

Third Sector Research Centre

Working Paper 11

## **Self-help housing: could it play a greater role?**

Professor David Mullins

September 2010

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Definitions .....	4
Construction of a field linking empty properties and self-help .....	4
Contemporary policy fit .....	5
<b>Origins and evolution</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Estimated numbers of local organisations</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Main types of organisation</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Roles and functions</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Third sector characteristics</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Key policy and regulatory issues</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Responses to credit crisis and recession .....	16
<b>Funding sources</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Temporary Social Housing Grant (TSHG) .....	18
Capacity building and organisational development .....	19
<b>Impact and value added issues</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Representative and umbrella bodies</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Post election update</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Budget reductions .....	22
Big Society .....	22
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Key issues for further research</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>End notes</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>28</b>

## Boxes

<b>Box 1: Peter Elderfield and the origins of East Midlands Housing Association in self-help housing for ex-servicemen.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Box 2: Harambee Ujima Hackney Committee (HUHC).....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Box 3: Leeds Action to Create Homes Ltd (LATCH).....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Box 4: Westminster Housing Co-op (WHC).....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Box 5: Community Campus '87 .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Box 6: Outcomes of volunteering: Canopy Project Leeds.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Box 7: Examples of funding sources: case studies .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Box 8: Bonnington Square: London.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Box 9: Tamil Community Housing Association: London.....</b>	<b>20</b>

## Tables

<b>Table 1: Main types of organisation .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Table 2: Temporary Social Housing Grant Allocations 2008–11: March 2009 .....</b>	<b>18</b>

## Self-help housing: could it play a greater role?

### Abstract

Self-help housing 'involves local people bringing back into use empty properties for their use, organising whatever repairs are necessary to make them habitable' (<http://self-help-housing.org/>). This is usually based on a time-limited licence or lease, but sometimes on a permanent basis, and there are possibilities for asset transfer. Models of self-help housing range from informal community housing projects, to social enterprises that also involve construction skills and other training for homeless people, young people, refugees and other disadvantaged groups as part of a more holistic approach to providing housing and employment.

Self-help housing constitutes a small part of the housing-related Third Sector. However it epitomises a form of bottom-up organisation that once played a more important role, particularly in the late 1970s when municipal housing schemes were delayed by public spending cuts, leaving empty properties which had already been acquired, and were then brought into use by 'short-life groups'. Now there would appear to be a similar opportunity in the context of reductions in public expenditure and policy support for self-help. Self-help housing seems to tick all the right boxes in offering a low-cost approach to meeting community housing needs (particularly for single people and couples who are not usually given priority for social housing), and maintaining some momentum in regeneration programmes while offering work training and experience to those participating.

However, while there are a number of successful self-help projects, these are generally small scale and 'below the radar'. To be successful, self-help housing organisations need to secure a supply of properties, funding, volunteers and residents. Further research is required to identify how these success conditions can be met, drawing on the experience of self-help housing projects from the different organisational models identified above in different local contexts. It will be important to relate these experiences to contemporary policy and financial drivers and to use the research to engage with policy makers, property owners and funders and with self-help models in other service areas.

### Keywords

Self-help housing, empty properties, construction training, social enterprise, volunteers, communities, third sector organisations (TSOs).

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Jon Fitzmaurice for extensive advice and permission to use material from the self-help-housing.org website (part-funded by Tudor Trust).<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Community Development Foundation for sharing findings of parallel research on self-help, and to HACT (the housing action charity) for permission to use earlier research by CURS. Finally thanks to my colleagues in the TSRC housing scoping project group: Ricky Joseph, Pat Jones, Rob Rowlands and Simon Teasdale for their contribution to the research framework and comparative perspective we have adopted for this series.

## Introduction

This scoping paper is one of five prepared for the housing work stream of the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC). Self-help housing is a relatively small scale, poorly defined and under-researched sub-sector in comparison to housing associations, the co-operative sector, tenants' and community organisations and homeless, advice and support organisations which are the subject of the other four scoping papers. However, it epitomises a form of bottom-up organisation that once played a more important part in the housing third sector, and one that could play a significant future role if appropriate funding, information and support mechanisms are put in place. It has been argued that the credit crisis and recession have stimulated lasting changes to the policy and institutional landscape, not least to the approach we take to affordable housing and regeneration. Self-help housing could play a greater role in this field, enabling more effective use to be made of underused resources such as empty housing while enabling more meaningful engagement of citizens and communities in longer term change. This paper reviews evidence on the history of self-help housing and the characteristics of existing organisations; given the limited academic sources, extensive use is made of websites and case studies. The paper proposes research to explore the steps that would be required for the sector to play an increased role in the future. Before proceeding further we offer a definition of self-help housing and locate this within the wider development of ideas about community self-help in the UK.

### Definitions

Self-help housing is defined for the purposes of this paper as 'involving local people bringing back into use empty properties for their use, organising whatever repairs are necessary to make them habitable' (<http://self-help-housing.org/>). Self-help housing is often provided through co-operative forms of organisation but is usually seen as distinct from self-build<sup>2</sup>; in its focus on existing empty properties, and squatting<sup>3</sup>; in its focus on securing legal access temporary uses, although it is not easy to draw boundaries around what is essentially a 'bottom-up' community based sector. Different models of self-help housing range from informal community housing projects, to more formal social enterprises that also involve construction skills and other training for homeless people, young people, refugees and other disadvantaged groups as part of a more holistic approach to providing housing and employment. These different models are explored in our discussion of the main types of organisation below.

### Construction of a field linking empty properties and self-help

The definition used above is part of a project by self-help housing.org to construct a field bringing together ideas and actions about empty properties and about self-help. This section traces the roots of these ideas and shows their wider resonance in policies developed over the past decade concerning social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal and more recently concerning building the Big Society.

The focus on bringing empty properties back into use links these organisations to policy concerns about the continued large numbers of empty homes that exist in the UK alongside the continued crisis in housing needs. Recent on-line debate (Empty Homes Agency,<sup>4</sup> Homes and Communities Agency<sup>5</sup>) has highlighted the level of interest in this topic and the wide range of housing and planning approaches that are being advocated from empty property strategies, enforcement, taxation of and

incentives to property owners and support for community-led initiatives to tackle the problem. Earlier research (BSHF, 2004) has mapped the nature of the problem of empty homes, the potential to bring properties back into use, the barriers to action and made numerous recommendations including the need for 'intermediary organisations' to help owners and local communities to make empty properties available for local needs. A key recommendation for this project is the need to 'recognise that local people are in the best position to know what should be done with empty properties in their locality' (BSHF, 2004). It is this recognition that stimulates the drive to enable self-help housing organisations and intermediary organisations to support them to thrive.

Having dealt briefly with the 'empty homes' aspect of field construction definition we now turn to the 'self-help' element. The concept of self-help has a wide currency in public policy debates and is sometimes canvassed as an alternative to state intervention, reflecting its origins in the disillusion of its early proponent, Samuel Smiles, with his former chartist and parliamentary reform campaigns. In the 1850s Smiles turned his back on politics and distinguished 'help from within which invariably invigorates' from 'help from without which is often enfeebling in its effects' (Smiles, 1859). While attracting praise and derision in equal measure over the following 150 years, Smiles' idea of self-help as individual progress through character, thrift and perseverance has continued to provide a stimulus for a debate much wider than its provenance would suggest. Archer and colleagues at the Community Development Foundation have recently explored the contemporary meanings of 'community self-help' and the contexts in which it has been picked up in UK public policies such as Labour's Social Exclusion Unit's work towards the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal in 1999 and the Coalition's Big Society agenda in 2010.

