

PROSPECTUS FOR COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING

Cohousing in Brighton & Hove



Sussex
Cohousing

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

TOWN.

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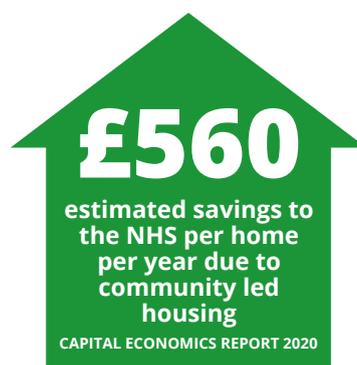
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Sussex Cohousing's vision

'Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come'



Housing is becoming ever more unaffordable. Since 2002, house prices as a ratio of earnings grew more than 78%.



Our vision is of a sustainable, affordable and neighbourly cohousing community for Brighton & Hove.

Brighton & Hove faces crises on multiple fronts: housing, climate & health. We believe that cohousing is part of the solution for all three.

The cost of housing continues to outstrip wages in Brighton & Hove, outpacing the South East and England as a whole.

Meanwhile, there is a climate emergency that demands we get as close as possible to net carbon in all new housing developments. We need to encourage low impact living. While environmental degradation is accelerating, our focus must be on restoring and enhancing the natural world around us.

The global pandemic has added to the social pressures and inequalities we face, laying bare how fundamental good housing is to health and wellbeing. For many, coronavirus has increased isolation and loneliness.

In addition, a third of the UK workforce has become used to working from home, altering what people need from their housing and placing an unsustainable premium on space.

Benefits of cohousing

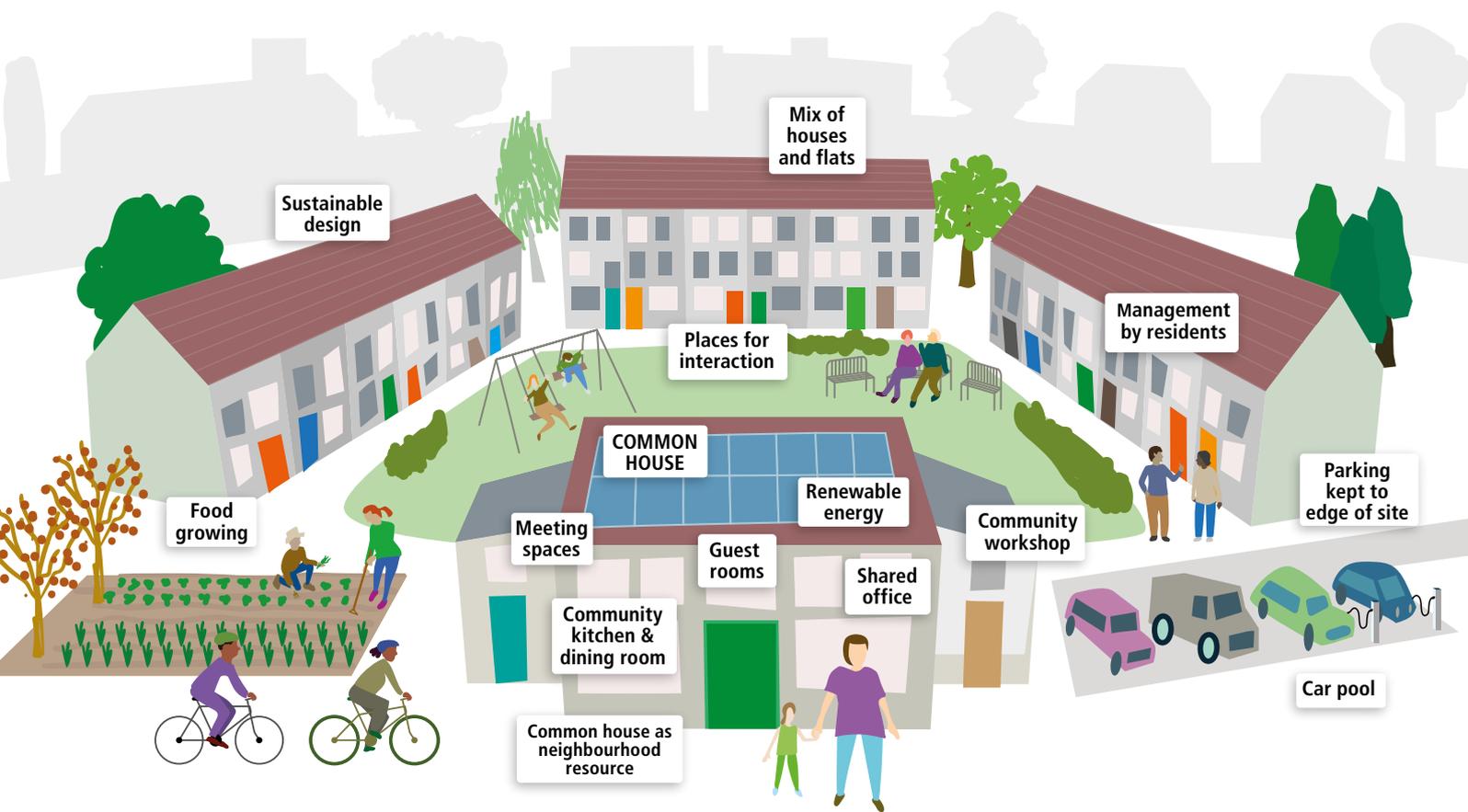
Cohousing communities offer a way of life that is healthier for people and the planet but despite Brighton & Hove's reputation for spearheading progressive ideas and the need for bold solutions, no such scheme exists here – yet.

