

Deep roots and modern methods

Jon Broome



The Good Building Book

Principles of Efficient,

Jon Broome
and Nick Grant

Lewisham : trailblazer in Community Led Housing

1960's

1st licensed squatting organization in UK, 1969 : Lewisham Family Squatting Association managed 80 houses and set scene for a national movement.

'Short Life' grant funded, improvements to empty houses to bring them back into use. Some still in use managed by squatting association reconstituted as a housing association.

Labour government promoted housing co-ops. We may forget that a 'Community Architect' was president of Royal Institute of British Architects, RIBA.

Co-ops were established around New Cross and Deptford in particular. Many still provide very affordable homes to this day.

1970's

1st new build housing co-op in UK 1973 built at Sanford Street, Deptford.

Paved the way for new build co-ops in Liverpool and elsewhere.

Recently installed biomass boilers and PV's.



“Britain's first purpose-built housing co-op is now leading the way in sustainable living. John Vidal visits the owners of an inner-city street that is a model for using green energy to refurbish estates and build communities.”

Guardian 2009

1980's

The architect Walter Segal was seeking an opportunity to apply construction method to community self-build and Lewisham made 4 small sites available.

People on the housing list without skills or experience to build 14 homes from the ground up completed in 1981. Council mortgages were offered for a 50% share of the equity with a self-build discount.

Visitors came [and still do] and the chair of the group, a floor layer, travelled all over Europe explaining what they had achieved.



A second site was completed in 1986.

1987 Community Enterprise Award for
Walter's Way self-build presented by then
Prince Charles

UN Year of Shelter for the Homeless Award
presented by the Secretary General of the
UN in New York. Prize money founded the
Walter Segal Self Build Trust



Ex docker Bill commented:

"I won't believe anybody who tells me I can't do something again..."

30m BBC TV show *The House that Mum and Dad Built*

Fusions jameen - UK's 1st Black housing co-op at Nubia Way, Downham

- Thatcher government decreed that social housing would be provided by housing associations. So Co-operative Housing in South East London, CHISEL, was set up and developed 5 further self build sites for rent in Lewisham.
- Other similar projects were built in Southwark & Greenwich and further afield in Birmingham, Brighton, Sheffield and elsewhere.
- Self builders didn't necessarily want individual ownership, but they did want a say in the design, construction and management of their homes.



1990's – 2010's

The appetite for community involvement drained away— Housing Associations became larger & more commercial. They micro-managed self-builders which they found very demanding.

Until that is Circle 33 [now Clarion] developed 10 houses completed in 2015 with self-fit out in Walthamstow for families in overcrowded flats in nearby tower blocks.

Probably the first community self-help project for 20 years or so.



“Landlords and local authority partners need reassurance that such projects...are worth supporting. The findings of this research suggest the long term benefits to landlords of helping self-build groups to develop their own homes in reduced demand for services and happy and sustainable communities – long term savings which could then be reinvested back into building new homes and supporting thriving neighbourhoods.”

Clarion Research Paper 2018

2020's

The son of one of the original self-builders in Lewisham founded RUSS as a Community Land Trust thinking 'My dad built our house when I was growing up maybe I could do the same.' That house had passed into the open market and was no longer affordable.

He approached the council and to cut a long story short RUSS entered a competitive bid for a site in Church Grove, Ladywell and completed 36 low energy homes in 2023. The largest urban CLT in the UK.



"Church Grove is stunning – the largest community-led and partly self-built housing project ever undertaken in the capital, a place where the price of these light-flooded, co-designed homes will be tied to local income for ever. A ray of hope in an otherwise bleak housing scene."

**The third best building of 2024 after the Olympic Swimming Pool in Paris.
Oliver Wainwright in the Guardian**

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- Also completed in 2023 was Citizen's House, a block of 11 flats in Sydenham all for discounted sale by London CLT
 - CLT's create 100% affordable homes – NONE on the open market
 - Prices are pegged to local incomes.
 - They hold land under common ownership removed from the open market
 - Prices remain so protected by resale covenants
 - CLT's can source additional funding from charities, crowd funding, share issues etc



As testament to the innovative design, community support and affordability model, the project has been recognised with considerable press coverage and many awards, including two **British Homes Awards**, an **NLA New London Award**, and a **Pineapple Award for Community Engagement**

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- Community housing has been shown to create social value.
 - Projects make many links with surrounding communities.
 - Health and education is improved, crime is reduced and volunteering boosted.
 - People report improved trust, neighbourliness & pride.