Archer (2009) makes two important distinctions between Smiles' concept and the ways in which the term has been adapted by more recent proponents. The first is a greater focus on collective dimensions of self-help in distinction to Smiles' emphasis on individualism; for Archer 'the "self" refers not to individuals but to groups of likeminded people in similar circumstances who can support and act together' (2009: 3). The second is the recognition that while some writers such as Burns and Taylor (1998) have emphasised the autonomy of self-help in 'not relying on any third party', others, such as Berner and Phillips (2005), and Archer himself, have identified the need to consider external relationships including with the state. Drawing mainly on third world examples in their critique of the rise of community self-help, Berner and Phillips, conclude that 'evidence on the futility of top down interventions is overwhelming, and a return to government-led development would not help the poor. The opposite extreme, namely relying completely on their own latent capabilities will likely prove to be just as futile' (Berner and Phillips, 2005: 27). Applying these conclusion to the UK context Archer concludes that 'aspirations for self-help will not be realised unless it is appropriately resourced and supported' (Archer, 2009 5).

### **Contemporary policy fit**

These ideas about self-help have found an increasing fit with contemporary policies on social inclusion and building the 'Big Society'. One of the strongest recent examples of the recognition of the need for the state to support and enable self-help in the UK's poorest communities was the work of Policy Action Team 9 set up by the Labour Government's Social Exclusion Unit in 1999 to contribute towards

a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal which aimed to 'close the gap between Britain's poorest neighbourhoods and the national average' ((Home Office, 1999, p.iv). Taking as its starting point the recognition that 'across the country, communities are already helping themselves, many achieving impressive results in the face of considerable obstacles' (Home Office, 1999: i), the report offered a review of the philosophy, nature, benefits and barriers to self-help and made 33 recommendations, mainly directed at government on how barriers could be removed and wider self-help promoted.

The Policy Action Team 9 report saw self-help as beneficial to the individuals involved, regenerating areas and communities, filling gaps in public services and reducing poverty while also reviving local politics. However, it was clear that despite potential benefits self-help faced important motivational, organisational, institutional, political and economic barriers and could not be expected to thrive unless these barriers were addressed. Its recommendations tackled some of the key institutional obstacles to self-help activity such as the operation of the benefits system, the need for simpler small grants and for community endowment funds that communities could allocate themselves and for infrastructure support organisations to mediate between self-help organisations and the state.

While many of these recommendations were taken up in different ways during the following decade it is interesting to see the coalition government's Big Society agenda seeking to combat a similar set of obstacles, and coming to similar conclusions 'that we need a government that actually helps to build up the Big Society... creating neighbourhoods who are in charge of their destiny, who feel that if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them' (speech from David Cameron on Big Society reproduced in the *Independent* 20 July 2010: 5). The Coalition's agreement commits the government to 'make it easier for people to come together to improve their communities and help one another'.

New case study research by Community Development Foundation on self-help in five fields (housing, domestic violence, Roma welfare, credit unions and community gardens) highlights the current challenges such groups face in 'reconciling lived and professional experiences' (Archer and Vanderhoven, 2010: 4) and makes the case for intermediaries to bridge the worlds of public service providers and self-help groups. Similar arguments for the need for brokers, enablers and facilitators, if the Big Society agenda is to be realised, have been made by a range of commentators while the government itself has introduced the idea of 'community organisers' recognising the need for the environment for self-help ('help from within') to be constructed by the state and other key actors including larger third sector organisations who may not always be the natural allies of self-help ('help from without').

From this wider context we have considered the external resource dependencies of self-help housing and the extent to which its success is dependent upon 'help from without' as well as 'help from within' in Smiles' terms. The key external resource dependencies appear to be the need for a supply of properties that can be made available on acceptable terms and a source of funding to undertake the repairs to these properties and to keep them in an adequate standard of repair. Internal resources are provided by residents and volunteers (who may be the same people) but again these can be considered in relation to 'help from without' which can steer interested people towards these projects and provide the resources such as training and the know-how required for 'help from within' to realise its potential.

The remainder of this paper follows a similar structure to others in this series of housing scoping papers (Mullins, Jones, Joseph, Teasdale and Rowlands, 2009; Jones, 2010; Joseph 2010; Teasdale, 2009). Following the template of the housing scoping studies series we begin by exploring the origins and evolution of this sub-sector, mapping the numbers and types of organisation and their key roles and functions and characteristics that define their third sector identities. We then consider the policy and regulation issues and in particular the funding sources that will be necessary for this sub-sector to take on a more significant role (perhaps returning to the peak activity enjoyed in the 1970s and 1980s). Turning to consider the significance of this sub-sector for the TSRC agenda we draw on case studies to illustrate the value added and impact of the self-help model, provide a post election update on the financial and policy context, draw some conclusions and suggest further research questions.

## Origins and evolution

The early origins of self-help housing have been traced by self-help-housing.org to the period immediately after the Second World War when disused military camps were used as temporary housing by local families. An example of the spirit of self-help in this period which developed well beyond the military camps is provided by the work of Peter Elderfield, founder of East Midlands Housing Association which went on to provide the funding for British Social Housing Foundation, one of the research partners for our phase 2 study which follows this scoping report (see p24-25 below). These developments can be linked to the much longer history of community and mutual ownership solutions to land and asset ownership and use, going back to Robert Owen and the chartists as outlined by Woodin et al (2010);<sup>6</sup> and to cooperative and mutual approaches to housing as outlined by Rowlands (2010) in Working paper 17 in this series. However this paper confines itself to self-help initiatives to bring empty property into use, usually without transferring the ownership of such property.

### Box 1: Peter Elderfield and the origins of East Midlands Housing Association in self-help housing for ex-servicemen

In 1946, at the age of 25, Peter Elderfield established the East Midlands Housing Association – the first post war housing association specifically intended to provide homes for ex-servicemen and coalminers. Recently demobbed and leading a group of homeless and penniless ex-servicemen he decided to set up his own housing organisation, rather than wait to be housed by the hard-pressed local authorities. He obtained the initial financial support from the co-operative movement. Perseverance, good luck and determination on his part enabled the fledgling organisation to obtain priority for labour and materials from Aneurin Bevan, the Minister responsible for housing at that time.

The Association's early successes, against all odds, and the value of what it was doing, brought the respect and admiration of other agencies in the housing field. With a loyal and hard working group of employees, EMHA went on to expand its activities into house-building for sale and contract repair work as well as the provision of social housing. It eventually became an integrated building, housing and planning organisation operating throughout the East Midlands.

**Source BSHF Website Accessed 7 August 2010**



Municipalisation of unimproved private sector properties by some local authorities in the 1970s and 1980s and the availability of a funding stream to make these properties wind- and water-tight for short-life use provided the stimulus for self-help housing organisations focused on bringing empty properties into use. This was particularly the case in London Boroughs (e.g. Hackney, Islington, Lambeth and Southwark) that had a ready market from students and young people requiring affordable housing and prepared to contribute time and effort. Institutional capacity was provided by the 'shortlife user groups' that were supported by local authorities and housing associations to enable short-life residents to undertake repairs, and the availability of funding from Housing Corporation 'Mini-hag grants' (see p. 18 below). An example from this period is provided by the Harambee Ujima Hackney Committee which worked with young minority ethnic people in the Borough of Hackney alongside a range of other short life groups supported by the federal body Hackney Short Life User Group (HSLUG).

Box 2: Harambee Ujima Hackney Committee (HUHC) operated in the late 1970s and early 1980s to make short-life housing available to young minority ethnic people in the Borough. It brought together a locally based BME organisation working with young black people, Harambee, and a London wide BME housing association, Ujima, specialising in accessing Mini-hag grant to undertake works and managing properties. HUHC was a member of Hackney Short Life User Group (SLUG), an umbrella body that negotiated leases for empty properties for member groups from Hackney Council that had engaged in a substantial municipalisation programme.