This prospectus outlines our vision for a cohousing community right here in Brighton & Hove: a community that provides high quality sustainable and affordable homes for local people. That offers additional social benefits to both its residents and to the wider community. Overall, it would provide a pioneering model of a healthier, happier and genuinely sustainable way of living.

We invite you to consider our proposals and would welcome the opportunity for collaboration to make this vision a reality.

Sussex Cohousing

Why cohousing?



Cohousing is a form of community-led housing and group custom build that is growing in popularity across the UK.

Typically in cohousing communities, everyone has their own home with a small garden or balcony as well as sharing a garden and usually a building called the common house. These shared spaces provide places to meet and extra resources like a laundry, guest rooms, offices and workshop.

Cars are usually kept to the perimeter to ensure safe space for children to play. The outcome is a more efficient use of space and resources with a more neighbourly and sociable atmosphere.

Cohousing schemes are intentional communities in which residents have chosen to live in a more neighbourly way. This intent informs the design, management and day-to-day life in the community. Residents are actively involved in the design of the scheme, helping to create a strong sense of community right from the outset, and have collective responsibility for ongoing maintenance.

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cohousing
projects in
development
the UK

UK COHOUSING NETWORK

Cohousing principles

Shared intention to create community

Residents involved in the design

Designed for social interaction

Private dwellings with shared spaces

Residents collectively manage the community

Cohousing communities are:

- Strong, resilient communities where people know each other and look out for each other.
- Active stewards of their community, with residents taking collective responsibility for the upkeep and management of their community.
- An asset to the local area, as cohousing communities seek to make sure they are actively contributing to their local area.
- A practical example of low impact living in a community context that can inspire and support other initiatives locally.
- Socially orientated and innovative by nature, cohousing communities have been at the forefront of responding to today's challenges, both in terms of sustainability and the crisis of housing affordability.
- Demonstrations of what is possible when residents are involved with the design and specification of their homes: better design, higher quality and more sustainability.

The common house

The common house is a key feature of cohousing. It is the social centre of the community, practically and emotionally.

Everyone has their own dwelling but the common house is where people can gather to eat together (typically twice a week), meetings and gossip, perhaps work there and do their laundry. There may be space for children to play.

The facilities in the common house could allow members of the community to acquire a more affordable dwelling and to live more lightly than in a standard street.

- Guest rooms could take the place of a spare bedroom.
- Shared office space could be used by people who work away from the office.
- A laundry and workshop could save every household owning every item.
- A car pool encourages sharing of vehicles and travel.
- These resources may also be offered to the local neighbourhood.



Marmalade Lane
common house

About Sussex Cohousing



Sussex Cohousing is a group of local residents with the passion and drive needed to deliver our long-held dream: a cohousing community of up to 35 households in or near Brighton.

Our ambition is to:

- provide affordable homes for local people
- make a positive environmental impact
- be an example low-impact living in response to the climate emergency
- make a positive contribution to our local neighbourhood and to Brighton & Hove.

