Enabling Community-Led Housing

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Abstract

This project investigated the factors that enabled or constrained community-led housing development in England with a view to supporting the growth of the sector. The study investigated the local and national conditions which enabled community-led housing development and considered the role of actors operating within these contexts to promote community-led housing approaches. In particular, this thesis investigated the emergence of regional organisations that provide support for community-led housing to the public, known as enabling hubs. The analysis is based on a comparative qualitative study of three regions in England that have seen significant growth in community-led housing, supported by a set of interviews with national actors. The thesis is based on a collaborative award, in partnership with Wessex Community Assets.

Using a theoretical framework grounded in new institutionalist theory, the thesis presents a connected macro-scale and meso-scale analysis of the community-led housing sector in England. The findings discuss the different factors which form the local institutional contexts in which community-led housing might operate and their relationship to the wider national institutional context. The findings further evidence the mechanisms through which actors can manipulate their contexts to support community-led housing development. The thesis has also generated data concerning the implementation of the enabling hub concept for the first time. It found that the implementation of the enabling hub programme did not result in the full actualisation of an established network of regenerative and financially self-sustaining organisations able to extensively support community-led housing projects. However, the conceptual and institutional groundwork for such services has been established, for actors to continue to utilise, adapt and strengthen where possible.

Acknowledgements

This thesis represents the culmination of my PhD programme in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at the University of Sheffield. I am grateful for the support I have received throughout my doctoral training and to those who contributed to this research.

Firstly, I am grateful to the participants from the community-led housing sector who engaged with the research. I hope this thesis, and further dissemination, can reflect all that I have learned from the insightful conversations I had across the fieldwork with participants working, in different ways, towards a better housing system.

I would like to acknowledge the excellent support and guidance I have received from my supervisors Professor John Flint and Dr Tom Moore. Throughout this PhD they have provided consistent support and feedback on this research and on all aspects of my academic career. I am grateful for their mentorship throughout my candidature.

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I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Urban Studies and Planning Doctoral School across my PhD study. The support of my colleagues within the Department has been invaluable. I would particularly like to acknowledge the input of Dr Steve Connelly and the New Institutionalism reading group for helping me find my feet with theory. Further thanks are due to the Sheffield Methods Institute and 2018-19 cohort of the MA in Social Research for supporting my reintroduction to academia.

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

1 INTRODUCTION

"We can't rely on heroes to deliver our housing requirements." This quote from a participant early in the research process articulated the central problem that this doctoral thesis aimed to address. Community-led housing, the participant had explained, was in the main being delivered by people who were "*basically heroic in their ability to get things done against the status quo and against expectations*." For community-led housing projects to proliferate and have a positive impact on England's housing system it needed to be "*a realistic option for ordinary people*" which, in their view, entailed at least *"immediate access to decent impartial advice on every aspect".*

I designed the research to unpack these issues. It seemed that there were a great many factors that frustrate the successful completion of community-led housing projects, making community-led housing developments, and those that lead them, exceptional and remarkable. However, it was also clear that, in some areas of England, community-led housing approaches were beginning to deliver a steady stream of homes. I sought to investigate what enabled these pockets of activity as well as develop an overall understanding of the context in which community-led housing activists and professionals operated. Furthermore, in conversations with stakeholders from the community-led housing sector, I had noticed significant interest in the emerging enabling hub network. Many hoped enabling hubs, and the access to advice they offered, would provide the support that citizens required to engage in housing development without entailing super-human effort. These observations led to the development of a research project that explored the factors that enabled, and those that acted as barriers, to community-led housing development; how community-led housing activists, volunteers and professionals responded to and worked within this context; and the development of the nascent enabling hub network. This thesis presents the findings of that research.

My interest in community-led housing as a field of study developed from a deep disquiet with how housing in the UK operated, which fed into a professional interest in housing research. I saw a study of community-led housing as a way to better understand the relationship between citizens and the housing regime. I first became engaged in housing issues when, like many people, I observed and was appalled by the increase in visible street homelessness during the 2010s. I connected this with my own experiences of precarious, expensive, and poor-quality rental accommodation and the poor housing experiences of others that I had worked with in different community-based research projects. My interest led to voluntary positions in Hackney Night Shelter and increasing political engagement in improving housing, including joining the tenant's union, Acorn.

Simultaneously, as I developed my career in social research, I was increasingly drawn to housing topics which then led to a role in the research team at the housing and homelessness charity, Shelter. It was here that I learned about the web of housing financialization, land speculation and state withdrawal from housing and welfare that connected homelessness with the precarity and low quality of rental housing that I was experiencing in my own life. It's a web that also connects poor quality new build, inappropriate luxury development and tenant displacement. It continues to be clear in the stark reality of under-insulated homes, in evictions, and in the inaccessibility of homeownership for much of my generation. It was at Shelter, from my colleagues, that I learned about the problems with housing development that feed this malfunctioning system, and it was also where I first learned of community-led housing projects which sought to overcome some of these entrenched issues. In particular, through reading "Rethinking the Economics of Land and Housing" by Ryan-Collins, Lloyd and MacFarlane (2017) and "In Defence of Housing" by Madden and Marcuse (2016) I developed an interest in supporting alternative models of housing development.

These issues led me to the central questions which guided my academic research; why does it not seem possible to build, rebuild, or reclaim affordable, appropriate housing that meets communities' needs? And how can scales be rebalanced to recentre housing as a need rather than a commodity? It is these questions which drove my interest in community-led housing. For me, community-led housing research is a study of housing alternatives. Such alternatives pose fundamental questions about how we, as a society, relate to the development, ownership and living in of housing. Community-led housing schemes create sites of community engagement and activism that draw critical attention from citizens towards prevailing housing and housing development practices. Engagement in this prefigurative politics of alternatives can also lead to providing tangible solutions in the here-and-now to improve housing options for residents within a local area. I hope that through expanding the knowledge base to support alternatives modes of housing development that these ideas appear more possible, and there is an impact on collective understandings of what housing can be. Moreover, I believe that studying these alternatives holds a mirror to dominant practices, highlighting the extent to which most citizens seem, and perhaps are, powerless to influence the development of homes in the places they live. Ultimately, this is the fight that I hope my research can contribute to.

This research was funded through an Economic and Social Research Council collaborative studentship award in partnership with Wessex Community Assets, a community wealth building organisation based in South-West England. Wessex Community Assets were lead players in the development of community-led housing in England, especially supporting the growth of the Community Land Trust (CLT) model in rural Devon, Dorset and Somerset. My contact at the

organisation provided an introduction to the sector which supported the shape of the research project. Wessex Community Assets also hosted the Wessex Community Housing Enabling Hub and were therefore able to act as the first of the three case studies. Their guidance also helped me to identify appropriate interviewees at the national level for the first element of the research project.

1.1 COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING

Community-led housing refers to a group of several housing movements with collective, self-determined, community-based housing characteristics which, collectively, have been the subject of policy interest and investment (Mullins, 2018). The term 'community-led housing' is a relatively recent label for a collection of practices with varied histories and geneses, notably, community land trusts (CLTs), cohousing, co-operative housing and self-build. These are described in Table 1.1. As a collective, the community-led housing sector has received investment from various philanthropic and social enterprise sources at the local and national level over the past decade. From 2016, the movement received an injection of resources and policy support from central government, especially the Community Housing Funds one (2016-2017) and two (2018 -2020). These funds were available for community-led housing projects to receive revenue and capital grants and supported the development of the sector, currently represented by the consortium, Community Led Homes. This funding also supported investment in the concept of the local community-led housing enabling hub, meaning locally based organisations that supported community-led housing groups through the provision of advice and guidance. This thesis presents research from this period of increased interest and investment from government.

Table 1.1 Key types of community-led housing practices

Type	Characteristics
Community land trusts	Land for housing is held in trust by a community group via an asset lock. This controls the price of the housing and groups can set criteria for who can live there.
Co-operatives	Fully mutual housing co-operatives are independent from the members, and the co-operative owns the property. Members (tenants) take an active part in all aspects of day-to-day management and decision making.
Self-help housing	A practice of bringing disused housing back into use through undertaking improvement works as a community group.

Cohousing	A social model of housing that includes separate smaller units for family groups and extensive shared facilities (including living rooms, kitchens etc.), intended to foster a collective lifestyle.
Self-build	A community group undertakes to build their own houses.

The community-led housing movement in England is operating within, and in some cases, in opposition to, a housing market beset by multiple crises of inadequate or insufficient housing, collectively referred to politically and in policy as 'the housing crisis'. This is a collection of problems, inequalities and ongoing frustrations with the way that housing is built, distributed, managed, paid for and lived-in in England. Overall, academic research has drawn attention to the overriding ideological issue of commodifying housing as an asset whose financial utility predominates over its use as dwelling space. This imbues all aspects of the market housing system, leading to the extensive dysfunction characterised as "the housing crisis" (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). It is in this context that demand for and interest in alternative solutions has emerged from a variety of actors at different levels, notably: the state, organised civil society and individuals.

Community-led housing practices, and the broader community-led housing movement, are attempts to provide alternatives, or in some cases workarounds, for problems faced in the mainstream housing system. The motivations for engaging with community-led housing practices are myriad but often coalesce around the need for affordable housing, more local engagement with housing built in an area and producing housing types that support more communal or environmentally conscious ways of living. As community-led housing models are non-financialised, that is they do not need to generate profit, they present an opportunity for communities to retain any public investment made in construction and utilise this to ensure ongoing affordability (Heywood, 2016). Community-led housing has been utilised to build affordable housing in rural areas with high second home ownership (Moore, 2018), combat gentrification in cities (Goulding, 2018), or revive housing in urban areas experiencing decline thus contributing to neighbourhood revitalisation (Thompson, 2015). Additionally, there is evidence that housing projects that include greater community engagement approaches can be useful in overcoming community resistance to affordable housing development (Heywood, 2016). Community-led housing proponents suggest that an increase in democracy and accountability will produce housing that is of good quality, with an appropriate look and feel for an area and generally increase citizen engagement within the local area (Goulding, 2018; Field and Layard, 2017). There is also the potential to produce housing that is specifically catered to the social needs or desires of groups, such as older people, or general needs housing that is modified in some way to the standard production of mainstream housing supply (Jarvis, 2015a). Some actors also hold

more political motivations for engagement with community-led housing as a challenge to the capitalistic approach to land ownership in favour of the development of a housing commons based on ecological and social justice principles (Bunce, 2016; Chatterton, 2016).

Similar, though distinct, conditions of housing market dysfunction as found in England can be observed in housing markets internationally, and similarly growing interest in alternative models of self-organised and collaborative housing provision can be seen internationally with different emphases (Mullins and Moore, 2018). Parallel movements in different contexts has led to recognition of a growth in these forms of housing practices as an international phenomenon rather than an isolated event (Mullins and Moore, 2018; Czischke, Carriou and Lang, 2020). Therefore, this study of the community-led housing sector in England has relevance for housing scholarship across a broad range of national contexts.

Although it appears there has been growing enthusiasm for these alternatives, the capacity of the community-led housing movement to offer an alternative mode of housing is limited by the small scale of the sector. The Community Led Homes partnership estimated that the size of the sector at around 27,000 homes in England in 2019. This figure includes still operating co-operative housing from the 1980s and 1990s and CLT development over the decade to 2019. This CLT development contributed around 800 homes across the decade from the model's introduction in 2008 (Archer, Green and Fisher, 2019, p. 9). However, supporters highlight a significantly raised profile and increased interest in the sector as evidence the sector could become a significant element of England's housing system. The pipeline of projects from the Community Led Homes partnership suggests that there are around 883 projects at some stage of development potentially providing 23,000 units of housing, though many of these were in the earlier phases of development. However, this figure does include around 10,000 units at a confirmed later stage of development (Archer, 2020a). The germination of community-led housing ideas has also been concentrated in a few areas, bounded geographically, politically, and by social networks (Thompson, 2015). There is also likely significant latent demand for community-led housing among the general population that has not been realised as many do not have the opportunity to become engaged with suitable projects. The size and emphasis of the community-led housing sector varies between countries in the United Kingdom. For example, Scotland has a much more developed history with community land trusts (CLTs), though this history is linked more to ideas surrounding rural land ownership than specifically housing (Moore and McKee, 2012). Though small, community-led housing offers potential for delivering housing in ways that are more locally focused, participatory and equitable, as well as unique solutions to specific affordability crises in some specific localities. Therefore, this research

seeks to understand what the enabling factors are in community-led housing development in order to support the sector in its growth.

1.2 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 of this thesis is this introduction. This has set out the motivations behind undertaking the research project and described the community-led housing sector in England. This introduction also provides basic context on community-led housing and on policy developments surrounding the research phase. The introduction concludes with the summary of the thesis presented here.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review of relevant studies in community-led and collaborative housing models. This first part of this chapter discusses research on the construction of the concept of a 'community-led housing' sector and its relationship to the academic concept of 'collaborative' housing studies. Then, it discusses the history and trajectory of the housing practices which are considered under the community-led housing umbrella concept. It continues with a discussion of the evidence regarding the drivers of interest in community-led housing practices from the perspective of residents, local communities, and policy actors. The chapter then discusses research regarding the context in which community-led housing practices operate and the role of professionals within this. Finally, the chapter presents the literature gap which this thesis aimed to address. This gap has three main elements. The first, is that the operating context of community-led housing, at both a national and regional level, merits further investigation from the sector-wide perspective, especially at a regional level. Secondly, much research is concentrated on political and structural approaches to the topic of community-led housing, as opposed to more actor-centric accounts. Finally, as a new phenomenon, there is a need for research which addresses the development and implementation of enabling hubs.

Chapter 3 sets-out the theoretical approach and conceptual framework which was selected for this study. It first outlines the general approach of utilising new institutionalist scholarship to build the conceptual framework and why it was selected for the research. This approach provides a view of the data which enables comparison of structuring processes within different regional contexts but also centres the agency of actors in responding to and co-creating their contexts. The chapter then positions the research within the key debates of new institutionalist approaches, situating it primarily within the sociologist institutionalist approach. Then, the chapter discusses previous research within the collaborative housing field and the broader fields of housing studies and planning studies that have utilised institutionalist approaches. From these examples I conclude that this theoretical lens is particularly useful in order to enable comparison and a perspective on actor's

engagement with structures. Then, the chapter outlines the key elements of the conceptual framework as applied to the research and summarises these in a table.

Chapter 4 presents the research aim and objectives before detailing the four research questions of this thesis. The aim of this doctoral research is to better understand the factors that support community-led housing and the processes of enabling activity. In response to this aim and the identified literature gap, the research had four objectives expressed in four research questions:

i.   What is the institutional context of community-led housing at national and local level and how does it influence the form of the sector?

ii.   How do actors navigate and innovate within this institutional context to support the growth of community-led housing?

iii.   How do actors construct the role of community-led housing enabling hubs and what are the processes through which hubs navigate the institutional context to promote community-led housing development regionally?

iv.   How can actors aiming to promote community-led housing work to create favourable structural conditions for community-led housing practices?

Chapter 5 discusses the research methodology employed in addressing these research questions and its suitability. First, the chapter describes the overall research strategy of a multi-level qualitative inquiry with national stakeholders and three regional enabling hub case studies. Then it explains that the primary data source for the project was 32 semi-structured interviews, conducted using online video call software. A document analysis provided further data, especially on context, regulations and dominant narratives. Then the rationale for the national stakeholder's stage is discussed. This stage provided an understanding of the structural conditions in which community-led housing actors operated from a national level as well as a broad understanding of community-led housing in different localities. Next, the chapter discusses the logic of using case studies to ground the research questions in the experiences of actors in specific areas and thus enable these experiences to be compared between contexts. It also explains the selection process of the three case study enabling hub areas. I selected from operational enabling hubs in regions with significant community-led housing development those that were most different to each other. Selection was further informed by the collaborative partnership with Wessex Community Assets, with an aim to focus on areas which had not seen significant research into their models. Then, I discuss the relevant ethical considerations, my positionality within the research project and the context of conducting the research during the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, I reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology employed for the study.

Chapter 6 is the first of the three empirical chapters and provides an answer to the first research question regarding the interaction between the institutional context of community-led housing at the local and national levels. First, the chapter discusses findings relating to the establishment of a 'community-led housing' sector from a range of individual practices. Then, it considers the key narratives that define community-led housing's role within the wider housing system, from the perspective of policy makers and activists. This section highlights the conflicting narratives which paint the sector as either a supporting aspect of the wider housing regime or a politically radical alternative aiming to transcend the existing regime models. Next, the chapter considers the national institutional context of community-led housing, it discusses the impact of the interaction with government funding mechanisms and especially the role of Affordable Housing funding streams in funding in the sector. From this I conclude that these powerful institutions offer support to the sector through resources, yet also enact an isomorphic effect, meaning that community-led housing projects become closer to mainstream Affordable Housing provision through contact with these funds. The chapter moves on to discuss the local institutional contexts and their operation. Here, I relate the findings from the case studies concerning the impact of the local institutional contexts, including relationships with local government, relationship to the planning system and the make-up of the local community. Here, I found that community-led housing has been particularly successful where it aligned with local government narratives about housing need. Furthermore, I found that existing planning tools were repurposed to support community-led housing groups where there was political support. I also note that community-led housing tended to engage more affluent, educated individuals, especially those that were already civically minded. The chapter concludes that the emergent community-led housing sector is embedded within a context of state and civil society institutions from which much of what controls the sector is borrowed or imposed. Furthermore, sector efforts to formalise and create legitimacy with government actors have been successful but have emphasised narratives about community-led housing which are less politically radical, causing some tension within the sector. Finally, the chapter concludes that supportive local authorities have been instrumental in accessing the required land and resources for community-led housing projects, but this further requires the sector to align with local political narratives.

Chapter 7 addresses the second research question concerning the agency of actors in navigating and innovating within an institutional context to support community-led housing. First, it considers the theme of a central committed individual, or small group of individuals, as instrumental in the development of community-led housing schemes. I unpack the risks inherent with over-reliance on key individuals, and how this relates to volunteer burn-out as a common reason that projects stall or fail. Next the chapter discusses the role of actors who wield some power within the institutional

context who champion community-led housing and are able to marshal their institutional resources towards supporting projects. These individuals were reported to be either politicians or local authority officers with a shared belief in the benefits of community-led housing and a willingness to engage. The chapter next applies the concept of institutional entrepreneurship (Garud, Hardy and Maguire, 2007) to the actions of actors supporting community-led housing, especially locally influential community-led housing practitioners. It provides evidence that actors deliberately engage with the tools of their institutional context to innovate and create change. The chapter concludes with the observation that the growth of a community-led housing sector in local areas has in some cases been highly associated with specific individuals who have been able to promote projects through their own political or institutional power, or through exceptional levels of personal commitment combined with relevant skills and resources. This indicates a relatively weak position for community-led housing within institutional contexts, especially if support for community-led housing is overly identified with a political party or politician. It also highlights the ingenuity of agents engaged in promoting community-led housing through combining available tools in acts of institutional entrepreneurship.

Chapter 8 considers the third research question which concerns how actors construct enabling hubs and how the enabling hubs operate within the institutional context. The chapter first addresses the development of the enabling concept, especially the rationale for the development of enabling hubs and their intended role as a provider of advice services. Next, it discusses the implementation of the enabling hub programme reflecting on how the enabling hub concept was adopted into different local institutional contexts. This includes a discussion of the organisational histories of the three case study enabling hubs. Then the chapter considers the operation and activity of enabling hubs. This includes a discussion of the role of the community-led housing adviser in guiding and shaping community-led housing groups and the local influencing work that enabling hubs engage in to create local environments that are more conducive to community-led housing development. It also considers the short period of funding that was available for enabling hubs and discusses how this has limited the development of the network, and a discussion of how organisations that host enabling hub functions have adapted to the changes in funding. I then discuss participants' assessment of the enabling hub concept. These assessments centred on the short-term nature of the funding leading to the enabling hub programme not becoming embedded and having an insecure future. The chapter concludes that horizontal and vertical influences converged to shape the form of local of enabling hubs, that there is a clear role for enablers as translators between communities and the housing system, and presents a discussion of the ways in which actors have been required to innovatively navigate shifting funding landscapes in order to continue enabling services.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis. This chapter details the empirical, theoretical and methodological contributions to knowledge and implications for policy and sector actors. Empirically, the thesis has contributed a linked macro-scale and meso-scale analysis of community-led housing sector growth, an investigation into of the role of actors and first data on the implementation of enabling hubs. Theoretically, it has contributed through the application of a new institutionalist framework to the study of community-led housing in England. Methodologically, the thesis has contributed by engaging in a study of an emerging phenomenon, applying a qualitative multi-level analysis, and generating further knowledge on the process of coproducing research with non-academic partners. Further the research contributes to collective knowledge of conducting research during the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. From a policy and practice perspective the thesis has contributed knowledge for the community-led housing sector. These findings address the fourth research question that seeks to understand how these findings can be applied by actors within the sector. Firstly, the research found continual change in the policy context is a challenge for delivering community-led housing. Secondly, the thesis emphasises the importance of a community-led housing enabler in working between community groups and the housing sphere of professional knowledge. Finally, the study documents that campaigners have been able to bring about community-led housing successfully through alignment with more powerful actors and institutions. However, there is a balance to be achieved between this strategy and the political aims of the sector as it relates to housing alternatives. The thesis ends with a discussion of future research agenda, which proposes further research with community members and volunteers into their experience with the enabling hub concept; further local case studies, including the addition of other national context case studies; and finally a suggestion of a quantitative approach to regional comparison.

2 COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter situates this thesis within the existing academic research field, acknowledging that the term 'community-led housing' is specific to the context of this study in England and linking it more broadly to international collaborative housing research. The chapter first describes the community-led housing sector in England, including the emergence of a defined 'community-led housing' sector from a collection of practices, policy support for the sector and the role of intermediary organisations. This is followed by a discussion of the drivers of interest in community-led housing. Then the chapter discusses the existing research pertaining to the contexts within which community-led housing operates; the relationship to government, drivers behind policy interest and support for community-led housing as well as the roles of community-led housing professionals. Finally, I discuss the research gap which this thesis has addressed. This gap has three main elements. The first is that the policy drivers relating to community-led housing, at both a national and regional level, and how these are manifested within the wider sector, are not well understood. Secondly, much research is concentrated on political and structural approaches to the topic of community-led housing, as opposed to more actor-centric accounts that consider the specific actions and agency involved in promoting community-led housing approaches. Finally, as a new phenomenon, there is a need for research which addresses the development and implementation of enabling hubs.

2.1 SITUATING THE RESEARCH

For this thesis the term 'community-led housing' is used in order to reflect the conventions of the sector in England. I aimed to utilise and understand the concept of 'community-led housing' in the same way that the actors and organisations operating in the field do, whilst approaching this with recognition that definitions and boundaries about the movement are contested. The Housing Associations Charitable Trust (HACT) developed a working definition of community-led housing which reflects its use in policy spheres; "housing shaped and controlled by a group that represents the residents and/or the wider community that will be served by the housing" (Heywood, 2016, p. 12). However, whilst 'community-led housing' has been used to delineate the field in research situated in the UK and USA (Jarvis, 2015a), the phenomena under investigation in this research is linked theoretically to activity and movements beyond these contexts.

There are several possible ways to bracket and categorise these types of activity and researchers have variously conceptualised and categorised these phenomena. In doing so they have drawn different conceptual boundaries, which emphasise specific characteristics of the practices being studied. Labels include the terms "community-led", "participative", and "resident-led" which

emphasise the way decisions are made, or "co-operative", "mutual" and "cohousing" which emphasise the practice of living communally (Tummers, 2016). Researchers have also referred to the category as "self-organised" housing (Crabtree, 2018; Mullins and Moore, 2018) which emphasises the engagement of citizens, over the state and the market, in the production of housing. Finally, the term 'collaborative housing' is currently frequently used, especially in the European context, to describe housing activity characterised by engagement between multiple actors with a collective social aim (Czischke, Carriou and Lang, 2020). The variety of ways of defining and delineating the concept reflects the diverse and complex empirical reality of housing movements across different geographical contexts. These movements and practices appear to have inherent resonance with each other that denotes a category of action. Yet such diversity presents a challenge for researchers to define the emphasis and aims of the phenomena under study.

As noted above, within academic research, the concept of 'collaborative housing' is currently prominent as a framing to consolidate and denote the phenomena of various alternative housing movements with collective and self-managed characteristics that constitute a research domain (Lang, Carriou and Czischke, 2020). This concept refers to a variety of housing models that encompass those with some shared community assets and some intentionality in creating community and resident engagement in development and/or management of the homes (Fromm, 2012). Housing development that falls into this category is also characterised by significant levels of collaboration between the participating residents and/or local community and external actors, such as established housing providers or the state. The term encapsulates a wide range of motivations for engagement, but for many researchers the drivers of social inclusion and affordability are of priority interest (Czischke, 2018; Czischke, Carriou and Lang, 2020). Authors have argued that this term is sufficiently broad to capture the international variation in comparable practices whilst emphasising the social relations which characterise these projects (Fromm, 2012) and gives appropriate weight to the external stakeholders beyond the immediate beneficiaries (Czischke, 2018; Thompson, 2020a). On the other hand, researchers have further argued that the 'collaborative' framing foregrounds resident participation but does not effectively delineate practices according to the "market and property relations in which specific tenures and housing forms are embedded" and therefore "do not necessarily exclude commodified forms of housing" (Ferreri and Vidal, 2021, p. 155). This contestation over the inclusion of market-rate housing with private shared facilities is also a site of debate in the use of the term 'community-led housing'. But it was clear from my own experience in the sector, prior to conducting this research, that at least some actors consider some types of market-rate housing to fit within the bounds of 'community-led housing' (Hughes, 2020). Therefore, I position this research broadly within the body of work related

to the concept of collaborative housing, as a frame to relate this research to international work. This frame informs the body of work examined within this literature review and presented in an engagement with the empirical findings.

2.2 Community-led housing sector in England

The term 'community-led housing' in England refers to a collection of housing movements with varied histories and geneses that share collective, self-determined, community-based characteristics. Generally, the practices included in the definition of community-led housing are community land trusts (CLTs), co-operatives, forms of cohousing, self-help housing, and community-based self-build groups. 'Community-led housing' is both an activist and a policy construct used to integrate these distinct practices. This alliance had the aim of uniting the movements in common cause as a mechanism to gain funding and policy support and to better share knowledge and resources (Lang, Chatterton and Mullins, 2020). Some researchers have suggested that the distinctions between the component movements are becoming less distinct as activists engage with multiple practices in order to realise their housing goals (Mullins and Moore, 2018; Griffin, 2019). Still, Lang and Mullins' (2019) caution against a view of a flattened sector despite widespread usage of the term 'community-led housing'. Their analysis highlights that the uniting of different practices and movements under one umbrella was not uncontroversial or universally embraced, and that actors have tended to retain the identity and character of their individual practices. They characterise the collectivisation as a "loose coupling of earlier and younger social movements, based on their shared awareness of and willingness to address macro-level societal problems" (Lang and Mullins, 2019, p. 184). The coherence of the sector identity, and the impact this has at different levels of governance on the production of community-led housing, requires further research.

Each practice within community-led housing is linked to a tradition of action which defines it. Cohousing, for example, is primarily defined as a way of living, whereas self-build and self-help are primarily defined as means of development whereas CLTs and co-operatives relate more to the ownership and management of housing. Some of the practices are more recent phenomena, such as CLTs in England, whilst others have extensive histories, such as the co-operative movement. The germination of the different forms of practices relates to a history of policy mobilities. Ideas were shared internationally between activists and policy makers and then adapted on connection with localised contexts (Thompson, 2020a). This process has led to unique individual models of community-led housing which are highly context dependent but drawn from a rich well of alternative and collaborative housing movements internationally. Given the diversity of practices and their origins, it is not possible to identify one single beginning for community-led housing in

England. However, this research responds to a clear 'wave' of activist, policy and academic interest in community-led housing approaches in England, notably community land trusts but including other models, which is recognisable from around 2008 onwards (Mullins and Moore, 2018; Lang and Mullins, 2019; Lang, Chatterton and Mullins, 2020).

In government policy, interest in community-led housing in England resulted in two major Community Housing Funds in the second half of the 2010s. The first, introduced in 2016, saw £60 million distributed to councils to support community-led housing initiatives. The second ran between July 2018 and March 2020 and made available £163 million of funds across England for different types of support. Since then, no further targeted investment has been offered. Research is required to understand how the introduction of these funds shaped action in the community-led housing sector, including how it was administered by the government agencies and utilised by community-led housing projects.

2.2.1 Community land trusts

Recent growth in the community-led housing sector in England is predominantly related to rapid development in community land trusts (CLTs). CLTs are non-profit organisations that hold land in trust and manage an asset on that land, usually, but not exclusively, this is housing for the benefit of a defined geographical community. CLTs are typically formed in order to provide affordable housing in perpetuity for residents either for rent or for owner occupation (Moore and McKee, 2012). In England and Wales the CLT practice has a legal definition that clearly demarcates the practice from other tenures and supports its use (Griffin, 2019). In order to protect the gain of affordable housing for the community, including preventing resale of the home at material gain by owner-occupiers, CLTs have an 'asset-lock' in place which prevents use or sale outside of the specifications of the CLT constitution. In 2019 there were 320 CLTs in England which had so far produced 870 units of housing (National Community Land Trust Network, 2019).

The CLT model was introduced to England via a government backed demonstration project conducted by the University of Salford Community Finance Solutions, which ran from 2006-08 and another in 2008-10. After these demonstration projects, a national body was set up to promote CLT development (Moore and McKee, 2012). CLTs have been supported by successive governments from all major parties. The Labour Government (2005-2010) included a statutory definition of CLTs in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. The Coalition Government which came to power in 2010 was also broadly supportive of the concept of CLTs. The Localism Act 2011 included priority access to land and a right to build for certain types of building which offered opportunities to CLTs. Researchers have suggested that the dominance of the model over other forms of community-led

housing, could be related to the ability of advocates to align the CLT model with government priorities and prevailing discourses, especially combatting the impacts of second home ownership on affordability in rural areas (Griffin, 2019; Lang, Chatterton and Mullins, 2020). The 2016/17 £60m Community Housing Fund specifically mentions CLTs, especially for rural or coastal areas experiencing high levels of second home ownership (MHCLG, 2016). However, targeted investment for all community-led housing practices ended in 2020 and was not renewed.

The CLT model was developed in the USA in the context of the civil rights movement and was transferred internationally to a variety of contexts including England, Scotland, Australia and Kenya (Moore and McKee, 2012). In the USA, the model was initially developed as part of the African American civil rights and Black Power movements in the late 1970s. The first CLTs in the early 1970s initially formed in rural areas before the idea spread to urban contexts in the 1980s (DeFilippis *et al.*, 2019). In this context the CLT model was utilised as a vehicle for providing access to land and assets to the Black community, in response to extensive marginalisation which included being severely disadvantaged in the open market for land and housing (Davis *et al.*, 2010). After early expansion the CLT sector remained somewhat static in the USA, without significant growth, for over two decades until a surge of interest since the 2000s (Martin *et al.*, 2020). Similarly to England most CLT housing development in the USA is small-scale, however, there are also much larger projects, , some with over 10,000 units of housing (Engelsman, Rowe and Southern, 2018). The longevity of CLT structures in the USA, oriented towards providing high numbers of housing units, is of interest and serves as a reference to practitioners and advocates of the CLT model in England.

The CLT movement in England has also taken inspiration from the Scottish land movement. Historically, the Scottish experience of community land ownership puts emphasis on common ownership of rural land which goes back to the 1900s (Bryden and Geisler, 2007). A modern community land ownership movement has sought to overturn generational injustice in land ownership in rural Scotland (Mackenzie, 2009). This process was supported through the creation of the Community Land Unit in the late 90s which promoted community land acquisition and for a brief period in the early 2000s was accompanied by a dedicated Scottish Land Fund to assist communities in acquiring land. CLTs have been utilised in this context to provide the basis for governance of this communally owned land (Moore and McKee, 2012). This experience within the UK of establishing CLTs, maintaining common ownership and principles of land stewardship also provides a point of reference for CLT movement in England.

2.2.2 Co-operatives

Co-operative housing is housing which is controlled by a democratic community membership organisation. The practice is associated with an earlier 'wave' of interest in community-led housing practices in England. In the 1970s, a brief window of national promotion led to a short-lived surge in the founding of co-operatives in England. This was driven by community campaigns for collectively owned housing for the working class and enabled by advocacy within a Labour government. In the 1980s, neoliberal reforms of the housing sector, including the marketisation of housing associations, led to the demise of the co-operative movement and a halt to new development (Thompson, 2020a). Despite this decline, there remains a co-operative presence in England and this sector currently manages the largest number of homes of any of the community-led housing models. Thompson (2020a), drawing on historical comparative research of the co-operative and CLT sector in Liverpool, concludes that the high level of state support and state involvement led to the co-operative movement being intensely enmeshed with the state. This resulted in its evolution to a form of social housing rather than an alternative. These discussions are of relevance to the developing community-led housing sector and its relationship to investment from the state. Co-operative homes are concentrated in specific geographies according to historical investment and the existence of secondary bodies to support maintenance over time. In 2014 the Confederation of Co-operative Housing noted there were around 250 co-operative organisations of various sizes, varying from a high number of units to one single home, though the CCH had noted a significant increase in interest in the model (Lang and Mullins, 2015, p. 25). The co-operative period is a legacy within the living memory of many current community-led housing practitioners and therefore provides the background experience of many actors. It has been used as an example to draw lessons from for the current wave of institutionalising community-led housing knowledge.

During the peak of the co-operative movement, intermediary organisations in the form of secondary co-operatives formed. These organisations which incubated, supported and linked co-operatives were central aspects of the growth of the practice. Thompson (2020b, p. 312) argues that "without the extensive support of co-op development agencies acting as secondary or 'mother' co-ops, Liverpool's co-operative revolution would never have begun". Though most of the organisations wound down as the movement dissipated, some of the actors remained operational. Furthermore, the national intermediary body for housing co-operatives, the Confederation of Co-operative Housing (CCH), formed at the end of this period and has remained in operation. The organisation is a member of the Community Led Homes consortium (Lang, Chatterton and Mullins, 2020).

2.2.3 Cohousing

Cohousing is a further key practice within community-led housing. In the cohousing model, an intentional community is formed of dwellings for individual households around a shared space which is used communally. This can be achieved under any ownership model. Projects include space for communal cooking and eating, everyday living, specific social activities, and outside areas. The cohousing model was developed in Denmark in the 1960s (Beck, 2020) and interest has spread across Europe, including England, as well as emerging movements in the USA and Australia (Crabtree, 2005; Jarvis, 2015b; Tummers, 2016). Despite interest from prospective occupants, and precedent from other European countries, co-housing has had limited implementation in England. There are around 19 cohousing projects that exist to date, although more than 60 are in the planning phases according to the UK Cohousing website (UK Cohousing Network, 2019). Whilst to date a marginal housing option in the UK, with groups reliant on private capital and voluntary effort to establish themselves, in parts of northern Europe such as Denmark and Sweden the practice is more established (Jarvis, 2015a).

The inclusion of cohousing within understandings of community-led or collaborative housing generates debate as the model does not necessarily prioritise the affordability of the homes, or removing homes from speculative, financialised use. Much, though not all, cohousing is developed as an owner-occupied model without restrictions on residents' ability to profit from the market values of their home (Goulding, 2018). Furthermore, the communities created by cohousing communities are generally self-selecting. Chiodlli and Baglione (2014) have called for a more "cautious" interpretation of cohousing phenomena noting that academic and policy literature has tended towards a more positive interpretation. They highlight the propensity for "social, ethnic and ideological homogeneity of cohouses" and a "lack of integration with surrounding neighbourhood" (Chiodelli and Baglione, 2014, p. 27). However, even with these caveats it is clear that cohousing contains some collectivised elements and represents a novel approach to housing development that engages with citizens. Furthermore, the practice is evidently included within the community-led housing concept in England through the inclusion of Cohousing UK in the Community Led Homes consortium. As the motivations of actors seeking to develop cohousing could be significantly different to other models, it is interesting to observe how this model operates under the collective identity of community-led housing.

2.2.4 Self-build and self-help housing

Self-build and self-help projects are housing movements which focus on the way in which housing is produced, with a focus on enabling future residents' control over the building process. There is a wide range of practices covered by the definition, self-build can be defined as housing procurement

where the first occupants arrange for the building of their own dwelling and, in various ways, participate in its production (Duncan and Rowe, 1991). Self-build can occur in a range of contexts and is regularly used for development of private market-rate housing. As with cohousing, this reflects another dimension of the types of market and housing needs that are being targeted through different forms of collective initiative. Self-help is a specific subset of the self-build model in which a community group has undertaken to restore derelict housing for the use of those in housing need. Championing ideas of self-sufficiency and 'sweat equity', these practices are frequently combined with other community-led housing practices, such as CLTs or cohousing models, as an intrinsic element of the scheme (Thompson, 2015; Benson and Hamiduddin, 2018). Self-build housing and self-help housing have received less academic attention than other newer models of community-led housing, notably CLTs and cohousing, yet the self-build ethos forms an integral aspect of many community-led housing projects. How important self-build is to different conceptualisations of community-led housing will differ scheme by scheme but the choice to proceed with a self-build ethos or not becomes an interesting dimension of any community-led housing project.

Supporters of self-build argue that the process of collaboration and interaction with the design leads to a neighbourhood that encourages social interaction, and neighbourhoods better designed for the residents (Benson and Hamiduddin, 2018). Additionally, researchers note the sense of purpose and capacity for development of skills in self-build practices (Mullins, 2010). Self-build approaches might also be used as a method of utilising the most environmentally sustainable materials and building practices (Heffernan and Wilde, 2020). Concurrent with a rise in interest in community-led housing practices there has been an increase in interest for neighbourhood self-build in England and this has been supported by some limited funding, public land at a national level and further support from local authorities within the mechanisms afforded by planning (Benson and Hamiduddin, 2018). Self-help housing was explicitly supported by the UK government with funding between 2012 and 2015 as part of the Empty Homes Grant, but since that ended the model has struggled to expand independently (Mullins, 2018).

