



SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO LEVELLING UP

1. WHO WE ARE

- 1.1. The Community Land Trust Network is the official charity supporting Community Land Trusts (CLTs) in England and Wales. We are a membership body and represent 350 CLTs with over 1,800 homes and other assets, and which together have plans to deliver 7,000 homes by 2026.
- 1.2. CLTs are best known as a form of Community Led Housing, along with housing co-operatives, cohousing communities, development trusts and self-help housing groups.
- 1.3. Community Land Trusts are democratic, not-for-profit community organisations. They are established for a specified local community. Anyone who lives or works there, and who supports the CLT's objects, can become a member. The members jointly own, and democratically control, the CLT. It may only use its assets for the social, environmental and economic benefit of the local community. CLTs provide communities with a participatory democratic capacity at the local level, complementary to the representative democratic function of local councils.
- 1.4. For further information on CLTs and this response please contact Tom Chance, Chief Executive of the National CLT Network, on tom@communitylandtrusts.org.uk.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1. **The key point we wish to make with this submission is that the Levelling Up White Paper fails to join the dots between sections on community action on the one hand, and housebuilding and planning on the other.**
- 2.2. The Secretary of State for LUHC told Parliament in December 2022 that he wishes to encourage development that is "done democratically with local communities rather than to them, that protects and improves our environment, and that leaves us with better

neighbourhoods than before.”¹ But while this rhetoric resonates with the positive section on community empowerment in the white paper, the paper does not provide any new mechanisms to take this approach when it comes to housebuilding, regeneration and the wider use of land, in left behind areas.

- 2.3. One of the secrets to the successes in past initiatives such as the New Deal for Communities was the integration of mainstream service provision – the basics – into the programme through partnerships between those service providers and councils, SMEs and community groups.
- 2.4. Local communities can be actors and agents of change in housebuilding and regeneration, partnering with the public and private sectors. They can do much more than take on at-risk assets with Community Ownership Fund bids; they can be involved in the development and regeneration process beyond the creation of local plans. Community organisations can play a part in building, repurposing and renovating, owning, managing and stewarding homes, shops, workspace, community centres. CLTs in left behind areas are already doing this, and can be brought in as partners on private and public-sector led development to develop greater social capital and cohesion.
- 2.5. There is a strong body of evidence that enabling this agency in housebuilding and regeneration has positive impacts in terms of social cohesion, health, pride and a sense of belonging; in improving opportunities for affordable home ownership; and reducing the number of non-decent rented homes. There is also evidence of co-benefits including the creation of more jobs and training opportunities.
- 2.6. We, therefore, propose a range of policy measures that would support, or create, opportunities for meaningful community agency in housebuilding and regeneration. These would be underpinned, and much strengthened, in left behind areas by the creation of a Community Wealth Fund.

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVELLING UP WHITE PAPER

- 3.1. We welcome the Government’s and the APPG on Left Behind Neighbourhoods’ exploration into what makes an area feel left behind and what is needed to ensure sustainable levelling up with local communities at the heart.
- 3.2. We support the White Paper’s commitment to ending geographical inequality so people can have fulfilling lives in the places where they already live and work. We agree that left

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<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-12-06/debates/22120655000010/PlanningSystemAndLevelling-UpAndRegenerationBill?highlight=done%20democratically%20with%20local%20communities%20rather%20than%20them#contribution-4018F53C-6F07-4BA0-862C-9479B6CFE36C>

