

2015

A new tradition of neighbourly living

# Cohousing

Clusters of homes with shared resources



**UK Cohousing**  
NETWORK

[www.cohousing.org.uk](http://www.cohousing.org.uk)

 @ukcohousing

 UK Cohousing Network

# What is cohousing?

**Cohousing is all about community and people. It is that simple; a set of streets or a cul-de-sac where residents know each other well and are signed up to be part of a community. Residents have private homes complete with all the regular stuff – kitchen, bathroom, living and sleeping space – yet they also have use of great shared facilities such as a common house, gardens, car pools and micro renewable energy schemes.**

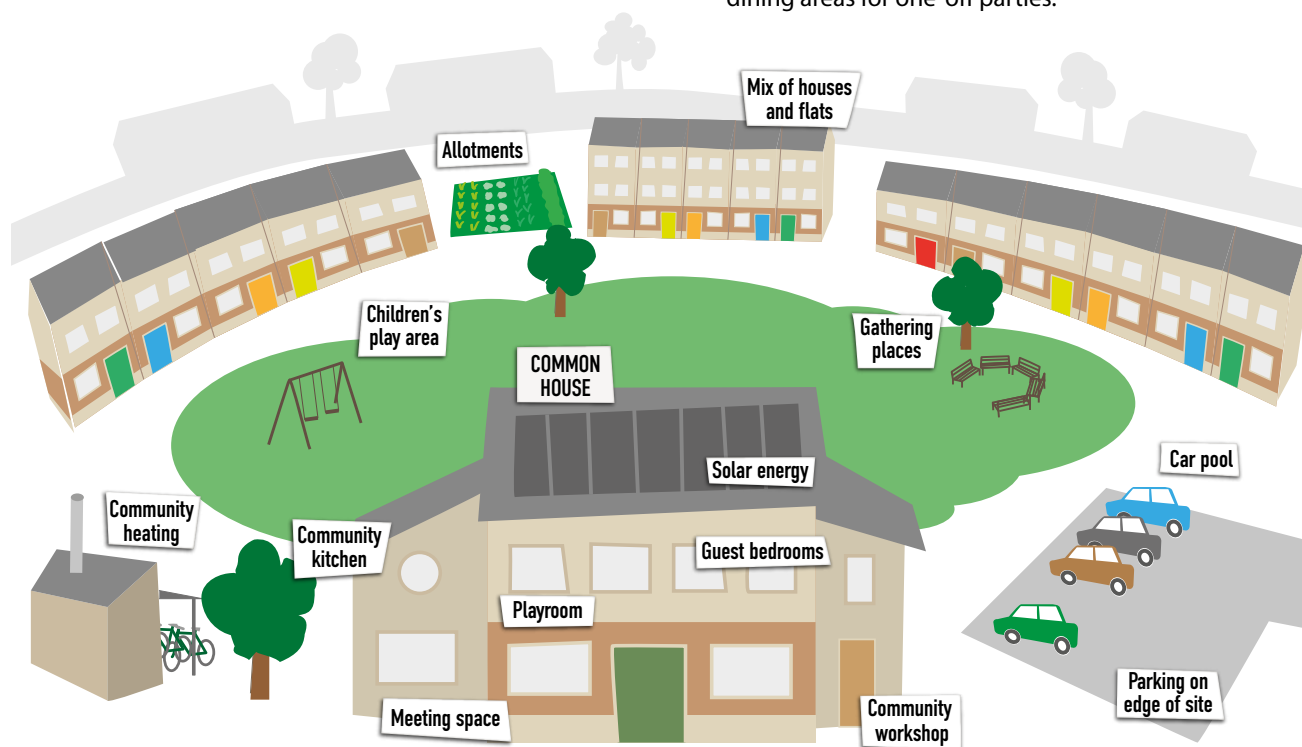
## Who is it for?

Cohousing is for anyone who thinks it would work for them. You can rent or own a home in cohousing. The essential value people need to have is a desire for community.

## How is a cohousing community organised?

The community takes decisions on how to run shared resources as a group. Each community varies in the time commitment residents volunteer. Your commitment might be two or four hours a week and you could be involved in a working group, garden duties or cooking a meal for the community. Sharing some of these chores can make everyday tasks easier, more fun and when others are cooking, cleaning and doing maintenance it gives you free time to do other things.

What would your cohousing community look like?



## Common house

Common houses are in a prominent position where residents will have cause to pass by and can pop in to collect post, check on laundry and so on. Most common houses have a kitchen and dining room large enough to cater for the whole community. Other features can include guest rooms, laundries, activity rooms and playrooms. It would depend on what your community likes to do – and, of course, what is affordable!

