

# Chorlton Cohousing Company Limited

## Prospectus for a cohousing development

### 1. Introducing Cohousing

Cohousing is a term used to describe intentional communities created and run by their residents. Each resident has a self-contained, private homes as well as shared community space.

The benefits of cohousing are well documented. There is a wealth of information on the [National Cohousing Network website](#). In recent times the benefits to people's personal wellbeing have come to the fore as cohousing creates a neighbourly, mutually supportive environment with access to open shared garden space.

For owner occupiers, the cohousing model outlined in the prospectus creates an opportunity to provide age friendly housing for older people by using the capital that many have tied up in larger family homes. At the same time, it potentially reduces demand on health and social care services through combatting loneliness and isolation and providing warm, economical, barrier free housing near to services and facilities. As such it represents a creative response to addressing the housing needs of this group of older people. Through investment of personal assets in a single development, it also creates opportunities for housing associations to meet other need from their waiting lists by the inclusion of affordable housing. Housing associations are well placed, through their development expertise and community building expertise to help bring cohousing developments to fruition.

This is a relatively new and pioneering area of work for housing associations. Current examples of cohousing developments in the UK, including those involving housing associations working with cohousing groups are included in Appendix 1.

### 2. Introduction to Chorlton Cohousing

Chorlton Cohousing was formed in 2013, when a group of friends based in Chorlton began to discuss how we might plan for getting older; downsizing from the family homes we were living in. We looked for ways of pooling our resources to build individual self-contained units for residents, with the added advantage of sharing facilities and creating a mutually supportive community, as a way of addressing the very real risk of loneliness in older people. We wanted to live in a way that was environmentally conscious, and to manage the setting to ensure it continued to fit our needs as we aged. Cohousing offered a means to do these things.

Since then we have met regularly to decide how our ideas could translate into a building development, to assess sites in Chorlton as they became available, to form a company (Chorlton Cohousing Company Ltd.), and to put into practice the steps needed to make the dream a reality. In this process we have been assisted by the experience of others; notably existing and planned cohousing schemes (e.g. Lancaster and LILAC) and other innovative projects, as well as

information and guidance from the UK Cohousing Network, The National Community Led Housing network, and the Greater Manchester Community Led Housing Hub.

### **3. Vision**

Our vision is to build a highly sustainable, socially inclusive and self-reliant neighbourhood based on the principles of cohousing focused on, but not exclusive to, the needs of people aged 50 and above. We aspire to offer a supportive environment, enabling independent living for as long as possible. We will live in our own individual homes designed to support and adapt to our needs as we get older. Some facilities will be shared, which will promote opportunities for social interaction and encourage a strong community.

Our agreed aims and objectives include to:

- i. Provide a positive alternative to the limited choice of living arrangements currently available, affording dignity and self-sufficiency to older people.
- ii. Develop an age-friendly, new-build project of up to 24 individual homes with some shared facilities: multi-purpose communal space for meetings, shared meals and activities, laundry, guest rooms and gardens.
- iii. Create a green development with the highest practicable standards of sustainability in terms of construction, maintenance, running costs and gardens.
- iv. Create a design that enables a balance between interdependence as a community and independence for individuals, ensuring the design of personal and community space reflect this.
- v. If possible, provide mixed tenures, including owner occupation, shared ownership and homes for rent.
- vi. Learn from other cohousing and green build projects and share our learning with others.
- vii. Live sustainably, including minimisation of unnecessary consumption of resources and using renewable technologies for designing, building and living in our community.
- viii. Where possible ensure interactions, including procurement from external organisations, abide by an ethical policy and that goods and services are locally sourced.

### **4. Governance**

Chorlton Cohousing Company is a Company Limited by Guarantee – not having share capital.

The Cohousing Company is currently open to prospective members who agree with the vision and values of the Company. They sign a membership agreement which outlines the aims and objectives and pay a membership fee. They then can vote at general meetings and be nominated for election as a Director.

The Directors appoint a Chair, Treasurer and other officers from their number. There are currently nine Directors (the maximum number) and 16 members in total. In terms of households this currently creates a demand for ten owner occupied apartments. New members are being actively considered.

The members vote in a board of Directors at each Annual General Meeting, who stand for three-year terms on a rotational basis. They can set up sub committees with delegated powers to deal with specific issues such as managing the garden area, dealing with major repairs, organising communal activities. The General Meeting agrees rules and policies regarding the scheme such as gardening, pets, visitors etc.

After the Company has built its properties, membership will be limited to leaseholders, which will include both long leaseholders purchasing their property and any assured tenants. The membership will be limited to a maximum of two per household. A type of membership called Associate Membership will have the right to attend meetings and speak at meetings but not vote. Associate membership will be open to residents who are not leaseholders. It will cover people who are interested in becoming a leaseholder including people on a waiting list for accommodation, people using the communal facilities, and members of the surrounding community.

## **5. Demand for cohousing**

Members' tenure requirements, priorities and approximate purchasing power were gathered by discussion and questionnaire. This information formed the basis of our design brief and target project construction cost.

Four architects were invited to bid to produce an outline design. After considering the submissions and interviews, [Loop Systems Ltd](#) were appointed and have developed a design in discussion with the members. The design was originally intended for the Ryebank Fields site in Chorlton and was then focused in another site which was not secured. The focus of the group has reverted to Ryebank Fields. The design has been costed by cost consultants [B2PM](#).

