STEEPLE & MIDDLE ASTON
COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Chairman's Annual Report

Our Community Land Trust is now two years old. We have 43 shareholders and a stable Board of Directors. We have had a year of trying to move forward on potential projects, with .....so far....mixed fortunes.

Last year, in my Chair's Report, I talked about making careful progress in discussions with local landowners. I mentioned a common problem for CLTs everywhere, namely that of convincing site owners to work with us rather than with commercial developers. The attraction of achieving high site values is strong, but has to be weighed against what we are offering – a community-led housing project that will meet the specific needs of our local community and provide some genuinely affordable homes. CLTs can't compete on the same terms as developers, and rely on a degree of compromise by the land owner, who may benefit from the designation of a site for appropriate housing. That problem has not gone away.

Late last year, our ongoing discussions with the owners of a commercial site just into Middle Aston came to a stop when the owners' ambitions to work with us to provide housing came to nought. Unfortunately, the attraction of selling the land to the neighbouring business park proved too great for us to compete with. It's a common story amongst the members of the national Community Land Trusts Network, of which we are members. Quite recently, we were approached by another landowner in Middle Aston, wondering if we might be able to purchase the land in advance of a potential housing scheme. The same obstacle, however, of commercial land values reared its head. Even so, we're grateful that people are starting to be aware that have a role to play locally. Who knows whether an opportunity might arise from out of nowhere?

Despite these problems, we continue to have the very real support of our Oxfordshire Rural Housing enabler, Fiona Brown – who is here and she will be talking about her work in a short while. We really appreciate her ongoing advice and experience in navigating our way forward.

On a more positive note, we have continued to work with another landowner in Steeple, and agreed with her last year that our CLT would prepare an outline of a housing scheme for the site on South Side, opposite Townend. The purpose of this was to submit it as a pre-application enquiry to Cherwell, in order to get any useful feedback prior to a more formal submission. The site is identified in the revised Neighbourhood Plan for Mid-Cherwell as one of several allocated for new homes, with the support of the local community and the parish council. In this case – up to 15 homes, with at least five of them being categorised as affordable.

We now await the outcome of examination of that Plan in the next few weeks. In the meantime, though, the pre-app received a strong thumbs-up from planners at Cherwell, which is of course very encouraging. Now we know that a planning application can be made with a high chance of success, and we can begin the next stage once the Neighbourhood Plan process comes to a conclusion. The landowner remains committed to working closely with us, and we are now discussing various ways in

which we can keep the partnership moving towards our mutual goals. This will involve helping to select a developer who wants to work with us to produce the best possible scheme for the benefit of all concerned. It's an exciting prospect, and is likely to become the focus of our activity next year. There is scope for you, as our members, and for any future members, to get more involved with the detail of this project, reinforcing the work of the Board members. Please let us know if you are interested. In due course, we will also be aiming to identify future occupiers of the new homes, to provide reassurance to the funders of the scheme regarding local demand.

So, with a fair wind, the coming year will see our CLT move into its next phase. Community Land Trusts work towards a long-term vision for their communities, and we know this will require patience, determination and, above all, maintaining a high level of engagement with local people to keep the aims alive and kicking. In January 2025, many of you will remember that we held a workshop to scope out a wide range of ideas for possible projects. Some of these may emerge – such as a local energy scheme, which you may hear more about in the months to come.

We are very grateful to our members, current and future, for their ongoing support while we work towards our first projects.

Thank you.

Martin Lipson, Chair

September 2026