

Create Streets
Briefing paper

January 2021



Trusting Communities

Increasing wellbeing through community
ownership of land and buildings

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Proposals to increase wellbeing through community ownership of land and buildings

Executive summary

"The public response to Coronavirus shows that we can, in future, have a better system for supporting our communities: more local, more entrepreneurial and more trusting."

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, June 2020.

Government policy is to support community ownership for council estates (COCE) and to support community asset acquisitions. Delivering these and other community ownership policies will empower communities to contribute significantly to the Government's levelling up agenda in the era of Covid and Brexit. Community ownership enables the provision of social benefits that are additional and complementary to those provided by the State and private enterprise, as illustrated by the case study of Walerton & Elgin Community Homes.

This paper presents an analysis of the challenges we face; a review of the development of community ownership in England and Scotland over the past 30 years; and proposals for policy makers to support council estate and other communities into sustainable ownership.

1. Proposals to increase community ownership

Restore the Tenant Empowerment Programme to support housing stock transfers to community-owned Housing Associations, with a budget starting at £3 million and scaling up to £5 million, adequate to build capacity among tenant groups and develop a stock-transfer pipeline.

Review the operation of the Right to Transfer, with revised regulations based on the repealed Tenants Choice Regulations (1989) to provide a more robust and workable mechanism that denies blocking mechanisms to the local authority landlord.

Restore the housing stock transfer programme, restricting grant to write off residual debt to support transfers only to community owned housing associations.

Renew the Community Housing Funds with a higher proportion of the housing budgets, not only to deliver existing schemes, but to resource communities sufficiently to develop the skills, identify the sites and obtain scheme permissions to scale up future programmes.

Broaden Assets of Community Value (ACVs) by including economic and environmental, as well as social interests in their criteria for designation, and to extend the right to designate ACVs to qualifying community bodies.

Create a full Community Right to Buy by granting qualifying community bodies the right to compulsorily purchase vacant, neglected or detrimentally managed public land and buildings.

Establish the Community Ownership Fund, supporting transfers of land and buildings to and purchases by communities with £300 million. Empower this fund to buy up assets on behalf of communities as an immediate response to threats from the Covid-19 Pandemic.

2. Analysis

2.1 The challenges

Several factors have diminished the influence that individuals and their neighbours can bring to bear on the places where they live. Local people have lost control over the quality of life for themselves, for their families, for their wider community, and over the safety and sustainability of their environment¹.

The most efficient solutions to the UK's pressing problems, such as demands for national independence, the demoralisation of local communities and families, the lack of affordable housing, the growth in inequality, the need to contain public spending and cynicism about our democracy undoubtedly lie in entrusting communities with greater ownership and control².

As for the Coronavirus pandemic, there is recognition of the role communities have played in combatting the virus and supporting themselves³, along with observations that lockdowns have caused a greater appreciation of neighbourhood⁴ and community⁵. As the second wave takes hold at the time of writing, it is apparent that the exercise of much greater central government control will need, more than ever, to be balanced by real empowerment of communities.


2.2 Community ownership

There is more to community ownership than pubs, libraries and community centres. Across the UK, communities have taken ownership of every type of asset from housing, worth hundreds of millions of pounds, to forests, vast tracts of spectacular scenery, former Cold War airbases and functioning harbours⁶. They've delivered housing and energy schemes which, had they been proposed by developers not controlled by the community, would have been blocked by local people.

Community ownership enables the provision of social benefits that are additional and complementary to those provided by the State and private enterprise. Community owned landlord, Waltham & Elgin Community Homes (WECH), which took ownership of two council estates in London in 1992, commissioned two academic studies in 2010 to measure its residents' wellbeing and compare their happiness nationally.

The first found that the community landlord had: "a management style that is different from most social landlords and is more effective at supporting individuals, instilling citizenship and building community"⁷. The second concluded that: "the measurable benefits associated with empowerment through community ownership appear to mitigate the detriment to wellbeing caused by financial deprivation, physical illness and fear of crime"⁸.

Statements from residents illustrated how the community landlord's accountability coupled with low turnover of tenants and staff facilitate stronger interpersonal relationships between the staff and the residents and among the residents themselves. The profound sense of security and the high levels of trust make management more efficient and enable the community to be more self-supporting and robust⁹.



Above all, it is demonstrable that community ownership is a force for active citizenship, for compromise and cohesion in families and communities, and for binding society by engaging individuals in shared endeavours to achieve mutually beneficial objectives.

Entrusting communities through ownership is the only policy which has not been seriously applied at scale in the UK¹⁰. Community ownership:

- Brings neighbours together in constructive endeavours to achieve common goals;
- Gives local people responsibility for deciding what should happen to their community and neighbourhood, and freedom to manage people sensitively and assets efficiently;
- Provides security, independence, and opportunity through ownership of a significant asset;
- Tackles poverty and disadvantage through systemic change, increasing self-reliance and reducing dependency and demands on the State; and
- Empowers communities with confidence to embrace, rather than resist, development that can address wider, as well as internal, needs (see the WECH case study appendix).