“RUSS addressed a derelict site with a development for common good... Such a model...can undo the NIMBYism that besets so much current development in challenged and advantaged neighborhoods alike, replacing conflict with collectivism and shared investment.”

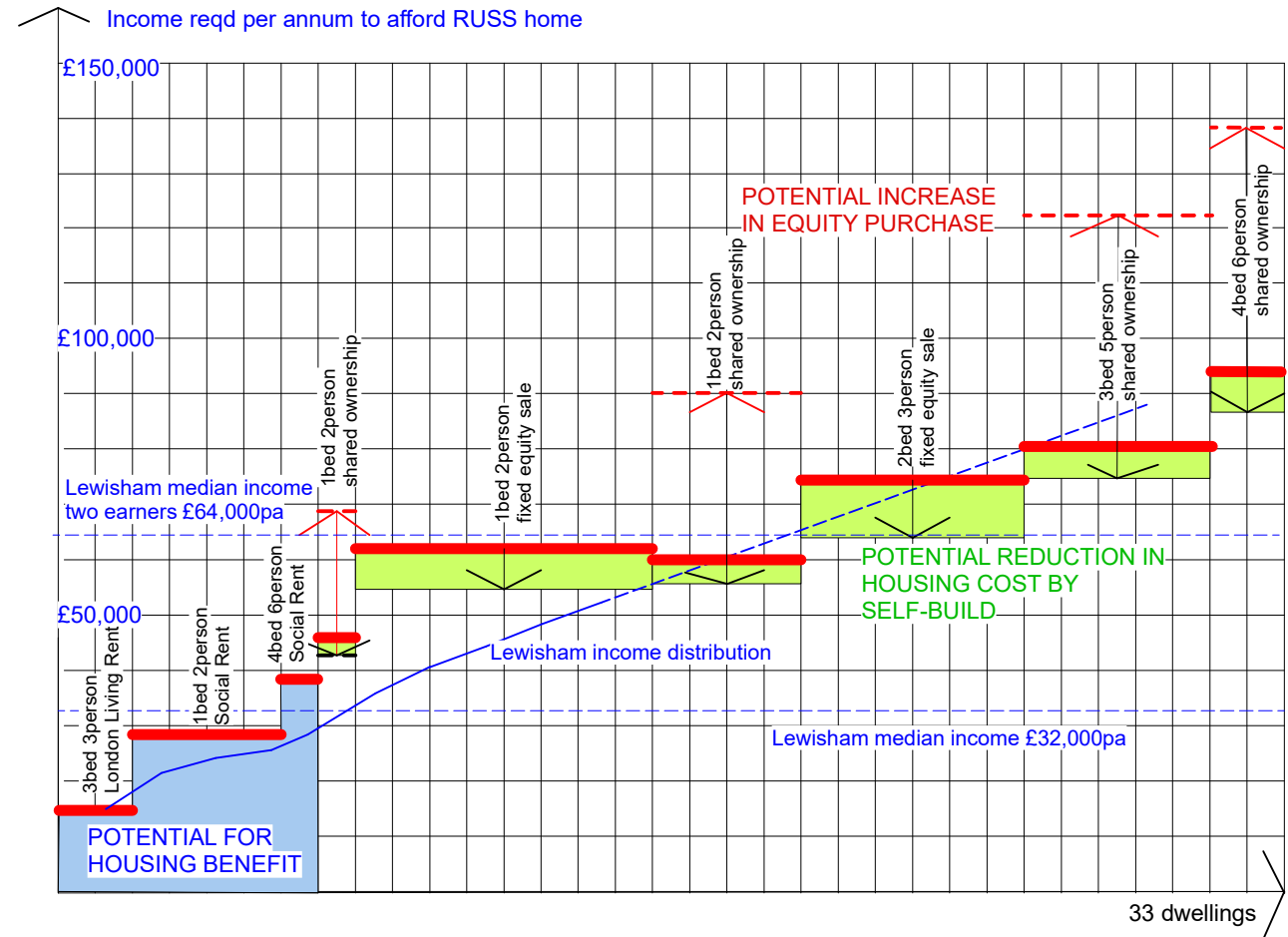
A Case Study in Self-Build by Pennsylvania University 2025

<https://penn.manifoldapp.org/read/church-grove/section/8cd3f02e-3618-473f-a647-7481ec5d6889>

RUSS is mixed tenure - with discounted sales, shared ownership, rooms in shared flats to rent at below private market rates and social rented properties - NOT just sales.