2.2.5   Intermediary organisations and enabling hubs

The growth of community-led housing practices in England has been accompanied by the development of national and sub-national intermediary organisations. This includes historic emergence of the secondary co-operative and contemporary developments which emerged to support new models of community-led housing delivery. These intermediary organisations aim to facilitate the growth or embedding of a social movement and provide a framework of unified action for social actors working within the same sphere. The role of the intermediary organisations is

primarily to represent the interests of a collective in a field of social action. This collectivisation connects actors at the grassroots horizontally to each other and vertically to actors in government or other positions of power such as large commercial actors (Anheier, 2005). Within community-led housing, intermediary organisations have developed to support each practice, in part contributing to more defined identities for these practices. These bodies take on much of the work of aligning the drivers of growth from the grassroots and the avenues of growth offered by the state. In 2018 an alliance of intermediary bodies at a national level was established: the Community Led Homes consortium. The term 'community-led' housing reflects a settlement between these organisations in forming a collective identity. The consortium is made up of the umbrella bodies for three practices, co-operatives (Confederation of Co-operative Housing), community land trusts (National Community Land Trust Network) and co-housing organisations (UK Cohousing) and also Locality, a more general intermediary that supports community-led businesses (Lang, Chatterton and Mullins, 2020).

Lang, Chatterton and Mullins (2020) offer a detailed analysis of the creation of the 'community-led' housing sector identity from distinct practices which emphasises these connections between intermediary organisations. They found that from 2014 onwards significant efforts were made by some actors to unify practices behind a collective identity to better enable growth at a national level, knowledge sharing and access to policy support and funding. They suggest this was in large part in response to requirements from state actors to present a more structured sector in order to engage with funding streams. Their account of this process points to a key consultation event entitled 'Scaling Up Community Housing Solutions', which led to the development of the project 'Community-Led Housing Alliance' organised by the Building and Social Homes Foundation. Alongside cooperation between umbrella organisations this included support from organisations with wider remits in community growth and social justice. It was through this coalition of actors that the label 'community-led housing' grew in prominence. A joint funding proposal to the Government produced the Community Housing Funds, the first in 2016 and a second in 2018, and the first national community-led housing conference held in 2017. In 2018 the consortium 'Community Led Homes' formed to organise the sector and allow organisations to make use of the second phase of the community housing fund. However, identities of the individual practices remain important in this formation and not all of the national intermediaries which could be described as community-led housing are involved in this consortium.

The national intermediary consortium, Community Led Homes, implemented a programme of work, with funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), to embed and spread a model of regional enabling hubs to support the growth of community-led housing in England through providing access to professional advice and support. This network of enabling hubs

was intended to consolidate resources and expertise regionally to support the growth of new and existing community-led housing projects. The grant funding for the development of enabling hubs ran between April 2019 and March 2021 and consisted of Development Grants of up to £50,000 for new organisations and a Full Grant of up to £150,000 with a maximum of £150,000 for any organisation from both grants combined (Community Led Homes, 2019). This grant funding was specifically orientated towards providing advice for community-led housing groups which were seeking grant support from Homes England. This process has incorporated the roles of some existing organisations, notably CLT umbrella organisations (Moore and Mullins, 2013), within the community-led housing sphere and aimed to develop new enabling hubs. The research presented in this thesis addresses the extent to which enabling hubs are able to fulfil these roles. Furthermore, the enabling hub structure also raises more fundamental questions about the nature and form of community-led housing practice in England, representing a process of formalising networks of community-led housing. This research aims to understand how the processes of establishing an enabling hub network impacts the sector on a regional basis, and the operation of mid-level bureaucracy within the national system.

2.3   DRIVERS OF INTEREST IN COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING

Researchers have noted a wide variety of motivations for engagement with community-led housing practices in England. Driving factors behind community-led housing development range from an outwardly apolitical desire for establishing specific units of housing in a given area, to an explicitly politically inspired movement that seeks to demonstrate alternative models of housing and living (DeFilippis *et al.*, 2019). A review of collaborative housing research by Lang, Carriou and Czischke (2020) found that most schemes which have been researched fall somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum. When applying this perspective to the English community-led housing context, this range is identifiable. Moore's (2015, 2021) research with CLTs in the South West of England found that volunteers were concerned with the ability to exert control over any new housing in a village, reflecting attachment to a locality and a desire to ensure that certain individuals are prioritised to occupy new housing. Here, the political content of the activity was relatively low level with a focus on the pragmatic possibility of generating a small number of affordable homes locally. Towards the middle of this spectrum, Thompson (2015) describes community land trust developments in Liverpool as both a pragmatic response to state abandonment in a situation of urban decay and as a political statement. On the far end of the spectrum, Chatterton (2013) notes aims to engage in sustainable building and living techniques in cohousing as a form of climate and urban activism and Bunce (2016) details an attempt to embody social resistance to gentrification in East London through

demonstrating an alternative affordable housing scheme. It should also be noted that engagement in these practices may reflect a desire to create space for alternative living arrangements for a specified group, that is unavailable within the mainstream housing market, rather than an aim to address more wide ranging societal goals (Tummers, 2015). This question is relevant at the level of the individual housing project but also in considering the purpose of a wider movement and the extent to which it can be considered alternative. These debates are especially salient as the sector grows and seeks political and policy support. The questions about the role of political expression versus pragmatism, that views the process not as an end in of itself but as a way through the current housing system, is central to understanding the community-led housing sector in England.

Civil society actors are a further aspect of the framework that supports community-led housing. Community-led housing projects usually require an extensive degree of dedication from the individual volunteers. This dedication can be borne of an intensely localised sense of duty or care but may also extend to a wider sense of being part of a movement, often motivated by a belief in civil society, housing justice, environmental sustainability or other political goals and values. Much research into community-led housing practices takes the form of case studies of the development of specific schemes. An important finding that emerges from these accounts is the dispersed and long-term nature of this community activism, which makes use of multiple channels of influence and public and private mechanisms to achieve its goals (Thompson, 2015; Bunce, 2016; Aernouts and Ryckewaert, 2017; Griffin, 2019). This voluntary, sustained and challenging nature of participation in community-led housing activities indicate significant commitment from the actors engaged in bringing forward the projects. The diverse range of motivations may be reflected in the range of individuals taking part in community-led housing activities. There is an expectation based on other forms of community volunteering that volunteers in community-led housing are most likely to belong to what has been described as the "civic core" who tend to be more affluent, older and predominantly white (Mohan, 2012). However, evidence from Moore (2015) and Griffin (2019) tentatively suggests that community-led housing projects may attract and engage a more diverse set of participants, though this remains to be fully researched. The way in which multiple motivations can exist within single projects is emerging from the literature but the process of negotiation between multiple actors remains an area for further research.

2.3.1   Political motivations

Aims to fight the financialization of housing and post-capitalist utopian visions for housing are a driver of interest in community-led housing. Researchers have theorised some forms of community-led housing as representative of emergence of an urban housing commons, reflecting the development of commoning practices as much as possible within prevailing capitalist environments

(Huron, 2015). "Commoning" and the "commons" is the social process of a place-based community creating and then maintaining a resource for the use of everyone in a decommodified fashion (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014). In these interpretations, community-led housing is proposed as an act of protest, as well as an alternative to mainstream housing options because it removes housing from the profit-driven market and realises its use-value over its exchange-value. For example, Bunce (2016) argues that community land trusts are an important manifestation of the concept of the "commons" in that land is acquired through collective action and then remains in common, in direct opposition to the normalising force of private property. This utopian thinking sees a wider role for community-led housing beyond specific place-based projects. Instead, it is seen as prefigurative political action that performs an idealised version of community democracy within the capitalist system and models alternatives for the wider housing system. For example, in their case study of a CLT in Brussels, Aernouts and Ryckewaert (2017) argued that, whilst CLT housing provision remains a fraction of the activity being employed to solve the severe shortage of homes in Brussels, it has a wider implication for political debates on alternative housing.

There has been significant interest from researchers into whether community-led housing approaches represent a radical or reformist politics of housing. Where some have argued that projects like CLTs represent a development of urban commons, others have highlighted that such projects may instead be reinforcing existing structures. For example, in their study of a long running CLT in Minnesota, USA DeFilippis et al. (2019) found staff and residents mainly view the CLT in terms of affirmative politics rather than as a transformative project in that they "do not challenge the larger relations, processes, or institutions of society" (2019, p. 797). However, they noted the projects were not completely lacking in transformative political capacity but that this requires deliberate practice to develop and that alternative models of ownership are not inherently politically transformative. Theorising further from this empirical material, Pierce et al. (2022) argued that CLTs may actually reinforce rather than challenge hegemonic discourses of home and land ownership through facilitating access to the identity of home ownership. This demonstrates a tension between interpretations of community-led housing that represent prefigurative political action and interpretations which have a tighter focus on the pragmatic delivery of affordable housing. Here, the central question is the relationship of community-led housing practices to the prevailing housing system and an emphasis on either its role as a workaround to the problems caused by the market housing system or as a protest against the system itself intended to serve as an example of alternative approaches.

In particular, researchers note that as projects grow and engage with external actors, notably the state but also other regime level actors such as housing associations, the political content of the

activity is reduced. Sørvoll and Bengtsson (2018) present a strong critique of the way civil society housing has evolved in Norway and Sweden over recent years, arguing that the imperative to provide affordable housing and to build at scale has led to the loss of the original values of cooperation and community control. They argue that there were ultimately irreconcilable trade-offs between civil society objectives and success within the prevailing market model. Similarly, Williams' (2018) research on a long-running community land trust in a city in the USA found that ongoing community control is less broad-based and more elite-focused than had been envisaged, though the organising group continues to include the CLT residents. She suggests this erosion of community control is seemingly a result of working with local government as an integral part of the mechanism for providing affordable housing in the city. In the English context, Moore (2018) highlights that some actors express ambivalence towards working with housing association partners in a CLT model. He notes for some actors such partnerships represent less ongoing community involvement, whereas others are optimistic about the opportunities such partnership presents for increasing the numbers of CLTs. The research shows these negotiations are common within the world of community-led housing approaches as projects must interact with a regulatory framework, especially in order to access government funding and support, yet in this way the policy framework exerts a considerable influence on how community-led housing can exist.

2.3.2 Citizen governance

By definition, all community-led housing requires engagement from civil society, such as local community members or future residents. But the extent, nature and duration of citizen governance of housing varies widely. Furthermore, the existing research details significant variation in the extent that democratic community control is a priority outcome for participants. Lang, Carriou and Czischke's review of collaborative housing research encountered "papers portraying a high degree of resident self-organization to top-down approaches to governance" (2020, p. 17). Moore's (2018) study of CLTs identified a distinction between CLT organisations which seek to manage their homes and assets long term, as a hub of community, and projects which see the CLT process as one of delivering affordable housing as a defined project for which there might not be for further input. Researchers have suggested that a distinction can be drawn between 'traditional' CLTs in rural areas, which might fit more neatly into existing models of housing management, and urban CLTs developed with the aim of exerting more community control often in collaboration with the future residents (Thompson, 2020a; Griffin, 2019). Given this variation, the distinction between extensive community control and community participation is an important site for theorisation of the role of community-led housing.

The interpretations of different actors within projects varies as well. Research has demonstrated that these subjectivities may be different between groups of actors engaged within the same project which can thus become a site of negotiation. For example, Aernouts and Ryckewaert's (2017) research in Antwerp showed that the community land trust emerged from housing and political activism already occurring in the area, however, comments from the future inhabitants who were in housing need reflected that for them, a community land trust was not chosen for political reasons but as the only available option for procuring affordable housing. Similarly, Griffin's (2019) study of a CLT in Bristol noted tensions between participants with politically radical agendas and participants eager to realise the project however possible as a route to obtaining affordable housing for themselves. The research further indicates the that such negotiations continue into the life of community-led housing schemes. Looking historically at the English co-operative movement, Thompson (2020a) notes the post-development experiences of co-operatives in which previously enthusiastic founding members lacked the motivation to take part in general day-to-day management. He theorises that the original energy of campaigners is motivated by political desire to challenge the housing regime rather than for co-living. Further work by Arbell, Middlemiss and Chatterton (2020) has investigated the various and changing subjectivities of tenants in a housing co-operative, noting different waves of interest and engagement in the business of collective management.

2.3.3   Social aspects

Research demonstrates that participants are often motivated to engage in community-led housing practices by a perception of the social benefits of collaboration. This is particularly the case in cohousing projects but is reflected in various models. Researchers focus on the benefits of participation in housing for empowerment (Aernouts and Ryckewaert, 2017), and for creating strong social networks and solidarity (Czischke and Huisman, 2018). Co-housing projects, in particular, are portrayed as an attempt to bring into practice a discourse of diversity, solidarity and inclusion, rather than of homogeneity and exclusion. For some engaged in this practice the housing project is only one aspect of a broader attempt at new forms of living based on the intention of sharing (Jarvis, 2015b). Cohousing has been proposed as an innovative living solution to issues of social isolation, especially in older populations and in the UK, cohousing advocates report rising interest in cohousing options for older people (Scanlon and Fernandez Arrigoitia, 2015). Furthermore, cohousing models are proposed to create opportunities to overcome domestic gendered work distribution (Vestbro and Horeli, 2021).

Researchers have highlighted a tension between the apparently inclusive aims of community-led housing to develop affordable housing and an exclusionary element to practices. Local connection

allocation policies, common to much community-led housing, could be criticised for their active exclusion of those not fitting certain criteria or as nepotism (Goulding, 2018). In the experience of English CLTs in rural areas, local connection policies can be the reason that concerned residents are willing to support the development of affordable housing (Moore, 2015). In a situation of scarcity of affordable housing there is an inherent tension in establishing a 'fair' allocations policy. However, various forms of local connection policy exist in social and affordable housing allocation policies outside of community-led housing. Therefore, this debate is not confined to community-led housing, though it is especially relevant here, but reflects wider questions about access to affordable and social housing in England.

Outside of the overt selection of residents, exclusionary aspects of community-led housing may be linked to prevailing power structures and be harder to identify. There can be a self-selecting nature of involvement with community-led housing that sees a concentration of interest among certain sections of society. Engelsman, Rowe and Southern (2018) note that participation in community-led housing practices, and therefore opportunity to take advantage of any affordable housing, is limited to the people who are aware of projects in an area. They suggest this will likely correlate to other forms of social networks and therefore fall along lines of race and class demographics even if that is not intended. Thompson's study of CLTs in Liverpool noted how the residents of the urban CLT tended to enact a "bohemian habitus" (Thompson, 2015, p. 1034) which could be off-putting to new residents from different social milieus but attract others who are inclined to similar practices. These criticisms and considerations highlight how it is important for research in community-led housing to not accept narratives about the positives of community-led housing practices uncritically but rather to interrogate these narratives and consider who the beneficiaries are in relation to wider society.

2.3.4 Affordability

There is a strong normative view that an important role of community-led housing is to produce units of housing which are more affordable than other local housing options, among their other attributes. Researchers have foregrounded the de-commodifying aims of community-led housing approaches and their objective to provide affordable housing in a context of rampant unaffordability (Moore and McKee, 2012). Campaigners promote community-led housing as a mechanism for producing new units of housing that are affordable to the local community. In particular, community-led housing practices have been recommended as a mechanism that can work to fill in the gaps between what can be achieved by the market and what can be achieved via housing associations and local government (Field and Layard, 2017). Moore (2018) demonstrates that CLTs have been able to mitigate some barriers to social or affordable housing that might exist in rural environments by mobilising development on smaller sites and overcoming local opposition to

development. Furthermore, Archer (2020b) argues that the collaborative nature of community-led housing itself creates more opportunities for affordable housing provision.

Definitions of 'affordable' vary and the term can be used in various ways by different actors. However, in relation to housing in England the term 'affordable' often refers to the definition used by government agencies as defined in the National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF). Grant funding from Homes England for housing projects is contingent on the production of affordable housing and stipulations contained within planning permission will be related to this definition of "housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market" (MHCLG, 2018, p. 64). This requires the housing to fall into the category of either social rent (around 50% of market), affordable rent (around 80% of market) and discounted home ownership products such as starter homes or shared ownership. The definition of 'affordable' used in the NPPF has drawn significant criticism given the extreme disconnection between some local housing prices and local earnings as market prices have significantly outpaced household earnings (Affordable Housing Commission, 2019). In this context, adherence to an 'affordability' narrative of community-led housing may have significant impact on the manner and mode of community-led housing that is developed, especially as it interacts with state definitions of affordable housing.

The centrality of housing affordability for those on lower incomes as a goal of community-led housing projects varies between actors in the sector. The extent to which projects and practices must meet specific definitions of affordability to be part of a community-led housing movement, and what those definitions of affordability should be, are contentious and unresolved issues that can introduce contradictions to the community-led housing ethos. Community-led housing might be targeted at a more middle-income groups or have no income requirements at all. Foregrounding affordability concerns in the case of co-operative housing might undermine the intentional community aspects as the community is formed on the basis of economic traits rather than other shared characteristics or aims to create community (Crabtree, 2018). Furthermore, some models have explicitly aimed for mixed income communities as a mechanism to finance the project (Chatterton, 2013). However, an unbounded approach to residents' income can cause debate over the role of the sector, in particular, where there is interaction with state subsidy as Crabtree et al. (2019) highlight from the Australian experience of co-operative housing.

2.4 COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING CONTEXT AND ACTORS

To understand the emergence of the community-led housing in England it is necessary to consider the policy context within which the sector operates, including the sector's relationship to government and the wider market. Researchers have noted that community-led housing sectors

have remained niche and face significant structural barriers in contexts in which they are not integrated with mainstream housing development (Palmer and Tummers, 2019) or into legal and institutional frameworks (Tummers, 2015). In the Australian context, Crabtree et al. (2019) describe the barriers created by the context of government policy, the market and historical norms as 'institutional lock-in' that prioritise private housing. Furthermore, their review of the international co-operative literature supports the view that a co-operative sector can thrive when receiving the support of "systemic entities, including by (for example) governments, union movements or mutual banks" in a way which is "balanced with the co-operative principle of maintaining autonomy" (Crabtree *et al.*, 2019, p. 140). In the English context, Lang and Mullins (2019) have begun to map out this context, assessing the extent to which the community-led housing sector could be considered a mature field of action. They did "not find much scaling and institutional completeness, i.e. regulators, funders, consultants, etc. working fairly exclusively within the field and providing it with economic resources" (Lang and Mullins, 2019, p. 196), emphasising the permeable boundaries and reliance on adjacent fields of action for resources and legitimacy. Further research is required to understand how these relations have developed over time and particularly to "emphasise the spatial dimension in the analysis of field emergence (e.g. by exploring emergence conditions for regional enabler hubs)" (Lang and Mullins, 2019, p. 196).

2.4.1   Relationship to state

The state is a central partner for the community-led housing sector. It can act as provider of resource and can enable community-led housing development through policy and government support for collectively owned and novel tenures. These relationships may be in action at multiple scales of governance and researchers have noted the cooperation of municipal level local government as important aspects of developing community-led housing initiatives in multiple contexts (Thompson, 2015; Lang and Stoeger, 2017). Government funding, either central or local, in grant, or at favourable lending rates, is central to the production of community-led housing in England. In particular, Moore's (2018) research highlights partnerships between CLTs, housing associations and the state body which provides funding for affordable housing, Homes England. Researchers suggest that targeted funding for specific practices can provide impetus for the number of projects to increase (Scanlon and Fernandez Arrigoitia, 2015; Mullins, 2018). The research presented in this thesis is framed temporally by the operation of the second Community Housing Fund introduced in 2018 and administered by Homes England[1], which was a site of research interest for understanding the relationship between the sector and the state. Beyond direct funding,

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[1] Administrated by Homes England outside of London, a specific fund for London was administrated by the Greater London Authority

research has noted internationally that other types of policy support are required to enable innovative practices within planning, legal or financial frameworks (Crabtree *et al.*, 2019). Tummers (2015) emphasises the importance of these frameworks to the form of different national sectors, highlighting the extent to which community-led housing schemes need to be contextualised within the "planning and housing systems in which the initiatives are operated" (Tummers, 2015, p. 76)

Whilst relationships with the state are important to growth in the community-led housing sector, the nature of the projects entails a separation from the state to distinguish itself from other types of state-led housing tenure. Therefore, actors within the community-led housing sector must balance maintaining autonomy with access to resources and legitimacy provided by partnerships with the state. Ganapati (2010) theorised from a cross-national study of co-operatives that co-operatives required 'embedded autonomy' to achieve sector growth. This means that co-operatives have significant autonomy from government but are embedded within a relationship to the state that grant the co-operative structures legality, legitimacy and support. Since the fieldwork for this thesis commenced, new research has emphasised the importance of government in creating the conditions for co-operative housing projects internationally, through a theorisation of public-co-operative partnerships as a mechanism for advancing the housing commons (Ferreri and Vidal, 2021).

2.4.2 Policy drivers

Community-led housing approaches are often reliant on the capacity to obtain state resources, or other forms of policy support such as legal definitions or planning approval at a local level. Therefore, government engagement is an important facet of the community-led housing sector's push towards growth; however, relatively little research indicates what facets of the community-led housing sector are of interest to policy makers.

A review of grey literature related to community-led housing suggests the capacity to deliver new units of housing, especially affordable housing, is a driver of policy interest in community-led housing. This relates to the fact that, whilst the number of units of housing produced by the community-led housing sector remains low, it is felt to be a useful solution for bringing forward difficult sites where there is community opposition. There are well-reported housing shortages and affordability crises across much of England and the provision of new units of housing is a regularly discussed solution (Barton and Wilson, 2018). A slightly more nuanced argument for house building focuses on the importance of providing affordable units of housing, protected from the spiralling prices of the market (Wilcox *et al.*, 2017; Shelter, 2018). The wave of CLT formation is characterised by development in rural areas, especially in areasu with high levels of second home ownership. It is seen as a solution to rendering affordable housing under local control as a corrective to villages with

high house prices and traditionally strong local resistance to development (Moore, 2015, 2018). It is not yet clear if government support and funding will be dependent on a capacity to scale-up the sector to provide significantly more units, or if a focus on affordability will prioritise certain models of community-led housing, community-led housing construction and modes of living, and what these priorities could mean for the future of the sector.

Further policy drivers relate to political narratives of community-based activity, in particular, researchers have linked policy interest in community-led housing to policy narratives of Localism and the Big Society (Moore and McKee, 2012; Czischke, 2018; Lang, Chatterton and Mullins, 2020). Localism can be summarised as the idea that the more localised decision making can be made, the more accountable and democratic it will be, and aims to move responsibility away from government to "communities" of active citizens. This can take the form of devolving greater decision-making power over local issues and services to communities, encouraging more involvement from the voluntary sector in providing services and generally encouraging forms of community self-help by removing bureaucracy and decentralising decision making (Moore and Mullins, 2013). Localism gained prominence as an approach under New Labour where greater community involvement was cited as a key agreement in favour of stock transfer of social housing (Mckee, 2007). Localism as a policy orientation, appeals to elements of both the left and right of the political spectrum and has been influential as a continual discourse through the New Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments since 1997. The importance of the localism agenda for housing and planning was enshrined in the 2011 Localism Act (DCLG, 2011). The Big Society approach associated with David Cameron's Conservative government (2010 – 2016) built on these concepts to argue for more engaged citizens taking responsibility for supporting others in their local community. Critiques of the localism discourse, including that increasing voluntary capacity can be cover for withdrawal of services by the state (Jarvis, 2015a) or that it can entrench inequality by providing greater power to members of civil society who already have the resources, expertise and social capital to become involved in these projects (Matthews and Hastings, 2013), are also relevant for discussions of community-led housing.

Through a localism lens, community-led housing is championed because it is thought to represent an increase in democracy and accountability that will produce the housing a community really wants or needs. Community-led housing is often portrayed in opposition to perceived unaccountable processes that govern social and market building (Heywood, 2016; Goulding, 2018). It is also argued that the local knowledge of community-led housing organisations makes them able to plan for the exact housing needs of the area at the micro-scale (Field and Layard, 2017). Moore and Mullins (2013) noted that the correlation between community-led housing values and the political agenda of

localism has led to extensive political support, which needs to be turned into practical and funded support for the sector to become established. Lang, Chatterton and Mullins (2020) argued that the capacity of intermediary organisations to align their models of housing provision with the localism political discourse, especially with Conservative party policy, created a way to link the sector's aims with those of the government and "mobilised short-term support" (2020, p.64). The alignment between community-led housing and discourses of localism appears strong, though some of this positioning could be more pragmatic than ideological. The impact of this discourse over the direction of community-led housing activity needs to be further explored in future research.

2.4.3   Professionals

A network of community-led housing professionals has emerged to support the development of community-led housing projects in various ways. The role of such professionals, observed in different contexts, is to liaise between actors in the fields of housebuilding, planning and finance (Palmer and Tummers, 2019). Fernandez Arrigoitia and Tummers (2019, p. 359) argue that professionals who specialise in cohousing development require the ability to translate between different types of knowledge and thus take on an important role as "a 'middle-agent' able to successfully inhabit, travel across and coexist in the different worlds of mainstream and alternative housing expertise". Their research with professionals in three national contexts, including the UK, suggests that the expansion of the numbers of these professionals is part of a process of professionalisation through which the sector is becoming more self-sufficient and engaged with mainstream housing provision. Researchers have argued that the development of this cadre of professionals is necessary to support the growth of a stable collaborative housing sector (Thompson, 2020b). Moore and Mullins (2013) highlight the key role played by local CLT umbrella organisations, which provide access to professional expertise, in the diffusion of technical skills and resources locally. However, they also note that there is potential tension in the model of support that undermines the independence and community-led ethos of individual projects. The research presented in this thesis occurred at the time that national enabling hub network, which aimed to provide better access to professional support for community-led housing development across England, was being established.

A further role which can be undertaken, or led by, professionals is advocacy which generates the conditions under which opportunities for individuals and groups with similar aims to create viable projects emerge and these interactions and projects in turn strengthen the movement. Lang and Mullins (2019) argue that "socially skilled" actors have contributed to the growth of a community-led housing sector by identifying means and discursive spaces. They identify framing practices among

movements functioning "by connecting micro-level goals with macrolevel political discourses" (Lang and Mullins, 2019, p. 195). Through this process of alignment, the National Community Land Trust Network was able to advocate for a statutory definition of community land trusts and the National Custom & Self Build Association succeeded in lobbying for the Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015. This requires local authorities to set-up self-build registers and allow sites to be used for self-build (Lang, Chatterton and Mullins, 2020). Establishing and maintaining this support is an important process for actors in the sector and they have played an active role in promoting and advocating for community-led housing practices, driving interest from the ground up and establishing vertical links between individual projects and national policy.

2.5   RESEARCH GAP

The literature presented in this review demonstrates that there is significant interest in the operation of community-led housing, and cognate sectors internationally. Existing research has mapped the trajectories of individual schemes as well as provided an overview of the sector as it emerged. However, the sector continues to evolve, and the roles and relations created by a growing sector merit further enquiry. In particular, I have identified three areas for further research which the empirical material presented in this thesis has aimed to address.

Whilst there is significant research into the drivers of individual community-led housing projects in specific circumstances, there is less research which explores the operating context of community-led housing at a national policy level and at the level of local government. Furthermore, there is limited understanding of how competing ideologies interact within the community-led housing landscape and an understanding of how political discourses, government action, market context and activism affect community-led housing development in England. This research examined these issues and sought to understand the 'vertical' links between actors at different scales. In building a picture of the way community-led housing operates as it scales, it is important to investigate the differences and commonalities within local contexts. This responds to Lang and Mullins' (2019) call to build an understanding of the regional dimensions of the community-led housing sector in England.

This research also builds our understandings of the roles of different actors within the community-led housing landscape. This relates to understanding the impact of actors at the grass-roots levels, how community-led housing sectors emerge locally, as well the role of national policy actors and professionals. In particular, it builds upon the understandings suggested by Lang and Mullin's (2019) identification of the role of 'socially skilled actors' and Fernandez Arrigoitia and Tummers (2019) discussion of professionals as middle-agents. This research aimed to investigate these social

processes more deeply and identify other such relational processes in operation in the community-led housing sector in England.

This research is specifically concerned with understanding the role of the enabling hubs in the community-led housing sector, noting this development as a site from which to investigate the regional dimensions of community-led housing growth and a continuation of research into the professionalisation of the sector. There is potential for this type of sector infrastructure to exert a homogenising force nationally or regionally through institutionalising attitudes, practices and orientations and there is also potential for these to become sites of conflict regionally and nationally. At the time of the inception of the research, it was unclear to what extent enabling hubs may promote a particular version of community-led housing practices and how this would impact on the forms, practice and outcomes of community-led housing projects moving forward. There are also questions about the legitimacy of the formalisation of support within the boundaries of community-led housing approaches. The regional model of diffusion reflects the highly localised practices found within the community-led housing umbrella and the model promoted by Community Led Homes allows for regional variations, whilst enacting some prerequisites for how enabling hubs must operate. This study examines how effective this model of diffusion is in contributing to scaling-up efforts, either through the growth or proliferation of projects, and whether the enabling hub infrastructure could become self-sustaining. Focusing this research on the role of the enabling hub through a comparative study of regional enabling hubs enabled an understanding of how these forces interact.

2.6 CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed in this chapter demonstrates how community-led housing has emerged as a sector, including the role of intermediary organisations, and has examined the drivers of interest in the practices and the context in which it operates. The research presented in this thesis aimed to build on these findings, particularly in relation to the policy developments at the time of designing the research in 2019 when the second iteration of the Community Housing Fund had been announced and the development of the regional enabling hub programme was underway. The existing research has shown that the community-led housing sector contains a number of practices which operate in a constellation to each other, with different practices holding more and less congruence with each other. However, whilst the emphases are different the direction of their aims and objectives are broadly compatible and working together as a combined sector has demonstrated a material value to stakeholders (Lang and Mullins, 2019). Similarly, existing research has discussed a range of drivers for engaging with community-led housing activity from highly politicised

prefigurative action to a pragmatic and limited problem solving operation. The research summarised in this chapter has also indicated that such a range of motivations can co-exist within individual projects (Griffin, 2019; Arbell, Middlemiss and Chatterton, 2020). This section has also reviewed the literature in relation to the operating context of community-led housing. Researchers have identified the central role of relationships to government and other mainstream housing actors in terms of the success of establishing community-led housing approaches, though this needs to be balanced with the aim to act autonomously (Ganapati, 2010). Furthermore, researchers have identified the role of professionals in the sector as a 'middle-agent' translating between the community and the mainstream (Fernandez Arrigoitia and Tummers, 2019). The empirical material presented in this thesis addresses questions raised by the existing research into the regional dimensions of the operating context of community-led housing and how this interacts with the national policy landscape, the role of actors in navigating these operating contexts and responding to the development of the enabling hub programme within the English context.

3 THEORETICAL APPROACH AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework used to shape the research approach and details the conceptual framework employed to understand the data. These were drawn primarily from new institutionalist perspectives, especially from within the sociological institutionalism branch. First, the chapter describes the key features of new institutionalist theory and why the approach was selected for this research. Then, previous institutionalist research into community-led housing and other relevant literatures is discussed. This is followed by a discussion of each of the key aspects of the theoretical framework, beginning with the structuring aspects of the institutionalist approach, followed by the role of agency, and the approach used to conceptualise power. The chapter concludes by summarising the conceptual framework and stating the implications for the methodology discussed in the following chapter.

3.1 OVERVIEW OF NEW INSTITUTIONALISM

The theoretical framework presented in this chapter draws on insights from scholars working primarily within the new institutionalist tradition. This was chosen as it offers tools to best investigate the activities of actors who are attempting to create a more favourable operating context for community-led housing practices. The approach furnishes the research with conceptual tools to elaborate on the structural parameters that influence community-led housing development as well as the role of agents in constructing these parameters. This approach foregrounds the predictable patterns of interaction which structure society, naming these as institutions (Peters, 1999). These include both formally codified mechanisms, such as constitutions, policies and formalised conventions that determine how decisions are made, and non-codified ways of operating, such as routinised practices or shared ways of thinking that are not formally prescribed but still carry a normative weight to them. The approach enabled the study to investigate the structural conditions that shaped how community-led housing emerged at a local and national level, which is under-researched in the literature. Further the approach, investigates "not just the impact of institutions upon behaviour, but the interaction between individuals and institutions" (Lowndes, 2001, p. 1953). This enabled the research to address the current gap in the literature on community-led housing foregrounding the agency of actors. The approach also enabled research into the enabling hub programme by providing conceptual tools to map their role within a local network of actors and institutions. Following this approach, the research aimed to capture both formal and informal structuring forces within the community-led housing field. For example, community-led housing groups must engage with formal institutions such as: becoming incorporated, completing a planning

application or engaging with a local plan, as well as meeting affordable housing and state aid laws for accessing funding from Homes England. In addition, these groups will need to engage with informal institutions such as effectively engaging with a local authority, navigating narrative framings about housing need locally, and establishing the forms of housing regarded as legitimate by local residents. This research was designed to capture these interactions and interpret the ways in which they are constructed and reconstructed by actors.

There are a range of approaches within the auspices of new-institutionalist thought, the conceptual framework presented here takes a broadly sociological approach, however, it engaged with the tools provided from each branch as proposed by Lowndes and Roberts (2013). Institutionalist thought has a long history in social science and theorists have taken the core concepts in multiple directions and across social science disciplines. Traditional institutional analysis addressed the ways in which constitutions and the administrative organisation of government and democracy operated (Rhodes, 1997). Then, in opposition to a more behavioural and individual turn which was dominant in social science, researchers from the late 1980s began to revive a focus on the shared institutions that shape the social world beyond an accumulation of individual choices. They differentiated their approach from the institutional approaches which had come before as a 'new' institutionalism (March and Olsen, 1989; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). The label "new" institutionalism is associated with institutionalist approaches that suggest actors' behaviours are not fully rational, that is intended to maximise self-interest, but rather are guided by logics of social legitimacy which are related to the wider social environment. Furthermore, theorists argued, these 'new' approaches were less descriptive and more theoretical than what came before, creating space for understandings of the interaction between institutions and actors and how this shapes the social world (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013).

This 'new' institutionalism perspective stems from political science (Koelbe, 1995), introducing a focus on the impacts of the organisational forms found in political life, especially where they are inefficient or not rooted in rationality (March and Olsen, 1989). The approach has been further developed in other social science disciplines, notably in management and organisational theory (Garud, Hardy and Maguire, 2007). Generally, theorists separate new-institutionalist approaches into three key schools of thought: sociological, rational choice and historical institutionalism (Hall and Taylor, 1996). Sociological institutionalism focuses on the norms and culture of a context in which agents act according to a logic of appropriateness (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Scott, 2001). Rational choice institutionalism is most closely related to economics and considers the institutions to be the parameters in which actors make choices that are most advantageous to them and is primarily concerned with the choices available to individuals (North, 1990). Historical

institutionalism focuses on macro-social structures and their continuity over time. It explains the institutional context through reference to preference for stability and a logic of path dependence, meaning that each action shapes the ability of actors to choose to take subsequent actions (Hay and Wincott, 1998; Thelen, 1999). Beyond the three major strands, theorists have identified multiple other strands of institutionalist thought. Peters (1999) suggests six distinct approaches exist. More recently, discursive (Schmidt, 2010) or constructivist (Hay, 2008) approaches have been proposed. In these approaches the ideas that pervade institutional contexts are given greatest significance and explanatory power. Furthermore, Lowndes and Roberts (2013) propose a "third wave institutionalism" which blends these established approaches, arguing "actors and institutional designers are themselves subject to mixed motivations, reflecting the artificial nature of 'pure' ontological constructs" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 50). The theoretical approach used in this research is generally built on the understandings provided by sociological institutionalism in that it seeks to understand actors' perspectives on what course of action are considered legitimate. However, it also follows the pragmatic approach proposed by Lowndes and Roberts (2013) in combining a range of explanatory tools for actors' behaviour across the range of institutionalist thought.

3.1.1   Key concepts

The foundation of a new institutionalist analysis is the study of institutions, which are structuring forces that guide actors, inhibiting and disinhibiting certain routes of action within a field of action. In this framing, a field refers to a social context in which actors and organisations undertake activity in a recognised sphere of activity with shared socially constructed constraints. These shared constraints are institutions. 'Institutionalisation' can then be defined as the process through which these structures become embedded and accepted by actors. Sociological institutionalists have defined this structure in various ways. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) defined them as a framework of norms and culture that can be perceived as separate to the individual. Scott (2001) proposed a set of regulative, normative and cognitive constraints. In this framing, regulative represents formal polices and rules, normative constraints cover habits and norms, and cognitive constraints address shared beliefs and values. March and Olsen identify institutions as social forces which can shape behaviour within a "logic of appropriateness" (1989, p. 160) in a way that is predictable, enduring and able to withstand shifting attitudes from individual actors or changing circumstances. Institutions are also enforced from outside of individual agents through enforceable rules or through social sanctions for noncompliance. However, they are distinct from pure administrative rules in that they carry values for actors and accepted practices could contravene official rules. In this way institutions represent a more social meaning of following what is legitimate.

Following the approach set out by Lowndes and Roberts (2013), this research refers to rules, practices and narratives as structuring constraints on actor's behaviours. These are similar to Scott's (2001) definitions of regulative (rules), normative (practices) and cognitive (narratives) but have a sense of meaning more rooted in everyday patterns of behaviour that participants can identify and discuss with the researcher. An 'ideational turn' within institutionalist theory also provides conceptual tools which are of benefit to this research. Schmidt (2010) set out a framework for understanding the way that discourse expressed through narratives can be included in accounts of institutional change. She outlines how an understanding of what she terms 'foreground discursive capabilities' engenders a way of explaining institutional change as agents have the "ability to think outside the institutions in which they continue to act, to critique, communicate, and deliberate about such institutions and to persuade one another to take action to change them" (Schmidt, 2011, p. 56). These approaches bolster a theorisation of the role of ideas, termed narratives, within this research and are utilised alongside the identification of rules and practices.

