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# The International Journal of Housing Policy

## Replication through partnership: the evolution of partnerships between community land trusts and housing associations in England

--Manuscript Draft--

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<b>Abstract:</b>	<p>Community land trusts have emerged as an innovative way of addressing the affordable housing crisis in England, as they seek to control and own housing to ensure lasting affordability and to democratically manage assets through voluntarism and community ownership structures. However, there can be difficulties that impede their progress, including legitimacy as new forms of housing organisation, access to finance, and voluntary capacity. CLTs have increasingly begun to partner with housing associations to overcome these issues, combining community leadership with professional expertise and experience. While partnerships may be critiqued for standardising community initiatives or for marrying contrasting institutional logics, housing association support has led directly to the growth of the CLT sector and created new frameworks in which communities can pursue local goals. This paper reports on empirical research into the constitution and effectiveness of partnerships, and considers their implications for future community-led housing development.</p>

**Replication through partnership: the evolution of partnerships between  
community land trusts and housing associations in England**

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## **Replication through partnership: the evolution of partnerships between community land trusts and housing associations in England**

**Abstract:** Community land trusts have emerged as an innovative way of addressing the affordable housing crisis in England, as they seek to control and own housing to ensure lasting affordability and to democratically manage assets through voluntarism and community ownership structures. However, there can be difficulties that impede their progress, including legitimacy as new forms of housing organisation, access to finance, and voluntary capacity. CLTs have increasingly begun to partner with housing associations to overcome these issues, combining community leadership with professional expertise and experience. While partnerships may be critiqued for standardising community initiatives or for marrying contrasting institutional logics, housing association support has led directly to the growth of the CLT sector and created new frameworks in which communities can pursue local goals. This paper reports on empirical research into the constitution and effectiveness of partnerships, and considers their implications for future community-led housing development.

### **Introduction**

Community land trusts (CLTs) are independent, non-profit organisations that are formed and governed by voluntary boards to provide affordable housing in perpetuity. They are typically formed to tackle local problems of insufficient housing supply and affordability issues, aiming to provide housing that is more affordable relative to local incomes and to prevent the displacement of lower-income households from communities in which they may be unable to access suitable or affordable housing (Moore and McKee, 2012). In addition, CLTs represent an attempt by local people to gain civic influence over the planning, management and ownership of housing in their communities, typified by their adoption of democratic governance structures that stipulate open membership, collective ownership, and democratic decision-making. CLTs have a legal obligation to have an ‘asset lock’, which prevents their assets from being used or sold in a way that contravenes objectives enshrined in their legal constitution. This asset lock acts in such a way to ensure that housing remains affordable in perpetuity, by attaching covenants to the future use, resale and letting of homes that restrict its use for private profit and

capital gains. Affordability is achieved and maintained by CLTs through the receipt of an initial subsidy, which may be free or cheap land, or capital grants from funding agencies, which is used to suppress sale (and subsequent resale) prices or to subsidise rents.

The emergence of CLTs is rooted in the entrenched housing problems that have endured in England for a number of years. These problems include restricted access to homeownership due to large discrepancies between house prices and incomes, particularly affecting younger households, difficulties in accessing social housing due to insufficient supply, and an expanding private rented sector which often offers limited security of tenure, high rental prices, and poor standard accommodation (Just Fair Consortium 2015). It is in this context that interest in forming and developing CLTs has grown: there are now over 170 CLTs in England, with over half of these forming in the two years from 2013-2015 (National CLT Network, 2015). Although there is no publicly available source, the vast majority of CLTs are based in rural areas and are often facilitated with local authority support, with small-scale urban examples emerging in cities such as Liverpool and London (Moore, 2014; Bunce, 2015; Thompson, 2015).

The growth in the number of CLTs has been supported in part by growing support from the housing association sector, as CLTs and housing associations have begun to form partnerships that help CLTs to overcome barriers that had previously impeded their progress, including acquisition of finance, stakeholder legitimacy in terms of technical competence, and volunteer capacity. These partnerships have been advocated for marrying housing association expertise and experience in housing development with the local stimulus and democratic virtues of CLTs (Moore, 2015), though previous research has also highlighted the risk of community leadership being co-opted through partnership with professional organisations that may not share similar objectives (Moore and Mullins, 2013). This paper seeks to explore the constitution and effectiveness of partnerships between CLTs and housing associations, exploring the motivations of each for entering into partnership, their effectiveness at overcoming barriers to CLT delivery, and considering the current and future benefits and implications for future development of CLT housing.

## **The growth and expansion of community land trusts in England**

The CLT concept has its roots in the United States, where it was originally utilised as a way to capture land rights for marginalised populations, and later evolved to become an important instrument for the delivery of affordable housing that was protected from open market forces, often operating in communities affected by gentrification and displacement of lower-income households (Moore and McKee, 2012). CLTs in England are a relatively new phenomenon, and it is only in recent years that the sector has grown. There has been a growth in the number of CLTs and an institutional framework to support their development has emerged. CLTs are typically formed by local volunteers who are motivated by philanthropic concerns for their local community; those who form and manage CLTs are rarely, if ever, the eventual occupants of CLT housing (Moore, 2015).

