

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY LAND TRUST?

Notes of a Seminar held at Queen Mary University on 9th March 2016.

There was a good attendance at this seminar, which was organised jointly by Citizens UK and the Diocese of Chelmsford's Mission in Regeneration Adviser and hosted by the Right Reverend Peter Hill, Bishop of Barking.

Bishop Peter welcomed people and spoke about the problem of rising house prices in East London and the fact that ordinary working people are being priced out. This contributes to the churn of people moving in and out of the area, which is bad for community. There is a need for people to make their home in East London and, for this to happen, housing needs to be affordable, stable and permanent. In the Old Testament there is a powerful picture of people putting down roots in an area and having their own land with olive trees and a vineyard. In the New Testament, "In my Father's house" is not just about beyond this life, but also here and now. An achievable response is needed to the crisis of affordability, and Community Land Trusts are one of the ways to tackle the problem.

Church people need to be informed and need to speak out to challenge politicians, in particular, about the way forward. Bishop Peter mentioned the London Mayoral election in May 2016 and the opportunity to engage with the main candidates at an event organised by London Citizens at the Copper Box in the Olympic Park at end of April.

Community Land Trusts – The National Picture Catherine Harrington, National CLT Network

Catherine Harrington set up the National CLT Network which operates in England & Wales. The group represents 175 CLTs and also lobbies Government on housing policy and works with Housing Associations and others.

Catherine gave a summary of housing today. Despite efforts to revive house building, the number of new homes being built remains at record low levels. Last year we built less than half the homes needed just to keep up with the new households forming each year. In many parts of the country private rents are soaring and house prices are rising. At the same time, in other parts of the country, there are whole neighbourhoods blighted by empty properties, disinvestment and failed regeneration initiatives. Some people are worried because they cannot fulfil their aspiration to buy a home, or are suffering because of overcrowding or poor private rented conditions. Other people are struggling to maintain the character and social fabric of the place they love as they witness the boarding up of homes, the closure of shops and the disintegration of services.

Community Land Trusts are a key part of the solution to the crisis of homes and communities. CLTs are local organisations set up and run by ordinary people. Land is gifted or bought by the community, homes are built, and the CLT remains long-term steward of the homes. The CLT's main task is to make sure these homes are genuinely affordable, based on what people actually earn in their area, not just for now but for every future occupier. The CLT can also develop and manage other assets important to that community, like community enterprises, food growing or workspaces.

The number of CLTs has grown from 40 to 175 in 5 years. 80% of CLTs are in rural areas, but the number of urban CLTs is growing. The goal is a CLT in each community. Catherine encouraged clergy and others at the seminar to get involved in local initiatives. Catherine gave some examples of CLTs: Lyvennet Community Trust has secured a sustainable future for the village of Crosby Ravensworth in Cumbria. Keswick Churches Together played a key role in



setting up the Keswick CLT. In some places the local church has disposed of a parcel of land to make a CLT possible. Further details <http://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk>

Recent measures by the Government will make the situation more difficult. Right to Buy extended to Housing Associations will impact partnerships with CLTs, and the 1% cut in rent will mean that Housing Associations will have less money so they'll be less inclined to partner. Starter Homes (which will not be affordable in most areas) will have to be provided in most housing schemes, and this will take money away from other affordable housing, including CLTs. In particular, the National CLT Network has been lobbying the Government that CLTs should be exempt from the Right to Buy legislation.

There was a question about whether churches are able to sell land to set up a CLT, as Trustees are required by the Charity Commission to get best value. A spokesperson for Housing Justice responded that it can be possible to argue that it's in keeping with the charity's objects and said there is further information about "Faith in Affordable Housing" on the Housing Justice website: <http://www.housingjustice.org.uk/pages/fiah.html>

Theology and Communities

Rev Canon Angus Ritchie and Sarah Hutt, Centre for Theology & Communities

Angus is Executive Director of the Centre for Theology & Communities and Priest-in-Charge of St. George's in the East in Tower Hamlets. The Centre equips churches to transform their communities through community organising, theological reflection and prayer. He said that community organising is part of what it means to be a community gathered around the Lord's Table.

Angus asked the question: How is the housing crisis affecting people in your community? He gave an example of a family living in overcrowded conditions in Dagenham. When people have to move, friendships are lost and the community loses an asset. There is also an affect on children and schools. The shift to multi-occupancy housing erodes community cohesion.

Angus mentioned a publication, "From Houses to Homes – Faith, Power and the Housing Crisis" that he and Sarah have written.

http://www.theology-centre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/CTC_HousestoHomes_V3.pdf

Sarah Hutt is the Housing Campaign Co-ordinator for the Centre for Theology & Communities. She said that people often think that housing policy is about economics or politics, but it's actually about human relationships. Good housing policy should be about people, roots and community.

Sarah spoke about "Land and Housing in the Bible". The introduction is given here, and the details are in the "From Houses to Homes" publication (pages 12 – 20).

Scripture has a wealth of things to say about housing and land, which are both profoundly spiritual and inescapably practical. Indeed, the two cannot be separated. In ancient Israel, as today, the way a nation treats housing has a major impact on relationships – not only with one another, but also with God.

This is the central insight of Walter Brueggemann's powerful Biblical study on The Land. Four key themes of his discussion are highlighted here:

1. God deals with specifics, not abstractions – and so place matters
2. 'Home' is an important Biblical image of redemption
3. Communities are not commodities
4. God is present in the poorest in a particular way

This theological underpinning provides the impetus for the current campaigns by London Citizens on affordability, bad landlords and the lack of control of local people over housing. The publication "From Houses to Homes" gives practical ways the Church can help.