**Source: the author: personal recollection as member of HUCH from 1980–82.**

Like East Midlands HA in the earlier period, some of the third sector organisations (TSOs) developed in the 1970s and 1980s to take advantage of opportunities later evolved into larger scale co-operatives and registered housing associations such as (West Hampstead HA, Ujima, Brighton Housing Trust), which have in turn been swallowed up by larger housing association groups (Genesis, London and Quadrant, Affinity Sutton), very large groups whose activities no longer give any particular emphasis to self-help. Indeed some would argue that the business models adopted by these organisations today are so different to their forbears that co-operation would be unlikely if they met each other in a time warp. **This raises an important issue for this paper of how larger TSOs can support a new generation of self-help organisations to develop to meet current needs and conditions.**

There is thought to have been a decline in self-help housing activity after the 1980s (self-help-housing.org website), possibly as a result of an upturn in the property market but also probably because of a reigning back of local authority municipalisation alongside demunicipalisation programmes for social housing that fitted the increasingly neoliberal policy climate. The boundaries between self-help housing and other forms of action to make use of empty properties such as squatting is an intriguing topic. The histories of short-life programmes by local authorities in the 1970s can partly be seen as a response to illegal occupancy of empty properties;<sup>7</sup> with self-help groups in their turn claiming protection of property from squatting as one of their key selling points to authorities

and property owners. Again today commentators are arguing that 'faced with the prospect of increased squatting, public and private landlords should look honestly at the prospects of bringing their long term empty properties into use...letting them to responsible squatter and other self-help housing groups' (Randall, 2010). It is nevertheless important to maintain a critical perspective on the 'golden age' of self-help housing in the 1970s and 1980s and to learn lessons for the current period. For example renovations and repairs achieved under the Mini-HAG funding, then available from the Housing Corporation, did not always meet standards that would be acceptable today. Furthermore, some short-life housing groups in the 1970s and 1980s had governance and labour relations problems associated with their informal or collective styles of organisation. Initiatives such as the Tudor Trust project should ensure that these lessons are learned and applied to today's context and expectations.

## Estimated numbers of local organisations

Information on the scale and boundaries of the self-help housing sector is quite limited, but mapping activity by Fitzmaurice estimates that :

At present there are only about 50 self-help housing projects in England and Wales making use of empty property. They vary from those managing only a few tenancies to those managing several hundred. However, there could easily be at least 10 times as many projects if people had the information and necessary funding was available to enable them to set something up. (<http://self-help-housing.org/self-help-housing-now/is-self-help-housing-a-new-idea/> accessed 2 August 2009)

In explaining the drivers underlying these figures Fitzmaurice distinguishes between the position in London and out of London. In London the main drivers have been supply/demand factors in the housing market and the presence of 'activist communities' ready to self-organise to take advantage of supply opportunities from municipal acquisitions waiting for funds for long term improvement. A network of user groups, co-operatives and other bodies (e.g. Phoenix HC in east London, Westminster HC & Riverlink in North London) with the capacity to take on short-life repairs and management built up in the 1970s and 1980s, some of which has survived into the present period, although not all have continued to be engaged in self-help housing.

Outside London, current information is more patchy, but housing supply/demand seems to have been a less important factor than wider social objectives that stimulated involvement of bodies such as Tyneside Cyrenians, Project John in Barrow and Community Campus 87 in Teeside to engage with self-help housing as part of wider objectives. Curiously the majority of out-of-London projects known to self-help housing.org are in Yorkshire and the North East, with little known short-life self-help activity in areas such as Merseyside, the North West and West Midlands, even though the latter regions have a strong co-operative housing tradition (Rowlands, 2009), and long-standing co-operative organisations and secondary co-operatives. This may reflect information gaps, or the potential to harness funding and support to expand self- help housing in these areas. **Further research is required to understand the patchiness of the map of self-help housing today and the factors underlying this such as the existence of intermediary bodies to nurture and support local initiative.**

## Main types of organisation

A variety of types of organisation may become involved in self-help housing. Five main types of organisation are listed in the self-help-housing.org directory.

Table 1: Main types of organisation

Types	Numbers listed	Locations
Community Housing Projects	(3)	Two in Leeds and one in Plymouth
Housing Co-operatives	(13)	Most short-life co-operatives are in London, others in Brighton, Southsea, Southampton and Norwich – vary considerably in size (from 10 to over 400 homes) and longevity (several London short life co-ops date back to 1970s). Short-life housing is a feature of surprisingly few housing co-operatives today.
Housing and Training Projects	(5)	One in London, remainder in northern England (Yorkshire, North East, Barrow), link construction training with housing mainly for young people.
Refugee Housing Projects	(9)	Most in London, manage private and housing association properties on short life basis – some on quite a large scale (e.g Tamil Community HA manages 620 shortlife bedspaces as well as 106 permanent HA units, Westcoast HA in Newham manages 120 short-life homes alongside training for refugees and migrants).
Community Training and Enterprise	(4)	Three in Yorkshire or the NE and one in Bristol, include two development trusts.
<b>Source: <a href="http://self-help-housing.org/self-help-housing-now/directory-existing-projects/">http://self-help-housing.org/self-help-housing-now/directory-existing-projects/</a> accessed 2 August 2009</b>		

There are clear overlaps between the categories (with for example some community housing projects also providing training). The varying geographies of these types of organisation are intriguing reflecting both variations in demand (e.g. refugee projects concentrated in London) and institutional support (co-operatives also mainly London based). It might be anticipated that housing and training projects might have a wider geographical spread outside London reflecting the labour market and worklessness creating opportunities for employment and training activities linked to the property sector. The latter might also have a greater separation between volunteers and residents, with much greater overlap in the housing-led groups and those constituted as residents' co-operatives.

The governance of self-help housing organisations also varies, with some adopting co-operative and, in the 1970s and 1980s, collective forms of organisation enabling volunteers and residents to become directly involved in running the organisations. Leeds Action to Create Homes Ltd (LATCH), is a well-established self-help organisation that has adopted a collective form of governance.

Box 3: Leeds Action to Create Homes Ltd (LATCH) is a run by five full-time staff, two part-time staff and around 10 regular volunteers who are overseen by a voluntary committee. Working collectively means that volunteers and tenants can become involved at all levels of the organisation, anything from volunteering on a building site to attending management committee meetings. It also means people are able to constantly bring new skills and ideas to LATCH, helping the organisation to grow and develop, as well as making it a place where people can pick up valuable new skills and experience of team working. LATCH aims and objectives were set down in 1989 and have changed little since then. The process of delivery is however being constantly reviewed and modified to meet changing needs and circumstances.

1. To rehabilitate houses in Leeds, and thus provide homes for people aged 16 to 60 who are homeless, threatened with homelessness or in housing need.
2. For those whose future homes we are working on to be involved in the planning, rehabilitation work, decision making and all other aspects of Latch's work.
3. To provide people with the following:
  - a) Skills in building work through training and supervised work experience.
  - b) Skills in decision making and working as part of a team through participating in the running of the organisation.
  - c) Decent affordable accommodation designed for their needs.
  - d) Confidence in their abilities leading to greater employment opportunities. Central to our work is the belief that the issues of homelessness and disempowerment are closely linked. We believe that in enabling young people to overcome their housing difficulties themselves, they will benefit not only from the accommodation they have created, but as importantly, from the achievement of doing so.

**Source:** <http://www.latch.org.uk/> accessed 2 August 2009

Further research with case study organisations could be used to refine the typology presented here to capture the main models of self-help housing found in operation today. Four key dimensions for the typology to include would be **values and ethos** (the underlying motives for the organisation and how these are reflected in the business model), the **mix of activities** (housing, employment and training and other), **ways in which community members and other supporters can engage with the organisation** (as residents, as volunteers as paid apprentices or staff and as investors or partners), and **governance** (the ways in which users are involved in decision making for the organisation). Two further dimensions that may prove useful differentiators are related questions of organisational **scale** and **geographical spread**.

