

# **NO COLIVING- YES COHOUSING**

**GREEN PARTY/ CO AONTAS GLAS**

**JUNE 2019**

## **CONTENTS**

- 1. INTRODUCTION**
- 2. COHOUSING ACROSS EUROPE**
- 3. THE COST OF THE DEVELOPER LED PROCESS**
- 4. COHOUSING IN IRELAND**
- 5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Cohousing is the provision of individual housing units through a cooperative model of finance, development, construction and maintenance. The cohousing model is currently widely employed across the European Union as an affordable, ethical and sustainable way for communities to provide housing for themselves and one that largely sidesteps the developer and profit led model that is the prevailing standard in Ireland. Cohousing neighbourhoods can be cooperatively owned or owner occupied dwellings and often have a clear focus on sustainable and fair land use, quality building standards and shared community resources.

The Green Party proposes that cohousing be actively promoted by the government as a progressive form of house building and as one that is more likely to produce climate responsible, adequately serviced communities that offer a high standard of living to home owners. It is part of a raft of solutions that could alleviate the deepening housing crisis in Ireland, particularly for vulnerable groups that struggle to find suitable housing. Instead of pushing the inhumane and profit driven model of Co-Living it is time to embrace the opportunities of Co-Housing.

### **2. COHOUSING ACROSS EUROPE**

Cohousing in Europe can take a number of forms and does not conform to a specific design or building typology- most projects comprise a series of private homes clustered around a shared exterior space. In many cases communities decide to include some shared, enclosed accommodation such as a community room or a recycling centre. The outdoor space is typically planned to include green space, rest areas and child friendly design. The idea of cohousing has its origins in some of the more radical and progressive social movements of the 1960s and while its first iterations were rural or subrural later generations have seen this housing model operate successfully in urban and metropolitan sites<sup>1</sup>. Communities are instigated, designed and

---

<sup>1</sup> Meltzer, G. (2005) *Sustainable Community: Learning from the Cohousing Model* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Press).

maintained by a co housing cooperative or homeowners association<sup>2</sup>. Such projects have been in successful operation in Denmark, Sweden, Germany and the United Kingdom from the 1970s to the present day.

Communities can consist of anything from ten to upwards of two hundred private stakeholders who input to the development and design of their homes and neighbourhoods at every step. Possibly the longest purveyors of the cohousing model are pioneers in Denmark where this type of housing has been in existence for five decades. Co housing is more than an alternative to traditional methods of procurement and construction in the provision of privately funded housing- the inclusion of community and shared facilities requires a level of 'social architecture' that can offer a number of opportunities to participants<sup>3</sup>. For Danish groups this has taken the form of 'feminist' communities, senior and intergenerational housing or collective building that focuses on food production and self sufficiency. The cohousing model allows for a cooperative, owner-occupier or rental mode of tenure and indeed, there are successful models for all three options already in operation across Europe. However it is also notable that, where cohousing is a recognised form of housing provision, the owner-occupier version of cohousing has steadily increased in the last two decades.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. THE COST OF THE DEVELOPER LED PROCESS IN IRELAND**

Ireland is currently experiencing the worst housing crisis in the history of the state and its exposure to this crisis is now evident in several ways: the number of mortgages in distress, long waiting lists for housing, rising homelessness, and rapidly rising rents, particularly in Dublin. The Green Party believes that we need to solve this crisis in a sustainable manner that will end the cyclical boom-bust dynamic that unfortunately seems to be integral to housing in Ireland. The dependence of this government on the developer led model of housing provision in Ireland has failed to produce a high quality, affordable housing stock to the nation. Beyond this failure it is now the case that pressure on the department of housing has led to a collapse in building design standards and the proposal of unsuitable and problematic housing typologies such as the 'co-living' model that, while profitable for the private developer, offers little in the way of long term sustainable housing.

The current profit driven process has also failed to provide communities with high standards of social and shared resources. Homes should be constructed as inextricable elements of a

---

2 Larsen, H. G. & Lund Hansen, A. (2015) Commodifying Danish housing commons. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 97(3), pp. 263–274

3 Jarvis, H. (2011) Saving space, sharing time: integrated infrastructures of daily life in cohousing. *Environment and Planning A*, 43(3), pp. 560–577.

4 Jakobsen, P. & Larsen, H. G. (2018) An alternative for whom? The evolution and socio-economy of Danish cohousing. *Urban Research & Practice*, doi: 10.1080/17535069.2018.1465582

neighbourhood, not as stand alone blocks in a city or suburban scape. A core vision of the Green Party is the development of communities where families work, shop, socialize and attend school without having to commute long distances. To achieve such a vision we need to utilize land very efficiently, particularly in urban settings. Cohousing could form one part of the solution during a crisis that demands widespread and systemic change in our building and housing sector.

