

Community Models for Farm Ownership

Briefing Paper: Housing

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Related Reports and Further Reading

This briefing paper is part of a series of reports created by the Community Models for Farm Succession project, which investigates various opportunities, barriers and approaches to community-ownership of farmland. The other reports can be accessed [here](#).

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Context

As part of the Farm Succession project we have undertaken research into the issues of housing provision that are limiting the expansion of agroecological farmland trusts (AFTs), acting as a barrier to them taking on family farms as part of a retiring farmer's succession plan, and acting as a barrier to new landworkers entering farming.

We undertook interviews with:

- representatives of four AFTs ([Ecological Land Cooperative](#) (ELC), [Soil Association Land Trust](#) (SALT), [Biodynamic Land Trust](#) (BDLT), [Calderdale Ecological Land Trust](#) (CELT), plus [Tablehurst Farm](#) and [St Anthony's Trust](#))
- advisors and practitioners in the Community Land Trust (CLT) sector ([Community Land Trust Network](#), [Middlemarch](#), [Calder Valley CLT](#), and [Action in Rural Sussex](#))

A roundtable was held to discuss the findings of the research.


What's at stake?

All the AFTs reported that issues of housing provision were limiting their ability to take on new land and accept potential gifts of farms from retiring farmers. These included a:

- lack of housing provision for retiring farmers who are looking to sell or gift their farms into community ownership
- lack of provision of affordable housing for the larger number of landworkers required for agroecological production methods and farm business models
- lack of suitable temporary housing for farmers having to live on site with only a temporary planning permission whilst developing new farm businesses

Housing for retiring farmers

A retiring farmer who is considering gifting or selling their farm to an AFT may wish to keep the farmhouse in order to provide themselves with a home for their retirement. In other cases there may be a requirement for the farm house to be sold to enable them to purchase a new home elsewhere, or for the benefit of family members. Where a farm house is being donated to the AFT it may be in poor condition and in need of investment. AFTs may therefore be



prevented from taking on a farm which is being offered to them as part of a farmer's succession plan due to the lack of suitable housing or the costs associated with building a new house or houses, or renovating an existing one.

Housing for farm workers / essential rural workers

The models of farming being supported by the trusts tend to be labour intensive and often operate models where several farm businesses operate on what was once a single family farm. The Enterprise Stacking/Community Buyouts briefing explores why and how agroecological farms use this approach, as well as highlight the challenges of providing affordable housing to their farmers.

Farmers and landworkers need access to good quality affordable housing, preferably on site, in order to develop and manage their businesses. The AFTs therefore need to be able to develop housing for farm workers to be able to live and work on site if their model of farm acquisition is to be successful.

Provision of temporary housing

The [Ecological Land Cooperative](#) (ELC) has developed a model that includes provision of affordable housing as a critical part of getting people onto the land. They typically buy land without housing and secure a new planning

permission on the land. This is usually a permission for a temporary structure in the first instance and can only be converted into a permanent planning permission after five years, once the viability of the business has been proven. Temporary housing is often of poor quality and this, combined with low incomes and pressure of establishing a new land-based business, makes it challenging to attract new farmers.

Learning from Community Land Trusts

It is clear that the expansion of AFTs, and the potential for them to act as an effective vehicle to enable farm succession for retiring farmers, is being hampered by a lack of good quality affordable housing. Meanwhile there is a thriving sector of [Community Land Trusts](#) (CLTs) which provide an existing model for the development of community-led housing, including in rural areas. Whilst CLTs in the UK are most closely associated with housing provision, they also provide a community-led and democratic model for the ownership and management of land for a wide range of purposes. There is [work actively underway](#) within the CLT movement to explore the potential for CLTs to manage more land for food production and nature restoration.



Key Findings and Analysis

Community Land Trusts

Most rural Community Land Trusts involve the development of housing on agricultural land and involve 1-2 acres of land providing 10-20 homes. This is often on land that would not usually be able to be developed, however a CLT can often get planning permission, if:

- it is meeting a need for affordable housing
- it will be not for profit; and
- residents will be drawn from the council waiting list and have been assessed as in need of genuine affordable housing and having a connection to the local community

There are two main models by which rural CLTs develop housing. Either they partner with a housing association who delivers the housing or they become a registered provider and deliver it themselves.