A key focus for new institutionalist work has been the processes which govern change within a field of action. The theoretical lens of new institutionalism focuses the researcher's attention on the parameters of legitimate action that shape behaviour and the mechanisms that influence how these could be changed by actors. The approach proposes a dialectal relationship between structures and agency, leading to "a set of theoretical ideas and hypotheses concerning the relations between institutional characteristics and political agency, performance, and change" (March and Olsen, 2008, p. 5). The discussion of constraints within new institutionalist theory addresses the processes through which a fixed social system is upheld, notably DiMaggio and Powell (1983) employ the concept of 'institutional isomorphism' to describe the process by which actors within a field tend to reproduce institutional arrangements that mirror established institutions under the prevailing logic of legitimacy. Furthermore, historical institutionalists developed the concept of path dependence to explain the continuation of particular institutional configurations over time, until disrupted by exogenous shocks (Pierson, 2000). However, theorists have also developed conceptual tools to account for change. Scholars within the new institutionalist approach have addressed the mechanisms through which actors, at the organisational or individual level, take action that shapes the institutional context going forward. This research has adopted a constructionist ontological approach to institutionalism which suggests that institutions are made and remade by agents based on what they believe about the world and that individuals can be conscious and reflexive about this interaction (Healey, 1997; Hay, 2008; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). Here, the constructionist lens on institutions provides a way to perceive gradual rather than wholesale institutional change and actors' potential contribution to this change over time. This means that though institutions may

appear fixed, and be somewhat resistant to change, they are mutable in that they are made and remade by the perceptions of individuals, mediated by power relationships, albeit with a strong tendency to remain congruent with the institutional context in which they are embedded. This framing is particularly useful in this study which seeks to identify the extent to which the existing institutional context accommodates community-led housing practices, and how these practices can or cannot, adapt to the context or vice versa. Therefore, my approach, through explicitly seeking to identify structures within social life and the ways these are perpetuated, gives significant weight to the capacity of actors to create change.

3.2 NEW INSTITUTIONALISM AND COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING RESEARCH

With its focus on the organisational aspects of social life, new institutionalist approaches are well suited to research within housing and planning studies that address the way that social processes, created and maintained by actors, act as structuring forces in determining how housing and planning regimes are experienced. New institutionalist perspectives provide a lens for understanding how housing and planning policy ideas are enacted in context and through actors. The studies discussed in this review demonstrate a precedent for institutionalist approaches on issues of housing and planning.

Researchers working within the community-led or international collaborative housing sphere have utilised new institutionalist approaches to examine the impact of policy environments in which these types of housing practices develop. These papers apply the institutionalist approach, foregrounding various concepts within it to empirical material concerning collaborative housing. In the English context, Lang and Mullins (2019) have utilised insights from new institutionalist conceptions of an organisational field to understand the development of the 'community-led housing' sector in England. They have argued that although there had been some convergence on a shared project and successful joint efforts at securing resources, the sector had remained quite fractured between different practices and reliant on the institutional support of the wider affordable housing field. Lang and Fink (2019) examine the role of social enterprises, taking community-led housing schemes in England as an example. Their research discusses the role of these organisations in harnessing social capital in both horizontal, place bounded, and vertical ways to influence resources holders, as well as the role of intermediaries in supporting this. Their findings suggest further investigation into the vertical linking role of intermediaries and the strategic positioning work of actors would be a valuable approach. Furthermore, Moore (2018) has considered the competing 'institutional logics' in operation between housing associations and community organisations in developing community land trusts in England. In other national contexts, Lang and Stoeger (2017) have contributed an

analysis of how the institutional context found within different provinces in Austria and how this has influenced collaborative housing development. They conclude that there is an important role for "socially skilled actors who can perceive and also seize opportunities in constraining policy environments" (Lang and Stoeger, 2017, p. 50). These studies have opened a rich seam of research for further analysis of institutional contexts in determining outcomes for community-led housing approaches and generating further evidence on the role of actors in operating strategically within these contexts.

Within the discipline, housing studies researchers have employed institutionalist approaches for various empirical aims. This suggests an increased interest in approaches which aim to reconcile a relationship between structure and actors in understanding housing policy. Housing studies scholars have previously called for greater utilisation of institutionalist approaches which centre actors' agency but within a constrained environment and recognise that actors are influenced by many motivations beyond pure rationalism (Clapham, 2001; Manzi and Jacobs, 2008; Bengtsson, 2015). Bengtsson suggests political science theory approaches like new institutionalism are a 'missing link' which help to explain "why thinly rational policy-makers do not always consider ambitious evaluations, nor implement well thought-out proposals from housing researchers" (Bengtsson, 2009, p. 19).There are now many empirical examples derived from institutionalist approaches. The historical institutionalist approach of path dependence, in particular, has interested housing studies scholars as an explanatory tool. It has been a topic of a special issue in *Housing, Theory and Society* where researchers used the concept to compare the development of housing systems in different national contexts (Bengtsson and Ruonavaara, 2010; Lawson, 2010) or tracked policy development within a national case (Nielsen, 2010). Furthermore, researchers have utilised the lens of institutional logics to draw comparisons between housing systems (Mullins, Milligan and Nieboer, 2018) or to understand the changing role of housing associations within the English housing context (Morrison, 2016). Furthermore, the role of embedded practices as structuring action has been utilised to explore the processes which supported collective action and cooperation in Swedish housing estates (Bengtsson, 2010). These previous studies demonstrate that the foundational ideas of the new institutionalist approach, which look for how courses of action are shaped and how they become routine and predictable, may be usefully applied within a housing studies context.

A further set of relevant examples of application of the new institutionalist approach can be found in the neighbouring discipline of planning studies where the approach has arguably found greater resonance within these fields than in housing studies. In Sorensen's (2017) review of the contribution of new institutionalism to planning theory he argues that new institutionalist approaches are of clear relevance to planning studies as institutions shape the articulation of urban

environments. He summarises: "Cities are densely institutionalized spaces, with multifaceted institutions shaping everything from the regulation of sidewalks to conceptions of good neighbourhoods to the legal structure of property" (Sorenson, 2017, p. 25). Similarly, Healey's work utilises a sociological institutionalist perspective to topics such as collaborative planning practices (Healey, 1997) and explorations of the transformative potential of planning practices (Healey, 2006). The approach seems well-suited to the analysis of socio-technical interactions and the application of governance within the planning system.

The new institutionalist approach has also been shown to be fruitful in empirical studies of citizen participation and innovative governance. These examples speak to the focus of this study in understanding how community groups can develop community-led housing which represents a deep and prolonged form of community engagement in governance of a local area. Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker's (2006) study of citizen participation in English cities provides a relevant example of new institutionalist approaches used in the study of micro-practices and a comparative methodology. The researchers examined 'rules-in-use' in their selected case studies seeking to explain examples of engagement in local politics that did not correspond to the trend of economic disadvantage correlating to low citizen engagement in local politics and vice versa in more affluent areas. Furthermore, González and Healy (2005) use a social-constructivist institutionalist perspective to explore how 'socially innovative' governance practices can emerge. They argue that such movements might experience greater success when they are congruent with wider changes occurring in different areas of governance. Their findings suggested that single attempts to make changes could be consumed by prevailing institutional establishments, though they might perhaps leave "a few seeds for future transformers to build on, left around in institutional memories and governance cultures" (González and Healey, 2005, p. 2067). The theoretical tools of the new institutionalist approach are well equipped for these research tasks as they account for the actors' interactions with institutional forms, ascribing these constraints greater power than the will of individual actors, but highlighting actors' ability to recognise and aim to alter these constraints.

3.3 APPLICATION OF NEW INSTITUTIONALIST THEORY TO THE RESEARCH

This section introduces the conceptual framework used to address the topics of interest identified in the review of the literature. It provides a theoretical scaffolding for collection and analysis of the data. Drawn from concepts within the new institutionalist approach this conceptual framework takes account of the ways in which established and identifiable processes of social interaction and an interlocking framework of institutions impact how community-led housing is developed in an area. Furthermore, the approach offers the opportunity to articulate how actors create and recreate

their environments to produce the space for new and alternatives ideas about housing. The approach theorises that agents co-create institutional frameworks through their interaction with each other and that they have the capacity to act outside of institutions, though this is a risk and may lead to censure. Furthermore, these agents have the ability to alter the institutional context under certain circumstances. The concepts included in this framework informed the research questions and anchored the analysis.

I have utilised a modified version of the framework proposed by Lowndes and Roberts (2013) to classify the institutional context within this research. Their framework calls for an analysis of rules, practices and narratives. These structure how actors operate by identifying what is legitimate action. Lowndes and Roberts (2013) call each of these constraints' institutions. In this conceptual framework, rules are formally defined written codes of conduct, such as laws and regulations. Practices are accepted activity, but they are not formally defined, such as patterns of engagement within a local authority or approaches to community engagement. These are not formally prescribed but would be recognisable to actors engaging within a social context as what is usually done (Lowndes, 2014). Lowndes and Roberts caution against seeing rules and practice as dichotomous and instead suggest considering rules and practice on "a continuum from highly formal to highly informal, with many places in between" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 60). Although institutions might be supported by formal rules, they may also contravene formal rules or operate along a specific interpretation of them. Indeed, Lowndes and Roberts highlight that "informal conventions can be as binding as formal constitutions and can be particularly resistant to change" (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, p. 3). Narratives are ideas that take on social force and carry values, gathering strength as they are repeated. This could include policy approaches such as localism, or ideas that create an identity for a place or population. Narratives can be in conflict and vie for position and dominance. It is important to note that whilst narratives may appear to be predominantly imposed from policy elites this analysis also seeks to appreciate where narratives are promoted by activists or other civil society-based coalitions. In this view, rules and practices supported by a prevailing narrative can also be used strategically by actors to establish new rules and practices (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013).

The institutions should be recognisable to respondents as having external reality, that is, they cannot simply be ignored but must be worked around, with, or changed, and they influence the way in which it is possible to act. This conceptual framework assumes that these structures can significantly account for the shape that social activity takes, in that human as actors tend to stay in the realm of what is normal or permittable. These structures are robust and to contravene, work around or alter these rules of operation takes concerted effort by an actor. Generally, then, the

theoretical framework suggests the institutional context will be characterised by path-dependence and institutional isomorphism. The concept of path dependence proposes that structures are reproduced by repeated action, as action shapes future action by precluding some approaches, suggesting that once a decision has been taken "some otherwise feasible, alternative paths will be closed – or at least difficult to reach – at a later point" (Bengtsson and Ruonavaara, 2010, p. 193). This tendency increases the likelihood that the same 'path' of action will be repeated as the structuring forces are strengthened. Institutional isomorphism similarly suggests that organisations will become more similar to each other over time in order to maximise utility from the institutional context. In particular, the theory holds that less powerful organisations will become more like more powerful organisations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This research sought to understand how the institutional context of rules, practices and narratives in which actors operated, and the processes which govern these interactions, encouraged or inhibited community-led housing development.

This research does not conform to the approach put forward by Lowndes and Roberts (2013) entirely as it retains institutions as ontologically separate from narratives, which are seen as ideas and frames of meaning that support or challenge the institutional context. This research brackets narratives as somewhat separate supporting social process to institutions, rather seeing them as institutional constraints alongside rules and practices. Although I broadly utilise the same understanding of narratives as Lowndes and Roberts (2013), I have chosen to explicitly separate narratives from these other aspects of the institutional context which exhibit more rigidity, are more external to agents, and are less reflexive. It is assumed that actors are likely to follow formal and informal rules in terms of actions but less likely to espouse narratives that they do not agree with, though they may well be able to identify these for the researcher. This framing of the research also identifies narratives as the carriers of change to institutional contexts but not the change itself. Put more simply, changing the story about how housing should be developed is an important first step in the process but does not bring about change unless it leads to changes in the rules and day-to-day practices. Therefore, a key aspect of this theoretical framework is the way that ideas, as expressed through narratives, support and legitimise rules and practices that contribute to the institutional context and can be used to advocate for institutional change.

This research foregrounds the ability of social agents to act reflectively (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). This approach gives significant explanatory power to the agency of social actors. Here, agency is defined as the capacity of individuals to interpret their institutional framework and undertake action according to their own free will as mediated through their own ideas about the world, a societal logic of appropriateness and perceptions of legitimacy, their relative power, and their own interest (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). Diverse narratives among actors provides an explanation of why

actors undertake different actions to each other within the same institutional context. Schmidt (2010) states that by employing an agent and ideas focused approach researchers can "infuse these 'structures' with 'agency', by focusing on the ideas of real actors that help explain changes or continuities in institutions, at critical moments or incrementally over time" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 13).

The conceptual framework of this research considers that change within the institutional context is often achieved by agents acting strategically. Following a concept proposed by DiMaggio (1988) and advanced in organisational and management studies, I label this strategic action institutional entrepreneurship (Garud, Hardy and Maguire, 2007). Such entrepreneurial actors, where they have sufficient resources to do so, can work within the existing institutional context to create new institutional forms in order to advance their aims (DiMaggio, 1988). Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence define the concept as the "activities of actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones" (Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence, 2004, p. 657). In this framework, embedded agency in an institutional context, the form of institutional entrepreneurship, is considered a means to understand the growth of the community-led housing sector. For the purposes of this research that could include understanding the impact of agency in, for example, business planning/direction within hubs interpreting and enacting local planning powers, directing resources, organising within communities, and making decisions about land sale.

Theorising on the process of institutional change requires the theoretical approach to account for the exercise of power within institutional contexts. This is important to contextualise the agency of actors, their capacity to influence the actions of others, and their ability to promote narratives with an understanding of their relative power within the given context. An analysis of power dynamics must be incorporated into an understanding of institutional change because, as Lowndes (2009) argues, "institutional change is never a purely technical matter. Any challenge to existing institutional settlements is likely to be met by resistance; indeed, shifting power relations may be one of the goals of institutional reform" (Lowndes, 2009, p. 95). Power can be defined as the capacity of actors to affect the course of action taken by others (Hay, 1997). For this approach, that means the options of legitimate behaviour within an institutional framework are differentiated according to the relative power of social agents, and therefore the latitude for enacting agency is also limited by the relevant institutions. In this way institutions empower certain actors over others and enable certain actions (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). Additionally, attempts to legitimise behaviours or bring about institutional change will benefit from alignment with certain actors or the combined power of several actors working in coalition (Sorenson, 2017).

Though an institutional perspective includes attention to the organisational forms that structure action, power within an institutional framework is not defined by official positions alone. Schmidt (2011) proposes that researchers consider both the objective position of actors within a hierarchy and the subjective perceptions of power lent by values and ideas. Furthermore, the exercise of power does not always neatly flow from rule makers to actors with rules in practice, due to the capacity of actors to interpret formal rules as well as deviate from established ways of acting (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). Both Schmidt (2011) and Lowndes and Roberts (2013) highlight that power outside of formal position is required to understand the role of non-elite actors, such as that found in social movements within a context of institutional change. Housing policy and housing development are governed and managed at multiple scales from highly localised decision-making processes to national policy frameworks. Therefore, a multi-level framework is used in recognition of the heterogenous nature of power and action at different levels of governance. Accounting for the different impacts of these scales the research follows Lowndes and Lemprière's (2018) proposition that institutional change occurs through an interaction of vertical and horizontal institutional constraints. In this understanding institutions are vertically nested within an ascending hierarchy of powerful institutions; for example, planning policies within the national planning framework, which itself is within the institution of the government department in control of planning, itself within the state. They are also horizontally embedded in that they operate within a wider institutional context at the local level, for example, housing targets in operation in an area with well-organised and robust community opposition to development. For this research, the power of actors and organisations within the institutional context was examined through the perceptions of respondents regarding who is able to create opportunities or marshal resources for community-led housing development. Furthermore, the analysis paid significant attention to the ways in which actors form coalitions to maximise their own relative power and employ narratives to generate further powers through persuasion.

3.3.1 Areas of weakness

All conceptual frameworks are susceptible to weaknesses, as they centre the researcher's attention on specific types of interactions within a frame of interpretation, introducing the possibility for phenomena to be elided, over-emphasised or misunderstood. I have identified three key areas of difficulty in utilising institutionalist theory in this study; the danger of conceptual stretching of institutions, an over-emphasis on the role of structures, and a risk of bureaucratic focus which could become overly technical and de-politicised.

Firstly, the concept of the institution could be too general, and capable of describing any phenomena, reducing its effectiveness at describing the data. Theorists have complained that the

definitions of institutions are too all encompassing, and therefore meaningless (Peters, 1996; Rothstein, 1998). In particular, as sociological institutionalists include culture and normative restrictions in the institution class critics have argued this approach means that anything that shapes behaviour is seen as an institution (Peters, 1996). Adapting the theory to make it more responsive to the role of actors confounds this problem as institutions are no longer immutable social facts but instead responsive to change from actors, and therefore become harder to define. To address this issue, I defined institutions as either rules, practice or narratives, following Lowndes and Roberts (2013). In addition to clear definitions, I also focused on structures that participants could themselves identify as shaping action as constituting institutions. I was empirically interested in what participants could directly identify themselves as rules, accepted practice and ways of framing action. Actors who wished to challenge or subvert established practices or attach their project to dominant narratives first needed to be able to recognise these practices and narratives as social reality. The ability of participants, as reflective agents, to express rules of operation clarified their impact at the scale of micro-interactions.

The second area of weakness is the charge that institutionalist accounts are overly structural with little room for agency (Crouch, 2005); or that where institutional theory does try to account for change it is inconsistent and utilises any explanatory tool available, making the explanation lack theoretical depth (Gorges, 2001). This study aimed to understand what makes change within the housing sector possible and therefore was obliged to account for change where it occurs. The conceptual framework I have employed identifies acts of institutional entrepreneurship as a mechanism through which actors can create new outcomes with the same tools and perhaps create space for others to follow the example. However, it notes the hegemonic power of stability within institutional contexts and that actors tend towards behaving the same way as others.

The third area of weakness for the approach is that it privileges in the analysis structures that operate in a more technical way that does not foreground wider societal power relations. The research deliberately addresses interactions at the micro-scale and routine processes. It is possible that following these at a surface level could lead to a lack of focus on the deeper structures, such as profit maximisation and exclusion, at work. I aimed to counteract this by including questions of who was engaged in projects and what did they aim to do, however, the approach does not take an overly critical stance. The conceptual framework was chosen to structure the research in a way that corresponded to the identified gap in the literature which questioned how community-led housing as a sector was becoming embedded regionally and nationally.

3.3.2 Conceptual framework

Table 3.1, below, summarises the key concepts discussed in this chapter and how they were applied to this research. For each concept the table details a description and some examples from within the research context that might apply. It also provides questions which the researcher can ask of their collected data in order to identify where certain concepts could be usefully applied to understand the social relations the research seeks to explore.

Table 3.1 Conceptual framework

Concepts	Description	Examples	Questions to ask of the data
Institutional Context	Rules, narratives and practices in operation together, including embedded relations between actors and embedded responses to contextual factors – can be observed at different levels	National institutional context of housing provision, ways of operating within a specific local authority area	What enabled this outcome or what blocked a desired outcome? What processes do actors need to engage in to create their desired outcome? What is business as usual and what is unusual?
Narratives	Perceptive frames that contain shared understandings and normative implications for actions	Attitudes to social housing, attitudes to state funding, purpose of community-led housing	How do actors explain their motivations or the motivations of others? How do actors justify their actions? How do actors frame conflict between themselves and others approaches?
Rules	Formal regulations that govern action	Local plans, National planning policy framework, affordable housing funding and finance regulations	How have actors shaped action to meet specific requirements or rules or laws? What regulations or laws do actors identify as blocking their desired action? What regulations, policies or laws are actors working to change?
Practices	Established and predictable ways of working that are not officially or formally prescribed in writing but are recognised as legitimate	Role of housing associations in a local area, role of local government in social housing provision, role of parish councils, system of developer contributions	What are taken for granted, de facto, ways of working in area? How do actors describe the way something is usually done?
Actors	Social agents that engage in action both as individuals and as constituent elements of complex actors (e.g., an organisation)	Types: Local government, enabling hub, politicians, local group Individuals: Rural housing officer, politician, community-led housing adviser	Who was involved at each stage of a process? Who is consistently involved in community led development? Who do respondents regard as key individuals?

Institutional entrepreneurship	Strategic action undertaken by actors to achieve goals through interpreting or modifying the institutional framework.	Coalition building, influencing, new applications of systems, campaigning, using the planning system (e.g., neighbourhood plans)	How did an actor achieve or attempt to achieve their desired outcome? What knowledge was required to undertake action in this space? How did actors seek to build coalitions or generate agreement? What tools did actors use to achieve their goals?
Path dependency	Process through which previous action defines future action through shaping available choices	Whether local authorities have their own housing stock, types of developments proposed	What is a specific local context that supports this outcome? In what ways is this course of action reproduced or self-reinforcing?
Power	The capacity to achieve action or block action	Able to accomplish action, not able to accomplish action, where actors sought support, who supports which narratives	Who are key individuals to engage with? What process most enables or prevents action? Who or what is being lobbied or influenced by whom and to what end? Who has decision making power? Who has control over resources?
Contextual factors	Wider structural factors	Housing market, employment, environment, location	What is the history of the area? What are the key housing problems encountered in the area? What is the natural landscape of the area?

3.4 CONCLUSION

The approach outlined in this theoretical framework seeks to identify the institutional parameters that impact community-led housing, the role of actors working in favour of community-led housing in navigating this and the narratives which inform the production, reproduction and altering of these parameters. The blended 'third wave' (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013) new institutionalist approach allows an analysis of the structural parameters that promote or inhibit community-led housing at a national and regional level through the interactions occurring at the micro-level whilst also examining the role of actors, especially powerful actors, in altering these parameters and the ideas expressed as narratives that shape their actions. This approach leads to the identification of key processes, both formal and informal, that influence the development of community-led housing in a region, and of key actors and their role in manipulating existing ways of working and forging new ones. The research seeks to identify where actors are empowered to undertake such acts of 'institutional entrepreneurship' and where they are blocked or require support from other sources of power. Furthermore, it entails developing and understanding ideas about community-led housing, and housing and planning more generally, that support or challenge institutional change.

4 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this thesis is to explore the structuring factors that enable or inhibit community-led housing development and the role of actors, particularly community-led housing enabling hubs, in mediating these to create more receptive environments for community-led housing development. This aim was supported by four objectives. To understand this, the research explored the processes through which actors in different regions navigate their specific institutional contexts to produce community-led housing projects and how these contexts influence the articulation of community-led housing in that region. Furthermore, it interrogated, specifically, the role of the community-led housing enabling hubs in this process. A multi-level analysis of institutional contexts was used to differentiate between institutional factors that originate from a national level and those that are implemented at the regional level. In addition, the analysis allowed space for understanding hyper-localised iterations of these. The research is organised by four objectives which are discussed next.

The first objective was to investigate the institutional context, both nationally and regionally, through an analysis of the formal and informal rules and practices in operation. The second objective sought to understand the role of actors in navigating this context. The third objective was to develop an understanding of the implementation of the enabling hub as a method of growing the sector. The final objective seeks to generate learnings from the sector from the research.

The first objective of this research was to investigate the institutional contexts of community-led housing at a regional and national level in order to better understand how these enable or constrain community-led housing development. The institutional context relates to the policy context of the area, that is the established rules of operation, but also the established practices and narratives that shape behaviour (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Policy reports on the nature of community-led housing in England have highlighted the localised nature of the practice and this is reflected in the regional enabling hub structure. The regional focus unpacks the relevant institutions at the meso-scale of governance in recognition of the devolved nature of some housing and planning powers and influence within England to levels of local governance whilst including an analysis of the national framework in recognition of the significant influence of centralised powers that govern housing and planning (Lund, 2016). Furthermore, the analysis of the institutional context incorporates actors and environmental factors outside of national or local government such as the characteristics of the local housing and land market, models of local affordable housing provision, and the perceived needs of the local population. The analysis generated by the first objective defines the operating context of community-led housing at a national and regional level and the way that

this influences the configuration of community-led housing development in the region. The objective is summarised in the first research question.

The second objective of the research was to develop an understanding of the role of actors in the community-led housing sector. It seeks to generate an understanding of social processes and actor networks as they operate within the institutional context. In particular, how actors might deliberately shape the institutional context in order to bring about favourable conditions for community-led housing. This objective seeks to apply an actor focused lens to the community-led housing sector in England, foregrounding the agency of those engaged in the sector. In particular, it generated an understanding of the relations between actors from civil society, policy communities and community-led housing professionals. This second objective is summarised by the second research question.

The third objective of the research is to conceptualise the role the regional enabling hub in mediating between actors and between actors and the institutional contexts. The regional enabling hub network has been coordinated, expanded, and formalised nationally to facilitate access to the knowledge and support that non-professionals need to undertake a development and allow learning to be consolidated at the regional level (Community Led Homes, 2019). The network received significant investment in the form of grant funding distributed nationally as an element of the Community Housing Fund known as the sector development programme which ended in March 2021. The intersection of formalised support and grassroots community development, as well as the significant investment and high expectations held for the concept, make the enabling hub an interesting site of analysis for understanding both the factors that shape community-led housing development and the experience of developing infrastructure for grassroots movements. Previous research has discussed the emergence and potential of these regional enabling hubs (previously CLT umbrella organisations) for CLTs (Moore and Mullins, 2013) and the role of the national intermediary organisations in supporting community-led housing (Lang, Chatterton and Mullins, 2020), however, less is known about how regional enabling hubs contribute to community-led housing development within specific local contexts. This research expands on understandings of the operation of regional based enabling hubs and their role as boundary spanning organisations through an analysis of their role of agents within the institutional context described by research under objectives one and two and also their contribution to creating this context. This is summarised in the third research question.

The fourth objective of the research is to use the knowledge generated through the first three objectives to develop learnings and recommendations for the community-led housing sector related

to the ways of working in different regional contexts, diffusion and promotion of community-led housing related ideas, and the role of the enabling hub regionally. This process of analysis will seek to find generalisable factors articulated variously across the three regional contexts of the research to produce recommendations for approaches to sustainable growth. This links the findings back to the broader purpose of the research, to support sustainable growth in community-led housing approaches in England.

4.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

i. What is the institutional context of community-led housing at national and local level and how does it influence the form of the sector?

ii. How do actors navigate and innovate within this institutional context to support the growth of community-led housing?

iii. How do actors construct the role of community-led housing enabling hubs and what are the processes through which hubs navigate the institutional context to promote community-led housing development regionally?

iv. How can actors aiming to promote community-led housing work to create favourable structural conditions for community-led housing practices?

5 RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter details the methods that the project took to answer the research questions. It explains the overall research strategy and the specific research methods used. The first section describes the overall research design. It discusses the logic of using multiple case studies supported by an analysis of the national policy environment within a qualitative framework. The second section describes the methods used to generate an understanding of the national policy environment of the community-led housing sector. This is followed by a discussion of the case study approach to researching specific iterations of enabling hubs and the community-led housing sector in different regional contexts. Next, the data collection methods utilised are outlined. The fifth section explains the analytical approach that was taken to answer the research questions, before the next section reflects on the ethics of the research design. Finally, I reflect on the effectiveness of the methods for this project, considering what the empirical data was able to generate and where there are deficits. The aim of this chapter is to provide a grounding in the decisions that were made to answer the research questions and the way the research design supported the analysis.

5.1 OVERVIEW OF APPROACH

The methodology presented here was designed to address the four research questions detailed in the previous chapter. The research questions focus on the description of institutional contexts and social processes, occurring at different levels of governance, related to the outcome of enabling community-led housing in different local contexts. Therefore, a multi-level qualitative comparative case study methodology was adopted to establish how these contexts and processes are in effect in different geographies and at different levels of influence. This strategy allowed participants to provide their own accounts of the community-led housing sector from their own experience and allowed the research to infer from these accounts differences and similarities across these contexts and processes. From a constructionist ontological standpoint, these perceptions and narrations create the social world in which the actors are engaged and are therefore all valid reflections of the social contexts in operation. This methodology has depicted the interlocking institutional constraints and actors' responses to these across three geographical areas and at the national level. This approach was also selected due to the relationship with the collaborative partner, Wessex Community Assets, who provided guidance on the key issues within the community-led housing sector as well as access to the Wessex Community Housing Hub as a case study.

I chose to take a qualitative approach to answering the research questions because it provides a way to explore them from multiple perspectives as experienced by those participating in the social

processes. This is in line with the theoretical framework of the study, which employs constructionist ontology, that is fundamentally interested in the perceptions and understandings that actors have of the social world. It is also congruent with a sociological institutionalist perspective that holds that actors hold an understanding of the social constraints that shape their actions. A qualitative approach investigates how the social world is experienced by the people within it, uses flexible research tools that respond to the subjects of the research, and embraces the complexity of the social world in answering its research question. It can be contrasted with a quantitative approach which seeks to measure a pre-existing social world through pre-defined tools and numerical data (Mason, 2002) The research tasks of this thesis are primarily concerned with how a social process operates, which Mason (2002, p. 175) labels a "mechanical" question. These sorts of questions are well suited to a qualitative approach, as the way in which a process occurs cannot be summarised into variables and must be highly informed by context. Furthermore, the research questions are concerned with the way this social process is experienced and interpreted by the actors involved and the meanings that they give to these interactions, which is the strength of qualitative research.

The research strategy centres on a comparative analysis of three case studies, supported and supplemented by a broader analysis of the national policy context. The three case studies are formed of individual enabling hubs and their activities, and the national context analysis consists of the views and perceptions of organisations and individuals who are relevant in the community-led housing sphere at a national level. Case studies were selected because the research questions require a deep and contextual understanding of enabling hubs, which is best achieved via detailed exploration. The comparative case study approach allowed an analysis of patterns and divergence between case studies. The national context acted as a further point of comparison as each case could be analysed in reference to national trends and understandings. Additionally, this strand of the research provided initial direction for selecting and structuring the case studies and contributed to theory generation as informants at a national level provided data in reference to cases outside of the specific iterations chosen as case studies. The crucial benefit of this combined approach is generalisation of findings to other contexts. Although this should not be overstated, conducting analysis across more than one case aided comparison between cases and allowed the research to generate findings that might have relevance to the population as a whole, in this case, to the national network of enabling hubs, rather than solely the enabling hubs chosen as case studies. Still, these findings are only potentially generalisable as they are so rooted in specific contexts. The case studies do not aim to create a generalisable sample but can be useful as examples or to generate theories about how these social phenomena operate.

5.2 NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

The first stage of fieldwork for this study engaged national stakeholders. This was designed to illustrate the national institutional context of community-led housing and inform the case study research. This stage situated the findings from the case studies within the wider national picture and allowed them to be understood in relation to the national policy context. Policy processes involve a variety of actors and stakeholders that form a "policy community" (Neal and McLaughlin, 2009, p. 691). It is this network of actors that formed the basis of these interviews. This interview stage was supported by an analysis of policy documents. These two methods were used in tandem in recognition that the policy-making process engages multiple actors in negotiations and compromise that are usually not recorded in the eventual documentation (Beyers *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, there may be significant disconnect between written policy and implementation practices, or the narrative found within written policy and prevailing attitudes (Tight, 2019). The national stakeholder interviews helped to establish the connections and relationships that were part of the process of forming national policy and making decisions, especially the more informal interactions between actors and between actors and structures. These participants also had a wide understanding of community-led housing practices across England which allowed an interpretation of the case study data that was more informed by other contexts.

The selection of individuals to interview was guided by theoretical sampling, which sought to generate as many perspectives on the national context of community-led housing and enabling hubs as possible, given the parameters of access and practicality. In selecting the sample of participants at this stage I aimed to include participant who represented a "meaningful range of mechanical components" of the social process (Mason, 2002, p. 124). An initial list of potential participants was compiled with the assistance of my contact at Wessex Community Assets, who also provided the contact details of some of these participants. I then approached participants myself but included in the cover letter where I had received the contact information and the relationship to Wessex Community Assets. I also found some contacts through desk research. I updated this contact list by asking participants to recommend individuals to request an interview and, in two instances, these participants facilitated introductions. Key stakeholders at a national level included representatives of the Community Led Homes national partnership and of the constituent partner organisations. The research also engaged with government actors within MHCLG and Homes England. Community-led housing is largely reliant on subsidies from government or major grant giving organisations (Moore, 2018), therefore national government housing policy decisions, and the ideas reflected in these, clearly act as a structuring force on the implementation of community-led housing. Furthermore, the research engaged with wider sector actors, including grant-making organisations. Most

individuals I approached engaged with the research with a few notable exceptions. Potential participants from the National CLT network and Locality, both part of the Community Led Homes partnership, declined stating they were aware their colleagues within the Community Led Homes partnership had undertaken interviews with me and felt that was sufficient participation in the project. The total number of participants at this stage was 10, a full list is provided in Appendix A.

5.3 CASE STUDIES

The study employed a comparative case study approach in order to deliver an in-depth analysis grounded in specific iterations of regional community-led housing activity. A case study entails a holistic analysis of a complex and bounded phenomena studied in context (Tight, 2017). Case studies are particularly useful for exploring social processes as they situate action deeply within context and multiple case studies introduce the ability to compare processes across contexts (Bryman, 2004). This research strategy aimed to describe the community-led housing sector in different contexts including generating an understanding of the relevant social processes and actors involved. Yin (1994) refers to this as a descriptive approach to case studies. Such an approach is appropriate for these research questions, which are 'how' questions concerned with illuminating a social process. A multiple case studies strategy was employed in order to garner data from diverse contexts and facilitate comparison across contexts. It enables the research to develop an understanding of the implementation of community-led housing in different circumstances. This comparative approach was selected with the aim to enhance the accuracy of the evidence, support generalisability, and enable the study to generate theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1999).

The primary unit of analysis, the case, was an established regional community-led housing enabling hub. This decision both reflected the study's interest in the role of the enabling hub in the community-led housing landscape and provided a mechanism to identify a region of community-led housing development. That is, rather than selecting a politically defined area such as a local authority, the study aimed to define a region according to actors' construction of the geographical territory of each enabling hub. At the time of the research, the organisational entity of the 'enabling hub' was new. Although there had been different types of enabling work occurring previously, the 'enabling hub' role was created in response to sector wide policy and funding incentives linked to the introduction of the second Community-Housing Fund. Therefore, previous activity within the case study regions that generated significant community-led housing development was not necessarily related to the existing 'enabling hub'. However, it was logical that the enabling hub, as a major development and source of resources, was likely to become a key node in the overall institutional context of area. Furthermore, background research suggested that the enabling hubs

had engaged the existing local actors previously undertaking enabling work in the sector. Because of this, it was reasonable to believe that the new 'enabling hubs' were now the institutional core of community-led housing locally and thus a productive site from which to engage with actors. Therefore, the enabling hub was utilised as the central unit around which to organise the regional case study, both to understand more about the enabling hub network and as a basis from which to investigate community-led housing development in the region even if it pre-dated the enabling hub.

From the sampling frame of all enabling hubs listed on the Community Led Home website a sample of three enabling hubs was selected according to meeting the key criteria for inclusion and in order to have as much variation in characteristics between cases. Each case was an established enabling hub within the Community Led Homes enabling hub network and was based in an area with significant community-led housing development. Within this, I purposively selected for cases in which the characteristics of the areas and the organisational characteristics of the enabling hub were as diverse as possible between the selected cases. Information on the different enabling hubs and their local areas was gathered through discussion with the collaborative partner, Wessex Community Assets, desk research and from the interviews with national stakeholders. The enabling hub linked to the collaborative partner Wessex Community Assets, Wessex Community Housing Hub, met the necessary criteria and was automatically included. The other two enabling hubs and related areas selected as case studies were Leeds Community Homes and The Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority Community Housing Enabling Service.

To facilitate the investigation of a range of different scenarios these cases were selected according to a logic of being diverse from each other while being relevant cases to the research question (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).This was done in reflection of the descriptive nature of the research approach which aimed to generate rich contextual information about how the community-led housing sector is operating in different areas and contribute to theory generation about the operation of the community-led housing sector from an institutional perspective. Whilst comparison was a focus, it was also important to ensure that each case had sufficient depth of data. I selected three cases as the maximum number reasonably achievable to provide appropriate depth of individual data and analysis within each specific context. The purposeful and theoretical sampling method used should not be confused with a representative sample found in quantitative research. The logic is not that other cases can be predicted reliably to be similar to cases with a given characteristic, which is statistically unviable in small *n* research, but rather that these cases allow the researcher to generate theories about the influence of these factors (Yin, 1994).

Two essential criteria were adopted to ensure that the case studies could provide data which responded to the research questions. First, the enabling hub must be in an area where significant community-led housing development had taken place. Second, the enabling hub must be fully established and operational. The first criteria ensured the research took place in a context that could illuminate the operation of community-led housing development and the role of actors. The second criteria ensured that the research was able to analyse the actual activity of enabling hubs, rather than just discussing their potential. Available data on community-led housing development on the Community Led Homes website showed figures of the expected pipeline at a regional level. However, enabling hubs operate on a sub-regional level, so regional data is not precise enough to be used to inform the choice of enabling hub. Therefore, in assessing these criteria, national stakeholders and the collaborative partner made suggestions as to what areas were experiencing growth and where established enabling hubs were in operation. These interviews also confirmed there was not an area with significant development that did not also have an enabling hub. I also analysed the websites of enabling hubs to confirm that activity was taking place.

The research aimed to include enabling hubs in areas with different kinds of context and the housing need that community-led housing was aiming to address. This is based on previous research which suggested that there is a significant difference between the community-led housing movements seen in different localities. For example, Griffin (2019) draws out a potential emerging divide between politically motivated urban community-led housing developments and more instrumental rural developments. Similarly, (Thompson, 2020a) distinguishes the community-activism in low-income areas as qualitatively different from more middle-class community-led housing activities focused on ensuring housing for 'local' people against a back drop of house prices inflated by second home ownership as described by Moore (2018). Therefore, the sample includes a mix of rural and urban regions and a mix of perceived populations of focus for the enabling hubs as described by my collaborative contact at Wessex Community Assets during the national stakeholder interview stage.

The case study selection also included a variety of organisational set-ups of enabling hubs. I was aware from the background discussions with the collaborative partner and through the early stages of the research process that there were significant organisational differences between enabling hubs. Therefore, the research aimed to capture some of this complexity within the case study sample. Wessex Community Housing was funded through the central government Community Housing Fund grant and partnerships with local authorities. Leeds Community Homes was one of the five enabling hubs which had received grant funding through the Power to Change enabling hub funding as well as the Community Housing Fund grant. The Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority Community Housing Enabling Service (previously the East Cambridgeshire Community

Housing Hub) was notable in that it was hosted from a local authority and was in an area of significant community-led housing development.

