

Case study: Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, York

This case study outlines how a housing association is thinking innovatively about how to develop the skills of young people and help them meet their own housing needs through a self-build project.

Location: City of York

Organisations involved:

Housing Association: Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust

Local Authority: York City Council

Other: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The opportunity

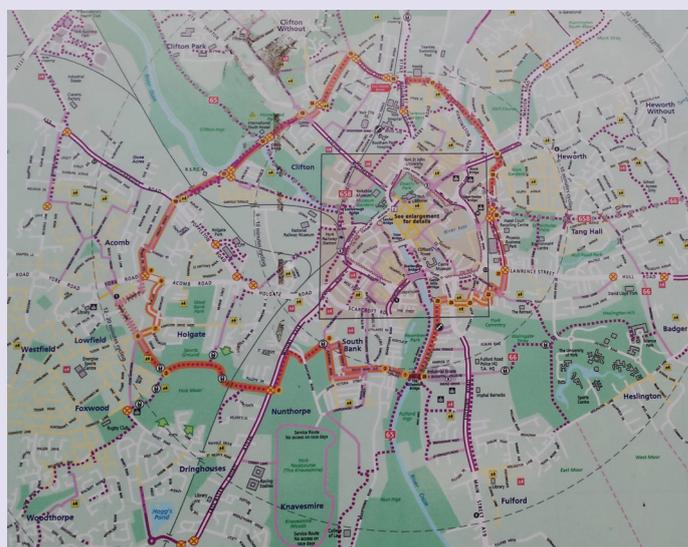
Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust was keen to set up a pioneering project to explore the merits of self-build in York and specifically to address some key outcomes:

- Providing new ways for young people in York to solve their housing needs
- Explore how a self-build project could contribute to the social objectives of both the Housing Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation – to inspire social change through research and practice
- Meeting the Trust's objective of demonstrating new approaches to housing including new forms of tenure, meeting special needs and exploring new features of design.

Through this project, links have been made between the Housing Trust and the Foundation to enable the sharing of learning. The Foundation has a large body of research on housing and other social issues and this project can both learn from and contribute to this evidence base.

Top tips

- Agree what the main priorities and objectives are for your project – in this case tackling the issue of housing for local young people – then identify those people that need to be involved in the process.
- Work with external, independent advisors with knowledge of comparable projects to formulate an objective view of new housing programmes and initiatives. Carefully scope out options and possibilities before formulating a project brief.
- Consider from the outset how you can communicate effectively about your project to external parties and the local community. Be clear what the local benefits are and show how your project will deliver these.



Map of York City



What they did

Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust's social objectives included tackling the specific housing needs of particular groups in society. In York the Trust was keen to look at the housing needs and issues of young people, given the difficulty of affording housing in the local market.

The Trust had conducted an initial exploration of potential housing options to address the needs of young people. The preferred option was to look at self-build and custom build mechanisms, particularly as it had the added benefit of potentially being able to encourage and support new skills development for young people. As part of the Community-led Design and Development programme, Design Council Cobe provided support to help the Trust document the options for the project in a scoping paper including ways to involve young people in the process.

Informed by the scoping paper the Housing Trust's executive board agreed on a list of activities. The first step was to undertake a visioning workshop to inform a project brief and to begin work investigating the feasibility of self-build compared to other housing delivery options.

The visioning workshop helped Housing Trust and Foundation staff members to define the self-build project and secure their commitment going forward. A key part of this was to map out the in-house knowledge of self-build and of the needs of local young people to identify resources and gaps in knowledge and skills. This workshop also highlighted a range of policy and research activities undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation policy team that could inform the project such as 'A Young People's Charter on Housing' (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2010). This report illustrated the challenges and dilemmas young people face when seeking their own housing.

After the workshop the Trust set out a number of next steps:

- to form a youth steering group
- to undertake further research and develop an updated version of 'A young people's charter on housing' specific to York
- to engage with schools
- to create a pop-up shop as a place to go for information and activities on young people's housing and on self-build.



Learning from Derwenthorpe development, York © Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust



A 'young person's housing' workshop facilitated by Design Council Cabe, February 2016 © Design Council Cabe

Challenges

There has been a long history in York of local resistance to new housing developments and the Housing Trust was concerned about how to address this positively. Best practice learning from elsewhere has shown that self-build and custom-build projects can bring about better relations with surrounding communities, particularly if there are definite opportunities for local people with housing needs to participate and benefit as the project develops.

Clearly the project needs to be financially viable. Self-build and custom build projects can be viable but are less well understood by many in the housing sector including financial backers, local authorities and landowners. As part of this project the Housing Trust will need to continue to explore the viability issues as the project develops. A key purpose of more self-build and custom build housing coming forward is to demonstrate its distinctive features that might address social and other local needs as well as ensuring it meets equivalent viability tests to conventional housing.

Solutions and lessons learned

Understanding the need for clear framework and processes. The Housing Trust worked with Design Council Cabe to formulate a scoping paper for self-build and young people. The document suggests a number of important areas to consider on self-build projects and provides useful suggestions and pointers to explore during project delivery. This will help to mitigate risks early on, given the Housing Trust's relative lack of experience of self-build, and to ensure successful outcomes. The paper has informed the Technical Paper 'Scoping your community-led self-build project (see Design Council Cabe website).

Working with young people to help address their housing needs. The Trust will test out a way of working with young people on a small pilot site of 2-3 self-build homes. It can then learn from the experience to consider promoting self-build at a larger scale.

An effective communication and engagement plan will be critical to help inform the local community about the self-build approach and in particular how local young people can benefit.