## Roles and functions

Case studies of 10 organisations on the self-help housing.org website indicate some core functions performed by all of these organisations and a variety of additional functions that reflect local origins and aims. The core functions are:

1. Securing use of empty property through negotiation with owners:
  - properties owned by a local authority or housing association that are awaiting improvement or redevelopment;
  - properties owned by other public bodies which are redundant or may have been bought up in advance of delayed capital project, such as a new road scheme, hospital or school;
  - properties in private ownership that are standing empty.
2. Securing funding to enable properties to be repaired and brought into use:
  - Self-help housing should be structurally sound and meet the decent homes standard<sup>8</sup> and:
    - be free from damp;
    - be in reasonable repair;
    - contain a serviceable bathroom, kitchen and WC;
    - have an effective heating system.
3. Making properties fit to occupy through a mix of professional and volunteer labour:
  - functions requiring professional help include electrics, gas and roofing done;
  - self-help volunteer work can be used for other work;
  - accredited and non-accredited training (see below) can shift the mix of input towards self-help volunteers.
4. Letting properties to people:
  - This is generally to people who for one reason or another, are not going to be offered a permanent tenancy with a local authority or housing association. These are likely to be single people who are not deemed to be 'vulnerable', couples, people leaving institutions of one kind or another, refugees etc.
  - Because of the short-term nature of the accommodation, self-help housing.org advises that it usually best to avoid housing people who are in some way vulnerable or have dependents which mean that they need long-term accommodation.
5. Rent collection and housing management – rents may cover core costs, but additional funding may be needed for repairs, organisational development, volunteer programmes.

A good example of core functions is provided by Westminster Housing Co-op<sup>9</sup>.

Box 4: Westminster Housing Co-op (WHC) is a housing co-operative with 26 years' experience working throughout the Greater London area.

**What we do:**

Take on property in any state of disrepair.

Manage property from as little as a six-month lease, for as long as you require.

House tenants in need in properties that would otherwise be empty.

Consistently return properties to the owners on time.

Manage 48 units on a permanent management agreement with a registered social landlord.

Own two freehold properties outright.

Work with local authorities, large housing associations, small co-ops and private landlords, throughout London.

**Source:** <http://www.westminsterhousingcoop.org/> accessed 2 August 2009

Wider functions carried out by a number of self-help projects reflect the main types of organisation listed above. These include organisations concerned with housing and training and with community training and enterprise. These organisations offer a variety of accredited and non-accredited forms of construction and related training. Partnerships with construction companies to employ trainees alongside employees working on construction contracts for social housing providers is another model that some new market entrants are trying to develop. The use of self-help housing as a vehicle for employment training is exemplified by the key skills project run by Community Campus in Middlesbrough.

Box 5: Community Campus '87

Community Campus was formed in 1987 in Middlesbrough. It was created by a group of concerned individuals in response to the housing crisis facing young people in Cleveland and North East of England. It started off by making use of empty properties, borrowed from their owners.

Over the years, the organisation has developed a range of projects in supported housing, resettlement, personal development and training and has also established Community Campus Trading Ltd to provide construction services and employment opportunities for local people.

In 1991 the Key Skills Project started as a property renovation scheme linking the housing and training needs of young homeless people and the number of empty properties in the area.

Young people have been able to access the project at a variety of entry points:

Training placement via recognised training agency;

New Deal Scheme – Voluntary Sector Option;

Volunteering – internal/external to organisation;

Pupil work experience scheme via Learning and Skills Councils, local schools etc.

Presently, the Key Skills Project employs 10 people, all of whom have been trainees and/or volunteers on the project. It continues to provide an access point for young disadvantaged people to learn and train in construction, following the creation of Community Campus Trading Ltd, provides

excellent value building and construction services to customers. These customers are predominantly from the voluntary, community and statutory sectors, offering high quality, competitively priced works with the added value of continuing to support and develop young people.

**Source:** <http://self-help-housing.org/case-studies/case-study-5/> **Community Campus '87, Middlesbrough**

### Third sector characteristics

Self-help housing organisations are generally small and locally based. They have a high potential for harnessing civic engagement and volunteering to promote social inclusion and community cohesion. This was epitomised by the Canopy project in Leeds<sup>10</sup> whose participation in HACT's Accommodate refugee housing project<sup>11</sup> provided opportunities to extend its community-based approach to create quality homes from disused properties to empower and house refugees alongside other volunteers. This provided a powerful model of community cohesion in action, and homes for young refugees and refugee families. Local young people and refugee households worked together on the renovation of houses in the Beeston area of the city and played football together (Mullins, 2008). A community research study undertaken by members of the refugee community in Leeds identified the positive outcomes of volunteering in this project (Goodson and Phillimore, 2008).

#### Box 6: Outcomes of volunteering: Canopy Project Leeds

"I get courage from the house as I contributed a lot, my energy and a lot of things, I am part of that house...it makes me feel good and I always look at something I helped to build"

"To give something back to the area and Canopy because they have helped me"

"My doctors suggested Canopy to me. I served five years as an apprentice plasterer so I'm qualified and I've actually done quite a lot of plastering for Canopy. I have shown some of these young people how to plaster. I've been involved for about four months. I can paint and decorate too. I volunteer for them four days a week"

"in my country women don't do men's work, they have a duty to look after children at home, but here at Canopy I become different, I have learnt men's work...like making doors, fitting carpets and painting. I have my own choice for my house. I painted it the colour I wanted to, working together with my children...it is great for me in my life ...I have learnt many new things"

"...they help people to get on college courses for different trades. One lad I know has done a scaffolding course. So it's not only helping people who want houses but its helping young people as well to get into the wide world and get a job"

"We have just finished a house and when I first saw it, it was nothing and now we have renovated it, it looks very nice. It makes the area look nice instead of a bad place to live...it make people want to live here"

**Source:** Goodson, L. and Phillimore, J. (2008) *Accommodate: Report of the accredited community research training programme*



It can be argued that by definition most self-help housing projects are social enterprises. They have social objectives, they trade and any surplus is ploughed back into the business to further their social objectives. They may also have links to other social enterprises such as furniture recycling and property maintenance enterprises.

A simple trading model is exemplified by self-help groups who use their rental income to accumulate the funds necessary to invest in the refurbishment of the properties and to support the training of volunteers. Some of these groups argue that it is possible to operate without public subsidy. More developed trading models may generate contract income to fund training activities, provide services to other organisations, and even seek to generate income from any uplift in the value of the housing asset as a result of self-help activities (even where the asset is not in the ownership of the organisation). Other groups may be more dependent on grant funding or on implicit rent subsidies or rent-free periods to cover some of the property refurbishment works. Grant or charitable funding may also be accessed to develop training packages for volunteers.

**Further research should unpack the different social enterprise business models operating in the self-help sector and differences in the extent of trading and grant funded projects.**

Self-help housing organisations are generally ‘below the radar’ and deserve a wider recognition by agencies involved in housing and regeneration than they currently enjoy. As the housing association and co-operative sector has become more institutionalised, the scope for more direct action and people orientation of the self-help sectors has been reduced. It has been argued that as associations have become more and more pre-occupied with new build and volume delivery, many have lost interest in supporting or engaging with this sort of activity, seeing it as too messy and labour intensive. Moreover, a new generation of employees often don’t see such activities as part of their more professionalised social businesses. Similar life-cycle arguments may be applied to campaign and advice agencies such as Shelter and CRISIS; the argument can be made that engagement with self-help groups could re-energise larger more established bodies as part of a ‘thriving third sector’.

**Follow-up research should explore the ways in which self-help projects and their partners conceptualise self-help today. This could include exploring the question of how important the inclusion of volunteers in service provision and governance is to the definition of self-help housing.**

## Key policy and regulatory issues

While it is tempting to see self-help housing as primarily a bottom-up and community driven activity, one of the clear messages from the work of is the need for a policy and regulatory environment that promotes and supports local initiatives. This is consistent with wider work on self-help such as the 1999 Policy Action Team 9 report (Home Office, 1999) and recent work by the Community Development Foundation on growing self-help today which highlights the need to bridge the gap between self-help groups and the state, secure the right technical expertise and funding and develop effective intermediaries to facilitate this (Archer and Vanderhoven, 2010).