Final selection was informed based on access, relationships and avoiding areas where significant research had already been conducted. Leeds Community Homes was the first organisation I approached as an urban case study as I had existing relationships with individuals involved in projects with Leeds Community Homes, in part due to proximity to Sheffield. As they agreed to take part, and were an appropriate case study, there was no need to approach other urban case studies. I was also interested in areas which had not received significant research interest, such as Bristol (Griffin, 2019) or Liverpool (Thompson, 2020b). This was a motivating factor behind the inclusion of The Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority Community Housing Enabling Service as I was not aware of any other research that had taken place, or was taking place, in the area. The selected case studies and their characteristics are summarised in the table below.

Table 5.1 Characteristics of enabling hubs

Type	Characteristics
Wessex Community Housing Hub	Predominantly rural, CLT predominantly, Community Housing Fund sector funding, previous charitable funding from Nationwide, South West
Leeds	Predominantly urban, mix of delivery models including self-build, Power to Change hub and Community Housing Fund sector funding, Yorkshire and Humber
East Cambridgeshire Community Housing Hub -	Predominantly rural, CLT predominantly, part of local authority, no Community Housing Fund sector funding, East of England

The holistic nature of the case study requires that data is collected from more than one source, which informed the choice to conduct the multiple interviews which inform each of the case studies. I identified between six and nine participants for each case study. Though the exact relationship to the enabling hub of the participants varied between case studies, I aimed to speak to one or two individuals from within the enabling hub structure, at least one individual from local government, and the others from relevant organisations or key volunteers in community-led housing projects. However, there was a significant mix of roles in the final list of participants and not all participant types were fully addressed. Notably, I was not able to conduct an interview with any participant within local government for the Leeds Community Homes case study. A list of all participants is

provided in Appendix A. The decision on who exactly to interview was taken on a case-by-case basis, balancing the need for thematic richness with practicality. The topic guide for the semi-structured interviews was shared across the three case studies in order to facilitate comparison on key themes.

5.4 DATA COLLECTION

The primary mechanism of data collection in this research was semi-structured interviews with participants engaged with the sector at the national level and within the three case study areas. These interviews provided an understanding of the context in which national and local policy is created and implemented via the perspective of key actors. Semi-structured interviews work from a pre-developed schedule in order to cover key points but the researcher has the flexibility to steer the interaction and discuss topics in any order as the conversation develops (Bryman, 2004). This style of interview guarantees key aspects are captured for comparison, but also allows some freedom to follow interesting points in depth with each interviewee. The semi-structured interview is a particularly valuable tool for developing an understanding of how interview subjects perceive social processes themselves as it allows them to lead the conversation with their own reasoning and using their own language. As Mason (2002) outlines, this style of interviewing is relevant for developing rounded case studies which have an analysis rooted in "peoples' situated or contextual accounts, rather than a more superficial analysis of surface accounts of a large number of people" (Mason, 2002, p. 65). Therefore, this approach is relevant to this study as it fits within the theoretical approach which recognises that the institutional context of a social phenomenon is complex, containing embedded rules, practices and narratives which are interpreted and reinterpreted by actors; and that these contexts include conflict among actors, and active interpretation of institutional contexts (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). In the case of policy this expresses in a complex process of implementation on the ground with variation from perceptions embedded in the policy creation stage. The goal of the semi-structured interview stage in the case studies was to generate a holistic understanding informed by several individual and institutional perspectives on the role of the enabling hub and how it functioned within the specific context of that region. A total of 32 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 at the national stakeholder level, nine in the Wessex Community Housing Hub case study, six in the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority Community Housing Programme case study and seven in the Leeds Community Homes case study. These accounts created rich contextual data from the different levels of governance and geographic contexts.

Topic guides sought to draw out participants' accounts of their experience, their narratives which justify and legitimize types of activities and reflections on the factors which drive their and others'

actions. Two slightly different topic guides were prepared, the first for national stakeholders and a separate one which guided the case study interviews. The national stakeholder interviews were utilised to develop more background to inform case study selection. The case study interviews included significant detail on the local environment and development of the local community-led housing sector. In general, the topic guides first addressed what activity participants considered to be community-led housing, the most important elements of a community-led housing project and their perceptions of major developments in the sector. This was followed by a discussion of the enabling hub concept and how participants saw their role, what the 'normal' process of community-led housing development would be, and any developments that were 'unusual' in order to highlight what activity had become routinised and what was still remarkable. All interviews also asked participants to express the key factors that enabled community-led housing locally or nationally and what they saw as the main impediments to further development. In a semi-structured interview, the topics are somewhat led by the interviewee, so where interviewees brought additional topics to the discussion these were explored thoroughly. Furthermore, the order of the research interviews did not always follow that set out in the topic guide in order to capitalise on the flow of the conversation as topics arose. However, all participants were asked questions in relation to the key themes of the topic guides outlined here. The topic guides for both stages are presented in Appendix B.

The interviews were supported by document analysis which provided context, an understanding of the rules and crystalised versions of narratives about community-led housing. The document analysis entailed coding a selection of relevant documents according to the theoretical themes of the research. Policy research lends itself to being conducted via document analysis given the crucial role documents play in the codifying of policy ideas into action to be implemented (Tight, 2019). Using this approach reflects the importance of documents in how the social world of policy making and implementation functions and their capacity to provide extensive context for the interview and case study elements of the research. Documents serve a purpose in their creation and interact with the social world and each other. Atkinson and Coffey label the phenomenon of the active document as "documentary reality" (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004, p. 74), a concept that is helpful in understanding the role of documents, especially in the realm of policy where documents and their production have such a central role to play. In conducting the document analysis careful attention was given to what the audience and role of the document were, what the author was trying to accomplish in producing it and the relationship between documents. Following this, as well as providing some form of representation of the social world which can be used for context, documents are a force to be studied in their own right and a mirror, or lens, to understand actions. Though the accounts within documents must not be viewed uncritically, they can establish basic "facts" about a

situation, such as organisational priorities, which the interviewer can use to design their topic guide. The combination of documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews is important because different actors within a policy network may disagree, and actors may be required to enact policy decisions they are opposed to. Actors may, therefore, attempt to reinterpret or minimise these decisions as much as possible. From this perspective, both elements of the research design were essential to building a picture of the policy environment surrounding community-led housing and the varied ways in which this is interpreted and experienced. Documents for analysis were selected from pre-existing documents that were already published and acting in the world, rather than produced for the researcher (Bryman, 2004). The research was focused on documents which had more explicit action, such as funding prospectus, over those that mainly related context such as news reports or articles. The documents analysed included funding prospectuses and bids, guidance and training documents for enabling hubs, community-led housing groups and others, as well as any documents which dealt explicitly with enabling hubs and their functioning produced by other organisations in the policy network. A full list of documents analysed in the study can be found in Appendix C. The combination of document analysis and semi-structured interviews with key actors was designed to construct a rounded account of the institutional context, actors' roles and how they related to the enabling hubs infrastructure.

5.5 ANALYSIS APPROACH

The data was analysed through a thematic analysis approach that applied the conceptual framework to the empirical material. Thematic analysis draws patterns from the data through a process of data coding and analysis that is based on a theoretically generated coding frame. Through coding 'data are broken down into component parts and given names' (Bryman, 2004, p. 568) which is essential for processing large amounts of data. These constituent parts are then reorganised through the process of analysis. For the code frame, I used a combination of deductive codes drawn from the conceptual framework and inductive codes which emerged from the data.

The interview data was prepared for analysis by producing a transcription of the interview and an interview synopsis. A transcription recorded the verbatim content of the interview whereas the synopsis consisted of the key points of the interview summarised in bullet points. The interviews were transcribed with a focus on the meaning of sentences, but 'filler' sounds were included to indicate the pace of the interview and any important notes about tone were also included. I found that some participants used tactics such as raised eyebrows or pauses in speech to communicate areas of controversy in their accounts. I have indicated this in the transcription through ellipsis where relevant, for example, "well…". The transcription file also recorded meta data detailing the

time and method of interviewing. Transcription transforms the recorded interview into written text thereby becoming a data file that can be coded. The prepared transcripts were uploaded to NVivo for coding. Using the transcript, I prepared a synopsis of each participant's key points. This was useful for generating an overview of the data prior to coding, as I went into the thematic coding process with some ideas of what might be good examples of key themes, such as the sorts of narratives I had come across multiple times in the synopsis stage. These synopses were also useful to return to during the writing of the thesis to remind me of the context of quotes used to illustrate different points without returning to the full transcript. This is particularly useful when working in NVivo coding software, which splits up coded text from its relevant interview context when viewing a thematic code. This is highly useful for reviewing the code but can lead to quotes becoming decontextualised from the main points of the participant. I also returned to the synopsis at the end of writing the empirical material to ensure that key topics had been addressed.

The data coding process consisted of two phases which generated the analytical tools used to compose the full analysis presented in the empirical chapters of this thesis. The first phase indexed the data thematically and the second phase identified patterns from the themes that could be developed into conceptual categories used to develop an answer to the research questions. These two phases are congruent with Saldana (2013) delineation of 'first cycle' and 'second cycle' coding where first cycle coding is concerned with applying codes to chunks of text data and second cycle coding works with the first cycle codes to generate more conceptual codes, which Saldana terms 'pattern codes'.

The first cycle of data coding focused on sorting larger units of data according to major themes, a process Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014, p. 77) label as 'holistic' coding. The codes used at this stage were initially deductive, meaning that they were pre-generated based on the theoretical framework as the research progressed inductive codes drawn from the research were added. The holistic coding generated a scaffold for the coding framework which enabled sub-themes to be easily compared within and across cases during the later process of second cycle coding. The data was coded across the national stakeholder's stage and the three case studies using the same code-frame. Then, close coding was used to identify sub-themes within the broader categories on a line-by-line basis. This stage utilised several coding methods depending on the category of data being analysed. Data was coded descriptively for key events and key actors and for identifiable rules and practices. This was supported by process coding, that is codes defined by gerund verbs, which indicate 'observable and conceptual action in the data' (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014, p. 75). Using verbs to identify the data creates a focus on *how* processes occur between actors and combined with value judgements of respondents indicates established practice. Emerging narratives within the

data were assigned In Vivo codes drawn directly from the speech of participants or documents analysed. This allowed the analysis of narratives to stay grounded in the data as well as marking where participants were using similar phrases to discuss phenomena. Values coding was used to indicate where participants expressed a value, attitude, or belief about the world. This is closely related to the narratives analysis and supported the identification of narratives where an In Vivo code had not emerged.

These first two applications of coding prepared the data for the second phase of the coding exercise which was used to generate interim analysis tools to support the overall analysis. In the second phase of coding the sub-themes were compared, combined, and categorised to produce conceptual categories which provide insight into nuanced themes, explanations, relationships or theoretical constructs arising from the data (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). These codes were then given a definition in order to define each conceptual category. The theoretical categories created during the conceptual coding stage formed the building blocks of analysis along with interview summaries that situated actors relationally to each other to generate a sense of participants' overall orientation.

5.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

University of Sheffield ethical approval was acquired prior to the data collection. This process entailed an application to the University ethics committee which detailed the aims and objectives of the study, any potential risk to participants, process of obtaining informed consent, risk to the researcher and data management. The project operated strictly within the bounds of overt research conducted with informed consent. This means that participants will be fully aware of what the project is, what it is about, how their data will be stored and used and given the right to withdraw at any time. The topic was generally not sensitive or of a nature likely to upset participants. However, there are key concerns around participants understanding of the confidentiality and the limits of providing anonymity in a study of relatively small professional context. In line with the University of Sheffield ethical policies to ensure informed consent, participants were provided with an information sheet and given a period of time to review the form and discuss it before they were asked to sign the consent form. These forms can be found in Appendix D. Due to the context of conducting research during Covid-19 interviews were conducted remotely, online, using video conferencing software. Interviews were recorded via video conferencing. I transcribed the audio files and stored the transcriptions securely on the University of Sheffield hard drive under pseudonyms.

The research engaged individuals within a relatively small professional context, therefore it was essential that participants understood the limits of using pseudonyms in the research. With many

participants it would be very difficult to make any comments anonymous as their perspective would be closely related to their role and is therefore necessary context for the analysis. The case study areas are named due to the geographical context holding relevance for the study. Therefore, many of the individual participants within the case studies will be clearly identifiable by job title to anyone with knowledge of the community-led housing sector locally. In order to ensure full informed consent, I was clear with participants that the study did not promise anonymity. I have used job titles instead of names, but participants were aware that people reading it may well be able to work out who the individual is. In some cases, I have agreed to a more vague description of the participants' role in cases where the participant felt that identification in the study posed a professional risk.

As community-led housing is a small sector there was significant risk of people experiencing a research burden, that is being contacted too frequently for research of varying kinds due to academic and policy interest in the sector. There is a further risk that participants feel compelled to participate in research if their employer has agreed to take part in the project or a professional associate has recommended them. To address these issues, I managed all communication about the project, including a clear note that participation was voluntary. I contacted participants a maximum of twice with the initial invite and a maximum of three times to arrange an interview time if they agreed. All participants were provided with the information sheet between expressing interest in participation and setting an interview date and time. I was transparent about the research aims and objectives and the burden on participating enabling hubs. I aimed to reduce this burden as much as possible by conducting the contact with participants except where the organisations wanted to initiate this contact.

Furthermore, although I hope that this research project will provide valuable insight for the community-led housing sector, I aimed to not misrepresent the output of the work which is largely academic. I intend to share findings with research participants in some form. However, the research is unlikely to be the targeted policy research that some participants hoped for. It is not, for example, a piece for research which could be used directly to evidence the need for more investment in enabling hubs. This is a difficult position for academic researchers engaged in social movements they support where some participants may assume that the role is to be campaigner or activist rather than a balanced researcher. On the other hand, there is a responsibility as a researcher to provide value for the participants engaged in the research. From an ethical standpoint, I made clear that findings would be generated over a longer time scale. However, I discussed interim findings with the key contacts at each of the case study organisations to offer initial feedback as well as to sense check my findings and aim to disseminate findings more widely beyond the thesis itself.

5.7 REFLECTIONS

The design of the research, including national stakeholders and three case studies, generated a lot of relevant data from well-placed participants to enable the research questions to be answered. The interaction between the information from the national stakeholders and the grounded experience of the case studies was a key strength of the methodology. For example, the research design enabled the data to capture the assessment of the Community Housing Fund from the perspectives of those implementing the fund and of those who engaged with applications. Furthermore, the concept of the 'community-led housing' sector could be explored both from the perspective of a national lobbying, infrastructure and funding organisation and through the contradictions found by individuals implementing multiple community housing practices. The semi-structured interviews allowed these topics to be discussed according to participants' own agendas and a significant amount of rich data was captured. Furthermore, the topic selection appears to have been relevant as recruitment for the study was generally successful and interviews generally lasted the whole of the allotted hour.

The case study selection generated interesting contrasts. However, the choice to include the very specific Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority case study perhaps limited the findings generalisability. However, this case was uniquely interesting in some ways and conversations throughout the research highlighted that it was a case of interest to many in the wider community-led housing sector that was under researched. Still, this research would be improved by the inclusion of at least one more case study area that had more in common with the other two case studies to support an understanding of how actors in different contexts responded to the same national conditions. The bounding of the case studies according to the logic of the enabling hub created some tension within the research design, which was intended to focus on individual areas. However, as I discovered during the research, the boundaries of the enabling hubs local areas were porous and shifting. This meant that the regions in which the enabling hubs were operational were not necessarily clear or mapped neatly to geographical areas in which I could pursue other interviews. This was a particular issue for the Leeds Community Homes case study where participants had experience across the North of England and beyond. It was also a challenge in scoping the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority study as generally participants' experience was limited to their work in East Cambridge.

As an emerging phenomenon, the study of the direct impact of enabling hubs was very difficult to achieve. The work of the enabling hubs had been limited by the time frame and the Covid-19 pandemic. I had imagined discussing the role of the enabling hub across the lifespan of a

community-led housing project, however, this did not match the experience on the ground of a short-term intervention within a wider context of enabling support work and time frames of up to ten years for the realisation of housing schemes. Furthermore, if the research was to better understand the phenomenon of enabling work in community-led housing, and the enabling hub concept, it would also need to expand into discussion with community-led housing volunteers. This had been considered for this research but was curtailed due to practical issues relating to completing research during the Covid-19 lockdowns in the UK which would have entailed online focus groups or another, digital, methodology. Participants from the enabling hubs also had a sense that participation levels were lower among volunteers and there was a desire that volunteer capacity not be used up by research. Finally, my own project was delayed due to the uncertainty of beginning research during the start of the pandemic which added extra time pressure that excluded this further stage of data collection.

5.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the methods employed to respond to the research questions. It has discussed the overall approach of a qualitative comparative case study supplemented by national stakeholders. This approach is linked to the aims of the study to generate data regarding the institutional context of community-led housing in different regional contexts and the role of enabling hubs. The national stakeholders' phase of the fieldwork provided an understanding of the national policy context of community-led housing as well as contextual data from which to understand the enabling hub case studies. The three case studies were selected in order to be most different to each other whilst meeting the criteria of being operational enabling hubs in areas with significant community-led housing development. Data from both stages was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, with a total of 32 interviews conducted across the project. These interviews were supported by a document analysis which was used to understand official narratives and policy detail. The data was analysed using a thematic analysis which was scaffolded in a deductive way from the conceptual framework but also allowed for the inductive inclusion of new codes as found within the data. The research was conducted with University of Sheffield ethical approval. The most salient ethical issue was the small size of the sector which means that participants could be identified from the that pseudonyms that are used to describe them. The major strength of this approach was the interaction of the different perspectives within the multi-level analysis and the different regional contexts from the three case studies. The ability of the study to generalise about the role of enabling hubs in particular was perhaps limited by the inclusion of a particularly unusual case study. The research also encountered issues related to the study of an emerging phenomenon

within a policy context in flux. The research approach outlined in this chapter produced a significant body of data which responded to the research questions. This data was analysed and is presented in the empirical material in the following chapters.

6 MAPPING THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING

This chapter presents an analysis of the institutional context in which actors operate to develop community-led housing. It addresses the first research question "*What is the institutional context of community-led housing at national and local level and how does it influence the form of the sector?*" As discussed in Chapter Three, to describe the context that I observed in fieldwork I utilise Lowndes and Roberts' (2013) conceptualisation of the three modes of institutional constraint: rules, narratives, and practices. First, the chapter discusses the identity of a community-led housing sector and the operation of the sector bodies. Then, the chapter examines the wider institutional context at the national level, including the narratives that shape the role of the community-led housing sector, the Community Housing Fund and its relationship to government Affordable Housing programmes. Then it considers the local institutional contexts found in the case studies. This section discusses the routinised community-led housing models in practice in different areas and the embedded social relations in which they occur. This includes supporting narratives, access to resources from local government for community-led housing development, interaction with the institution of planning, and community-level context. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the impact of the institutional context on the emergent processes of community-led housing, the opportunities for growth and potential obstacles to delivery and sites of contestation in the sector.

6.1 THE COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING SECTOR

As discussed in the literature review, 'community-led housing' is an umbrella term for a variety of modes of delivery. The study found that the use of this identity was a well-established strategic position, but that due to the broadness of the term many actors identified their own work most strongly with subsections of the concept and in alignment with other fields, such as towards more autonomous housing or, conversely, towards mainstream social housing. I observed a stronger orientation towards endorsing the narrative of integrated sector among the national policy actors than within the case studies where participants could be sceptical about the relevance of the wider community-led housing sector or mostly focused on established local models of delivery. This places the identity of the community-led housing sector in the centre of an overlapping, but not wholly congruent, Venn diagram of definitions.

Participants reported that national actors had worked to form a definition of the community-led housing sector in order to better communicate with government and the public, obtain resources

and lobby for joint aims. Participants recalled that actors had recognised the need to form a collective identity in order to obtain Government resources by presenting as a single sector rather than multiple independent sectors. This process had been the site of significant negotiation, especially over how to define the sector, as it moved the practices' identities from being affiliated with each other towards defining a shared core. However, the process reached consensus around the 'community-led housing' label:

> *The sector grappled with definition for quite some time. And, and there's been a need at various points to, to pin down a definition largely for sort of government and grant funding programme purposes often. And, you know, as the sector is sort of grown and matured, the sort of various representative bodies; so the community land trust network, CCH, et cetera, et cetera, have increasingly become collaborative around it and drawn towards a consensus around definitions.* – Participant, Homes England and other sector experience

A national policy actor from a key funder in the sector, the Nationwide Foundation, described this deliberative process. They recalled how their organisation encouraged the development of a definition for community-led housing within a policy sphere that would form the narrative of the alliance between the national intermediaries:

> *Some years ago, we funded the organisation called World Habitat they also used to be called the Building Social Housing Foundation. And we funded them to have a go at forming an alliance of all the different national bodies to come together. It did and didn't work to varying degrees of success, they did come up with some sort of generic definition of Community-led Housing.* – Programme Manager, Nationwide Foundation

This effort and the period of negotiation have also been reported in previous research (Lang and Mullins, 2019). These findings provide further data of the active work of coalition-building that actors engage in, with specific institutional aims. Overall, the 'community-led housing' identity was viewed as a successful intervention in that a consensus was reached that allowed sector actors to achieve their goals. Participants largely credited the Community Led Homes partnership, and its joint lobbying efforts, with securing resource for all of the practices through the Community Housing Fund.

The definition of community-led housing developed by a coalition of actors in the sector leads with the engagement of local community. Notably, this definition does not explicitly define community-

led housing in relation to providing affordable housing, but rather a more general 'benefit to the community'. The definition is also deliberately broad in scope of model:

1. *Open and meaningful community participation and consent takes place throughout the process.*

2. *The community group or organisation owns, manages or stewards the homes in whichever way they decide to.*

3. *The housing development is of true benefit for the local community, a specific group of people (an intentional community), or both. These benefits should also be legally protected in perpetuity.*

   – (Community Led Homes, 2020) "What is Community Led Housing?", Community Led Homes Website Accessed: 23/11/2020

This definition is found on the Community Led Homes partnership website and across multiple websites and reports that discuss community-led housing. The Government's Community Housing Fund also utilised this definition which highlights the cooperation between the sector bodies in the Community Led Homes partnership and government actors in the MHCLG and Homes England in bringing forward the fund. However, the funding prospectus from Homes England also adds to this definition a preface which highlights the Government aims in providing the fund:

> *Community-led housing is about local people playing a leading and lasting role in solving local housing problems, creating genuinely affordable homes and strong communities in ways that are difficult to achieve through mainstream housing.*

– (Homes England, 2018, p. 5)

This addition emphasises the role that community-led housing was intended to play within the wider housing market: as additional to mainstream housing and, in particular, acting in situations where there was perceived failure in mainstream housing provision.

In terms of the everyday construction of the sector responses tended to emphasise the participation of citizens as the defining feature. For example, emphasising the role of community participation beyond consultation:

> *I guess I think community-led housing has its own definition. Its, not statutory definition, but definition that's kind of widely recognised in terms of community participation. And that's over and above, kind of your standard consultation, but long-term stewardship or ownership of a scheme, being sort of genuinely community*

led and being held in perpetuity for the community. – Director, Community Led
Homes

Participants were usually very broad with their definitions, and a shared construction of the sector
which didn't focus on the individual mechanisms but instead focused on the actors involved:

*I think it's any form of, of housing development, that is instigated in some sort of
grassroots or collective fashion* – Participant, Homes England and other sector
experience

Furthermore, some brought the idea back to an argument of shared values, but again focused on the
ideas of citizen engagement and involvement:

*I suppose the common issue between all of them is the idea of basically, individual
citizens or groups of citizens have power to take action to resolve their housing
situation or the situation of housing in their local area* – Chief Executive, UK
Cohousing Network

These lay definitions are congruent with the 'official' definition of community housing, suggesting
there was a widespread shared understanding of the community-led housing sector as an entity.

From the perspective of some participants, especially at the national level, the shared identity was
fostering a more mature and innovative field. These actors saw significant positive potential in a
broader way of understanding community-led housing and perceived a softening in the identities of
the individual practices, which offered space for innovation. For example, the Chief Executive of the
UK Cohousing Network highlighted growing awareness of different community-led housing models
contributing to innovative hybrid ways of working:

*And we're starting to now see projects, which demonstrate all of these things coming
together, which is very exciting, where we have community land trust, who will be
supporting the setting up of a cohousing project, which will be run on co-operative
lines of governance.* – Chief Executive, UK Cohousing Network

The Co-Director of Confederation of Co-operative Housing (CCH) suggested that such 'hybrid'
schemes and the collective identity was symbolic of a maturing movement that resonates beyond
individual models. They stated:

*And to me, all of these, this range of different ways of doing it are part of the
community-led housing sector... I think it's, it's part of the maturing of the national
organisations that they, they are becoming less, if you like, product or model driven*

and more accepting and acknowledging of the fact that their models are part of a
broader thing. – Co-Director, Confederation of Co-Operative Housing

These findings suggest that there was significant learning occurring between sections of the community-led housing movements in terms of the models and mechanisms utilised. This indicates a commitment to long-term shared working from the national intermediary bodies.

In general, however, the use of the term community-led housing was seen as successful pragmatic move rather than representing a new mode of working. Participants described an underlying pragmatism to the choice:

I think its pragmatic, that that collectivism at a representative national
representative level, has produced some results over recent years. So, I think there's
this benefit of, of the outcomes that have been achieved, have been recognised and
that I suspect are now becoming rapidly bit more removed from this, but I suspect
there's probably a bit of 'well, this is working, you know, there's a bit more
momentum here. We should continue to work in the same sort of vein.' –
Participant, Homes England and other sector experience

Furthermore, some participants emphasised that the concept of 'community-led housing' was just one aspect of the way they described the sort of housing they aimed to develop. For these actors it was a tool for engaging with certain audiences. For example, the CEO of Leeds Community Homes described being flexible in how they referred to their work:

Sometimes I talk about collaborative housing, or, or whatever, really affordable
housing, sustainable housing, whatever's if the audience is more interested in. – CEO,
Leeds Community Homes

This shows the term can be adapted by users for different contexts but does not always emphasise the aspect that actors find most important. These findings suggest the identity of the 'community-led housing' sector as strongly associated with strategic positioning rather than a coherent ideological framing device.

Furthermore, in some ways the impact of the sector-wide definition at the ground level appeared to be relatively limited within the case studies as the local community-led housing sector had their own prominent delivery models. In the two predominantly rural case studies, community-led housing delivery was overwhelmingly associated with their local version of CLT development. Within the urban Leeds Community Homes case study, a much broader range of project types were in operation. This suggests that while the narrative of a combined sector was in operation, and

practitioners were aware of a more broadly conceived understanding of community-led housing, practices mostly continued to reflect preferred and established localised modes of delivery.

Although at the time of the research the use of the term and identity was stable and well accepted, participants noted the use of the term 'community-led' was contested by different stakeholder groups during the process of establishing the definition. A participant from Leeds Community Homes explained that though they felt the term was now generally accepted, they and others had originally wondered if the term was too restrictive:

> *As far as I know, there hasn't been much discussion around the term community-led housing in the last a year or so. Everyone's just been busy trying to lobby government for more money. But in the years before, that, there was quite a bit of discussion around, you know, is it too restrictive. And I was quite interested in the discussions about, you know, possibly calling it something different. Because community-led implies that some group magically appears from the community grassroots and does some housing or leads the housing project.* – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

This demonstrates that actors engaged in negotiation, but more powerful actors were able to prevail. Some participants suggested that the inclusion of projects that were not affordable or did not involve a significant enough degree of community self-management weakened the concept. A participant stated that the definition of community-led housing was too broad and included too much latitude over the types of projects that could be considered community-led:

> *So, to summarise, there's loads of different routes. I am in the purist camp; I think we the community should have more of a stake and more of a say. But yeah, it's there's so many different ways that you can do it. I think. I think that's probably its strength, and its weakness... I think that that community-led housing can be all things to all men.* – Associate, Leeds Community Homes

Many individual participants tended to identify the goals of their own practice in more specific and circumspect ways than the broader community-led housing label. Within the data, I found very little contestation between participants over the inclusion of individual models. However, tensions in terms of what counted as 'community-led' existed over the types of projects that utilised these models. Especially if these were not affordable models or models perceived to have limited ongoing community control. It was more that the resonance of the 'community-led housing' sector identity was limited for them as the broader aims of collaboration or affordable housing were the focus. These participants emphasised their own interpretations related to their own practices, referring to

alignments beyond the community-led housing sector, for example, towards more autonomous housing or intentional communities.

Within this context, the meaning and focus of the work conducted by individual actors under the umbrella of 'community-led housing' is variable. In the research, participants could be placed on a continuum of opinion as to the political and social purpose of community-led housing. At one end of this continuum, participants hoped that their practices could be examples of radically different housing politics that exhibit extensive community control, more communal ways of living or environmentally sustainable building practices. At the other end, participants emphasised the need to deliver housing units above all else and emphasised the sector's utility in overcoming barriers to development. Many participants believed the sector was leaning towards more mainstream ways of housing delivery, which satisfied the expectations of those who believed the sector's focus should be on delivering as many housing units as possible but frustrated others. For some on the more radical end of the political spectrum, the current primary direction of the community-led housing sector was not aligned with their goals:

> *[Community-led housing] is fundamentally non radical, you basically get the drabs. You live off the edges of the conventional housing system, which is like, you know, capitalism, scary everything.* – Community-Led Housing Adviser A, Leeds Community Homes

However, for some participants, especially those working in the affordable housing sector or involved with community land trust delivery, the ability of the sector to deliver on affordable homes was the crucial marker for success. One participant highlighted that for many community-led housing volunteers, the wider goals of the movement were not as important:

> *The sector is like an ideological group, which have a real ideological mission. There's also a lot of people delivering community-led housing, who just want some affordable housing where they live, they couldn't give a monkey's whether it's in this ideological sense, they just want to see some good quality, affordable homes.* – Participant, Homes England

Across the interviews participants noted that others within the sector may hold a different perspective on the most important role of community-led housing. One participant explained how their own perception of what community-led housing should be had changed over time:

> *You know, I've kind of gone through an evolution of thinking on this thinking. Before I thought 'It's got to be purist. It's got to be owned by the community and done by*

the community.' But I think that that's kind of like, a bit more of an eccentric opportunity or version. And that will always be possible. But I think really, what we want is we want a different type of housing association. Just basically one that works alongside communities. – Community-Led Housing Adviser B, Leeds Community Homes

Although there was general consensus on the broad definition of 'community-led', aims and associated practices differed significantly and were not always congruent with each other. The data suggests that some actors on the more political end of the spectrum may place their practices as outside of the community-led housing narrative.

6.1.1 Sector organisation

The community-led housing sector was identified with the Community Led Homes partnership and the related network of regional enabling hubs. This work was funded through the sector infrastructure support programme which accompanied the Community Housing Fund. For many participants this process indicated an exciting opportunity for growth of the sector:

The infrastructure funding that's come out as Community Housing Fund is very, very important. 8.5 million or whatever it is yeah, which is funding the Hub's training programme, the community-led housing website and the information and advisory team, the training centre, so that's really important. – Director, Self Help Housing

The construction of the national sector is linked to the Community Led Homes partnership and the transmission of narratives and practices through training and accreditation. These practices were strongly linked to narratives concerning the need to professionalise the sector and bring community-led housing practices closer to the mainstream in terms of cooperation with mainstream actors and increasing the numbers of units built.

The alliance-forming efforts of national actors led to representatives of community-led housing organisations establishing a common community-led housing definition and the Community Led Homes partnership which acted as a common brand. The joint organisation was conceived primarily as a delivery body for the Community Housing Fund. The Director of the Community Led Homes consortium described the process of establishing the partnership, which was initially between three national membership organisations representing CLTs, cohousing and the co-operative housing sector:

The Nationwide Foundation did some work to try and actually bring the sector the broader sector together and to get some of these smaller organisations, to work

collectively together on helping support the infrastructure... And out of that
partnership of those three organisations came together and they actually ran a
programme that was part funded by Power to Change part funded by Nationwide so
that's a few years old now. – Director, Community Led Homes

Then, as the partnership positioned itself for engagement with funding from central government, a further organisation, Locality, which focused on community enterprise, joined the coalition. Locality provided the partnership with further legitimacy as they had delivered Government funding before:

And then Locality joined the partnership. And maybe two and a half, two and half
years ago. And this is when bidding for funding from central Government to scale up
the programme of community led homes to be able to deliver the full support.
Because Locality has kind of history of delivering grant projects through government,
so they became part of the partnership. So part of the kind of delivery partnership, I
guess. – Director, Community Led Homes

The Community Led Homes partnership was a joint project of the national practice intermediaries, rather than a new distinct organisation. It was responsible for administration of funds, running the network of enabling hubs and a national advice helpline service. It is hosted by the Community Land Trust Network, with partner organisations taking on distinct tasks and retaining ownership of them, such as the community housing adviser training and accreditation programme ran by CCH. Describing the organisational management, the Director of Community Led Homes stated:

So, Community Led Homes limited; the only sort of rationale for that at the moment
is to just hold intellectual property, but potentially, it could be an organisation in its
own right in the in the longer term and actually employ staff, but as a moments staff,
we're all employed by those four organisations – Director Community Led Homes

This organisational history reflects that the adoption of a collective identity has clear boundaries between the practices. It also highlights the role of Government funding opportunities in structuring the sector as the collation formed to respond to Government funding opportunities.

To support a more professional sector, national actors engaged in creating guidance, processes maps and training programmes for those working in the sector. In particular, sector actors developed a training and accreditation programme for community-led housing advisers to support the implementation of the enabling hub network. This programme was intended to professionalise the sector and standardise the quality of support available to community groups:

> *There was always this piece that underpinned it about accreditation of advisers. That's really important because if you're a group, you can say, 'Well, how does that person know what they're telling me is the right thing to do.' And that's always been recognised in you know, just professionalise the sector. –* Programme Manager, Nationwide Foundation

This process also granted the enabling hub network of advisers a level of legitimacy with outside stakeholders. Participants noted it added a level of quality assurance to the work of the sector:

> *I think the work that [Confederation of Co-operative Housing] led on around the accreditation of advisors, I think that was a genius move, in terms of what came out of that – the quality that came out of that, and the timing of that. To bring that kind of credibility to that tier of support, I think was brilliant.'* – Participant, Homes England and other sector experience

Such credibility is aimed at increasing the capacity of the sector to interact with mainstream housing processes through equipping the workforce to interact both in the community setting and with partners in different levels of government or mainstream housing.

The narratives of mainstreaming and professionalisation was an important touchstone for the national actors engaged in supporting community-led housing growth. Among these actors there was significant optimism that with the right support the sector could grow significantly:

> *So, if all of those for your elements are in place the people demand finance and the support, then I can see that, you know, there's exponential growth in the sector. –* Hub Manager, Community Led Homes

In support of this, some actors spoke about a need to introduce a more professional approach to housing development. A national actor stated:

> *And there was this, you know, this sort of idea that being a jolly volunteer mentality is more worthy than professionalising and using language like governance and risk management and you know, 'why, why would you be thinking about long term financial plans?', well, for goodness sake! you know, well there's pretty good reasons why. –* Director, Confederation of Co-operative Housing

They further emphasised that meeting the ambitions for sector growth would require a change in the mindset of some sector participants:

> *Well, without the structures to enable larger scale activity and scaling up of the*
> *sector. We won't deliver on, you know, the aspiration that some people, lobbying for*
> *the sector, express to governments and others - if we can be a major player in*
> *meeting the country's housing crisis.* – Director, Confederation of Co-operative
> Housing

However, not all national actors shared this, and some also questioned if a more mainstream approach was necessary for the sector. The director of UK Cohousing wondered if cohousing as a practice actually needed to grow, and posited it could remain a niche social movement and retain its 'anarchic' philosophy:

> *Is there something essentially grassroots and anarchic, that part of the whole gist of*
> *the movement is the fact that it's rebelling against the mainstream? So, if it becomes*
> *the mainstream, you know, is that part of the culture that's been lost?* – Chief
> Executive, UK Cohousing Network

In general, however, the orientation of national actors was towards achieving growth for the sector and supporting a process of professionalisation of advice and support services. Generally, it was felt this would lead to the emergence of community-led housing as a more mainstream option for more communities and residents. However, some disputed the desirability of a sector that was more engaged with the mainstream.

6.2   NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The national institutional context beyond the sector organisations primarily asserts itself in terms of the way in which access to resources for community-led housing groups is structured. Community-led housing relies heavily on support from national government programmes which are orientated towards iterations of community-led housing that engage with central government subsidised Affordable Housing. The most important narratives that structured Government engagement with the community-led housing sector were discussions of the affordability and additionality of homes contributed from the sector. Interaction with these funding mechanisms impacts the dimensions of growth for the sector as some models operate more fluidly within the existing channels of resources.

