process of appointing

to a development admin job. This post-holder will be responsible for communications, including with BCLT's large membership.

Suggestions include

- Monthly mailings to members
- Quarterly meetings for members
- Pulling together the information gaps that have been highlighted in this report.

Other roles in relation to BCLT's membership are discussed below.

4.3. Membership

a) The role of the wider membership raised important and difficult issues. BCLT should consider a longer-term piece of focused work on this issue.

b) Examples of the offers made by CLTs to their members should be explored. RUSS in South London was identified as having an interesting member offer.

c) A 'quick win' would be to ask each member about their motivations for joining, and about their interest in contributing to BCLT. However, the organisation would need to have the capacity to take up offers that were made – there is no better way to lose the support of members than not to take up their offers of time or expertise!

d) The Board needs to address-how the management of membership will be resourced as part of a plan for the wider engagement of members.

5. Conclusions

The development of Fishponds Road has been a great success, sometimes against the odds. BCLT should recognise that it has not only built homes, but also an organisation; and a valuable relationship with United Communities. There have been many challenges, due in large measure to the lack of an organisational infrastructure. The organisation's aims of delivering housing differently, including its commitment to co-production, have increased the challenges it faced during its first scheme.

Many organisations would have allowed themselves some breathing space after their first scheme, during which they could address the questions raised in this report, and the need to focus on organisational development. BCLT has moved quickly into its second scheme, which is larger than the first and which is being developed jointly with United Communities. However, BCLT does need to pay attention to itself so that it can develop as a sustainable and robust organisation that will be able to grow and to meet its own aspirations.

Throughout this report, we have made many recommendations following the learning from this review. At the same time, we are aware that BCLT's capacity is already stretched and that it will face challenges in delivering the recommendations as well as a development programme on top of the demands of housing management.

Our suggestion is that BCLT forms Working Groups which will address the recommendations. Board members will be central to each group, but each group should co-opt people to support their work. This could be residents, BCLT members, UC staff if appropriate.

Proposed Working Groups



Each Working Group may set up specific “Task and Finish” groups to address some of the tasks within their remit. If the budget is available, Working Groups might commission or outsource some of the work. In most cases, the ultimate decision maker is the Board. Working Groups will make recommendations to the Board for final decision, once they have worked through the recommendations arising out of this report.

We have brought all of the recommendations together in a table, grouped according to the roles of each of the suggested Working Groups.

BLCT Review into the development at 325 Fishponds Road: All Recommendations

Development Practices			
Ref: Report Section	Issue	Recommendation	Actions
3.1.1	Co-production: Decision making	<p>BCLT needs to agree clear and realistic processes that set boundaries around this potentially fraught approach to the development of its schemes, and the degree of choice that residents will have. This includes agreement about whether residents' options should be limited to a number of set choices of self-finish elements.</p> <p>The limits of influence must be clearly spelled out to potential residents. Recommendations for good channels of communication should be included in this element of work.</p> <p>There are implications for the roles of the Project Manager and Self-Finish Manager in relation to communicating with residents and contractors about these issues. This has to be included in their role descriptions and management arrangements. Some of the issues to consider are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is responsible for communicating with whom about what issues? • Who is responsible for enabling consensus decisions to be made, including communicating the constraints and time-scales for decision making? • The Project Manager is responsible for communicating about the decisions to the relevant people in the project and delivery teams This has to be clearly defined and monitored. 	<p><i>Development Practices Working Group (DPWG) to</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw up a set of processes • Include recommendations for communications channels with residents and relevant stakeholders. • Self-finish Manager should be involved with this task. <p>BCLT Board and Project Board to agree and sign off.</p> <p>DPWG, with Project Board to draw up a communications map. <i>It must be recognised that this will not be definitive. Issues will arise during the build that are not on this document.</i></p>

