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**Oxford City  
Council Local  
Plan 2036**

*Community-led and  
Self-build Housing*

BACKGROUND  
PAPER

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper comprises of a review of the wider planning policy context relating to community-led and self-build housing, an overview of the level of demand for self-build housing, and a discussion of the justification of the policy in the draft Oxford Local Plan 2036, as well as considering potential impacts on the viability and timing of implementation.

## **POLICY AND REGULATORY CONTEXT**

### **Revised National Planning Policy Framework (2018)**

The revised NPPF states the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes and stresses the importance of bringing forward a sufficient amount and variety of land where needed (paragraph 59). Planning policies are required to identify and cater for the variety of sizes, types and tenures of homes that are required for different groups within the community. Alongside the expected groups – such as families with children, people with disabilities, older people and those in need of affordable housing, amongst others – there is a requirement to take into account those who wish to commission or build their own homes.

The Revised framework (paragraph 64) also states that major housing developments must make available at least 10% of their properties for affordable housing. Exemptions are made for certain forms of development, including:

- developments solely providing Build to Rent homes;
- specialist accommodation for a group of people with specific needs (such as purpose-built accommodation for the elderly or students);
- sites for people who wish to build or commission their own homes;
- developments exclusively for affordable housing, an entry level exception site or a rural exception site.

This approach indicates that the aim is to encourage self-building as a primary conduit for meeting local housing needs while giving the opportunity for people to create homes that are best suited for their own or their community's needs.

## **LEVEL OF INTEREST IN SELF/CUSTOM BUILD HOMES**

The Self build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (as amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016) places a duty on relevant authorities to maintain a register of individuals or associations that have an interest in acquiring serviced plots of land in order to build dwellings to be occupied as homes. Accordingly the council maintains a register which currently indicates a modest level of interest for self/custom built homes in the city

area. The Oxford register has been maintained since 2016 and currently there are 49 individuals on the register, along with the Oxford Cohousing group which has 21 members.

There are at least 3 groups operating in and around the Oxford area that are part of the National Community Land Trust network, with a number of self/custom builder networks that each maintain their own lists/registers of members, which seems to reflect that there is a level of interest in alternative models of housing provision. These are informal registers. It is quite possible that interested individuals may register on both the formal and informal lists, only on the informal list or on none at all. As such, arriving at a definitive number of potential self/custom builders is not straightforward and the figures are at best only an indicator for the level of interest.

Another indicator is the number of completions of developments within the self/custom build category, which can be measured by the number of CIL exemptions granted on that basis. Since 2016 there have been 24 CIL payment exemptions granted on the basis of the developments being self-builds, and there have been between 8 to 10 such exemptions granted in each year between 2014 and 2017. This figure has held steady over the time period and indicates that there is a modest level of take up.

In 2016 and 2017, there were 23 and 20 new entries respectively added to the register. As at July 2018 there are 7, which is a sharp decline compared to the same points in the previous years. While it is too early to say definitively that this is an established trend, the decline in numbers could be an indication likely future rates of addition, as latent demand will have resulted in many people adding themselves to the register initially, and a decline would be expected in following years. At this point it is difficult to predict trends, but a demand of 200-300 might be expected over the Plan period.

## **LEVEL OF INTEREST IN COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING IN OXFORD**

Community led housing schemes are a means of delivering housing which allows for people to be more involved in the process of meeting their specific needs and wants. These are developments driven by groups that are formed on the basis of a geographical connection or any other characteristic the members have in common. There are various approaches that can be followed in delivering housing this way, which can encompass new build, regeneration or the use of existing buildings. The exact form that these schemes take would depend on the nature of the demand, available resources, location and type of activity. Schemes that are community-led generally have the following characteristics that make them distinct from other forms of development<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> From an overview by World Habitat – formerly the Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) – [www.world-habitat.org/our-programmes/community-led-housing](http://www.world-habitat.org/our-programmes/community-led-housing) (accessed July 2018)

- A requirement that the benefits of the scheme to the local area and/or specified community must be clearly defined and legally protected in perpetuity.
- A presumption in favour of community groups that are taking a long term formal role in the ownership, management and/or stewardship of the homes
- A requirement that the community must be integrally involved throughout the process in key decisions, whether or not they initiate and manage the development process, or build the homes themselves

The self-build register currently has the details of one association and is a straightforward measure of the level of interest. At a broader scale Community First Oxfordshire has been a key regional body in promoting community-led housing and demonstrating the level of interest. It has organised a number of public workshops with the view to holding more<sup>2</sup>. The events thus far have been well attended with very positive and enthusiastic feedback from the participants, who hail from a range of organisations and backgrounds, including activists, councillors and built environment practitioners.