6.2.1   Objectives of community-led housing

At the national level, key narratives for the community-led housing sector related to prominent Government narratives about housing need. The ability to respond to these needs was crucial in the imagination of the role of the sector. Government engagement with community-led housing was primarily meted through the Community Housing Fund. The objectives of the fund set out the role of

the Community Housing Sector and Government expectations of the sector. The stated objectives of the Community Housing Fund were:

> • increase housing supply in England by increasing the number of additional homes delivered by the community-led housing sector
>
> provide housing that is affordable at local income levels and remains so in perpetuity; and
>
> • deliver a lasting legacy for the community-led housing sector in the form of an effective and financially self-sustaining body of expertise within the house building industry in England

> – (Homes England, 2018, p. 4)

The first two objectives of the fund relate to the role the community-led housing sector in terms of Government housebuilding targets. Furthermore, the ministerial forward clearly links the Community Housing Fund to broader Government narratives related to the objective to increase housing delivery to 300,000 homes per year. It puts this target as the motivation for a "*package of radical new measures*" such as the Community Housing Fund in order to "*realise the potential offered by all sectors of the house building industry*" (Homes England, 2018, p. 5)

The perceived 'additionality' of the sector is a central narrative which provides a frame for understanding the sector's roles in the national housebuilding project. 'Additionality' means that homes would not be brought forward any other way, certainly not as affordable housing, but also not as market housing due to factors such as difficulty of the site or local opposition. This narrative is central to the justification of governmental support. This is demonstrated by the first of the three objectives of the Community Housing Fund 2018 which relates to 'additional homes'. For a participant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the main value of community-led housing was its capacity to build units of housing where others cannot. They stated that the offer of the sector to government was:

> To make a very substantial additional contribution to meeting housing needs that cannot be met through mainstream development providers, such as house builders and registered providers. That is the primary thing. – Participant, MHCLG

They were confident in the sector's ability to deliver in this way, and this helped to make a case for funding community-led housing within the MHCLG:

> *And the additionality of the community-led housing sector is massive… 81% of the*
> *housing delivered by this sector, is additional, is adding to the total rather than*
> *displacing delivery from any other sector. So, it's really important.* – Participant,
> MHCLG

Within the narrative of the additionality of community-led housing the small scale of the sector is no longer a significant drawback as it is directly contributing to the 300,000 homes a year target through building things that would not get built otherwise. This narrative had particular salience among participants in the Wessex Community Assets case study areas, where one participant explained:

> *The advantage of these was these homes that really wouldn't have been built any*
> *other way. You know, they wouldn't have been built as exception sites, or affordable*
> *sites or open market. So, they are genuinely additional to anything else we've got*
> *coming forward.* – Housing Enabling Team Leader, Dorset Council

From their perspective, the sites that were developed through community-led housing, especially CLTs, in villages would have been unlikely to have been developed by housing associations otherwise. This is because rural exception sites such as these sites can be difficult to develop on, could face a lot of objections, and would not be eligible for planning permission for market housing under current guidelines. Therefore, the perception was that housing associations would not undertake such developments without cooperation from the local community and local government.

The research demonstrated that developing housing that is more affordable than conventional housing options locally tends to be a key narrative that motivates engagement with community-led housing practices. This is in line with government aims in producing the Community Housing Fund which emphasises affordable housing linked to local incomes. This perspective was clearly shared among those engaged through the public sector:

> *I think to the professionals in the housing world, in the social housing world, it means*
> *housing that's affordable housing that is, in some way initiated by local community*
> *activists who are responding to a need. But you know, it can be all kinds of things.* –
> Housing Enabler, multiple councils in South West

Housing that is aimed to be affordable to those on average local incomes, using a marker of 30% of average income, for example, or any general housing where costs are sub-market, is distinct from housing which is officially Affordable Housing. The latter requires that the development complies with specific affordable tenure products specified by central government and that any rented

housing is managed by a Registered Provider of Social Housing (RP). Though there is significant overlap between the concepts, as government subsidy given to Affordable Housing is often crucial to the ability to provide lower-cost housing, this is not always the case. This is demonstrated in the CLT model in East Cambridgeshire or some of the alms-house developments in the South West in this research. The narrative of the aim of producing affordable housing should not always be seen as a desire to do development that falls within the Affordable Housing paradigm, but more related to the generic sense of affordable. However, the two were closely related in practice and in participants' perceptions.

Often, participants identified their practices as aimed at those on middle to low incomes facing affordability pressures in their chosen area and lack of housing choice rather than the most acute housing need. Some participants challenged the narrative that affordable housing was only a requirement of specific groups. They highlighted the broad swathes of population experiencing housing affordability pressures as well as the lack of choice and control many had around housing:

> *Our assumption of being that we're mainly looking at this kind of intermediate kind of squeezed middle, if you like, between anywhere between first time buyers or people looking to downsize. And yeah, people really motivated by, you know, low carbon living shared the shared economy, that sort of thing.* – Chief Executive, UK Cohousing Network

The research also found that some actors were hoping to expand the community-led housing sector's perceived remit towards more vulnerable groups such as those experiencing homelessness or local refugee populations:

> *So, it's interesting for me an interesting divergence, because the image CLH is probably a white middle class activity. Put it at the highest level, a nice rural activity, but actually there's much more to it community-led housing as a as a cutting edge to it that can be doing much more great work for what we would like people in need.* – Programme Manager, Nationwide Foundation

However, that these projects were considered novel emphasises that community-led housing was considered an approach primarily for mid-tier income groups.

Whilst affordability was a key value for the community-led housing sector there are several other aspects which are central to the aims of the actors in the sector. These overlap with affordability in different ways. Participants' opinions diverged as to whether 'affordability' should be an all-encompassing focus for the movement and at what level of housing need community-led housing

schemes should aim to support. Not all community-led housing practices have a central aim to develop lower cost housing, or may be mixed:

> *Community-led housing doesn't always have to be affordable and sometimes, and particularly in the case of cohousing, it might not necessarily be affordable. And there might be a need to have some kind of market housing to subsidise schemes and so on… When we talk about Community Housing Funds, then yes, it does need to be affordable… I would say predominantly, the schemes that come forward usually have some element of affordable in them.* – Director, Community Led Homes

Community groups engaged in community-led housing approaches might be focused on goals such as sustainability or community living above providing affordable housing. This type of housing is generally not available on the market and is difficult for community-led housing groups to finance although the intended residents might not be in acute housing need. Affordability, therefore, is still a concern for these projects even if the housing is not intended for the lowest affordable tenures. In the Leeds Community Homes case study sustainability was often a key aim of project groups. The CEO explained the tension between the two values:

> *It's very common to see real tensions and difficulties around being able to afford the kind of levels of sustainability that they want. And so sometimes groups have to compromise. You know, sometimes they might have two options on the table, and then they just see how much money they can raise. And if they can raise enough, they get plan A. And if they can't, they get Plan B.* – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

If supported by Government at any level, these types of projects may be able to access resources such as public land sale. A participant noted that in these cases there was debate around whether these projects should be drawing from the same resources that were designed for providing affordable housing for those in the most direct housing need:

> *And why if it, if it becomes different by being a bunch of middle-class people who ought...not all, you know, perhaps they can afford to house themselves? Why are we doing this? You know, why? Why is publicly owned land going to these people? Is that justifiable just because they want to live some other kind of community focused lifestyle that is more sustainable? I mean, arguably, that is, but it's a different debate there really.* – Housing Enabler, multiple councils in South West

These experiences demonstrate that these aims can be in competition with each other both across the sector and within projects. The research suggests, therefore, the narrative of building affordable

housing is central to what actors feel they are doing when they engage in community-led housing, but it does not define the sector exclusively.

A secondary narrative to affordability and additionality surrounding the contribution of the community-led housing sector emphasises the sector's contribution to the diversification of the overall housing market. The sector's qualities of small-scale development with an emphasis on design, sustainability and community also suggest innovation and a role for SME builders and developers. The participant at the MHCLG stated:

> *That's another reason why we like the community-led housing sector is because it helps to sustain the SME builder sector, which adds to the sort of robustness and resilience of the house building industry generally and intends to deliver variety and helps to meet additional markets, which aren't going to be developed by the sort of the mainstream house builder model.* – Participant, MHCLG

Actors in the sector were also aware of this aspect of the sector and aimed to capitalise on this as case for further Government support:

> *But I think it's something that's come up in some of our we've got a campaign at the moment looking at housing diversification, the housing sector does seem to be one of the few where, you know, you still seems to be working on Fordian principles of you can have whatever you want, as long as it's exactly what we're going to provide for you.* – Chief Executive, UK Cohousing Network

Such campaign positioning highlights the strategic action of the actors in intermediary bodies who sought to emphasise the broader societal benefits of their practice to lobby for government support.

6.2.2 Community Housing Funds

Central government has provided dedicated funding for the sector through a series of funds labelled 'community housing' that have been available in multiple forms, introducing regulations, norms and roles into the institutional context of the field. It should be noted that the Community Housing Fund has never been the sole source of funding for the sector. Notably, the sector has received significant funding from charitable donors such as the Nationwide Foundation, Power to Change, Carnegie Trust and Tudor Trust. Such charitable funding was particularly linked to pre-development revenue costs. Community-led projects have also been able to bid for Affordable Housing funding through Homes England mainstream routes according to the general rules and structures of Homes England funding. Additionally, there is a patchwork of local government funding available depending on location, and the potential for groups to apply for individual charitable grants outside of state

funding. Loan finance is usually also utilised for the development stage but there was a perception that grant was required in order to make loan finance viable. However, at the time of this research the Community Housing Fund was considered by many participants to be the major source of funding for the sector, reflecting an orientation towards government grant as a means for growth.

The first iteration of the Community Housing Fund was distributed to local authorities in 2016 based on a formula that took into account levels of second home ownership. The second iteration of the funding was national and open to applications from individual projects, or local government on the project's behalf. The fund opened for applications in 2018 and closed to applicants on 31st March 2020. It was administrated by Homes England. The were three streams of funding to which schemes could apply; revenue fund, capital fund, and infrastructure fund. Revenue funding refers to any pre-development costs such as early-stage work on vision, communication and consultation (referred to by the sector as the Group stage) or mid-stage work such as identifying the right site, negotiating with the landowner, design, the steps involved in obtaining planning consent (referred to by the sector as the Site and Plan stages). Participants noted that pre-development costs are 'at-risk' and it is unusual to be able to finance these through borrowing costs, therefore a grant was perceived as essential to the process at this stage. Capital funding refers to the cost of buying land and building homes for which grant is utilised to part-fund projects. This supports in lowering the cost of development and reducing the amount of further finance required, making borrowing less expensive to the project and reducing risk to the lender. The fund included infrastructure funding which could be released to local authorities to fund pre-development work on sites. In addition to these three streams of funding the was also a separate sector development fund which provided funding to support the enabling hub network and the activities of the Community Led Homes partnership in supporting the sector.

At the time I conducted this research, participants were reflecting on the recently ended Community Housing Fund 2018-2020. Participants saw this as the most significant investment in the sector to date and several credited the fund with a period of increased activity in community-led housing projects, though they noted this was tapering off as the funding had come to an end. Participants also had criticisms of the fund, in particular that it was short-lived and had revenue and capital grants on the same timelines, meaning groups who had secured revenue grant for pre-development work were too late to then apply for capital grant from the programme.

Participants' experiences and opinions of the fund were mixed, with a strong sense that dedicated Community Housing Funds had not run for long enough to achieve their stated aims and were

unpredictable. This was summarised by a director of a community-led housing organisations in Leeds:

> *I think it's incredibly difficult to get groups off the ground without some decent Community Housing money. And it's and it's not the problem with community-led housing fund isn't so much the money or the amount of money? It's the lack of clarity about how long it is going to run for and the really short timescales.* – Director, Community-led housing organisation in Leeds

A dedicated fund has been a key aim for the sector for several years, but the dedicated capital fund ended up being under-utilised due to issues with timing and preparation to use it. This sense of having good work going to waste due to lack of capital funding was strong among participants when considering the impact of the second phase of the Community Housing Fund:

> *You know, it's just there these people are standing there like in limbo go well, we're happy to start building tomorrow, but we need the capital grant promised us so it's, it's that is in terms of quick wins. Nothing could be quicker than that these schemes are people standing there with the shovels ready and waiting for the money.* – Participant, MHCLG

However, the extent to which these homes were ready was debated by some, with one participant suggesting that the Capital funding underspend of the Community Housing Fund reflected that the sector had predicted that more projects would be sufficiently far enough in the development process to bid for capital funding than was the case.

> *The time it was launched, there wasn't really enough time left. But also, I think, to be frank, the sector's view on what is a 'shovel-ready' scheme is almost entirely wrong … and so they weren't quite ready to go as they perhaps said and so they weren't able to use it- though they'd never admit that themselves. But that was our view, because sometimes, you know... It didn't quite come to fruition quite as much.* – Participant, Homes England

Overall, there was a sense of disappointment regarding the Community Housing Fund as participants felt that the opportunity presented by the fund has not been entirely capitalised upon due, in large part, to short-time frames.

Due to the timing of the fieldwork, lobbying for the continuation of the fund was a key theme of participants throughout the research. At the time of the national policy stakeholder interviews significant effort was being extended to lobby for a continuation of the fund:

And in fact, all the efforts and still the efforts today are about trying to get that fund renewed and extended. Because it's been a great catalyst to help get the sector up and running. There are a vast amount of people now out there wanting to do it, but it's almost like they're going to be cut off. Having just got going. – Programme Manager, Nationwide Foundation

 As this research was concluding a small extension of the Community Housing Fund had been announced, providing revenue funding only in specific cases through a separate grant managing organisation, rather than Homes England. The fund is geared towards projects that have already undertaken significant amount of work to support them to a stage where they are ready to apply for capital funding, generally understood as having received planning permission. It seems this fund is designed to address some of the concerns that participants articulated in interviews which occurred earlier in the year-long fieldwork. However, in an interview conducted at the end of the fieldwork period actors highlighted their difficulties with the newly announced fund:

It's quite strict criteria. And then very tight timescales and looks like there might be issues around state aid, but we're not sure, every group's having to get their own advice on that, which is really annoying. But yeah, I mean, having to fit within these really tight criteria. And timescales is really annoying. So, you know, I mean, we'll see, we'll just have to see how it goes. I think we're supporting one or two groups to apply – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

The continuing potential for dedicated Community Housing Funding offers a route for some community-led housing development but for many it has not proved a sustainable source of funding. In particular, the sense of frustration with the short-lived nature of the fund was common across the case studies, though the fund was mentioned more by actors engaged in community-led housing work outside of established CLT models seen in the South-West and East Cambridgeshire area which had developed models to access other sources of revenue. There was debate among participants as to the benefits of a dedicated fund for the sector with some suggesting that community-led housing groups should apply to the mainstream Affordable Housing funding and others finding this to be an unworkable option. Once the Community Housing Fund had ended, eligible groups were instead expected to apply for capital funding through the mainstream Affordable Housing fund. A participant from Homes England stated:

Quite a few of those would be able to come through our normal Affordable Homes programme… there would be no extra benefit for them in coming through the Community Housing Fund and this is, I think, quite misunderstood. If it went through

the affordable housing programme, we still look at the value for money case in the
same way, they'd still have to be a registered provider if they're doing rental
accommodation. – Participant, Homes England

This view reflects that most community-led housing projects apply for funding to support affordability of the housing they produce, and as either rented or subsidised home ownership should fit into the existing funding options. The view from Homes England represented here is that community-led housing groups can access the existing fund in the same way as others without the need for a ring-fenced share.

However, other participants identified that community-led housing projects faced significant issues when applying to the Affordable Homes programme, as another participant explained, community-led housing groups struggle to compete with larger housing associations that can offer better value or less risk on their development sites and a reduced capacity to borrow money entails requests for higher levels of grant funding:

> *And of course, their ability to borrow money is completely different for a community*
> *organisation is much more expensive, because it's much more risky… And they need*
> *more grant because it's going to cost them more money to borrow. And quite often*
> *they need more grant because they're doing higher design quality, higher*
> *sustainability quality. So, in value for money assessments, they don't score as well as*
> *the big providers… So, you know, that's where the Community Housing Fund was a*
> *better route in my view, because it recognised that these were different providers*
> *and that what they required was different, which is why the sector continues to*
> *lobby government for more funding for more years.* – Participant, Community
> development practitioner – Multiple roles

Furthermore, though participants from Homes England stated there were no differences in the sorts of projects that could be supported, participants from the sector believed that the dedicated Community Housing Fund was more flexible and open to new tenure types. A participant explained that they believed their plan to utilise Mutual Home Ownership, a new form of tenure type, would have been possible under the Community Housing Fund but not the Affordable Homes Programme:

> *But the problem with that is that the mutual ownership model isn't a recognised*
> *form of affordable tenure by the government. So, the CHF was going to allow us to*
> *sidestep that because they were open to the idea of capital funding for schemes that*

> *weren't, you know, the Homes England that weren't in their standard programme.* –
> Associate, Leeds Community Homes

The conclusion of the dedicated Community Housing Fund, then, represented for many in the sector a loss of opportunity and a sense that the momentum of the previous years could be lost.

In general, participants reflected on the challenges of working in a constantly shifting funding environment but also recognised that inconsistent funding was a pattern that the sector had to deal with:

> *It's very difficult challenge…. We have to rely on this kind of funding environment*
> *that, you know, teases us essentially.* – Director, Community Led Homes

Another participant explained their initial confusion when they first joined the sector and a funding stream, they thought was successful was cancelled and then eventually replaced with another funding stream with different rules. Here they explain how they have accepted this but still strongly feel it introduces serious inefficiency to the sector:

> *And there'd be a completely different pot of money with different criteria and so on.*
> *Most inefficient way of working that anybody could ever come up with really… And*
> *that's one of the structural problems is all of this stop start stuff, which is a complete*
> *waste of everybody's time.* – Community-Led Housing Adviser B, Leeds Community
> Homes

The difficulty of adapting to multiple funding streams and changing processes regularly was a frustration shared across the research in all elements of community-led housing. It points to the extreme difficulty of engaging with housing development outside of the mainstream models where community-led housing as a sector has struggled to generate resources through grant or otherwise. This need for resources is the most significant factor in limiting or enabling growth.

6.2.3 Affordable Housing

Affordable Housing refers to the network of rules, practices and narratives involved in development of discounted housing options with some funding from central government acquired through the Homes England delivery body. Affordable Housing, as opposed to any generic housing option that is affordable for residents based on income, entails specific rules to access funding and certain abilities within the planning system. Using the lens of new institutionalism, these institutional arrangements form the institution of Affordable Housing. These rules require the housing to be one of the approved tenure products for which the developer has received some grant funding in order to produce a discount; these include Social Rented Housing, Affordable Rented Housing and Shared

Ownership. These rules also require rented housing to be carried out either by or in partnership with a RP.

Much community-led housing activity discussed by participants was bounded by and vertically nested within the institutional parameters of the national Affordable Housing programme. The second iteration of the Community Housing Fund was delivered through Homes England and included capital funding for projects under these rules, though revenue funding was not restricted to projects that meet these criteria. Community-led housing projects may also bid for funding through the main Affordable Homes fund where they meet the requirements. In the case studies, relationships to the affordable housing institutions were mixed. The dominant CLT model of delivery for Wessex Community Assets was heavily aligned with national Affordable Housing institutions whereas in East Cambridgeshire the dominant CLT method explicitly bypassed the influence of the rules associated with Affordable Housing through utilising unique rules within their Local Plan and cross-subsidy. Leeds Community Homes was in the process of undertaking significant work to become a Registered Provider of Social Housing in order to facilitate better access to the available subsidy for projects, whilst other community housing groups in the area attempted to see through their plans without it.

For some actors the relationship to Affordable Housing introduced friction between the aims of a community-led housing project and the reality of central government housing policy expressed through the Affordable Housing programme. However, ultimately this is the most potential resource that the community-led housing sector has access to under the prevailing conditions. An adviser described their frustration with supporting groups to be the affordable housing provider on a mainstream site:

> *So, at the moment, like a lot of what we've been encouraging groups to work towards is looking at partnership developments. Because this just the realistic way that's just going to get developed, if you can wedge your thing onto the corner of some massive development, where they bought all the land 10 years ago to speculate on it and now, they've got planning. It's probably the best you're gonna do.*
> – Community-Led Housing Adviser A, Leeds Community Homes

This ambivalent relationship between the resources offered by Homes England and the affordable housing programme versus the extent to which it required compromise of the groups' vision was summarised by a community-led housing group leader in Leeds:

> *Well, [Homes England] have sort of fairly definite rules, which tend to be at odds with a lot of the values of sort of co-operatives… So, for a lot, lots of time, we're saying, if there's any way, we can build this without, you know, taking the Homes England money, do it, but at £45,000 pounds a unit for the shared ownership, affordable homes programme? Um, basically, we didn't have much option. So, we've tried to find ways, ways of softening the implications of that.* – Member, Community-led housing project in Leeds

This suggests the institution of Affordable Housing acts as a significant structuring force on the community-led housing sector as a separate but neighbouring institution with significant resource potential. However, the relationship to this central institution was differentiated as many actors were frustrated by the constraints of the system and in some cases aimed to complete their projects without the subsidy.

Aligning the community-led housing sector to the institutions of Affordable Housing requires any funded body to either be, or to work in partnership with an RP; normally housing associations but also local authorities that own their own stock, if they provide rented housing. A participant with experience of the Affordable Housing mechanisms stated:

> *So, in order to access [Homes England] grant, you have to be a registered provider if you're being a landlord – if you're planning on doing affordable rent or social rent. So that is a barrier for a lot of Community Housing groups who don't want to be registered provider. But it is actually set out in statute... All those things that the regulator assesses, [Homes England] need to know are in place before [they] are confident giving grant, it's a bit contentious with the sector that but there we are, that's where it is. If you're doing shared ownership, you're not the landlord and therefore you don't need to be registered provider.* – Participant, Homes England

Participants explained that for many community-led housing groups becoming a Registered Provider in their own right is a daunting task, though some attempt it. An alternative route that schemes often follow is partnering with a housing association that is already an RP. The Director of Self-Help Housing, a national organisation that supports local people to bring empty properties back into use, stated:

> *What happens is that pushes people, if you can't get funded through the call, get registered or then you're pushed towards working with a registered provider.* – Director, Self-Help Housing

These partnerships are a source of dispute within the sector as their use links back to central debates about the need for community control within community-led housing and what that would look like long-term.

The rule of RP status for funding has a structuring impact on the way that community-led housing can develop. This challenge made projects that engaged with housing associations more straightforward which also requires the appropriate housing associations be operating locally, leading to development of the sector appearing differently across the country. The CLT-RP partnership is commonly seen in the Wessex Community Assets case study areas in which CLTs partner with housing associations. In this model, housing associations finance the development through their own means with the CLT taking a key role in directing the development, especially having control over issues such as design and allocation. Once completed, the CLT owns the freehold of the land, and the housing association owns the leasehold and manages the properties. The CLT retains an interest, but day-to-day decisions are taken by the housing association. However, this approach was not wholly accepted as demonstrating sufficient community control by all actors in the sector:

> *So, at some point, most community land trusts sign a very long-term lease with an organisation like a housing association. Now, some of my colleagues would say, the minute they sign that lease, that ceases to be community control, because now the housing association is running the game. And yet people within the community land trust sector said, 'Well, that's just nonsense, you know, we clearly are controlling this process we clearly made this decision to partner in this sort of way.'* – Co-Director, Confederation of Co-operative Housing

Leeds Community Homes has found it difficult to find the right sort of housing association to work with, even as they recognise this as the most viable route to growth from a funding perspective:

> *We're trying to warm up housing associations more, because we think that's a really good route for groups to be looking at, especially in you know, in the in the kind of environment that we've got, where government funding is dried up. And the only route really is to become a, an RP, yourself or partner with one. And a lot of groups haven't got the capacity or appetite to become an RP. So, we might see a more standard model in the future, but at the moment, all the groups we talked to want to do something slightly different.* – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

To meet this challenge Leeds Community Homes itself was also in the process of becoming an RP, which would enable the organisations to support emerging community groups with their own projects if they join Leeds Community Homes CLT. However, this approach also entails a degree of institutional isomorphism in the sector as community-led housing organisations begin to resemble housing associations or consistently partner with them.

Another interaction identified between community-led housing and affordable housing was actors' perception that community-led housing could be a way to capitalise on affordable housing resources whilst avoiding aspects of the affordable housing system, notably the Right to Buy. Community land trusts are considered to be exempt from Right to Buy legislation currently, but the exemption has not been tested legally and such exemption is subject to change by new government policy. Despite this, participants explained that the legal form of the CLT partnership reassured both communities and local authorities that there was less risk of losing the properties through the Right to Buy scheme as the Dorset housing enabler stated:

> *Generally, the communities like the idea of them being rented for ever. And if that CLT is exempt from any right to buy.* – Housing Enabling Team Leader, Dorset Council

The theoretical underpinning of community-led housing for one participant centred on obtaining assets from the state and then protecting these assets from private ownership:

> *You know, state is a very powerful tool for communities. But unfortunately, you know, different political regimes come and go. And what we've seen is different political regimes can unpick, you know, previous things… So, the value of something like a community land trust is that you set up trusteeship arrangements outside the state, which can't be unpicked.* – Board member, Wessex Community Assets

This shows that where community-led housing is nested within the institutions of affordable housing it is also being utilised by actors in an attempt to reform the embedded relations that exist within affordable housing.

6.2.4 Alternatives to Affordable Housing funding

Some models of community-led housing seen in this research bypass Affordable Housing funding completely. A key example of this was seen in East Cambridgeshire where local government funding was used for revenue costs and capital funding was resourced through loan and cross-subsidy. Avoiding the requirement of the Affordable Housing programme was considered one of the benefits of the approach:

Once you get into the big costs, then they always insisted that you have to be a
registered provider and just CLTs are so reluctant to do that, or, or align themselves
with a with another RP to the extent that actually, they lose control of the whole
thing and don't retain any real benefit themselves. – Community Housing
Programme Manager, Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority

Other examples of routes include raising community-share funding, utilising cross-subsidy, investment from residents and increasing the amount of loan. One participant explained that rather than change their tenure choice from Mutual Home Ownership – a new form of tenure preferred by the group but not supported through the Affordable Housing programme – to shared ownership, their project had increased the length of loan and raised the prices of homes within their project slightly, which led to some members downsizing within the scheme and some leaving. Whilst there are methods to resource community-led housing without Affordable Housing funding, for much of the sector it is the preferred route. However, a participant also highlighted the importance of groups being made aware of all funding routes available, such as community share offers or other forms of grant, as much community-led housing in England falls outside of the Affordable Housing programme. Furthermore, practices such as cohousing that fall under the umbrella of community-led housing do not aim to be as affordable as possible, but instead to meet a need of their members not available in other forms of housing development. For example, a participant discussed a cohousing development in Cambridge that was developed as a normal market development with concomitant S106 developers' contributions obligations, which chose to meet these as a commuted sum rather than use affordable housing tenures in the development. Such projects would not seek specific Affordable Housing funding though they may still interact with Homes England through loan or infrastructure funding on the argument of diversifying England's housing stock. Where Affordable Housing funding is not used it requires more resources from individual members in terms of cost of housing, further skills in engaging a wider community in ideas such as community share and/or extremely supportive local government practices.

Cross-subsidy for low-cost housing, as an alternative or addendum to Affordable Housing grant, was identified by participants as a potential strategy for community-led housing groups to finance development, yet this route also presented obstacles and similarly introduced debates about the role of community-led housing. Cross-subsidy allows schemes to part-fund low-cost homes on their site through utilising the profit from the sale of homes at market value, with the remaining loan amounts on the low-cost homes to be paid back through rent. In this way, the cross-subsidy can replace the Affordable Housing contribution. The interviewee at the MHCLG stressed how they hoped the sector would consider building more homes for market sale that would cross-subsidise

affordable homes in projects. However, they noted this might include engaging with building market housing and working with private developers and mainstream for-profit actors in a way that could be antithetical to the wider goals of the group:

> *So, there is a sort of cultural aversity to providing housing at market sale, but our programme says we'd like them to do that, because it reduces the requirement for grant and if it reduces the grant requirement, the grant and the available money can go further we can develop more houses.* – Participant, MHCLG

As the interviewee at MHCLG had imagined, there was some pushback to the idea of utilising more cross-subsidy in community-led housing schemes. One national policy stakeholder made a case against cross-subsidy and loans suggesting that it entailed community-led housing supporting more affluent people:

> *I suppose the price of relying on loan funding would be to make more use more expensive housing for a more privileged group of people, more affluent people, which I don't think is something worth pursuing, particularly really, because they can probably house themselves anyway. My interest is in housing is providing housing for people who are less privileged in who'd be left behind or who haven't got access to resources. So that's the first thing. We need to continue with grants.* – Director, Self-Help Housing

However, for one participant the problem was not about values but technical processes. They suggested that introducing cross-subsidy to the rules of the affordable housing system did not work:

> *I mean, in terms of including market housing on rural exception sites to incentivize landowners that's in the NPPF. But it's quite vague, different local authority areas have different takes on that… we've never done a scheme where we included market housing on a CLT scheme, working on the first one at the moment in Dorset. And it's proven quite complicated… I think we could end up in big caught in the middle if the planning policy allows small amounts of market housing on an exception site if Homes England are reticent to fund it.* – Development Manager, Housing Association

Ultimately, the manner in which community-led housing can be financed depends on the values of the scheme and the ability to align with more powerful sources of resources either through grant or loan. This issue dominated many of the discussions on community-led housing enabling and whilst some models have forged a reliable way through the contestation introduced via interaction with institutional parameters of the affordable housing and other funders, many have not.

6.3 LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL PARAMETERS

Though the national institutional framework has a significant influence, much of what determines community-led housing development takes place at the local level. Community-led housing is institutionally embedded in these local contexts (Lowndes and Lemprière, 2019). This includes local routinised community-led housing practices with accompanying supportive narratives, rules and practices of local government funding and in-kind support and established procedures and rules observed in planning. It also includes the practices of communities relating to community-led housing leadership, community involvement and local landowners.

6.3.1 Local ways of working

The research found that that community-led housing development was most successful in gaining resources from local government and otherwise navigating the local institutional context where there was a clearly developed narrative about the role of community-led housing shared by actors in the area related to specific community-led practices. For example, in the case of CLT development there are multiple approaches that contain significant differences in various geographical clusters. This includes the difference between the model seen in East Cambridgeshire District Council and the "Wessex" model but also a popular model in Cornwall based on homeownership, small urban CLTs and other emerging protypes across the country. A participant linked these differences between the CLTs with the specific journeys and individuals involved in establishing the models:

> *At the moment it's still kind of reflects the, you know, the original, probably the original people who became involved... You know, we all found that there was a model here that really seemed to work and, was workable for us in other areas. It's just not the same, you know [elsewhere], Cornwall is a good example. Almost all of their projects, originally, were on resale covenants, you know, homes for sale and resale covenants, and we haven't done any of those. And I think that's because Alan Fox and Bob Patterson, who were originally involved in Cornwall, that's just a model they were they were familiar with and comfortable with and, and once the ball was rolling on that model, again, you know, the demand was sort of insatiable. –*
> Director, Middlemarch Associates

These differences demonstrate the mutability of the core concepts of the Community-Led Housing sector. The models relate to what is most well supported in the area, and also what is most well understood, creating a clustering effect of different models. This suggests a sector that is closely adapting to local needs but is also a sign of an institutional path dependence on action at the local level.

Adapting to local ways of working has led to a wide range of models that make use of local routes to delivery. Some participants considered this a strength of the sector and others found it a source of frustration and limiting factor in the growth of the sector. An SME builder, speaking of community land trusts they had been involved in, stated:

> *I think people fail to realise that actually, the financial model for a lot of these, they all vary! Every CLT is different. Which seems odd to me. I think there should be a national standard way of doing it. So that everyone knows how it works. Because every time you talk to CLT they're never sure how it works. And then you'd seem to be able to make it up.* – Director, SME developer in East Cambridgeshire and surrounding region

This sentiment speaks to the difficult in innovating within a set system, and the risk that actors take on when engaging in non-standardised ways of working even in local contexts with established models. It further emphasises why local actors might engage in replication of other successful community-led housing projects where possible.

6.3.1.1   *Wessex CLT-RP developments*

In the Wessex Community Housing case study areas of Dorset, Somerset and Devon, participants delineated the 'typical' community-led housing model as small-scale community land trusts in rural villages. These were generally built on rural exception sites with a Housing Association acting as RP partner who would then own and manage the homes on the basis of a long leasehold from the CLT. This model was developed in 2010 by the Wessex Community Land Trust project. These projects were generally supported by Middlemarch Associates in association with Wessex Community Assets and was known locally as the 'Wessex model':

> *The last five years we've been focusing on community-led housing approaches, primarily, community land trusts and in particularly using the Wessex model, which is one which involves community land trust, owning the land and leasing it to a housing association do the development. Other options have been offered, but that's the one that everybody that has chosen to go down the community-led housing route has chosen.* – Rural Housing Enabler, Devon Communities Together

This CLT-RP model dominated participants' perceptions of community-led housing in the area. It was well-established within the practice of the local affordable housing teams. In Dorset, for example, the Housing Enabling Team leader stated:

And that's our, our bread-and-butter model. And I think, if I was to be critical of ourselves, we've got very comfortable with that model. And that tends to be what we promote. And what we like, I think, because we can, because it's worked. – Housing Enabling Team Leader, Dorset Council

The participant argued that the Wessex model was most suitable as it removed a lot of the risk for communities by passing liabilities on to housing associations, but it still enabled community groups to stay in control, a common perception amongst participants in the case study. The CLT-RP model provides a solution to local actors' problems with rural housing and interacts effectively with planning rules through rural exception sites as well as local actors such as housing associations and is legitimate in the eyes of the relevant local authorities. There were exceptions to the CLT-RP model also seen within the case study. For example, Bridport Cohousing, aiming for cohousing rather than single family units, not utilising rural exception sites, or Raise the Roof which worked towards co-operative management rather than partnership with a CLT. Both schemes also had a greater sustainability focus than was associated with the CLT-RP approach. However, these were highlighted as exceptions from the norm whereas there were several CLT development already built with many more in various stage of development in villages across the region.

The supporting narratives for the CLT-RP model seen in the Wessex case study area were based on its ability to develop affordable housing. This drive for affordable housing was based on a lack of housing affordability locally which most actors related to the growth in second and holiday-let homes in the area. The lack of locally affordable housing led to villages with a lack of working-age people which caused further social problems as villages lacked life:

So certainly, the villages we end up with villages of all old people with no young people doing anything employment steadily shifts away, then the pubs and shops close and they've you've got little dormitory villages, theme-villages, some of them call themselves and they look pretty they look how they ought to look. There's nothing actually going on there. – Housing Enabling Team Leader, Dorset Council

However, affordable housing development was deemed difficult in these villages where housing association development was either unwelcome or unforthcoming. In particular, local narratives centred on unattractive previous developments or opposition to allocation policies that operated regionally but that did not prioritise existing connections to the village. This attitude to housing associations was summarised by a Middlemarch associate, who also worked nationally as a hub manager with Community Led Homes:

Everywhere I go, there's a community that says, we, you know, we'd like to do this ourselves because the last time we had affordable homes built, they put it in the wrong place. And they look wrong and they're housing wrong people and they're not managing their properties properly – Hub Manager, Community Led Homes

Therefore, by generating affordable housing development the CLT could provide affordable housing for these villages whilst avoiding the perceived ills of housing associations as the development and the inclusion of a local connection policy would be controlled by the CLT.

This perceived success has led to replication and now the RP-CLT model is an established institutional practice in the local area making the model a successful iteration of community-led housing, but it is one that grants significant power to housing associations after development, which does not align with some community-led housing supporters' view of the role of community-led housing. A participant whose work was focused on more political forms of community-led housing reflected on the CLT-RP dominance:

And so, then the question is, is that community's kind of being quite clever and, you know, finding route that would get them their 10 houses that they needed on the edge of their village? Or is that a kind of co-option of the community housing movement, you know, within the mainstream system? – Board member, Wessex Community Assets

This reflects a common site of contention in community-led housing. Models which are well-suited to the prevailing institutional context are often more similar to mainstream ways of developing housing. Therefore, some actors do not feel that their proliferation constitutes an alternative to existing housing provision but a co-option of the sector to the mainstream.

6.3.1.2   East Cambridgeshire CLT model

In the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority case study, the key model of delivery that participants discussed was a CLT-developer partnership with cross-subsidy of low-cost rental housing managed by the CLT. This model was associated with East Cambridgeshire where the community-led housing team had been transplanted at the creation of the city region. The process involved in the CLT-developer partnerships was narrated by the community-led housing programme manager:

But our kind of typical community-led housing model is, and this is very much an East Cambs model. You have a community-led housing group who partners with a developer. And they develop a, not a majority affordable homes, somewhere under 50%, of affordable homes. And then the developer builds out the scheme. And

> *obviously, the communities involved with the design and everything throughout and there's a lot of community engagement. And then the developer sells completed turnkey properties to the CLT. At which point, the CLT goes out to kind of Triodos or charity bank gets a long-term loan to purchase the properties, the loan is secured against the complete properties. And then, yeah, they use the rents to repay the loan, and they employ a managing agent.* – Community Housing Programme Manager, Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority

Similarly, to the situation observed in the Wessex Community Assets case study, the perceived success of the model has led to replication within the local area.

> *What we do find is when you see one group form in one area, others tend to tend to follow; Streatham and Wilburton community land trust, and they're one of our longest standing community-led housing groups, they they've got their first development, they had an open day and they've actually seen what a community land trust can do. So we've now got Thetford community land trust that was set up, We've got East Cams, Community Land Trust. So once people see and see that they can provide housing and the types of housing that affordable housing that they provide, because they are high quality housing, I think, yes, we want that for our village.* – Community Housing Programme Administrator, Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority

In East Cambridgeshire this way of working has been supported by a community-led housing planning policy, discussed later in this chapter, and a developer, Palace Green Homes, that was set up as a trading arm of East Cambridgeshire District Council. These steps demonstrate the extent to which the East Cambridgeshire District Council was attached to this model of housing delivery. The positive experience in East Cambridgeshire led to the promotion of community-led, especially the CLT model, through the Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority for a time. However, at the end of the fieldwork the facility was returned to East Cambridgeshire after an election victory by the Labour party in the city region.

