

Community Land Trusts: some Q&As

-What is a community land trust?

Community land trusts (CLTs) are a form of community led housing, run by ordinary people to own land and develop homes as well as other assets important to that community, like community enterprises, food growing or workspaces. CLTs act as long-term stewards of land and assets, ensuring that homes remain genuinely affordable – based on what people actually earn in their area – not just for now, but for every future occupier.

-Where does a CLT get its land?

CLTs acquire land in a variety of ways. Usually land needs to be bought at a low cost in order to enable the development of affordable homes (if the land price is too high then the scheme might not work financially).

Examples of how CLTs acquire land are:

- Land could be bought from a private landowner. This kind of site is sometimes suitable if it is on the edge of a settlement and is a site that can only be developed for affordable homes for local people (an exception site in planning terms).
- Land could be bought at a discount or gifted by a public body like the local authority, or a community minded landowner like a charity if they are in support of the aims of the CLT.
- Land could be bought at a discount or gifted to the CLT by a developer as part of the contribution they must make to the community as part of their planning agreement (known as a section 106 site).

-How does a CLT create affordability?

To create affordability a CLT needs to receive initial subsidy in one form or another, whether it's free land or financial grants from government, charities or benefactors. Once properties have been built, the land on which they are built is protected from fluctuations in land market valuations by a legal 'asset lock' that is a fundamental part of all CLTs' structure.

-What is meant by 'community'?

For CLTs, the community is a geographic description. It is up to the members of the CLT to determine what area the trust will seek to serve. This is usually a local parish, a town or a neighbourhood within a city. The community then means all the people that live and work, or want to live and work, within the defined geographical area.

-How is community ownership of the land protected for the future?

CLTs hold their assets in perpetuity, though they need to have the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances. The CLT's legal 'asset lock' dictates that assets can only be sold or developed in a manner which benefits the local community. So if a home is sold, the cash realised is protected and can be re-invested into something else that the trust's members think will benefit the local community.

-How are CLTs run?

CLTs are locally driven, controlled and democratically accountable. They have a membership that is open to all who live or work in the defined community, including occupiers or users of the land and properties that the trust owns. The members elect a volunteer board to run the trust on their behalf on a day to day basis. Usually, the board comprises a balanced mix of supportive local residents, tenants and employers; people from the wider area with useful skills to offer; and additional stakeholders that seek to preserve the integrity of the trust (perhaps local authority representatives, or those who endow land or property to the trust).