Formed in 2013, we have an active development team, around 20 regular financial supporters and a wider base of around 300 people who are following our project with interest. Ours is a diverse group of different ages, skills and life experiences with the commitment and dedication to make our vision a reality.

Some members of Sussex Cohousing's development team



Paula

Consultant in technology policy

WHY COHOUSING

To create and live in a community of lovely, messy humans. We are social beasts and we need each other.



Saul

Learning and Development advisor

WHY COHOUSING

Ecologically sensitive homes built in the midst of a diverse mix of like-minded people, all willing to thoughtfully shape a community-led housing coop.



Mike

HR professional

WHY COHOUSING

To have my own space within a community of like-minded people working sociocratically. And I want to be able to grow and give away vegetables in my dotage!



Daniel

NGO development and zero carbon project manager

WHY COHOUSING

Because life is too short to live in small, nuclear families. We have a spiritual need for social interaction and a global need for sustainability.



Julian

Retired graphic designer

WHY COHOUSING

I see it as a more neighbourly way of living, which can reduce energy use and our impact on our environment. Many people could benefit from this if we can create the opportunity.



Lucy

Communications professional

WHY COHOUSING

Covering cohousing communities as a journalist convinced me this model offers us a better solution for living in harmony with each other and the environment.

Our partners



Brighton & Hove
Community Land Trust

TOWN.



One of our biggest assets is our relationship with **Brighton & Hove Community Land Trust**. The CLT helps us with clarifying ideas, networking, expertise and bid applications, gives us information about sites around Brighton and supports us with bids for land.

Another asset is our relationship with **TOWN**, a developer with good intentions and strong local connections. TOWN builds sustainable, well-designed new homes which respond to people's needs and which improve, not detract from, the places that they are built in. They are one of the few developers with a track record of working with cohousing groups and enabling cohousing schemes.

We are part of the **UK Cohousing Network** which enables us to learn from other cohousing groups.



An introduction to TOWN

TOWN's first cohousing scheme was the multiple award-winning Marmalade Lane cohousing scheme in Cambridge, which was built on land owned and designated by Cambridge City Council for cohousing. Appointed in the summer of 2015, TOWN worked with the cohousing group on the details of the design, obtained planning and appointed a contractor. The 42-home scheme was completed in December 2019.

TOWN has made land available for Still Green cohousing community to be part of their town centre regeneration of Wolverton near Milton Keynes. That cohousing scheme is 25 market sale and 4 social rent apartments for people aged 50+.

TOWN is also acting as development manager for a cohousing scheme in Norwich City Centre.

TOWN's awards for Marmalade Lane

- Shortlisted for the EU Mies Award 2021
- Civic Trust Award 2021 & their Sustainability Award
- RICS Social Impact Awards, Project of the year 2020
- RTPI Silver Jubilee Cup Overall Winner 2020
- RIBA National Award 2019
- Housing Design Awards Richard Feilden Award 2019
- National Urban Design Award (Public Sector) 2019
- Structural Timber Award (Social Housing Project) 2019
- Cambridge Design & Construction Award Joint Winner 2019
- Cambridge Property Awards Environmental Award 2015 & 2018

How Sussex Cohousing works



We are a co-operative and use sociocracy – a system of collaborative governance

We have a development team of Brighton residents that actively work on the project, week in, week out, to keep the momentum going as we search for a site.

Our vision is of a collaborative community where everyone is valued and has an equal say in how the community operates. We take that seriously and it informs how we work together as a group now. Sussex Cohousing is constituted as a co-operative society as that legal model will best support our vision. We have invested in training in sociocracy and compassionate communication (NVC) to support us to listen to each other, integrate different perspectives, and make decisions collaboratively and start to build the healthy social community we want to create.

Local support for cohousing

Sussex Cohousing has around 200 subscribers who are interested in cohousing and following this project with interest. Surveys give us a snapshot of the local appetite and priorities for any future cohousing project.

Our most recent survey was completed in January 2021 and received 56 detailed responses. Below is a snapshot of what our supporters are telling us.