In this case study, the key narratives in support of the CLT-developer model included generating development that was agreeable to local people. It was seen to avoid the mistakes of previous affordable housing development and provide extra community benefit and revenue stream into the future. It was regarded as meeting affordable housing need where many private developers argued down their affordable housing contributions through viability clauses. The Leader of East Cambridgeshire District Council stated:

Our sites are our normal sites, you know, our policy compliant levels in the north, we demand 30%, affordable housing on sites in the south, it's 40% in the south of our district, but we very, very rarely achieving those percentages, because the developers come in and argue viability. – Leader, East Cambridgeshire District Council

Participants stated that the CLTs also offered further community resources and services, such as open spaces and buildings for use by General Practice healthcare providers, that private developer, or affordable-only housing association developments, would not. They explained that CLTs could allocate their own affordable homes and set rent levels for the affordable homes freely including, for example, giving a month rent holiday in December 2020. Participants in East Cambridgeshire suggested that communities are aware of the development pressures their areas face as local communities were used to fighting unwanted development. Sometimes they would win and sometimes they would not, and unpopular developments received planning permission due to the requirements of national planning regulations. Community-led housing was perceived to allow these communities to commit to their own development plans before an alternative unpopular development succeeded or local land was marked for open market development in a local plan. The community housing programme manager at the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority hub stated:

[The communities] don't love development, you know, if they could just not have it, that would be great. But it's better the devil we know, like, it's better to do it ourselves, and at least have some control and do it the way that we would want it. – Community Housing Programme Manager, Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority

As with the Wessex Community Assets case study, participants were aware of other ways of building community-led housing, though most had very limited experience of alternative ways of working. There was little criticism of the approach from participants themselves, but the Leader of East Cambridgeshire acknowledged that:

I think my opposition would say, and therefore, potentially, in other areas of the country, that, you know, our model, our version of Community Land Trusts gives too much favour to landowners perhaps. And they would expect to see a high percentage of affordable housing. – Leader, East Cambridgeshire Council

This approach was embedded in East Cambridgeshire due to its alignment with narratives around avoiding housing associations, undesirable affordable developments on the edge of villages, place-

making and taking active responsibility for development. This is a second example of a community housing model that was seen as highly replicable and successful. In this case the way of working was extremely institutionalised with significant influence from local government.

6.3.1.3   Leeds: self-help history, no contemporary key model

In the Leeds Community Homes case study, there was no single model that had become synonymous with community-led housing in the area. The nearest thing to this phenomenon was an established core of organisations founded from around the late 1990s that engaged in empty homes renovation work, sometimes called 'self-help' housing. Rather than a dominant delivery model, the Leeds Community Homes case study included a multitude of approaches and represented a testbed of innovation in urban community-led housing delivery. The CEO of Leeds Community Homes reflected:

> *I think it's something to do with the urban setting as well. And you compare it with something like Wessex, where they they've come up with a really good, kind of replicable model, which is more or less like a production line, you know, you get a group together with the Housing Association, couple years later, out pop the houses. No, we haven't got that.* – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

However, Leeds had several flagship community-led housing projects in different forms making up what the EDI consultant at Leeds Community Homes described as a "*strong community-led housing fraternity*". This list includes empty homes work such as Frontline Self-build, Jigsaw, Canopy and Latch projects as well as the LILAC (Low-Impact Living Affordable Community) cohousing project.

A key driver behind early community-led housing work in Leeds was a narrative about addressing pockets of empty local authority properties. A handful of organisations formed to take on these empty homes and bring them back to use through work by the future residents. This approach aligned with the Council's needs as the Director at a community-led housing organisation in Leeds explained:

> *So, all of the early properties were all leased from the city council. And, and because they were rehousing people from the house from the council waiting list, councils… it was kind of they'd sort of got what they saw as a liability off their books, while they were still managing to rehouse people.* – Director, Community-led housing organisation in Leeds

There was central government funding available in the mid-2000s to tackle the perceived empty homes crisis and organisations in Leeds already engaged in this were able to step up their work.

When this funding ended, these organisations were further able to make a case to Leeds City Council for continued funding which was accomplished though Right to Buy receipts. The organisations continue to manage the properties acquired, though new acquisitions slowed:

> *And then sort of things really changed with the empty homes programme that was run… But there's still several 1000 empty properties in Leeds so there's sort of plenty to go at. But there's not the same area blight that there used to be sort of massive areas of sort of empty homes.* – Director, Community-led housing organisation in Leeds

This experience emphasises the cyclical nature of funding opportunities and the way in which they are related to particular narratives about housing policy at a specific moment in time. However, many of these organisations were still in operation and building up further homes, albeit at a much slower rate. This also highlights the benefits of accruing and maintaining assets as a source of future capital for community-led housing development.

The second form of community-led housing more associated with Leeds Community Homes is the Mutual Homes Ownership model aligned with the influential Lilac development. In this model residents form a co-operative collective in which they can accrue equity. This development is something of a blueprint for other sustainability focused community-led housing initiatives as evidenced by the experience of a national policy actor who, when first discussing the option with groups across the country, was often told: "*We want you to help us build a Lilac*". However, despite the interest, the Lilac model has not been replicated yet within the Leeds area, though a few projects are nearly on-site which share some similar approaches. A member in a Leeds community-led housing project said:

> *We leaned heavily on Lilac blazing the trail. So, you know, we say we want to do something like Lilac, and for some people that sort of open doors* – Member, Community-led housing project in Leeds

Sustainability is a more major focus for Leeds Community Homes than the other case studies. One of their developments was taking place in Leeds 'climate innovation district' and most of the emerging projects also have a sustainability focus. The prominent projects in Leeds were more varied than in the other two case studies but also harnessed narratives and aims from local government in their operation.

6.3.2 Local government resources

Most participants ascribed an important role to local government attitudes and actions in enabling community-led housing development. They reported that through finance, land, and support in achieving planning permission process, local authorities had been invaluable for successful projects. As the Community-Led Housing adviser for Wessex Community Assets stated:

> *There's definitely a difference between those local authorities who are tolerant to community-led schemes, and those local authorities who are positively promoting schemes. So, if you've got a local authority that's actively promoting and enabling community-led schemes that that's quite important. Because that's going to make a whole lot of difference in terms of financing and planning.* – Community-Led Housing Adviser, Wessex Community Housing Hub

Such support, however, is in competition with multiple other, equally under-resourced areas and there are limits to the resources that can be provided by local authorities to community-led housing. Therefore, community-led housing needs to align with the priorities of the local authority and have supporters able to navigate within a local authority to identify potential resources. A participant summarised:

> *So, you know, local authorities, I mean, they're under duress and then they haven't got a lot of money throw away and probably after Covid, they'll even be even more threadbare. But I think it seems to be the case that if you know enough about where the hidden pockets of money and where the where the sort of cracks in the in the accounts are. Sometimes it's possible to conjure up funding out of those things* – Director, Self-Help Housing

As the community-led housing adviser for Wessex Community Housing Hub explained, for their work, it was *"whether they see community-led housing schemes as being an adjunct to their enabling programme"* that led to successful relationships with local authorities in their region. Furthermore, participants recognised community-led housing approaches as more labour intensive for local authorities so emphasised that the will to engage must be present. In Dorset, a recently created unitary authority, a participant explained how they were establishing this attitude as an import from the previous West Dorset team:

> *And I think there's probably some local authorities who would struggle with the flexibility that you need. Whereas I think it's, there's, there's definitely an attitude and a mindset and it's been at the Council what's been quite nice as they've let us get on with it… Because they could take an awful long time. So, you need that, that that*

attitude which comes from the bosses in the council it's actually "we're gonna

support this and we accept, you're gonna have to be flexible". – Housing Enabling

Team Leader, Dorset Council

This shows that local authorities, through introducing or enforcing specific rules or by engaging in supportive practices, can be a key partner for the community-led housing sector where the rules and practices are supported by effective narratives and the idea has fully taken root.

Participants suggested that local authorities could support community-led housing projects through specific funds via various methods or investing The Right to Buy receipts into the process. Some areas had specific funding for community-led housing through the original Community Housing Fund, as was the case for several of the local authorities in the Wessex Community Assets case study including Dorset. Similarly, Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority was able to offer this through their own city-region devolution funding. However, bidders for capital investment were required to apply through the general housing development resource for the city region which had similar pressures as research participants reported competing with conventional housing actors at a national level. Access to these funding pots allowed local government agents to invest in community-led housing in a proactive way and to become active partners to groups.

So, we do give start up grants of 5000 pounds per group, and to help them with their

start up. And whilst we don't have a community-led, housing specific housing grant

programme, and they're able to apply, and we'll support them to apply, and they'll

kind of they're not giving preferential treatment, but they will be kind of more

heavily supported to apply and be successful within the broader housing programme.
– Community Housing Programme Manager, Cambridge and Peterborough

Combined Authority

The impact of availability of local authority resource is a key determinant of potential for community-led housing development locally, as the two case studies where this was present had secure pipelines of housing delivery, whereas in Leeds, where this extra funding was absent, actors were less sure about future prospects.

Participants explained that local authorities could provide support in other ways, with access to land a crucial element of this. For example, local authorities can in some cases sell land at rates community-led housing groups are able to finance. Such deals allow groups time and access to land that would not be available to them on the open market. A community-led housing project leader in Leeds stated:

> *We then had an exclusivity arrangement with the council. So that gave us some period of time to, so they were promising not to sell land to anyone else. So, earmarking it for us, and giving us a certain length of time to get the money together, etc. and get planning permission.* – Member, Community-led housing project in Leeds

Previously council-owned land, or council mandated S106 contributions of private developers, were considered the main likely sources of land in urban areas where community-led housing groups would be unable to compete with other developers. However, as with other resources, groups then may find themselves in competition with other aspects of the local council's work, as explained by a housing enabler working voluntarily on urban community-led housing in the Wessex Community Assets case study area:

> *And that really means looking at things that are council owned or previously health service owned based but then we find we're back in this position of being in competition in some ways with the housing company. So yeah, it's all got a bit complicated.* – Housing Enabler, multiple councils in South West

Local authorities have a responsibility to uphold a self-build register, but participants noted the extent to which this was used varied and self-build projects comprised only a portion of the community-led housing sector. Ultimately, the extent to which this is adhered to again reflects the attitude of the council, as this participant explained a key factor in the success of cohousing in different areas:

> *I mean, where the local authorities have heard of cohousing, interested in cohousing interested in community-led homes have a keeping a self-build custom build kind of register? Honouring it. That's pretty important. Making sure that they are, you know, I suppose actively ensuring that those people looking to self-build or custom build have a chance of finding land and it's on the minds of the councils it's part of their kind of duties. I think that's pretty important.* – Chief Executive, UK Cohousing Network

This study demonstrates that the ability of different local authorities to support community-led housing initiatives varies, as does the inclination to do so. Where the two are combined local authorities can be incredibly important partners for community-led housing but this will generally follow a pattern of the local authority's own perception of their priorities and available resources, thereby encouraging some forms of community-led housing development but not others.

6.3.3   The institutions of planning

The institution of planning is a further institutional arrangement operating at a local level which provides opportunities and obstacles for community-led housing development. Though planning officers make recommendations against fixed rules and are answerable to the planning inspectorate, local authority planning committees formed of councillors are able to exercise some discretion in their judgement. Furthermore, they may also change some of these rules through instruments such as local plans. The institution of planning is, therefore, a heavily formalised process that relies significantly on rules, but local authority planning committees and the early stage of the process also includes actors performing unwritten practices. Both these rules and practices can be linked to supporting narratives within local authorities, national government or planning departments.

However, planning permission can introduce a barrier to community-led housing groups. As sites of innovation, providing housing that is outside of the mainstream, participants reported that community-led housing sites are irregular and can face obstacles in achieving planning permission. For example, as the Middlemarch Director explained, the needs of the community group may push the team to choose sites with more planning considerations:

> *So, we had to choose to build on land that we could afford to build on, but the planners wouldn't like. So, it was no surprise when, having done all of the kind of feasibility and planning work, we submitted an application, and it was recommended for refusal. That was overturned by the planning committee, who were able to, you know, make a decision on the merits of the case rather than on planning policy.* – Director, Middlemarch Associates

This quote also demonstrates that in the rural case studies it was suggested that community-led housing groups have been able to achieve planning permission in cases where other actors would not, due to profound community support behind the development. This was echoed by another participant:

> *And again, anytime you get a CLT in front of our planning committee, they've all gone through whether they've been recommended by the officers or not, because that's what the public wants. It's nice to have that positive attitude towards development.* – Housing Enabling Team Leader, Dorset Council

Introducing further complications for community-led housing development, planning applications can take a long time and require significant resource. The slow pace and bureaucracy can be a challenge for community-led housing groups:

> *We just, we just got planning permission on Mistress Lane, but that took 14 months. And like, you know, why? Yeah, no, I think there can be some questions and you have a meeting, and you resolve it, and then there's some other stuff. So, answer, then it's another month before you get another meeting. And it's all very, very slow and bureaucratic.* – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

The institutions of planning then, may provide opportunities for community-led housing groups to access preferential treatment and resources through control of development by the local and central government. However, the extent to which they are granted access to these resources is mandated by rules that are generally not adapted to community-led housing approaches. Furthermore, they require extensive engagement with bureaucratic processes that necessitate groups having access to comprehensive and specific skill sets and engender long waiting times.

One tool within the national planning system that appeared in the research as a route for community groups to develop their schemes was the Rural Exception Site. This tool allows councils to grant planning permission for certain forms of development, predominantly affordable housing, for a local community in rural areas where development is generally not permitted. In the CLT model favoured in the areas of the Wessex Community Assets case study, actors utilised rural exception sites as a key planning tool to bring forward land for their schemes. As one actor explained, they were vital to the whole idea of the model:

> *Yeah, there isn't anything else in rural areas? Yeah. You know, no village that we've ever worked in has got a piece of land within the settlement boundary that a landowner would be crazy enough to sell to us. With what we're willing to pay for it…*
> – Director, Middlemarch Associates

A reliance on this method was offered as one reason the CLT-RP model was so dominant in the area:

> *And if community-led housing is to include other models like cohousing, and co-ops and self-build, and so on in rural locations, then there would probably need to be changes to planning policy, local level to make that happen, because at the moment, you've got exception sites, which are primarily about affordable housing. And you've got allocated sites within settlements, but those will be gobbled up by private developers.* – Rural Housing Enabler, Devon Communities Together

However, in East Cambridgeshire actors found rural exception sites to be unsatisfactory and misaligned with the goals of community-led housing actors there:

> *I think problems with rural exception sites are twofold, really, but they don't involve the community. That's a key thing. And they're not really looking at addressing local needs. They're looking at addressing district needs.* – Director, SME developer in East Cambridgeshire and surrounding region

For the actors in Wessex Community Assets case study, the rural exception site was the only available workaround, planning regulations and unaffordable land prices in the few places where non-exception site planning permission was possible. Whereas, in East Cambridgeshire the rural exception site tool was seen to introduce a need to rely on affordable housing institutions, or work with housing associations, which many participants did not want to do. This difference of opinion demonstrates the extent to which the same planning rules can be adopted, utilised or disregarded based on local practices and narratives about how they operate.

A key manifestation of the use of planning as a tool for community-led hosuing development was the bespoke community-led housing policy within the East Cambridgeshire District Council local plan. East Cambridgeshire have a unique element to their Local Plan that gave preferential treatment to Community-led housing development. As the programme Manager for the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority explained:

> *So, because we are such a high value area, I think we have to think quite creatively about how to make any kind of affordable housing opportunities work. And, and I'd say the, the kind of best example, and the kind of gold star is East Cambs District Council's community-led housing planning policy. Because that does literally unlock land from a planning perspective*. – Community Housing Programme Manager, Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority

This policy allowed the district to grant planning permission for development outside of areas marked for development if it was community-led, enabling community groups to pay less for land as it could incentivise landowners to accept less than market rate for land for development where a community land trust was the only eligible developer. This rate falls somewhere between agricultural value and market value. Combined with the cross-subsidy from the market rate homes, this discount enabled the CLT to offer low-cost rental options for local people in their development.

> *And that gives [community land trusts] such a huge bargaining chip, when they're approaching landowners, because essentially, the conversation is your land is*

agricultural land, it can't come forward for development. But if you work with us, we
can give you not full development value, because we can't afford that, but we can
give you better than agricultural value. And you'll be doing something really fantastic
for the community, something that's going to be somewhat of a legacy for you. –
Community Housing Programme Manager, Cambridge and Peterborough combined
authority

This policy was adopted in the 2015 local plan and was still in operation at the time of the research. Here, the local authority narrative about community-led housing centred on the undesirability of housing association development, due to a lack of appropriate local housing associations, and the risk to local communities of what they considered to be inappropriate development due to overwhelming development pressure.

6.3.4   Community

The locations in which community-led housing sites are planned and the communities around them are a further form of norms and code of behaviours. These community institutions guide who is involved in community-led housing steering groups, how authorities interact with communities and how community resources can be marshalled. In the two predominantly rural case studies participants were able to identify how groups typically operate, whereas in the Leeds Community Homes case study experiences of communities were more varied.

The engagement of parish and town councils and councillors was suggested as having a key role in determining the acceptability of community-led housing initiatives. In the two rural case studies the role of parish councils as leaders of projects was emphasised by participants. A participant from Somerset Community Council stated:

But really, for community-led housing, the parish and town councils are really key
organisations to encourage and support that to happen. – Smart Communities
Manager, Somerset Community Council

Describing a typical engagement, a participant from Dorset described the parish council as the conduit for suggesting community-led housing approaches to a village, and highlighted that their engagement is vital for a successful scheme:

Generally speaking, how would I approach a parish council we would normally,
occasionally some parishes come to us. But normally, we'll drop a line out to all the
parishes every now and again and say, we think you've got a housing need in your
village, we think this is something that you should be looking at…it's too much hassle

> *to do stuff when the parish council aren't supportive, it's just not worth our effort.* –
> Housing Enabling Team Leader, Dorset Council

A participant speaking from experience in East Cambridgeshire similarly noted the importance of engaging with parish councillors but emphasised that they are conscious to avoid overdominance these existing powerful voices:

> *So we generally have a few parish councillors [on the steering group], and although
> we do recommend that they limit the number of parish councillors, so it doesn't just
> become kind of a second parish council.* – Community Housing Programme
> Manager, Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority

These examples demonstrate the role of the lowest tier of local government in generating interest in and providing legitimacy for community-led housing initiatives. However, this is linked to existing power dynamics and may reproduce existing problems with power distribution in terms of local decision making as these actors hold a gatekeeper role to development.

Community-led housing leadership varied across projects and contexts which triggered different patterns of interaction. There were three key types: local community steering group (non-future resident), future residents and existing community anchor organisations. Some respondents who had worked with different types of community-led housing groups characterised the groups formed to house others and community anchor organisations as more efficient and less prone to an extremely extended development process than those consisting of future residents. Similarly, community anchor organisations seemed to be able to harness the organisational power they had already, especially if they had staff or long-term volunteers engaged who had experience of administrative work. A community-led housing adviser in Leeds described their experience:

> *Whereas some of the other projects, we work with a board of people within a
> community that see the need for it within that community, but they're not in need.
> Yeah, more of like the conventional charity trustees and will guide this project. And
> they are invested in community buy in and getting feedback and everything else. So,
> it's very noble, kind of governance type thing, those ones, are generally more
> effective.* – Community-Led Housing Adviser A, Leeds Community Homes

Though this adviser was more interested in working within the autonomous housing movement, they had noticed that where community-led housing groups mirrored conventional charity trustees, relationships to the project were more dispassionate and therefore more likely to facilitate prompter decisions about the project. They noted that these sorts of groups also tended to include

those with professional skills and experience, and this also enabled them to progress more quickly with their projects:

> It's a technical topic, there's quite a lot of stuff to do, you basically need to become a small development company. And to get people up to that. It's just like, you can't really force the issue too much, it needs to happen organically with the abilities of that group has or otherwise, you're just going to try and force something that isn't ready. And yeah, those sorts of more professional job voluntary type people, just have more experience with that. And are more used to it and I guess, probably have a slightly more emotionally distant relationship in a way. – Community-Led Housing Adviser A, Leeds Community Homes

This suggests community-led housing groups that can emulate the organisational practices of government and business, either through efficient decision making or administrative languages and practices, have an advantage. This pattern supports institutional isomorphism as new institutions begin to resemble more established institutions as they develop. This could leave groups that do not have as much experience in these norms, or do not wish to follow them, less able to access resources or engage the required partnerships.

Participants repeatedly shared the sentiment that involvement in community-led housing leadership was a long and fairly arduous commitment and therefore tended to attract certain types of people. Furthermore, the work required volunteers with particular skills. They characterised those who tended to be involved as 'middle-class' or 'retired professional':

> Whereas, all of this development stuff, you're really relying on community groups that are unusually capable, you know, so very often, you know, retired professionals and so on, who've got the time and experience which, you know, in dealing with bureaucracy, and finances, you know, so what, that effectively means that a large number of other communities are cut off from this as an option. And yet, the results would be probably more relevant to those communities. – Community-Led Housing Adviser B, Leeds Community Homes

The narrative of middle-class people working on affordable housing for less well-off people was something that many participants were keen to avoid or were working to alter. The Cambridge and Peterborough Community-led housing programme manager stated:

> And so, we're always desperately trying to get younger people in and working-class people. [steering groups tend] to be very, very middle class… which is not, really, is

not preferable, when actually what you're trying to do is affordable housing, you
want people that have got experience of living in affordable housing, that, you know,
we don't want it to be so like paternalistic that it's like, 'oh, we the rich people will
give you the poor people, some houses'. And we want it to be people doing it for
themselves. – Community Housing Programme Manager, Cambridge and
Peterborough Combined Authority

The characterisation of middle-class retired professionals generally also implied that project leaders were overwhelmingly white. A few participants pointed to the need to diversify the sector, though for some in the rural case studies the issue did not register because of their perception of the homogeneity of the local area. To address the lack of racial diversity Leeds Community Homes employed an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion consultant in part to work on recruiting more groups that were Black- or Asian-led in the area. The impact of individual leaders within community-led housing is discussed in further detail in the next chapter. However, it is important to note here that the typical process of community-led housing development and the required time commitment and skill set were seen as determining the type of people who engaged with community-led housing. This highlights one way in which institutional isomorphism is shaping community-led housing development in England.

6.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the institutional context of community-led housing and how actors perceive this framework to influence the form of the sector. The research demonstrated that the community-led housing sector is an emerging institution embedded in a network of institutional configurations spanning the state and civil society. The component parts of its institutional configuration and the sector's rules, practice and narratives, are a mix of inherited or imported characteristics from individual practices, borrowed from or imposed by the institution of affordable housing or local government, and new purpose-built tools for the sector. The findings discussed in this chapter support Lang and Mullins' (2019) description of multiple and hybrid identities of actors within the community-led housing sector and strategic positioning with adjacent fields as a tactic of the emergent community-led housing sector. My findings provide further description of the processes described by Lang and Mullins, exemplifying that these actions entail degrees of contestation between the aims and values of different actors. The configuration of influences on the institutional context discussed in this chapter, resonates with Thompson's (2020a) finding that the CLT and co-operative movements in Liverpool had emerged through the adoption of new ideas from

elsewhere that morphed into new expressions of the ideas when they interacted with the local context.

This research shows that national actors have undertaken to create institutions that formalise community-led housing as a field. These structures are intended to secure longevity and grow the capacity of the sector, but they are contested by some actors who perceive these processes as taking the community-led housing sector away from their perception of its core values. The narrative of a united community-led housing sector held an important role in the institutional configuration of the sector. Actors perceived this narrative as a useful tool, but participants expressed significant perceptions of difference about various practices. This supports Lang and Mullins (2019) which emphasise the instrumental and pragmatic role of the combined community-led housing sector over a new definitive ideological grouping.

Other instruments that formalised the sector, such as training and accreditation, were seen by many research participants as a positive influence that offered a route to greater growth in the sector, but some actors expressed reservations based on a desire to retain a more responsive and less structured version of community-led housing that did not mimic mainstream practices. Within the research I observed multiple narratives pertaining to the role of community-led housing. Two important points of contestation emerged; the first concerns the extent to which the community-led housing sector should predominantly concentrate on affordable housing tenures and the second concerns the degree to which community involvement and ownership is sufficient to designate practices as community-led housing. The distinction in narratives about community-led housing can be partly understood through the affirmative/transformative distinction that DeFilippis et al (2019) utilised in their research into a CLT in Minnesota, USA. They argue that alternative models do not always lead to transformative politics and found an activist element that emphasised CLT capacity to challenge capitalist land and housing practice (transformative) but that the projects themselves were generally more focused on providing for households within the current narratives of the system of home ownership (affirmative). These concepts could be applied to my findings to describe the poles of opinion in narratives around community-led housing in England. I argue that these narratives are key elements of actor's construction of their work and what they intend to do and are utilised as tools to promote or discourage actions.

The institution of state-subsidised affordable housing is a powerful adjoining institution that has an extensive impact on the shape of growth for the community-led housing sector. In large part, the sector is reliant on resources and legitimacy inferred by Affordable Housing and the support of MHCLG which confer resources and legitimacy on the sector but requires alignment with their own

rules, narratives and practices. But again, this relationship is contested, and actors were ambivalent about adhering to the requirements of the Affordable Housing system such as working with registered providers or working within strict tenure types. Beyond an ambivalence about technical rules and requirements, I also observed that some actors held fundamental disagreements with Affordable Housing policy and preferred community-led housing to act as a counterpoint and demonstrate alternatives where possible. Generally, these actors relayed narratives which leaned more towards the anarchic and political legacies of their practices than of upscaled community-led affordable housing development as a policy solution to entrenched housing development problems. This internal tension within the community-led housing sector is congruent with Moore's (2018) findings related to the early stages of CLT partnerships with housing associations in which he reported that these partnerships led to growth in the sector but introduced tensions surrounding competing institutional logics and standardisation. My research suggests that as growth in the sector is seen as quite reliant on these external affordable housing institutions, it creates challenges where the sector is in partnership with institutional actors that some in the community-led housing space see themselves as in opposition to.

I found that local institutional constraints and enablers also played a significant role in determining how and if community-led housing practices had taken root in an area. The research suggests that growth in the community-led housing sector has mostly occurred where actors have successfully aligned with established and powerful institutions at a local level through relationships with local authorities. These relationships include creating shared narratives about the role of community-led housing practices locally which can be harnessed to establish resources and legitimacy locally. However, this is only actionable in cases where local authorities have been provided with, or have created for themselves, resources to support the sector locally. Even then, community-led housing is in competition with other priorities and ways of working. For example, the findings suggest that the CLT-RP partnership model had achieved a level of legitimacy and permanence through its congruence with the established institutional arrangements of affordable housing and perceptions that it fits into the shared goals of the field, but also due to its capacity to challenge some of the accepted rules of this process. However, participants noted that even within sympathetic local authorities the competition for land through local authority land disposal was extremely high, as the cost of land on the open market was prohibitive to community-led housing developments.

Again, the research shows that some actors within the sector consider some iterations of alignment with local authorities to be incongruent with their values and aims, such as questions about the political nature of the CLT-RP partnership model in the Wessex case study or the reliance on local

authority input in the model of CLT seen in East Cambridge. Or some have found that preferred routes to delivery have become harder to access over time such as self-help housing in Leeds.

There is no singular coherent community-led housing narrative that operates across contexts. Within two of the case studies, understanding of community-led housing generally reflected the dominant local delivery model rather than the wider definition. Though each case study hub nominally supported all forms of community-led housing, strong regional patterns had emerged and in two of the case study areas these established forms dominated the activity of the hub. This reflects the comparatively new rule of the sector which required hubs to cover all forms of community-led housing and applied to the existing regional configuration of CLT umbrella organisations. In this context, certain paths to delivery become entrenched whilst others continue to struggle to gain traction, requiring actors to continue to innovate beyond established routes.

7 ACTORS' ROLE IN COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

This chapter focuses on the actions of actors in the community-led housing sphere. It aims to answer the second research question: "*How do actors navigate and innovate within this institutional context to support the growth of community-led housing?".* It considers the roles of key individuals in navigating the existing institutional framework. First, I discuss the identities and skills-sets of individuals within community-led housing groups that appear to predicate success for community-led housing schemes. I argue that this reliance upon individuals reflects the challenge of community-led housing development and is a limiting factor in the growth of the community-led housing sector. Next, I consider the role of actors who wield power at different levels of governance either politically or bureaucratically. This research suggests that these actors skilfully navigate the existing institutional context to generate legitimacy for community-led housing, which leads to access to resources and other forms of support. Finally, I discuss the way in which actors have taken strategic action within their contexts to advance the development of community-led housing. I argue that these actors are institutional entrepreneurs (Garud, Hardy and Maguire, 2007) in that they created new modes of delivery through adapting existing institutions. This provides context for the following chapter in which I address the role of advisers and sector support in more detail.

It is important to note that I found throughout the research that individuals held many roles within the community-led housing world that could transmute and inform each other. For example, an employee of Homes England might also be a community-led housing volunteer and a former local enabler. Similarly, a local authority housing enabler may begin their involvement with community-led housing schemes in a professional capacity and continue this involvement in a voluntary capacity despite role changes. Among those involved as advisers or consultants some had a history as a volunteer though this was not universal. For the sake of clarity, within the writing the roles of actors may be collapsed to a central identity concerning their role within the community-led housing sector though I have attempted to preserve the complexity of their experiences within the text.

7.1 COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING HEROES AND PIONEERS

Participants' narratives about successful community-led housing projects generally included a common theme commending a committed individual or individuals and their contribution. These individuals were primarily community volunteers, though they could be employees of community organisations or hold dual roles in the community as discussed above. It was a common perception among participants that extraordinary individual actors were usually required for projects, especially those that took approaches that were new or unusual in the local area. Summarising their

experience, a participant emphasised that these individuals of extraordinary dedication capable of inspiring others were usually the key to a successful project emerging:

> There are really outstanding people that make it their life's work to rehabilitate an
> area, who can rise up within the community to do these things. But obviously, they're
> few and far between, aren't they? They're those kinds of people. So, if you get those
> kinds of people, I think it works. If they can bring others with them and bring others
> together. They're important. – Chief Executive, Cambridge ACRE (Eastern Community
> Homes)

In addition to these characteristics, such leaders were also noted for specific skills or networks they could bring to the project. For example, a participant described a development in the South West that had, unusually for the area, been developed without a housing association partner. They attributed its success in this more difficult development route to the individual qualities of the chair:

> I worked with one community that did their own community land trust, without
> partnership with a housing association. And that, again, was very successful. But the
> reason I think that it was successful was that the chair was a developer. And he was
> a parish councillor, and he was a district councillor. And I think he understood
> planning, he might have been on the planning committee, so he was so skilled and
> also, he came from that community. So, he also had their confidence – Development
> Enabler, Somerset West and Taunton

This quote again illustrates that both local government and community-led housing practices often attract the same type of individuals with a strong civic mindset, as discussed in the previous chapter. Though this has potentially negative implications for the diversity of community-led housing groups it is also identified as a factor that facilitates the success of community-led housing schemes. Such individuals bring significant social capital to projects and are well versed in navigating the institutional mechanisms of a local authority or other organisations. They have the knowledge and abilities to exercise some influence within this sphere. Narrating a successful scheme, a participant stated:

> If you speak to one of our board members, at [cohousing project], you know, the fact
> that he had been a Green Councillor on the council for a number of years and then
> had stepped down before developing the cohousing project was really helpful in
> terms of being able to find his way around things and advocate for the group. – Chief
> Executive, UK Cohousing Network

These examples were repeated throughout participants' stories of initial projects of different practices within local areas, emphasising the significant amount of social skill required by individuals to establish a viable group and lead it through a tangled process of development that usually took several years. As new actors engaging in a new practice these individuals must be able to translate their ambition into actions that have legitimacy within the local community, with local government planners, and a mix of funders.

Participants identified this reliance on individuals as a limiting factor on the growth of community-led housing practices. They suggested that an individual's capabilities and commitment are not generally replicable in different scenarios. If such an individual is essential, this limits the growth of community-led housing to places and schemes where such individuals are active, rather than creating a structure or movement that generates its own momentum. A participant summarised this concern:

> *Some of these projects are delivered by people who are basically heroic in their ability to get things done against the status quo and against expectations. And we can't rely on heroes to deliver our housing requirements. It needs to be a realistic option for ordinary people.* – Participant, MHCLG

This label of heroism is based not only on an extraordinary ability to provide leadership to a community-led housing project, but also to sustain it over time. The generally accepted average project length time reported by participants for the sector was seven years, but some projects take considerably longer to come to fruition. Participants noted that the extended period required by development projects means that even individuals who begin with sincere commitment may disengage for various reasons. Continued leadership over the project life may then require multiple individuals at different points to drive it forward, as described by a participant working for the SME developer wholly owned by East Cambridgeshire District Council:

> *But I think, you know, there are, there are people out there who have got the sort of ambition to do things, but they get quite tired if things don't progress quickly. And they don't, generally, you know… these schemes progress very slowly. And people lose interest, or their life changes, and so they can't commit to it. So, keeping continuity of animated and enthusiastic trustees all the way through the life journey of project is one of the biggest challenges, I think, particularly in rural areas.* – Director, SME developer – wholly owned by East Cambridge District Council

Beyond commitment and inspiration, specific individuals may also be able to undertake particular tasks and functions due to their specific skill sets acquired in other aspects of life. Where these skills and attributes are not available for all groups it can become a limitation for schemes:

And we're very aware as a group, that we don't really have sufficient expertise. We really need, as many groups do, we could do with more sort of finance people with a financial background. There's definitely [locally], I think a sort of competition going on between groups for people who have the relevant skills and experience. – Housing Enabler, multiple councils, South West

The presence of a determined and capable individual, or a small group of two or three individuals, could lead groups through challenges such as being denied planning permission, sites falling through, being denied expected funding and unexpected costs. Though in many cases these individuals were the leaders of a larger core group of volunteers this research suggests that the individual actors make a significant contribution to the success of community-led housing projects. Whilst a more systematic process of advice and support, easier access to funding and land would likely enable more groups to be successful, the dedication and knowledge required of individual citizens would likely remain extensive even if these processes were changed.

Unequal workload and input between individuals on steering groups appeared to be a common issue within the sector but caused particular tension within groups led by the intended future residents of a development. If the desired outcome was for the residents to collaborate on the design of the homes and see them through development, then the long process and amount of work required might exclude groups of people unable to commit in that way. In practice, participants explained, the weight of a project was often carried disproportionately by one or two volunteers within a group. These would be those with the greatest drive and commitment to the project, but also with the capacity to commit their time to it, and experience or social connections that enabled them to make a significant contribution to the project. For example, a participant who was a key member of a cohousing group was an architect by profession, and over the period of the project had become a community-led housing adviser, described the issue of unequal amounts of work within groups. He noted the different capacities of individuals within the project:

This has been a perennial problem, that sort of commitment of people to put time in like this, there's always tension… And there's always, you know, like someone like me, I've been doing this for seven years, we're supposed to all be putting in a certain amount of time a month. Well, if we go back, historically, I put in way more than that, so shall I down tools now and let everybody else crack on? [laughs]… You know,

> *there's people in different circumstances, there are single mums, there's people that*
> *have to work two jobs, especially with Covid. Like, people losing their jobs and stuff.*
> *And also, there are people that are just trying to battle through, and they would*
> *massively benefit from this community, once it's built* – Associate, Leeds Community
> Homes

Another participant closely involved in a cohousing project shared the same issue and had similar experiences. They commented that though their group had managed to reach the build stage, this was only with an over-reliance on key individuals which did not constitute a sustainable model going forward:

> *I suppose the fact that we've got as far as we have, I think that's down to quite a*
> *small subset of the group. And it's, it's a permanent issue of how do we get people*
> *more involved? Yeah, you know, make it so it's not just the same handful of people*
> *doing all the work. So that is a tricky one. So how we have we managed it so far?*
> *Well, I think by a few people putting in a lot of work. That's not really sustainable.*
> – Member, Community-led housing project in Leeds

Their experiences suggest the existence of other projects that never got past early stages of the process in situations where no individual or group of individuals were able to commit in this way or the development process was just too difficult, and the energy of the group dissipated.

These experiences evidence the importance and influence of key individual actors within project steering groups for reasons of expertise, social connections or personal commitment to the project. This is a factor which is difficult to replicate or ensure in all community-led housing projects. Participants flagged a loss of momentum as a common pitfall after projects faced challenges or setbacks. Though they mostly discussed successful or currently in progress schemes all participants also noted that many groups never manage to get to development stage. At each step of the journey to development, groups face significant compromises to their vision and significant workloads involving complicated tasks that may result in failure. Given these challenges some may choose not to continue or feel that their vision is impossible to deliver in their area.

7.2   COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING CHAMPIONS

Participants perceived the support of key committed individual champions who wield power within a tier of governance as central to the development of community-led housing. I theorise that this support imbues legitimacy to community-led housing ideas and lends an actor's institutional power

to the process. Discussing their experience working with a successful community-led housing project, an adviser at Leeds Community Homes stated:

> *How do you navigate? Well, you try and find individuals that are sympathetic to what you're trying to say. The only way to navigate is to try and find individuals that are sympathetic* – EDI Consultant and Adviser, Leeds Community Homes

Several participants identified political support as one of the most important enablers of community-led housing in their region. Some also described the work of council officers who were committed to community-led housing supporting schemes within council planning departments and other levels of bureaucracy. In this section, I examine the role that these community-led housing champions are reported to play, and the characteristics and skills that define them.

Participants connected political will to the action of key politicians. They considered individual MPs as key allies, capable of wielding enough power to create opportunities for community-led housing practices at both a national and local level. For example, the support of individual MPs was highlighted as a contributing factor to the establishment of the Community Housing Fund. It was also linked to the form that the first Community Housing Fund (2016) took, specifically that the initial fund prioritised areas with high numbers of second homes, which corresponded to the housing concerns of that MP's constituency. A participant stated:

> *I think there was an MP down in Cornwall, who did a lot of work with the Chancellor to get something for Cornwall. And that obviously translated into a bigger piece for the country to deal with issues because, in particular, places like Cornwall and South Hams are really struggling with second home issues.* – Participant, Homes England

This experience highlights the role of a supporting narrative in establishing legitimacy for community-led housing practices with an institutional context as discussed in the previous chapter. A further crucial role for MPs was described by a participant in Dorset, who attributed the large proportion of the Community Housing Fund received by the previous West Dorset local authority in part to intervention by a local MP:

> *So [MP] was very keen on community housing and he promised they would do something. And in one of the budgets, the government had said we will spend 60 million pounds of community-led housing by the end of the financial year. And this year kept going on. We kept saying to our MP, to Homes England, what's going on?*
> – Housing Enabling Team Leader, Dorset Council

This experience also shows that whilst the participant considered it was the MP who exercised influence at a national level, actors within local government were applying lobbying pressure to that MP to generate resources. This suggests a network of individuals who are able to exercise influence is required in each key node of decision making. Beyond influence with central government, which may be limited by party allegiance, MPs may also have significant political capital locally which community-led housing groups can harness to exercise influence within local government. A participant involved with a cohousing group in Leeds explained the multiple routes they attempted to establish political support:

> I was told "it's vital to have your ward councillors on board". But I didn't know them, and the first attempt was some I got a bit of a brush off. And then somebody else, an MP on the other side of Leeds, told me way to get the ward councillors on board was to go through our local MP… who I knew, you know, fairly well anyway through an earlier business connection. So, he has been amazingly helpful. – Member, Community-led housing project in Leeds

These experiences illustrate the ability of an engaged MP to create productive environments for community-led housing as an actor with significant institutional power, but also the requirements of personal networks and lobbying required to generate this support.

