

Common questions

Why can't we borrow more money? We are already borrowing the maximum.

Isn't there more grant funding available? We have applied to all the major grant funds and have already received over £1m in grant for Clay Park.

Why not build more market houses and keep the compost toilets, community building, and straw bales? To generate enough profit to cover the overspend, we'd have to build more houses than would be appropriate at this site. The build cost was also so high that funders, our contractor, and the council believed costs needed to be reduced.

Why not have less affordable housing and more market housing? We exist primarily to provide affordable housing, and therefore our aim is to protect the number of affordable homes.

Why not built them out of concrete blocks and cheaper materials? Our other main aim is to build housing with a low environmental footprint. We therefore have lines we won't cross regarding the materials we will use.

Why was the scheme so over-budget? There are lots of factors, including but not limited to:

- Inflation due to delays had increased costs over what we could afford to borrow (for example, the delay in planning added over £400,000) so we expected, going into the tendering process, that value engineering of around £500,000 would be required.
- We asked our contractor to cost the best eco-specification items/materials, knowing that we wouldn't be able to afford them all and would pick and choose based on cost/benefit.
- Infrastructure costs have come in higher than estimated: this is the single biggest category of 'overspend' at £340,000. These costs are extremely hard to reduce, as they are mainly determined by outside parties e.g. South West Water and Devon County Council Highways. As we aren't developing the whole site we aren't getting the same economy of scale as a larger development.
- A lack of expertise generally in the industry about building eco-homes on a large scale meant that some items were difficult to estimate; some items e.g. lime rendering are expensive because they are specialist skills, and there aren't many builders with the necessary expertise e.g. of straw bale building, or many suppliers of e.g. compost toilets, to make them competitively priced.