- behind neighbourhoods “lack vital social infrastructure” in terms of **meaningful opportunity and space for people to be in community with each other**, leading to the absence of pride in place, or satisfaction people feel about their local area’s future.
- 3.3. We agree that an infusion of **good quality housing**, refreshed and thriving **high streets** and genuine **community empowerment** are key ingredients to rebuild social capital, local capacity, local economic growth, and pride in place in these neighbourhoods. And we agree that this equation will contribute to higher well-being, health, education, and innovation outcomes in left behind neighbourhoods.
- 3.4. **High-quality housing that people can afford** (for the right people in the right places) is a core building block of people’s feeling of security and trust in their neighbourhoods, and ultimately their pride in place. Addressing poor quality and insecure housing must be foundational to improving the quality of life and health of people in left behind neighbourhoods, especially as they are uniquely vulnerable to crises like the cost of living crisis and Covid-19.² We support the White Paper’s commitments to improving housing provision.
- 3.5. We support the proposed new **Strategy for Community Spaces and Relationships**, and the strong principles underpinning it (below). But we would note that **housing is fundamental to creating these spaces and relationships** - both the physical spaces within and between our homes in which we meet neighbours and friends, and the processes by which those are planned, built and managed which can create social connections.
- 3.6. **The paper frames levelling up as, in part, building community power around people and places** - strengthening the bonds between people and their places as well as with one another. Ending the inequality of geography is only possible if the levelling up effort harnesses the knowledge, spirit, grit and agency of local communities and their leaders. This is welcome.
- 3.7. Evidence collected by the APPG found that “**local and central government often focus on weak forms of community participation** ... projects and programmes can often leave communities feeling ‘done to’, eroding traditions of self-help and community organisation.”³ **This is particularly common when it comes to housebuilding and place-based regeneration**, with tokenistic consultation the common experience for local communities. The white paper cites neighbourhood planning as one way to bring democracy into the planning system. But this is under-represented in left behind areas. It is a complex, bureaucratic and ultimately quite weak way to influence development. And it

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<https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/news/residents-in-left-behind-neighbourhoods-uniquely-vulnerable-to-rising-cost-of-living/>

³ <https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/APPG-Session-4-briefing.pdf>

offers no opportunity for community participation in the preparation of planning applications, post-consent changes, the build-out, and then the decades or centuries over which the homes and other assets are managed, adapted and change hands.

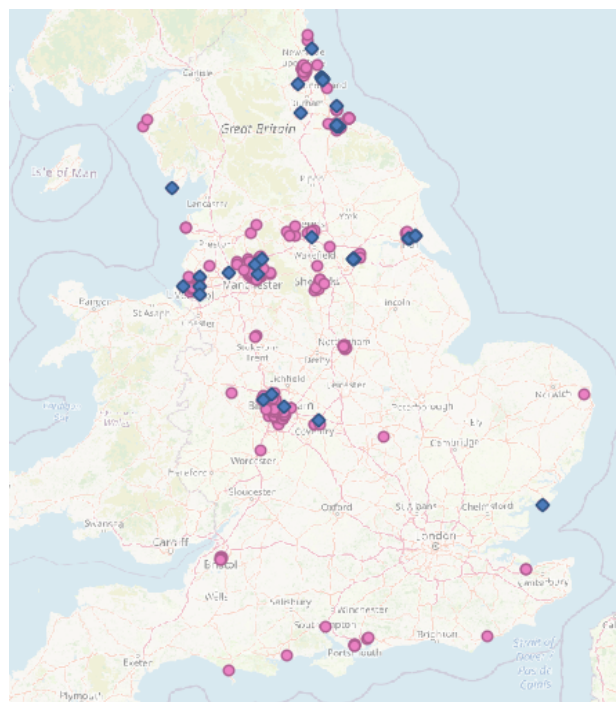
- 3.8. Similarly, the proposal of **Community Covenants** is welcome, to encourage more partnership working between community organisations and the public and private sector. But this seems focused for the moment on the provision of local social and community services, and **the idea has not encompassed the potential for partnerships involving communities in housebuilding and place-based regeneration.**

4. MISSING FOCUS - LAND AND HOUSING

- 4.1. The Government wants to see development “done democratically with local communities rather than to them.” While this rhetoric resonates with the positive section on community empowerment in the white paper, the paper does not provide any mechanisms to take this approach when it comes to housebuilding and place-based regeneration.
- 4.2. The Local Trust conference in Manchester heard from Professor Peter Tyler that one of the secrets to the successes in past initiatives such as the New Deal for Communities was the **integration of mainstream service provision – the basics – into the programme through partnerships between those service providers and councils, SMEs and community groups.** This was supported by evidence given to the APPG by Toby Lloyd and Professor Sarah Pearson; they told the APPG that the best way for local people in communities to feel ownership over, and pride in, changes happening in their area is for government to enable local people to envision and deliver those changes themselves.⁴
- 4.3. The conventional approach to developing and providing basics including homes and high streets provides very limited meaningful opportunities for community involvement. Only around 1-3% of local people get involved in Local Plan consultations and planning application consultations. Coproduction of proposals is very rare. Even housing associations that are ‘community based’ are rarely focused exclusively on one left behind area, and are top-down in their model of ownership, scheme design, development and management. Housebuilding and regeneration are typically a top-down process with tokenistic forms of consultation for local communities.
- 4.4. But community organisations can play a part in building, repurposing and renovating, owning, managing and stewarding homes, shops, workspace, community centres. CLTs in left behind areas are already doing this, and can be brought in as partners on private and public-sector led development to develop greater social capital and cohesion.