## **Responses to credit crisis and recession**

The credit crisis and recession has been seen as a key opportunity to kick-start self-help housing. The slowing down of new build and regeneration programmes has led to some housing being mothballed. While it seems unlikely that private sector developers would be interested in short-term leases on new build developments, there may be greater potential in stalled regeneration projects where existing properties have been decanted and now face a considerable gap before redevelopment proceeds. It is reported that such opportunities are arising in relation to some social housing estates, but also in relation to private sector housing that has been acquired and emptied awaiting regeneration in areas such as Beeston/Holbeck in Leeds. This may be particularly the case in the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder areas where planned regeneration activity has stalled during the credit crisis, and where a downturn in public expenditure plans will make future development less likely.

Furthermore the credit crisis experience has stimulated a substantial rethink of how regeneration is approached, potentially creating a greater space for community based and self-help solutions (BSHF, 2009). There are challenges to align the very different business models adopted by property owning and development organisations to those of small community based self-help housing organisations. For example these different business models may lead to a very different valuations being placed on the rents that are charged for the short-life use of empty properties that have been acquired for future regeneration projects. The extent to which such rents reflect the works that the self-help groups put into the properties and the savings enjoyed by the property owners through the properties being maintained and protected from squatting and vandalism or the use value of these properties to existing or future residents would be worth unpacking in case study research.

Self-help housing has the potential to contribute to sustainable place shaping with active involvement of people living in the area and locally based TSOs giving expression to civil society as examples such as Bonnington Square (Box 8) below illustrate. These examples fit well within the previous government's view that citizens and communities 'want a bigger say in the services they receive and in shaping the places where they live' (Communities and Local Government, 2006: 7) and could be well placed to the asset transfer agenda (Quirk, 2007). However, the pressure on public finances over the next few years will raise challenges for self-help housing to secure the funding and support required to make a more significant impact. Arguments about value for money, congruence with the new localism and added value associated with self-help will be important in convincing key funding bodies such as Homes and Communities Agency of relevance to their mission.

**Further research on the scope for self-help and other alternatives to large scale regeneration may be appropriate.**

This could explore potential synergies between the two scales of organisation and aim to enable more sustainable self-help through closer integration with large regeneration schemes. This could maximise the opportunities for self-help groups to move from temporary occupancy of pre-regeneration properties in one area to the next in a more planned way. A closer partnership between large development organisations and self-help housing initiatives could be facilitated by bodies such as HCA, particularly where the former are mainly publicly funded.

## Funding sources

Many self-help housing organisations currently operate on very limited budget, drawing on volunteer labour and rental income to cover core costs as well as housing management service costs. This is partly due to lack of awareness of funding opportunities and partly to the lack of interest of mainstream housing funders in an area that has much lower profile than large scale regeneration programmes. One of the objectives of self-help-housing.org is to try and get more funding into the sector, to raise interest among trusts in this area of activity and to get them to adopt self-help housing as one of their 'priorities' and to try and lever money via statutory sources.

Some self-help housing organisations have accessed Supporting People (SP) funding and are now at risk as contracts are re-negotiated and SP funding is no longer ring-fenced within local funding. However, the ability of successful self-help organisations to harness funding from a variety of sources is indicated by the following cases:

### Box 7: Examples of funding sources: case studies

#### **LATCH<sup>12</sup>**

Over the years, Latch has been successful in securing grants from a variety of charitable trusts, to support property renovation and development work. Currently the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund is funding their 'Hands On' training project. The housing management service is funded through rental income and they have been in receipt of Supporting People funding from Leeds City Council for a number of years.

#### **Community Campus '87**

*'The organisation grew from an idea on the back of a beer mat' writes Carl Ditchburn 'and in the early stages we all paid subs to get things moving. We started attracting charitable monies to employ a development worker, a support worker and admin support to work with young people in borrowed leased properties. We went through the usual routes to fund vans/materials/furniture as a 100% grant dependent agency does.*

*We now have moved to the point where we earn 70% of our outgoings through contractual delivery and the income from the property we own, including office accommodation. This has taken over 20 years of hard work. Most funding regimes last 24–36 months, which does not encourage long term thinking!*

*We still have to raise upwards of £250k each year. The key to the overall position is that we have built an asset base which has created a robust financial model and we did this through borrowing money and using various grant regimes such as the Lottery, Futurebuilders, & Government regeneration initiatives. The other key is hard work: you have to work hard for every pound you earn or ask for!*

**Sources:** <http://self-help-housing.org/case-studies/latch-housing-project-leeds/>  
<http://self-help-housing.org/case-studies/case-study-5>

A key contribution of self-help-housing.org has been to identify existing funding streams (notably temporary social housing grant) and to harness new funding (e.g. negotiation with Shelter to fund raise to launch a new stream of funding to support self-help projects).

**Temporary Social Housing Grant (TSHG)**

Research by self-help-housing.org has identified TSHG as a potentially key source of funding which could be harnessed to enable self-help housing to thrive in a similar way to the Mini-hag grant, the availability of which from the Housing Corporation had helped to stimulate the short-life housing movement to make use of empty property opportunities in the 1970s and 1980s. Table 2 shows the amount of funding that had been allocated to housing associations in March 2009 for improvements to public and private sector properties for short-term leases (mainly for statutory homeless households). An interesting aspect of the data obtained by self-help-housing.org from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) was the very small number of housing associations currently involved in the programme and the limited links that have been so far made to the self-help housing sector even by associations that are drawing on this funding source. Most of the funding is currently used for temporary accommodation schemes for statutory homeless applicants housed through local authorities. This is a major contrast to mini-hag in the 1970s and 80s which had been more widely accessed and used to house non-statutory homeless groups in particular single people who were largely excluded from social housing.

Table 2: Temporary Social Housing Grant Allocations 2008–11: March 2009

REGION	2008/2009		2009/2010		2010/2011	
	Grant	Units	Grant	Units	Grant	Units
Eastern	110,000	10				
London	10,406,511	271	3,066,582	129	2,794,550	115
North West	538,200	26				
South West	834,647	28				
West Midlands	35,000	5				
Yorkshire & Humberside	72,500	5				
	11,996,858	345	3,066,582	129	2,794,550	115

**Source: Data provided to self-help-housing.org by Homes and Communities Agency.**

Nevertheless the potential for this funding stream to support renovation and repair work by the self-help sector through partnerships with housing associations is indicated by the principal features of the scheme set out in HCA guidelines.

- It applies to properties available on lease/licence for periods between 2–30 years.
- It covers the costs of carrying out any necessary repairs and an allowance for on-costs.
- A housing association has to apply for an allocation to their HCA regional office (usually on a scheme-by-scheme basis).

- Housing associations can manage the properties themselves or enter into a management agreement with a suitable voluntary agency (e.g. unregistered housing association/project).
- Properties can be in public or private ownership, but housing association-owned properties are excluded.
- Average grant levels for repairing properties are c£50k in London and c£25k out of London – (n.b. this varies from property to property according to the number of people housed and the life of the property).

TSHG is administered through the National Affordable Housing Programme and in recent years has been part of ‘continuous market engagement’ arrangements for considering new proposals. Standards for TSHG properties are set out in the HCA Design & Quality Standards Guide. Terms and conditions relating to TSHG are set out in the Affordable Housing Capital Funding Guide:<sup>13</sup>

### **Capacity building and organisational development**

Sources of funding beyond rental income may include grants from local authorities, charities, the Big Lottery, regional development agencies or local businesses and loans from ethical banks such as Triodos. However, as Self-Help Housing.Org points out there is increasing competition for all these sources and small scale stand-alone projects are not in a strong position to develop proposals.

