

SOA Research CLG

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Mr Leo Varadkar TD
Leader Fine Gael
Government Buildings
Upper Merrion St
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and

Mr Micheál Martin TD
Leader Fianna Fáil
Áras De Valera 65-66
Lower Mount Street
Dublin 2

and

Mr Eamon Ryan TD
Leader The Green Party
16/17 Suffolk Street,
Dublin 2

28th May 2020

Submission to the next Programme for Government

Dear Sirs,

We write on behalf of SOA Research CLG to propose a recognition of:

1. Community-Led Housing¹
2. The Community Land Trust

as key components of housing delivery and neighbourhood creation in the next Programme for Government.

Community-Led Housing and Community Land Trusts are growing components of the housing landscape which have gained rapidly increasing recognition in the UK and mainland Europe over recent decades. As such we propose that a recognition and associated support for this sector in the Programme for Government would have wide-reaching benefits to the citizens of Ireland.

The draft document (Framework) published by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to facilitate negotiations on a Programme for Government places significant emphasis on the theme of improving the well-being of the Irish people. SOA Research welcomes this focus, and particularly appreciate the proposal that the new Government's approach "**will be built on the fundamental values of community and solidarity**", as well as the acknowledgement that the new Government "**must look beyond economic indicators**" and "**create new, credible, quality-of-life measures of individual and societal wellbeing and progress.**"

SOA propose that increased recognition and provision for Community-Led Housing would serve to enhance societal well-being, particularly under the following five 'Missions' identified for a new Government:

1. Housing for All
2. A New Social Contract
3. A New Green Deal
4. A Better Quality of Life for All
5. Supporting Young Ireland

¹ See definitions for 'Community-Led Housing' and 'Community Land Trust' in Appendix Glossary, Page 7 of this letter.

Housing for All

SOA welcome the stated intentions in the draft framework to “**place the State firmly at the centre of the Irish housing market**” and through bold action to “**tackle land costs and provide the stimuli for home-building**”. We propose that State support and facilitation of Community-Led Housing, along with policies to support the creation of Community Land Trusts, would have a significant impact in achieving both of these goals.

Specifically, we propose the following measures to tackle land costs, and to support and empower community groups to meet their own specific housing needs:

1. Acknowledgement and associated support of Community Led Housing² as a means of empowering communities to meet their specific housing needs affordably and collectively.
2. Recognition of the Community Land Trust in legislation, as has been done in the UK Housing and Regeneration Act 2008³, as a means of retaining public land in perpetuity for community benefit, and separating the cost of land from the cost of the homes built on it. Community Land Trusts provide a unique solution in catalysing the reuse of vacant sites and buildings.
3. The creation of long-term leases on publicly owned land, which can be allocated to community-led groups to meet their housing needs, while retaining the land as a public asset.
4. The investigation, streamlining and integration of funding mechanisms which could support community-led groups in Ireland in realising their projects. This could include for example a Community Housing Fund, as has been implemented in the UK⁴, as well as necessary measures to empower Credit Unions and others to provide low interest mortgage financing to Community-Led Housing groups.
5. The implementation of measures to provide increased autonomy and decision-making to Local Authorities and communities, which would empower them to evaluate and deliver housing initiatives which successfully meet specific local needs. This has been achieved in the UK via the 2011 Localism Act⁵ which grants communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area.⁶
6. The formation of competitive ‘concept-based’⁷ processes by which community groups can bid for public land (and/or land leases) which prioritise socially and ecologically sustainable proposals along with financial viability, as per initiatives in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, UK⁸ and elsewhere.
7. Emulating initiatives which have proven successful in the UK, the creation of supportive hubs, technical advice, and funding for community-led groups to realise their specific visions to improve how their places look and function. (Acknowledging the positive societal benefits of community-led housing, the UK government has worked with a variety of stakeholder groups over recent decades to develop a supportive infrastructure for community-led development.⁹)
8. The integration of Community Led Housing into State and Local planning frameworks, such as Rebuilding Ireland and Local Area Planning.