CLT activity in England was initially stimulated by a national demonstration programmes that ran from 2006 to 2008 and 2008 to 2010, each supported by seedcorn funding from charitable funders and the Department for Communities and Local Government and influenced by earlier scoping research published earlier in the 2000s that explored the potential for CLTs to meet affordable housing need (Conaty et al, 2003; Countryside Agency, 2005). These programmes aimed to scale and increase CLT activity, helping the small number of CLTs that existed at the time (16 participated in the first national demonstration programme) to overcome definitional, technical and financial challenges. As a new form of housing organisation, CLTs were an unknown quantity for stakeholders and funding agencies unfamiliar with their operation and governance, while technical and financial issues arose from requirements for specialist skills required for the formation and management of a housing organisation, and the need to obtain substantial capital funding for the development of affordable homes. These barriers led to the formation of a number of intermediary organisations across England, which offer specialist CLT support that helps to “disseminate good practice and promote public understanding and acceptance of this mutual approach to ownership of land and property” (Countryside Agency, 2005). Recent studies have argued that CLT intermediaries play an important role in supporting CLT development, as their provision of technical support and promotion of CLT activity within local, regional and national policy networks has

helped to expand CLT activity in areas where intermediaries are active (Moore and Mullins, 2013). There are currently seven CLT intermediary organisations in England, usually operating on a countywide or sub-regional basis, and have in some instances received support from housing associations with their formation, usually from associations seeking both to support affordable housing development and to enhance their local reputation in communities in which they operate. This is reflective of the growing role that housing associations have begun to play in the delivery of CLT housing through partnerships with local voluntary-led trusts. In addition, CLTs have benefited from an increase in central government support, with funds recently made available to help newly-formed CLT organisations with start-up costs (Inside Housing, 2014). While research has been conducted into the role and relationship of CLT intermediaries in supporting CLT development, there have been few considerations as to the role of housing associations in scaling-up CLT activity.

### **Communities, partnerships and affordable housing delivery**

The emergence of CLTs can be associated with the resurgence of political interest in the role of civil society and community participation, evidenced by localist agendas in advanced economies in which the mobilisation of volunteers and communities assumes greater importance in the design, planning and management of public services and resources (Moore and McKee, 2014). In an increasingly complex global environment, communities have often been enlisted to contribute to the resolution of social and economic problems, as well as being promoted for their potential contribution to a revitalisation of democracy through new forms of citizen engagement, often taking the form of partnerships with state or other non-governmental actors (Taylor, 2012).

Forms of community participation, as part of partnerships with other public and non-public agencies, have long existed in both the field of housing in a variety of international contexts. Networks and partnerships have been important for the delivery of social and affordable housing as part of inclusionary housing schemes, where the involvement of a range of stakeholders has been key to securing low-cost housing as part of market-rate developments (de Kam et al, 2014). Similarly, Needham and de Kam (2004) argue that, rather than viewing land acquisition for

housing development as a rational market-based financial transaction, land is often acquired through networks of mutual trust and collaboration between different stakeholders and within different policy frameworks that encourage such relationships. Sturzaker (2011) argues that community empowerment in planning processes, through consultation and involvement in decision-making, can help to overcome opposition to affordable housing in rural areas. This highlights wider trends in the planning of developments that may be locally unpopular, moving from what Armour (1991: 5) describes as technocratic decision-making that results in the imposition of unwanted developments, to processes “based on the voluntary participation of communities and collaborative, joint problem solving and decision making.” Panelli and Lerner (2010) argue that these processes involve moving beyond binary conceptions of different partners in governance, arguing that less clear-cut divisions exist between communities, the state and other actors and that instead partnerships may be contingent on, and facilitated by, moments of opportunity whereby mutual interests and goals are identified and agreed upon by partners that may have contrasting forms, functions and philosophies.

Internationally, the scaling-up of CLT activism has involved partnerships with a range of actors. Bunce’s (2015) case study of the East London CLT highlighted how activists mobilised to achieve objectives within a terrain of neoliberal governance and perceived political preference for private development. She argued that while the CLT was able to achieve objectives of community-led housing provision, their eventual provision was reduced in scale due to constraints of governmental preferences and power imbalances with private developers, resulting in a “more tempered vision for a CLT that would gain political acceptance” (Bunce, 2015: 13). Similarly, in the United States, CLTs have partnered with municipalities to overcome obstacles relating to funding and capacity, but these have been critiqued for a practical focus on housing and potentially diluting community empowerment in CLT management and governance (Davis and Jacobus, 2008). This argument follows a similar theme to Meehan (2014: 131), who argues that the integration of CLTs into wider housing markets confronts them with “the possible danger of being a useful practical tool for managing problematic urban housing markets, while losing sight of the wider vision and social critique associated with its focus on, and accountability to, its local community. These arguments mirror longstanding critiques of community

development (Taylor, 2012) and highlight the need for research studies that take into account the framing and nuances of partnerships between community-based actors and associated stakeholders.

