



**A greener, more neighbourly way to live
in Sheffield**

FIVE RIVERS COHOUSING COMPANY LTD

Management Committee Annual Report 2021

For the year ending 31 October 2021

1 Introduction

Five Rivers Cohousing Company Ltd. was set up in 2012. The search for a site for our cohousing community continued throughout most of 2020, within the confines of several national lockdowns due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Five Rivers Cohousing felt the impact of the lockdowns in a number of ways:

- Face-to-face meetings were replaced by meetings on the “zoom” platform. This somewhat prevented the free flow of ideas and dialogue. It felt harder to really hear the meaning of what someone was saying and responses felt wooden at times
- Some meetings with new enquirers had to take place on zoom
- Social plus activities were curtailed
- Five Rivers’ contact with Sheffield City Council was difficult as many workers and teams had been redeployed to help manage the Covid response
- Members’ experiences of Covid affected lives through separation from family members, with some forgoing direct contact with family for at least 18 months or more. Anxiety about their own and their loved ones’ physical and mental health was quite significant for most. Restrictions on regular activities such as singing, dancing, writing, reading groups and so on were keenly felt. Reliance on technology was often an unwelcome effort for all. Confusion about the “rules” was everywhere, (and still is!).

On the positive side all members continued to look ahead to the possibility of developing our cohousing community by meeting up in small groups for walks or sit in a garden, share research online and, of course, by logging in to yet another zoom meeting.

2 Search for a site

Last year's Annual Report shows that in December 2020, no site was being actively pursued. The Sheffield City Council sites we had looked at in the summer of 2020 had all been deemed unsuitable for us by council officers. The S6 privately owned site on which we had had an Exclusivity Agreement was not forecast to be considered for residential use until 2023. Five Rivers looked at other privately owned sites but contact with the owners of these sites did not result in anything which could be taken forward. Spawforth's Land Agency had not managed to identify any suitable site.

In December 2020 however, members became aware that Oakworth Homes, with whom Five Rivers had been in touch 3 years earlier, had got outline planning permission for a scheme of 9/10 houses on the Spider Park/Wisewood site in Sheffield 6 in July 2020, but appeared not to have started any development on the site. Contact was made with the Director of Oakworth Homes. Oakworth Homes (OH) expressed interest in a possible collaboration with Five Rivers and first meetings took place in January 2021. No other sites were considered during 2021.

3 Governance of Five Rivers Cohousing

Thirteen Management Committee and Members meetings (MCM) were held between 1 January and 22 November 2021. There has been one Extraordinary General meeting. The Annual Statement and the Annual Accounts have been filed at Companies House.

4 Spider Park/Wisewood chronology

January 2021 A meeting with Oakworth Homes, led by Adam Broadway, Consultant to Five Rivers, resulted in both parties expressing a willingness to move forward with a possible scheme. OH were in the process of completing the land purchase with Sheffield City Council and suggested that Five Rivers then purchase the land from OH as part of a Land and Build contract. An initial Information sheet about the site was prepared, a site specific Financial survey for members was drawn up and financial viability began to be looked at. The need for a Business Case was identified, along with the need to approach institutional lenders to finance the land and build costs.

February 2021 Site layout discussions began and an initial scheme of 22 units comprising houses and apartments was proposed and provisionally accepted by both OH and Five Rivers. This followed the drawing up of viability spreadsheets based on land, build and development costs, and based on income derived from sales of the units, following a professional valuation of the site and potential 22 units plus a common house. The raising of funds through institutional borrowing and soft loans from supporters was discussed. Some design aspects such as heating systems were touched on, along with the need for ground surveys. Adam Broadway's role as lead negotiator was cemented at this time.

