Brighton & Hove Community Land Trust

THUR 13 APRIL 2023

HUSTINGS



Over 50 attendees came to our Hustings on Thursday 13 April at Community Base. Representatives of the 5 political parties attended and spoke about how their party would support community led housing and the BHCLT ask if elected, and answered questions from the audience.

It was brilliant to have such a great turnout and to hear support expressed widely across the panel. Following the election, we're looking forward to working to see these commitments turned into action.



SAMER BAGAEEN
CONSERVATIVES

Councillor Hove Park, standing for re-election. Town planner and environmental consultant in an engineering firm. BHCLT shareholder since 2020.

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING. Agrees with this as overall as an approach and the Conservatives signed up to launching the health care co-op recently. The group is wary of some of the costs that have been incurred by insourcing. Progressive procurement and increasing social value scoring are particularly important.

LENDING FROM BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL. Reasonable but explores supporting other avenues, especially around community and green bonds which are a much more efficient route than delivering housing within local authority systems. Need to better use neighbourhood forums as none of these have yet effectively embedded a CLT approach.

SITES FOR CLH PROJECTS, INCLUDING A LARGER SITE. Should also be happening through neighbourhood forums. In Leeds, Leeds Community Homes CLT are building 34 new homes on land that neither the council or other developers wanted to develop and the council has active engagement in working with the CLT on that site. They are also working on a site owned by a local church. We should be looking more widely at what opportunities there are.

COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF EMPTY PROPERTIES: there were 170 empty properties at end of 2022, but need a better way of monetising and making those available for CLT. Need a register, a strategy for meanwhile use, and also a better approach to the high street. Other CLTS have picked up ex-commercial space on high streets for housing as part of a wider neighbourhood regeneration strategy.



CARMEN APPICH
LABOUR & CO-OPERATIVE

Councillor of Westbourne and co-leader of Labour. Not standing again. Particularly interested in co-operatives, and involved in care co-op.

Carmen outlined the housing element of the **Labour manifesto – https://manifesto.bhlabour.co.uk**. Very strong contention that housing is a basic human right and we mustn't forget that. We have a housing tragedy and a housing crisis in our city. House prices have gone up by over 11% in the city in the last 12 months. Planning laws and some of the draconian budget cuts have prevented local authorities from building enough council homes.

Labour have made housing a priority following successful implementation of plan for 800 additional council homes and 700 extra 'affordable' homes; will seek to ensure all homes are of a decent standard and have and will continue to support private renters and introduce tough measure to deal with rogue landlords.

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING has been a Labour party policy for a long time and of the local Labour group. Need more progressive procurement and to improve social value scoring in procurement. Agrees that the council should look at land and property portfolio through lens of Community Wealth Building.

SITES FOR COMMUNITY LED HOUSING
Seven plots were provided for community led housing over the last administration. Many of these schemes were difficult politically and geographically so need to look again at different plots and what council are doing as this is not the way forward. Community land holdings are an important (and should become more important) part of the portfolio, not least because they are not subject to right to buy when developing social and affordable housing.

Labour are keen to work more closely on **LARGER SITES**. Larger council owned sites don't often come up but we should aim to speak to CLT more when they do and think about whether there are alternative models.

ON-LENDING has happened with Bunker, with a caveat around nominations and allocations. Labour will ask finance team to explore new applications and will also support CLH groups to raise money through different routes. The SEASALT model is a really good example of how other funding can be raised.

Very keen on **NON-PROFIT MANAGEMENT OF EMPTY COUNCIL PROPERTIES**, especially through co-ops. Current arrangements with guardianships are not good enough and are for private profit. Any reasonable proposal for community management of empty properties should be looked at by council officers and Labour will insist on officers exploring proposals and a report being brought to housing committee at a very early stage.



DOMINIQUE HALL
LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

First time standing. Long experience in the homelessness sector.

We have the same issues as we did 20 years ago. We need more social housing! New thing for Dominique to look at community led housing. Fundamental thought about the principle is that there should be multiple routes to solving problems: so doesn't disagree with CLH on an in-principle level. However does want to know how to go from really small projects to much more sustainable, ongoing, scaled up projects that really change the housing situation in Brighton.