### **Trust and association: the origins of CLT and housing association partnerships**

Partnerships between CLTs and housing associations usually occur when the CLT is developing rental homes, and tend to take two different forms. One form involves the CLT sub-contracting key aspects of delivery to housing associations, such as responsibility for day-to-day management and upkeep of rental homes. In this instance, CLTs retain ownership of the homes and any subsequent surplus that is generated from rental income. A second and more common form of partnership differs from the traditional CLT model, in that CLTs own the freehold of land and lease this to a housing association, which then uses it to build and develop homes. The CLT receives a nominal ground rent from the housing association as part of the lease, while the housing association takes responsibility for funding, developing, and managing the homes, and retains the rental revenue (National CLT Network, 2011).

The roots of these types of partnerships between local CLTs and housing associations lie in the former's attempts to gain capital funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the national housing and regeneration agency in England and the main funder of affordable rental housing. CLTs wishing to access capital funding were required to partner with a local housing association, in part due to the unfamiliar nature of CLTs and lack of a track record of delivery, meaning a housing association was required to mitigate risk by standing as a guarantor for the development and ensuring its completion (Aird, 2009). Advocates of the partnership approach argued that housing associations were natural partners for CLTs, due to their perceived commonalities and shared characteristics:

Whilst CLTs and housing associations have different roots and can have different objectives, they have a lot in common. CLTs and housing associations both work in the property world. They both work on a non-profit basis. They both act as long-term stewards of property, with CLTs in particular

being very committed to holding their assets in perpetuity. And they often share similar funding, leasing and town planning models. Perhaps most importantly, they both aim to improve people's quality of life.

National CLT Network (2011)

These commonalities reflect the original roots of the housing association movement, which was based on local philanthropy similar to contemporary CLTs and sought to provide low-cost housing for households whose needs were unmet by the state or the market. Housing associations grew in importance throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, particularly as access to council housing became more restricted in the latter half of the Century and associations sought to meet the niche housing needs of marginalised and excluded households (McDermont, 2010; Mullins, 2010).

However, in recent decades the housing association sector has increased in scale and scope through processes of merger and agglomeration. This was partly provoked by the stock transfer of homes from local authorities to housing associations, leading to a significant increase in the portfolio sizes of many associations, and the utilisation of new forms of private finance to fund growth. This also led to changes in the management and governance of associations, as more streamlined and professionalised structures were often adopted that shifted from a community focus and provided fewer opportunities for local residents or tenants to engage in organisational management (Mullins, 2006). Expansion and professionalisation caused tensions within the sector, creating a paradox between housing associations seeking to 'sensitively serve the needs of society', based on their original local base and community focus, while undertaking processes of merger and expansion on the basis of business logics such as economies of scale (Mullins, 1999; McDermont, 2010). These changes in housing association outlook provoked Malpass (2000: 272) to observe that "voluntary housing has changed, virtually out of recognition, transformed to a point where the voluntary element is of symbolic relevance only."

These changes sometimes manifest in distrust of housing associations amongst local communities, often provoking opposition to affordable housing development,

particularly in rural locations (Sturzaker, 2011). In this context, while the emergence of CLTs may be viewed as an attempt to re-embed voluntarism and community leadership into the ownership and management of affordable housing at a local level (Moore, 2015), it may also be the case that partnerships with housing associations are contrary to CLT objectives. Aird (2010) argued that stipulations that CLTs must partner with housing associations in order to access capital grant funding may conflict with their commitment to local focus and providing benefit to a defined geographic community:

The major strengths and unique selling points of the CLT model are independence and an ability to tailor housing to meet specific local needs ... We should think carefully, however, about what we are asking when we call for CLTs to be given public housing grants. The unique features of the CLT model could be threatened if government moves to regulate CLTs and to merge them into the conventional social housing sector.

Aird (2010: 461)

Research has shown that the ability to tailor housing to meet specific local needs is a key attraction to volunteers forming CLTs and other community-based housing organisations, who value their local focus and accountability (Rowlands, 2011; Moore, 2015). As such, policies that may alter their outlook and activity may undermine their organisational identities, particularly where partnerships are undertaken with professionalised bodies such as housing associations that may be required to balance organisational logics of scale and cost efficiency with agenda of localism and community ethos (Moore and Mullins, 2013). Indeed, the history of co-operative housing in England has been susceptible to demutualisation, privatisation, and a dilution of core values related to democratic member control, as a result of compliance with the 'rules of the game' that structure conventional housing provision, such as finance, professional knowledge, skills and political legitimacy (Birchall, 1992; Rowlands, 2009).