March 2021 Oakworth Homes presented their initial costs for the land and build to Five Rivers, Five Rivers drew up their provisional development costs. Calculations were made as to how much money Five Rivers will need to raise and by when, in order to make the scheme happen. An Employer's Agent was commissioned to give a view on OH's initial cost plan. Share Instead Housing Co-op expressed an interest in buying property at Five Rivers Cohousing. This was welcomed as it may allow rental properties to be provided if Five Rivers cannot afford to provide them.

April 2021 Fundraising began. Members were asked to loan what they could. A Supporter Loan prospectus was drafted. A Recruitment group was formed to work on increasing membership of people who wish to live in the community. The possibility of Government grants was explored. The membership was polled on where savings could be made, for example on lowering the environmental specification of the build, or on forgoing the lift in the apartment block. The Website went live.

May 2021

The Five Rivers/Oakworth Homes (OH) liaison group continued to meet on zoom. Five Rivers detailed the amount of savings they would need on the OH cost plan. Ways of achieving the necessary reductions were discussed. OH submitted a further cost plan on 21 May. The Employers Agent produced a preliminary report on the OH cost plan. An Extraordinary General meeting was held on 23 May which agreed to accept the OH cost plan and move to signing Heads of Terms, subject to conditions. Finance group grappled with formulae for setting unit prices based on value of the units rather than on area, taking into account our policies and principles.

June 2021

Ongoing discussions took place on viability. The need for Members' loans and Supporter Loans was spelled out even more strongly, along with ways of reducing costs on the OH Cost plan. The pricing of the units and the fairness, or otherwise, of early purchasers paying less than those late to the project was further discussed. Also discussed was how to keep properties affordable in the long term and some form of price-capping on re-sale, with a special meeting held to discuss these matters. Recruitment policies and procedures were firmed up.

July 2021

There was ongoing discussion on price setting and on the terms of the draft Heads of Terms document, with Five Rivers taking advice from consultant Adam Broadway and Wrigleys solicitors.

August 2021

The Heads of Terms Agreement was signed with Oakworth Homes. This will act as an Exclusivity Agreement. Many issues remain unresolved but our consultant advised us to sign the document and stated that there would be flexibility for revisions later, before the main Land and Build contract is signed. An "Away Day" took place at Longshaw where there was a mixture of social time, a meet-up with Share Instead co-op members and discussions about pricing, design and the possibility of adopting a mutual ownership model.

September 2021

The general publicity leaflet was designed and printed and was distributed among our networks. There were a good number of enquiries, apparently as a result of people seeing the leaflet. The website was updated and was viewed by increasing numbers. A Design meeting took place at the Orgreave factory, with ongoing discussions about site layout, unit mix and “massing”. Also discussed was Five Rivers’ input into the planning Application. Two Information sessions were planned for the following month. The Finance group began requesting advance loans for capital spending from members to achieve viability of the project. The Fundraising group worked on a grant application for Community Homes Funding from Homes England which is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

October 2021

Oakworth Homes informed us that they hoped to achieve Design Freeze by 31 October and put in a Planning Application 6 weeks later. They later accepted that this timetable would have to slip a bit due to illness and the complexity of the decisions needed. OH has appointed a Planning Consultant to handle aspects of the Application. More fundraising ideas were discussed. The Partnership with Share Instead which would enable rentals to be provided at the project via Share Instead is looking more possible than previously. The Information Sessions at Wisewood Methodist Church received positive feedback. Positive contact was made with local community groups who welcomed our plans for the site, and with local councillors, all of whom expressed their support.

5 The Professional Team

With advice from our professional Development Consultant, we have engaged a highly experienced professional team to support us in our scheme.

Role	Lead	Company
Development Consultant	Adam Broadway	Instinctively Green www.instinctivelygreen.co.uk
Design Team	Mark Twynam	Benchmark Design
Solicitor	Emma Ridge	Wrigleys Solicitors www.wrigleys.co.uk
Employer’s Agent/ Quantity Surveyor	David Titterton	Mascot Management Ltd. www.mascotmanagement.co.uk
Clerk of Works	tbc	Mascot Management Ltd
Financial Consultant	Oliver Chamberlain	uk.linkedin.com/in/oliver-chamberlain-40064519

Accountant	Stuart Croft	Alan West and Foster Ltd

6 Finance

The Annual Accounts for 2020-21 were prepared for approval at the AGM on 22 November 2021.

