



## ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014

It has been a difficult year and a half for BCLT since we all last met at an AGM. I note the 2013 report said ...“Recently, the Council has agreed to sell BCLT the site for £1 and the Trust's architects are on the verge of submitting a planning application for the development of 12 new units. At our launch just over two years ago, Tim Southall, the Council's affordable housing officer, challenged the new organisation to build the first urban CLT housing units in the UK, beating Boris's attempts in London. We believe that we are on track to do that. “

Then, 18 months ago, after 2 years of pretty intensive work, we were about to go out to tender on 325 Fishponds Road when things took a turn for the worst. Firstly, after two years of working with the council on the basis that it would offer us the Fishponds Road site for £1, new chief officers suddenly announced that it probably wouldn't be possible to do that any longer. Then, after securing an offer of a £255K grant from the Homes and Communities Agency to help fund the project, we were suddenly advised that BCLT would need to be approved as a 'registered provider' (in effect a housing association) in order to get it. And, as if these were not enough problems, our principle lender that was going to fund the scheme started to get cold feet.

### **Fishponds Site Acquisition**

It has been a testing year for the trust's board, especially as for much of it we have been without Anna, our brilliant development work and Sarah McQuatt, our principle liaison at United Communities, both of whom have been on maternity leave. Nevertheless, we have struggled on, often thinking that we were getting close to the last throw of the dice for BCLT. As you probably know however, we eventually managed to appeal to George Ferguson for support with our collapsed land deal at Fishponds Road and in March this year, the Council's cabinet resolved to support the transfer of the site on the original peppercorn basis.

### **Achieving RP Status**

Resolving our grant eligibility with the HCA has been even more testing. The government heralded the new community rights incorporated in the Localism Act 2010 – the right to challenge, the right to buy and the right to build. It encouraged communities to get involved with the provision of appropriate new housing in their own neighbourhoods and backed this by enabling community groups to bid for grant support from the Affordable Homes Fund, the mainstream programme by which the government funds social housing, worth £4.5 billion between 2011 and 2015.

It seemed relatively straight forward to get an offer of a £255K grant from the Affordable Homes Fund. It was only when we started to arrange to draw this down that we were advised that we would need to become an RP. The registration process required to achieve this status has been little short of harrowing and has revealed that although the Localism Act set out to encourage

communities to get involved in the delivery of housing projects by using government funding, no effort has been made to change any of the existing qualification procedures to make them accessible to non professionals and community volunteers. So you can see that BCLT has been struggling for a year to survive the practical impacts of much larger failures of policy and politics beyond our control.

### **Moving Forward**

Nevertheless, we have kept the show on the road, we have re-agreed a £1 conveyance of the 325 Fishponds Road site with BCC with a great deal of help and support from many of the council's officers. Having at last secured the site, we finally conducted our tender for the construction works during this spring. We have even coped with the fact that the recent surge in construction activity meant that the tender prices we received were well above the estimates we had the first time around last year, when building contractors had far less work. And I am delighted to report that in the last couple of weeks we have finally had confirmation from the Homes and Communities Agency that they are minded to approve us as an RP. This will finally give us access to the public funding ear-marked for the Fishponds scheme after 10 months of effort, and we are therefore extremely hopeful of a start on site around January 2015.

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### **Boxing Club**

In parallel with all this effort to survive the setbacks to our Fishponds Road project, the board has also managed to make significant progress on other schemes. Working with Chris Askew, one of the trust's panel of architects we produced a proposal to develop the site of the Bristol Boxing Gym on Newfoundland Road. The gym was housed in a large complex of Victorian school buildings with a substantial car park, which was being sold by the club's landlord. Our scheme proposed to develop the site along with United Communities, producing 12 new flats by conversion of part of the existing buildings and 16 new-build flats above the car park, while also allowing the Boxing Club to stay on the site as a substantial community use. Our scheme allowed us to support United Communities in a substantial cash bid for the site, which we had great hopes would succeed. Sadly it did not and we were outbid by another developer.

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### **Shaldon Road**

Board members have worked with United Communities and the former Green Capital Partnership to bid for a substantial housing site of 1.4 hectares (3 acres) in Lockleaze, offered by the Council to members of the West of England Housing Delivery Panel. As I mentioned at the last AGM, our bid with our partners was the only one submitted and hence we became 'preferred developers'.