Key finding from our recent survey of supporters

61% of respondents live in households earning less than £25,000

One in five (20%) of our supporters has over £500,000 in savings or equity

68% say they require home office facilities and would be willing to share with others

Survey respondents are willing to consider a range of tenure options within the cohousing community, irrespective of their current housing situation

Of the total population of households represented in the survey, one fifth (22%) are children and 32% are aged 55+

88% of survey respondents identified themselves as white, in line with the most recent census data for Brighton

Meet some of Sussex Cohousing's supporters

'I am excited about the affordability, sustainability and community aspects of cohousing'



Vera, 39, lives in East Brighton with her partner and their two-year-old son. The family is outgrowing their small home, an ex-council house, which they have been renting for 5 years during which

property values in the postcode have grown 12%. With a third of household income already going on rent, Vera finds herself priced out of the area where her growing family has laid down roots. A charity worker and food campaigner, Vera is excited about the affordability, sustainability and community aspects of cohousing:

'We are desperate to get some kind of housing security. We're saving all we can and we've done well considering our low incomes, but we are always going to be five years behind the property market. Without family support available to us, a mortgage is simply out of our reach.'

'We don't want to be forced to move out of the area – this is where our work is and our friends are. We have both worked incredibly hard all our lives. We both came from families who experienced poverty. We were told that if you work hard, if you save, you get there. To reach this point where we're almost 40 and still living in fear of being kicked out by our landlord doesn't seem fair.'

'We'd love for our son to have his own bedroom, but with the lack of space and having to work from home it just hasn't been possible. I feel a lot of pressure thinking about our circumstances, our housing and finances; it has had a real impact on my mental health.'

'Living in a cohousing community would reduce the cost of living overall, as we can help each other, share facilities and swap skills and services'



Daniel, 21, lives at home with his mother and stepfather in rented accommodation in Hove. The family has been hit hard economically by the pandemic, and is struggling with stress

and uncertainty over how much longer it will be able to afford the rent. With his only source of income being Universal Credit, saving is not an option. Daniel is enthusiastic about living in a more sustainable, neighbourly way as part of a cohousing community.

'The place we currently live in is small and run down. Almost any money made by anyone in the household is either spent on rent, utilities or food. It's got worse over the pandemic due to the uncertainty over jobs and higher utility bills. This has been quite a cause for stress as we do not know where we will be in a few months' time and if we will even be able to afford to live here.'

'I cannot afford a mortgage. Our current rent equates to the full monthly wages of one of the members of the household and about half of my income goes towards the utility bills. After that and the food shop it's almost all gone. There's no chance of saving.'

'Having access to affordable housing would allow us to have savings for the future. I also believe that living in a cohousing community would reduce the cost of living overall, as we can help each other, share facilities and swap skills and services. We don't have anywhere to grow things at the moment, so it would be great to have a shared garden space to grow our own food.'



OUR OFFER: Affordable housing



Brighton is one of the least affordable places to buy or rent in Britain. The city has one of the highest rates of homelessness and a significant number of households are living in emergency accommodation.

Our dream is of a cohousing community reflective of the diversity of the people of Brighton and Hove. One that is genuinely affordable and open to everyone whatever their needs and financial means.

We understand that affordable homes and housing need will be the Council's priority for land it owns. We look forward to working with the Council to find the most suitable approach for affordable homes in a cohousing context.

We would also welcome exploring whether the supportive environment cohousing offers provides the opportunity to address some specific housing needs, for instance, by providing homes for migrants, adults with learning disabilities or the elderly.

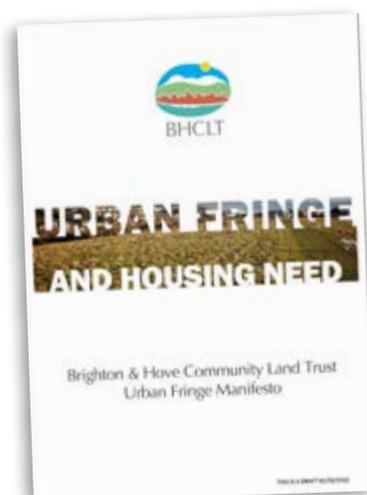
Public land for public good

Our partner, Brighton & Hove CLT, has set out its aspirations for publicly owned sites, which includes the principle that public land should be retained in public ownership or transferred to a body that holds the land in the public interest.

We would welcome working with the Council to identify the most appropriate approach for the site, whether that means the Council retaining the freehold, or the freehold being transferred to an asset-locked organisation like the CLT.

A menu of affordability options

Various tenure models are available – some examples are shown on the next page – but all would be based on achieving as much affordability as possible and retaining affordability into the future. Asset locks would prevent the sale of land and property for commercial gain.