² <http://clhtoolkit.org/introduction-clh/what-community-led-housing-clh>

³ Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, Part 2, Chapter 1, Section 79, Subsection 1(d) (www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/17/section/79)

⁴ Homes England, *Community Housing Fund Prospectus* (Crown Copyright, 2018)

⁵ UK Localism Act 2011 (www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted)

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2#what-is-neighbourhood-planning>

⁷ <https://www.bim-berlin.de/immobilien/angebote/erbbaurechte-verkauf/konzeptverfahren/>

⁸ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/housing-and-land/land-and-development/small-sites/>

⁹ MD2194 (<https://www.london.gov.uk/decisions/md2194-london-community-led-housing-hub>)

A New Social Contract

SOA welcome the framework document proposals to **“provide each citizen with accessible and affordable housing, and a dignified retirement”** along with a new social contract which will **“provide for greater security for individuals and communities and will be founded on the principles of equality and ensuring that every citizen has the opportunity to contribute to, and achieve, their potential.”**

Community-led housing initiatives empower communities to unlock their know-how and innate creativity to visualise and plan ways to regenerate their neighbourhoods. They offer a voice and genuine participation to citizens in the creation of their homes and communities. Community-Led Housing groups promote full integration, from mixed income to age to special needs to ethnicity. They further provide a mechanism by which those not adequately catered to by the wider housing market are empowered to invent innovative solutions to their particular housing needs. In Ireland this mechanism has the potential to provide huge benefits for societal groups such as:

- Elderly and/or retired citizens who are eager to retain their independence while participating in and being supported by a strong neighbourhood community.¹⁰
- Those with various disabilities or accessibility constraints, who are empowered to visualise homes and communities which enable them to retain independence.¹¹

A New Green Deal

It is exciting to see acknowledgement in the framework document that **“the response domestically and internationally to the Covid-19 Emergency illustrates our capacity to react comprehensively and imaginatively to fundamental challenges”** and that **“we must utilise the radicalism of the response to this Emergency to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis.”**

SOA believes that a proactive and enthusiastic national response to the climate emergency offers huge opportunities to Irish citizens in terms of innovation, enhanced quality of life, and the creation of new environmentally friendly industries.

By empowering local communities to collaborate in responding to specific local needs, Community-led housing initiatives can address the combined challenges of climate action, urban regeneration, regeneration of our towns and villages, and sustainable housing. Innovation in developing solutions to these challenges can often best be explored not at individual, family or regional level, but at a community level. Community led housing projects, which typically range between 10-50 households, offer the potential to explore innovative solutions at a manageable scale. In Germany for example, encouraged by low-interest KfW¹² financing which supports environmentally sustainable projects, the vast majority of community-led housing projects are built to very high environmental standards, and frequently exemplify innovation in community generated energy via mechanisms such as project based Combined Heat & Power systems.

A key feature of cohousing projects worldwide is an emphasis on car-free neighbourhoods, and projects from across Europe and further afield provide examples of reduced car use and encouragement of travel by foot and bicycle. Furthermore, the frequent inclusion of coworking spaces as an element of collaborative housing projects reduces the need for residents to commute to work, reducing their carbon footprint in the process.

Encouraged and incentivised by ‘concept-based’ approaches to the development of land which prioritise social and environmental sustainability criteria over speculative price bidding, community-led projects in the UK and Europe have demonstrated leadership in creating socially and environmentally sustainable and cohesive homes and neighbourhoods, and inclusive multi-generational communities. Furthermore, these projects frequently contribute to urban regeneration and ecological retrofit by adapting and reusing disused buildings and/or difficult sites.

¹⁰http://www.rocagallery.com/senior-cohousing?utm_campaign=topic-month&utm_medium=post&utm_source=twitter

¹¹ Michael LaFond & Larisa Tsvetkova, *CoHousing Inclusive*. (Jovis, 2017), p.154-157

¹² <https://www.kfw.de/inlandsfoerderung/Privatpersonen/Neubau/index-2.html>
<https://www.kfw.de/inlandsfoerderung/Privatpersonen/Bestandsimmobilie/>

A Better Quality of Life for All

The framework document highlights **“anxieties of citizens around commuting, regional imbalance, and a lack of time with family”** and proposes **“drawing on the sense of community and solidarity that has been displayed in such strength throughout the Covid-19 Emergency to provide a basis for improving the quality of life for individuals and families across Ireland.”**

SOA welcome in particular the following steps outlined in the document to aid the achievement of these goals:

1. **“Move to 20% home and remote working in 2021” for public sector employees.**
2. **“reduce dereliction and to bring vacant properties back into use in our urban areas.”**
3. **“Support the building of new affordable homes in our towns and villages.”**
4. **“Prioritise the upkeep and expansion of parks and green spaces for community enjoyment across Ireland.”**
5. **“Support community groups, arts and cultural bodies, sports clubs, voluntary organisations, charity groups and voluntary bodies to recover and grow in the aftermath of the COVID-19 Emergency.”**

Community-led housing initiatives abroad have been shown to accelerate the achievement of the above listed steps in many countries. By placing resident participation in the design process as a core element, community-led housing allows future residents to consider and plan for their neighbourhood needs, which has frequently resulted in a more holistic approach to design, encompassing coworking, public amenities, communal gardening and sharing of resources. Innovative live/work arrangements have enabled residents to work from home and reduce commutes, to co-design green spaces for neighbourhood amenity, and thus to spend more quality time together as families and as neighbours.