3.1.3.	Sweat Equity: Principles	BCLT needs to set out what is counted within the sweat equity equation, and to be clear about the values given to the whole range of tasks required across the scheme.	DPWG to produce clear recommendations on this. Involve Project Board in decision making before recommendations are put to BCLT Board.
3.4.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decisions needed about the implications for rent levels. See 3.4: should renters have their stake recognised through lower rents: “time equity”? Should “time equity” be a factor that gives a prospective tenant extra “points” on the allocations register? Is this possible? If it is not, the reasons must be clearly communicated. 	
3.1.3.	Communicating decisions	<p>Will United Communities residents have the same expectations, and how can CLT processes be aligned with UC’s?</p> <p>The decisions made about these issues, and the rationale for the decisions must be communicated clearly.</p>	Set up a Communications Group, drawing from all of the working groups, and Fishponds Road residents. Comms issues were raised throughout the review and are an issue within each theme.
3.1.4.	Resourcing co-production & Project Management	<p>Site roles: Self-Finish Manager</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the remit of this post, including the extent of authority and decision making of the post holder; and the relationship of this post to the Project Manager in terms of decision making Define who is responsible for residents’ Health and Safety on site. Define who is responsible for First Aid on site, and for establishing/training First Aiders <p>(2) Budget for Self-Finishing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set a clear budget for the Self-Finish Manager and define levels of authority for spend Set a realistic budget to resource co-production, including training and tools 	<p>DPWG to draft Role Descriptions and an accountability / decision making ‘map’ for all posts.</p> <p>Decision making by Project Team and BCLT Board.</p> <p>DPWG recommendations to be agreed by BCLT Board</p>
3.2.1.		Site Roles: BCLT Project Manager	

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a clear role description and budget for a Project Manager for Shaldon Road. This should be a paid role, to ensure that the post-holder is available as contracted, during working hours; and is fully accountable to the Project Team and the BCLT Board. • Include limits of decision making, and relationship with the Self-Finish Manager, UC Development Manager, BCLT Board and Shaldon Road Project Team; and with the Employer's Agent • See Recommendations in report Section 3.2.1 	This is part of the 'decision making map'
3.3.1.	Managing the contract	<p>Clarity is needed about roles and decision making, in relation to the contractor: what is the client role? Who makes client decisions?</p> <p>Set out expectations about reasonable decision making time scales.</p> <p>Put in place a decision-making log that is accessible to the Project Board, Shaldon Road post-holders, BCLT staff team, BCLT Board and relevant staff at United Communities.</p> <p>Ensure that consistent messages are given to the contractor.</p>	DPWG to work through these issues.
3.3.2	Self-finish approach: implications for the contractor	<p>Pricing for the self-finish elements must be clear and transparent.</p> <p>Decision making processes by residents about the self-finish elements must be clearly set out, including time-scales for decision making, and whether resident decisions have to be unanimous.</p> <p>Decision making processes with residents should be managed by the Self-Finish manager.</p>	DPWG to develop decision log with the Project Board, so that there is one process, shared by all.
3.3.1.		Aim to appoint a contractor who has a commitment to self-finish, and to be willing to work with resident self-finishers on site	
3.3.1	Communications	These issues must be clearly communicated to residents and contractor.	Comms Group

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3.4.	Allocations	<p>There is a need for a transparent allocations process for BCLT properties, while acknowledging the complexity of this: that changing time scales relating to both the build/contract and resident needs means that it will never be an exact science!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BCLT and United Communities need to set out clearly the extent to which their processes can, and should, be streamlined or made the same. • BCLT should have clear protocols for delegating authority for allocations, so that decisions can be made quickly when this is needed. This work is underway • Expectations of scheme residents: involve some Fishponds Road residents in a short piece of work to co-produce a document setting out the expectations of people living in BCLT schemes. 	<p>DPWG to set up an Allocations Task and Finish Group to work through these issues. Include UC Housing Managers.</p> <p>Sign off by BCLT Board</p> <p>Development Manager and residents; reporting to DPWG</p>
Organisation Development			
Ref: Report Section	Issue	Recommendation	Actions
3.5.	Communication with current residents (325 Fishponds Road)	<p>Explore the feasibility of a BCLT residents “portal” in order to have a constant channel of communication between the organisation and residents. This would put the onus on residents to check information before raising concerns. Could this be extended to members?</p>	Organisation Development Working Group (ODWG) to delegate this to the Comms Group. Include Fishponds Road residents in this task.
3.5	Communications	Develop a “people map” to explain who’s who in BCLT, and who deals with that issues. This would be for residents, and other partners.	Comms Group, with reference to ODWG.