This highlights the potential for another funding development self-help-housing.org is hoping to progress; a system of promotional grants which might replicate the methods whereby Shelter had funded and worked in partnership with newly formed housing associations such as Birmingham Housing Trust (Gulliver, 2000) and Notting Hill Housing Trust (Holmes, 2005) and bodies such as the Family Squatting Advisory Service to promote short life housing in the 1970s (Randall, 2010).

**Further research on the funding of short-life housing should include an analysis of the income and expenditure of a sample of projects, exploration of attempts to harness TSHG for self-help housing, on the need for promotional grant funding and the potential for more sustainable long term financial viability through trading.**

## **Impact and value added issues**

Case studies provide the best evidence of the value added by self-help housing organisations. A few selected examples illustrate some of the different outcomes that have been achieved. Methods such as Social Return on Investment (SROI) could be used to quantify the value added by the self-help model. Simpler forms of impact assessment including user feedback through standard satisfaction surveys and peer research such as that undertaken by refugee residents of Canopy in Leeds (Box 5) might provide more cost effective alternative.

Bonnington Square provides a good example of the contribution of a community based organisation to place shaping, creating a neighbourhood environment with gardens, community café and local employment.

#### Box 8: Bonnington Square: London

In the early 1980s a large number of properties in Bonnington Square, Vauxhall, were acquired for demolition by the then Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) in advance of proposals to build a new school on the site. They were left empty and would have become derelict but for the intervention of a group of people who could see how they could be brought back into use on a temporary basis

They formed a housing co-op and negotiated with ILEA who eventually agreed to lease the properties to South London Family Housing Association, which handed over the management to the co-op. The co-op renovated the houses, transformed the area and even opened a community café.

Years later plans for the school were eventually dropped but of course the properties had been saved. Today, there are various forms of tenure in the Square ranging from tenants to shared owners and even owners, but the amazing thing is that it was saved from dereliction and has gone on to provide a much sought after place to live.

Funded by grants and local sponsorship, the garden includes a water wheel and lush, sub-tropical planting. Widely reported in the media, the Pleasure Garden is today regarded as one of the finest community gardens in London.

The Bonnington Café is a co-operatively run vegetarian and vegan restaurant in the Bonnington Square Community Centre in the heart of Vauxhall. One of South London's best-kept secrets tucked amidst the beautiful community gardens of the square, the Café has been open since the early 1980s when it was started to provide a good cheap meal for the community living in the Square.

**Source:** <http://self-help-housing.org/case-studies/bonnington-square-london/>

The Tamil Community Housing Association shows the value added of a responsive community based organisation that has been able to use empty properties as a base to develop a sustainable organisation that is now able to provide long term accommodation for the community.

#### Box 9: Tamil Community Housing Association: London

##### **Origins**

The Tamil Community Housing Association, formerly the Tamil Refugee Housing Association, was formed in 1986 to address the housing and support needs of the Tamil refugee community in London. The Association grew out of the Tamil Refugee Action Group and was established with the support and help from other community based refugee organisations, housing associations and several London local authorities. Since 2002 TCHA has been registered with the Housing Corporation (since 2008 Tenant Services Agency).

##### **Properties**

TCHA started out by borrowing empty properties from Haringey and Hackney councils. Twenty years later it still manages 40 short life properties, but also manages 220 permanent properties which are owned by various housing associations. TCHA's objective is to acquire ownership of permanent housing and hopes to be able to persuade some larger housing associations to transfer stock to themselves. The Association is managed by a voluntary Management Board, with day to day operations and administration carried out by a professional staff team.

## Tenants

TCHA provides a lifeline for many Tamils, particularly refugees, who often have difficulty accessing mainstream services.

**Source:** <http://self-help-housing.org/case-studies/tamil-community-housing-association-london>

**Further research should consider how self-help housing organisations and their users and partners judge whether they are doing a good job and what they put any successes down to.**

It will be important to take a broad view of impact (for communities, property owners, users, volunteers and partners) but to avoid overly-complex attempts to measure added value that impose unnecessary burden. The potential role of community research in longer term monitoring of such projects should be explored.

## Representative and umbrella bodies

**Self-help-housing.org** <http://self-help-housing.org/> has been actively constructing a field of self-help housing to attract and broker resources of one kind or another, rather than operate as a representative or umbrella body. Like other forms of bottom-up community based activity self-help housing is unlikely to thrive without institutional linkage to a network of funding, regulatory and support bodies. The key resource dependencies of the sector are on a supply of properties, adequate funding and a supply of volunteers and residents.

**Empty Homes Agency (EHA)** is the key body identifying supply and stimulating use of empty dwellings. Social landlords (local authorities, housing associations and ALMOs) currently appear to be the major sources of supply, but ways to access the much larger numbers of empty private dwellings are needed and properties held by government departments are of great potential importance. Local authority empty property strategies can be a key resource.

**Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)** is the main funding agency for housing and regeneration schemes. There is potential to integrate self-help housing in a planned way to maximise use of empty properties during the regeneration process and thereby enhance place-shaping objectives. There has been £6.7 million funding for unimproved properties allocated for TSHG in 2008–11. This funding stream could be taken up more strongly for community-based self-help housing alongside the larger scale use for temporary accommodation for statutory homeless people.

**HACT (the Housing Action Charity)** has provided financial support to more than half of the self-help groups referred to on the self-help.org website and is may partner with Shelter in the proposal for collective fund-raising.

**National Housing Federation (NHF)** is the trade body for housing associations and its members own over 2 million properties. It can encourage housing associations to engage with self-help housing partners and to draw down funding through TSHG.

**The Development Trusts Association** provides links between self-help housing and the asset transfer agenda providing the potential for longer term sustainability.

**Community and grass roots organisations** such as schools, nurseries and Sure Start schemes, employment training projects, tenants' and residents organisations and refugee community organisations can provide a key resource for self-help housing by providing linkages to maintain the supply of volunteers, some of whom may also become the residents of properties they work to repair.

**Shelter** the national homelessness campaign provided a historic role in supporting housing associations to tackle homelessness directly and could now link with a new generation of self-help housing organisations responding to homelessness today.

**CRISIS** the homelessness charity working with single homeless people, including new migrants, to secure employment, training and housing has a keen interest in the potential of self-help housing to meet its clients' needs.

## Post election update

### Budget reductions

The economic recession and the new Coalition Government's efforts to reduce the budget deficit have implications for the demand for and supply of alternative models of housing provision such as self-help housing. The Coalition Government in its emergency budget in May 2010 announced over £150 million of cuts to housing investment; including major area based regeneration initiatives, in particular the Housing Market Renewal Area Pathfinders. The Autumn Comprehensive Spending Review is expected to lead to further reductions to both capital and revenue spending in housing and regeneration. Overall the Treasury is seeking to make between 25–40 per cent spending cuts across most departments.

These reductions will have a consequence for groups able to harness the resources to invest in the temporary use of properties that remain empty for a longer period awaiting capital investment. The potential is there for self-help housing groups to be seen as a key enabling resource to bring properties into use and secure them for their owners' future development. However, this will require a more proactive and supportive environment than has existed over the past 30 years when despite the continued existence of large numbers of unused and empty properties the number of self-help housing organisations has not increased.