Partnering with a housing association

In this model the CLT acquires the freehold on the land and grants a long term lease to a [housing association](#). The housing association then raises the

capital to build the homes. The housing association is the CLT's tenant and pays an annual rent for the land.


The scheme is led by the CLT who selects the site, agrees the number of houses, and can access grants to cover the costs of design, applying for planning permission etc. The housing association is the delivery vehicle and is able to secure subsidy funding from [Homes England](#). These funds are only available to organisations registered with the Regulator of Social Housing (registered providers).

Establishing as a registered provider

In this model the CLT registers as a registered provider and secures the funding and develops the housing themselves. The cost of providing each home is in the region of £150,000 - £200,000 and Homes England will provide approximately 40% of the cost, enabling them to be made available on an affordable basis.

Allocation of housing

The local council will have a Housing Allocations Policy that sets out the general criteria which people need to meet in order to be eligible for local affordable housing provision and will also set out how housing provision will be prioritised. A Local Lettings Plan is



then agreed between the local authority and the housing provider in relation to a particular scheme that might include additional requirements for access to that housing in that scheme, e.g. length of residency, age, connection to local area etc.

Potential Role of Farmland Trusts in housing provision

There are a number of different roles a farmland trust could take in the provision of affordable housing on their land.

As the land provider

If a farmland trust were to sell land to a local CLT the current land value would be approximately £7,000 per plot; £70,000–£80,000 per acre depending on housing density. It would be possible for a CLT to provide homes in lieu of payment for the land value e.g. 2 homes in a development of 20. The farmland trust would therefore either benefit through the generation of capital income or the direct provision of housing.

As the CLT

A farmland trust could potentially meet the definition of a CLT. In order to do so they would need to allow membership


from members of the community. Whilst a national farmland trust wouldn't necessarily be showing local leadership, a local farmland trust would be more likely to be able to demonstrate local leadership and would therefore be more likely to secure the support of the local community and local authority for the development.

If acting as the CLT *and* the landowner but developing the housing in partnership with a housing association the farmland trust would not benefit from the capital receipt from the sale of the land, but would benefit from a smaller ground rent in the region of £4/property/ week (e.g. £2,000 annually for 10 properties).

As the registered provider

Registering as a housing provider would open up opportunities for direct funding through Homes England but would incur new regulatory, financial and administrative burdens.

An alternative to one or each of the national farmland trusts registering as a housing provider would be to jointly establish a national housing association to develop housing on their land, and potentially on other rural development sites. A potential model for such a venture is the [Church Housing](#)



Association established by the Church of England.

Recommendations

Sharing expertise: there is potential for the CLT Network and its network of advisors and practitioners to provide advice and support on housing issues to the network of farmland trusts, and for the farmland trusts to advise the CLT Network and its advisors and practitioners on the development of farming and nature restoration projects.

Recommendation 1: Both networks should develop closer relationships and explore opportunities for joint working and knowledge sharing.

Sharing data: there is potential for farmland trusts to work more closely with local CLTs on issues such as the provision of land for housing and on the provision of housing for farm workers. In order to do this effectively it would be useful to know where they are co-located.

Recommendation 2: A map should be developed showing the locations of both farmland trusts and existing CLTs to help to identify opportunities for collaboration.

Developing capacity: there is potential for establishing a specialist registered provider or housing association with a focus on rural housing development on land owned by farmland trusts and other rural sites.

Recommendation 3: A feasibility study should be undertaken into the establishment of a registered housing provider specialising in rural housing development.

Case Study: Tablehurst Farm

[Tablehurst Farm](#) is owned by [St Anthony's Trust](#).

When the Trust took ownership of the farm there were two houses. The Trust obtained planning permission to convert one into a care home to provide housing to three residents with learning disabilities who are part of the farm community. .

30 people work on the farm and local rents are high. The trust has therefore developed a long term plan with the local authority to turn some buildings into accommodation. They have converted a vegetable store into 2 family units and 3 apprentice study bedrooms.

They also needed to offer a home for the retiring farmer and fundraised for £100,000 to build a two-bedroom straw bale house using farm labour and volunteers. The house is part of the St Anthony's estate and is available to the farmer for life. In order to create a new permanent dwelling on site the Trust had to take one caravan that had had residency for 12 years out of use.

