

# a place to grow

Hazelmead Bridport Cohousing CLT



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A cohousing development in Bridport  
by Bridport CLT and Barefoot Architects





"I can't believe that we could be living in such a generous house, in such a lovely community, in one of the most beautiful parts of the country and that we can afford to live here."

Karen and H





Hazelmead is a cohousing development in Bridport, by Bridport CLT and Barefoot Architects, for 53 net zero carbon affordable homes.

Cost	£9.5 million
Area	3863m <sup>2</sup> GIA
Cost per m2	£2460/m



**For 15 years, Barefoot Architects and Bridport Community Land Trust have worked together to pioneer Hazelmead – a community housing project that faces up to issues of affordability, loneliness, health, and environmental sustainability.**

Bridport Cohousing describes itself as ‘a way of living that is more green, less costly, and more neighbourly’. It’s the largest cohousing development in the UK so far – trailblazing a viable alternative to the open market.

Alongside Barefoot Architects, they have created a place for their multi-generational, diverse community to call home, working together in a fair and equitable way to maintain their friendly, safe and supportive neighbourhood. Their mantra of ‘Good enough for now, safe enough to try’ has allowed them to embrace learning through doing, and careful testing of new ideas.

Energy, food and housing security were high on the agenda. The brief also asked for comfortable, generous homes that felt easy to live in. Just as important is the space between the homes: the meadow, gardens and allotments. These were seen as shared places to grow vegetables, but also for relationships to blossom and be nurtured.

The first residents arrived in 2022 and by 2024, all the homes were occupied. Here, the streets are car-free, children play outside and people connect. This is a place to grow.

**The residents have formed a close, supportive community who take pride in their governance and self-established social boundaries. In doing so they have taken their initial ambitions of affordability, sustainability and local-lead design, and created a neighbourhood that is far more.**



# good things take time

The seeds of Bridport Cohousing were sown by Bridport entrepreneur Alan Heeks. His longstanding interest in environmentally-friendly living spaces was the catalyst, and in 2008 the local authority encouraged him to 'give it a go'.

The Bridport Cohousing Community was established and it would take an incredible 14 years before the first residents called Hazelmead home.



## ? what is a CLT?

A community land trust, or CLT, is a democratic, non-profit organisation that owns and develops land for the benefit of the community. It is run by ordinary people who want to make a difference – by creating affordable homes and ventures like local pubs or shops. CLTs put the control of assets into the hands of local people, to ensure they benefit those around – now and in the future.



Construction took place during the pandemic



Building the common house from straw bales and timber



Everyone who is able to is expected to contribute



All the homes are occupied




# more neighbourly

**Bridport Cohousing was a community long before they had designed any housing. But Hazelmead has built on this, encouraging new relationships to form and existing ones to flourish.**

The homes are nestled into the hillside, the terraces following the land's contours and drawing attention outward towards views of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In between the homes are car-free 'streets' lined with shared vegetable gardens and wild areas, full of cultivated and native plants. Children run freely around the development. People linger to chat to their neighbours whilst they garden, or sit on the benches that are built into the front of every house. They joke that everyone has to add ten minutes to journey times to make time to chat to friends on their way to their car, bike or bus stop.

A sense of togetherness is important to the community. They are currently self-building a timber and straw bale common house and once it's finished, it will host things like communal meals, parties, coworking, and exercise classes.

**The buildings are nothing without the neighbourhood. Shared activities in the homes and gardens bring the community together and encourage individuals to ask each other for help.**