**Further research should explore the specific forms of support and mediation that would make the greatest difference to self-help organisations and their users.**

### Big Society

One of the emerging policy agendas floated during the election by the Conservative leader, David Cameron was the notion of a Big Society. Although, questions were raised about the detail of this, the Coalition Government since taking office has taken steps to add flesh on the bone which involves reducing the size of government, cutting red tape and liberating local communities and groups by offering opportunities to create social enterprises in the delivery of services; succinctly summarised by the Prime Minister on 19 July as involving three main strands: 'first social action, second public service reform and third community empowerment.'<sup>14</sup> This suggests that there may be increased opportunities for the development of self-help approaches to the delivery of services; but research by the



Community Development Foundation with local groups on how to grow self-help<sup>15</sup> has highlighted the need to reconcile lived and professional experiences, build bridges between self-help groups and the state and meet shortfalls in technical expertise if this is to be achieved (Archer, 2009; Archer and Vanderhoven, 2010). The conditions required for self-help housing to contribute to meeting homelessness needs while making use of empty properties, includes those awaiting longer term investment following reduced public investment in regeneration.

**The implications of the Big Society agenda for self-help organisations; particularly the understanding that different actors have of the meaning of self-help and of the importance of the direct involvement of volunteers in providing services and in governance will be a key issue for ongoing research.**

## Conclusion

This paper has provided a scoping review of self-help housing in the UK, focusing mainly on projects to bring existing empty properties into use principally through volunteer effort. Other forms of self-help housing such as self-build of new properties have been excluded from our scope since this is not how most people actively involved view the field.

The paper has identified the four essential ingredients for successful projects in this field as

- access to a supply of suitable empty properties,
- funding for activities (usually a mix of trading, grants, subsidies and voluntary labour),
- a supply of volunteers or paid staff to work on the properties (including trainees and apprentices) and
- a supply of residents to occupy the properties (who may or may not overlap with the volunteers and staff category).

It has illustrated the relatively small numbers of groups that exist in this field despite over 30 years of evidence that such groups can be effective in providing cost effective methods to bring properties into use and to safeguard assets during periods in which they would otherwise be unused and risk deterioration. The benefits of such groups often extend well beyond these physical achievements in providing common bonds, a sense of purpose and achievement and contribute to better places (albeit often in places seemingly abandoned or blighted by regeneration plans or roadbuilding schemes) that are cared for by residents themselves.

However, the vulnerability of such groups is also apparent in the impermanence of the assets that they act as guardians of and their general exclusion from the benefits of property development that accrue to the asset owners. The variable forms of organisation and activities (from housing to construction skills training and employment generation) and mix of residents, volunteers and paid staff make it difficult to generalise about self-help housing. This is reinforced by differences in the business models adopted by these organisations, despite their common form as social enterprises, trading and reinvesting surpluses mainly for the benefit of their members.

The mix of funding between trading and grant income is an important source of variation and the question of whether such organisations could generate a financial return for investors or could operate



without grant or subsidy appears to be a matter of disagreement within the field. The level of rental return expected by property owners in addition to the benefits of maintenance and protection of their assets through temporary use is another key factor affecting the viability of self-help projects. The potential for self-help groups to realise some of the benefits of uplift in the value and use of the assets that they improve is an important challenge for a sector that is distinguished from other housing TSOs by generally not owning assets that it invests in.

Self-help housing overlaps with some of the other TSO fields covered in these scoping papers; notably with co-operatives and tenant led organisations where co-production of services and active engagement of service beneficiaries is at the centre of organisational models. Housing associations, some of whom had roots in activities similar to self-help housing, and who today are among the main property owners and developers and could therefore make opportunities available to self-help groups on terms that would enable such organisations to build up their strength.

We conclude that self-help housing can be considered as a field that requires policy and funding agencies (such as the Empty Homes Agency, the Homes and Communities Agency, Shelter, CRISIS and HACT) to work with, support and co-ordination bodies (such as self-help-housing.org, local authorities, housing associations and co-operatives, training and construction knowledge brokers) to work with community-based organisations to harness volunteering and civic engagement.

Only through the active construction of partnerships between 'help from without' and 'help from within' is self-help likely to thrive.

## Key issues for further research

Throughout this paper we have identified themes in which further case study based research could generate improved understanding of the self-help housing sector and the factors which might enable it to grow to take up the opportunities that the current policy and fiscal agenda would appear to present. These potential themes for further research are highlighted in bold in the text above. Here we have sorted the themes to frame a set of specific questions requiring further research:

- **What can we learn from the history of the sector?**
  - What can we learn from the life-cycle of self-help housing organisations?
- **Why is the map of self-help housing today so patchy?**
  - What sort of intermediary bodies might fill the geographical gaps by nurturing and supporting local initiatives.
- **How do self-help projects and their partners conceptualise self-help today?**
  - Is self-help the most appropriate label for these projects?
  - How important is the inclusion of volunteers in service provision and governance to the definition of self-help?
- **How can the typology of self-help housing groups be refined to capture the main models of self-help housing today?**
  - Could the typology set out in Table 1 be refined, for example, in relation to functions, values and ethos, ways in which community members and other supporters can engage with governance of the organisations, scale and geographical spread?

- Could the typology be extended to consider the characteristics of the different social enterprise business models operating in the self-help sector today (e.g. trading and grant make-up and mix)?
- **What are the main sources of income and expenditure in different self-help projects?**
  - Can viability be achieved through rental income and voluntary labour alone?
  - What is the value of implicit subsidies through reduced rents and rent free periods; how does this relate to the reduced costs of security etc incurred by property owners?
  - What is being learned from attempts to harness TSHG for self-help housing?
  - What could be achieved through grant funding to set up self-help housing projects?
  - What is the potential for sustainable long-term financial viability through trading?
- **What is the scope and limits to self-help and other alternatives to large-scale regeneration?**
  - What are the potential synergies between self-help organisations and large regeneration schemes?
  - Is there scope for better collaboration with large developing associations to enable self-help groups to move from temporary occupancy of pre-regeneration properties in one area to the next in a more planned way?
  - Could closer partnerships between large development organisations and self-help housing initiatives be facilitated by bodies such as HCA, linked to conditions of public funding?
- **How do self-help housing organisations and their users and partners judge whether they are doing a good job?**
  - What do they put any successes down to?
  - What is the broader impact of self-help (for communities, property owners, users, volunteers and partners)?
  - How can broader impact be measured without overly-complex methods that impose an unnecessary burden?
  - What is the potential role of community research in longer term monitoring of such projects?
- **What are the specific forms of support and mediation that would make the greatest difference to self-help organisations and their users?**
  - How could larger TSOs support the development of a sustainable self-help sector?
  - What policies would make the greatest difference?
- **How will self-help housing benefit from the Big Society agenda?**
  - How do different actors understand the meaning of self-help?
  - How important is the direct involvement of volunteers in providing services?
  - What are the best mechanisms to involve self-help participants in governance?

## Stage 2 Research

The second phase of the project commenced in July 2010 using case studies to explore innovation, barriers and enablers from the perspective of different stakeholders, and a national policy forum to

explore how learning from the case studies can be applied to policy for the sector. There will be a number of outputs to communicate key learning to a range of audiences and an academic journal article to add to knowledge on a relatively under-researched topic.

There will be eight case studies; five of established organisations selected on the basis of the typology in this paper, and three of organisations currently developing self-help housing projects. The former five should be of particular value in learning lessons from the history of the sector and the life-cycle of organisations and in adding depth to our typology and understanding of various business models. The three min-cases should be of particular value in understanding barriers and enablers in the current policy environment and in informing the discussion at the BSHF policy event in December 2010. Connections will be made with current research on self-help in other fields, such as that currently being undertaken by the Community Development Foundation<sup>16</sup> so that wider lessons for the role of self-help within the Third Sector can be drawn out.

For this research to have an impact in this context will require effective engagement with policy makers, and organisations that have the assets and resources required to provide the 'help from without' that will empower rather than the 'help from within' that self-help organisations can contribute. We are therefore delighted that the British Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) is supporting the project by convening the policy event to draw out and discuss the implications of the case study research with policy makers, funders, property owners and others able to offer 'help from without' to create a thriving self-help sector. We are also delighted to have received support from CRISIS towards our planned case studies to enable the relevance and appropriateness of self-help to homeless people, particularly single people and couples, to be explored.