Last autumn we engaged Architype, another architectural practice from our architects panel, to help us engage and consult with local residents around the site in Shaldon Road. Architype is the only architectural practice on the Trust's panel which does not work from Bristol. We have included them partly because of their long-running support for BCLT (they have made presentations at several AGM's and events), also their long experience of self-build housing, but mainly because of their national reputation for excellence in sustainable housing design. Their scheme for the Stroud Co-

housing Group inspired us and won numerous awards including the Deputy Prime Minister's Award for making an "outstanding contribution to Sustainable Communities" in 2005.

Working with Architype, the board ran a series of three consultation events for local residents, held at Eastville Library. The first began by introducing the trust and explaining our wish to develop the site if a scheme could be agreed with and supported by local people. We then worked in small groups to listen to local people's concerns about the site and their views on possible development approaches.

The second event used the information gathered at the first to explore the problem of developing a new access into the site, which is currently almost completely surrounded by houses and a railway line. Once again, using this further information gathered last autumn, we ran a third event in March this year, exploring how new development might be located on the wooded site and asking how neighbours would prefer to balance some taller buildings and the possibility of keeping a substantial amount of the existing wooded structure with the alternative approach of lower buildings covering a larger proportion of the site.

The results of all these events have been collated by Architype. They used them when they met BCC planners this morning with Anna for a pre-application meeting, which I understand was very positive. They will now produce a report on the consultation process including an indicative scheme design, which we will use to start pursuing funding for the detailed design process and submission of a planning application.

Our current intention, given the difficulty we have experienced of using government funding as a small community based developer, is to work on a mixed tenure scheme with a combination of commercial self-build plots (as at Ashley Vale) an area of mainstream affordable social housing developed by United Communities, and a self-build co-housing project for BCLT members based on a low-rise block of apartments. We will see whether this approach appeals to both the council's planners and to the community around the site in Lockleaze.

Recently, the trust made a bid to be included in the National CLT Network's Urban CLT Project. During the growth of the CLT movement over the last 10 years, most CLT's have cropped up in rural communities. This new initiative will link 20 of the new URBAN CLT projects across England together over the next 2 years, exchanging support and information and developing models of good practice. Inclusion in the project brings a small funding award of £10k. If BCLT succeeds in being included, we plan to spend this on developing and supporting a steering group for the Shaldon Road Project formed of local residents and CLT members. This will work with the trust board, the council, professional advisers and designers to create the project, build community support and ensure that benefits for the wider community are incorporated into the scheme along with new houses.

### **Role in supporting PRSC**

Chris told us a little about the development here at PRSC. BCLT board members had a small involvement here too as midwives. Mindful of our remit to support other groups setting up land

trusts in Bristol, BCLT directors played a modest but useful role at the beginning of the project to acquire this building, in supporting and encouraging PRSC board members to be brave and take the plunge, and working of the formation of the new land trust for Stokes Croft. It's worth noting that, as the project doesn't include housing, hasn't required grants and doesn't involve any land owned by the council, they are now well ahead of us! Well done then to PRSC, which now joins the family of Bristol Land Trusts.

### **325 Fishponds Road**

Through all this work we have wanted to include you as members much more in the development of ideas and the progress of schemes. We have also wanted to recruit more members – and it would certainly have been extremely useful to have had a thousand members lobbying the Mayor on Twitter when it looked like we were going to lose the Fishponds Road site. But due to a combination of the extreme pressure that there has been on our time as volunteer board members just keeping existing schemes afloat – and also because we have always worried about the danger of raising a lot of expectations for things we could not deliver, we have been putting off the member engagement programme and the recruitment drive for far too long.

There now seems to be light at the end of the tunnel. We finally believe that 325 can go forward and we have secured funding to bring our development worker back into post. On the back of this progress we recently held a social event for all the individuals and families interested in the 325 project (some of you may have been involved) and invited them to begin the process of coming together as a group and developing agreements about how they would work together on the project

This essentially democratic and inclusive style of organisation and management, also demonstrated at in the Shaldon Road consultations, is one of BCLT's great strengths and one that probably no one else can match. It offers us a distinct role and a unique opportunity, and we want to build rapidly now on the new momentum. It's time to mobilise to get houses built. Our country is in the worst housing crisis for 100 years and a general election approaching. BTW, everyone should sign the 'Priced out' petition. There does not seem to be any end to austerity and rising house prices in sight. So the BCLT board wants to work with you, our members, to get good, cheap, sustainable houses built in Bristol's communities.

I want to close with my personal thanks to the other BCLT board members, who are some of the most creative, optimistic, professional and determined people it has ever been my good fortune to work with. I would also like say as special thank you to our host, mentor and partner United Communities, without whose support we wouldn't have got to here, and also to our brilliant development officer Anna Maloney - so good to have you back on the team - and her stand-in maternity cover Julia Wilson.

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