⁴ <https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/session/levelling-up-communities/>

- 4.5. If the levelling up effort is to strengthen the bonds between people and their places as well as with one another, Community Led Housing groups and Community Land Trusts provide a means by which **communities can be partners in the development and provision of basics including housing and high streets**. Enabling CLH and CLTs can achieve meaningful community empowerment, capacity building, accountability and agency. Government and local authorities must trust communities as equal partners to imagine, create and maintain the futures they want and need for their areas.
- 4.6. **Communities in left behind neighbourhoods have been using models of Community Led Housing and CLTs for decades** to take the future of their areas into their own hands. In 2021 we produced an analysis for Local Trust (unpublished) showing that there is already a disproportionate amount of Community Led Housing activity in left behind areas, i.e. more than you would expect if the activity were evenly spread across England. Our own analysis in 2020 found that Community Land Trusts exist in the least affordable parts of the least affordable regions and the most deprived areas of the most deprived regions. We also found 276 Community Led Housing projects active within 2.5 miles of the 206 left behind areas across England identified by Local Trust, together owning, building or planning 20,600 homes.⁵ Many of these organisations could extend into those neighbouring left behind areas, or catalyse new community activity.
- 4.7. In the map below, blue diamonds represent projects located in left behind areas, and pink dots represent projects within 2.5 miles of a left behind area.



⁵ <https://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/news-and-events/levelling-up-and-community-led-housings-role/>

- 4.8. Putting housing in community hands gives them a sizable asset base and relatively stable income (underpinned by housing benefit) to reinvest in community development. For example, Walterton & Elgin Community Homes, a CLT that owns and manages 675 homes in Maida Vale, most transferred from Westminster Council in 1992. Its membership is open to anyone living or working in and around their estates, and those members control the Board and direct the work of their staff. In a survey of WECH tenants by professor Peter Ambrose and Julia Stone of Brighton University, 88 per cent of respondents said they felt happy, settled and in charge under WECH, compared with 52 per cent when they were managed by Westminster Council. WECH produces an annual surplus in the order of £0.5m which it reinvests in services for its community, directed by members of that community.
- 4.9. Many of the new homes being planned or built come from CLTs and local community organisations that do not normally fit under the Community Led Housing banner - homeless shelters, womens' aid groups, social enterprises, etc. Some of the projects originated from the New Deal for Communities and Big Local programmes. Both trends indicate that what is needed to enable more is a large programme of reliable funding (not the stop-start funding of the Community Housing Fund) which is holistic, place-based and flexible in terms of the types of projects applying.
- 4.10. Danny Kruger MP recognised this potential in his report on levelling up for Number 10, recommending under the heading of community covenants that 'In social housing, Community Land Trusts and other forms of community-led housing – usually small developments, supported by local people – should be recognised as the future of social housing, both in rural and urban areas, and more enthusiastically backed by government.'⁶
- 4.11. The link has also been made by Onward in its project on Policies of Belonging, recommending that councils should have an obligation to "identify, purchase and zone suitable land to meet the identified housing need for local people who had been on the waiting list for ten years or more and had formed or commissioned a CLT to build them a home"⁷.
- 4.12. So too the Create Streets Foundation in the report of its No Place Left Behind Commission which focused on "on approaches that can empower local communities, such as community led housing and asset ownership" and recommended the renewal of the

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<https://www.dannykruger.org.uk/sites/www.dannykruger.org.uk/files/2020-09/Kruger%20.0%20Levelling%20Up%20Our%20Communities.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-Policies-of-Belonging.pdf>

Community Housing Fund⁸.

