

SO, WHAT EXACTLY ARE COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS..... A NEW FORM OF COMMONING?

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A recent academic paper has shown just how diverse the character and purpose of CLTs can be.

Entitled '[Community Control in the Housing Commons: A Conceptual Typology](#)', the paper looks at case studies of American and English CLTs in the academic literature.

- CLTs are characterised as follows.

Some, like Homebaked, Granby and London CLT are described as 'urban activism CLTs' that emerged from grassroots community activism, and that have retained a focus on community mobilisation as much as providing homes.

Others like Christow, Corry Valley, Powerstock & District, Upper Culm, Queen Camel and Toller Porcorum are all characterised as 'hyper local rural CLTs' that were started by a few dedicated volunteers rather than an organised civil society, and which developed and sustained community engagement over time.

Two, Lyvennet and Norton-sub-Hamdon, are both put in a different 'partnered CLT' category but both really belong with the six above, all eight of which partnered with housing associations or developers. The paper touches on the complex question of how much control the community has when it partners with a housing association and contracts out the ongoing management of their homes. Those CLTs would argue that they were able to control the things that mattered to them – where the homes go and what they look like, what the affordability policy is, how local people are prioritised – and that the loss of control over management is less important.

Finally, Cornwall CLT is characterised as an 'asset lock CLT'. It's an umbrella organisation for communities across the county, using the CLT model to lock in affordability but – the paper argues – without substantial involvement of community or wider civil society and without developing community control.

I think Cornwall CLT would protest that they very extensively involve the local community in each scheme. In this, they're quite similar to London CLT, which operates over a city with a population 18 times as

large as Cornwall. In Cornwall, communities are also given the option of forming their own CLT and partnering with Cornwall CLT (as Grade Ruan CLT has done recently to build 6 low rents homes). Or – if they're too small a community and don't have the capacity – to work with Cornwall CLT to build its own homes.

But it does raise an interesting question as to what scale ownership and control operates at, in this case in a large county with a lot of very small communities. Can you develop a richer community life and participatory governance at this scale?

It echoes an earlier paper asking: [what do we mean by community?](#) Are CLTs nurturing community control? A community of neighbours? A community or purpose? A community of future residents? Or a mix of all four?

The authors of this new paper show that simply incorporating as a CLT isn't sufficient to create community control. Our model rules protect the independence of CLTs, and our work to develop the enabler hubs and advisers provides the external support that facilitates rather than undermines community control.

But real community control needs to be developed and sustained through community engagement and participatory governance, something only CLTs themselves can do.

Reading this paper may help you rethink what your CLT's purpose is and how you operate.

We have hugely improved the guidance on how you run a CLT in our new [essentials handbook](#) – the governance, operation and community outreach required to run an excellent CLT.