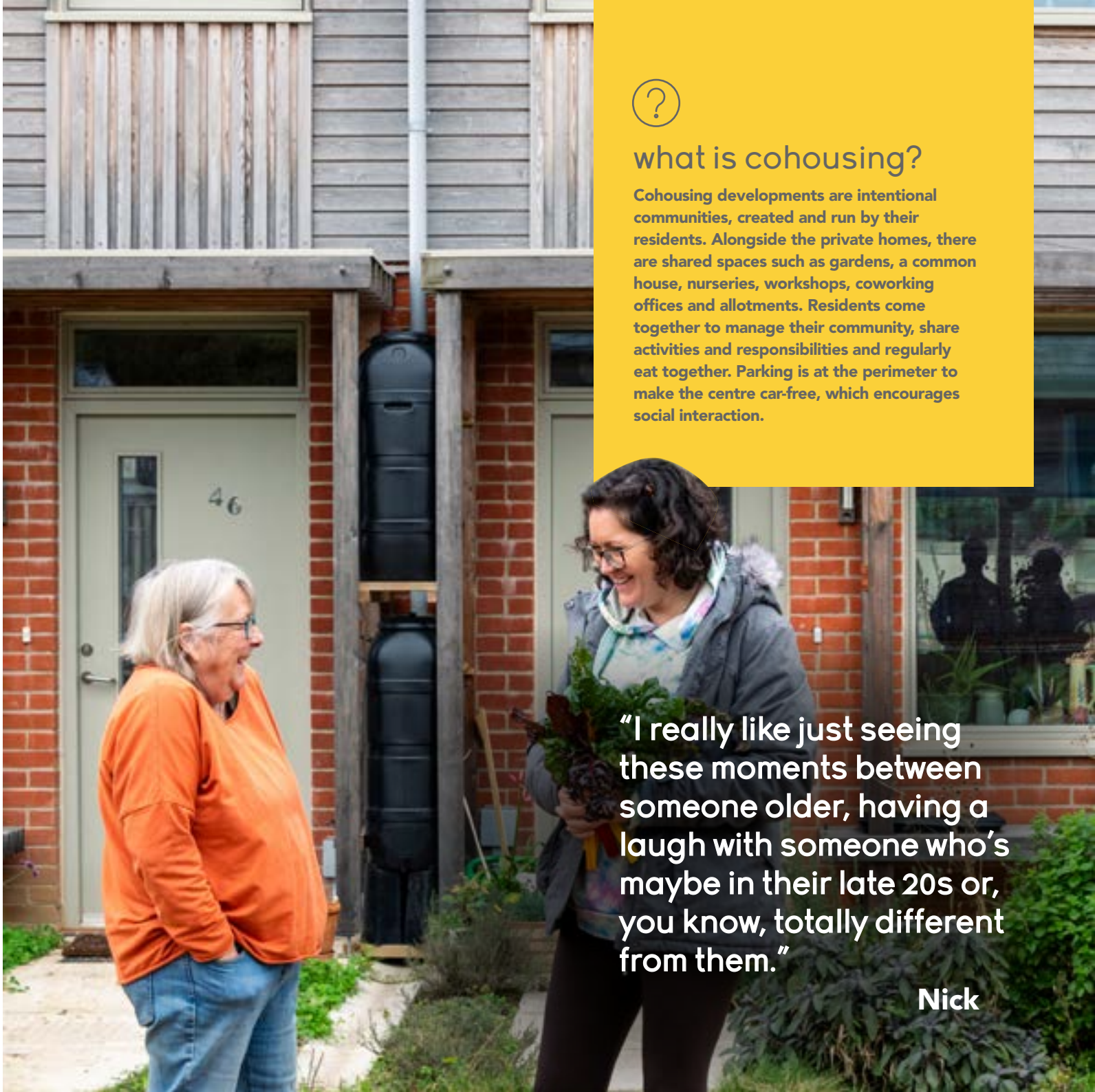
### a loneliness epidemic

**In older adults, loneliness is associated with a 50% increased risk of developing dementia and a 30% increased risk of coronary artery disease or stroke. Up to 15% of adolescents are lonely. Being part of a community can have a positive impact on people's health.**



### what is cohousing?

**Cohousing developments are intentional communities, created and run by their residents. Alongside the private homes, there are shared spaces such as gardens, a common house, nurseries, workshops, coworking offices and allotments. Residents come together to manage their community, share activities and responsibilities and regularly eat together. Parking is at the perimeter to make the centre car-free, which encourages social interaction.**



**"I really like just seeing these moments between someone older, having a laugh with someone who's maybe in their late 20s or, you know, totally different from them."**

**Nick**





## the homes

53 homes  
27 shared ownership  
26 affordable rent  
14 one bedroom apartments  
23 two bedroom houses  
13 three bedroom houses  
3 four bedroom houses

## more affordable

**Hazelmead was born to address the critical shortage of affordable, sustainable, and community-oriented housing in Bridport.**

In a region where average house prices exceed 11 times the average local income, it provides a practical solution by delivering 53 affordable homes secured in perpetuity through the Bridport Cohousing Community Land Trust (CLT).

The development consists of 14 one-bedroom flats within two low-rise apartment blocks and 39 terraced houses offering two, three, and four bedrooms. Half the homes are allocated for social rent, and the remainder for shared ownership, with 14 sold or rented at 80% of market value and 13 at between 25% and 80%. The remaining 20% of equity is owned by Bridport Cohousing and Bournemouth Churches Housing Association, ensuring affordability in perpetuity. Driven by residents of the town, the aim was to provide long-term housing stability for local people and key workers – such as nurses – who would not otherwise be able to afford private housing.

**Studies on secure housing, mental health and community informed the development, but the ambition to combine long leases with affordability was non negotiable.**

**“We are on a low income so it gave us an opportunity to live in a modern, environmentally conscious way, at a price we can afford with people who hopefully are of similar ilk.”**

**Lucy**



# more sustainable

## Hazelmead is a net zero development in operation.

It supports community resilience, and integrates environmental, social, and economic priorities. It aims to create a robust and future-ready community.

