

**ON-LINE RESPONSE TO DCLG QUESTIONNAIRE****1. What is the name of your Local Authority?**

Dover District Council

**2. Intended use of the grant: Revenue support to groups**

*(This could include any plans that your local authority has for providing grants to CLH groups for technical advice and seed-corn funding to establish themselves; further technical advice and professional fees to develop their plans; funding for existing organisations to provide advice and support to CLH groups in your local authority area)*

The Council has worked for many years in partnership with Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) to deliver affordable homes in the rural part of the district. Together with other LHAs in Kent we jointly fund a Rural Housing Enabler employed by ACRK. We anticipate that the promotion and development of CHF projects will have an impact on this limited resource and we are in discussion with other LHAs who have received funding and ACRK about the need to increase capacity and additional funding that may be required for additional local housing needs surveys.

We are also interested in the possible development of a loans/grants scheme similar to that developed by South Hams District Council. The scheme provides loans to registered CLTs, constituted community groups and town and parish councils to assist with pre development costs eg professional fees such as architects/surveyors and general costs associated with progressing a scheme. The ability to provide loans is attractive as it will enable funds to be recycled and ensure the longer term sustainability of the scheme.

We would like to explore potential interest in self build and custom build and how we raise awareness of these potential options. One way of doing this would be to run a local event (possibly jointly with neighbouring councils) and use some specialist advisers. We can consider whether or not the Council owns any areas of land that would be suitable for such a scheme.

The Council is looking to acquire a development appraisal tool to assist with the appraisal of its own housing development projects and would be willing to make the tool available to community groups and provide support in the use of the tool. The tool under consideration is one which was originally designed to be used by CLTs.

**3. Intended use of the grant: Capital**

*(What plans do you have to make grants or loans available to community groups to deliver affordable units? Capital can be used to make mixed tenure schemes viable, and to increase the number of schemes within the delivery pipelines. If known, please indicate the number of additional homes that you expect the grants/loans will enable over the next 3-5 years)*

We are currently involved in active discussions with a parish council and CLT in relation to the provision of new affordable homes in two villages. Surveys have been carried out which support the need for such homes. We are now assessing potentially suitable sites. However, the financial viability

of the schemes may be an obstacle and we would like to use the CHF to help address this issue and deliver the type homes needed. We anticipate the 2 schemes would deliver around 15 new homes.

The Council is also in the process of securing an option on an area of land in another village through a planning agreement. This is a village where the parish council has, in the past, unsuccessfully tried to facilitate a rural exception site development due to lack of suitable sites. We would therefore like to work in partnership with the parish council to bring forward an affordable housing scheme on the option site. In partnership with the parish council we would like explore ways in which they can secure a long term financial stake in the development. The scheme is likely to deliver around 10 – 15 new affordable homes.

We are also in early stage negotiations with a developer who is looking to develop a large brownfield site in the district which has been stalled for a number of years. It has been difficult to attract interest from RPs in the affordable housing quota and the Council is exploring the possibility of directly acquiring the affordable housing so as to help unlock the site. The developer has also indicated that he wants to try and provide around 20 homes for ex-service men and women and we have had preliminary discussions about the possibility of some of these being delivered on a self-build basis. We are aware of a similar scheme that has been undertaken in Bristol.

We would be interested in exploring a potential, low or no interest, loan scheme for self-builders which would help fund the construction phase and then be repaid when a conventional mortgage is raised.

#### **4. Joint plans across your local area**

*(What discussions, if any, has your local authority had with neighbouring authorities to pool part of the funds? This could include supporting an existing – or establishing a new – local enabling service, or providing a shared resource to support delivery (such as a revolving land purchase fund))*

LHAs in Kent have a strong record of sharing good practice and partnership working. The partnership vehicle is Kent Housing Group and there are various sub-groups and task & finish groups which meet on a regular basis. The Strategy & Enabling Sub Group recently completed a refresh of the Rural Housing Protocol for Kent and at its most recent meeting it discussed the CHF and the potential for joint working. As well as funding additional capacity within ACRK the group intends to explore the possible development of an umbrella CLT similar to that which has been developed for Cornwall.