## The housing

You can build from the ground up, design around existing unused buildings or make a start by talking to your neighbours, taking down fences and cooking and eating together. Homes can be detached, attached, flats – it is really flexible. Homes can be smaller as you have use of the common house with guest bedrooms, work space and playroom; you don't need space for occasional visitors, or large dining areas for one-off parties.

## Sharing

This is both the hard part ... and the exciting bit. We are so accustomed to having our own cars, washing machines and a range of gadgets that we use rarely. A power drill gets used for just 13 minutes on average during its lifetime. Cohousing is a great way to share with neighbours, purchase collectively and reduce your environment footprint whilst making savings.

## Cohousing and older people

The neighbourly relationships of cohousing are particularly important to older people. Becoming part of a community, whether inter-generational or a similar age-range, offers continued active involvement in daily life and a mutually supportive environment. Senior cohousing initiatives are on the increase in the UK.

## Cohousing design

Design plays an important role in cohousing communities – for example, using buildings and landscaping to create meeting places and safe spaces to play, away from vehicles. Homes are orientated to provide privacy by positioning living areas and bedrooms to the rear of the property, and kitchens and work areas to the front. Cars are parked on the periphery of the community.

## What type of legal structures?

Most cohousing communities register as one of these:

- Company Limited by Guarantee
- Industrial & Provident Society.

It is also possible to be a Community Interest Company.

# Living in community



**Kathy from Lancaster Cohousing:** *Life with Polly, 5, and Isla, 3, when my partner works away a lot is more fun and easier in cohousing. We enjoy healthy meals everyday yet I only cook once a fortnight. We socialise everyday with other children and adults without my having to organise playdates, pack a bag or tidy the house. Polly can visit her friends down the pedestrian street, and Isla has a safe space to ride her bike and scooter. When the girls fall asleep I don't need a babysitter, or to travel to enjoy a quick glass of wine with friends.*



**Maureen from Chapeltown Cohousing:** *I've spent most of my life here in Chapeltown and I love this place. It's home for five generations of my family. I think cohousing is going to be a great way to keep communication alive across the generations to the benefit of all of us, young and old. And I really like the idea of extending mutual support out into the surrounding neighbourhood. For us, cohousing offers a way of embracing the differences and bringing people together to build a strong, supportive community that's rich in diversity.*



**Joe from Lilac in Leeds:** *I wanted to live in an eco house but didn't have the money, skills or tenacity to do a Grand Designs-style self-build on my own. When I heard about Lilac I saw it as a way to achieve my dream and to make some new friends in the process. I now live in an ecohome which reflects my green values and gives me freedom in terms of my income needs and livelihood choices. What I didn't expect was how great it feels to live in a supportive community who all pull together in difficult times, and how living in a community would promote self-development and personal growth.*

## History of cohousing

The first residents moved into a purpose built cohousing community, Sættedammen in Denmark, in the late 1960s. A group of fifty families were inspired by an article, 'Children should have one hundred parents' by Bodil Graae, to build a different type of neighbourhood from the mainstream.

In 2015 there are 20 established cohousing communities in the UK and over 70 in development. There are hundreds across Denmark and the Netherlands and 130 in the United States. Many more are in development around the world.



Members of Sættedammen, near Copenhagen, celebrate the first 40 years!

# Some benefits of cohousing

## Cohousing is a sustainable and affordable approach to living in community

### Affordable

Smaller, energy efficient homes cost less to build and run. Communities organise opportunities to reduce daily living costs through shared laundries, community meals and bulk food purchasing.



### Safe, welcoming neighbourhoods for children to play

Cohousing design code encourages shared pedestrianised walkways and car-free central shared gardens. People know each other really well and hopefully there will be play friends in the community.



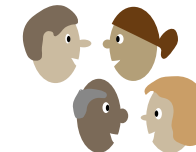
### Sustainable

Community laundries, car clubs and larders cut waste and costs. Sharing equipment such as tools, lawnmowers and play facilities between households saves money and makes better use of them.



### Social

Loneliness is a growing problem in the UK. In cohousing communities residents often meet up to eat together, chat, organise and have fun. Gardens and shared spaces are situated to encourage interaction between residents and the host community.



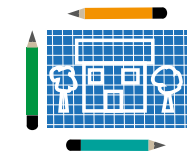
### Working together can achieve a better quality of life

More hands make light work! The care and connections that are fostered in collaborative communities lead to a wide range of possibilities. For example, residents report avoiding prolonged hospital stays, having fun community events and spending less time on maintenance.



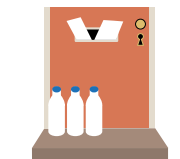
### Independent community management

The community decides together how things are organised; there is no external management committee. It starts from the beginning when future residents have an active say in the design of the community. This also creates a sense of place and ownership of issues and solutions.