The introduction of combined authority mayors has created an opportunity for community-led housing practices to gain traction at a regional level through favourable policy and funding streams. Different areas received different devolution deals, so the powers of these metro mayors are not uniform. However, these politicians can exert significant power over policy and strategy which can create a favourable environment for community-led housing schemes to be successful. Reflecting on the growth of community-led housing in different areas a participant from Leeds stated:

> So, it's not just all about the money, but when you've got a mayor, or, or kind of key people in their team who are really supportive of what you're doing is definitely going to help. – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

In the Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority case study there was strong political support for community-led housing. This support was linked to the key political figure of the Conservative Party Mayor, James Palmer (2017-2021), and a deputy mayor. Both individuals had previously held positions in East Cambridgeshire District Council during the period in which the community land trust model had been established locally. The Council had made community land trusts a corporate priority and adopted a local planning policy in favour of them. This support also

extended to the creation of a council owned enabling service and developer to work on bringing forward more schemes in the Council area. When the mayorship was established for the region in May 2017, the enabling service for East Cambridgeshire District Council transferred to the combined authority where it was intended to cover community-led housing development across the Cambridge and Peterborough city region. The programme manager of this service stated:

> *And so that's where community-led housing came in is – that's one of the programmes that the current combined authority Mayor, it was actually in his manifesto, and in his devolution deal was to further community-led housing… –* Community Housing Programme Manager, Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority

Due to this support the community-led housing enabling service enjoyed significant resources. Community-led housing schemes within the city region had access to city region funding streams for grants and finance, as alternatives to central government funding through Homes England. These schemes were also able to access advisor time for free without a predefined cap on hours. In comparison, the nearby East of England hub, which covered areas outside of the city region, limited groups to ten free hours of adviser time. The programme manager listed political support as the most important factor in enabling community-led housing growth, referencing the support they received at the city region level. This example demonstrates that city regions present a further opportunity to influence policy and practice and the actions of these entities might be closely tied to the political priorities of the elected mayors. The community-led housing sector has in places been established within these priorities but, as is the case at all political levels, it is in competition with other priorities.

At the level of the local authority, participants identified that individual councillors could be key allies for community-led housing groups. As discussed in the previous chapter, cooperation with local authorities can create opportunities for community-led housing practices to flourish. However, in order to establish these productive relationships, there must be enough political will from within the local authority to provide legitimacy for alternative practices. Participants reported that engaged councillors could hold the political capital necessary for the development of prototype schemes that might go against established practices within the local authority. The director of the East Cambridgeshire District Council owned development company, Palace Green Homes, was engaged in the first community land trust developments that occurred locally prior to the creation of the development company. Reflecting on the success factors involved in establishing the first

community land trust, which included significant support from a local councillor who was also deputy leader of the council, they stated:

It is definitely the case that if you can get your get your local councillors really supportive of that of the project, you know, it can really ease things through. Certainly, in terms of, you know, getting planning permission, that side of things, and perhaps finding some local money to support schemes. – Director, SME developer – wholly owned by East Cambridge District Council

This research has demonstrated that at any level of governance key individuals might exercise power in favour of community-led housing practices, and this can be a key enabling factor. This power might emerge officially through their role as decision makers or unofficially through networks and relationships. Identifying these individuals and establishing these relationships is therefore a key activity for the growth of community-led housing.

Despite political support emerging as a prominent enabling factor, the research demonstrates that the value of political support can be contingent on the political fate of individual actors. In particular, the findings suggest that if the idea of community-led housing is connected very strongly to an individual actor or a small collection of actors, it may equally lose strength with the coming and going of individuals and political parties. This can introduce the risk of any benefits for community-led housing being temporary or limited to one scheme. The Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority community housing programme provided a key example of this during the fieldwork period. After the defeat of James Palmer and the Conservative Party in the 2021 mayoral election by the Labour candidate Nik Johnson, I was told the community-led housing support service was going to be discontinued at the city region level and reinstated within East Cambridgeshire District Council. I observed that such institutional re-arrangement was common within the framework of the community-led housing advice hub landscape, an issue which is discussed in depth in the following chapter. As this was emerging a participant from an SME developer that worked on CLTs in East Cambridgeshire District Council stated:

Well, this is what we've been told about. You know, what we've got with the new man now who is Labour. Yeah. And he wants to do things for community. But he doesn't seem to be that interested in community land trusts. And is that because James Palmer was supporting it before? Well, maybe…. We have been told that Lib Dems, if they get elected, next time [in East Cambridgeshire District Council], they would scrap it, wouldn't do at all – Director, SME developer in East Cambridgeshire and surrounding region

The change in the Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority highlights a pitfall of political support for community-led housing. If the practices are identified with a specific political party locally, supportive institutional arrangements may not be maintained across administrations. This is especially a risk when institutions surrounding community-led housing are new or not fully embedded, and therefore may be more easily reconfigured or abolished.

Political power can, of course, also change in the other direction and introduce more opportunities for community-led housing. Still, participants suggested that the impact of political actors was in places severely limited by structural issues outside of the actors' influence. Participants noted that local authorities in which political leadership had changed to a party with a (local) pro-community-led housing stance remained limited by the existing rules and practices. Speaking of a council that had changed leadership, a participant stated:

> *I think that what we're up against is a lot of the kind of programs that the previous administration had. So, for example, the Torbay development corporation that wants to do its own development and probably would be the body that makes the loan and probably would want to charge us masses of interest. And, you know, the people who are running that have a different mindset to the councillors that have taken over the council.* – Board member, Wessex Community Assets

This experience highlights that any new administration might need to utilise time and political will to dismantle the work of previous political administrations to establish favourable conditions for community-led housing, a finding which could be generalised up to national government as well. Furthermore, the same participant argued that local authorities were also constrained by national rules and expectations. They reported that in local authorities where Liberal Democrats, seen as sympathetic to community-led housing, had taken control of councils previously controlled by the Conservatives it did not mean the councils were able to introduce radical reform:

> *In Somerset, again, I think most of the districts also went from Tory to Lib Dem control. So, you get the sense, again, that the councillors are sympathetic to, you know, Community Housing, but again, you know, they're as constrained as, as anyone else, in the same terms that I was talking about before. And so, they have their, you know, whatever it is, you know, there'll be some objectively defined housing targets that's imposed on them by central government. They've got to operate within the National Planning policy framework, you know, their, their ability to do anything more radical is, is very constrained.* – Board member, Wessex Community Assets

These findings on the role of political actors and their limits demonstrate that, whilst important, political support at any level may not always be enough to establish routes for community-led housing. One participant discussed a local authority in the North of England which was very keen to engage with community-led housing at both a political and officer level. However, without community housing money or right to buy receipts they were struggling to identify a source of funds. This complements the findings in the previous chapter which consider the limits of local authority budgets, assets, and policy options available to introduce community-led housing support. Therefore, it is important to recognise that political support alone cannot secure a future for community-led housing. The sector requires structural change to support the practice long term. However, such structural change requires actors, especially political figures, to explicitly engage in changing the institutional framework.

Participants' experiences suggest that political advocates alone cannot bring about the necessary conditions for community-led housing projects to emerge but must also engage with actors who are empowered to exercise influence over day-to-day bureaucratic activities. These individuals can ensure that community-led housing projects receive the required support from different departments of local authorities or enlist further political support. The CEO of Leeds Community Homes described these individuals as 'champions':

> *I think one of the key factors is having champions within the local authority. So, if you've got someone in there who will kind of agitate and lobby and have a word in someone's ear and see things through the different departments and silos that things have to find their way through. That's pretty key.* – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

Participants identified a key element of the work of these champions as tracking and promoting a community-led housing project through bureaucratic processes within different departments within the local authority. Many participants discussed relationships with local authorities in terms of engaging with planning departments and planners. Reflecting on these relationships, they noted the importance of an advocate from within the local authority, either a councillor or officer. For example, the housing enabling team leader in Dorset considered that he held an important liaison role between community groups and the council officers:

> *We have to be a conduit between the communities and the Council, which can be like this big, faceless organisation to most of them for really overstretched officers and really busy people who haven't got time, barely to do their day job... I work in the housing department. But when we go back to the offices, I will sit in the middle, by*

the planning department, and that is sort of like having that housing voice in

planning. So actually, I'm not a planner, but actually, I'm that that voice of housing

and the voice for the CLT which is the voice of the community. And I try to just keep

on to the other officers, to say "you've got to be helping these people". – Housing

Enabling Team Leader, Dorset Council

This example illustrates the necessity of committed individuals even within a local authority where community-led housing is officially embraced, and in which ring-fenced resources are available.

As in the case of political actors previously discussed, a reliance on key individuals can introduce a risk that community-led housing projects might struggle to maintain momentum as circumstances change. For example, a participant who had workedas a housing enabler in multiple councils and also was a volunteer member of two community-led housing groups explained that one of their projects had become stalled after they and another member who worked for the council had taken on new work roles in elsewhere. Although a replacement had been appointed to their previous role, a strategic housing post, they observed that the new post-holder was not pursuing community-led projects in the same way and focusing on other aspects of the role. They described:

Initially [the CLT] was really successful… But we've ended up with about three

activists who run this community land trust, and I think we really struggling to

reconnect with the broader people who were involved. And that's partly because the

people, those of us who were in the council at the time, have shifted over to, the two

of us have shifted over to become ex-employees and on that group, so we don't have

the same links into the council and the council has also reorganised and there's

different staff. – Housing Enabler, multiple councils in the South West

These experiences expose the significant work of individuals actors within governance structures in utilising their knowledge of institutional structures and institutional capital to support community-led housing schemes.

A further key actor within the community-led housing institutional context is the community-led housing enabler or technical adviser. However, in the research in some cases specific individuals from enabling hubs or other enabling services were discussed as having significantly influenced regional development of community-led housing. The research suggests there was an important role for innovative advisers or project managers that established ways of working within a region. These figures can then also be instrumental to community-led housing growth within a region. Such actors can provide a source of inspiration and vision for working through systems from previous

professional experience that dedicated volunteers may lack. Further, they can become involved in the day-to-day work of producing community-led housing schemes in a fashion that political advocates cannot. One participant stated:

> *Well, my experience with Middlemarch is with Steve and Allison. And I would say they're just fundamental, they've been fundamental in getting as many community-led housing groups going across Devon, as you know, it just wouldn't have happened without them…. the thing about Middlemarch. They absolutely know the system, they know the process* – Development Enabler, Somerset West and Taunton

According to participants specific individuals are valuable due to both their vision and leadership, and accumulated experience, relationships and knowledge. A participant in Leeds discussed their experience:

> *So, I think one of the best decisions we made right at the start was, you know, recognising, we didn't have a clue as to how to do this sort of thing. We sort of asked around, and, you know, realised that Lilac had a project manager, Jim. So we just approached him and said, Would you like to be our project manager too… He's, um, cornered the market in, you know, project managing co housing projects. So, most sort of community-led housing projects in the area, now seem to have Jim as their project manager, the ones that are making any progress* – Member, Community-led housing project in Leeds

As more community-led housing advisers emerge and, through centralised training, perhaps become more homogenous, it is possible that such individuals will become less important to the continued trajectory of community-led housing. However, this research suggests that dedicated individual actors in these roles are required to establish routes for community-led housing practices within local areas.

The importance of individuals points to an insecure and incomplete institutionalisation of community-led housing in some places that is reliant on strong advocacy by individuals to maintain momentum. However, such support, where strong, appears to be crucial in allowing community-led housing practices to take root regionally. In other words, it might be that significant amounts of individual agency are required until a process is institutionalised and until that point it remains vulnerable to changes in circumstances among individual actors. However, even after this point there will be a role for committed actors in championing community-led housing among other priorities. For example, participants noted that in parts of the South West, CLTs had become the

preferred way of delivering affordable housing creating a formalised and robust structure that does not always require individuals to push through individual schemes as strongly. However, even in these areas participants noted that liaison and influencing work was required to promote community-led housing groups' interests. The strength of established institutions is such that newer ideas, less aligned with other prevailing societal narratives, may need constant attention and maintenance to operate.

7.3 INSTITUTIONAL ENTREPRENEURS

My research has demonstrated that community-led housing advocates work to establish routes to delivery by engaging with narratives and seeking new institutional arrangements. This role could be understood through concept of the institutional entrepreneur (Garud, Hardy and Maguire, 2007), an actor that deliberately innovates within an institutional context through utilising existing rules, practices and narratives, and changing or repurposing them towards a new end. These entrepreneurs utilise their familiarity and experience of operating within the framework alongside existing relationships to meet their goals. They might harness their own relational power within the framework, but may also amass allies and secure the power of other actors to support their innovation. Institutional entrepreneurs could be overtly powerful members of a framework such as political leaders, or they could be less overtly powerful with a strong network of relationships and personal legitimacy to work through. In the research, this sort of activity was apparent in the actions that participants described undertaking as participants leveraged different capabilities to carve out routes for community-led housing.

The research suggests that actors with knowledge of institutional mechanisms endeavour to relate their own projects to narratives and practices in order to fit their processes into the institutional framework. As discussed in the previous chapter, community-led housing projects that are most aligned with existing rules, narratives and practices seem to experience the most success. Individuals' ability to do this effectively is predicated upon extensive knowledge of their wider field of action. For example, a participant from the UK Cohousing Network, when discussing future avenues for growth, stated that previously it had been difficult to work with housing associations on cohousing projects. However, recently they had experienced a higher interest from housing associations into opportunities to develop specialist housing for elderly people that include more communal spaces. They related this to policy narratives of 'ageing better'. Similarly, they are seeking to expand through existing government subsidy focuses on first time buyers through First Homes schemes. This example indicates how advocates immerse themselves within the wider field of housing and capitalise on any emerging avenues to promote their practice and leverage resources.

The ability to undertake this advocacy requires actors to be versed in the institutional context and have the skills to leverage the social context. For example, a participant described the work of a local authority 'champion' who was able to use their extensive knowledge of the institutional context and ability to navigate it to secure resources for the group:

> *She helped track down some funding, they when we realised, we didn't have enough*
> *development finance…She tracked down the housing infrastructure fund, possibly*
> *with help from Jim, and helped to land it so that was Leeds City Council that was*
> *awarded the housing and infrastructure. And, and then when there was still this hole*
> *in our funds, she found she was hunting around for other stuff and got us a million*
> *quid loan from the Public Works loan board. Which I discovered was set up in*
> *something like 1793, fascinating. I didn't even know such a thing existed.* – Member,
> Community-led housing project in Leeds

Actors may also use their knowledge of political and managerial practices to mould community groups into the formats required to achieve influence and engender support. A participant described the manoeuvres undertaken to create legitimacy for what was described as an 'idealistic' group aiming to build an unusual type of development with local eco building materials in Dorset. Once they had decided to aim for a specific local site, they endeavoured to engage more people within the local area specific to the site to form a group that could more effectively engage with the process:

> *So, by setting up this Local Community Housing group, that then becomes the official*
> *Community Housing group that sits at the table with those Dorset Council, so with,*
> *the developers; to say, "okay, we would like all of the affordable housing to be*
> *transferred to us. "... So that's, that's the kind of political move is to sort of give*
> *ourselves, you know, some kind of credible structure that represents the community*
> *and can be at that place at the table.* – Board member, Wessex Community Assets

Knowledge of the wider field of housing development and understanding how to engage with it to create community-led hosuing schemes is a key role of the enabling hubs, discussed in the following chapter. Actors engaged in this work are mediators and translators endeavouring to alchemise the ambition of community members into forms that align with prevailing practices in order to facilitate the scheme's success.

The research demonstrated that individuals undertaking institutional entrepreneurship may need to coordinate large numbers of actors establish all of the necessary resources and permissions. Participants described how a central actor or team of actors connected these disparate actors, with

different priorities and requirements, in order to garner enough resources and legitimacy to support a development. For example, a housing enabler in Dorset described the multiple processes necessary to establish an affordable cohousing development that had been established in their area:

> *And we've had quite a lot of grants from Homes England under the Community Housing Infrastructure Fund, we've done...well, it's been a long journey. But it will be all affordable, we got the land quite cheap, and some houses going to go to some NHS workers because that's how we're going to get the access [to the land]. And it's going to take an awful lot of work on the lettings' agreements, to make sure we actually were nominated some of them from the housing register, making sure they're the right fit for co-housing, which isn't for everybody. But it's going to work fine.* – Housing Enabling Team Leader, Dorset Council

In this example, the participant discussed working with the NHS to secure land, but participants also noted working with the Church of England and national parks among others in an effort to secure land. The variety of examples available highlights the range of actors who may be engaged by a skilled institutional entrepreneur. Different actors in the coalitions that the central actors form hold different roles, either with access to resources, legitimacy or both. For example, a Wessex board member involved in the eco-development in Dorset noted that engaging a well-known innovative architecture brand was in part a political move to create more interest in their ideas:

> *And so, the attraction of getting Assemble in is because they've got this national reputation. You know, it's good that they were shortlisted for the William Sutton prize, because it's quite high profile. It kind of allows these sorts of broader set of ideas to be taken more seriously than if it was just us coming in and saying, you know, why don't you do something a bit more interesting.* – Board member, Wessex Community Assets

This sort of coalition building seems especially crucial where the proposed schemes do not fit neatly into institutional forms of affordable housing practices, as with these two examples. These examples demonstrate the value of networking and idea sharing between actors and of committed community-led housing advocates to allow them to acquire sufficient social capital to achieve their aims.

Further, some community-led housing advocates without requisite social capital used campaigning to create legitimacy for their ideas and generate power for their group. An example from a participant's experience of establishing a cohousing community in York shows that campaigning can

generate legitimacy and resources for projects. Their campaign recruited powerful supporters for community-led housing through political pressure, though the commitments gained through campaigning needed to be sought multiple times before action occurred. The participant described a campaign surrounding the sale of public land which challenged the prevailing practice of selling public land to the highest bidder:

> *And so, we started campaigning around this idea around whether the council should be selling off its assets to the highest bidder. Now we know that that is central governments message, it's a Conservative government, of course, that's what they're going to be doing. Best Value means the most money, but we sort of challenged that locally and got quite a lot of support for that.* – Associate, Leeds Community Homes

The group lost their first campaign to purchase a previously publicly owned building, but through the process they gained a commitment from a senior figure in the council to help them find a site for their community-led housing scheme. As a year went by without this occurring the group began to mobilise again, around a further site which was for sale. The participant explained that this threat of further public criticism resulted in the prioritisation of the group's demands and attempts to find a space for them. Eventually this resulted in the group being allocated a small section of an existing development to build an eco-focused cohousing style development. Reflecting on this experience the participant narrated the change in relationships between the group and the council over the period:

> *Then the big thing that the [first campaign] demonstrated was that if we are to go on the open market, and try and compete with people, the homes won't be affordable, because we'd be spending so much on the land. So, the City of York council after our sort of a public slagging off of them, we have actually came around with a really quite engaged process.* – Associate, Leeds Community Homes

This example illustrates the power of an engaged citizen group, centred on a smaller collection of committed individuals, who were able to advocate for their own projects. Public campaigning can be effectively utilised alongside, or instead, of less visible methods of obtaining influence. Yet it also demonstrates the structural lack of power of these groups, who are unable to compete financially with investors and must rely on the power of the local state to procure resources for them. It is through these relationships that community-led housing approaches to housing might be able to take root locally.

The differentiated nature of the community-led housing landscape in England is testament to the ingenuity of institutional entrepreneurs acting locally according to their own perception of the institutional framework, relationships and narratives about community-led housing. This has created a rich repository of approaches that allow other schemes to access blueprints of approaches which potentially lessens the risk and burden of achieving a successful scheme. For example, Lilac cohousing was described as 'trailblazing' and participants described faster processes to establish CLTs in both the South West and East Cambridgeshire District Council areas once prototype projects were established, though it was still not fast or easy. However, such heterogeneity presents challenges in itself as legitimacy for models is not forged at the national level, so the scope of replicability of each model is geographically limited.

7.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has analysed the roles of agents engaged with the community-led housing sector and the actions they undertake to support growth of the sector. It has demonstrated that a theorisation of the growth of community-led housing should include the significant influence of the individual agents operating within an institutional framework, in a structuration process that creates change in the institutional context through the forging of paths. It highlights the significance of the agency of individuals in the relationship between actor and institutional context.

This research has found that community-led housing projects are often reliant on core individuals who undertake much of the work and/or have specialist skills and connections necessary for development. Moore (2015) has described the volunteers within community-led housing projects as typically socially engaged individuals with professional backgrounds and available time capacity, often due to being retired. This research corroborates this and builds upon it by suggesting that, currently, the commitment, social ties and professional skills of these individuals are major explanatory factors in the success of a given project. The finding that collective housing models struggle to equally distribute work support those of Arbell, Middlemiss and Chatterton (2020) in their study of micro-level interaction between co-operative members which indicated significant variation in interest and capacity to engage in day-to-day affairs and decision making for the collective. The findings presented in this chapter also reiterate that deep engagement with the process is lengthy and time consuming, and that engagement with this as a volunteer is an extremely significant undertaking. This scenario leads to more motivated or available group members being drawn further into a project, often creating a small core of leaders. This reflects what Griffin (2019) found in her study of a CLT development in Bristol in which different group members had significantly different investment, interest, and ability to consistently engage with daily decision

making. These findings emphasise that community-led housing is not securely positioned or widely distributed within an institutional context that provides access to resources. These resources were therefore procured by leaders within the group exercising social capital. A more structured route to resources and a process less reliant on, and demanding for, a small group of individuals, could reduce dependency on these prominent individuals, though the findings suggest a strong leader is integral to many groups.

This chapter has discussed the impact of political activity at different levels on the growth of community-led housing. Furthermore, it offers examples of individual politicians at all scales of governance who have acted as key allies for the community-led housing sector. The findings highlight that these more powerful individuals are nodes in a network of actors. Such a network required activation by community-led housing advocates either within community groups or as advisers and intermediaries to access these political actors and convince them to support community-led housing, either through supportive policy or direct support for a scheme. Participants described taking attempting multiple routes in order to reach influential individuals within a network, often utilising their own social networks in order to do so. This reinforces the finding that a particular individual within a community-led housing group is often considered the key to that group's success, as without the social network of particular individuals some groups may not have been able to access the right individual in order to make the case for their project.

The research also found examples of public facing campaign work being utilised to access decision makers. This demonstrates that generating this political capital is crucial for a group's success. However, the research also noted that political support, though an important factor, requires maintenance and is subject to changes in the prevailing political power structures and dynamics within a local area. Previous research has highlighted the success of particular forms of community-led housing when advocates capitalise on prevailing political narratives (Lang and Mullins, 2019). Authors have evidenced how influencing and alliance forming activity operates through case studies of individual projects (McGowan, Dembski and Moore, 2020; Thompson, 2020b). This thesis adds to these understandings by arguing that social networks and interactions between individuals are crucial to enacting these coalitions and that these coalitions are vulnerable to changes within the political environment.

Key individuals for supporting community-led housing schemes were also identified within the bureaucracies of local government. These 'champions' working within local authorities were identified by participants as playing the role of a guide within the institutional structures. These individuals also acted as a connection between community groups and other actors within the local

authority. Forming and maintaining relationships with these allies is therefore a key enabling activity within each local authority area. The centrality of individual actors again suggests that community-led housing is not fully institutionalized and is reliant on actors choosing to adapt existing institutional forms.

This chapter has also demonstrated that actors often skilfully navigated their institutional environment in order to establish community-led housing schemes. This process and these actors are engaging in institutional entrepreneurship (Garud, Hardy and Maguire, 2007). These actors harness available institutional resources, that is existing rules, narratives and practices; and adapt them where possible in support of their goals. Lang and Mullins (2019) have previously noted such actors' role in community-led housing, noting their importance for institutional field formation. The actions of such institutional entrepreneurs alter the structure of the institutional context and can present new 'paths' for community-led housing initiatives. These paths create more stable access to resources and permissions for specific types of projects that are a locally established type, such as the CLT model in the South West and that seen in East Cambridgeshire, or, previously, empty homes refurbishment in Leeds.

8 UNDERSTANDING THE ENABLING HUB PROGRAMME

This chapter focuses on the construction of community-led housing enabling hubs – regional organisations that support community-led housing development – and their role in the wider institutional context.   It aims to answer the third research question: *How do actors construct the role of community-led housing enabling hubs and what are the processes through which hubs navigate their local institutional context to promote community-led housing development regionally?*

Enabling hubs represent an innovation in the institutional context of community-led housing, both locally and nationally, and have not received significant attention in the literature so far. This chapter discusses the enabling hub concept nationally and within the context of the three case study areas. First, I discuss the rationale behind the development of enabling hubs, including how funding was acquired and the relationship to existing enabling activity. Then, I discuss the implementation of the enabling hub concept, arguing that the interaction between the national programme and local circumstances have led to significant variation in the form and function of enabling hubs in different parts of England. The final part of this chapter discusses the operation of the enabling hubs including the role of advisers, the impact of hubs and the way in which organisations have responded to short term funding cycles, as core funding for enabling hubs was not continued. The chapter concludes by discussing what this programme suggests about the nature of supporting community-led housing initiatives and the relationship between different levels of governance within the community-led housing sphere.

Stakeholders established community-led housing hubs in order to support the growth of community-led housing within a region. Enabling hubs were established to host community-led housing advisers who could support community groups through a housing development scheme. The Community Led Homes partnership website states that enabling hubs "are regional organisations that provide one-to-one technical support to groups" and that "the evidence shows that when an enabling hub exists, the more community led homes are built in the vicinity." (Community Led Homes, n.d.). There were 28 enabling hubs registered across England over the course of the Enabling Hub Grant Programme, between April 2019 and January 2020. These formed a network overseen by the Community Homes partnership. These were made up of newly established enabling programmes and investment in existing programmes. There were two major investments in the Enabling Hub network in the years surrounding this research, which took place between September 2020 and June 2021. The largest investment came from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) including a programme of funding for enabling hubs in the second Community-Led Housing fund, which launched in April 2019 and required all funds to be spent by March 2021. The second largest

investment came from the National Lottery funded Power to Change Homes in Community Hands programme which funded five urban enabling hubs between 2019 and 2021.

8.1 RATIONALE FOR ENABLING HUB PROGRAMME

The establishment of an enabling hub programme was a long-term ambition of actors within the community-led housing sector. A participant from Nationwide Foundation recollected that the hub model had been discussed extensively throughout their engagement with the sector as a method of growing the sector beyond a niche role in the housing market. They recalled that policy interest and funding availability had built upon each other to produce the existing extensive hub network:

> *So that hub and spoke conversation has always been in the sector since I've been involved for a number of years, and when we launched our grants programme, we were thinking about who we wanted to fund… and then that's all at the same time the Community Housing Fund started to come out as well. And there's been quite a like a sort of snowball effect quite quickly of that growing to the point today that actually we've got more than 20 plus hubs across the country* – Programme Manager, Nationwide Foundation

Participants explained that the concept of the enabling hubs was borne out of an analysis of the common barriers that groups faced and a recognition that without advice and support these barriers could be difficult and costly for community-led housing groups to address as non-professionals. These barriers included accessing central government finance and becoming a registered provider of social housing, if applicable, but also support at the start in forming and becoming incorporated and accessing seed corn funding for early work. This approach to growing the sector gained traction with stakeholders and major funding streams were made available for enabling hubs from the national government Community Housing Fund and Power to Change Homes in Community Hands programme.

Community-led housing sector actors lobbied a case for support for enabling hubs from Government as part of the Community Housing Fund. Actors within the community housing sector argued that a lack of appropriate advice and guidance would prevent groups from engaging with the funding opportunities presented by the Community Housing Fund. They further argued that existing secondary infrastructure organisations in England, notably the CLT umbrellas such as Wessex CLT project or Cornwall CLT, had been successful in supporting the growth of a local community-led housing sector in their region. The overarching rationale for investing in an enabling hub network

was based upon stakeholders' argument that unequal accesses to advice and guidance for community-led housing groups would limit the growth of the sector:

> *So, it was [the CLT network] actually, that pointed out that one of the major missing pieces in the jigsaw of getting this sector up and running properly and developing properly in this country – is the lack of availability of what they call sector infrastructure, which by which they mean a body of professional expertise to handhold people through the process. And that just made sense to us.* – Participant, MHCLG

This narrative of the role of enabling hubs is reflected in the enabling hub grant programme literature which states:

> *The primary aim of this grant programme is to expand the network of Enabler Hubs - regional organisations supporting community led housing groups to deliver projects, particularly those likely to bid to Homes England or the Greater London Authority (GLA) for the Community Housing Fund.*

> – (Community Led Homes, 2019)

The expansion of the enabling hub network then, was clearly linked to the investment of central government in the growth of the sector, linked to narratives of professionalisation and mainstreaming.

In some areas, there were existing organisations engaged in some of this enabling work. However, coverage was limited, and the availability of different skills was variable across the country. Therefore, the enabling hub programme then was envisaged as both supporting existing infrastructure and creating new services in order to ensure access to quality and locally relevant advice, support and guidance throughout England:

> *So, some places had very well-established hubs, some places have nothing, some places had some form of support, but maybe not for everything. So, we developed a grant scheme for enabler hubs. A development scheme for new hubs wanting to start up to help them get business plan together and get the right kind of skills and experience and see what kind of model would work for them. And a full grant for those enabling hubs that are already running to help them grow and make sure they sort of develop in the right way.* – Director, Community Led Homes

This demonstrates the way in which the fund was seen as a standardising tool that would bring the same experience of localised sector infrastructure to all regions and all forms of community-led housing.

Stakeholders were also motivated to develop the enabling hubs in order to support a stable community-led housing profession, based on the rationale that, to enable a group of qualified professionals available to support groups, a cadre of advisers needed to be accredited and a system for ensuring that those professionals could secure a consistent income needed to be established. In this way the enabling hub programme also aimed to support the sector through the establishment of a profession of community-led housing adviser, which would allow knowledge and experience to be retained by the sector. The MHCLG project summary for the sector support programme listed priority one as "a*n increase in the scale and capacity of the national network of professional local advisors ("enablers") to support community groups through the project planning and development stages"* (MHCLG, 2017, p. 1)*.* The form of the local enabling hub served to provide these professional advisers with an employer and mechanism to access a steady income. Advisers could be paid by the enabling hub whilst working on projects rather than securing grant funding for each individual project or working for a final fee only payable at the end of a long-term project. This approach was also intended to move the sector towards a financially self-sustaining model. The hub manger for Community Led Homes described the intended system:

> *So, through the hub, there's an ongoing model, but doesn't theoretically need grant funding to carry on providing support to more community-led housing groups locally. Whereas if it was just an individual network of advisors, you'd continue to need grant funding to be able to do anything, you know, you can't ask individual person to upfront fund its work for free* for *five years and then get paid 20 grand or whatever, at the end of that. And so having the hub makes all of that work better for those that are working on it. –* Hub Manger, Community Led Homes

Stakeholders hoped this approach would enable individuals to stay within the profession and build skills, experience and relationships. Participants' descriptions show that enabling hubs were intended to create a base for a profession of community-led housing advisers with specialist regional knowledge.

8.1.1 History of the enabling hub concept

The ambition to develop an enabling hub network was based on established precedents of mechanisms to support emerging community action through regionally based secondary infrastructure both in the UK and abroad. This included established organisations such as Wessex

Community Assets, Leeds Community Homes and East Midlands Community-led housing as well as looser networks of charities, organisations and individuals, as was the case in Bristol. Furthermore, some functions were hosted by local authorities such as the East Cambridgeshire advice centre that worked across the East of England. Examples of more established community-led housing sectors in other countries were linked rhetorically to the availability of professional support:

> *You know, it's, and this is where the hubs come in, that people may decide that they, you know, be sitting in a pub in a village and looking out the window at a field and say, why don't we just build some houses out there? And they go, yeah, it's a great idea. Then they go, well, how do we do that? … You know in sensible countries like Germany and Sweden and Denmark, there is a professional body of expertise, who they use, phone up and ask them to come and hold your hand through the whole process. And that's what's missing. Why we've got the hubs hopefully, that's hopefully their purpose.* – Participant, MHCLG

Support organisations were emerging in a piecemeal way across England already. CLT 'umbrellas', such as Wessex CLT project, were piloted with funding from the Carnegie UK Trust and were regarded as catalysts for the growth of the CLT models in their areas. Wessex Community Assets noted in a 2017 funding bid to the Nationwide Foundation that "12 CLT projects have been completed, totalling 123 affordable homes" (Wessex Community Assets, 2017, Unpublished document, p.2). Actors also referenced the role of secondary co-operatives in supporting the growth of Co-operative housing in the 1980s. Both the emergent CLT infrastructure and the historical secondary co-operatives were utilised as models and examples for a proposed expansion of the enabling hub network and the establishment of new hubs. Characteristics imagined for enabling hubs and inculcated into the enabling hub grant programme reflect the findings of an influential report from Power to Change entitled "Delivering a community-led housing enabling hub service: experience and lessons from existing practice" (Duncan and Lavis, 2018)

In particular, participants suggested that the Enabler Hub programme had been heavily influenced by the operating model of the Wessex Community Assets and Middlemarch enabling service: The Wessex CLT Project. Discussing the impact of the project on the design of the programme, a participant from Community Led Homes said:

> *And I know from the National CLT network point of view, [Wessex] were one of the umbrella organisations and when we've done some work in the past – looking at kind of sustainable models, it was very much built around the Wessex model – in terms of*

pipeline fees, and when we looked at how a hub can build up fees, we looked at the

Wessex model… – Director, Community Led Homes

Following the example of the Wessex enabling hub model meant the financial model through which Wessex Community Assets with Middlemarch Consultants had provided advice and support for several CLT developments in the South-West of England through working with a housing association partner that funded the development. Wessex Community Assets recouped the funding for advice and guidance at the end of the CLT project through fees included in the cost of development paid for by the housing association. This provided the financial basis from which advisers could support further projects. This model directly influenced the design of the programme, though participants raised the concern about the extent to which the Wessex experience was not replicable. Addressing this theme, the Director of Community Led Homes described their change in perspective over the period of implementation as it became clear to them that enabling hubs based in different areas needed to pursue different business models:

> *And it's been really interesting for me coming in over the last two years and looking*
> *at the hubs because actually, I think the Wessex model worked very specifically in a*
> *rural area where you had smaller housing associations, which you could partner*
> *with… So, it's always quite a good one to kind of benchmark but it's not always*
> *replicable in other areas. – Director, Community Led Homes*

The influence of the Wessex experience was clear as a key precedent in establishing the enabling hub programme. However, the model related strongly to a specific CLT – housing association partnership model which provided a steady stream of schemes from which to charge fees. However, most areas did not have a locally embedded model that could be replicated consistently enough to provide secure income for a hub.

Wessex Community Assets was not the only precedent for the enabling hub model, in some urban areas enabling work was conducted through a network of community-led housing practitioners. This work was particularly influential on the Power to Change Homes in Community Hands programme, which a participant stated drew on examples from Leeds and Bristol:

> *And [Power to Change] had created their Homes in Community Hands Programme -*
> *around just after all of that [setting up of LCH] happened, really. And so, we applied*
> *into it, and us and Bristol were the first two organisations to get hub funding. So,*
> *then we were a hub. And I guess we've kind of been a hub before, but this funding*
> *was pretty much inspired by what we were doing and what we and Bristol were*

doing. And so, it was to do exactly what we wanted to do, which was to enable

groups to do community-led housing. – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

Existing enabling services provided exemplars in the thinking of those with the power to distribute funds. These precedents shaped the design of the funding programmes and through interaction with these programmes existing organisations took on new identities as official 'hubs' and were granted legitimacy as the local source for community-led housing support.

Some research participants' perspectives were informed by the collapse of the secondary co-operatives of the 70s and 80s after government funding ended. In particular, a participant from the Confederation of Co-operative Homes saw this experience as a crucial example for the contemporary community-led housing sector growth. They recounted that they had worked to bring attention to this historical antecedent and ask, "how do we not repeat that mistake?". Their interpretation focused on the manner in which the secondary co-ops were reliant on government grant:

> *[Secondary Co-ops] became so reliant upon, dependent upon and comfortable within*
> *an environment of being distributed government grants to do what they were doing.*
> *And the inherent weakness there is that if the government changes its policy, or*
> *there's a change of government, or there is a, you know, a financial crisis that*
> *requires government to redeploy its funds, then all of a sudden you fall on your face*
> *very quickly, because you have created a structure that is basically completely grant*
> *dependent.* – Co-Director, Confederation of Co-operative Housing

The memory of the trajectory of the secondary Co-ops was associated with decline and highlighted the difficulties in maintaining a mid-level third sector infrastructure. Some participants used this history to strongly argue for financial independence for the emergent enabling hubs as the key to longevity.

8.1.2   Enabling Hub characteristics

The enabling hub funding was linked to several eligibility criteria. This criteria required enabling hubs to be formed in defined geographical areas, to engage key stakeholders in those areas, provide advice on all forms of community-led housing and employ experienced advisers. Furthermore, the programme required enabling hubs to have business plans which demonstrate a plan to become financially self-sustaining. The Director of the Community Led Homes partnership highlighted these elements as key criteria for a hub:

The kind of the things that we look for enabling hub is to have a business plan and
the full suite of skills they cover all forms of community-led housing, all stages, what
the accredited advisor scheme gives them, that they have a kind of defined
geography that makes sense to them, whether that's a kind of political geography or
it's built around a pipeline. – Director, Community Led Homes

These conditions represent a structuring impact of the enabling hub programme which relates to narratives about the importance of a professionalised sector but also emphasises a locally embedded sector.