In practice this means the homes are built from materials that don't cost the earth, are bright and comfortable inside, and have low energy costs.

They're built to AECB CarbonLite New Build Standard, which emphasises energy efficiency and occupant comfort. A timber frame with premanufactured SIPS panels ensures a low carbon construction method, while cladding in brick and larch harmonises with the natural surroundings. Resident-led design features resulting from the codesign process, such as large windows, high ceilings, and vaulted roof spaces, lend a sense of spaciousness and quality that belie the affordability of the homes.

The homes are arranged in south facing terraces and two apartment blocks. This provides the perfect orientation for the rooftop solar array. The PV array is linked to a huge onsite battery to create a community microgrid managed by a CLT energy supply company (ESCO). By selling excess energy back to the National Grid at peak times, the investment in the microgrid is covered and energy costs are kept at below market rates for residents.

**To date, the microgrid has produced more energy than the all-electric homes require, taking into account heating, lighting, hot water (ASHP), ventilation (MVHR) and domestic power.**



- AECB CarbonLite New Build Standard
  - Quality assurance to minimise design gap
  - Overheating assessed in PHPP
  - Thermal comfort matches Passivhaus
  - 100% green electricity
  - MVHR whole house ventilation
  - Triple glazing
- Solar array: 210kWp microgrid  
Solar production average: 20kWh/m<sup>2</sup>

“For me, the best thing here, compared to my old house, is heat. It's so warm. And there are no draughts. There's no damp. It feels like a healthy place to live. And it's cheap to run compared to my old house.”

Emily





## nick and lucy

**"When I lived in London, I lived in a warehouse community. And I think when you're there in your 20s and 30s, it's really amazing and it's really fun. But you get to a point where you think, 'I really want the community element, but I don't want to share my kitchen and my bathroom anymore.'" So this was kind of the perfect next step in a way.**

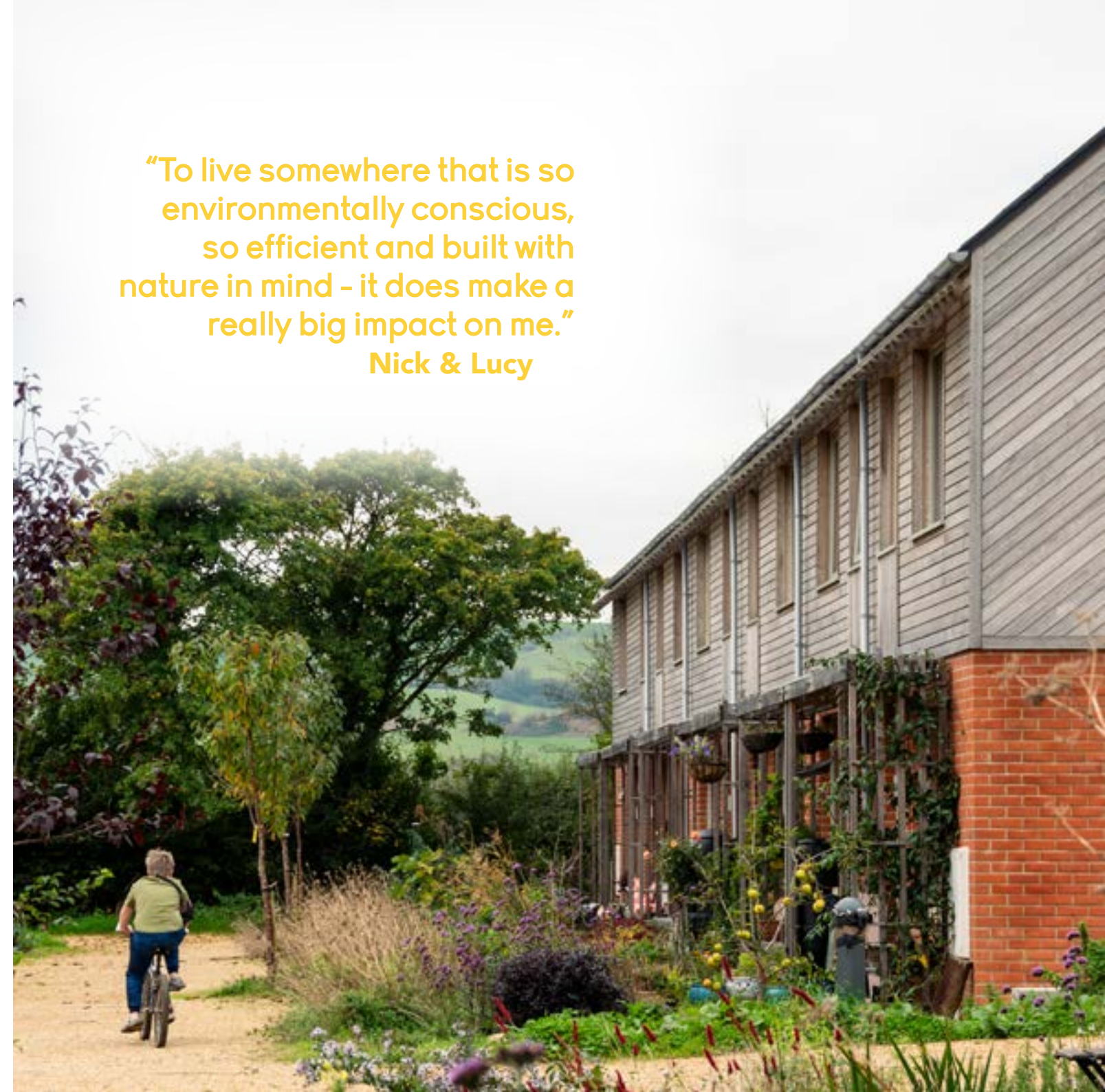
You get your own safe haven, but you also get the perks of living as a bigger group. We are on a low income, so living here gave us an opportunity to live in this very high quality home in a modern, environmentally conscious way, at a price we can afford and with people who are of similar ilk. We're out there doing things that are really positive for the environment and for education, but actually it can be incredibly difficult to do that and live within your financial means. I'm not sure what our other options would have been, really.