7 Membership and Recruitment

Members: Current membership remained at 11.

Enquirers: At the beginning of the year there was the usual steady flow of enquirers. Then, when we entered into discussions with Oakworth Homes, we put recruitment on hold until we had reached a Heads of Terms Agreement with them. Then we launched a campaign, specifically recruiting for the Wisewood site distributing information widely about the site and our plans for it via a printed leaflet, a much revamped website and social media, re-contacting previous enquirers, and so on. As a result, the numbers of new enquirers increased significantly. We also re-contacted some 80 enquirers who had asked for their details to be kept so that they could be informed when we had a project in progress.

We developed our recruitment process including more comprehensive information packs on how to become a member, what it might cost to live on the site, our current policies, etc. The joining process was summarised in a document called “Five Steps to Five Rivers” and we now have enquirers at various steps along that journey. We invited enquirers to our fortnightly online informal ‘cafes’ and to take part in sub-groups and Management Committee meetings as a way to get to know each other better. We also started to hold regular Information Sessions at a community centre close to the site. An Information sheet for families was produced, emphasising the family friendly amenities in the Wisewood area. This was in line with our hope and intention to recruit a mixed and balanced group of residents for the scheme.

The Membership Secretary continued to maintain a comprehensive spreadsheet of the enquirers and the extent of our contact with them, in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

8 Design

The Design group has taken the lead in discussions throughout the year about the layout of the site and how the mix of 22 houses and apartments would look, taking into consideration regulations such as for emergency access, disability access issues, our Transport policy and our desire for green space for growing and playing. Also considered was the need to incorporate sustainability into all our decisions, balancing our wish for energy saving technology with what we are likely to be able to afford. Several meetings have been held with Oakworth Homes who also need to work within the

budget they have given us. Topics have ranged from the housing mix, floor areas and massing on the site, to sizes of window, window frame material and balconies, to design and function of the common house, and much else in between.

Negotiations with OH have partly been done by our consultant Adam Broadway, briefed by the Design group which is open to all members. Design freeze is approaching for layout and “externals”. Meetings about internal aspects of the dwellings and common house will continue to happen.

9 Social Plus Events

This year there has been little time for socialising together, Covid 19 also being a factor. There have been a couple of walks, an outdoor curry evening and a Sunday morning brunch in a café. The weekly Friday “cafes” have provided some light relief at the end of the week and on alternate weeks these have been open to enquirers.

10 To sum up

It’s been a few months of many highs and lows. Members have expressed a huge range of positive and negative emotions at meetings, both in person and on zoom, and through email and phone messages. Everyone has felt anxious, stressed and overwhelmed at times. Everyone has worked extremely hard to keep focused on the tasks in hand but deadlines have been missed and vital work not done. Much remains to be done. We have not been able to spend anything like enough social time together due to Covid, workload, other interests and other commitments.

We don’t know yet if the scheme will come to fruition in the form we want it to -we will probably need to modify our thinking in some areas. We will need to use all our resources to take decisions in a way that makes sound business sense and that takes account of everyone’s opinions and of areas of where we may make compromises.

And yet.....we all want to make this scheme happen, we are pulling together and we have achieved a lot. Our friends and contacts in our networks are excited for us and praise us for our efforts. Our vision is the same as it has always been. Our strapline still rings true, this year, and for next year- “ A greener, more neighbourly way to live in Sheffield”.

11 Management Committee Members at 31 October 2021

Jill Angood*, Dilys Candler * (Company Treasurer), Teri Connolly*, Rachel Hope* (Company Secretary), Celia Mather* (Membership Secretary), Chris Pyke*

*Company Director