All of these outcomes and characteristics of a rich and strong place-based community life are strong indicators of the more resilient civic settlement that will be needed in this world of Covid and Brexit, in which Citizen and State are better organised to work together to meet both local and global challenges.

3. Government policy position

3.1 Community empowerment

This government has recognised the need for community empowerment and its potential to invigorate our democratic and economic life.

The Prime Minister has said that Government has a role to play in supporting voluntary effort and maximising the role of community groups in contributing to the Government's levelling up agenda.

"The public response to Coronavirus shows that we can, in future, have a better system for supporting our communities: more local, more entrepreneurial and more trusting." ¹¹"We have seen tremendous levels of voluntary action by private citizens, and of innovation and partnership between the public, private and social sectors. These are critical elements of the social model we want to see for the recovery, and into the future." ¹²

As Danny Kruger MP explained in his Maiden Speech, 'Our first loyalties are to the people we live among, and we have a preference to be governed by people we know'. Creating new sources of participatory local power and autonomy 'represents a challenge to some of the traditional views of both Left and Right'¹³.

3.2 Manifesto commitments

"We will support communities living on council estates who want to take ownership of the land and buildings they live in." Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto, Page 31, November 2019¹⁴.

"We will establish a £150 million Community Ownership Fund to encourage local takeovers of civic organisations or community assets that are under threat – local football clubs, but also pubs or post offices. And we will help communities that want to create 'pocket parks' and regenerate derelict areas." Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto, Page 26, November 2019 .

3.3 Policy proposals

"Empowering communities from council-owned estates with greater responsibility for their homes and their neighbourhoods' development by investigating the facilitation of stock transfers to CLT housing associations ... One way to achieve this would be through restoration of the Tenant Empowerment Programme and review of the Right to Transfer Regulations". Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, January 2020¹⁶.

"Government should consult on the proposal to turn the current 'Right to Bid' for public assets by community organisations into a full 'Right to Buy'. To support the Community Right to Buy, the Community Ownership Fund should be brought forward urgently and increased in size. The Community Ownership Fund could be empowered to buy up buildings and land owned by community businesses (or even SMEs and local family businesses which demonstrate real community value) that are at risk in this [Covid-19] crisis, and hold them until the previous owner, or a new community owner can take them over." [The Fund, first proposed in the Conservative Party's November 2019 Election Manifesto, should be doubled to £300 million and administered by Power to Change]. Levelling up our communities, September 2020¹⁷.

3.4 The community ownership opportunity

Government policy is to support community ownership for council estates (COCE) and to support community asset acquisitions. Delivering these and other community ownership policies will enable communities to contribute significantly to the Government's levelling up agenda in the era of Covid and Brexit.

Now is the moment for England to take the opportunity to develop a community ownership programme to support large-scale asset transfers, using previously tried and tested legislation and procedures to replicate proven models, linked to the purposes of planning set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and to the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 2030, to which the Government is committed, particularly SDG#11 Sustainable Cities and Communities¹⁸.

4. Review of large-scale community ownership over the past 30 years

4.1 England and Wales

In England and Wales, the Housing Act 1988 resulted in several transfers of council estates into community ownership. Some were through Tenants' Choice (Part IV Change of Landlord: Secure Tenants) such as the 700-home Walthamton and Elgin in West London. Others were through Housing Action Trusts such as the 2,500-home Castle Vale in Birmingham. The 1988 Act gave no room for a local authority to block transfer, and the Housing Corporation promoted Tenants' Choice and funded the costs of tenant groups to get through the process.

In 1996, following the loss of the Torbay transfer ballot in August 1995 and "in view of wider concerns about the high cost and low success rate of the initiative, the Tenants' Choice initiative was ended and the legislation repealed."¹⁹ It cannot be argued that community ownership was uppermost in the minds of those who enacted Tenants' Choice. Torbay provided the pretext for closing that door.



West Kensington and Gibbs Green residents visit the community-led Elgin estate development

Its successor, the Right to Transfer (RtT), s34A of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, and which was implemented when the Regulations were made in December 2013), addressed this by requiring not one, but four tests of tenant support throughout the process. Regardless, the RtT has failed to live up to its potential to support the transfer of council estates into community ownership:

- West Ken Gibbs Green and other tenant groups have experienced several ways in which local authorities have deliberately obstructed or frustrated the transfer process despite the whole purpose of the legislation being to require the Council's co-operation; and
- No resources were allocated for a dedicated RtT programme to promote awareness of the opportunity or to fund the necessary support for tenant groups going through the process.

4.2 Scotland

There has been long enough experience of community ownership at scale in Scotland to produce sufficiently robust evaluation data to inform reforms and Value for Money considerations in England²⁰. For a century, the growth of community ownership in Scotland has been supported by private individuals, by communities and by Governments and politicians of all the main parties. Since devolution, the Labour, Lib Dem, Scottish National and Green parties have all supported policies to enable more community ownership. So too has the Scottish Conservative Party, only stopping short of supporting compulsory measures to secure such land purchases from private landowners.