The City Council has commissioned Community First Oxfordshire with partner organisations Oxfordshire Community Foundation and Oxfordshire Community Land Trust to undertake a research project to explore the sustainable delivery of community housing within the City<sup>3</sup>. The findings are due in the autumn of 2018. The research has been facilitated by £54000 worth of funding from the Community Housing Fund, which is part of a national scheme to support and promote the delivery of more Community-led housing<sup>4</sup>.

## **POLICY JUSTIFICATION**

Self-build housing and community-led housing in particular could make a modest contribution to meeting the OAN as identified in the SHMA. Being locally based self-building individuals or groups and community housing groups are likely to be in a particularly good position to identify needs and develop typologies that are most suitable for end users. The current SHMA identifies the main barriers to the development of this sector as lack of land, limited financial options, restrictive regulation and the absence of impartial information for potential home builders.

Community-led housing in particular has the potential to bring significant social and communal benefits which include:

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<sup>2</sup> Community Led Housing - <http://www.communityfirstoxon.org/housing-community-planning/community-led-housing/> - accessed July 2018

<sup>3</sup> Community First Oxfordshire Annual Report 2017-18

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.communityfirstoxon.org/housing-community-planning/community-led-housing/>

- mobilising public support for new homes and regeneration initiatives;
- reducing reliance on public services by building communities and providing mutual support for the vulnerable or disadvantaged;
- providing a range of genuinely affordable housing in perpetuity, including rented homes that are not susceptible to the Right to Buy, and homes for those priced out of ownership;
- diversifying the local housebuilding market, and providing a route for small sites to become available;
- supporting the implementation of statutory duties such providing permissioned plots for individuals and groups on the Self and Custom Build Registers; and
- promoting community cohesion and resilience

Oxford is a unique case with respect to its spatial and physical constraints, which in turn affects the number of sites that could be available for housing. The majority of the allocated sites in the Local Plan are small sites of less than 50 units that are not best suited for volume housebuilding. Therefore, priority is given to provision for social rented/affordable homes for which there is a great need. The threshold requiring the allocation of suitable land has been set bearing in mind the relative lack of large sites within the Oxford area.

With respect to the national planning context, there appears to be trend towards placing increased importance on self-build housing provision contributing to the OAN. It is clear from recent national planning guidance and from the assessment of demand in Oxford that a positive policy is required that will ensure the delivery of plots for self-building. The proposed policy responds to this.

## **DRAFTING THE LOCAL PLAN POLICY**

The draft Local Plan includes the following policy:

### **Policy H7: Community-led Housing and Self-build Housing**

*Proposals for community-led housing will be supported because of the benefits they are expected to bring in terms of community cohesion and sustainable development.*

*Proposals for self-build housing will be supported as a way of enabling people to meet their own housing needs.*

*On residential sites of 50 units or more, 5% of the site area developed for residential should be made available as self-build plots. Employer-linked housing, student accommodation, specialist care*

*housing and residential development in conversions or constrained brownfield sites where only flatted development is provided are excluded from this requirement. Plots will be part of the 50% market housing element of the scheme, unless they are to be conditioned to be brought forward as housing that meets the affordable housing definition. Plots should have services (water, foul drainage and electricity supply) to the boundary and access to the public highway. Plots should also have surface water drainage, telecommunications services, and gas (or district heating) where available.*

*A legal agreement will be used to ensure that if the self-build plots have not sold after 12 months of marketing, then dwellings should be built and brought forward via S106 in the normal way, in accordance with other policies including regarding affordable housing and housing mix, rather than reverting to the open market.*

Table B of the HELAA 2018 shows the anticipated number of sites to come forward and estimates how many homes they will deliver. From this table, all developments of 50+ residential units (other than those that would be excluded by the policy) were identified, and the likely area of residential development was estimated. 5% of this residential area would equate to approximately 3ha of land that would be available for self-build accommodation, which could be expected to be adequate to meet predicted demand.

## **IMPACT ON LOCAL PLAN VIABILITY**

The viability assessment comprises, among other elements, of the appraisal of a number of development scenarios that are based on a number of assumptions, including dwelling sizes, residential sales, development costs and allocations for affordable housing provision at all levels. The proposed approach of the policy is to enable the availability of self-build plots as part of the intermediate housing provision required as part of larger housing sites. As such it is not expected that there would be additional burden on the developer with respect to the viability of such developments. It will also not be a blanket requirement that would be applied to developments of all sizes and as such the policy is not expected to comprise of an onerous element to developments in the pipeline.

## **TIMING**

The proposed policy would not require special arrangements or preparations other than the allocation of suitable sites. These allocations will comprise that which is already set aside for affordable housing requirements and as such it is not expected that there would be an additional burden on developers.

## **LIKELY TRENDS WITHOUT A NEW POLICY**

Without a supporting policy the latent demand may not be encouraged, and the potential contribution to the overall housing provision that could come through this route would be constrained.