

Case study: Stretham and Wilburton Community Land Trust

This case study outlines how residents of Stretham have led on providing new and affordable homes in their village, driven by a desire to create good quality, affordable homes that contributed positively to the village.

Project name: Manor Farm development
Location: Stretham, Cambridgeshire
Organisations involved:
Lead organisation: Stretham and Wilburton Community Land Trust
Local authority: East Cambridgeshire District Council
Other partners: Community Land Trust East, Stretham and Wilburton Parish Council
Developer: Laragh Homes
Architect: Hayson Ward Miller

The exception sites policy meant that local groups proposing affordable and local needs housing had sole negotiation rights with landowners who were interested in putting forward sites for housing. When land at Manor Farm on the edge of the village was proposed, Stretham Parish Council saw an opportunity to lead on the future growth of the village and so the parishes of Stretham and Wilburton came together to form the Stretham and Wilburton Community Land Trust. In addition to building new homes, it aimed to:

- develop some of the homes as protected assets (as affordable homes for local people) that would remain in community ownership
- support the economic growth of the two parishes.

The opportunity

The Cambridgeshire village of Stretham faced a dilemma. Few new homes had been built in recent years, while house prices in the area were unaffordable for local people on an average wage. Young families in particular were often unable to live locally and employers were finding that staff had to travel long distances to work. New development proposals were usually opposed, as a result of dissatisfaction with previous developer-led housing which didn't reflect local character or provide facilities the village needed.

East Cambridgeshire District Council's planning policy in its Local Plan allowed development on exception sites outside of the village envelope subject to certain criteria (such as demonstrating local housing need and causing no harm to the setting and character of the village). This included a requirement to engage with the local community in shaping future development.

Top tips

- Making Community-led Design and Development a local authority corporate priority can transform the scale of activity by promoting the Community Land Trust model, developing in-house expertise and sharing experiences and good practice across groups.
- Trust and building strong relationships is essential and cannot be overemphasised: the relationship between the Community Land Trust and the local authority was positive and strong throughout; helped by the fact that the chair of the group is a Councillor and champion for Community-led Design and Development within the Council.
- Engagement and design needs to be considered together. When this happens everyone benefits from the creative process of collaborative design and problem solving to get the best design solution.
- Funding to support initiation of the project and develop strong foundations is essential.



What they did

The Community Land Trust took seriously the objective of ensuring that the views of the whole community were embedded in the proposals for new development from the start. Using a grant from Design Council Cobe, it appointed the Community Spirit Partnership in October 2012 to run a range of activities. 149 adults and 70 children participated in these workshops.

The focus of this work was on creating a new development that was of high quality; complementary to the village; well connected with good access for those on foot or cycle into the village and out into the countryside; and incorporated a new playing field. This this was encapsulated in a brief to:

- create development that draws on the character of the area
- allow for future housing development
- provide development that would address other problems in the village – traffic management and its speed in particular.

Laragh Homes was appointed by the Community Land Trust as development partner for the site, and planning permission was granted in 2014 for a three-phase development of 75 new homes. It includes 23 affordable rented homes, 52 for market sale and land that has been reserved for a new doctors' surgery, workplaces and a new village green. Work began on site in 2015. Funding for the affordable housing has come from a mix of cross-subsidy from the market homes and a commercial loan from a bank specialising in support for social enterprises.

Challenges

- Establishing and running a Community Land Trust, with a strong Board of Trustees and Vision
- overcoming opposition to development by some local people.



Model by Haysom, Ward and Miller for Stretham and Wilburton Community Land Trust

Solutions and lessons learned

Partnership working: This project has gone from inception to starting on site comparatively quickly. It demonstrates what can be done when a number of factors come together:

- Policy support in the Local Plan, to encourage locally-led development.
- Financial support from the local authority to establish the Community Land Trust.
- Funding for an experienced facilitator from Design Council Cabe, with design understanding, to help organise meaningful community engagement.
- Harnessing local enthusiasm and people willing to give time and expertise on a voluntary basis to a project they believe in (resulting in better facilities and good quality housing for the community).
- Wide-ranging support and minimal opposition due to the inclusive process of community engagement and retention of local control.

Quality of engagement and design: Design quality was one of the drivers that instigated the project in the first place. Engaging effectively with those who will be affected by the development, in conjunction with the design team and a supportive developer, has resulted in a layout, a mix of uses and architecture that contributes positively to the existing village.

Seed funding: While initial funding was comparatively modest it was critical to building a sound foundation with a shared vision and local support. East Cambridgeshire District Council provided financial support in the form of a loan of £30k for pre-development work. The local authority now gives £5k to emerging Community Land Trusts for legal set up, community consultation and clerical work.

Effective and skilled board of trustees:

Establishing an effective board of trustees, with leadership qualities, is essential. Stretham and Wilburton's board included a planner, lawyer, accountant and charity organiser. However, even with a good board, professional support is required at all stages to meet knowledge and skills gaps.

Added benefits: Not only has the process enabled homes to be built sustainably, it has strengthened community spirit and has been stimulating, educational and uplifting for those involved.