The earliest large-scale modern community land trust in the UK is the Stornoway Trust, home to 9,000 people, which has owned the capital of the Outer Hebrides along with 69,000 acres of land since it was gifted to the community by the industrialist and philanthropist Lord Leverhulme in 1923.

The Major Government's support for community buy-outs of private and State-owned Highlands and Islands crofting estates inspired high-profile community transfers such as the 7,400-acre Isle of Eigg and 22,200-acre Assynt, and culminated in the Transfer of Crofting Estates Act 1997²¹.

This advance laid the foundations for further land reform, under devolution, which granted communities powerful rights to acquire, backed with multi-agency financial support not only to fund and guide communities through the process, but also to contribute towards acquisition costs. Communities took ownership of 17,300-acre Knoydart in 1999, 3,200-acre Isle of Gigha in 2002, 55,600-acre North Harris in 2003, and 93,900-acre South Uist in 2006. Almost a century after the foundation of the Stornoway Trust, over two thirds of the Outer Hebrides is community owned and three quarters of the population live on community owned land. According to the Scottish Government:

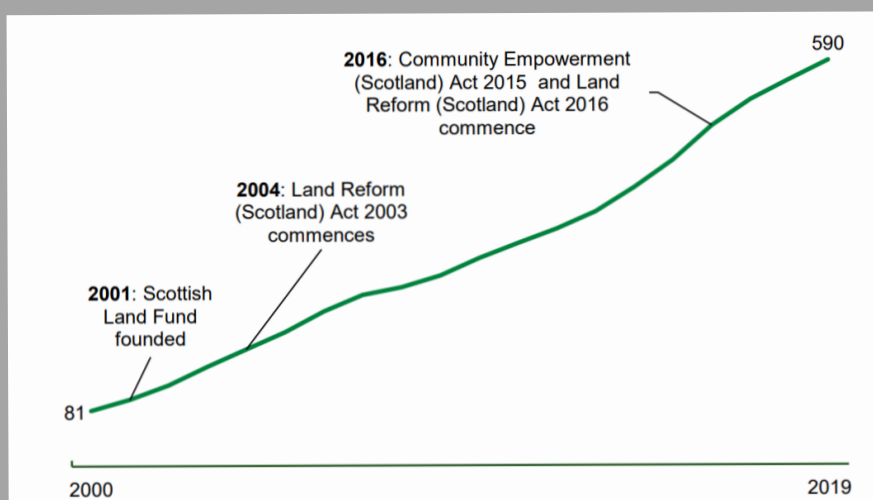


Figure 1 -Assets in community ownership 2019 to 2020

"There were 590 assets in community ownership as at December 2019. All but two of the assets in community ownership are land and/or buildings. The 590 assets were owned by 418 community groups and covered an area of 191,290 hectares.

*There has been an increase in recent years with 509 (86%) being acquired after 2000 and 49% (288) after 2010. The chart shows the initiatives and legislation coming into effect in 2001, 2004 and 2016, which supported community ownership."*²²

The Scottish Parliament has legislated to empower communities to be agents for the promotion of sustainable development and the repurposing of the use of public assets and private land for community benefit, through community ownership and the planning system, to achieve social, economic and environmental outcomes it could not otherwise obtain.²³

Scotland is a country whose Government has set targets for increasing community ownership, where the preference is for negotiating the sale of private land with rights to buy as the last resort - and only when Ministers decide that is in the public interest, and where it goes unremarked that Savills sponsors Community Land Scotland's annual conference.²⁴

4.3 England

In England, over the past three decades, some 15,000 homes have been transferred to community owned housing associations. Since 2008, England and Wales have seen the growth of 290 Community Land Trusts.

In the early 2000s, the Labour Government supported a handful of large-scale voluntary council housing transfers using the 'Gateway' model, which provided for a third of Board members to be tenants, with mixed results. Watford Community Housing reduced the proportion of tenants on its Board, while Phoenix Community Housing (6,500 homes in Lewisham) increased the proportion of residents to 50% and stipulated that the chair, who holds the casting vote, must be a resident.

Another community owned housing association which has developed from voluntary transfers is WATMOS. It owns around 3,000 homes on eight estates in Walsall and three in London (Lambeth), all of which started as Tenant Management Organisations. It provides a model that extends community ownership beyond its natural geographical confines through federation with devolved estate management.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced several potentially useful, though relatively limited community rights over local planning and community ownership of assets. However, the new Assets of Community Value could only be justified on social, rather than also economic and environmental grounds, thus divorcing this right from the supportive policy context that the planning system should have provided.

Unlike Scotland, few if any community rights resources have been allocated to enable aspirant community landowners to develop an effective voice for engaging directly with landowners, let alone to help finance community land purchases. Despite the 2011 Act's intentions, in practice the support programme has generated myriad micro-projects chasing limited resources.

Until now, there has been no strategic focus on delivering transfers of land and buildings into community ownership with local hands-on support, at a scale large enough, and in numbers sufficient to deliver widespread transformative change.