We are currently involved in discussions with ACRK regarding the potential creation of a community-led housing hub which would act as a community housing focal point within Kent for activities such as promotion, training, capacity building and networking. ACRK is a member of the Community led Housing Alliance and would be able to draw upon expertise within the Alliance. Relationships have already been established with the CLT Network, British Social Housing Foundation and Co-housing network.

We have also held meetings with the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) to discuss how we may be able to utilise their network of contacts to generate interest amongst town and parish councils in forming community led housing organisations.

## **5. Advice obtained**

*(In drawing up these plans, which CLH specialists or other stakeholders (e.g. housing partnerships, housing associations, other community associations) have your local authority engaged?)*

We have a strong track record of partnership working with both ACRK and English Rural HA in respect of the development of affordable housing schemes in the rural parts of the district.

ACRK attended the recent HSEG meeting referred to at 4. above and Stephen Hill a member of the National CLT Network Board was also present to give advice about the CHF.

We are also engaged in discussions with the Kent Association of Local Council, neighbouring LAs and Kent Housing Group about the possible development of a partnership approach and are in the process of setting up a meeting with Locality, the national membership network of 600 community-led organisations, to see how they may be able to assist us in developing our approach to community led housing.

## **6. Existing local activity**

*(Which CLH groups already exist in your local authority's area; which other community organisations might want to develop housing; and which other planned developments are you aware of that could become community-led?)*

The main community representative bodies that we work with on housing projects are parish councils and over the years we have enabled the provision of several successful new housing schemes. ACRK has also given advice to a parish council which is now actively involved in forming a CLT.

Other groups involved in housing projects include Aylesham Community Welfare Trust and the St Margaret's Bay Trust. The Aylesham trust was recently involved in a partnership project with Orbit Homes to provide affordable housing on land owned by the Tust. As part of the development agreement 2 houses were built for the Trust and provide it with a revenue income stream.

Some of the planned developments that could become community led are referred to in 3 above. In addition to these the Council has recently granted planning permission for a residential development which includes a number of self-build plots and early stage discussions around the possibility of some plots being included in a community led housing project have been positive.

## **7. Intended use of the Fund – developing your plans for the fund**

*(What plans does your local authority have to use the grant to procure further advice or additional officer capacity?)*

We recognise that there is limited capacity within the Council to stimulate interest within our community in the scheme. We no longer have a dedicated housing enabling officer but there is knowledge, skills and expertise that is available in other council services, such as community development, and we can also tap into the expertise available in partner organisations such as ACRK, KALC and housing associations. As mentioned above we are in discussion with ACRK and other Kent councils about increasing capacity within ACRK ever, but we also think it would be beneficial to employ a dedicated member of staff on a temporary contract to drive the project and build capacity and sustainability in local groups. This could be a dedicated post within the Council or possibly one

that is shared with neighbouring councils. We have strong track record of sharing services across East Kent including an ALMO jointly owned with 3 other councils. All of these partner councils have also received CHF funding. There has already been an initial discussion regarding this.

## **8. Other plans**

*(What other plans – not covered above – does your local authority have to deploy the grant funds in accordance with the aims of the programme? Plans could include use of your or others' financial or staff resources, or through your policies and asset management plans)*

The information provided above pretty much sets out our thinking at this stage about how we would be able to use the funding to enable the delivery of community led housing projects.

The Council is currently considering a number of affordable housing opportunities it can deliver directly and we will explore ways in which we can engage with community groups and facilitate their involvement.

We have also undertaken a review of HRA land holdings and as referred to above some of these may provide self-build/custom build opportunities.

As mentioned above we are keen to look at the potential to recruit to a dedicated community housing officer post which would take a lead on promotion, relationship building, skills and capacity building. Our community development team already has many of the skill sets required and we see the post as one which can act as focal point for community housing groups and provide a key link between housing services and community development services.