I'm certainly aware of living greenly and to be given the opportunity to live somewhere that is so environmentally conscious, so efficient and built with nature in mind - it does make a really big impact on me, morally and consciously. Just having these beautiful big windows and sitting here looking out and seeing the seasons change in the hedgerow. To feel connected with the land here and with the people around you as well.

**To be involved with the largest community cohousing project in the UK means being part of building something that can leave an incredible legacy. It's amazing that there's this group of people that are all quite different in lots of ways, but with this shared project and shared vision."**



**"To live somewhere that is so environmentally conscious, so efficient and built with nature in mind - it does make a really big impact on me."  
Nick & Lucy**





## emily and herbie

**“As Herbie was getting older, I really became aware that going forward into our future, most people around us would probably be paid to be in our lives, you know, care assistants, services... And I didn’t think that was good enough.**

Herbie was diagnosed with Lennox-Gastaut epilepsy when he was three years old. This means he also has global learning disabilities, so I knew from a very early stage that Herbie would need support for the rest of his life. I have always been looking for what that might look like, that wasn’t about paid carers or medical intervention, but a quality of life. Here, everybody knows him and they care about him. I think cohousing has definitely given us the answer to that.

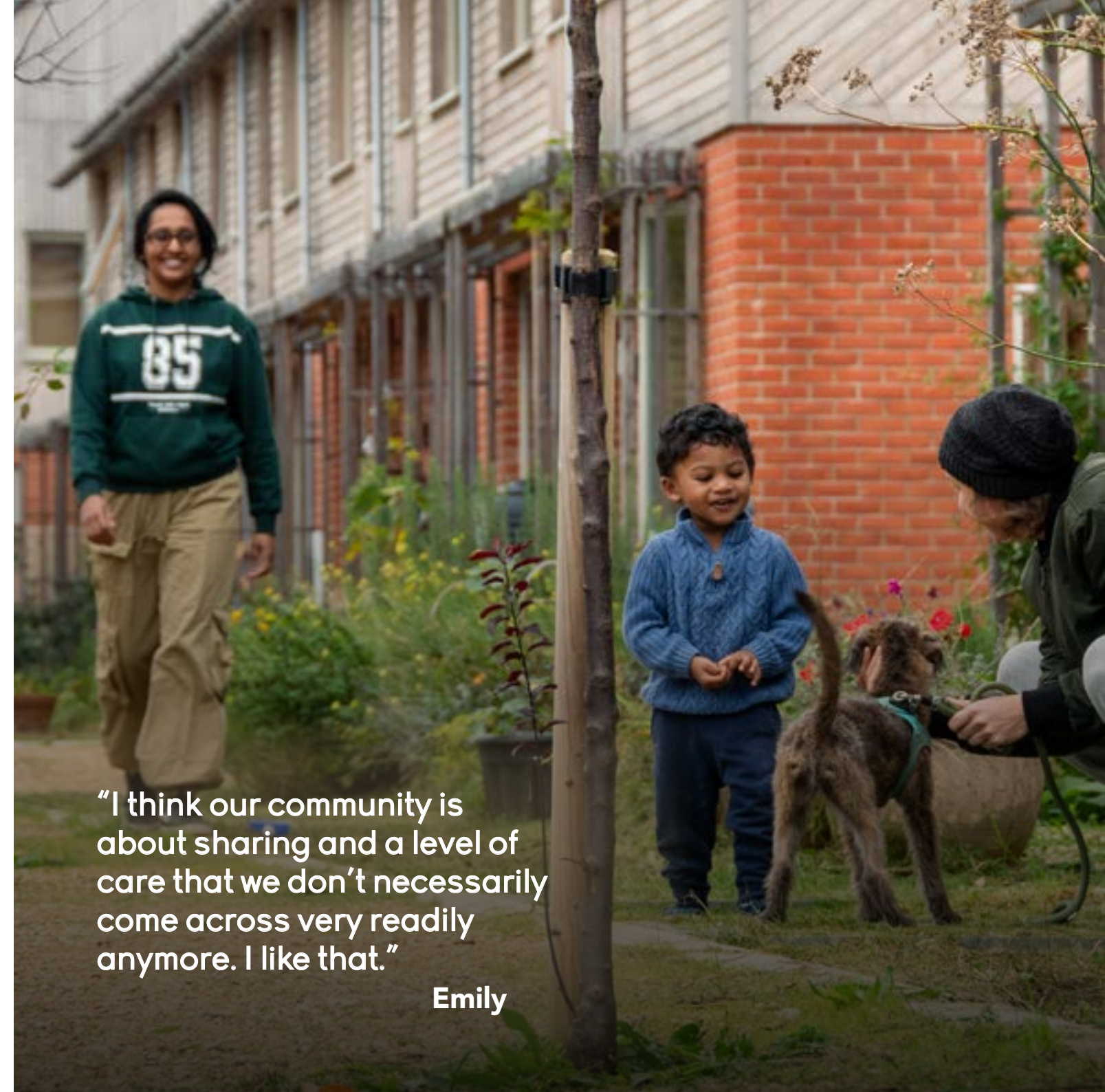
I joined because I wanted to be able to care for Herbie, and I knew that I would need support to do that, but it’s actually improved the quality of both of our lives. Even the layout of the house means that I can see my friends when they’re walking past. Or when Herbie is having a day where he doesn’t want to go anywhere or see anybody, I don’t have to be the same. I can sit on my bench and talk to people.

I never expected to get so much out of it. I absolutely love it. I have friends that I would never have met. I’ve been really inspired as to what my older age might look like. And I love the support. Herbie and I had Covid for three weeks, and I would come downstairs and there would be soup and medicine on the table, and somebody had set up a list of dog walkers. And that was amazing.



I think community is about sharing and a level of care that we don’t necessarily come across very readily anymore. I like that. I don’t have to be everybody’s best friend, but I do really enjoy the fact that I know everybody who lives here and I want to help and want to share what I have and contribute to the community. There’s a reciprocal arrangement.