5. Supporting council estate communities

5.1 Take back control

'Patronised, disrespected and disregarded' is how Lancaster West tenants feel about the way they were treated in the run-up to the Grenfell fire. And this is how tenants on many estates across the country also feel about the way they are taken for granted and imposed upon by their council landlords and their exclusion from the decisions that determine the future of their neighbourhoods.

Driven by housing numbers targets and land price inflation, by depopulation and deindustrialisation, by historic lack of maintenance, rarely have large-scale demolitions achieved the well-meant policy outcomes intended by their decision-makers. Usually, they have caused long-term harm to individuals, and contributed to social dislocation and environmental damage.²⁵

Too many communities have been ruthlessly displaced in a mostly illusory quest to secure financial benefits for the local authority.²⁶ Under commercial confidentiality, and without open debate about where the balance of public interest lies, nor meaningful and genuine dialogue with the residents affected, local authorities have determined the fate of communities without a proper consideration of the social and individual costs.

Less dramatically, though of no less significance to the individuals affected, slow and often unresponsive management by increasingly remote and hard-pressed councils and housing associations has caused chronic problems which have burdened MPs and Councillors with casework they should not have expected.

This tension - between what councils want and what residents need - can be resolved by empowering communities to take back control over the places where they live and work. This will give them the freedom to make their own choices, take responsibility for their own mistakes, and stand with their sector.²⁷

Most councils have not behaved badly; a few have been honourable exceptions; but enough have alienated a sufficient number of estate communities to supply a community ownership transfer pipeline.

5.2 Community ownership for council estates (COCE)

Three high-profile council estate communities in London: 800-home Lancaster West (LW) in RB Kensington and Chelsea - the estate that included Grenfell Tower; 700-home West Kensington and Gibbs Green (WKG) in LB Hammersmith and Fulham - the failed mega Earl's Court scheme; and 300-home Cressingham Gardens (CG) next to Brockwell Park in LB Lambeth want support to go into community ownership. There are also large estates in the Midlands, the Northwest²⁸ and Northeast, with circumstances and motivations common to those in London²⁹.

The March 2018 Legatum Institute and Create Streets report by Danny Kruger and Nicholas Boys Smith recommended a "Community-led future" for the Lancaster West estate³⁰. The report recognised that:

- For too long the development and management of estates like Lancaster West has been carried out without the local community having real power over the decisions that affect their neighbourhood;
- Never again should residents be at the mercy of a system that can disregard their views and downgrade their interests; and
- The future of Lancaster West should be determined by the people who live there.

It proposed that:

- A listening exercise be held to understand the people's wishes, where residents feel power resides in the estate, where it should reside, and whether they support more community control;
- RBKC should give the residents an option to transfer Lancaster West to a Community Land Trust, whose members are the residents of the estate; and
- If residents support it, ownership of the estate could be passed to the local community.

5.3 Covid has disarmed tenant groups

Covid-19 has given local authorities, whether indifferent or hostile to community ownership, the upper hand, emboldening them to press forward with their schemes while not co-operating with transfer into community ownership.

At LancasterWest, none of these proposals have been implemented. RBKC has pursued its £60 million refurbishment scheme (half paid for by the Government), while, so far, not offering residents the community ownership option.

Cressingham Gardens and West Ken Gibbs Green have both entered the Feasibility Study stage of the Right to Transfer. Regulation 15 requires the local authority landlord³⁰ to assist the tenant group to work up its proposal to transfer the estate to a community owned landlord. The tenant groups have no resources to produce the Feasibility Study, and due to Coronavirus restrictions cannot engage face-to-face with their residents to keep them involved with the process.

Lambeth Council seems unwilling or incapable of co-operating sufficiently to get the transfer done. Rather, it is pressing forward with its scheme to demolish Cressingham Gardens, even though the GLA has withdrawn its funding contribution.



Proposed community-led new homes on West Kensington Estate by Francis Terry and Create Streets

Instead of assisting West Ken Gibbs Green to produce the Right to Transfer Feasibility Study, as required by law, the staff which Hammersmith and Fulham Council said it had redirected to Covid-19 related duties have been duplicating the tenant group's feasibility studies for the development of two housing sites on the estates to take forward council priorities rather than the community led housing developments envisioned by the residents as part of their emerging Neighbourhood Plan. The residents' studies were financed with £20,000 from the GLA's Community led Housing Hub and undertaken on residents' behalf by Create Streets.

In this era of Covid, council estate communities seeking ownership are disarmed - unable even to enforce their already weak rights.

Government needs to support the implementation of its manifesto commitments by backing up and strengthening the law through policies and programmes designed to support communities into ownership.



