

COUNTY COUNCILLOR WENDY PATTISON

**EMBLETON PARISH**

**COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT**



COUNTY COUNCILLOR WENDY PATTISON

[wendy.pattison@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:wendy.pattison@northumberland.gov.uk) – Tel. 07779 983072 and on Facebook – Cllr Wendy Pattison

**EMBLETON PARISH**

**NORTHUMBRIA IN BLOOM**

Northumbria in Bloom runs a campaign every year to recognise, encourage and reward community groups who work together to transform their village, town or city through gardening, environmental awareness and community support. They organise the competition into classes by size of community, from Small Village to Large City. Urban Communities and Coastal Communities have classes of their own.

Detailed information can be found in their Entrants' Handbook.

Any group can enter – many are entirely volunteer-run, others are in partnership with their Local Authority. All of them see the benefits that horticulture and community support bring to everyone.

If your local community has not entered the Main Competition you may still be able to take part as a Stand Alone Special Entry. There are 13 categories from which to choose

---

## HOW TO ENTER THE MAIN COMPETITION

It couldn't be simpler – just fill in the entry form! The entry period runs from November 1st to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2023 for entries in 2024.

There's lots of information to help you decide which class is right for your group or community in the Entrants Information, but in general you will be either a village, town, city, or coastal community. The relevant entry fees are also listed in the Handbook and payment details are included on the entry form.

The Handbook also has a section on top tips to gain the most points, and practical advice about organising your judging tours, so it's well worth reading it to help you achieve our highest medal – Gold!

In the main competition there are 3 areas to be judged on;

## Horticulture, Environment and Community.

Northumbria in Bloom are very happy to discuss your entry with you further and they can be contacted as below and are will answer any questions you may have. In the first instance, please contact either:

Jo Wood (Entries Co-ordinator)

01287 660696

[joannamfwood@gmail.com](mailto:joannamfwood@gmail.com)

Or Val Giles (Secretary)

01434 240462

[valgiles1@hotmail.com](mailto:valgiles1@hotmail.com)

## COMMUNITY LED HOUSING

Community led housing isn't about giving people power, it's a mechanism for people to take power and create something better. So, why community led housing?

- Because homes that are genuinely affordable to rent and buy means communities aren't displaced, young people can have security, village shops and schools remain open. And because the prices are protected in perpetuity, future generations will benefit from them too.
- Because homes that are designed by local people are built with their friends and neighbours in mind, not profits. They'll be high quality and truly consider what people really need to be able to live happily and independently.
- Because house-building has been dominated by a few traditional methods for too long, and their failure means normal people are bearing the brunt. Community led housing is for everyone. It's built with people in mind, everyday life, the environment, a more sustainable future. Not called community led housing for nothing!

These are five steps you'll need to take, and it's really important to take your time and get this right:

1. Form a steering group.
2. Decide what your purpose is.

Recruit more, whether you're an individual, an emerging group or an organisation starting a project, at some point you'll need to create and incorporate the community group that will ultimately run the show.

3. It's people.
4. Develop a business plan.
5. Incorporate your group.

We encourage support to guide you through these questions, [browse the resources](#) for this stage for more detail and [learn from others](#) who have taken their first steps in community led housing.

## 1. FORM A STEERING GROUP

You'll need a group who will steer the project, and in time agree on a chairperson, a company secretary etc.

For groups that want to involve their whole community (e.g. a community land trust), the steering group are the people who will keep everything moving and sort out all the administration. But if you're leaning more towards a cohousing scheme or a traditional housing co-op the steering group is likely to be made up of people who want to live together in the homes.

### NEW COMMUNITY GROUP

Any group of people can start a community led housing project. The people who initiate it typically use public meetings or call-outs to recruit a larger steering group to get the ball rolling.

### EXISTING COMMUNITY GROUP

You can develop your project through your current organisation. But you might also spin off a new steering group to run the project, and they might go on to create a new legal entity for it.

### DEVELOPER OR LANDOWNER

Projects aren't always started by a community group, but they quickly need one. Developers and landowners can build a new group around future residents or the wider local community and support them to take control.

### LOCAL COUNCIL

Councils can initiate projects. You need to quickly start recruiting the community group so that they can play a leading role as early as possible, and eventually take control.

## 2. DECIDE WHAT YOUR PURPOSE IS

It's worth spending some time discussing what you want to achieve together, also known as outcomes. Setting up a Community Land Trust isn't an outcome, it's a way to achieve some outcomes, and once you discuss your aims you may find a CLT isn't the right way to go.

Often your aims will relate to a particular threat or opportunity.