- 4.13. But government and philanthropic funders have also tended to **isolate themes like housing, high streets and community ownership in separate siloes**. For example the Government's Community Ownership Fund, Towns Fund and Community Housing Fund are disjointed, and housing is not an eligible cost for the COF; and Power to Change's programmes Homes in Community Hands (HCH) closed early, closely followed by a programme looking at high streets which didn't carry through the grantees, activity and research on housing in high streets. The academic evaluation of the HCH programme found that "projects supported by the HCH programme are generally developing a mixture of property assets, and so failing to fund the housing component will have a ripple effect on the viability of projects overall. This means community centres not being renovated, high streets not being improved, and shared facilities and resources not being created. Local and national policymakers have failed to appreciate this."⁹
- 4.14. This is obviously counterproductive. At the policy level, the Government's Expert Retail Panel recommended that shopping centres should be refocussed with more housing, so why silo housing and high streets from one another? At the community level, organisations like Homebaked CLT, New Ferry CLT, Heart of Hastings, Jaywick Sands CLT and North Ormesby CLT are involved in a mix of residential, retail and community uses, seeing their communities holistically; but they get tripped up by programmes that only fund or support a certain theme.
- 4.15. Having considered housing and high streets, we can think of assets more broadly still. The unique partnership behind the Gloucester Service Station sees 3p in every £1 of non-fuel sales channelled to the Gloucestershire Gateway Trust, serving the most deprived communities in the town. The Trust will work with local residents to decide how to spend up to £2.5 million over five years, an income stream that will keep coming so long as motorists buy the locally-sourced food and goods on sale¹⁰. This is a good example of community partnership in the provision of a basic service which will be more empowering for the community than any short-lived competitive government fund.
- 4.16. None of these links are made in the Levelling Up White Paper. It is a missed opportunity, all the more glaring when one considers the budgets and policy levers in the housing and regeneration sphere that communities have no access to. For example, DLUHC forecasts it will spend £20.7 billion (2021–22 prices) between 2015 and 2032 on affordable housing¹¹ and that doesn't include Homes England and other public budgets more generally for

⁸ <https://www.createstreetsfoundation.org.uk/no-place-left-behind/>

⁹ <https://icstudies.org.uk/repository/homes-community-hands-year-three-evaluation>

¹⁰ <https://www.gloucestershiregatewaytrust.org.uk/gloucesterservices.html>

¹¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmpublic/684/report.html>

place-based regeneration. If you also consider the level of private and social investment channelled into housebuilding and regeneration, and the ongoing value of rental and other income streams, even in (or close to) low-value left behind areas, it is easy to see that ensuring even a rounding error of this finance is directed towards community empowerment and development would be a fairly seismic change, dwarfing siloed pots of money like the Community Ownership Fund.

5. THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF COMMUNITY LED HOUSING

- 5.1. There is a strong body of evidence that enabling community agency in housebuilding and regeneration by enabling Community Led Housing has positive impacts in terms of social cohesion, health, pride and a sense of belonging; in improving opportunities for affordable home ownership; and reducing the number of non-decent rented homes. There is also evidence of co-benefits including the creation of more jobs and training opportunities.
- 5.2. **Community led housing organisations have long tackled the LUWP's mission to improve the private rented sector** by acquiring long term empty properties, by purchasing housing from landlords that are selling up, and by rescuing HA properties that would otherwise fall into the hands of disreputable landlords. In areas with low property values, traditional landlords have little incentive to invest in improvements. In those same areas, owners may not have the resources or capacity to renovate. This is where Community Led Housing groups can play a larger role.
- 5.3. For example Back on the Map in Sunderland has already bought 87 properties from the PRS - 10% of the PRS stock in the area, and has the ambition to own all of the rented housing in their local area of Hendon.¹² Other organisations like Giroscope in Hull, LATCH and Canopy in Leeds, have been purchasing properties for many years, with an average of over 100 homes each.¹³ These organisations all train people in construction skills and help people into jobs.
- 5.4. **Many community led housing groups have sought to provide affordable and well-supported routes into home ownership, another LUWP mission.** While the majority of the 11,818 homes included in the latest pipeline analysis were for low rent, 2,016 of these were for forms of home ownership. CLTs in particular have sought to develop new routes into ownership that are more affordable to people on local incomes¹⁴.