Generally supports the elements of the ask around **ON-LENDING, COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING AND USE OF EMPTY COUNCIL PROPERTIES**. Need to think about how the latter would work in terms of changing odd properties into one, two and three-bedroom flats.

Wants to see a detailed plan from CLT and how it will progress and benefit Brighton & Hove over a long period of time.

Regarding **LARGER SITES** – community led housing needs to start small and prove itself, with greater take-up from residents of Brighton & Hove.



SIRIOL HUGH JONES
GREEN PARTY

Current councillor, Preston Park and co-chair of the Housing Committee. Also a BHCLT member and shareholder.

We all want more social housing. However, we are here to talk about community led housing. Couldn't see anything in the Labour Manifesto on CLH.

The Greens have learnt from BHCLT, especially in terms of the focus on sustainable materials which has impacted how the council build their own homes and helped inspire the newbuild housing sustainable energy policy.

They put in place the **ON-LENDING** project for Bunker which should be a game changer in term of helping Bunker to become a Registered Provider. It will also have the effect and will have of binding the council much more closely with the CLT and CLH groups which should be a stepping stone to partnerships on **LARGER SCHEMES**. When it comes to larger sites it often works better for it to be community rather than council driven. Siriol has one or one or two sites where there might be scope for development in this way.

The Green door is always open to BHCLT but the council does have a responsibility in terms of

getting best value. They can't hand over parcels of land and not be sure that those sites are going to be developed. There needs to be certainty from CLH groups around business plans.

Re. **COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF EMPTY COUNCIL BUILDINGS:** we need to make the distinction between council homes and council buildings. Regarding some of the buildings that have been used by property guardianships: would really welcome use of a co-operative model. Property guardianships are unethical and taking advantage of people in an overpriced city. Empty council homes are a different matter. There was a repairs backlog during COVID that is being caught up with now.

All BHCLT asks have been adopted in the **Green Manifesto https://www.brightonhovegreens.org/green-manifesto-2023/** – some are not in the main manifesto but all in the additional pledges. The Greens have welcomed working with the CLT and intend to continue.



BRIDGET FISHLEIGH
INDEPENDENT

Councillor, Rottingdean Coastal. The first independent councillor elected in the city for decades. There are nine independents standing for election across the city.

The Independents are committed to identifying council owned land and properties that can be used for new affordable homes. The Paddock in Roedean is an excellent example of this, costing the council money because of fly-tipping, identified for disposal, in and out of city plan. There are other little plots of council owned land across city that could and should be used for housing. Needs to be more joined-up thinking around this.

The Independents would undertake a full audit of the council's commercial property and land portfolio to ensure that revenue is being maximised.

The Unique Selling Point (USP) of BH Independents is that everyone lives in wards that they'd like to represent and so all are very familiar with the local issues.



YOUR QUESTIONS

Q: What is the candidates' position on full implementation of the Homeless Bill of Rights (HBOR)?

SAMER (CONSERVATIVE) HBOR was approved at full council so is a council commitment.

CARMEN (LABOUR) HBOR is in Labour Manifesto, and the Labour group are committed to building on the declarations – which draw from the European model of working with homeless people – to turn policy into practice. Interested in whether the empty property policy and work around property guardianships could also target temporary accommodation.

DOMINIQUE (LIBERAL DEMOCRATS) The biggest issue with homelessness is that there's no throughput, nowhere for people to move onto. The way to resolve this is to build more homes. Relying on private landlords is not fair and doesn't work.

SIRIOL (GREEN) Greens have supported the HBOR

BRIDGET (BH INDEPENDENTS) Bridget abstained from the vote on the HBOR because no costs were provided and no Key Performance Indicators or measures of success. Not because she is unsupportive of the issue – runs a self-funded food bank from her home.

Q: When the CLT was set up, one of the major opportunities identified was sites on Urban Fringe. There seems to have been a change of view in the council about development of these sites. What do parties see as the potential of this going forward?

CARMEN (LABOUR) Is it really fair to try to allocate politically difficult sites to community led housing. Not sure that we need to build on the Urban Fringe, especially now mandatory housing targets have been withdrawn.

SIRIOL (GREEN) We need to think about distinction between brownfield and greenfield sites on the Urban Fringe. Can think of at least one brownfield site where there is the potential for development and it would be great to see sensitive, sustainable development there. Always has to be a wider conversation with the local community.