For example, you might want to:

- provide more homes that people in your group or local area can afford
- bring empty homes or commercial properties back into use
- give renters more control over their homes
- live in a community and sharing more of your life with neighbours
- revive a run-down neighbourhood, or sustain village life
- build up a strong organisation that can do positive things in the local community
- run shops, post offices, community centres and solar farms as well as housing
- learn to build or decorate your home, or learn governance skills

Who you are aiming to help is also important to establish. Are you a group looking to house yourselves, and if so how do you want to live together? Or do you aim to house other people in need in your local area, and if so what sort of housing is most needed?

Whatever the reason, it's helpful to develop a mission statement that sets out why the group exists, what it's looking to achieve and who the intended beneficiaries are. Establishing your purpose will then influence what the group should incorporate as and what funding is available.

It can also help to explain why you think a community led housing group will be better able to achieve these outcomes. You can use this when trying to win support from others.

### 3. RECRUIT MORE PEOPLE

Community led housing is people powered. Who you recruit depends on your project, but could include the following.

**Steering group members** are your starting point, and they who might stay on to be your first governing body members. They need to be enthusiastic, have the time to commit to the project, and between them have a range of skills. It's always very useful to have people with accounting, legal, business and governance skills on board. All community led projects also need to recruit **ordinary members**. These could be the people looking to live in the homes, or the wider local community.

If you are a group looking to house yourselves, and you don't want to be governed by or responsible to a wider local community, then you only need to recruit members

interested in living with you. It's important to quickly establish democratic and inclusive ways of working, so that new members can shape the project as much as founder members, and so you work effectively together over many years.

If you are a local community group looking to provide homes for anyone in that area then you will need to recruit a larger and more diverse membership. If you get a significant proportion of the local population to join, including members with different backgrounds that reflect your local area, this will give you much more power when talking to your council. It will also ensure your project reflects local views.

With both types of group, it is worth building some local support in the area you hope to build or renovate the homes. This will avoid damaging local opposition. Obvious tactics include hosting public meetings, posting on local social media forums and putting up posters. But you could also do more community organising - go out and speak to local community organisations and their leaders such as schools, places of worship, transition towns, youth clubs and so on. Set up a stall at local community events and outside shops. Carry out a survey to test local opinion and build support. Even go door knocking in the area local to your project to explain your aims and plans.

Then there are other project partners, which you could be bringing on board as you develop your concept.

- The **local council**, could be in a position to help you with expertise, funding, land and in some cases building or renovating your homes.
- A **housing association**, which might help develop and/or manage your homes, bringing skill, experience and financial muscle. You should talk to a few to explore how you might work together.
- A **private developer or builder**, who might assist you in developing your plans or just bid for the contract for the construction or renovation works.
- **Investors**, whether public funders, banks and building societies, social investors, local landowners or the local community.

## 4. DEVELOP A BUSINESS PLAN

These don't need to be fancy, or long. But every successful community led housing group needs a business plan, as you are setting up a new community business.

A good business plan will set you on the path to success. It can help you win the support of potential partners and build confidence among your members.

At the early stages you won't have all the detail, and you can improve it as you go along. But you are much more likely to succeed if you try to sketch out the full picture from the start, getting a feel for the process and costs throughout the group, site, plan, build and live stages.

Some suggested headings include:

- vision and aims - what you hope to achieve

- values - the principles that are fundamental to your vision
- context - what the need, or demand, is for your project
- organisation - who you are, your structure, and your strengths and weaknesses
- objectives - turning the vision into specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (i.e. SMART) goals
- action plan - the steps you plan to take, noting who will be responsible for them and when they will need to happen
- financial plan - what the costs are likely to be throughout the process and how you will fund them
- sensitivity analysis - the 'what if' analysis that considers how you can flex to cope with changes to costs, revenues, etc.

## 5. INCORPORATE YOUR GROUP

You can get a long way with just an informal Steering Group, so don't rush into incorporating your new Community Benefit Society or Community Interest Company. If you do this too soon you may find that your legal form doesn't match your needs.

Once you start to actually do things as a group, such as commission architects and enter into negotiations over land, you need to incorporate. That is, create a legal entity like a company. There are organisations that can help you to register new organisations with the Financial Conduct Authority without the need for solicitors:

## LIGHTING NORTHUMBERLAND

Over the last 9 years, the council have been modernising the street lighting in Northumberland, by investing £25 million in new technologies. This has allowed nearly 20,000 lampposts to be replaced, and all streetlights to be fitted with a new LED lantern.

The LED lights have helped to reduce the annual street lighting energy costs by 64% and the cost of maintenance has also reduced, as less visits are required.

The project was funded by the 'Invest to Save' initiative, where the funding will be repaid over 25 years from the budget savings

The LED lights are fitted with technology that enables the council to 'dim' street lighting at certain times. Many local authorities now use this method or even 'part-night lighting,' where they turn the lights off on certain midnight and 6am.

For any street lighting queries please telephone 0345 600 6400