¹² <https://backonthemap.org/community-homes-on-the-map/>

¹³ <https://giroscope.org.uk/>

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<https://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Delivering-the-Community-Led-Housing-Pipeline-in-England-Final-Copy.pdf>

- 5.5. **Community Led Housing also delivers significant health and well-being and community development outcomes.** A UWE literature review demonstrated how a range of Community Led Housing models support healthy ageing, increase social capital and social cohesion, improve physical health, meet additional support needs and tackle multiple disadvantages.¹⁵ Research we commissioned that was carried out by Capital Economics in 2020 found that the benefits of public investment in CLH far outweigh the benefits, especially in improving health, well-being and income inequality.¹⁶ Several studies have found that Community Led Housing groups and schemes increase feelings of social cohesion and trust in communities,¹⁷ and decrease the loneliness of residents and volunteers.¹⁸
- 5.6. As with the general evidence of the benefits of community participation mentioned in paragraph 4.2, there is robust evidence of these benefits specifically with housing. These go beyond the general benefits of good quality housing - the kind of housing built, and the community spaces they design in, differ when communities are in charge; participation in the processes of designing, commissioning, building, renovating, managing and stewarding homes itself has a measurable social benefit.
- 5.7. Further research has found that Community Led Housing group schemes are also leading the way in the transition to net zero,¹⁹ creating work and training opportunities for their local communities,²⁰ and supporting diversification in the housebuilding industry by contacting small and medium builders.²¹

6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1. The Government has already been supporting CLTs and CLH in left behind areas over the past decade. To take two examples:

¹⁵ <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/research/centres-and-groups/spe/projects/community-led-housing>

¹⁶

<https://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/999-final-report-capital-economics-housing-by-the-community-for-the-community-sept-2020-2.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/join-movement/more-housing>

¹⁸ <https://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/news-and-events/tackling-loneliness-by-design/>,
<https://cwmpas.coop/what-we-do/policy-publications/clh-schemes-during-lockdown/>

¹⁹ https://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Leading_to_Net_Zero.pdf

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<https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/files/2018-10/self-help-housing-supporting-locally-driven-solutions-final-web.pdf>,

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/chasm/research/housing-communities/publications/working-papers/2015/wp-2-2015.aspx>

²¹

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-into-scaling-up-self-build-and-custom-housebuilding-report>

1. The **Empty Homes Community Grants Programme** (EHCGP) 2012-15 in which approaching £50 million was allocated to 110 community based organisations to bring empty homes into use. An academic evaluation of the programme focused on North East Yorkshire and Humberside found a wide range of social impacts including the provision of affordable homes, community safety, accredited construction apprenticeships and financial leverage, with the total public benefits estimated at between £3.24 and £5 of social value for every £ invested²².
 2. The **Community Housing Fund** (CHF) 2017-21, through which over £30 million has been allocated to Community Led Housing organisations and regional enabling organisations, and a further £60 million to 148 local authorities. While this has not targeted left behind areas, many community groups in these areas have benefitted. In an evaluation of a complementary £5.1m Power to Change programme focused in the Tees Valley, Leeds city region, Liverpool city region, West Midlands and West of England, CRESR concluded that the Community Housing Fund was “a direct step toward several of the Levelling Up missions, not least in terms of wellbeing, living standards, housing and pride in place.”²³
- 6.2. Both grant programmes addressed three problems communities face in left behind areas if they wish to start or grow a community led housing project.
- The first is that groups wishing to access the Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) need a developed project with a secure site or building and - if relevant - planning permission. But small and new community groups have no working capital to undertake this work, in the way that a larger housing association would. The CHF and EHCGP both provided grant funding for this early work, which would typically be knocked off later capital grant applications for the AHP, thus cost neutral to government.
 - Second, communities lack the technical expertise and industry/local government relationships to pull off these complex projects. The CHF invested £6 million between 2018-20 in developing a CIH-recognised training programme for professional advisers, and the growth of a network of 26 enabler hubs - organisations spanning areas such as the Tees Valley, North of Tyne area or the East Midlands, focused on supporting new and existing projects in their area. Many of those enabler hubs have secured further investment from funders like Power to Change, local authorities, combined authorities and housing associations. But they have not had the 5-6 years of sustained investment that research suggested would be needed to put them on a financially sustainable footing²⁴.