Sophie Morley

Architecture Sans Frontieres-UK

Architecture Sans Frontieres-UK (ASF) is a UK registered charity that creates architecture for people and communities. The aim is to make places that are more sustainable, more environmentally friendly and are ordered and designed by the people who live in them.

Further details: <http://www.asf-uk.org/>

Architecture Sans Frontieres works in many different countries and aims to work through local partners to build capacity, eg, work in India on strategies for development after the flooding.

Plans are developed based on shared concerns and visions. ASF provides the technical knowledge, but local knowledge is also important or things might not change for the better.

Sophie commented that, in general, consultation is not done well in this country as local residents are not engaged and developers do not listen to them. She gave an example of how it should be done - a workshop with Camden Citizens, where participatory design was used to understand community aspirations. Different methods of engagement included talking, mapping, photography, walking, playing. Activities were held in pop-up Teashops to capture as many voices as possible. Findings were collated to create strategic plans – what to change and what to keep. This is an inclusive process that is about empowering communities. Working in this collaborative way is time and labour intensive, but it is possible to achieve plans that communities can influence locally.

In this particular example in Camden the challenge was HS2, with a 25-year construction phase, 175 homes lost and lots of upheaval. It's important to be realistic – the Government is driving the project, so sending in a local petition against the proposals wouldn't stop the project going ahead. However, before the engagement process, the community's voice was being blocked. The process itself helped vulnerable people in the community come to terms with the change in the area, and resulted in the development of a Citizens Charter for Euston, which brought about improvements. There is further information in this document "Reclaiming Regeneration: Negotiating a Citizens Charter for Euston Area", Edited by Alexandre Apsan Frediani, Tamlyn Monson and Stephanie Butcher, in partnership with Citizens UK. http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/programmes/postgraduate/msc-social-development-practice/London-based-fieldwork/2015_report_reclaiming_regeneration_Euston

Neighbourhood Forums are starting to be formed and are working on drawing up neighbourhood plans – many of the above tools can be used to engage local people in the planning and give power back to communities. Sophie acknowledged that it can be difficult to engage people if there's no identifiable threat, as a common threat does pull people together, but she says it's possible and has been done overseas.

St Clements – Introduction to London's first CLT

Calum Green, Citizens UK, Community Organiser in Peckham and London CLT

Calum started by giving an introduction to Citizens UK, an alliance of 300 member organisations across the UK – faith groups, educational institutions, Trade Unions and Charities. It started about 20 years ago in East London with TELCO because ordinary people on their own don't have the power they need to effect change, but together they can be more powerful. The person generally considered to be the founder of modern community organising is Saul Alinsky (1909 –72), who focused on improving the living conditions of poor communities across North America.

Calum gave a modern example: Peckham Citizens' 1,000 voices campaign spoke to 1,000 people in Peckham on what they like and dislike about the area. One of the main issues raised was Kelly Avenue Park, after drug dealing, shootings and gang activity made it unsafe for children to play there. 60 children turned up and spoke about the issues at a Peckham Citizens' assembly meeting, and Southwark's cabinet member for public health, parks and leisure, made a commitment to work with Peckham Citizens to make the park clean and safe. Funding was made available. This shows the power of 60 children. Community organising is not about representation or advocacy, but about training local people so they can help themselves.

The St. Clement's CLT started as part of the Olympic bid. People said they wanted workers to be paid a living wage, the employment of young people and a CLT to provide affordable housing. The Olympic organisers agreed, and then, when the bid was won, they asked more questions and said they wanted a pilot project to prove it works. There were problems finding a site. St. Clement's was formerly a psychiatric hospital and the NHS had just transferred it to the Greater London Authority (GLA) as a site for future development. The CLT put in a bid but were not successful. However, following pressure on the candidates for London Mayor in 2012, when 2,500 people turned up to an event at Methodist Central Hall, Mayor Boris Johnson, when appointed, asked the winning company to work with the CLT group.

There are 23 homes as part of the St. Clement's CLT, currently under construction. They are for sale and the cost is about 1/3 of local price in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (£130,000 for a 1-bed property, £182 for a 2-bed, £235 for a 3-bed). Calum referred to the St. Clement's CLT as an East London model, where there is a need for affordable homes to buy. Elsewhere in the country, the model is mainly homes for rent and shared ownership.

It has taken 6 – 7 years to get to the current stage, but nothing could have been achieved without people power. When people power is combined with technical know-how it's possible to get things done. Calum mentioned a Council meeting in the London Borough of Redbridge where 75 people all stood up together to show they were united in the desire for CLTs to be included in planning policy for the borough. Redbridge has agreed to deliver 2 CLTs in future. The London Citizens' meeting at the Copper Box in the Olympic Park at the end of April 2016 (ahead of the Mayoral election at the beginning of May) will focus on housing and the Mayoral candidates will be asked how they intend to solve London's housing crisis.

In most cases CLTs are on public land, and local churches help to drive them forward. In a few cases (a Baptist Church in Southwark was mentioned) churches do it themselves, which shames the politicians. This can give good leverage – eg we want you to do 100+ and we'll do some ourselves. The advantage of a CLT is that the housing is affordable in perpetuity.

There were some questions:

Who gets a home? Applications have been received from people who satisfy the host borough's housing priorities. People need to have been priced out of the open market but able to afford a mortgage. There needs to be a local connection and local involvement – belonging to or participating in the borough. It will also be useful if people are supportive of the first London CLT, as it will be helpful if they're advocates, but they can't be forced on this. There was a question about what happens when people move? The property is sold back to the CLT and then it will be sold to someone else. However, because the land is taken out of the equation, it remains low cost housing.

The CLT will be involved in the whole development and will try to ensure it's a fantastic place to live.

The Seminar was followed by a visit to the marketing suite at the St. Clement's development

Carol Richards 18/04/16