DOMINIQUE (LIB DEM) Developments like Bunker seem like a good solution; would support community led housing to attempt these sites.

BRIDGET (BH INDEPENDENTS) Her ward runs from Sussex Square to West Saltdean and there are Urban Fringe sites being developed in the ward. Often these don't respond to what's needed. In Ovingdean there are 45 detached high-value homes being developed on an Urban Fringe site, when what's needed in Ovingdean is properties for people to downsize to.

SAMER (CONSERVATIVE) Two sides to this: maximising receipts but need to ask if we actually need sites on the Urban Fringe? There are enough sites in the city with the current population growth and trajectory.

Q: What are the candidates' positions on the current high-rise, high density proposals for the Gasworks site in East Brighton

DOMINIQUE (LIB DEM) Anything that provides more housing is good. Not perfect answers but nor is having 10,000 people on the housing register.

BRIDGET (BH INDEPENDENTS) Stands with campaigners and has been involved in campaign to date.

SIRIOL (GREEN) In some circumstances, in favour of high rise, high density but in this case, high price too. Also not for local people! In early session, the Barclays group openly said would be marketing abroad. Worried that many of the properties will remain empty.

SAMER (CONSERVATIVE) There hasn't been the drive from the council to encourage Barclays to bring in CLT involvement, which there could and should have been. Probably shouldn't be building high density in that location. We don't want more concrete tower blocks, would have been good to explore timber or Modern Methods of Construction.

CARMEN (LABOUR) Doesn't have detailed knowledge of this site, but some element of CLT involvement would have been desirable.

What are you doing to help people in the private rental market paying really high rents? Especially as it is disproportionately people from minority communities who are struggling in the private market.

SIRIOL (GREEN) There is an item in the Green Manifesto about reviewing housing needs for specific groups, particularly mention LGBTQ and senior housing. Certainly support rent caps and controls. Have a council Direct Lets scheme that works at Local Housing Allowance levels which it would be great to expand but need landlords willing to work with council to directly let homes. Would regulate second and holiday homes to bring more properties back into use for local residents and family homes. Council are also buying back properties where they can represent value for money.

BRIDGET (BH INDEPENDENTS) The policy of BH Independents is to cut out waste that is prevalent across the council (ie million pounds spent on bike racks) to focus on buying back properties that people can move into.

SAMER (CONSERVATIVE) Shouldn't be about council buying back properties but more about facilitating CLT and CLH access to properties. There is waste in the system (for example 2 million last year on the empty property portfolio) that is the sort of money that could support CLH.
There is support for helping people from ethnic minority and refugee backgrounds. Speaking to residents in Hove Park and Whitehawk – the challenges are the same. Encourages people to reach out if there is a specific issue to discuss.

CARMEN (LABOUR) In London, have introduced fair rents scheme and have been asked by Citizens BH to look into the feasibility of such a scheme. It costs a lot of money to do, which budget cuts make very difficult, but Labour will look into the possibility of this. Will also try and encourage landlords to be fair and support tenants' rights and need to provide more housing and especially more affordable housing.

DOMINIQUE (LIBERAL DEMOCRATS) The way to solve high rents by getting more properties. In Brighton & Hove the Local Housing Allowance is particularly low. These things are set by central government so we need a change of government.

How do you overcome national planning laws that tie the hands of the Local Authority?

CARMEN (LABOUR) Not a lot that can be done about this. She has supported residents and groups to appeal against some of the most brutal developments in her ward. We do need more housing but not more second homes. Labour would try and ban second homes on all new developments going forward and find the legislation that would enable this to go through.

BRIDGET (BH INDEPENDENTS) Sat on planning for 3 years and was horrified by developments that were approved, especially in terms of affordable housing. Have a 40% affordable housing policy and the council planning dept need to be firmer with developers about sticking to it and not permit viability loopholes. Nobody looks at viability assessments in enough detail.

SAMER (CONSERVATIVES) The system sucks but it's the system. Planning inspectorate is an independent body whose role is to monitor the rules and implement them as they see them. Council was very wary of taking on developers because of legal costs, but if you are sticking to policy, you have legs to stand on. Re 40% target for affordable housing, shouldn't be taking monetary contributions but should be enforcing the policy.