## **Research Methods**

This paper's findings are drawn from two research projects that both sought to explore the growth and expansion of the CLT sector in England. The studies (conducted from 2013-15) looked at several aspects of CLT development, including the local and social origins of CLTs, the processes by which they acquired resources, gained legitimacy and overcame barriers to their development, and the personal and collective benefits they brought to their communities (see Moore, 2014; Moore, 2015). A core theme central to exploring these aspects related to the considerations all CLTs had given to partnerships with housing associations, in the context of the sector-wide debates described earlier in this paper. Nine case studies of local CLTs were undertaken, located in Cumbria (1), Liverpool (1), Somerset (2), Dorset (2) and Devon (3). Case studies were selected purposively through consultation with national CLT experts in order to research CLTs that were at advanced or completed stages of housing development. The weighting towards CLTs in the South West reflects the greater levels of CLT development in that area. Case studies involved interviews with CLT board members, sub-regional intermediaries, housing association partners, and local authority stakeholders. In addition, supplementary interviews were conducted with national CLT experts and campaigners, strategic stakeholders at regional and national levels, and the Homes and Communities Agency. During the course of the research, the author had active engagement with relevant policy communities, including CLT sector experts, to inform the research questions and findings. Respondents and individual organisations are anonymised in the analysis that follows in order to protect participant confidentiality.

## **Research Findings**

### **Partnership motivations and funding interdependencies**

As noted earlier, a key driver behind CLT and housing association partnerships has been the stipulations attached to capital grant funding available for housing development from the Homes and Communities Agency. In recent years, the HCA has responded to the growth of CLTs by widening access to its affordable homes funding programme to encourage new community-led developments. This included

ringfenced capital funding available to community-led housing organisations, or consortiums involving community-led organisations, as part of their 2011-2015 Affordable Homes Programme. The funding prospectus for this explicitly encouraged partnership arrangements, providing advice that “small specialist organisations” such as CLTs “may find it beneficial to partner with existing consortia or investment partnerships to benefit from shared expertise in development” (HCA, 2011: 30). Similar encouragement was given to housing associations within the prospectus, which were advised that partnerships with local community-based organisations such as CLTs would be look on favourably when funding decisions were made. While partnerships were encouraged, funding was still available for CLTs applying on an independent basis, though as Table 1 shows, applying on an independent basis or through a housing association partnership involved contrasting forms and types of leadership and responsibility, and different forms of partnership based on service-level agreements.

**\*\*Insert Table 1 here\*\***

While in theory CLTs could access funding independently, in practice the majority of CLTs both in the research and, anecdotally according to one interviewee, in the programme as a whole pursued partnership arrangements. The majority of CLT volunteers in the research were inexperienced in housing development and expressed concerns that they lacked the technical expertise and time commitment to fulfil the tasks required to bid for funding independently. This led the National CLT Network, in partnership with the UK Co-Housing Network, to comment in September 2014 that the capital grant funding programme:

...is not designed for small-scale community-based organisations: organisations either need to partner with a housing association or, if they choose to go it alone, have to go through a rigorous and prohibitive registration process to even apply for the funding.

UK Co-Housing Network and National CLT Network (2014)

The local experience of these challenges were described by the Chair of one CLT:

We had different routes that we could do; we could do it independently, which I would've loved to have done, but I knew that I didn't have the capability and actually there isn't anyone in this village that has. And it was a long slog, and although it would be shorter for anyone now because you can ride on the back of people [receive support from intermediaries] it would still be a huge responsibility. And why reinvent the wheel when the housing associations have got all the expertise?

These concerns echo those expressed in other research, which has found that mandated use of the HCA's Information Management System – in addition to its registration system – is problematic, complex, and typically designed for large organisational structures (Goodling and Johnston, 2015: 60). As such, this CLT entered into a partnership with a local housing association, whose assistance was cited by one volunteer to have expedited the process of housing development by utilising their professional expertise:

My aim was to get the houses built and occupied in the village. I didn't want to set up the village as a property development company, as a landlord. I think other people do that and can do it better and I think it's proven a lot speedier than we can. There was initially one particular person who started as Chairman and wanted to start effectively a village company so that the village would have a long-term income. But the way I saw it we weren't going to get houses for six or seven, eight/ten years, right, whereas this way we're going to get houses possibly occupied within about four years of this thing kicking off.

The responses from these two volunteers highlights their wariness of the technicalities and complexities associated with the design, delivery and management of a housing development, as well as concerns as to the speed at which housing could be provided and the capacity within the community to assume responsibility for its planning and delivery. This CLT was located in Somerset, where its local intermediary had developed strong links with housing associations interested in supporting CLTs, and was therefore able to facilitate and broker the partnership. In this way, the working practices of the intermediary was a key component of

facilitating local partnerships between CLTs and housing associations. From the perspective of the housing association in this instance, as a small rural organisation that had developed housing in similar local villages and won awards for community engagement activities, entering into a partnership was seen as a natural extension of their working practices in rural areas. Similarly, all housing associations in the study highlighted the funding interdependencies that had been created by the introduction of the ringfenced HCA community-led grant programme. Housing associations perceived partnerships as an additional opportunity to develop schemes utilising funding that would be otherwise unavailable to them, particularly in locations in which there was unmet local housing need and where there was community interest in seeing affordable housing developed.