### Security

In a cohousing community people do not keep a check on each other's whereabouts, but will instinctively know if something is out of the ordinary.



# The route to cohousing

Every cohousing journey is unique. You can join an existing community or start cohousing where you live, but if you are starting from scratch, use this routemap as a guide to the key steps.

## Cohousing sounds like a good idea!



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### How can I find out more?

- Go to [www.cohousing.org.uk](http://www.cohousing.org.uk)
- Join the Facebook group
- Attend a cohousing event or Cohousing Network webinar



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### Find a cohousing group near you

- Look up 'groups' page on our website
- Visit an existing community

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### Start a new cohousing group

- Host a meeting, advertise locally
- See **how to start** on our website
- Post a shout on our website



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### Build membership

- Agree membership offer
- Make communications plan
- Hold regular open meetings
- Set up a website or a page on the Cohousing Network website



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### Identify the group's site/property criteria

- Type of location
- Existing property or new build
- Size and requirements
- Important features
- If group doesn't agree, revisit step 3



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### What is the core groups' vision?

- Draw and/or write down a community vision
- How do you imagine living?
- Where do you want to live, and why?
- What do you want to build?
- Get training in group decision-making
- Join the Cohousing Network



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### Seeking to provide 'affordable' housing?

- Research Homes and Communities Agency 'Community Led Housing'
- Discuss working with a housing association or local authority



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### Time to get serious

- Create membership categories of full members, who make decisions and contribute funds and/or time, and supporters
- Decide organisation legal structure
- Establish working groups to share tasks
- Keep an eye on your community vision
- Ensure full members can stay the course – invest in fun!

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### Site/property search

- See land and property top tips on our website
- Talk to the local authority
- Contact neighbourhood planning group
- Establish relationships with estate agents, housing associations and land agents



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### Consolidation stage

- Reinvigorate call for new members
- Draft outline community policies
- Fundraise
- Refine business plan
- Check available sites against criteria
- Start talking to capital lenders
- Remember to get to know each other and have fun!

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### Closing the deal on the site or property

- Check out planning permission context
- Do a feasibility study
- Negotiate an 'option to purchase' to hold the site until planning is obtained (if needed)

Things are getting serious. Check core members are on board. Do not avoid difficult decisions. It will be easier to go back to stage 9 or even stage 4 now than when you start to spend bigger sums of money in the next stages.



Move in and start living in community – now the real work starts...



### Assess financial capability

- What can you can afford?
- Start a business project plan
- See Cohousing Network website for resources for members on finance and funding

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### Do not pass this point unless...

- You have a business plan
- The project is viable
- You have proof of equity, cash, deposits and commitments
- Group agrees on final design



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### Group agrees design criteria

- Choose a build method
- Develop briefs for professional services (consult Cohousing Network professional services directory)
- Continue recruiting and integrating new members
- Agree policy with your local authority and/or housing provider for the allocation of the affordable homes.



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### Go for it

- Close the deal
- Confirm construction (or refurbishment) method and contract
- Draw down and/or sign up confirmed investment

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### Start construction

- Huge celebration!
- For the next stages see the **cohousing toolkit** on our website for guidance



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# Designing for community

## Deciding what you want in the common house

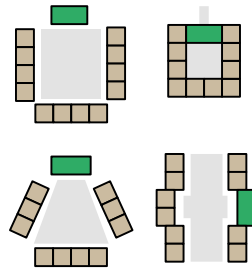
The common house is a building designed for use by the whole cohousing community. There is not a prescriptive design layout. The only fundamental criteria are a dining room and kitchen large enough to accommodate cooking and eating for large groups. Other rooms and uses can include; guest rooms, workspace, children's play rooms, music rooms and libraries, workshops, postboxes, laundries, larders, art, craft and spiritual rooms. The common house should feel like an extension of your home; warm, inviting and intimate.

## Designing together

Cohousing communities are designed by residents from the start to make best use of the site dimensions to suit the needs of residents and to incorporate features that will nurture community and a sense of place. There are different design guides to help the community with this task. With everyone together, start with a large sheet of paper and pens, and have a go!

## Thinking about different styles of layout

The communities that either develop cohousing in and around existing property, or select a site with very defined dimensions do not have the luxury of working with a blank canvas and lots of space. Sometimes this can be a blessing! The centralised location of the common house is paramount, after that there are variable options available like terraced rows and circles. Typical site plan layouts include; pedestrianised streets, one large converted building into smaller units and courtyards.