A core goal of Community Land Trusts is the assurance of **long-term affordability**, meaning that not only are homes affordable at initial construction, they will remain affordable for future residents, and remove land speculation from the cost of homes.

Furthermore, policy supports and funding for community-led housing initiatives in the UK and elsewhere have enabled citizens in rural, village and urban areas to proactively tackle vacancy and dereliction, and to breathe new life into disused buildings. By considering local needs and inviting participation from the wider community, Community-led housing and Community Land Trust initiatives have been shown to creatively respond to specific local challenges, and have a revitalising effect on the wider neighbourhood.

Finally, community-led housing projects frequently provide meeting spaces and facilities for community groups in the wider neighbourhood, a community benefit which can be further incentivised by Local Authority led ‘concept-based’ processes for the disposal or leasing of public land.

Supporting Young Ireland

Young people in particular have become increasingly disenfranchised from access to quality housing in Ireland over recent decades. The aspiration of owning a home, or of secure affordable rental, has become unattainable for many in their 20s and 30s. SOA welcome the intentions stated in the framework to **“Ensure that young people have access to affordable housing, and that homeownership is a realistic aspiration for them”**, to **“develop mechanisms for the voice of young people to be part of decision-making at community, county and national levels”**, and to **“enable young people with disabilities or special needs to live as independently a life as possible.”**

Community-led housing offers a voice to all citizens, including young people, and the opportunity to participate in the creation of more inclusive, mixed and diverse neighbourhoods. Combined ‘owner renter’ models further provide young people with the opportunity to become cooperative members with relatively low initial costs, and to increase their share of space over time.

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Summary

SOA Research considers that these recommendations would serve to empower communities to proactively contribute and innovate in the creation of high quality built environments, as part of the implementation and delivery of the new Programme for Government.

It has been widely highlighted that the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to reimagine a more equal and just society in Ireland. We hope you will help seize this opportunity to put communities and citizens back at the heart of neighbourhood development, and to embrace the idea of homes as a social good. These proposals would provide a social return which far outweighs the investment, by unlocking the latent potential for citizens to contribute more fully to the quality of their homes and communities.

We would be happy to provide whatever assistance we can to help implement the new Government's commitments to tackle land costs, to provide the stimuli for home-building, to provide each citizen with accessible and affordable housing and a dignified retirement, and to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis, building on the fundamental values of community and solidarity.

Please let us know if we can provide you with any additional information in the meantime and we will be happy to oblige with further details.

Yours sincerely,

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SOA Research CLG

Tom O'Donnell

Executive Director
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Co-Signatories

SOA Research CLG's proposals for the development of Community-Led Housing in Ireland, as outlined in the letter above, are supported and endorsed by the following national organisations:

Hugh Brennan

CEO
Ó Cualann CoHousing Alliance

Donal McManus

CEO
The Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH)

Kevin Johnson

CEO
The Credit Union Development Association

Sam Toland

Secretary
Dublin Food Co-operative

And by the following Irish Community-Led Housing Groups:

Michael Reidy

Common Ground CoHousing (Wicklow)

Anne Fitzgerald

ARTHOUSE Cooperative (Dublin)

Davie Philip

Co-President of *ECOLISE*
Member of *Cloughjordan Co-Housing* (Tipperary)

Rosie Lynch

Lionra CoHousing/ Nimble Spaces (Kilkenny)

About SOA Research CLG

Self Organised Architecture (SOA) is a non-profit research collaborative formed to promote the possibilities for self-organised, collaborative and cooperative approaches to housing in Ireland. We contend that the creation of housing can be a participatory, non-speculative, affordable and democratic process, and that such a process has the potential for positive social transformation.

- SOA's work aims to influence a changed attitude to urban living and housing development in Ireland. We aim to inform and educate the Irish public in regard to alternative, socially and environmentally sustainable housing models, which encourage and facilitate diversity, adaptability and community development. We hope to inspire Irish people as to the possibilities for participating in and contributing to high quality diverse urban neighbourhoods, and the potential for self-organised development. SOA's work further aims to support and inform policymakers, to better enable cooperative and collaborative approaches in the creation of socially and environmentally sustainable Housing.
- Projects to date have included the international *CoHousing Here!*¹³ conference held in Dublin in 2019, a series of *CoHousing Café!*¹⁴ public events in various Irish cities, and a current multi-stakeholder research project to develop a supportive national infrastructure for Community-Led Housing in Ireland.
- Upcoming projects include a cross-country collaboration with North-West European partners to develop the Community Land Trust initiatives in Ireland, the UK, Scotland, France, Belgium, The Netherlands and Germany, as part of the Interreg *Sustainable Housing for Inclusive and Cohesive Cities* programme¹⁵.

Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance develops and supports fully-integrated communities. It delivers well-designed, top-quality, energy efficient homes at an affordable price. Ó Cualann is working with local authorities and like-minded groups to change the way housing is delivered in Ireland.

The Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) is a national social housing federation representing and advocating for 270+ housing associations across Ireland. As a representative organisation the ICSH works with other organisations to identify and streamline mechanisms to promote social housing in relieving housing need in Ireland through policy development and analysis.

The Credit Union Development Association (CUDA) is a credit union owned network that enables member credit unions to engage in beneficial activities which would not have proved possible to do as single stand-alone entities.

Dublin Food Co-operative is Ireland's oldest and largest community-owned consumer food co-operative, committed to supporting communities as they seek to address their own needs through self-help and co-operation.

Common Ground Co-Housing is a community-led housing group based in North Wicklow. Our vision is to create a new paradigm for low-impact affordable housing in Ireland with a focus on community and the environment.

ARTHOUSE Cooperative is seeking to build a cooperative community and affordable low carbon homes for our members, who are primarily artists and community workers, young and older, single and with families, who wish to have a permanent home which supports community arts.

Cloughjordan Co-Housing CLG are developing a co-housing neighbourhood in Cloughjordan Ecovillage, a unique model of how communities can respond to the many challenges of climate change, building not just ecological resilience but also economic regeneration and sustainability.

Líonra Co-Housing is part of the Nimble Spaces project, which in 2020 will advance to the build phase, with three Inclusive Neighbourhoods (26 new homes) in Callan, Kilkenny. The aim of the project is for people of different ages, support needs and income levels to live in close proximity.

¹³ <https://soa.ie/cohousing-here-2019/>

¹⁴ <https://soa.ie/cohousing-cafe/>

¹⁵ <https://www.nweurope.eu/projects/project-search/shicc-sustainable-housing-for-inclusive-and-cohesive-cities/>

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED

Community-Led Housing

Community-led Housing, as defined in the UK¹⁶, contains the following features:

1. A requirement that meaningful community engagement and consent occurs throughout the process. The community does not necessarily have to initiate and manage the development process, or build the homes themselves, though some may do;
2. The local community group or organisation owns, manages or stewards the homes and in a manner of their choosing;
3. A requirement that the benefits to the local area and/or specified community must be clearly defined and legally protected in perpetuity e.g. through an asset lock.

Community Land Trust

(From Community Land Trust Bruxelles¹⁷)

Community Land Trusts are community-led non-profits designed to develop and steward individually owned homes and community assets such as shops and civic spaces on community owned land. CLTs balance the needs of individuals to access land and maintain security of tenure with a community's need to maintain affordability, economic diversity and local access to essential services.

An essential purpose of a CLT is to provide access to land, housing, and economic opportunities for low and moderate-income people who otherwise have no access to these resources. Long-term ground leases are used to separate land ownership from homeownership. Homes are made affordable by taking land costs out of the price. Resale restrictions are used to keep housing affordable. When CLT homeowners decide to move out of their homes, they can sell them. However, the land lease requires that the home be sold either back to the CLT or to another lower income household, and for an affordable price. When a CLT homeowner does sell, he only earns a portion of the increased value. The rest is kept by the Trust, preserving the affordability for future low-income families.

CLTs have an open democratic structure: People who live and work in the defined local community, including occupiers of the homes on CLT land, can become members of the CLT. The CLT engages members of the community in its work. CLTs are representatively governed: $\frac{1}{3}$ of the board represents homeowners, $\frac{1}{3}$ the surrounding community and $\frac{1}{3}$ is made up of public officials.

A CLT does not disappear when a home is sold or rented but has a long-term role in stewarding the homes. In some cases they will remain the landlord of the rental homes or will retain an element of unsold equity in the homes. At the least, the CLT will retain the freehold.

CLTs range in size, can be rural or urban, and provide a variety of housing tenures as well as other community facilities, including workspaces, energy generation, community food and farming.

¹⁶ <http://clhtoolkit.org/introduction-clh/whatcommunity-led-housing-clh>

¹⁷ <https://cltb.be/en/the-model/>