Co-designing new homes with West Kensington and Gibbs Green residents

6. Proposals to implement Government policies and increase community ownership

The following regulatory and legislative improvements and programmes would support, promote and stimulate greater community ownership of land and buildings:

1. *Restore the Tenant Empowerment Programme* to support housing stock transfers to community-owned Housing Associations, with a budget starting at £3 million and scaling up to £5 million, adequate to build capacity among tenant groups, promote community ownership opportunities and develop a stock-transfer pipeline. Fast track a pathfinder cohort of 'oven-ready' estates (5.2 above) by supporting and grant-financing tenant groups through the stages of the transfer process. Accompany this by an action-learning process to ensure the programme delivers practicable and effective policy instruments. This programme should be managed by the Regulator of Social Housing³².
2. *Review the operation of the Right to Transfer* (S34A Housing Act 1985) Regulations (2013) between December 2013 and December 2020 to assess impact and effectiveness³³. Base revised RtT Regulations on the repealed Tenants Choice Regulations (1989) (a draft on that basis is available on request) to provide a more robust and workable mechanism that denies blocking mechanisms to the local authority landlord³⁴. Subject to appropriate encouragement and expertise, the Regulator, or a body other than MHCLG, should undertake this review.
3. *Restore the housing stock transfer programme*, restricting grant to write off residual debt to support transfers only to community owned housing associations. MHCLG should re-issue the Housing Stock Transfer Manual, aligning it with revised RtT Regulations and prioritising transfers to community-based housing associations, ensuring that the regulatory regime is technically and culturally fit³⁵.

4. *Renew the Community Housing Funds* with a higher proportion of the housing budgets, sustained for the duration of the upcoming Public Spending Reviews, not only to deliver the previously agreed programme, but to sufficiently resource communities to develop the skills, identify the sites and obtain scheme permissions to scale up future programmes. When assessing value for money, take account of relevant Scottish data evaluations and methodologies.
5. *Broaden Assets of Community Value* (ACVs) by including economic and environmental, as well as social interests in their criteria for designation, to align the re-purposing of these assets with the full range of NPPF planning objectives, and to extend the right to designate ACVs to qualifying community bodies.
6. *Create a full Community Right to Buy* by granting qualifying community bodies the right to acquire land and buildings when they come up for sale, and the right to compulsorily purchase land and buildings which are vacant or neglected or their use or management is causing harm to the environmental wellbeing of the community, if the community can demonstrate sustainable development or use benefits, to be purchased at existing use value, ignoring any value created by the exercise of other community rights³⁶.
7. *Establish the Community Ownership Fund*, under the administration of Power to Change, to support transfers of land and buildings to and purchases by communities, endow it with £300 million, and empower it to buy up assets on behalf of communities as an immediate response to threats from the Covid-19 Pandemic³⁷.

Case Study - Walerton & Elgin community homes

Residents' organisation, landowner and developer all in one

The Walerton and Elgin estates in West London were transferred from Westminster City Council to a community owned housing association in 1992, transforming service provision and democratic accountability.

Walerton and Elgin Community Homes (WECH) is a Community Land Trust - residents elect their neighbours to the Board, which can then appoint up to six independent members with appropriate expertise. The Board takes the policy decisions about rents, management, investment and development. WECH is a regulated registered provider of social housing. According to its 2018 satisfaction survey, 94% of residents were satisfied with WECH as their landlord.

WECH owns nearly 700 homes, 20% of which are leasehold, with the rest mainly secure tenancies on social housing rents. It employs 15 staff and its annual turnover is £3.5 million. In each of the three years from 2017 to 2019, around 130 residents from 20% of WECH's properties attended its AGM to elect the Board and appoint the Auditor.



Westminster Council Leader Rachael Robathan with Jonathan Rosenberg at the start of WECH's Elgin development scheme

Thanks to being community owned, WECH provides:

- Extra lettings to help meet local needs: low turnover of staff and residents coupled with estate-based management means the community landlord knows its tenants and stock sufficiently well to create a chain of several moves out of one letting opportunity, an outcome which rehouses several households to more suitable accommodation instead of just one;
- Independent income to support community services: while the Council had to end some local community services due to austerity, WECH spends £150,000 of its own money providing community services, including support for younger and older people and for those needing debt and related advice;
- A low rent home for occupation by a police constable; For more than two decades, WECH has worked with the Metropolitan Police to identify suitable occupants, who move into the home on condition that they will participate in the community - helping to organise social events and giving advice via the newsletter - and will contribute to the good working relationship between WECH and the Police.



An extra storey on each block in place of the pitched roof

Elgin estate development

1. Densification

The scheme adds 43 new homes to the 151 homes:

- In an extra floor on top of eight existing blocks - four two-storey and four four-storey;
- In two new five-storey infill blocks;
- In the top two floors of a new stand-alone five-storey building;
- Through conversion of WECH's former office; and
- Through conversion and addition of an extra floor to the two-storey building containing WECH's former community centre, pre-school facility and community organisation offices.

2. Tenure mix and affordability

All 43 homes are for affordable rent at the Mayor's London Living Rent levels, effectively social housing rents at their cap. There are no sales or market rents .

23 of the homes are for rent to Westminster Council nominees, 12 are for rent to key workers from Westminster Council's intermediate tenancy list, and eight are for WECH's use to meet its own population's needs.