Homes in a range of sizes to reflect local household makeup for young and old, singles, couples and families - NOT just profitable small flats.

Mix of residents in neighbourhoods fully integrated into the social and physical fabric of the city - NOT just areas for disadvantaged people.



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- All electric towards net zero carbon with PV's for power, cooking and lighting and heat pumps for heating, cooling and hot water.
 - Homes that are highly insulated, airtight and easy and cheap to heat
 - Heat recovery ventilation provides healthy living conditions
 - Low environmental impact construction
 - Provision for composting waste and food growing in the city.
 - Homes above UK minimum space standards (currently amongst the lowest in Europe) to provide homes adaptable to changing lifestyles, working at home for example.
 - Church Grove includes a guest suite, office and shared laundry.
 - Also a Community Hub, funded, designed, built and managed by residents, used by local residents and community organizations.

A role for residents

- A sustainable housing system requires residents have the opportunity to take part in the development of ideas, the construction and management of their homes and neighbourhoods.
- Community led housing is a necessary complement to public or private mass housing.
- Not for everyone but a necessary option.
- RUSS currently has around 1,200 members many of whom volunteer to keep the organization running.



Self-help

- RUSS offers a range of opportunities for self-building from building a complete home to finishing the interior of a contractor built shell.
- It creates opportunities to learn building skills
- Taking part in the Land Trust creates opportunities for residents to acquire skills in organization and management
- This builds a sense of self-confidence and enhances people's employment possibilities.



Next steps

- RUSS is testing ideas and learning from the pilot project at Church Grove and planning to disseminate this on the RUSS School of Community Housing
- RUSS is bidding to restore the Playtower for community use, workspaces, nursery and affordable housing as an outstanding opportunity to further the aim of creating a sustainable neighbourhood in Ladywell.



Community Led Housing

- RUSS has also developed thinking on the role of community led housing to complement the council's effort to provide affordable homes.
- To create sustainable neighbourhoods we need dense towns and cities with good services, convenient amenities and frequent public transport.
- This is in contrast to the current housing market which is creating unsustainable suburban areas where residents are reliant on cars to access work, school and shops or otherwise tower blocks surrounded by windswept, overlooked, polluted spaces
- Densification of existing neighbourhoods would boost the local economy and sustain more amenities and better transport.
- It could revitalise forgotten areas of the borough such as Bell Green.

We have undertaken a search within a 1km radius of Forest Hill which has produced 10 council owned potential sites. Some will not be viable for one reason or another but there will be others which are.

2 are currently vacant, the others within existing estates.

3 are small accommodating 6 or 8 dwellings each. Experience from the early self-build projects demonstrated that a number of such sites can be developed simultaneously to make a viable project with a minimum of around 15 dwellings.

A further 5 sites will accommodate between 20 and 40 dwellings each and 2 large sites can together create around 200 dwellings.

This suggests a potential for over 300 new dwellings within that 1km radius.

Potential sites



Densification

- Typical example; Dacres Estate - already 50 new flats built for over 55's.
- Additional potential for 40 new houses and flats elsewhere on the estate.
- Creates shared, secure landscaped spaces for play and relaxation with community centre.



Sustainable neighbourhoods fit for the future

- We have a new local administration and a government pledged to housing investment which offers Lewisham an opportunity to make a mark developing genuinely sustainable neighbourhoods.
- Community housing organizations are well placed to work with tenants on existing estates.
- Many existing estates have blocks surrounded by space which is not organized for play, sitting or anything else but which requires significant maintenance. New buildings would be coupled with improved landscape design creating comfortable places for play & relaxation.
- New investment on estates will create opportunities for new amenities to invigorate neighbourhoods; a nursery, workplaces, commercial premises and guest accommodation for example.

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