Would panellists support the abolition of the Right to Buy?

CARMEN (LABOUR) This is not current Labour party policy although would personally support this. Also personally very interested in trying to introduce rent controls and caps where that property has been subsidised by public funds. This happens elsewhere in Europe.

DOMINQUE (LIB DEMS) Would love to abolish Right to Buy as is part of the problem

SIRIOL (GREENS) Of course the Green Party would abolish it. Unfortunately currently only 1 MP in Parliament.

BRIDGET (BH INDEPENDENTS) Independents are a local party based on local issues, this is a national issue

What would the panellists do to support people in emergency accommodation and make sure people get a fair deal when they go through the system?

CARMEN (LABOUR) Knows what the issues are regarding emergency in principle but it is question of money. Trying to have less emergency and more temporary but even that is not particularly good.

DOMINIQUE (LIB DEMS) It comes down to money. Knows that council is trying to stop people being sent out of area, which is helpful as support remains in Brighton & Hove. People should only be in emergency for a short period of time but end up there for years. There needs to be better throughput – places for people to go.

SIRIOL (GREENS) Currently down to under 100 people in Eastbourne (was 400+ during pandemic). Also re-procuring a lot of emergency accommodation and trying to work with smaller providers as well as bring more in house.

BRIDGET (BH INDEPENDENTS) Council has said that it wouldn't put more people in Kendall Court after deaths there, but knows someone who has just been placed there for 2nd time after being in emergency accommodation in Eastbourne. Says it is worse than ever.

SAMER (CONSERVATIVES) The issue of boundaries is very important: the council is promoting Greater Brighton as an entity. Can't encourage landlords to do anything they don't want to do as a local council but there levers at disposal that might encourage people and we are not using these to the best advantage.



For the last three questions, candidates were given the challenge of responding to (all 3) in 30 seconds.

Is community led housing and housing co-operatives such as SEASALT an answer to the student housing crisis

DOMINIQUE (LIB DEMS) Maybe

SIRIOL (GREENS) Yes, definitely

BRIDGET (BH INDEPENDENTS) Independents see themselves as potential power brokers and will be listening to residents. Son is a resident of Uni of Sussex, £220 a week for his room on campus, yes.

SAMER (CONSERVATIVES) No because student housing is a commodity

CARMEN (LABOUR) Yes

Why should people interested in CLH vote for your party?

SIRIOL (GREENS) Greens support all asks

SAMER (CONSERVATIVES) Conservatives support asks so please give vote

CARMEN (LABOUR) Labour supports asks

Where are the larger sites for CLH? Has been discussion for ages but nothing has materialised.

SIRIOL (GREENS) Two sites in mind, not going to disclose in this forum.

SAMER (CONSERVATIVES) Everything, everywhere, all at once is what we need to do

CARMEN (LABOUR) Larger sites, we absolutely support the demand for larger sites, I'm not going to commit to one or the other but I promise that we will work with you to identify one.

www.bhclt.org.uk

FEEDBACK

Did you enjoy the Hustings?
Please give us your comments and feedback

"Yes, it was very useful. It's such an important issue and it was good to pose questions to local politicians."

"It was a great event with a good turnout in terms of the audience and the panel. Well organised. Inevitably the subject of discussion became housing generally but that shows the need for more alternatives to what is being developed by more normative pathways. Well done all."

"Yes, very good discussions and helpful debates."

"Yes! Some good questions and responses but, unfortunately, time ran out! Great idea to limit the time available for questions and responses!"

"What would you like to see BHCC do for the future of community led housing?"

"I would like to see the five asks honoured and closer collaboration with BHCLT."

"Enable bigger sites, enable funding to develop these sites, keep to the s106 promise of CLH at Toads Hole Valley."

"Work with CLT to deliver truly affordable, sustainable long term non-Right-to-Buy housing for local people in need of decent housing."

"Bigger projects, to cater for the growing number of people suffering from housing deprivation. Campaign for more sites to be made available by Local Authorities and developers (as part of their developer contributions) and for the site acquisition process to be simplified/made more user-friendly."

"More concrete support, more public endorsement and showcasing success as well as genuine partnership."