**Most of the people that pioneered this project, including people like Charles Couzens and Barefoot Architects, they did it for more than themselves. I feel like that’s why it’s successful, because people really cared about it. And still do.”**



**“I think our community is about sharing and a level of care that we don’t necessarily come across very readily anymore. I like that.”**

**Emily**





**“Bridport Cohousing offered a sense of community and other people wanting some of the same things as me. It felt like there were shared values amongst us and that was important.”**

**Judith**

## judith

**“I was living out in the sticks in private rented accommodation. Old, damp, too big for me really, with my children gone. It was cold and hard to live in, and I realised that as I was getting older, I needed a different living situation. I needed something affordable. I’d never owned a house but I had some savings and so I thought this could be an opportunity.**

Cohousing was attractive because of its sense of governance, sense of shared responsibility, shared work. I really wanted to have more control and more say over where I lived and how I lived.

Bridport Cohousing offered a sense of community and other people wanting some of the same things as me. It felt like there were shared values amongst us and that was important.

One of the primary tenets of our governance here is that everybody’s voice matters. And there’s an opportunity for everybody to have a say. Not everybody wants a say, that’s fine, but the decision-making process is transparent. People know who makes the decisions and that the power is shared.

One of the ways I felt I had a significant impact was during the design stage. There is a principle, which was that you have the sink in the front of the house, in front of the window, so you can wave at people. I had always wanted a table in front of the window – so I brought up the idea of having the sink to the side and having a big window that you could sit at and look out, and nobody objected. So in this type of house, the sink isn’t in front of the window. For me, it’s just been absolutely brilliant, I have light and a view and I can see people as they walk by.

I feel like my life here is more balanced: between solitude and people, between town and country, between generations. There is time to do the things I want to do, because I don’t have to spend so much time looking after my house and creating warmth in my house because it’s so wonderful and it’s all here.

