

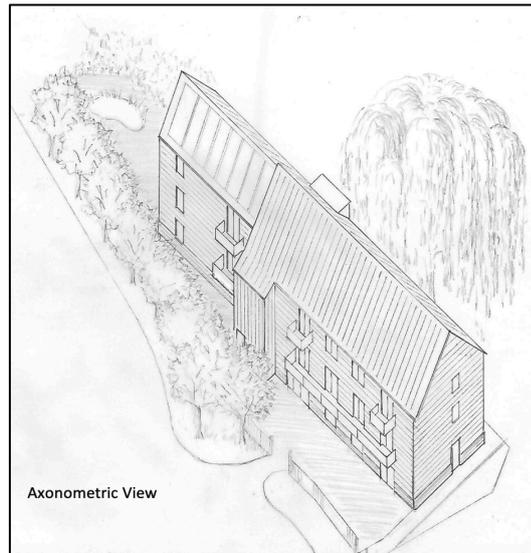
## Annual Report - September 2021 – September 2022

### *Introduction*

This report covers our third year of operation.

### *What progress have we made?*

- During the year we investigated a total of 32 potential sites or buildings - eight in or near Cheltenham; 19 in Stroud district, and five in Tewkesbury. Many were quickly dismissed, as we became more skilled at sorting the 'strong contenders' from the 'non-runners'.
- We undertook our first Pre-App, with Stroud's planners, for a site off Merrywalks – frustratingly the conservation officer didn't like our proposals, so we decided not to progress the purchase of the site. Later in the year a second Pre-App was prepared for an attractive site in one of the Stroud Valleys; this time the planners indicated that they would support our proposals.
- We built a good relationship with Stroud's council officers, and we concluded that Cheltenham council was not really interested in the sort of scheme we wanted to create (largely because of the significant over-supply of older persons' housing in the town).
- We also became more knowledgeable of likely development costs, as we realised there had been a significant increase in construction prices during the Covid pandemic – making many sites challenging, or completely unviable. For example, we spent a lot of time exploring a site just to the west of the centre of Cheltenham. In the end we concluded that the rise in construction costs (and some flooding challenges associated with the site) meant it was not viable to build there.
- One outcome of our costs analysis was that we identified a number of existing properties (for example empty office buildings) that could potentially be converted to housing more cost effectively than building from scratch.
- We nurtured a relationship with a local small developer who has control of an attractive site in central Stroud. He is now keen to work with us to deliver a bespoke cohousing scheme, rather than his original plans for the site.
- We have appointed land agents in Cheltenham and Stroud – both have been helpful in identifying possible sites and with other wider property advice and contacts.
- We undertook a study trip to Bright Green Futures' 33 homes Water Lilies scheme in Bristol; this was a joint visit with members of the Cirencester Cohousing group.
- We have lost a few of our original core members but have recruited one or two 'explorers' who we hope may later become full members of the group. A recruitment plan is in place to boost our numbers in 2023.



*Left - members undertook an interesting study visit to the Water Lilies scheme in Bristol in the summer of 2022. Right - our design for seven apartments on this site in the Stroud Valleys has been well received by the local planners.*

When our group initially came together in 2019, we were keen to make swift progress; we had noted that many cohousing groups take a decade or more to evolve from 'formation' to 'realising' their scheme. Sadly, the Covid crisis has probably delayed our progress by a year or two, so we are not quite as far along our planned trajectory as we would have liked.

Having said that, we do now have two or three sites that we consider to be very strong contenders, and we are optimistic that at least one of them will firm up and be deliverable soon. The challenge of rising construction costs is still there, but the current economic downturn may play to our advantage as contractors' costs are likely to become more competitive.

Our finances are in reasonable shape, and we have a modest balance in the bank. Households that are Full Members have so far contributed £260 each. This, together with a government grant for £4,000 that we received in 2020, has paid for legal advice to help us get set up in the right way, various training courses we have attended, and study visits to other pioneering cohousing schemes.

In a typical year our running costs are only a few hundred pounds, and our core members are prepared to share this equally.

I would like to formally thank everyone in the group for your sterling work and support over the last year, and I am confident that we will make further significant progress over the coming 12 months.

Ted Stevens  
Chair  
Horizon Cohousing Gloucestershire