One case study CLT acquired funding independently. The rationale for doing so was based on a desire to retain ownership and control of all aspects of the CLT development, including rental income. A partnership model was still used, as the CLT sub-contracted aspects of housing management to the housing association, such as maintenance or tenant enquiries. In the view of the Chair of this CLT, this allowed them to retain ownership, control and the ability to make decisions independently, while their contractual relationship with the housing association allowed them to tap into their partner's resource and experience in housing management:

There seems to be quite a range of arrangements, to almost what I would say is more housing-association led but with an element of community development. In other words, the housing association does just about everything other than the links with the community. It's a different approach but if it works for a community then that's fine. It depends on the level of involvement that the community actually wants to have in the scheme. We took the very hands-on approach, but perhaps the development in true partnership with the housing association where they do all the work would be a lot easier. It depends on the skill levels and the skill set [of the CLT]. With that particular approach, you've got to be very careful that you do retain an element of community control and it's a fine balancing act, that you simply don't become the spokesperson for the housing association.

This quotation also highlights potential drivers for different types of partnership. As the majority of partnerships were set up on the basis that housing associations would acquire funding on behalf of the CLT, this was interpreted as being a way of managing the risk attached to CLTs, as new organisations lacking a track record or history in delivering affordable housing. In this example, however, the management of risk related much more to that of the practicalities of housing management, rather than concerns over organisational or technical competence, reflecting the skillsets of the CLT that enabled them to pursue funding independently.

### **Community and stakeholder legitimacy**

While there was a financial imperative for some housing associations involved in partnership schemes, their involvement was also typically motivated by the recognition that CLTs could offer greater community-based legitimacy to the planning and management of local housing developments. This was especially true in rural areas given the often contentious nature of rural housing development, whereby proposals are often met with opposition from local residents due to perceptions that schemes fail to prioritise local people in allocations, concerns over the location of new developments, and ‘democratic deficits’ where community involvement in decision-making is perceived as limited and constrained (Sturzaker, 2011). Housing associations that had entered partnerships spoke positively as to the enhanced engagement and leadership of local residents found through a CLT, as opposed to conventional consultation processes where local residents may be asked to comment on development proposals rather than lead or shape them:

It revolutionises the engagement of, and liaison with, communities. You are delivering housing on a site chosen by the community group. They organise the public consultations and the Registered Provider merely assists.

While housing associations would typically undertake community consultation over developments with parish councils<sup>[1]</sup>, the presence of a CLT – as an organisation embedded in the community and focused specifically on housing rather than generalised community issues – was thought to enhance not only the engagement

and leadership of residents, but understanding amongst the wider community of the implications of new homes being built in the area. This was commented on by the Chair of one CLT, who highlighted the strength of local relationships between the CLT and local residents in the area as being important to local acceptance of the new housing being built in their village:

What is attractive to them [the CLT's housing association partner] or what makes joining in a partnership acceptable when naturally you would want to go it alone? Because they've got the funding, they've got the expertise, they're going to build the houses. So isn't it all negative being with a CLT? What are the advantages? Well a big advantage is the relationship that the CLT has with the local community. The housing association doesn't know the community at all and you can't under-value that. And a big advantage is that the local CLT has a relationship also with the Council, the District Council, Parish Council which is all pluses. So I think there are some advantages and the CLT does do quite a lot for the housing association. I mean when they have to do consultations which they have to do in the village, well they've come to them and they've attended them and really supported, but we've done all the organising.

All CLTs in the study had undertaken extensive community planning exercises that sought to fully involve local residents in deciding where new housing should be built in their villages through surveys, consultation events, interactive techniques of collaborative planning, and regular public meetings and feedback sessions. These processes of community deliberation, particularly in relation to where new housing is located, helped not only to inform the decision-making of the CLT and housing association, but to strengthen the legitimacy and acceptance of local development. It should be noted that this type of activity is not necessarily exclusive to CLTs and that such relationships could theoretically be developed between a housing association and residents affected by its development work. Indeed, the housing associations that partnered with CLTs tended to have already developed housing and perceived their engagement with CLTs as a logical extension of their attempts to collaboratively plan and deliver housing that reflected community preferences. However, a local authority official noted that CLTs held a comparative advantage in some

communities due to the subjective way in which local residents related to the housing scheme, as the principles of community leadership and deliberation engrained into CLT constitutions meant that residents felt able to influence projects to a greater extent and more assured that developments would be of benefit to the local community. This mirrors Armour's (1991) argument that locally unwanted land uses can be overcome through a collaborative process that prioritises local views; housing may often be opposed in some communities, but providing residents with opportunities to influence and manage developments was thought to help facilitate housing delivery:

Initially I could not see what the involvement of a CLT could offer that a responsible housing association with a track record of delivering housing in a rural setting could not. However experience shows that the involvement of a local CLT brokers a lot which otherwise might have taken longer for the 'traditional' route to navigate, not least the opposition to development plans arising from certain parts of the community itself.