3. Style

WECH designed the homes in the 'neo-modernist' style to restore and enhance the existing 1960s buildings, though it followed the planning authority's stipulation that the powder-coated steel façade panels be substituted with yellow brick (slips) on the new five-storey block on Elgin Avenue (which actually works quite well as a hybrid, transitioning the style between the outer and the inner part of the estate).

The scheme has transformed the mid-1960s core of the Elgin estate, which WECH modernised in the early 1990s, from a palette of beige render and yellow brick, to the white and black of its original 1960s modernist style. This restoration, along with the dusky blue powder coated windows WECH installed in the 1990s, fits seamlessly with the anthracite and copper palette of the new neo-modernist homes to present a unified modernist/ neo-modernist densified core.

The extra storeys are set back from the buildings' edges and accommodated within the height of the now-removed pitched roofs WECH installed in the early 1990s, thus minimising the impact of the intensification. A first-time visitor might not realise that what seems a single design is actually a palimpsest of the original construction layered with two subsequent interventions over 55 years.



New community-led homes, the Elgin Estate

4. *Environmental and quality of life enhancements*

The scheme is designed to meet the Code for Sustainable Homes, Levels 4 and 5. In the homes:

- High quantities of insulation in the walls, floors, ceilings and windows all but eliminate heating costs, significantly reducing CO₂ emissions;
- Fresh air, pumped in from outside and filtered, force-ventilates the rooms, reducing indoor concentrations of CO₂ and harmful chemicals emitted from cleaning products and cooking;
- Fashionable, high-quality open plan kitchen/ living rooms with extensive cupboard and storage space look out through walls of floor-to-ceiling French windows to attractive views of the estate, into central and out to West and North London, with nearly all flats opening onto generous private balcony/ external spaces.

Outside the homes:

- 415 roof-mounted solar panels, each rated 335 Watts, in total generate up to 140KW of electricity;
- Batteries will be installed to store solar energy to power - beyond sunset - WECH's office, Community Centre, Nursery, Community Offices, electric vehicle charging stations, communal lighting, and to feed any surplus electricity into the National Grid;
- Living walls of evergreens and perennials line the walkway to the Nursery's entrance and the closed end of the top deck of WECH's car park, and wildflower meadows fill roof spaces not covered in solar panels; and
- Eight communal gardens, each 40 SqM, provide roof-top spaces for residents to develop their own projects to grow food, reduce pollution and improve human and environmental wellbeing.

5. *New office, community and outdoor facilities*

WECH's new office, community, and youth facilities include:

- Spacious dual-aspect, two-part WECH office with reception staff and housing officers in one section and the rest of the team in small offices surrounding a large open plan space with more desks and equipment, and access to a full kitchen with six-seater table and large external terraced area looking into the Elgin estate;
- A new community centre that can be used by one, two or three groups at once, with a kitchen able to cater for up to 200 people, along with direct access to extensive underground storage for other community events' equipment;
- A purpose-built pre-school facility – nursery - with enclosed external play area open to WECH residents and families from the wider area for up to 30 children;
- Offices and space for organisations supplying community services such as sports activities for young people, debt and welfare advice for WECH's residents, and storage, office and operational space for the North Paddington Food Bank. These three non-residential floors were decorated with a lime-based paint which uses Graphene instead of petrochemicals to achieve durability. Rather than giving off volatile organic compounds in the first couple of years following application, it hardens by soaking up CO₂ from the air; and
- A renewed five-a-side football pitch and basketball court, bespoke deck seating, outdoor gym stations, and open space accessible to the public during daylight hours from the Harrow Road.



Solar panels and...



...a new green wall on the Elgin Estate

6. Scheme cost

<i>Cost</i>	<i>Pre and post build</i>
<i>£1 million</i>	<i>Invested by WECH working up the scheme over several years before letting the building contract</i>
<i>£17 million</i>	<i>Total cost of construction works</i>

There was no land cost because WECH developed this scheme on land it already owned.

7. How is it paid for?

At the point of letting the contract in 2017, WECH had £1 million in the bank and no debts. WECH borrowed £9 million from a consortium of two banks. The loan is secured against WECH's total portfolio of around 700 properties and its term is 25 years with a break clause at 10 years. It will be paid back by WECH continuing to generate operating surpluses. The £11 million from WECH is supplemented by grant:

- £4m from Westminster City Council's s106 monies;
- £2.6m from the Mayor of London's Housing Programme; and
- £0.4m from the Government's Community Housing Fund.

The total grant from public funds of £7 million is towards the cost of building the housing. The non-residential elements, such as the office and community facilities, are funded entirely by WECH.

About Trusting Communities

Trusting Communities was established in 2017 to inform policy and decision makers about what programmes, policies and legislative framework could best support communities, especially council estate communities, into ownership. The project is overseen by the Create Streets Foundation.

Trusting Communities is led by Jonathan Rosenberg, who organised the Walerton and Elgin estates community to stop sale and demolition using the Conservative Government's Tenants' Choice legislation to achieve community ownership in 1992.

Trusting Communities' work plan includes advising Ministers and Civil Servants on the most effective means to achieve the Government's community ownership commitments; supporting tenant groups to take ownership; and raising awareness about community ownership.