#### **4. CoHousing in Ireland**

##### **Opportunities for Specific Groups**

We know from other countries that, once established, those cohousing groups that have made it through the preliminary stage of planning, design and construction and have occupied their homes, rarely fall back into traditional modes of living. Co housing has proved remarkably successful in creating long term communities with strong social bonds and cohesion. This makes it a particularly attractive model of housing provision for groups who may be otherwise under provided for by our current developer and profit led systems. In particular this mode of housing could be an opportunity for marginal groups to achieve an alternative and affordable access to homes that suit their needs and that could provide sustainable security of tenure and improve their quality of life.

As a case in point this paper considers the current failure of government to provide appropriate and affordable housing for the 13% of Irish residents living with disabilities in the state. The Green Party believes that every resident in the state of Ireland has a right to decent and affordable housing. We also recognise that, as with many other spheres of our society, the provision of housing to those living with disability is currently underfunded, ill managed and insufficiently planned into the future to fulfil existing needs. We believe that access to housing is a primary route towards integration into communities and failure in this area is amongst the most serious ways in which we do not adequately provide for persons with disabilities and their families. We are also very aware that over 1000 people with disabilities under the age of 65 are living inappropriately in nursing homes for older people.

Choice should be at the centre of housing policy for persons living with disabilities. Following a periodic review of the Irish Government by the UN Committee in Geneva in 2002, the Department of Health established a policy initiative in relation to people living in institutions, and adopted a programme to transfer people with an intellectual disability or autism from psychiatric hospitals and other inappropriate settings such as de-designated units and other large HSE residential centres. However, nearly ten years later, the 2011 Report on Congregated Settings found that over the period 1999-2008, reported admissions to congregated settings (692), had exceeded the number transferred to the community.<sup>5</sup> Currently 4,000 people still live in congregated settings<sup>6</sup>

---

5 Inclusion Ireland's submission on Report on Disability Review, pg 3

New models of housing construction, and crucially community creation, could offer a highly effective choice to families who require high quality and specific housing types. The involvement of owner occupiers in the decision making process, from group formation through land use and onwards, could be tailored to support different social, ethnic and marginalised groups.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Available Ethical Lending Instruments**

The servicing of a healthy private housing sector, is both a social good and a long term economic investment in the state. In conjunction with the vital work of social and affordable housing provision it is nation building of the most important kind. The most pressing challenge in this area is to broaden the ability of cooperative groups, and the Local Authorities they will work in conjunction with, to access appropriate financial instruments from a number of sources as is the case in a number of other European countries. As part of our housing strategy we propose to allow Credit Unions to invest in cohousing projects where their surplus funds are currently invested in overseas financing and to seek further European Investment Bank funding for alternative housing procurement methods in Ireland. We propose that the Central Bank of Ireland undertake a review of available cohousing financing with a view to supporting its implementation. The provision of stable and transparent State guaranteed investment mechanisms to new models of affordable housing construction such as co housing must be focused on innovative, socially and environmentally sustainable projects.

### **5.2 Supportive Legislative Framework**

Cohousing is not something the Irish construction sector is familiar with and much work is required to ensure projects are delivered in a timely and fiscally responsible way. As one of our core and most longstanding principles the Green Party believes in decision making led by stakeholders at the lowest possible level, that empowers communities and local regions to envision a future that is tailored to their own specific needs. The Green Party supports the development of a community land trust in Ireland and would advocate for the promotion of them legislatively and financially. A community land trust is a non-profit legal entity that holds land in perpetuity in stewardship for the common good and could be utilised with great effect to progress cohousing projects. In terms of housing, the community land trust model in other countries has mostly been used to promote a model of affordable homeownership. We support the implementation of Community Land Trusts and MHOS models in Irish legislation in order to manage and develop land to the benefit of local communities and implement a method of housing provision that is affordable, available and managed by communities themselves.

### 5.3 Preferred Planning Consideration

As the housing crisis deepens in our country not only are people struggling to afford rent but communities are struggling to maintain a cohesive identity as the rising costs of living see urban dwellers pushed further and further away from families and community bonds. Gentrification in urban areas ultimately damages the city as a whole as service workers and locally owned and run businesses are forced out into suburban areas. Cohousing could be one avenue through which local authorities could preferentially support local populations to stay in areas that are becoming increasingly unaffordable to those on all but the highest of incomes. We propose that the relevant local and national government stakeholders should make available a Knowledge Transfer Hub for those for whom cohousing is a viable option. The introduction of the cohousing model in Ireland may require updated legislative and planning guidelines. We propose that a review be undertaken to amend the Ground Rent Act to empower approved bodies and community trusts to create ground rents over private entities. We also propose that local authorities undertake a mapping process whereby brownfield and post industrial sites can be earmarked as particularly suitable for

c  
o  
h  
o  
u  
s  
i  
n  
g  
  
p  
r  
o  
j  
e  
c  
t