CLTs were seen as offering a platform for community engagement that was not otherwise there, overcoming issues of opposition and detachment previously found in planning consultation processes. Yet, while the community-focused democratic nature of CLTs was considered as important in assuaging local concerns, the involvement of housing associations in partnerships was also seen to legitimise the CLT itself. As new voluntary-led organisations, some funders and policymakers were keen to ensure that CLTs had the requisite amount of professional expertise within their governance structures and delivery plans in order to mitigate risks and ensure development was completed. This was described by one local authority official who described his organisation's inclination to support a formalised partnership arrangement between a CLT and housing association:

For us having the housing association on board was essential really because, worst case scenario, the CLT group falls out with each other and collapses, well you have still to a housing association there, you can still get the housing built. I don't mean that in, you know, it's a bit hardnosed, but that is the worst case scenario. You have got to think through all the possibilities. For us that

kind of partnership between an existing established housing association and a new fledgling CLT was kind of an essential factor to convince us it was worth trying.

In this respect, we can see a process of mutual legitimisation between CLTs and housing associations, as CLTs provide a focused structure for community empowerment in decision-making over the planning, delivery and management of local housing, and housing associations provide professional expertise and assurance to strategic stakeholders and resource holders over organisational and technical competence.

However, while the examples above represent mutually accepted and effective methods of partnership working, the concept of partnering with a housing association was rejected by other communities. In some rural areas – particularly in Cumbria – there was a strong commitment to independence and local control, provoked by the perceived mismanagement of homes in the local area by housing associations. In these instances, CLT housing was seen as a response to local concerns and as an effort to rescale the ownership and management of housing in order to ensure it reflected community-determined priorities and concerns:

Certainly in some places, it's been the line of "we're not happy with housing associations and how they're managing the existing properties, or how they're planning to do things or how they're allocating existing properties." And some places where, perhaps, they haven't done a CLT but they've talked about it, it's been: "we're very unhappy on how our present housing is being managed and being let and it's not helping our community, so therefore any new houses we should be managing and we should be ensuring its local people who are getting them." I can think of one character who used to go round the different Parish Councils, sort of saying, "look, we must make sure the housing is locally owned and locally managed." And so there was this push for some communities to say "right, we are wanting to ensure that our properties are actually helping our community."

This highlights the perceived importance of local control over the management of housing, particularly over the allocation of homes. The allocation of rental homes in local areas is often contentious, due to perceptions that they are allocated to people with no local connection to the community (Gallent and Robinson, 2012), and therefore some CLT volunteers and stakeholders saw their role as being to independently meet and prioritise the allocation of homes. Housing associations were perceived to lack legitimacy due to perceptions that their work had previously failed to meet or prioritise local needs, prioritising more general social housing needs at the expense of those with local connections, and therefore some communities were unwilling to enter into partnerships. Similar concerns were expressed by a volunteer for a CLT operating in an inner-city urban neighbourhood, who argued that the institutional logics of a local housing association were more orientated towards scale, efficiency, and business-led concerns, rather than the long-term needs of specific residents and communities:

I think housing associations may have started off like that they were a mutually beneficial organisation, but now they are just big businesses and the personnel at the top are on very high salaries. It is something else now. If they look at their portfolio and think “oh, this does not suit in the scheme of things”, they will get rid of these to somebody else. They took over social housing from the council in many places and now they are passing it on and you think people are getting a raw deal in certain communities. Therefore, they are just big business, whereas this is community, so I think it is quite good.

This is an important finding given the increasing encouragement that is given to CLTs and housing associations to enter into partnerships to access government funding. Each is thought to benefit from different but complementary expertise in housing development through combining voluntary endeavour and local accountability with professional experience. However, not all CLTs will be willing and able to find suitable housing association partners, particularly where objectives in relation to the use and management of housing are conflicting, and where institutional logics that guide decision-making differ. This echoes research by Gooding and Johnston (2015) that presented local accounts of community-led housing organisations receiving little support from, or being obstructed by, housing

associations operating in their area, highlighting the potential 'postcode lottery' that may dictate the ability of CLTs to find a receptive and suitable housing association partner.

### **Objectives and philosophies: shared or conflicting?**

When assessing the potential for further replication of CLT and housing association partnerships, it is therefore important to consider the extent to which the objectives of each are complementary or conflictual. The potential for partnerships was not viewed positively by all and many respondents drawn from the CLT sector expressed concern at the increasing tendency for CLTs to partner with housing associations. This was largely due to a perception, articulated by one CLT board member that had declined the opportunity of a partnership arrangement, that formal partnership arrangements diluted the potential of CLTs to generate future surpluses generated through rental income for reinvestment into the community, potentially compromising their core values and ability to contribute to local economic development:

With this shift towards housing associations my worry is whether they see those long-term benefits or whether they see it as a short-term project. It seems to me that the first generation [of CLTs] were all formed by groups of idealists who wanted to develop affordable housing, and saw that there was a long-term benefit that perhaps we could regenerate that money for other community uses.

This reflects concern that the partnership arrangements with housing associations, whereby the CLT receives a small ground rent by leasing land to the housing association which retains subsequent rental income, disadvantages CLTs and dilutes their organisational potential. This was echoed in one case study area where a CLT had rejected support from a housing association in purchasing a local community asset, as the support offered was contrary to the CLT's longer-term objectives:

A housing association said "ok we'll buy the bakery, we'll buy it and you can rent it off us", and in that they just proved the point that they just had

absolutely no clue what it was about at all in any framework, that they didn't even get that the point was that the community would own the asset and benefit from the increase in value it would be worth and the value of the asset in the long-term.

