

NLCLT Annual Report: April 2016 - March 2017

Chair's Report

NLCLT was set up in 2012 by a group of local people responding to the sell-off by the County Council of a site in Lancaster which it was hoped could be developed for community housing. Our bid was unsuccessful, but NLCLT has continued to seek projects which can use the directors' expertise to fulfil its key aims.

NLCLT remains a tightly-led organisation with just 4 directors. The Trust continues to seek opportunities to create community held assets, both as land-based green spaces, and buildings-based housing and offices.

1. Green Spaces Projects

1.a **De Vitre Gardens site on Ashton Road.** Progress this year includes:

Lease agreement: Despite promises earlier this year and change of personnel in the NHS legal department the final agreement to lease has not yet been finalised.

Grant applications have been made to Walney Wind Turbine Community Fund and to the Postcode Lottery Fund (outcomes expected in April and June respectively)

Friends Group: Good communication continues with the newly formed Friends of De Vitre Gardens who held their first AGM in November 2016 and elected a new chair, Tim Newton. NLCLT have established a Memorandum of Understanding with the group, about future management of the land.

1.b **Levens Drive Woods and other County Council sites**

Levens Drive Woods: We have entered an informal arrangement with Lancashire County Council to take over the management of Levens Drive Woods in Heysham with a view to LCC transferring ownership NLCLT in the future. Director Simon Gershon has links with the local community forestry project, who plan to organise volunteering sessions. The NLCLT was successful in obtaining a small grant which has enabled dry access into the woods. Litter and fire-lighting are a problem, and the paths a very muddy in winter. We plan to involve more local residents in improving the woods.

Director Simon Gershon visited other LCC countryside sites, but no others were considered suitable for the NLCLT to take over.

2. Housing projects

Research: NLCLT directors have continued to spend considerable time investigating and assessing housing sites for their suitability and viability for providing affordable housing for vulnerable groups.

Various models of Sheltered housing, Supported housing, and Community-led housing have been explored. We prepared business and layout plans for at a brownfield site in Morecambe, and several older houses that might be converted.

Directors met officers from Lancaster City Council to find out the key gaps and local needs in terms of housing provision. They don't want housing in poorer areas of Morecambe, or a concentration of vulnerable groups. Despite considerable time and effort investigating sites coming onto the market, no viable project has been found but the following areas have been explored this year:

Homeless Action (LDHAS): Homeless Action are seeking premises for their day centre as well as small accommodation units to be run as supported tenancies for their clients. NLCLT explored the option of acquiring houses, in order to lease them back to the support organisation, or other organisations such as Methodist Action.

County are being forced to withdrawing support for homeless people.. We note that LDHAS only has 2 years of Lottery funding, so we would need LDHAS to have a good business plan for sustaining any residential centre, before we provided anything for them. It was noted that some of their clients' personal budgets could be used to pay for rent and services.

Methodist Housing Action: Methodist Housing Association rent properties and provide tenancies to vulnerable people and wish to see sub-standard housing improved. They have been taking on empty housing that the City Council has been doing up. Their experience & capability would make them good partners but we recognised that property would need to be extremely cheaply indeed to make 'Moving on' accommodation a viable investment for community investors.

Women's refuge moving on accommodation:

Evglades Care Home: This large former home could not be turned into a viable affordable housing unless substantial grant funding was found. Buying smaller ordinary houses is a better option, both for the NLCLT and for tenants.

Community-Led Housing Fund; A new Government fund became available via local district councils to support the development of community-led housing. The Local Planning Policy Liaison Group may ask local experts how to spend the money . It is thought that rural affordable homes may be attractive., but addressing homelessness less so for this fund . We have not yet been able to establish how the NLCLT could be a vehicle to deliver some good outcomes with the money.

Older people's Cohousing at Halton: NLCLT has made it known to the local group that we might buy the affordable housing units in total (maybe 6 out of 28 flats) and rent these at below-market rents if a subsidy could be obtained from the Community-Led Housing Fund.

Housing for Refugees: Director Simon Gershon has established a good relationship with Global Link, who are the principal support organisation for refugees. He continues to explore housing opportunities.

3. Recruiting New Directors

We were pleased to accept Peter Wiltshire as a director of the NLCLT in March 2017. Peter has extensive experience of both new-build and refurbishments, and has also worked for community organisations.

4. Policy Development

The Conflict of interest (of Directors) policy has been adopted

5. Events attended by Directors – none in this financial year