**Living here has made me more conscious of the richness of human connections, no matter how small or significant they are. A smile, a hello, you know, nurtures me, makes me feel warm inside.”**





## talent, natalie and denaishe



**"It makes me happy because everyone cares for everyone here. Hazelmead is a community to me.**

Because, you know, in Zimbabwe, we used to interact and play outside in the roads and communicate with everyone. So when I was introduced to this, Hazelmead, it became my community.

Most of the people in this country are so lonely. They have no one to talk to. They just have their animals, but they don't have anyone. So if they come and move in here, in this place, they can actually have someone to talk to.

They don't miss any parties here. Christmas parties. International Women's Day. Or anyone can just say in the group. "Can you come?" And we can have some tea and coffee or drink something together. Here they take you as you are. It is so multicultural.

They talk about bringing and sharing. So they will say to you, you can bring whatever you want to the party. In Zimbabwe, if you bring something it shows your togetherness, you know, it brings love, it brings everything together. You be together.

I call this place a new Zimbabwe, because to me it's a community. When I first came here, to the UK, I was living somewhere else. So, you know, I would miss some vegetables, some green vegetables – we call it Covo, like the green leaves which you cook. So here there are a lot of gardens at the back of the houses where the tomatoes are grown, and different types of vegetables.

For you to be given a house here, you have to attend some meetings. You must be living locally for the past two years. So that's when I did start coming to the cohousing meetings. I spoke to the accommodation officer at the hospital and they said they are going to give out six houses to the NHS. So because I was coming to the meetings, I was nominated as one of those people who would come and live here.

**I can see a bright future here for my kids. So I'm here to stay in this community. I love it here."**

**"So I hope there'll be more cohousing for people. For the old age, the young ones, a mixture of everyone. I think that would be great."**

**Talent**





# community ideal to ideal community

the architect's view

**Bridport is a small coastal town in the West Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The area is a popular tourist destination, but also a place for like-minded creative souls. The result of this is that house prices are particularly high, some 11 times local incomes, driven by second home ownership, rentals and tourism.**

The rural economy simply can't support local people and key roles, such as those of nurses and teachers struggle to be filled. In 2008 a group of local people came together to challenge this – determined to create housing that would be “more sustainable, more affordable, and more neighbourly”. In 2012 Bridport Cohousing Community Land Trust was formed as a Community Benefit Society. Led by a team of professional advisors who had undertaken similar projects, the search for both members and land began. Motivated by a range of needs and ideologies the group formed around an ambitious plan for social justice, personal empowerment and better housing.

**What the group lacked in development experience and capital, they made up for in tenacity and resilience as they faced the inevitable ups and downs of getting a building project off the ground.**



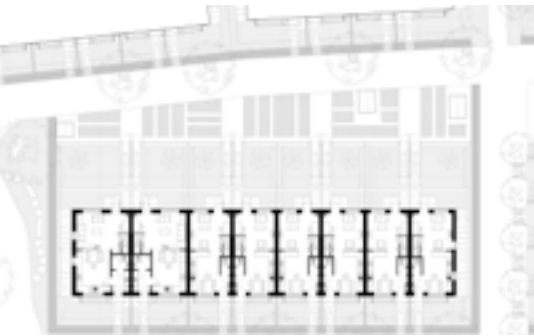
Bridport, Dorset



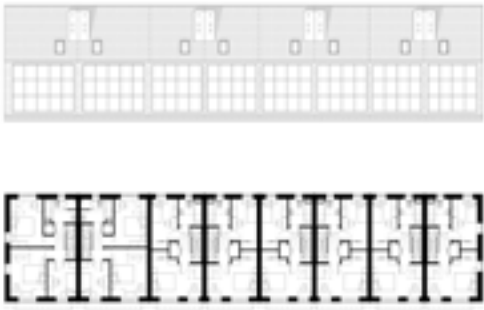
**Concept sketches** for the development focused on bringing the community together through car-free streets, allotments and benches in front gardens



**Sam Goss**, Director of Barefoot Architects, on site during construction



Ground floor plan



First floor plan

## A fresh start in 2014

When we began working with the group in 2014, they had achieved a lot, but also faced setbacks and challenges. They'd lost their original architect, and their housing association partner. However, with the assistance of Charles Couzens and Alan Heeks they had managed to secure grant funding to pay for professional services, and agreed a purchase option on land on the northwest edge of the town. The stars were aligning, and the process of re-designing the project began.