This highlights a conflicting institutional logic that emerged in partnership discussions, illustrating that not all associations will share similar philosophies and attitudes towards community asset ownership that tally with CLT ambitions. However, a key finding of the study is that, rather than being uniform across the CLT sector, objectives and ambitions often contrast within and between local CLTs. This was illustrated by a local volunteer who emphasised that the main short-term objective of his CLT was to provide affordable housing for local people with expediency, with no immediate desire to create new forms of ongoing village enterprise:

It was about getting the houses as the end game, not running a village business and not worrying about profit for the village. The profit for the village is having the houses.

Furthermore, while respondents in the study generally welcomed and encouraged the ability of CLT's to reinvest in their communities, whether using rental income or more modest sums generated through ground rents, some of the housing developed through partnerships in the study was built at a loss incurred by delays in pre-development work, construction and changes in costs. These costs were withstood by the housing association, which was able to do so due to its financial capacity and scales of efficiency. This is not to suggest that the partnership approach is intrinsically preferable or more cost efficient, but its ability to mitigate such risks helped to overcome a key financial barrier that may have otherwise impeded or delayed the delivery of CLT homes. The CLTs in the study that had entered formal leasehold partnerships had done so because they wished to see affordable housing delivered in their locality, and saw the CLT as a platform to agitate and antagonise for this to be achieved without necessarily desiring the responsibility associated with housing governance and management. This was described by an intermediary

representative in the South West of England where leasehold partnerships are most common:

What is important to communities? Why do they really set up a CLT? Not for the utopian idea of co-operative ownership and control, but instead to achieve affordable housing and other things in a way that gives a community significant influence over three things: design, tenure and allocations.

Respondents cited the ethos and social mission of particular housing associations as being the motivating factor for their entry into partnerships, guided more by logics of local accountability and community investment rather than of scale and cost efficiencies. This was described by one housing association official, whose organisation had an expanding portfolio of partnership schemes delivered with CLTs:

It is beneficial for the organisational ethos of a Registered Provider to have a programme of CLT delivery. It reminds people where the roots of the sector lie and differentiates Registered Providers from housing developers.

This was echoed by a CLT intermediary representative who argued that housing associations should assume an enabling role with respect to community-based self-help, positioning themselves not only as affordable housing providers but as an organisation that supports and enables community development that aligns with their social focus:

You would look at it that they're providing social housing, but if there are other mechanisms to achieve those aims they should be helping to do it rather than feeling they've got to own it all and they've got to manage it all. So that, in a way, it's using the skills of the housing associations to help the communities help themselves and do things, rather than always the housing association feeling they've got to come in and have the asset and own it. I think that enabling role of the housing associations is important.

This community development role was a core driver for the housing association that had partnered with a CLT through a service-level agreement related to housing

management, rather than accessing funding on the CLT's behalf. A housing association representative argued that supporting CLTs as an enabler and provider of core services could be interpreted as a key element of their organisational ethos, beyond any need to expand the housing association's asset ownership or portfolio:

Our mission says about sustaining rural communities within the area, so I think the CLT and what they're doing fits with our mission. And you think, well, if we're going to be more than a landlord ourselves and we've got this fancy mission then we need to be doing something about that. I think we'd be happy with a cost neutral position, so we cover the costs of the staff time [through the sub-contracting of services] and I think we would see ourselves as helping and supporting the community with our expertise. It's, as I say, in line with that big ambition that we have to go beyond just being a landlord.

We can therefore see that partnership approaches tend to work where there are mutually beneficial and shared objectives and philosophies, particularly in relation to high levels of community control and influence over the planning, design, delivery and allocation of homes, and a commitment to collaborative working. However, interviews with national experts highlighted instances whereby partnerships were led by housing associations to a larger degree, with community leadership thought to be restricted and diluted. Participants referred anecdotally to 'top-down' endeavours, where control over development, as well as economic benefit, lay in the housing association's possession. It is clear, therefore, that partnerships will vary in the extent to which they accord empowerment opportunities to local residents and in the way that power balances between the CLT, its wider community, and the housing association are managed.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this paper highlight that housing associations have become important partners for local CLTs delivering affordable housing, providing technical support and expertise that has helped to expedite the development of CLT housing. In part, this has been motivated by the creation of funding interdependencies associated with social housing grant, whereby it has been mutually beneficial for each to partner in

order to access finance that may have otherwise been inaccessible to each partner. However, while there was a financial imperative for some partnerships, they were also underpinned by mutually legitimising principles and characteristics that helped to enable development. In particular, the insight that CLTs are perceived to offer enhanced platforms for local democratic opinion to be expressed in relation to housing development suggests that, especially in rural areas, they may be suitable vehicles to mitigate opposition to housing development. These findings have wider resonance in providing credence to the view that levels of local opposition to development need to be understood in relation to the extent to which citizens likely to be affected are afforded opportunities to shape and influence local outcomes and to interact with those responsible for its planning and design (Armour, 1991; Sturzaker, 2011).