About the author

Jonathan Rosenberg has lived on the Walerton and Elgin estates in North Paddington, City of Westminster, since 1979. He has spent most of his life supporting his social housing community and others to determine their own housing futures, in some cases in the face of displacement and demolition being imposed upon them, by taking ownership of their homes and control over development.

Endnotes

¹ “In the space of a few decades, thousands of families have lost control of housing in England. With owner occupation out of reach and social housing supply restricted, families with children, households on lower incomes, and older people are now living much more extensively in the private rented sector. Two thirds (63 per cent) of private renters agree that it is important for them to feel a ‘sense of ownership’ over their home. But only one in five (20 per cent) say they currently do so. This compares to owner occupiers, of whom 87 per cent say that feeling a sense of ownership is important and 85 per cent currently do.” Putting Down Roots, Improving security for renting families and private landlords, Centre for Social Justice, 16th March 2019. <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/putting-down-roots>

² “We know that the poorer you are, the less connected with your wider society you tend to be. Lacking in both bridging and bonding capital and bereft of the institutions and structures that could help them, too many poorer families and communities are facing seemingly insurmountable problems alone, unadvised and without proper aid. Based on the principle of subsidiarity, we believe that power should be devolved to the lowest appropriate level. Public services and neighbourhoods should be governed and shaped from the ‘bottom up’, by families and the communities. These neighbourhoods need to be served by a range of providers that incorporate and empower communities. Moving away from a top-down siloed approach to service delivery, such activity should be driven by a holistic vision, which integrates need in order to ascertain and address the most consequent factors that limit and prevent human flourishing. Local and social value must play a central role in meeting the growing, complex and unaddressed needs of communities across the UK. The needs of the bottom should shape provision and decision at the top. To deliver on this, we need a renewal and reform of our major governing institutions. We need acknowledgement of the fact that the state is not an end in itself, but only one means by which to achieve a greater end: a flourishing society. Civil society and intermediary institutions, such as schools, faith groups and businesses, are also crucial means to achieving this outcome. We also need new purpose and new vision to create new institutions which restore the organic and shared society that has served Britain so well over the centuries.” Power, People and Places: A Manifesto for Devolution to Britain’s Key Cities, Phillip Blond & Mark Morrin, Respublica, May 2015. <https://www.respublica.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Key-Cities-Final.pdf>

³ Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant. A report for government by Danny Kruger MP, September 2020

⁴ “Many of us have to come to appreciate, contribute to, or rely more on, our local neighbourhoods – both physically (the small local park) – and those who live close to us.” My ten point plan for the new normal, Nicholas Boys Smith. Conservative Home, 11 May 2020. <https://www.conservativehome.com/localgovernment/2020/05/nicholas-boys-smith-my-ten-point-plan-for-the-new-normal.html>

⁵ “Social bonds are stronger, with 40% feeling a stronger sense of local community and 39% more in touch with friends and family”. YouGov survey commissioned by the RSA, April 2020: <https://www.thersa.org/about-us/media/2019/brits-see-cleaner-air-stronger-social-bonds-and-changing-food-habits-amid-lockdown>

⁶ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/mediafile/100263178/rr-wt-71014-community-ownership-for-woodland-management-and-creation-.pdf?cb=beg80a20d2274265aeceoba176e92842>; <http://www.machrihanish.org>; <http://portpatrickharbour.org>

⁷ Happiness, Heaven and Hell in Paddington: A Comparative Study of the Empowering Management Practices of WECH, Peter Ambrose and Julia Stone, September 2010. http://wech.co.uk/images/pdf/Happiness_Heaven_and_Hell_in_Paddington.pdf

⁸ Community Empowerment, Madhu Satsangi and Susan Murray, School of Applied Science, University of Stirling, January 2011. http://wech.co.uk/images/pdf/Community_Empowerment_Report_by_Dr_Satsangi.pdf

⁹ Measuring the benefits of empowerment through community ownership, WECH January 2011. http://wech.co.uk/images/pdf/Measuring_the_benefits_of_empowerment_through_community_ownership.pdf

¹⁰ “More than any other policy issue, housing needs to be locally-led by giving local areas the freedom to find and plan the housing they actually need. Every entrepreneur will tell you to start local, with the facts on the ground. That is what we must do now. To solve the housing crisis we need local incentives to drive better development that better realises the needs of local economies. As with so many policy problems the answer is not in Whitehall. It is out around the country.” Home Time: Fixing the broken housing market. George Freeman MP, Bright Blue. <https://brightblue.org.uk/wp-content/>

¹¹ Letter from Prime Minister Boris Johnson to Danny Kruger MP, 23 June 2020. Reproduced on pages 5 and 6 of *Levelling up our communities*, Danny Kruger MP, September 2020

¹² Letter from the Prime Minister to Danny Kruger MP, 24 September 2020: https://www.dannykruger.org.uk/sites/www.dannykruger.org.uk/files/2020-09/0239_001.pdf

¹³ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-01-29/debates/FC076C93-9BD1-4277-80E6-55A77EF28B7F/details>

¹⁴ See the policies proposed in *Trusting Communities: Community led housing policies for building affordable homes, healing division, reducing inequality and providing additional social benefits*, Jonathan Rosenberg, June 2019.