Some possible layouts of homes and common house

## Defining private and shared spaces

Cohousing is designed to achieve the optimal balance between community and privacy. Landscaping and porches can help create a buffer zone between private space and the public realm. Creating nooks for people to gather and talk in shared gardens and spaces, alongside the introduction of different materials to demarcate different uses. There is no need for six-foot-high fences!

## Elders designing cohousing for themselves

Cohousing is a viable alternative to the mainstream provision of sheltered housing and care homes. The important distinction with cohousing is that residents oversee the design and management of the community. As people come together to share their needs, interests and expectations, the community can coalesce around a shared vision, recognising that there is not a one sized model for vibrant active senior living.

## Design challenge



Try sketching out your own ideal community. Think about the layout of homes, the position of the common house, where to put parking, how to create privacy and space to meet and do stuff – and what you would like to share. Homes can be detached, terraced or apartments. They can be new build, or refurbishment of existing property. The common house can be attached or detached, but should be integral and central to encourage frequent use.

*Caution:* great cohousing design can only support sustained community interaction. People have to invest in the process of building community to make it happen. Building the homes is the easy bit!

## Some living examples



Threshold Centre, Dorset. Soft landscaping at the front of properties helps to separate private space from the shared community garden.

Laughton Lodge, Sussex. A warm and inviting common house dining room. Decorated with vibrant warm colours and using natural materials for furniture, alongside bookcases and comfy sofas by the wood burning stove.



Lancaster Cohousing. A car-free pedestrian walkway between some of the homes and the common house, creating safe spaces for children to play and informal areas to meet for a chat and a coffee.

# Some of the cohousing communities in the UK

There are currently (2015) 21 built cohousing communities in England and more than 70 groups in development across the UK. This map shows just some of them. You can see a list at [www.cohousing.org.uk/groups](http://www.cohousing.org.uk/groups). If there isn't a group near where you want to live, post a 'shout out' on the Cohousing Network website.



**Springhill (Stroud)** On a gently sloping site, pedestrianised streets meander through a community of 34 homes (ranging from one-bed to five-bed). In the large common house the community cook three meals a week. Other features include a community room, games, laundry and workshop facilities, sustainable urban drainage and photovoltaic roofs.



## Threshold Centre (Gillingham, Dorset)

A farm converted to fourteen homes, seven of which are affordable rent and shared home ownership in partnership with a housing

association. The community offers various courses to showcase living in community. The common house is a renovated old farmhouse, with eating and cooking facilities alongside a relaxation room and guest rooms. The community also manages a community market garden and a green energy system.



**Lancaster Cohousing** Eco-housing with community! Forty-one energy efficient homes with fabulous common facilities; a large dining room where meals are cooked five times a week, guest bedrooms, laundry, children's room and bike shed. A converted mill *Halton Mill* provides low carbon workspace.



**LILAC (Leeds)** Low Impact Living Affordable Community. Twenty homes and a common house. This first Mutual Home Ownership Society ensures homes are permanently affordable. Community food purchasing, shared laundry, car pooling and other facilities will help community members live sustainably.



**K1 (Cambridge)** 38 high-efficiency homes with a common house, workshop and shared garden. Group members have a say in shaping their own homes and community with the support of dedicated professionals. Build should be finished by end of 2016.



**Older Women's CoHousing (OWCH)** The OWCH community in Barnet, London, started construction in 2015, creating 25 mixed tenure apartments. This pioneering community will be the UK's first senior cohousing project and will take up residence in Spring 2016.

## Contact us

We welcome your contributions and requests for further information.

Email [hello@cohousing.org.uk](mailto:hello@cohousing.org.uk)

Twitter [@ukcohousing](https://twitter.com/ukcohousing)

Facebook **UK Cohousing Network**

Telephone **020 3096 7751**

Website [www.cohousing.org.uk](http://www.cohousing.org.uk)

Our website has a comprehensive range of information about cohousing, details of forming and established groups, events and frequent news updates.

## Our aims

The Network is involved in a wide range of activities. This is a summary of some of the work that we do:

- Increasing awareness of the cohousing model
- Resource point about cohousing
- Seeking ways to make cohousing financially accessible
- Hosting learning events and the annual cohousing conference
- Developing projects to support delivery of senior and retrofit cohousing
- Facilitating research to make the case for cohousing
- Undertaking campaigning and policy development to support grassroots development of cohousing

## Join us

Be part of the cohousing movement and get a range of benefits. The Cohousing Network has three membership options:

- Group Membership
- Friends Membership
- Associate Membership

Full information about the benefits and criteria for membership and how to apply is available on our website.

 [@ukcohousing](https://twitter.com/ukcohousing)

 [UK Cohousing Network](https://www.facebook.com/UKCohousingNetwork)