## Cohousing and codesign

Through a structured set of codesign workshops, we led the members along a journey to make a plan for the site and to design the homes together. Using simple models, large drawings and open discussions we developed our proposals over successive fortnightly workshops. It was an exciting part of the process – with real momentum. The residents found greater clarity in their vision, and confidence in how that could be realised through design and then at planning. The group's foundation of 'sociocracy' enabled a successful sharing of ideas and decisions – giving voice and time to all members.





“We believe passionately in designing *with*, and not just for communities. Working together to create places that are more than just houses.”

Sam Goss



## Codesign

Hazelmead was codesigned by Barefoot Architects together with the CLT steering group over the course of eight collaborative workshops. We started by talking about the overall vision, before looking more closely at the context, the masterplan, house and flat types and layouts and materials. Together, we presented the scheme for public consultation, and finally explored the landscape spaces.

At the end of this iterative design process, we drew all the information together for review by the group, before submitting the first of the planning applications for Hazelmead.



A celebratory summer get together on the field

The design followed some core cohousing principles: Car-free streets, with parking on the perimeter of the site, a balance of privacy and communality, with spaces intentionally designed to support social interactions, and a common house at the heart of the development. Managed and maintained by residents, this approach would give the group agency and ownership over the design.

Many of the ideas of cohousing are unconventional in the UK and we were met with both fierce opposition and popular support. The Local Planning Authority for example were resistant to the idea. Building in the AONB was a non-starter, in spite of local political support. Led by local people, the resident group engaged carefully at every level with local stakeholders – including Parish, Town and District Councils. When the project came to the planning committee with a recommendation for refusal, the foundations of political support had been laid. The planning committee’s decision was unanimously in favour, citing the scheme as “the future of affordable, sustainable housing”. It felt like vindication.

Having overcome one hurdle, the next was to purchase the land. To do so the group needed to raise over £400,000 for the two parcels of land. The first parcel was funded through a loan offer to the Bridport Cohousing members, their friends, families and supporters, with no guarantee of being paid back. Yet, within less than a month, it was achieved! This extraordinary group of people had become landowners!

Finding development finance to pay for the construction of the project would become the next challenge – requiring partnerships, further permissions, and more homes. Over the course of the next three years, complex legal and financial partnerships were sought between key players. The affordable housing team at Dorset Council were instrumental in this, recognising the social value the project would have. Homes England too offered significant grant funding to pay for affordable homes – on the basis that the rental homes would be at a ‘social rent’.

### imperfect partnerships

Despite them being landowners and a CLT, who on earth would lend £10 million to a group of local people trying to build themselves homes? Alternative lenders like Triodos, and the Ecology Bank considered it, but wouldn’t follow through.



Lending requires collateral, and so a Housing Association partner was required. Eventually, the mission aligned, Bournemouth Churches Housing Association came on board with Bridport Cohousing.

With land, planning and finance secured, the project appeared set to proceed. However, to access the land it was necessary to negotiate an entrance through the driveway of the community hospital next door. The NHS Trust were supportive of the principles of the scheme, but their lawyers less so. Seeing the project as an opportunity for capital rather than social value, they started protracted negotiations. Finally, a proposal to ring fence six of the homes as genuinely affordable houses, dedicated to nurses at the hospital, was a win-win arrangement, alongside the provision of 30 car parking spaces for hospital staff.

A building contract was signed with local contractor CG Fry at the end of 2019 and construction finally progressed. Our own design team worked tirelessly from home through the pandemic to develop the details and oversee the work on site. Made from prefabricated timber-framed cassettes, a shortage of timber and labour caused delays, but one by one the terraced houses came into being. Their brick bases ground them in the earth of a former clay pit, and larch cladding softens them in the verdant surroundings of Allington Hill.

**held to higher standards**

It was always the case that the residents had high aspirations for their homes – higher ceilings, bigger windows, better acoustics and lower energy bills. Their vision means that the homes belie their affordability. Huge south facing windows capture the sun and surrounding views, vaulted stairwells give a sense of spaciousness – making the homes ‘light and airy’. People can play the piano, or even drums, knowing that their neighbours can’t hear them! These qualities all make the homes truly liveable, a joy to inhabit, and enable the community to thrive.

“The beauty of these architect-designed houses, apart from the energy consumption, is they’re so generous. They’re spacious, hugely well lit and beautifully thought out.”

H



**The residents specified** Scottish Building Standards for soundproofing, so there is no noise transfer between homes.



**The rooftop solar panels** supply energy to the community microgrid



**Housing designed by and for** the community

**power to the people**

Covered in a vast array of photovoltaic panels, the entire south facing roofscape is designed to capture solar energy via a ‘community microgrid’. The panels are owned by the homeowners and those owners have given rights to Hazelmead Community Energy to use the energy generated. Huge on-site battery storage creates capacity to trade electricity to the National Grid, enabling it to be supplied to homes at less than market value – helping to eradicate fuel poverty.

