TIMELINE

Pre-2011 – people at Transition Town Totnes’ Building & Housing group meetings decide to explore building affordable sustainable housing, in response to frustrations about conventional development. First community consultation held.

2011 – Transition Homes becomes a CLT and is incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee. Meanwhile the CLT is exploring potential development sites, including ‘Pondfields’ which is owned by Dartington Hall Trust.

2012 – Negotiations with DHT fall through. A local farmer puts the field now known as Clay Park on the market.

2013 – The CLT raises £250,000 in local loans to buy Clay Park, purchases it in April, and starts developing plans for 25 homes. We plant an oak tree in celebration, which is later destroyed by escaped calves from the neighbouring field. A bad omen?

2014 - Community Led Project Support Grant from DCLG provides pre-development funding to develop the planning application and employ a part-time coordinator. Nicola joins the team in April. The Rural Community Energy Fund grant enables us to work with Totnes based Argand Solutions to look into renewable energy options.

2015 – Transition Homes becomes a Registered Charity. We host a National CLT Network event for other CLTs. Receive Community Building & Housing grant from Locality for pre-development costs. SHDC agrees £190,000 of grant funding. The Environment Agency agrees to compost toilets, but not a greywater treatment system. Full planning application (2927/15/FUL) is submitted in December

2016 – In planning limbo, waiting on a decision. We win a grant from the Big Potential to work with Triodos Corporate Finance to get ‘investment ready’ and secure funding for Clay Park. As we submitted an outline application for the community building, we consult the community and start developing detailed plans for the hub. Dartington Hall Trust invites us to join the steering group for the proposed self-build Plantation site. Ultimately DHT progresses the scheme independently.

2017 – with funding from the Postcode Local Trust we run a year long programme of workshops on hedge-laying, restoring and building traditional stone-faced Devon hedge bank, and foraging, and hold a Community Day on site. We take part in Transition Town Totnes’ 10th birthday celebrations. Our new membership scheme attracts 80 local members. Planning is granted in February subject to the S106, but it takes until December to complete this – we receive full planning permission just before Christmas, after two years. Ruth & Tom join us as Trustees.

2018 – With a detailed financial model and investment advice, we realise we can’t borrow enough to fund the scheme. We submit bids to Homes England for a £454,000 grant for the shared ownership units (SOAHP 16-21 programme) and with SHDC to the new Community Housing Fund for £300,000 for infrastructure. Decisions are a long time coming, but both are successful. SHDC agrees a further £108,000 for the scheme. With the remaining PLT funding we build a boardwalk across the boggy south entrance to the site and plant an orchard. We’re busy with our architect and engineers completing technical design for Clay Park, in order to tender the build. In April, we choose a contractor, but due to our funder’s modifications to the standard building contract, we spend 6 months negotiating terms. We recruit a part-time administrator to work alongside Nicola initially 1 day/week. Full planning permission for the community building is submitted to SHDC. We also submit an application to convert 2 x 4 bed rental homes into 2 x 1 bed and 4 x studio flats, for adults with learning disabilities and young people, working with Young Devon and United Response.

2019 – in January, our contractor withdraws from the scheme. Facing a further delay, we re-tender, and appoint a new contractor in May. Jim and Gavin join us as Trustees. Permission is granted for the community building. Loans are agreed with Triodos Bank, CAF Venturesome and Social & Sustainable Capital, nearly £4m in total, to build Clay Park. Devon County Council Highways grants technical approval for the highways, and S38 and S278 agreements are drawn up. Our contractor costs the scheme, which comes in over budget – as expected, but by much more than expected. Value engineering follows, and we lose some of the elements such as the straw bale, composting toilets, and community building, that felt integral to what we were trying to do. We cut as much as possible and still face a >£600k deficit but the team rallies to try and find solutions. Conversations with our funders – Triodos, CAF, SASC and Homes England – are positive, and they remain committed to the project.

2020 – Moving into the future, we plan to submit a new application for additional market housing, to generate more income to cover the shortfall. We’re also starting an application to become a Registered Provider and apply for grant funding for the rental units. Both processes will take most of this year, and currently put us on site in spring 2021. We need to raise funding for core costs and further pre-development costs associated with the new planning application, and fundraise for the community building.