## End notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://self-help-housing.org/> (accessed 12 August 2010).

<sup>2</sup> See for example research by Barlow et al. in 2001 estimating 15,000 self-build homes a year in the UK mainly for owner-occupation. They define self-build as 'Self-build' can vary from people physically building much of a dwelling themselves to cases where they hand over responsibility for the entire construction process to other parties. (Self-build may also be undertaken collectively, usually with groups of people pooling their expertise and resources; this study did not deal with this kind of self-build.) The procurement route partly varies according to the level of assistance the self-builder requires. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/current-state-self-build-housing-market> (accessed 17 September 2010).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.squatter.org.uk/> (accessed 17 September 2010).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.emptyhomes.com/> (accessed 12 August 2010).

<sup>5</sup> The Homes and Communities Agency held an on-line debate on 'how do we maximise the use of empty homes' in Summer 2010 and had received 117 responses by early August <http://showcase.homesandcommunities.co.uk/debate/how-do-we-maximise-the-use-of-empty-homes-.html?page=1> (accessed 12 August 2010).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/community-mutual-ownership> (accessed 17 September 2010).

<sup>7</sup> See for example the UK Squatting archive for examples from 1969 <http://www.wussu.com/squatting/> (accessed 17 September 2010).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/138355.pdf> (accessed 17 September 2010).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.westminsterhousingcoop.org/> (accessed 17 September 2010).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.canopyhousingproject.org/> (accessed 30 July 2009).

<sup>11</sup> <http://hact.org.uk/accommodate> (accessed 3 August 2010).

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.latch.org.uk/> (accessed 2 August 2009).

<sup>13</sup> <http://cfg.homesandcommunities.co.uk/>; <http://cfg.homesandcommunities.co.uk/temporary-social-housing-tsh.htm> (accessed 2 August 2009).

---

<sup>14</sup> *Independent*, 20 July 2010, p.5, extract from a speech by the Prime Minister, 19 July 2010, and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/jul/18/four-authorities-experiment-big-society> (accessed 17 September 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Community Development Foundation [www.cdf.org.uk](http://www.cdf.org.uk) (accessed 17 September 2010).

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/publication?id=185845> (accessed 17 September 2010).

## References

- Archer, T. (2009) *Help from within: An exploration of community self-help*. London: Community Development Foundation.
- Archer, T. and Vanderhoven, D. (2010) *Self-help: A discussion paper on how to grow self-help*. London: Community Development Foundation.
- Barlow, J. Jackson, R. and Meikle, J. (2001) *The current state of the self-build housing market*. York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Berner, E. and Phillips, B. (2005) 'Left to their own devices? Community self-help between alternative development and neo-liberalism', *Community Development Journal* 40 (1) 17–29.
- British Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) (2004) *Recycling the city: Unlocking the potential of empty properties*. Consultation at St Georges House Windsor, June 2004. Coalville: BSHF.
- British Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) (June 2009) *Future of UK housing consultation*, Coalville: BSHF.
- Burns, D. and Taylor, M. (1998) *Mutual aid and self-help: Coping strategies for excluded communities*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Communities and Local Government (2006) 'Strong and prosperous communities', Local Government White Paper. London: CLG.
- Goodson, L. and Phillimore, J. (2008) *Accommodate: Report of Accredited Community Research Training Programme*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
- Gulliver, K. (2000) *Social concern and social enterprise: The origins and history of focus housing*, Studley: Brewin Books.
- Holmes, C. (2005) *The Other Notting Hill*, Studley: Brewin Books.
- Home Office (2009) *Community Self-help*. Report of Policy Action Team 9, National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, London, Home Office.
- Jones, P.A. (2010) *The evolution of tenants' and community organisations and their relevance to policy and regulatory issues today*, Third Sector Research Centre, Working Paper 18.
- Joseph, R. (2010) *Homelessness, housing advice and housing related support*, Third Sector Research Centre, Working Paper 19.
- Mullins, D. (2008) *Better together: The final Accommodate evaluation report*. London:HACT [www.download.bham.ac.uk/curs/pdf/accommodate\\_summ.pdf](http://www.download.bham.ac.uk/curs/pdf/accommodate_summ.pdf) (accessed 17 September 2010).
- Mullins, D. (2010) *Housing associations*, Third Sector Research Centre, Working Paper 16.
- Mullins, D., Jones, P.A., Joseph, R., Teasdale, S. and Rowlands, R. (2009) *Housing scoping papers: Overview*. Third Sector Research Centre, Briefing Paper 10.
- Quirk, B. (May 2007) *Making assets work: Review of community management and ownership of public assets* [www.communitymatters.org.uk](http://www.communitymatters.org.uk) (accessed 3 August 2009).
- Randall, B (2010) Waste not want not. Comment. *Inside Housing* p.15 September 24<sup>th</sup> 2010.
- Rowlands, R. (2009) *Forging mutual futures: Co-operative and mutual housing in practice. History and potential: Phase 1 research report to the Commission on Mutual and Co-operative Housing*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
- Rowlands, R. (2010) *Co-operative and mutual housing in the social rented sector*, Third Sector Research Centre, Working Paper 17.
- Smiles, S. (1859) *Self-Help with illustrations of conduct and perseverance*, London: John Murray.
- Teasdale, S. (2009) *Innovation in the homelessness field: How does social enterprise respond to the needs of homeless people?* Third Sector Research Centre, Working Paper 5.
- Woodin, T., Crook, D. and Carpentier, V. (2010) *Community and mutual ownership: A historical review*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

## About the Centre

The third sector provides support and services to millions of people. Whether providing front-line services, making policy or campaigning for change, good quality research is vital for organisations to achieve the best possible impact. The Third Sector Research Centre exists to develop the evidence base on, for and with the third sector in the UK. Working closely with practitioners, policy-makers and other academics, TSRC is undertaking and reviewing research, and making this research widely available. The Centre works in collaboration with the third sector, ensuring its research reflects the realities of those working within it, and helping to build the sector's capacity to use and conduct research.

Third Sector Research Centre, Park House, 40 Edgbaston Park Road,  
University of Birmingham, Birmingham, B15 2RT

Tel: 0121 414 3086

Email: [info@tsrc.ac.uk](mailto:info@tsrc.ac.uk)

[www.tsrc.ac.uk](http://www.tsrc.ac.uk)

## Service Delivery and Housing

From housing to health, social care or criminal justice, third sector organisations provide an increasing number of public services. Working with policy makers and practitioners to identify key priorities, this work will cut across a number of research streams and cover a series of key issues. The centre's research will help to inform the debate on the way in which service delivery is developing, the potential role of the third sector in commissioning as well as contracting, and the implications of different approaches to service delivery on the overall impact of the third sector.

This is part of a series of scoping papers on housing commissioned and edited by David Mullins, Professor of Housing Policy, at the University of Birmingham. Each paper sets out the origins and evolution of a sub-sector, mapping key roles, and functions, numbers and types of organisation and third sector characteristics, outlines key policy, regulation and funding issues and suggests further research contributing to wider knowledge of the third sector.

## About the author

David Mullins is Professor of Housing Policy at the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) and leads the Housing Stream research for the Third Sector Research Centre. He is co-author of *After Council Housing: Britain's New Social Landlords* with Hal Pawson (Palgrave, 2010) and *Housing Policy in the UK* with Alan Murie (Palgrave, 2006). He is a housing association board member and a charity trustee and has a longstanding interest in self-help housing, having started his career in local government in Hackney in 1980 when he was a co-opted committee member of a short-life housing group. Contact David Mullins on [d.w.mullins@bham.ac.uk](mailto:d.w.mullins@bham.ac.uk) or 0121 414 3248.

**The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) and the Barrow Cadbury UK Trust is gratefully acknowledged. The work was part of the programme of the joint ESRC, OTS Barrow Cadbury Third Sector Research Centre.**