Social and affordable housing

A proven model within existing cohousing communities. We would explore an all-rental model, with a combination of social and affordable rented homes. Affordability would be managed by a registered provider.



BAREFOOT ARCHITECTS

EXAMPLE Bridport Cohousing (under construction in Dorset) is a truly **mixed tenure, all affordable cohousing community**. 26 homes will be for social rent. The other 27 homes are for leasehold purchase. 13 of these will sell at 80% of the market price. 14 homes will be available from 25% to 75% shared ownership. Rent is paid on the unsold equity, and there is the possibility of 'staircasing' up to 80% with the unsold 20% remaining with Bridport Cohousing.

Community Rental Scheme

The Community Rental Scheme is an all rental approach similar to Build to Rent. Its primary difference is that it is based on an annuity-leaseback arrangement between a pension provider and a local authority and can be used to support the pursuit of a range of social objectives and local priorities, including cohousing. This means the Council can choose the degree to which the initial land receipt is prioritised, along with greater flexibility around rent levels and selection criteria. Another option is the Council on-lending from the Public Works Loan Board at an affordable rate of interest. This innovative all rental model offers great flexibility within the financial parameters and could support an inclusive cohousing community where rent paid is linked to a percentage of household income.



EXAMPLE Cohut is a 22 unit cohousing **Community Rental Scheme** that TOWN is involved with and is heading for planning in Scottswood, Newcastle. An annuity leaseback arrangement with the Council for a 40 year period before transfer to the cohousing community is being considered by the Council.

Co-operative Housing

Land ownership is retained by the Council or a Community Land Trust to ensure perpetual affordability. In this model, the co-operative owns and manages the buildings through a collective mortgage, granting leases to member residents. Members make an entry payment proportionate to the size of their housing unit as a percentage of development costs, including the common house. Residents pay affordable rent during their tenure to repay the mortgage. All residents have an equal share and say in the association. International examples include La Borda in Barcelona, Spain, and Andel Cooperative Housing, originating in Denmark.



Bunker Housing Co-operative in Brighton is a fully affordable rental scheme that leases land from BHCC. Co-op members manage the scheme and contracts are issued to members, which allow them stay as long as they need, so long as they follow the co-operative rules. Bunker is applying to become a Registered Provider.

Mutual Home Ownership Society

An innovative way for households on modest incomes to own a stake in the housing market, while keeping homes permanently affordable. Instead of buying their own home, residents pay rent, purchase and accumulate equity shares in a Mutual Homes Ownership Society in which they are members. This Society owns all the homes and uses the rent to fund a mortgage for the entire scheme. Equity is needed from at least some of the residents.



EXAMPLE The UK's first built example, **LILAC cohousing**, in Leeds, was developed on a site difficult for mainstream developers to develop. Lilac stands for Low Impact Living Affordable Community. Through Mutual Home Ownership it was able to deliver permanently affordable housing, with 'rent' linked to 35% of income. The decision was made to link equity increases to earnings not house prices and the scheme should become more affordable over time.



OUR OFFER: Sustainability

Brighton & Hove City Council has declared a climate emergency and has a target of zero emissions by 2030 – we want to be part of the solution.

Our development will be as close to zero carbon in construction and operation as we can and will not rely on offsetting to do so.

We will implement practical measures that help us radically reduce our carbon footprint. We will pursue an internal sharing economy as a way of reducing our impact. This might include:

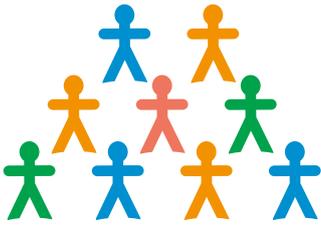
- Sharing cars and bicycles
- A common utility room (sharing washing machines)
- Tool bank and workshop, encouraging repairs
- Office space for people working from home
- Bulk buying and swap shop
- Enhanced recycling

We would also like to use local suppliers where possible to encourage circular economy.

We want to demonstrate how much more is possible when you know your neighbours and are part of a community and inspire others to take similar steps in their neighbourhoods.



LILAC, Leeds: built from straw bales within timber frames, the community has recently committed to becoming net carbon by 2030 and is actively working together on how that can be achieved.



OUR OFFER: Local community

The benefits of cohousing are not just for residents; cohousing communities play an active and positive role in their local neighbourhood as they become established.