Whilst most members wish to own their homes outright, the group also includes a number of people who are interested in rental and shared ownership options.

The expectation is that there will be a strong demand for cohousing in the area once there is more likelihood of a project being realised.

## **6. The proposed scheme**

The following is a summary of the key features of a proposed development.

- i. Up to 24 apartments with a mixture of one bedroomed (59 square metres), two bedroomed (76 square metres) and large two bedroomed (square metres) The highest demand is for standard two bedroomed. Architects drawings have been prepared for standard apartment layouts and overall scheme design.
- ii. Ideally the group would wish to have up to six affordable homes included within the development, managed by the housing association. The form of affordable housing is subject to further discussion and agreement.
- iii. There will be shared community facilities including a kitchen, eating/meeting space, shared laundry, a guest room, shared bike storage and a shared garden.
- iv. We aim for a high level of environmental sustainability to contribute to Manchester's ambitions to be a zero-carbon city by 2038, with Passivhaus and Code for Sustainable Homes level 6 certifications.

- v. Flats will be 'Lifetime Homes', designed to be adaptable for the future needs of ageing or disability.

## **7. The model of development and management to be explored**

*The model below was drafted for working with a housing association as both a development and management partner. However, the model can be adapted for a private developer/housing association partnership.*

In summary, the model suggested is that the housing association partner supports the Chorlton Cohousing Company to acquire the site and builds the development to the agreed design specification. The cohousing group holds the freehold and the affordable homes are leased back to the housing association to manage.

Further details are as follows:

- i. The land is purchased by the Chorlton Cohousing Company.
- ii. The initial investment funding for land purchase and development is provided by the housing association.
- iii. The scheme is developed by the housing association on the brief developed by the cohousing company. (For continuity and efficiency, the group's preference is that housing association engages the cohousing group's architects and cost consultants).
- iv. The funding for the owner-occupied units is repaid to the housing association by the prospective owners.
- v. The housing association contributes the costs of the affordable units and manages them on a long lease from the cohousing company.
- vi. It is anticipated that the housing association will maximise any grant input to the development for the affordable units.
- vii. The housing association and the cohousing company will jointly agree the form of affordable housing using local information on local needs prospective member demand, and impact on the development's viability.
- viii. The total costs of the development are apportioned across the number of homes to determine the purchase price of the homes (The cost of the community facilities needs further consideration. Options are that these are funded through each unit paying for a share of the cost (in the purchase price of their home. Alternatively, a long-term loan to fund the capital cost could be paid back through service charges).
- ix. The cohousing company will be responsible for the external repairs and the provision of communal services (e.g. lift maintenance). The possibility of these services being provided by the housing association to the cohousing company will be explored.
- x. The cohousing company would be responsible for the finances overall including for services charges and administering a sinking fund for major repairs for the owner-occupied units. Charges for services and major repairs sinking fund would be set by the cohousing company in consultation with the housing association (whose interest is in the affordable units).
- xi. The cohousing company would be responsible for the resale of owner-occupied homes.
- xii. The housing association would be responsible for reletting affordable homes through a bespoke local lettings policy in partnership with the cohousing company. The cohousing company will use its best endeavours to help ensure lettings are made as quickly as possible. This can include prospective

new occupants becoming Associate members of the cohousing company. New tenants would be required to become full members of the cohousing company and sign up to the cohousing policies.

- xiii. Homes will as far as possible be pre-allocated in the development phase – ensuring maximisation of sales and lettings to people who have become members of the cohousing company.

## **8. How the partnership would work in practice**

The cohousing group would wish to develop a partnership agreement at an early stage with a developer/ housing association that sets out the respective roles of the organisations, how they will work together, and how any issues will be resolved.

## **Appendix 1 Examples of cohousing**

### Lilac, Leeds

No of homes 20

Eco-build cohousing development in Leeds . No housing association involvement. Unique mutual home ownership model.

### Halton Senior Cohousing group, Lancaster

No of homes 20 (16 market value, 4 discounted market value 2 rented)

Cohousing company owns freehold. Predevelopment costs grant funded by local authority Community Led Housing Fund. Common facilities funded as part of overall site infrastructure. No housing association involvement.

### Bridport Cohousing, West Dorset

No of homes 53 (26 social rent, 13 grant funded shared ownership,14 non grant funded shared ownership)

Cohousing owns freehold. Housing association will lease and manages standard shared ownership and rented units. Common facilities to be funded via loan repaid by service charge. The housing association are developing all the site infrastructure and the units they will end up owning.

### Older Women's Cohousing, OWCH, London

No of homes 25 (17 leaseholder and 8 social rent)

Hanover HA acquired and developed the scheme. Complex legal arrangement. Freehold now with Homes 4 Women. OWCH have a 999-year head lease of the site. OWCH grant sub leases to individual owners and to Housing r Women on their 8 flats so they retain control of these and act as the tenants' social landlord.

### The Threshold Centre, Dorset

No of homes 14 (7 privately owned via leasehold , 7 rental homes leased by Aster Housing Association)

The Cohousing company owns the freehold.

### Marmalade Lane, Cambridge

No of homes 42- houses and apartments.

Award winning cohousing development led by private developer [TOWN](#). The finance for the development is repaid by the sale of the homes. The website of the [cohousing company](#) states they will take ownership of the land once the development is complete . Apartments are held as leasehold. There is no affordable housing or housing association involvement.