¹⁵ Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto, November 2019, page 26. https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf

¹⁶ *Living with Beauty: Promoting health, well-being and sustainable growth*, Report by the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, January 2020. Policy Proposition 13, Page 78

¹⁷ *Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant*, A report for government by Danny Kruger M, September 2020, pages 40-41.

¹⁸ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg11>

¹⁹ *Tenant's Choice and the Torbay Tenants Housing Association*, Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office and the Housing Corporation, July 1997: <https://www.nao.org.uk/pubsarchive/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2018/11/Housing-Corporation-Tenants-Choice-and-the-Torbay-Tenants-Housing-Association.pdf>

²⁰ *Benefits from land development and community ownership: Methodology and evaluations from Scotland*. *Trusting Communities Briefing Note* by Jonathan Rosenberg, 14 October 2020.

²¹ Professor Jim Hunter, Scottish historian and champion of community ownership, commented to me on 2 June 2020: "There is a sense in which the entire community land movement in Scotland was triggered by the then Conservative Government's interest, around 1990, in transferring ownership of government-owned crofting estates to the crofters living on them. This was proposed in 1989-90 for the Government's crofting estates in Skye and Raasay. Although it was rejected, the concept, and much of the work done to refine it, underpinned the successful purchase in 1992 of the previously privately-owned North Lochinver Estate by the Assynt Crofters Trust (ACT). Despite the ACT being wedded to crofter collective ownership rather than wider community ownership as now understood, the 1992 buy-out was a milestone. Michael, now Lord Forsyth, Secretary of State for Scotland in the closing period of the Major Government, took a close interest in these matters, visiting Assynt, meeting with crofters there, and also visiting Eigg where he met with islanders then engaged in a long battle to get control of an island with an especially bad experience of private ownership. Declaring "I am not a Bolshevik", Forsyth, while setting himself against anything smacking of expropriation of privately-owned assets, revived the notion of transferring state-owned land to communities. Hence the Transfer of Crofting Estates Act, and hence too the beginnings of moves to get Forestry Commission land into community ownership."

²² *Community ownership in Scotland 2019*: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-ownership-scotland-2019/>

²³ The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 provides for the transfer of state assets to communities.

²⁴ A useful summary of the growth of community ownership in Scotland and the response of community owners to the Coronavirus pandemic can be found here: <https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Built-in-Resilience-Community-Landowners-Response-to-the-Covid19-Crisis.pdf>

²⁵ This observation is made by the author of this paper, following 35 years' experience dealing with social housing not just in London, but across the UK, helping tenants, then turning gamekeeper for a short while to work for the Regulator.

²⁶ For example, from the Heygate Estate in Southwark and from the West Hendon Estate in Barnet. For a detailed treatment of this subject see *The social cleansing of London council estates: everyday experiences of 'accumulative dispossession'*, by Professor Loretta Lees and Hanna White, *Housing Studies Journal*, November 2019 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673037.2019.1680814>. This needs to be contextualised by the many times as many communities in England's former industrial heartlands which have been ultimately erased by the wholesale demolition of their neighbourhoods.

²⁷ 'Active citizenship' has had a mixed record in public policy; possibly because the opportunities and support mechanisms for autonomous citizen action were insufficiently focussed on places where citizens had a genuine public and self interest in the outcome of their actions. The privately moved cross-party amendment that led to the 2008 statutory definition of CLTs was an attempt to fill the gap that had been left by the Labour Government's abandonment of 'double devolution' in the early/mid-2000s. It aimed to make use of other statutory props to give communities of place some leverage on political process, resources and land.

²⁸ Manctopia: Will progress make or break this council estate? <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-54056226>

²⁹ Previous Government programmes such as the Estate Regeneration Fund also provide data for researching likely candidates.

³⁰ A community-led future: A proposal for the neighbourhood of Grenfell Tower, March 2018, Nicholas Boys Smith and Danny Kruger, Legatum Institute and Create Streets
<https://lii.com/reports/a-community-led-future-a-proposal-for-the-neighbourhood-of-grenfell-tower/>

³¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/2898/regulation/15/made>

³² BBBC Commission report January 2020 quoted at 3.3 above.

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ Tenants Choice Regulations (The Housing (Change of Landlord) Regulations 1989 (1989 No. 367) (repealed 1996); and The Housing (Change of Landlord) (Prescribed Forms) Regulations 1989 (1989 No. 374) (repealed 1996).

³⁵ The last version of the Housing Stock Transfer Manual, which was published in 2013 and covered the period to 31 March 2015, can be found here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/583402/Housing_Transfer_Manual_-_Period_to_31_March_2015_archived.pdf

³⁶ Levelling up our communities, Page 40, September 2020

³⁷ Conservative Party Manifesto, Page 31, November 2019; Levelling up our communities, Page 41, September 2020

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