We will engage with the Council and the local community to understand local needs and existing resources so that community benefit can be embedded into the design of the site. We would expect other benefits to evolve organically over time as it has in other cohousing communities in response to the needs of the local community, the interests of residents, and any opportunities that arise.

Copper Lane, London: Its common house is used during weekday mornings by the local school for its nursery class.

Lancaster Cohousing: A local community energy company uses their roof space for a large array of solar panels. Every year residents organise Millfest – a mostly free one day festival for the local community.

Laughton Lodge, East Sussex: is very much at the heart of this rural community, they host a community recycling centre, their small football pitch is available to everyone to use and their hall is used very much like a village hall. The Lodge organises small-scale music and film festivals for their local community.

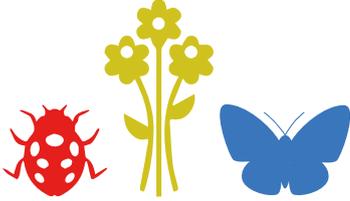
Marmalade Lane, Cambridge: One resident's desire to paint a mural has led to residents painting a nearby development hoarding with the wildlife and plants found in Orchard Park. This has led to discussions with the Art Department of Anglia Ruskin University about using the community's boundary fence to create a linear art gallery along the path of the guided busway.



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existing
cohousing
communities
in the UK

UK COHOUSING NETWORK



OUR OFFER: Land stewardship

The world is facing an ecological crisis due to human actions. The Council noted the biodiversity crisis as part of their climate emergency declaration in December 2018. We are committed to creating a sustainable low-impact community, treading lightly and making sure there is a net environmental gain on the site.

Reduced development footprint

The nature of cohousing design and its emphasis on sharing space reduces the amount of land required for development.

Food production

Part of the site would be used for food allotments for residents. Planting throughout the scheme will support the Council's status as the UK's Gold Sustainable Food City.

Supporting biodiversity

Around the homes, allotment and children's play area our planting will prioritise the food and habitat needs of wildlife and insects and night-time lighting will be minimised to reduce the impact on wildlife.

Public recreation

We are open to exploring how the cohousing community can support public access to the site. We think the cohousing community could look after the site in a way that enhances the amenity for local people. This may be as simple providing a water station for dogs in the summer months and providing benches and seating for walkers. Litter is a significant risk to wildlife and we like the idea of organising rubbish rambles of the site as a whole and into the surrounding area.



LILAC, Leeds: A fifth of the cohousing community's allotment space is made available to a sheltered housing scheme nearby supporting people with mental health difficulties recognising the therapeutic value of community gardening. A wooded corner of the site is managed as a pocket park for the local community. We would be interested in supporting a similar arrangement. v



Marmalade Lane, Cambridge: The cohousing community organises a monthly rubbish ramble in its local area and looks after hedgehogs over the winter.

Design objectives



Our site brief

- A site suitable for 15 to 35 homes, so everyone can know their neighbours
- A mix of apartments and houses in a range of sizes to support a mixed, multigenerational community
- Homes that are both accessible and affordable
- Shared indoor and outdoor spaces where the day-to-day life of the community can take place
- A site that is well-connected, supporting our ambition of positive environmental impact
- A site where our cohousing community will positively impact its local neighbourhood

Sussex Cohousing is looking for a site where we can develop around 15-35 homes of various sizes. Many of us are based in Brighton but we can consider locations within about 30 minutes of travel by public transport.

Our design objectives include:

Low impact

Preserving the existing landscape character with buildings built using carefully chosen materials that reflect the local vernacular, and with a layout that reflects so far as possible the existing characteristics of the area.

Sustainable development and living

Limiting CO₂ emissions in both construction and use, and encouraging low-impact forms of transport and sustainable ways of living with less than one parking space per household.

Enhances the environment

Minimising the impact on the environment while increasing biodiversity.

Mixed community

Twenty-nine homes in the following mix:

- 1 bed apartments x 6
- 2 bed apartments x 6
- 2 bed houses x 5
- 3 bed houses x 10
- 4 bed houses x 2
- Plus a 200+ sqm common house

Designed for sociability

Designing to enhance the opportunities for social interaction and support a strong sense of belonging and community.

Cohousing

Striking the appropriate balance between shared space and individual and household privacy.

Positive contribution

Integrating and contributing positively to the wider neighbourhood.

