



VIVARIUM CO-HOUSING PROJECT

Newsletter 21, May and June 2016

Well there certainly has been a bit of a silence on the newsletter front for some time. It is not because not much has been happening but more that a lot has been happening. Here is a bumper catch up.

May AGM: The AGM, which was well attended, was held at the end of May. New trustees were elected. The board trustees after the AGM were Clare du Boulay, Judith Bryden, Liz Hodgson, Carol Morton, Jess Mitchell, Jennifer Leiper and Tony Hodgson. Unfortunately due to unexpected professional and academic requirements Tony felt he could not take up the Trust post.

SITE NEWS: We have the possibility of a promising new site in Cupar. It will involve a multi faceted project with local partners.



Picture – Cohousing Community Nevada, USA

MEETINGS: The Trust board has met with Douglas from Community Enterprise and Tom from Arc Architects to look at the next version of our financial plan. Additionally the feasibility study for the site is inspiring. There is still research and conversations to have to further develop the financial plan. The board will meet together in early July to spend considerable time understanding and testing the financial structure in order to further hone it. We have, indeed, a tall

order to create a viable financial plan for three categories of tenure and to create something for everyone regardless of financial means. Current affordable housing rules do not fit several real financial situations of older people so they remain excluded.

PRACTICE: The board has also met to look at some the admin tasks needed to sustain the trust. Time and energy will be needed for the new site and developing an active living group who have learnt to work together in a harmonious way ready for cohousing. We are not in the business of providing nice accommodation for random future tenants who hopefully will get on sufficiently well to take responsibility for the running and policy making that will be needed. Cohousing is quintessentially about a community of people who have demonstrated the ability to be supportive of each other in the administrative and practical responsibilities. It is about learning new skills, accepting feedback and continuous learning together. Cohousing needs to be a suitable, well experienced and happy choice for each member. It is not suitable for everyone.

WEBSITE AND FUTURE MEETINGS: It is hoped that a new and improved pattern of meetings will be announced shortly. The new website is at the basic first stage of completion: www.vivariumtrust.scot . We hope you will help develop it further. Let us know if you spot any typos and what else you would like to see there.

READING: In the meantime, a good basic read to further understand cohousing is Maria Brenton's *The Rowntree Foundation Report* which can be found on the *Articles* page of the website. Maria has been working with OWCH in London and they are finally on the verge of moving into their cohousing. Interestingly, they already have a waiting list of over 90 people wishing to become tenants.

You will also find the report here: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/senior-cohousing-communities-%E2%80%93-alternative-approach-uk>

EVENTS: In May, as part of Scottish Festival of Architecture, SEDA (Scottish Ecological Design Society) organised a very well attended evening discussion 'Land, Community and Home: Future Social Housing Debate' in Edinburgh. David Seel of SEDA gave an overview of a spectrum of community led housing and building past present and future. Maria Brenton spoke about the OWCH project which took nearly two decades and over 4000 people passing through OWCH membership. Diarmaid Lawlor from Architecture and Design Scotland spoke on the conceptual challenges and economic solutions implied in the endeavour to shift paradigm and emotional readiness in housing from competitive and unsustainable to sustainable and collaborative practises. His presentation of a visual graph of rising health and social care costs relative to decreasing funding brought home the ever widening gap and strain on the ability of services to meet growing needs.

Ann MacInnes from Penington Cohousing spoke of their project. Liz from Vivarium spoke of the failures of the current health and social care system, greatly under strain and underfunded, as an opportunity for cohousing to alleviate some of these problems. Prior to the event, Vivarium members spent time in the cafe with Ann and Maria sharing information and progress stories. Thank you David and Vivien for making this event happen.

In late June, members attended an A&DS cohousing meeting at the Lighthouse Glasgow. There will be a cohousing event take place in Glasgow (possibly 8th September) during Housing Week. It is hoped that policy makers will attend. Many of the current rules of 'affordable' housing disallow low income pensioner tenants.

In early June we were invited to the House of Commons parliamentary launch of a two year wide study *Cohousing: Shared Futures*. The report is the result of a series of seminars and knowledge exchange involving cohousing practitioners and academics. The report sets an agenda for policy makers, practitioners and researchers in the years ahead. It states clearly the many barriers that are holding up cohousing in the UK. You will also find it on the *Articles* page of our website as well as here:

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/geographyAndEnvironment/research/london/docs/Cohousing-shared-futures-FINAL-web.pdf> .

MEMBERS NEWS: Cecilia has now left Vivarium and found a home in the centre of St Andrews. Like for many, time to settle into the final home becomes more urgent than the time spam of achieving a project. Huge thanks to Cecilia for all the help given over many years. We hope you stay in touch.

FUTURE HOMES: In May, indoor air quality was a topic headlining in the Scottish news. During our autumn design session there was a consensus preference for natural materials especially indoors. With new standards of building air tightness, indoor air quality needs greater consideration. Many of our building materials, cleaning materials, paints and furnishings give off toxic fumes which add to the stress load on the immune system. Although measurement of indoor air pollution has been a consideration in Germany for many years it has been slow to reach UK awareness. It is an inconvenient fact that many regular building materials and household products coupled with less ventilation create air pollution. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-36134213> Careful choice of materials and paints can reduce the pollutant load.

Picture – Cohousing community supper - Canada

We welcome feedback on suggestions to improve the newsletter or website. We are considering a regularly updated Facebook as an alternative to the newsletter. If you know of anyone else who is interested in



cohousing please feel free to pass on this newsletter.

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