

How putting trust in the locals drives regeneration

GOING FOR GROWTH

Developing run-down areas street by street can keep communities together, writes **Hazel Sheffield**

For most of the 20 years Peter Browne has lived in Anfield, Liverpool, the row of terraces over the road has been boarded up. The properties were emptied as part of the government's housing market renewal programme, which stalled in 2008. For the past decade, Mr Browne, 49,

has been involved in an ambitious plan by residents to reimagine the houses not as draughty old Edwardian red-bricks, but as a mix of modern flats and commercial units, with space for shops, a micro-brewery and an extension of the successful Homebaked bakery that sits at the end of the street.

In July, Liverpool council granted planning permission for residents to develop the block to include eight homes and three new businesses as well as an extension to Homebaked, which has thrived since residents saved it from demolition in 2012.

Mr Browne, who works in a supermarket and supports Everton, says redesigning the terrace as part of the Homebaked Community Land Trust has given him a sense of what ownership means for the neighbourhood. A normal housing developer "has a certain number of three-bedroom and two-bedroom houses it needs to build, but this process thinks about the area and what it needs. [It] brings the community together, whereas in a lot of places, development will break it".

Joe Anderson, the mayor of Liverpool, says: "We were acutely aware that previous schemes for improving the area hadn't taken the local community with them and we were determined it would be different this time."

There are 253 such community land trusts in England and Wales, acting as micro-developers delivering homes and supporting small companies. These not-for-profit trusts own and look after land on which communities can build houses and commercial buildings that are priced according to local income, rather than to the property market. Land being owned by a trust might mean the difference between an affordable rent and one that only a large chain can afford.

In July 2018, the government made £163 million available to this sector to increase the number of homes built by communities. Almost 1,000 houses have been built thus far, with more than 5,000 on the way.

While traditional big developments often come at the expense of long-established local employers and tradespeople, Tom Chance, director of the National Community Land Trust Network, argues that trusts put local businesses at their heart. "A [trust] involves local people and existing business owners, drawing them into the design process. On top of that, they think about what community businesses need: maybe there is a shortage of community workspaces, or the pub is on its last legs."

The trusts often use new housing as a starting point. At Queen Camel, a village in Somerset, residents completed 20 affordable houses in 2015 and have followed this with a plan to acquire a disused school to turn it into a community centre and space to support local entrepreneurs.

In Hastings, a partnership of community-led organisations joined up in 2014 to redevelop Rock House, an old office building, into a mixed-use facility with 425 sq m of residential space and 804 sq m of affordable workspace. The building is now home to ten residents and 45 small businesses.

Once Rock House hit profitability in 2018, it raised a mortgage of £1.2 million to acquire the Observer



Peter Browne, a resident, says the work

of the Homebaked trust has given him "ownership" in the neighbourhood. The project in Anfield provides a home for a microbrewery run by Patricia Levey-Bennett

Building, a massive multistorey former newspaper office that had been boarded up for decades on the same street. It is now one-third-owned by Heart of Hastings Community Land Trust, with the goal to move it entirely into community ownership. The community is drawing up plans for offices on the first floor and temporary space for artists and traders on the second floor, while they develop the second and third floors into residential flats at capped rents. The work is due to begin in 2021.

It is important for the property to be used while a project is being set up, says Jess Steele, director of Jericho Road Solutions, one of the Hastings-based organisations involved in the redevelopment of Rock House: "You get told there's a master plan and it will take ten years and then it gets put aside for five years. We shouldn't accept that, because if my child is five now and it will be sorted in ten years, what are we supposed to do in the meantime? We need to be impatient to get community benefits now as well as longer term."

In Liverpool, throughout February and March this year, members of the Homebaked trust occupied a disused house in the area earmarked for redevelopment. They invited locals to come in and have their say on the development plans drawn up by Jemma Cosgrove, 30, who was born in Anfield. Marianne Heaslip, lead architect on the scheme, says that important design elements emerged from this approach: the desire to keep

Fears for funding as door closes on government scheme

Tom Chance, director of the National Community Land Trust Network, says that community land trusts face many of the same problems as other start-ups: "You're a new business, so it's hard to get finance."

Such trusts, set up to develop and manage homes and small commercial properties, are known for being resourceful, he adds. Some convince their local authority to transfer ownership of disused land at a peppercorn rate. More often, the groups seek funding from charities and foundations, or loans from ethical sources, including Triodos, a bank that promotes sustainability.