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		<p>Communicate clearly to residents and all members about the role of BCLT as a landlord and Registered Provider.</p> <p>Develop appropriate mechanisms for resident involvement.</p> <p>See also 3.1.3.; 3.3.1.; 4.1.</p>	<p>Draw on the knowledge and experience of UC.</p>
3.2.1.	Organisation infrastructure	<p>BCLT runs on minimal resources. What is needed to enable it to grow, and to become more sustainable in the longer term? How do other CLTs fund larger staff teams? Should there be a 'CEO' role, which could lead on the development of the organisation, and on fund raising?</p>	<p>Development Manager to carry out this research, and report to ODWG</p>
4.2.	Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out a Board skills audit to identify any gaps in Board knowledge and expertise, now and into the next stages of BCLT development. • Ensure effective and transparent decision making protocols and a clear reporting structure. • Run a briefing session at a Board meeting to ensure that all Board members understand their strategic and operational roles and responsibilities; and the responsibilities that they have as Board members of an organisation that is a landlord and a developer. • It is good practice for Boards to develop an induction pack for new members, which can be part of a Board members "handbook". This can set out policies, procedures, job descriptions, expectations about levels of participation, decision making structures, etc., as well as the organisation vision. BCLT should develop this set of documents, and keep it updated. 	<p>ODWG to lead on and own this work.</p> <p>Development Officer to lead on this, reporting to the ODWG</p>

	Succession Planning	A Board information and induction pack would help to ensure consistency and would be an asset with recruiting new people to the Board. It would also help with succession planning for the Chair.	
Vision and Relationships			
Ref: Report Section	Issue	Recommendation	Actions
5.1.	BCLT Vision	<p>The report from the Visioning workshop and the lessons from this review should be aligned with each other.</p> <p>BCLT should continue to draw on the experience of more established CLTs to explore how they blend aspiration with pragmatic delivery. While the responsibility for setting the strategic direction of the organisation lies with the Board, the views of residents, members and other key stakeholders should be considered as part of this process. The Development Officer must be involved to ensure deliverability of any proposals.</p> <p>BCLT will need to communicate its mission and core offer.</p>	<p>Chair, or Chair with Task & Finish Group of Board members to present a paper to the Board</p> <p>Task and Finish Group, led by Board members Involve residents and members in this. Members could add valuable resource to this task. Development Officer to service and advise this group.</p> <p>Comms Group</p>
5.3	Membership	<p>The role of the wider membership raises important and difficult issues. BCLT should consider a longer-term piece of focused work on this issue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the offers made by CLTs to their members, e.g. RUSS in South London. 	<p>Board to decide how to resource this. There are two options:</p>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the how the management of membership will be resourced as part of a plan for the wider engagement of members. <p>Identify any 'quick wins'. See Recommendations at 5.3.</p> <p>While this is a very important area for development, BCLT should be cautious and not rush this work. It is important that decisions made are realistic and can be implemented.</p>	<p><i>Either</i> set up a Task and Finish group led by Board members, including members</p> <p><i>Or</i> outsource this (e.g. consultancy)</p> <p>Members will play a key role whichever option is agreed.</p> <p>This is a piece of work that could go on for a long time; so the Board and Development Officer need to set parameters, clear terms of reference and a timetable for it.</p>
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Appendix 1

Interviewees

Residents Focus Group of 8 people who are part of the Fishponds Road Community. Both shared owners and renters were represented.

Dave Bull: Head of Housing, United Communities

Keith Cowling: Chair of BCLT

Sally Gilbert: Development Manager, United Communities

Oona Goldsworthy: Chief Executive, United Communities

Steve Irwin: Head of Finance, United Communities

Darren Jones: Board Member, BCLT

Anna Maloney: former BCLT Development Officer

Sarah McQuatt: Development Manager, United Communities

Jackson Moulding: Self-Finish Manager; Former BCLT board member

Bridget Petty: BCLT Development Officer

Sue Walton: Board Member, BCLT; 325 Fishponds Road resident

Appendix 2

The Consultant

This review was carried out by Rowan Associates, a consultancy that was by Lori Streich in 1996 to support the delivery of effective services to people and the communities they live in. We have two decades' experience of engaging stakeholders – in research, evaluation and service development. Our focus is on

- **Evaluation and service review**
- **Engagement:** we work with organisations and their stakeholders to ensure effective participation of the right people in projects, developments and partnerships.
- **Heritage:** we work with organisations and partnerships to develop, review and evaluate heritage projects.

Lori has been working as an independent consultant since 1996. Her practice builds on considerable experience of work in the social purpose sector and with housing, health and social care providers.

She is an experienced evaluator with a track record of identifying what works for housing, health and social care and young people's organisations. Recent clients include CLIC Sargent, British Red Cross, Age UK, GreenSquare Group, the Green House Restore project and Oxfam GB. She has carried out research into the factors that contribute to effective practices at a systemic level, including for The Countryside Agency, National Housing Federation, YMCA, Communities and Local Government Department, and National Youth Agency.

Lori is the Chair of the Carriageworks Action Group, and a Non-Executive Director of SUEZ Communities Trust.