The professional expertise and influence of housing associations that entered partnerships meant that local strategic stakeholders and resource holders were assured of the CLT's ability to see the complete the technical and intensive process of overseeing a housing development. Where partnerships have been well regarded, they have been founded upon shared objectives and attitudes towards the value of locally managed and controlled housing that has been shaped and influenced by local residents through the democratic structure of a CLT. Each partner is thought to benefit from contrasting but complementary skills, expertise, and reputation, and the ethos and social mission of housing associations appears to be a determining factor as to whether shared objectives can be agreed. The engagement of housing associations with CLTs in this study tended to reflect pre-existing engagement with local communities; for the housing associations in this study, their partnerships with CLTs can be interpreted as a logical extension of historical collaborative work with communities in delivering affordable housing. In addition, the rise of partnerships must also be viewed in the context of ongoing political agendas of localism, which emphasise local accountability, community focus, and bottom-up engagement of communities in the planning and management of neighbourhoods. Indeed, a recent review of Community Rights policies – all of which are legislative tools for communities to influence the planning and management of their local areas – particularly emphasised the role of housing associations in building the skills and capacities of volunteers in community-led projects (DCLG Select Committee, 2015).

Yet, the findings of this study also suggest that housing association engagement in some areas may be more influenced by a widening and expansion of their housing portfolios, rather than by shared objectives or commitments to community leadership. The extent to which this is problematic will be dependent on local context and the aims and objectives of local CLTs. Where housing associations and CLTs may have conflicting objectives and ethos, the latter may be disadvantaged in their attempts to access funding, given the emphasis that current funding streams have on partnerships.

The possibility for there to be a conflicting ethos is also important to recognise, as the motivations of some CLTs extend beyond the mere development of housing, and are instead place-based, place-oriented, and aimed at providing lasting benefit for their defined local geographic community. This involves not just the delivery of affordable housing, but community control and influence over the type, tenure, design, and its use and future reuse. This includes the prioritisation of local people in the allocation of housing over and above the more general social housing needs often provided for by housing associations. While this is couched in terminology that prioritise local focus and control, CLT objectives may not necessarily fit with wider social and housing objectives and could serve to prevent those with no local connections from establishing themselves in their communities. This may contribute to what Walters (2004) describes as the governance of space based on emotion, belonging and citizenship criteria, achieved through things such as housing allocations, rather than rational economic need. In this respect, the consequences of partnerships and alignment with strategic resource frameworks, which may concede control to a housing association may, for some communities, be contrary to their very reasons for formation. In particular, the impact a changing economic model has on CLTs through partnerships may undermine their attempts to capture the value of local assets for local benefit. Furthermore, given constraints on public finance, long-term partnership models may lead to the absorption of CLTs into the wider affordable housing sector, leaving it susceptible to change and potentially diluting their local focus. This may provoke questions as to alternative methods of replicating CLT activity that avoids reliance on external partners. Recent investment in peer-to-peer learning by the National CLT Network suggests a commitment to following the trends of other forms of community-based self-help housing, which prefer to pursue models

of self-help and mutual exchange of technical learning and expertise between organisations (Moore and Mullins, 2013).

Finally, the findings of this paper point to increasing diversity within the CLT sector. Rather than there being a homogenous model of CLT governance and housing, there are emerging geographical differences within and between different parts of England, where CLT practice and the interpretation of their current and future roles is varied, and is likely to be influenced by the working practices and perceptions of various stakeholders including CLT intermediaries, local authorities, and housing associations, as well as the desires and objectives of local CLTs. These distinct geographical differences highlight the need for these nuances to be accommodated within strategic resource and institutional frameworks, taking into account the disparate and varied objectives that exist within and between CLTs, as well as the availability and extent of support from housing associations, intermediaries, and strategic stakeholders, whose motivations for supporting and enabling replication of CLT activity will also vary in accordance with local, regional and national norms, practices, and opportunities.

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[\[1\]](#) A parish council is the first and most local tier of local government in England, usually ran by a board of community-based volunteers.

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**Table 1: Differences between independent and partnership funding routes**

<b>Independent Funding</b>	<b>Partnership Funding</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· CLT must become a Registered Provider with the HCA, achieved through a formal registration process.</li> <li>· CLT must complete a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire specific to each project and funding application, including information as to their financial standing, track record, and technical capacity to deliver a project with an agreed timescale.</li> <li>· CLT must comply with regulatory guidance as to the ongoing use of grant and management of properties.</li> <li>· Recipients of grant must report regularly on its use and progress during and after housing development, using the HCA's Information Mangement System.</li> <li>- CLTs may still enter partnerships, but these are likely to be through service-level agreements for specific housing management tasks, rather than for funding applications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· CLT must identify a suitable partner, who is a Registered Provider with the HCA (usually a housing association).</li> <li>· The partner leads grant applications and takes responsibility for reporting on the progress of development and use of money.</li> <li>· The partner is the recipient of the funding, and therefore is the organisation that fulfils necessary legal, regulatory, and governance obligations.</li> </ul>