²²<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/chasm/research/housing-communities/publications/working-papers/2015/wp-3-2015.aspx>

²³ <https://icstudies.org.uk/repository/homes-community-hands-year-three-evaluation>

²⁴<https://icstudies.org.uk/repository/delivering-community-led-housing-enabling-hub-service-experience-and-lessons-existing>

- Third, unlike with the EHCGP, community groups aiming to provide homes for sub-market rents need to become a Registered Provider with the Regulator for Social Housing, or partner with an RP, to access capital grant. This is a considerable undertaking that previous CHF programmes have provided up to £10,000 of expert support to assist with.
- 6.3. Two issues in left behind areas remained unaddressed by both programmes:
- Projects in left behind areas may not be eligible for AHP capital grant if they aim to buy up and improve poor quality private rented housing (unless it has been empty for at least six months). Both the CHF and EHCGP focused on 'additional' housing supply (new build or long-term empty homes).
 - Neither provided a means for communities lacking the pre-existing social capital and agency in left behind areas to develop the capacity to bring forward a project, to make use of these funds and support mechanisms. A Community Wealth Fund would therefore be a powerful complementary measure.
- 6.4. The EHCGP and CHF have helped to grow a niche of community led activity in left behind areas. The CHF could also be reformed to enable the sector to pilot, develop and roll out a 'top down meets bottom up' approach to achieve greater scale and speed. One approach emerging from this recent innovation has funding going directly to the enabler hub to initiate and develop a large number of projects in target areas, where those communities are willing and able to be supported to take control and later ownership of the projects. A similar approach was taken in the housing co-operative programmes of the 1970s and 1980s, which have left a strong legacy in those places. This approach could seed dozens or even hundreds of new community assets and organisations across left behind areas.

Policy recommendation 1: The Government should reopen the Community Housing Fund, support innovation in modes of delivery, make it a standard component of the Affordable Homes Programme, and review how it can best complement other funding programmes such as the Towns Fund, Levelling Up Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Policy recommendation 2: The Government should amend the rules for the Affordable Homes Programme so that projects acquiring and refurbishing poor quality PRS homes are eligible for appropriate levels of capital grant where it can be demonstrated that there are significant issues with housing quality in the PRS.

- 6.5. The EHCGP and CHF can grow this community led approach. But the Government could also 'inject' community leadership and ownership into mainstream activity to bring about the wider social benefits discussed above.

- 6.6. One approach would be to use the planning system to incentivise landowners and developers to form partnerships with community organisations.
- 6.7. We are drafting a submission to the Government's current consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework, which includes questions about community-led development. This is a golden opportunity to provide the mechanisms for left behind communities to play an active role as agents of change in housebuilding and regeneration.
- 6.8. One example we have discussed with the current housing minister is the community led development policy in East Cambridgeshire, reflected in its Local Plan with an accompanying Supplementary Planning document²⁵. The policy provides permission in principle for the affordable housing elements of community led developments on unallocated sites on the edges of settlements, subject to safeguards. It gives landowners an incentive to sell to a community group, rather than wait for future revisions of the local plan to see if their land can be allocated for development. The policy has led to private landowners selling more land to CLTs than in any other local authority area in the country, with 808 homes completed or in the pipeline, mostly being delivered in partnership with private developers. The policy has 'injected' the CLT model of community governance, participation and ownership into the mainstream development process in the district.
- 6.9. We are proposing, among other technical changes to the NPPF, a generalised version of this: a Community Led Exception Site, which would give communities permission in principle to develop on edge-of-settlement greenfield sites, and to change the use of and redevelop assets such as high street shops and disused industrial and commercial land and buildings. It would tip the balance in favour of land and building owners selling to, or partnering with, community groups. Communities should be trusted to make wise decisions in their own long term interests.
- 6.10. We have also suggested that the Government introduce a new concept into the early stages of the Local Plan process: Community Priority Projects. These would enable community organisations to propose allocations of land and buildings that would be redeveloped to meet community needs such as affordable housing, social space and workspace. If so-allocated in the Local Plan, there would be a presumption in favour of community led development approaches on those sites.

Policy recommendation 3: the Government should introduce a policy for Community Led Exception Sites into the National Planning Policy Framework.

Policy recommendation 4: the Government should introduce a policy for Community Priority Projects into the Local Plan process.