Mark Ogden, a relationship manager at Triodos Bank UK, says the bank has been financing housing projects for over 35 years. "We finance [trusts] in particular because they provide affordable housing and are often built on strong co-operative practices and principles of equality," Mr Ogden says. "The finance



How the Anfield development will look. Start-up cash is key for community land trusts

needs tend to vary from project to project and often require specialist arrangements for both capital raising or lending but we are keen to do more in this area."

Since 2016 the government has allocated funding through the Community Housing Fund, unveiled by David Cameron.

But the fund, which was intended to run for five years, will close at the end of 2019.

The National Community Land Trust network is calling on the government to extend the closing date to match the deadline for community homes in London, where the mayor, Sadiq Khan, has a

£38 million fund that runs until 2023.

"Community land trusts are in a very uncertain environment as their funding might be discontinued," Mr Chance said. "The number one thing the government can do to support this sector is the continuity of the community housing fund."

the frontages of the buildings intact (to retain local residents' memories of growing up in the area) and the need for energy-efficient homes, reducing bills for residents, who could do their bit to tackle climate change. Solar panels on roofs will supply energy within the block.

"This is where the trust has a big advantage," Ms Heaslip says. "They can take a longer-term view, because they're not just looking to sell the homes at a quick profit."

Homegrown, a brewery started by a group of residents who plan to recycle surplus produce in the brewing process, has taken a unit that Ms Heaslip designed for the purpose. It can also host an affordable fruit and vegetable market and a place for people to meet and learn new skills.

The trust has planning permission for two other commercial units in the block, which it plans to allocate to other start-ups or established local businesses. It hopes to provide inspiration and support for the redevelopment of other empty properties in Anfield so that more residents and small firms can benefit.

Ms Cosgrove says the process of redesigning the terrace has given her a reason to stay in the area. "Me and my husband were looking to move a year or so ago, and then being involved with the design process and meeting all the different kinds of people that are in the area made us think again," she says. "This might just be a building project to some but for many others it's an opportunity to have a future."

Small firms set for more payment protection

James Hurley Enterprise Editor

A government scheme designed to encourage big businesses to pay suppliers on time is due to be overhauled in an attempt to give small companies better protection.

The prompt payment code, under which large companies promise to pay 95 per cent of their invoices within 60 days, is expected to be taken over by the government's small business commissioner, who is understood to be keen to implement tougher qualifying criteria.

The code was launched in 2008 to tackle a culture of late payment of commercial debts among large businesses. It has been criticised for being slow to respond when signatories are accused of mistreating suppliers.

The Chartered Institute of Credit Management, which runs the code for the government, has taken a much tougher approach this year, launching two waves of suspensions and expulsions of signatories found to have been breaching its terms. Last week BT, Prudential and BAE Systems were among large businesses suspended from the code for failing to pay suppliers within agreed terms.

However, Paul Uppal, the commissioner, is thought to believe a more radical approach is needed. He is expected to take over the running of the code when the government implements proposals that include making boards of large businesses responsible for the treatment of their supply chains.

It is understood that representatives

2,305

Number of signatories to the payment protection code

of small businesses have discussed the possibility that his plans could go as far as removing all 2,305 signatories from the code, including many of Britain's largest public and private sector organisations, and starting again with businesses needing to demonstrate stronger evidence of fair treatment of suppliers in order to be included.

A spokeswoman for the commissioner would not comment on his plans for the code.

Mr Uppal is also expected to be given the power to fine late payers. His role was among the topics of discussion last week at a late payment summit between business leaders and Philip Hammond, the chancellor, held at Downing Street. More than one in ten companies struggle to pay their staff and other costs due to late payments, the government said. Mr Hammond accused offenders of "unacceptable behaviour" after the meeting.

Other topics of discussion included a loophole that allows large businesses to dodge a requirement to report payment practices to a national database twice a year. They can avoid the requirement simply by contracting and paying for services via a smaller subsidiary.

The Federation of Small Businesses indicated that Mr Hammond had been a key ally in driving through late payment reform and called for his successor to be equally supportive. Craig Beaumont, director of external affairs at the federation, said: "We will be looking for reassurance that he or she will be just as strong in implementing the late payment plans."

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