



Transition Homes Community Land Trust

www.transitionhomes.org.uk

REconomy Project

Mission

Provide low cost and low carbon homes built with local, natural materials in a sustainable setting that includes food production, renewable energy and waste management.

The idea grew from a recognition that we needed homes that were efficient to run as well as low in embedded energy and affordable for people in housing need. Our initial project is to build 25 homes on a 7 acre site which leaves plenty of room for food production. However, at least a million people in the UK are in serious housing need and millions more live in unsuitable homes. This project is designed as an exemplar for how local people can develop sustainable housing and we hope that many other communities will copy, and improve on, this project.

Is there a link with Transition?

Yes – our project grew out of the Building & Housing Group within Transition Town Totnes. All of our directors are active in TTT, we are represented on the core group and also have a TTT Trustee who is responsible for keeping us in good communication with TTT Ltd, the charity which oversees various legal responsibilities for TTT.

Your product or service – how much does it help improve resilience in your local community or elsewhere?

Low carbon homes for people in housing need – housing is a basic need and, since our homes are responsible for over 25% of energy consumption, the more we can reduce this the more resilient our community becomes. Affordability is also crucial. Places where local people have to move away because they can't afford to buy or rent a home are unlikely to be sustainable as real communities.

Employees

15+ volunteers with a board of 10 trustees. No full time employees as yet but we will be employing professionals and consultants as required. We held a design competition among local architects and selected a small practice who demonstrated that they clearly understood the Transition Homes concept and had ideas of their own about how it could be implemented. We've already employed local surveyors for a topographical site survey and an ecologist to study the site.

Are you in profit? If not, when do you anticipate being so? How long have you been trading?

Not trading but we raised and spent around £15,000 last year. This year a few local people lent us £250,000 to purchase the 7 acre site and Venturesome CAF are loaning us another £60,000. We expect the project to create a small surplus towards Transition Homes 2.0!

What is your company structure and why did you choose it?

Community Land Trust – this enables us to manage land and other assets for 'charitable purposes' even though we are not a charity and ensure housing remains affordable in perpetuity. CLT's are recognised at local authority and government level as a vehicle for delivering affordable housing and the National CLT Network provides a supportive umbrella with regular workshops, conferences, case studies and advice.

What about financial sustainability? Are you trading or part-trading without money?

Grants from Tudor Trust and the Network for Social Change enabled us to get the project off the ground. We also have small loans from local individuals to help us get going as well as £250,000 loaned from three local supporters which enabled us to make our first purchase of 7 acres of land. We have an agreement with Venturesome CAF to lend us £60,000 as a non-recourse loan to prepare the planning application and the first chunk of £30,000 is now in our account.

Are you looking to build more common wealth & ownership and is priority your profit sharing and/or community benefits versus more traditional investor returns?

Yes – if possible we would like to raise the development finance through a community share issue. We are also considering forming a partnership with Totnes Renewable Energy Society (TRESOC) to develop the on-site renewable energy systems. The homes we build will be either rental or shared equity to ensure affordability and the fact that we are a community land trust means that we can lock in this affordability for all future occupants.

Localisation – are you sourcing, distributing and interacting locally?

Absolutely – local materials, local employees and local finance if possible. We intend the project to have a legacy of training and education in natural building systems and the use of local materials. We have support from Parish and Town Councils and the first thing we did after purchasing the site was talk to the immediate neighbours. We are also collaborating with South Devon College and hope that their staff and students will be involved in the design and build.

Where appropriate we will source expertise from outside the immediate area but always with a view to building local resilience. For example, we've been talking to Patrick Whitefield, the UK's foremost permaculture designer and Jay Abrams who has an international reputation for permaculture wet systems design. But involving local volunteers in the process should mean that we can develop a body of skills and experience that we can use for future projects.

Climate impacts – negative, beneficial or neutral?

Homes will be extremely well insulated, built with local and natural materials that have low levels of embodied energy and generate significant amounts of energy from renewable sources – solar PV and solar thermal and biomass heating. Overall impact should be carbon neutral or carbon negative.

Anything else you want to share with us?

We see this as an exemplar project – which means others should be able to learn from all the mistakes we will be making! Education, learning and hands on training are integral parts of the project. We have agreement for articles in Green Building and Permaculture Magazine and believe this project will excite interest around the UK and much further.