²⁵<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/supplementary-planning-documents>

- 6.11. Where large-scale new development takes place in left behind areas, they are also increasingly afflicted by the scandal known as ‘fleecehold’. Open spaces, parks, playgrounds, roads and community facilities that might normally have been adopted by local authorities are increasingly put into private management companies instead. These private management companies pay for their services by collecting an ‘estate charge’ from all the residents. Unlike leaseholders, who have a range of rights to challenge fees and take over management themselves, there is no accountability and limited redress for the freeholders paying estate charges. In a Westminster Hall debate brought by the then-MP for Bishop Auckland, MPs shared horror stories and called for action²⁶.
- 6.12. One simple reform would be to require that any management companies are owned by, governed by and/or accountable to the residents who pay the charges. Homeowners in existing developments should also gain a Right to Manage, similar to the right for leaseholders unhappy with the managing agent that collects their service charge. Resident Management Companies are a common alternative that should become the default. But there is also an opportunity to think of these as new asset-owning democratic community organisations. By adopting the Community Land Trust legal form and ethos, and supporting them to take advantage of the training and peer support available to all CLTs, private developers could be seeding community developers up and down the country.

Policy recommendation 5: the Government should introduce a Right to Manage for residents paying service and estate charges, and encourage the adoption of the Community Land Trust model for new estate stewardship including in the revised NPPF.

- 6.13. The Government could channel more of the money levied from new development directly to communities - what the minister for levelling up described on the 23rd June 2022 as ‘double devolution and neighbourhood-level governance’.
- 6.14. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill introduces a new Infrastructure Levy, to replace the Community Infrastructure Levy. A portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy can be passed to local communities via town and parish councils. But as was noted in the bill committee debate on the 23rd June, at present, nearly two-thirds of England (63%) is not covered by a town or parish council. So the community element of the Community Infrastructure Levy is not available to two-thirds of local communities, including many in left behind areas. Various organisations have proposed that it could be passed on to Neighbourhood Forums as well as town and parish councils, and this was touched on in the bill committee debate on the 23rd June. This would be welcome. But this would still leave much of the country untouched. For example, in London, there are no designated neighbourhood forums in 9 of the 32 boroughs, and most of the capital's area is not covered by a neighbourhood forum. CLTs are another equally democratic local structure

²⁶<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-01-22/debates/69D31E91-49DD-4DF4-B638-4620B5314D15/FreeholdEstateFees>

that could receive the community element of the infrastructure levy, achieving greater devolution to neighbourhood-level governance.

- 6.15. To illustrate the impact of this, one CLT in a deprived community was offered a paltry £500 to produce some community art for a nearby development. If eligible for the community portion of the Infrastructure Levy they would have received a sum in the region of £250k which they could invest in their activities.

Policy recommendation 6: the Government should amend the regulations for the Infrastructure Levy to enable Neighbourhood Forums and Community Land Trusts to receive the community element of the levy, as well as town and parish councils.

- 6.16. Where these plan-led approaches fail to bring disused or underused assets back into full and productive use, communities need other means to achieve that.
- 6.17. The Government has consulted on a 'Right to Regenerate' to trigger the sale of some public land. But the proposals were deeply flawed - it would release land into the open market, at prices that would not reflect the Local Plan expectations for social benefits such as affordable housing, and with no mechanism for a negotiation over less than best consideration disposals to reflect wider social value goals. We - and others - have proposed a Community Right to Buy, which would apply to public and private land and assets, and might include provisions to effect compulsory purchase where assets were causing a detriment to local wellbeing. This should replace the toothless and tokenistic Community Right to Bid introduced in the Localism Act.

Policy recommendation 7: the Government should replace the Community Right to Bid with a Community Right to Buy.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

- 7.1. With cross-party support for levelling up, for more housebuilding and place-based regeneration, and for devolving more power to communities, there is a huge opportunity to join those three agendas up.
- 7.2. Community led development of housing and other assets, and their stewardship through democratic community models like the CLT, are powerful tools for every left behind community to 'take back control'. To be active participants rather than passive consultees; to be partners in the development and provision of their basic needs
- 7.3. Taking this approach will not only bring new capacity to the mission, it will improve the outcomes by the very fact of local participation and ownership.