The houses are built to AECB building standards – a kind of ‘Passivhaus lite’ approach. Having monitored the entire project for over a year in use, the total energy consumed for all purposes is being met annually by the electricity generated across the roofs. Electric radiators, Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) for hot water, and Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) systems, and all domestic power (lighting and appliances) are powered by the energy generated or stored on site, by infrastructure owned by Hazelmead Community Energy – a small, not for profit company. This is truly power to the people.

**a place to grow**

So after 16 years of extraordinary dedication, passion and perseverance, Hazelmead is complete. It is hard to overestimate the amount of work that has gone into this development by so many people. But at its heart is the community of individuals who decided to make a stand within their own town to create a place to grow and thrive in an intentional neighbourhood. It is a place where people know, look out for, and support each other. It is a place of birdsong and bicycles, vegetables and visitors – where children play safely outside the homes whilst adults grow food on their doorsteps.

Hazelmead has exceeded the group’s intentions, and created a place in which people can truly thrive. It has transformed the way its residents live together, and more than anything, it feels like a place of hope. I’m proud of our part in making their vision a reality.

**Projects like Hazelmead address multiple crises of our time. It’s a project that takes different values and creates a multi-cultural, multi-generational community where people and nature are thriving. The question is, why aren’t more developments like this? Here we have demonstrated real solutions to problems widely recognised nationwide. Isn’t it time we saw cohousing developments like Hazelmead in every village, town and city in the UK – designed by people, for people?**

**Sam Goss, Founding Director,** Barefoot Architects



“What attracts me to living in cohousing is the community. Having people around, being part of friendships, sharing and making decisions together. Living every part of your life with more than just your family.”

Karen







“We have these absolutely huge windows with this beautiful view of the wildflower meadow and trees behind at the back. So even if I’m stuck in bed, that’s the view I’ve got. And it is completely health giving and joy giving.”  
Karen



Sam and Rob from Barefoot Architects collect the Pineapple Award for healthy homes

## award winning healthy homes

A home should be a haven. More than just protection from the elements, it should have a positive impact on its residents: mentally, physically and socially. Hazelmead recently won the inaugural Pineapple Award for healthy homes and the judges said this:

“A trailblazing example of large-scale cohousing, demonstrating determination and community-led ambition at an unprecedented scale.

The scheme successfully balances privacy and sociability, with safe communal streets, shared green spaces, and common facilities that foster a strong sense of neighbourhood. The project’s design actively supports a different era of living, where play, trust, and connection flourish – evidenced by children safely roaming and bikes left unlocked. The project’s commitment to affordability in perpetuity, achieved through crowdfunding and a community land trust model, ensures that Hazelmead remains a sustainable, long-term asset for residents. Its microgrid energy system and passive design features offer not just sustainability but also thermal comfort and resilience, setting a strong precedent for future developments.

The judges felt that Hazelmead’s approach to collaborative living, environmental sustainability, and long-term affordability is a model to learn from going forward.”

The Healthy Homes award recognises homes that promote the health of residents, and are judged according to the twelve principles of healthy homes from the Town and Country Planning Association:

• Fire safety	• Climate resilient
• Liveable space	• Limit light and noise pollution
• Inclusive, accessible and adaptable	• Affordable and secure homes
• Access to natural light	• Thermal comfort
• Reduction in carbon emissions	• Prevent air pollution
• Safety from crime	• Access to amenities, nature and transport



# it takes a village

**The story of creating this growing community has taken over a decade and has touched the lives of a huge number of people.**

A big thank you to

**the CLT and the residents**

Thank you to those that were highly influential in getting this project off the ground, those that stuck with it, and those that are making it work now.

Particular thanks to Stephanie Rogers and Paul Derrien at Dorset Council, for speaking up and championing the project throughout.

**the consultant team**

Alan Heeks, Charles Couzens, Cepro, Delta Q, IMA, Welling Partnership, LT Studio, Land Products, Aileen Shackel Landscape Design, Common Practice.

**the crowdfunders**

All those who contributed what they could to the loan offer, and encouraged others to do the same. Thank you.

**the Barefoot team**

Sam Goss, Rob Hankey, Jess Haigh, Martina Goluchova, Maria Krupa.

Photos by kind permission from Bridport Cohousing and Rebecca Noakes. Bridport streetscene CC via geograph.co.uk.

Barefoot Architects are an RIBA Chartered Practice with offices in Bristol and Devon. We fundamentally believe that a safe, secure, sustainable and affordable home is one of the most important issues facing our generation in the UK. We have established a reputation for undertaking innovative affordable housing projects across the South West on challenging sites. We work with a range of client groups on projects that truly make a difference.

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