To address the perceived need to assure the quality of advisers, the Community Led Homes partnership established an accreditation process for community-led housing advisers, funded through the sector development programme. This further relates to narratives of professionalising the sector and standardising access to advice across England. The training programme, delivered by the Confederation of Co-operative Housing (Confederation of Co-operative Housing), provided training for advisers in all types of community-led housing models and working with community groups. The accreditation process was carried out in association with the Chartered Institute of Housing and gaining accreditation entailed passing four accreditation exams. An adviser's accredited status lasts for three years at which point they need to be re-accredited. Describing the motivation to establish and deliver the programme a participant stated:

We saw that there was a variable skills level and within the advisors, as in actually
having access to a local advisor anyway, and just that overall understanding of what
Community Housing is and having access to the resources. So, we devised a training
and accreditation scheme for advisors to set a standard for advisors. So, you needed
to complete modules, which takes you from the very early stages all the way through
to managing housing and look all forms of Community Housing. – Co-Director,
Confederation of Co-operative Housing

This process was identified by participants as an important mechanism through which the sector could build the skills base of those working on community-led housing projects. Stakeholders hoped this process would increase not only adviser competency but the trust that community groups and other stakeholders had in engaging with advisers. However, some participants found the centralising force of the partnership to be problematic and to represent a specific vision for the future of community-led housing that did not leave enough room for innovation:

> *There are courses in, you know, this is the development process for community-led*
> *housing, or this is what you need to do around governance… And it feels very stuck in*
> *a way and not open.* – Board member, Wessex Community Assets

Overall, the introduction of national training and processes was welcomed by most participants working in the sector. However, even participants who spoke in favour of the training programme also emphasised the need for local knowledge and approaches which is reflected in the enabling hub network of locally based infrastructure. Ultimately, there was a push and pull between the ambition to grow a professional sector and efforts to adhere to core values which actors hold for the sector, including the ability of any community-led housing project to be hyper-specific to the perceived needs and wants of the community involved.

According to participants, the rationale for a network of local enabling hubs was based on a narrative that locally embedded advisers would be more effective at supporting community-led housing than advisers who worked nationally. Enabling hubs were intended to be geographically defined without significant overlap, with staff working within bounded localities to support groups and engage with local stakeholders. Describing their approach, the Director of Community Led Homes said:

> *Our rationale is the best way to support groups is to put money into their local*
> *enabling infrastructure so they have* direct *support at local level, there's only so*
> *much you can do nationally. For that kind of group interaction, you need to do it*
> *locally…, they shouldn't be overlapping and competing with other hubs, and they*
> *should have the right connections with relevant stakeholders and be engaged with*
> *all the right sort of parties.* – Director, Community Led Homes

This explanation highlights the expectation that an adviser's experience within a local area and ability to be located nearby would enhance the support they could provide groups and that a local hub would be capable of working with local stakeholders to create a more conducive operating environment for community-led housing project. Focusing on similar themes and adding the idea that local hubs could diffuse power and decision making from the national level, a participant from a national level infrastructure organisation explained why they had supported establishing a regional substructure that sits underneath the national organisations:

> *Firstly, I don't just want to build a top-heavy national structure where everything sits,*
> *all the influence, all the power, all the leverage, if you like. And also, you need to*
> *have some intermediary level of the structure that understands local markets and*

understands local, local communities and their needs. – Co-Director, Confederation of Co-operative Housing

This demonstrates that amongst national stakeholders engaged with the development of the hub programme, there was an almost universal narrative favouring local hubs. Though enabling hubs were encouraged to be local, the Power to Change working paper on hub design also emphasised that the area should not be too small in order to facilitate a larger number of community-led housing projects for the hub (Duncan and Lavis, 2018). However, as discussed further in the chapter, during implementation these geographical distinctions were not always simple to define, enabling hubs expanded their reach into adjacent areas without a specified hub and there was overlap of personnel between enabling hubs and across areas in their actual operational delivery.

Enabling hubs were intended to both support groups through the planning and development of housing projects and to develop a stronger operational environment for community-led housing locally through marketing and influencing work, though participants indicated there were differences of opinion over how much resource should be allocated to the second aim. As a core service, enabling hubs were intended to act as a source of technical information and guidance that would allow non-professionals to engage with housing projects from an informed position and better enable other stakeholders to engage with community groups. As a secondary role, enabling hubs' remits included influencing policy and network building with partners to create more opportunities for community-led housing. Both aims were set out in the Enabling Hub Grant programme prospectus, though influencing work was listed as a secondary aim. However, the extent to which enabling hubs should utilise resource in marketing and influencing work was the topic of deliberation:

> *And the big question, I guess, is some enabler hubs spend a lot of time on the maybe marketing or influencing marketing and influencing their services. So, marketing as in trying to get the information out. And influencing is trying to work with local authorities and influence policy and things. And others just concentrate all their time on actually work, working directly with groups. Because by working with groups, you then prove the concept and that in itself is your marketing tool or local authority. And I suppose that really, I want to know, what is the best way to enable hubs to be splitting their time?* – Director, Community Led Homes

Participants observed that some enabling hubs engaged in this sort of activity more than others, although, as discussed in the later section on operation, all hubs were engaged in this work to some extent. This split of roles has implications for the continued role of enabling hubs and is a key

rationale for embedding the hubs locally. Significant amounts of influencing work might be seen as a shorter-term role that creates the conditions for schemes. However, if the enabling hub is focused on technical guidance that can be delimited from the role of local authority housing enablers, then it more strongly supports the image of a standalone social enterprise.

A key aspect of the rationale for developing enabling hubs was the expectation that enabling hubs would, over time, become financially self-sustaining. This assumption reflects a narrative that independence from government grants and a more business-orientated approach would result in a stronger and more sustainable sector. An element of the drive towards establishing enabling hubs becoming financially independent was the idea this would make them resilient to changes in political attitudes towards community-led housing approaches, by capitalising on the current Government's willingness to invest in order to create a stronger sector:

> *And one of the things when we were when we were working with governments had to establish the framework for this new national network of hubs was this desire right for the outset to get them to be thinking; this funding that government's giving you is, is to buy you the time to build your business model or create your sustainability* – Co-Director, Confederation of Co-operative Housing

The perception among national stakeholders was that, rather than the funding providing a short-term boost to the sector, enabling hubs were expected to form a basis for a future more stable sector. This narrative was well-embedded within the national stakeholder group. However, in practice, many participants at the time of the interviews felt it was unlikely that many of the hubs, especially the newer hubs, would be able to continue as self-sustaining entities.

8.2 IMPLEMENTATION

The research found that during implementation of the enabling hub programme the formation of the enabling hubs was structured by institutional constraints on two levels: vertically from the national level and horizontally from the local level. Structuring forces stemmed from the national level in which the basics of the enabling hub concept were prescribed, and resources acquired, and from the local level where the eventual form of enabling hub was negotiated by local stakeholders. Through the grant programmes and, in particular, the national Community-led housing Enabler Hub Grant Programme, the landscape of support for community-led housing was expanded, formalised, and homogenised into a network of organisations that were of the class "Community-led housing Enabling Hub". However, implementation of the enabling hub programme entailed interaction with already existing relationships and locally established ways of working. These interactions required

negotiation between stakeholders. The research suggests that the idea was adopted confidently at the national level, but implementation within different local institutional contexts caused some tensions. This demonstrates that the imagined niche for the enabling hubs was not shared by all actors within the field but entailed conflict and negotiation in order to gain legitimacy.

The Community-led housing Enabler Hub Grant Programme was a powerful institutional tool in the formation of the enabling hub network: it provided resources and legitimacy to hubs and set out rules for their operation. The programme had £2.6 million available and was provided by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) to accompany the second Community Housing Fund. The fund was managed by the Community Led Homes partnership consisting of two grant types; emerging hubs could bid for Development Grants up to £50,000 and pre-established hubs and those that had been through the development phase could bid for Full Grants with a maximum of £150,000 available per organisation from both grants. The fund was open to applications between April and September 2019 and required all money awarded to be spent by March 2021. The Community-led housing Enabler Hub Grant Programme expanded, formalised, and standardised the enabling hub network. In total the programme funded 28 enabling hubs across England These were made up of newly established enabling programmes or the re-branding and adjustment of existing practices. The programme represented a significant investment in the concept and provided a tool for infrastructure support to grow in England. It also suggested a form that this infrastructure should take through rules that reflected the narratives of national stakeholders and policy makers about what would make the sector successful.

8.2.1 Negotiating the enabling hub form locally

The introduction of funding for enabling hubs necessitated local negotiation over the form the hub would take. Though there was guidance from the national level and rules connected to the funding about how enabling hubs should be formed, they were also locally embedded and subject to influence from locally embedded networks, relationships and ways of working.

Considering the balance of local and national influence on the formation of enabling hubs, a participant from Confederation of Co-operative Housing, a member of the national partnership, stated:

> *On the one hand you want to enable people at a regional level to establish their own thing, and to then shape things. So, it's able to respond to market needs. But at the same time, from a national perspective, you want all of this to sit within a broad direction of travel, and a broad policy direction that you want the sector to take and that you're seeking to achieve.* – Co-Director, Confederation of Co-operative Housing

A participant also noted that diversity between enabling hubs also meant that some hubs did not follow the best practice guidelines outlined in the Power to Change report (Duncan and Lavis, 2018) due to a need to pragmatically balance between an ideal form of an independent hub controlled by community stakeholders that supported all forms of community-led housing throughout the process, with what was pragmatically possible in each area given funding, capacity and political boundaries. They stated:

> *On, the one hand, you could take something like the report the Power to Change wrote, you know, that set out what they felt to be the ideal features of an enabling hub. And then, but equally, you could have all 28 hubs and probably find variations in all of those 28 hubs. And the problem with setting out an ideal form is that, you know, it's all a bit abstract, it's not going to reflect a particular, you know, territory or history or political dimensions. So, I think it seems that pragmatically, you know, the powers that be, have sort of become quite open about what a form, you know, what form a hub should take.* – Board member, Wessex Community Assets

These quotes illustrate the degree of discretion afforded to locally situated stakeholders in establishing the form and functions of enabling hubs, demonstrating that locally embedded stakeholders and existing ways of working were significant in shaping enabling hubs.

In areas where actors were engaged in community-led housing development work, establishing enabling hubs required stakeholders to translate their current practices into the institutional forms prescribed by the funding programmes. A participant involved in the creation of the Eastern Community Homes hub described the process:

> *They had a grant fund to set up hubs. Some of them have been set up in just individual counties, some of them across two counties, you just went for the model you thought best for your area. So that's how we started to come together and discuss is this feasible, it was kind of like an opener, there's two tranches for that the first tranche of money, we had to write the business plan. So, we applied for that got that money, wrote a business plan. And the second tranche of money is what we are using now to start that development of that business plan.* – Chief Executive, Cambridge ACRE (Eastern Community Homes)

The new enabling hubs interacted with existing infrastructure, such as existing networks or CLT umbrellas, in different ways: in the North East a network model of smaller hubs was maintained, and in the East of England the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority enabling services

worked in partnership with Eastern Community Homes. The research also indicated that the territories of existing enabling hubs expanded or contracted in different areas, reflecting the settlement among stakeholders. These negotiations also included taking a decision on what organisation would be host of the enabling hub function. Participants described different levels of debate during this process, but throughout participants' recollections of the development of enabling hubs in different local areas, the themes of negotiation and debate were clear:

> *As I said, I don't know how it's working in other places, but I think the West of England one, they have a kind of wider stakeholder group, a kind of steering group for it. And then there was always this big debate, should it be part of Bristol CLT or separate or whatever?* – Participant, Community development practitioner – Multiple roles

The negotiations about the territory and host of a hub are elements of a process of constructing the role of the enabling hub between stakeholders and agreeing the boundaries of the institution being created.

The research shows that the concept of discrete local enabling hubs covering defined regional areas created some challenges during implementation. Bidding for funding required stakeholders to agree geographies, which in some cases led to protracted negotiations and tensions before compromises could be reached. For example, the Wessex Community Housing Hub was set-up in the area previously covered by the Wessex CLT project which included Devon, Dorset, and Somerset. However, stakeholders in Devon, after a period of debate, decided to establish a separate enabling hub for Devon. That enabling hub was hosted by Devon Communities Together, a rural community council in the Action with Communicates in Rural England (ACRE) network that already delivered some housing enabling services especially Housing Needs surveys. This decision appeared to reflect a strong link in the minds of stakeholders between the concept of community-led housing and the creation of CLTs providing affordable housing for local people following housing needs surveys. Reflecting on the process of establishing the Wessex Community Housing Hub a participant recalled:

> *And then in 2019, the government finally released the funding for hubs. And so, we bid to community led homes and we got 18 months funding to set up a hub, but by this time, people in Devon, it mostly in the community council and some local authorities that decided that they wanted to set up their own hub. And so, the funding that we got from community led homes was just to set up a Dorset and Somerset hub notwithstanding the fact That actually the largest number of schemes*

that we were working with and continue to work with, were in Devon. – Board member, Wessex Community Assets

A participant described similar negotiation between stakeholders over geographical areas as related to the Power to Change funding, which was more prescriptive geographically than the MHCLG enabling hub programme as it was aimed at individual city regions. They stated:

So, Power to Change fund five regions that they've identified that they're going to support financially for hubs. Now, they got the map out, drew the boundaries for those five areas. The people in those five areas didn't come together and say, "this is our community, we need this hub", the funder made that decision for them, and that created some tension within those areas. – Co-Director, Confederation of Co-operative Housing

This example illustrates the way in which the ideas of those designing institutional mechanisms may need to alter in order to be accepted at the local scale.

In addition to the overlapping geographies of enabling hubs, the research found that individual advisers were also not geographically bounded in the work which they undertook. Participants also described an operating context in which many advisers worked in different areas, holding part time or short-term contracts in different regions. In part, it was suggested this was evidence that there was not enough work for wholly local advisers. Reflecting a demand for advisers which aligned to shared visions and values rather than geographical affiliation, Leeds Community Homes developed a subsidiary called People Powered Homes that had a remit to deliver community-led housing advice and support work wherever it was employed to. The Leeds Community Homes enabling hub had already been operating quite far beyond the boundaries of Leeds city region, so the change in structure reified the existing practice.

The relationship between local authorities and enabling hubs was individually negotiated within different contexts. The construction of the enabling hub concept entailed an organisation that was separate to the local authority, but in places where enabling activity was already taking place within local authorities, this required negotiation over the disambiguation of the roles. These negotiations indicate areas in which tension exists between the perceived role of the local authority in housing provision and the role of civil society organisations. This appeared to be a particular issue in local authorities that had received funding in the first Community Housing Fund that was distributed directly to local authorities for their own use. A participant working in a local authority that was already engaged in community-led housing recalled that at first, they had felt the proposed role of

enabling hubs had seemed to overlap with housing enabling work that should be undertaken by the local authority:

> *And, speaking entirely honestly, I thought they were treading on our toes a little bit, because as a council, we'd set up some of those facilities. So, it was a slightly rocky start, but now we've kind of, we do get on quite well with a now kind of agreed, who does what, but really, we see ourselves as a council, you know, we're going to be here for the long term.* – Housing Enabling Team Leader, Dorset Council

This quote also emphasises the participant's belief that their council had committed to supporting community-led housing long term, something it is more able to do than the enabling hub given the hub's shorter-term funding. A national stakeholder participant gave a further example of an area in which the local authority had already taken the lead on delivering community-led housing. They stated:

> *So, in [region], for example, there are a lot of local authorities that received [Community Housing Fund Round 1] funding. And there's a really good network of professionals within those local authorities now working to support and develop community led homes in their area… But when I talk to some of the people who are involved in groups on the ground in that area, they quite often say to me,' we can't get in the door. It's almost as if they think they don't need us. Because they're just going to make it happen themselves'. And there's this tension between, you know, the community groups and the local government structures and officers should we say, but that doesn't exist in all areas.* – Co-Director, Confederation of Co-operative Housing

These examples indicate tensions over ownership of support for community-led housing approaches and the extent to which the attitude of the local authority can be a deciding factor in the emergence of community-led housing practices. The narratives that surround community-led housing suggest that 'communities' – that is groups of local residents or an organised group of individuals who intend to form a community – are the essential stakeholders in community-led housing. However, it is clear in many cases that local authorities expect to retain a central and controlling role. This hierarchical relationship meant that, although local authorities did not intend to be the hosts of enabling hubs, their cooperation as a key stakeholder was regarded as essential to hubs operating successfully.

Although, the enabling programme only funded services hosted outside of local government, as already discussed, one of the case study 'enabling hubs' was actually a service based within a

Combined Authority. As a service based within a local authority, the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority Community-Led Housing Enabling Programme was not eligible to be part of the Enabling Hub funding programme. A participant from Community Led Homes commented that the East Cambridgeshire service, which then became the combined authority service, fulfilled the role of enabling hub but as a local authority service did not have the right characteristics to technically be described as an enabling hub:

> *One of the things that we in terms of what our description of an enabling hub is it needs to have independent kind of independent structure. So, it shouldn't really sit within a council because obviously a council is very politically driven and can change from year to year and that doesn't really help the sustainability of the hub. So, when I talk about East Cambs, it doesn't, and it doesn't really kind of fulfil what we think of as a hub. But it's just the way the service moved.* – Director, Community Led Homes

Being part of local government in this way was a source of tension in the identity of the service between their local way of working and national stakeholders. However, the programme manger emphasised that, from their perspective, the service had independence and benefited from the security being a local government programme offered:

> *[We] worked very hard on with politicians and things like that is… there is no value in our team, unless you let us be completely unbiased and independent. And so that's something that's very much entrenched. But then at the same time, we are working in a political body working in our authority. So, being independent, would be good. But I think that's outweighed by the fact that we don't spend any of our time having to secure funding. – Community Housing Programme Manager, Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority* Community-Led Housing Enabling Programme

The situation of the service within the Combined Authority gave it the freedom to spend time with groups quite freely and the ability to provide groups with small grants and support to apply for capital grants for the projects. However, the stability was linked to the political control of the Combined Authority, which changed hands during this research; at which point the service was closed by the Combined Authority. This corroborates the perception of national stakeholders that enabling services within local authorities could be unsustainable due to being too vulnerable to political change locally.

Within the research a small number of participants raised the concern that enabling hubs could displace or prevent more participatory mechanisms of supporting community-led housing. For these

participants, the institution of the enabling hubs was perceived to also create a more rigid and top-down institution where practices had been previously more informal, dynamic and accountable to local community-led housing activists. One participant's perspective on the implementation of enabling hubs was drawn from their experience of being part of a network of community-led housing organisations engaged in mutual support prior to the introduction of the funding. The funding programmes required the enabling hub to be its own entity, either incorporated or hosted within an incorporated entity. This meant that enabling programmes taking place within networks were required to formalise the enabling hub function and place it within a host organisation. They described a feeling that something had been "taken away" in this process which detracted from the dynamic nature of what went before. Summarising this they explained:

> *I feel like through the Power to Change and Ministry hub funding, it has the there is a risk that it can feel quite top down. And how effectively that is managed depends on the hub and who's involved and who else involved…. but for me is always the risk when you bring money. You bring in professionals, you bring in, you know, competition, and if the fund says you've got to do X, Y and Zed then it isn't really bottom-up community development. If it's not in a truly enabling way like here's some money, do it how it works in your place as opposed to do it like this because that works somewhere else.* – Participant, Community Development Practitioner - Multiple roles

Furthermore, a participant from the Wessex Community Housing Hub case study raised the lack of "*accountability, sort of broad stakeholder governance*" within the enabling hub form that had emerged in their area. One weakness within the research design for this project was that it did not engage very much with local stakeholders who were disconnected from the enabling hubs in the case studies but engaged in community-led housing. This means that there is potential for these views to be held more widely but not articulated in this research. However, it is clear that the introduction of more rigid ways of working, intended to support and professionalise the sector, also risked neutralising some existing community-based activity.

8.2.2 Case study examples

Each of the three case-study enabling hubs within this research demonstrate the pattern of institutional convergence between national scale plans and the local institutional framework. The research found an evolving arrangement of enabling services within local areas that was influenced by the implementation of the major funding programmes but also by the decisions of local stakeholders and approach of actors within the local community-led housing sector. The accounts of

participants engaged within the hubs indicate these multiple influences and also suggest that the power of the national enabling hub funding programme to establish and shape a long-term community-led housing enabling programme was limited by the short-term nature of the fund. Rather, the emergent sector absorbed the investment and continued to evolve through actors leaning towards different sources of sustenance for their activities.

8.2.2.1   *Wessex Community Assets Community-Led Housing Enabling Hub*

Wessex Community Assets, in operation for over 20 years, supports community enterprise and community development projects, and hosted the Wessex CLT project between 2011 and 2019 and the Wessex Community Housing Hub between 2019 and 2020. The Wessex CLT project specialised in the CLT and Housing Association partnership model of development. These projects were based across Devon, Dorset and Somerset. Middlemarch Associates, a separate legal entity, was created to employ advisers engaged in the Wessex CLT project. The project went through periods of investment and periods where no funding available. Significantly, it received funding between 2014 and 2015 to develop the CLT and Housing Association approach. From 2017, this work was funded through several sets of contracts negotiated with different local authorities, that had received funding through the first Community Housing Fund, and other project bound sources of funding. A participant from Wessex Community Assets described this period as "*a very complicated process to navigate."* Also in 2017, Wessex Community Assets approached the Nationwide Foundation to bid to fund an enabling service for which they received four years of funding to provide advice and support for community-led housing Projects (Wessex Community Assets, 2017, Unpublished document). In that time, some stakeholders and board members suggested that the project be named a community housing hub, rather than a CLT project, to reflect a wider array of models. However, this change did not take place until the introduction of the MHCLG enabling hub funding in 2019. When the MHCLG announced the enabling hub programme, Wessex Community Assets entered into negotiations with local stakeholders to host an enabling hub for Devon, Dorset and Somerset. However, stakeholders in Devon decided instead to bid for a separate Devon enabling hub. Wessex Community assets won funding for an enabling hub to cover Dorset and Somerset, known as the Wessex Community Housing Hub. This enabling hub as an entity operated for one year hosted by Wessex Community Assets before stakeholders decided to move the function to Middlemarch Associates, separate to Wessex Community Assets, which continued to engage in a specific set of innovative community-led housing projects.

The decision to transfer the enabling hub to Middlemarch was informed by the fact that the enabling hub funding period was coming to an end and was not likely to be extended, meaning that the hub would need to become sustainable. Moving the function to Middlemarch meant the hub could

benefit from the cycle of advice and guidance, with payment included in the development cost, that had been developed by Middlemarch. A participant from Middlemarch described the progression:

We set up Middlemarch as a sort of self-employment vehicle. First as a limited liability partnership, and more recently as a community interest company. And, whereas before, we were very much delivering the service, with Wessex community assets as the host, within the last month, by agreement with Wessex, we've taken over the full responsibility for the service. And Wessex has gone back to what you might call its core strategy of innovation and experimentation in the world of community assets. So, it's been a sort of incubation story, really, where we're very much focused on supporting communities to deliver homes, sort of in volume really. And Wessex is much more at the kind of experiment, experimentation, and innovation place. – Director, Middlemarch Associates

These changes reflect negotiations over the role of enabling hubs and the nature of projects that they should aim to support. Middlemarch Associates previously exclusively worked on, and continued to see, these as the most viable form of community-led housing approach. Considering the future of the hub, the participant from Middlemarch explained they intended to work on the leads already developed by the Community Housing Hub alongside existing steady demand for the technical advice of Middlemarch Associates for CLT- Housing Association partnership developments. Describing the outcome of the organisational restructures, a participant from Wessex Community Assets reflected:

I think what we won't see, is projects that are more risky, or seen as risky, or complicated, or whatever… apart from the kind of work that Wessex Community Assets does. We're kind of continuing to do sort of action research into different types of projects. But we're not offering that as a service, because we don't have the resources to work with anyone other than, you know, those partners that we're currently working with. – Board member, Wessex Community Assets

The history of the enabling service concept within the Wessex Community Assets case demonstrates the wide array of stakeholders engaged in the process and the multiple iterations it went through. It also shows the multiple perspectives of stakeholders on what the role of a hub should be and how these are negotiated at different inflection points.

8.2.2.2   Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority Community-Led Housing Enabling Programme

The Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority Community-Led Housing Enabling Programme, the second case study, also had a complicated organisational heritage that was influenced by negotiations between local stakeholders. At the time of the research, the enabling service was based within Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority, so had not received funding from the MHCLG enabling hub programme. However, the service took part in the enabling hub network and performed the same role locally. Participants tracked the beginning of the service from CLT East, a project hosted by the charity Foundation East. In 2016, Foundation East closed their programme, but the leadership of East Cambridgeshire District Council decided to bring the service into the local authority as CLT development had become an important aim of the Council's leadership. The CLT support service became an element of their wholly owned development corporation as partner to the developer Palace Green Homes. During the period in which the service operated, East Cambridgeshire District Council's demand for Community-Led Housing enabling support grew across the East of England as local authorities received funding through the first Community Housing Fund. The advisers began to provide this service to a wider area, holding contracts with different local authorities. However, participants explained that at the time it was acknowledged by all stakeholders that the arrangement was unsustainable due to staff capacity. Furthermore, stakeholders felt that the new contracts being a reach from the originally intended East Cambridgeshire service which was still located within the wholly owned subsidiary of East Cambridgeshire District Council. In 2019 the service, the adviser that focused on Cambridgeshire, moved to the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority under Mayor James Palmer, previous leader of East Cambridgeshire District Council as part of the Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority devolution process. Additionally, at this time, Eastern Community homes was formed, hosted within a partnership of rural communities councils, Action with Communicates in Rural England (ACRE), and operated across the East of England. As a service based in a local authority, the combined authority community-led housing enabling programme was not eligible for the enabling hub grant programme. However, they worked closely with Eastern Community Homes, an enabling hub formed for the East of England outside of the combined authority. This close working relationship included resource and information sharing:

> *We kind of came to the conclusion in which the Eastern Community Homes and the*
> *combined authority we kind of have a sharing agreement kind of thing… we don't sit*
> *as two separate hubs, we kind of fit as two parts of the same hub… I would say like,*
> *the combined authority is we're kind of a supporting partner to Eastern Community*

Homes. – Community Housing Programme Manager, Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority

Over the course of this research, after the completion of this case study, an election changed the leadership of the Combined Authority from Conservative to Labour. Representatives informed me that, reflecting the new approach of the Combined Authority, the community-led housing enabling programme was ending, suggesting the service would return to East Cambridgeshire District Council.

8.2.2.3   *Leeds Community Homes Enabling Hub*

Leeds Community Homes drew funding from a range of sources and at the time of the research the organisation was in the process of adapting its business model in the interest of developing further income streams. Leeds Community Homes was set up in 2015 by individuals involved in successful community-led housing projects in Leeds. There was a history of community-led housing projects in Leeds from different eras. This included the self-build projects such as Canopy and Latch established in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the more recent LiLAC eco cohousing project. The Director of Leeds Community Homes described the early stages of the organisation:

> *So, we didn't initially call ourselves a hub. People weren't really talking about hubs*
> *back then five and a half years ago. But we, we set up… And we just thought, well,*
> *you know, we want to create more affordable, sustainable community led homes.*
> *And Leeds is where we're based. And there's already a lot of track record in Leeds.*
> *So, the next thing we did was we invited a few other people to join us in a small*
> *group, which became the steering group, which became the founding board of LCH.*
> – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

After an initial period of activity based on small grants the Board decided to incorporate as a Community Benefit Society and launch a Community Share Issue, raising £360,000 which the organisation is now using as a basis from which to acquire homes as a social landlord themselves. At the same time Leeds Community Homes also applied to the Power to Change Homes in Community Hands programme and received five years of funding from that programme. The research participants described how the organisation had changed during that time, including a widening of geographical scope to include West and South Yorkshire, and were undertaking the process of becoming a Registered Provider of Social Housing to enable them to act as an affordable housing landlord. As part of this, the advice and guidance element of the organisation was split off to become a consultancy arm, People Powered Homes, which was not geographically defined, whilst Leeds Community Homes acted as Registered Provider and CLT:

> *LCH is registering as an RP. So, we're, we're already developing our own homes,*
> *there's that the partnership that I mentioned with the private developer, and also*
> *just recently got planning permission on another site, where we'll be the developer*
> *and owner. That's our Mistress Lane. And so that will all sit in the RP. And so, People*
> *Powered Homes will do this sort of development functions and the consultancy stuff.*
> – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

The example of Leeds Community Homes shows that community-led housing 'enabling hubs' can be one element of an organisation's trajectory, but that it is an identity that organisations can undertake and then separate from as suits their needs. In Leeds Community Homes actors have utilised different models of working, reflecting their goals as a housing organisation and their perspective on what might lead to sustainable development for the organisation.

8.3 OPERATION AND ACTIVITY

This study was conducted in 2021, the data collected includes activity of enabling hubs during the period covered by the Enabling Hub Grant Programme of April 2019 and September 2021. Over the course of the research period the enabling hub grant programmes ended, so the study period also includes the start of new ways of working beyond the grant funded period. Different enabling hubs had been in operation for varying lengths of times, both as organisations and as 'enabling hubs' due to the organisational histories and variety in the details of grants. Grants opened for application from April 2019 and the application and negotiations required at the application stage meant that enabling hubs were operating to different timelines. For example, decision making over the Wessex Community Assets Hub took to several months leading to the launch of the enabling hub in early 2020. Therefore, a core period of operation from this research is around Spring/Summer 2019 to March 2021. Importantly, this period also coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and related lockdowns and restrictions.

8.3.1 Activity of the enabling hubs

The enabling hubs engaged in two key types of activity: supporting and advising community-led housing groups and influencing relationship building work in order to create more opportunities for community-led housing groups locally. This included promotion of community-led housing in the area and creating more awareness of community-led housing and a market for their services. As the enabling hubs have matured as organisations, they had begun to diversify their income streams including in, in some cases, acting as a housing developer or Registered Provider of Social Housing.

Support to community-led housing groups was provided by community-led housing advisers. Participants engaged in community-led housing adviser work described their role as an intermediary between the technical world of housing development and the aspirations of the community housing group. These perceptions of their role illustrate the extent to which the processes that govern housing development are seen as a realm for professionals that required extensive knowledge to engage with. Participants highlighted the knowledge required to make assessments of what was feasible as well as the overall process and investment that would be required. A participant describing their role as adviser emphasised their role in navigating this volume of information:

> *Anyone who's got any interest, they are going to need the information that those of us that have worked in housing for far too long take for granted. They're going to need that explaining because it's going to open and they're going to need help navigating them will be arcane systems. Not least planning. But also, you know, trying to get up to speed, there's a number of things that are out average person would find quite confusing. So, I think the purpose of an advisor should be to provide information and explanation and navigation.* – Community-Led Housing Adviser, Wessex Community Housing Hub

Similarly, another adviser who participated in the research spoke of the importance of interpreting housing processes for 'lay people':

> *I suppose it's probably an interpreter of processes. Really, it's quite a demanding role, because you've got to have a reasonable understanding of all the different elements to do with housing delivery, and group organisation. And the interplay between organisations and what's reasonable to expect and what isn't. So, you know, your kind of probably in the role of a development officer in a housing association. But with a different starting point.* – Associate, Leeds Community Homes

Participants saw the adviser's role as explaining pertinent information to the community-led housing group who could then make informed choices; and also, to translate the aims and ambitions of the group into the language of housing policies and funding procedures to clarify their vision and communicate with other stakeholders. A participant described this process when helping a group communicate with a housing association:

> *So, what we do is when we've done group stage training, and we've got a group that wants to go into partnership with a housing association, and what we do is we get*

them to write, or we write with them a prospectus. And this works really well because it comes across as being quite professional. It shows that the group has had training, it shows the group's got support, yeah, shows the group's vision. And it shows what the group is asking for, and it puts it into the context of case studies and so on. And, you know, events, share that with housing associations. – Community-Led Housing Adviser B, Leeds Community Homes

The advisers saw themselves as intermediaries operating between the distinct spheres of the everyday and longer-term development. Their engagement lent legitimacy to groups through translation into the discourses of housing.

Participants expressed some tensions within the role of adviser: between supporting a group to achieve their aims and operating within the wider housing environment and pressure to deliver homes as an enabling hub. A participant expressed the tension they felt acting as an adviser in a situation in which a community-led housing group had chosen to oppose a local development that was unpopular in the wider community and which they felt was inappropriate, even as the group were offered control of the affordable units which would be built on the site. They expressed:

And is a little bit difficult for me it's like, really, as the hubs should be like, for us, our business model is like, we should push them towards going for it, because we'll get paid. And it'll be part of the development and doing this RP thing means that we could potentially lead on the development and build some of our own units and da da da. It's like, well, the community group that community-led housing group is like, we don't want to operate in this thing that works like the conventional model – Community-Led Housing Adviser A, Leeds Community Homes

On a similar theme, reflecting on the approach to community-led housing adviser work embedded within the Community Led Homes "Group, Site, Plan, Build, Live" framework a participant expressed their reservations about the relationship this created between community and enabler:

It doesn't reflect the kind of a critical understanding of community development processes like that, you know, if any of the literature on community development would say, you know, one has to be really aware of how one is stepping into a particular community and how are you stepping in? Are you stepping in as an expert, you know, with all your knowledge, then you're going to give direction or are you trying to turn that around to the group? – Board Member, Wessex Community Assets

However, most participants emphasised that their role as adviser was led by the community group. Here, a participant emphasises that, due to the challenge of a community-led housing project, groups must be intrinsically motivated before engaging with any development otherwise the projects could not be successful:

> *There's always somebody objects, or more than one person, when it comes to advocating the project to those objectors it has to be the CLT that does it. There's no way it's going to work, if they're going to step back at that stage and say, right, Middlemarch, you've got to argue with these people, because you told us what to do… It has to be the CLT that believes wholeheartedly in what they're doing. And this is very kind of confidence in its leadership.* – Director, Middlemarch Associates

Tensions within adviser roles reflect the overall bridging role of the adviser and the enabling hub between the worlds of community-based action and housing and asset management.

The research found that an important role of community-led housing enablers was to link different stakeholders together and act as a site of relationship building between community-led housing groups and other relevant stakeholders. In this role, the enabling hub is a nexus of relationships that acts as a gateway between actors from different contexts. A participant from Community Led Homes reflected that successful advisers have strong relationships with a wide range of relevant stakeholders locally:

> *Some of the really good hub advisors have, you know, they've known for many years, the right people to talk to local authority. They've got good, trusted relationships. And that just helps things to get underway, as well as developers in the area. You need to have those connections. I think there's a very strong rationale for having them locally rather than nationally.* – Hub Manager, Community Led Homes

Describing this model, a community-led housing adviser working in Devon Community Council described their experience of enabling community-led housing projects:

> *There is the people that are the stakeholders, or people that are wrapped around it, there's the information in the middle of it, and then coordinating wrapped around all of that is an enabling person who can who can kind of join the dots, make the connections, support people through the process…So that's why, you know, that it's coordinating that takes a lot; finding a joint vision and taking it forward, that's a real skill, to do that piece of work, where you're harnessing everybody's energy and*

taking them forward in the same direction. It takes a lot of time; it takes a lot of

understanding of people. – Rural Housing Enabler, Devon Communities Together

The experience of interviewees suggests that communication and linking actors together are regarded as crucial aspects of the advice and support process. This points to the role of the adviser again as translator and interpreter between contexts, emphasising the advisers as a key node in forming the actor network engaged in community-led housing development.

The extent to which advisers' roles centred on direct engagement with group support differed between case studies. Non-direct group support fell into three categories: producing guidance for a more general audience than individual groups; marketing and awareness raising; and influencing other stakeholders to support community-led housing, such as actors in the local authority or housing associations. This took various forms in different enabling hubs but appeared across all case studies. For example, in the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority Enabling Programme the lead adviser stated:

> *I also have a separate part of my role, which is the more strategic part of the role. So,*
> *it's making sure that we have strong political support across the region. And so, via*
> *kind of, and attending things like we have like a Cambridgeshire affordable housing*
> *board, which is attended by housing associations and local authority partners. So,*
> *attending that and kind of explaining our progress, and making sure that we have*
> *good relationships with developers, good relationships with funders that were kind*
> *of represented on a national level. – Community Housing Programme Manager,*
> *Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority* Community-Led Housing Enabling
> Programme

Similarly, the Director of Leeds Community Homes discussed working with stakeholders to identify opportunities. Furthermore, another participant from Leeds Community Homes described some of the more general support materials they had produced under the auspices of the enabling hub. They reasoned it was an effective use of the limited funded time as more groups could benefit from the knowledge:

> *I share my job with another guy. So, we worked four days, a week, two days each.*
> *And within that we, with this mindset of like, right, well, this is all quote unquote,*
> *sort of curtailing and what can we do to utilise the time we've got now to build*
> *things that will make our delivery more effective in future. So, we developed like a*
> *whole kind of series of modules and training resources and stuff for the group stage*

work. So, we could basically because we knew we were working with like, 10 groups,
we should standardise this as far as possible. – Community-Led Housing Adviser B,
Leeds Community Homes

Likewise, a participant from Wessex Community Housing Hub discussed a planned series of village meetings, which were moved online due to Covid-19 restrictions. These experiences demonstrate that, while funding was available for positions in a way that was not directly linked to individual projects, professionals in the sector engaged in capacity building work, especially given the restrictions of the Covid-19 lockdowns; the environment in which the enabling hub programme primarily was in operation.

Participants also reported differing patterns of engagement with groups based on the skill set of the advisers and the resources available to pay for their time. This means that the engagement of the adviser was structured by the funding settlement of the enabling hub. Different organisations were also able to offer different levels of adviser engagement, for example, the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority programme was able to assign resources and a lot of direct support to groups and assist them in securing technical support. This was provided at no cost for the group and the adviser stated there was no official limit on the number of hours groups could require. The participant stated that they, as an adviser, would attend most group meetings just in case any problems arose and that this was helpful as they have the skills and experience to identify and resolve problems earlier. By contrast, participants stated that Eastern Community Homes had a cap of 14 hours for adviser support before groups needed to find a route to pay for it. The model of the community-led housing adviser taking a group though all stages of development suggested a long-term relationship with a single adviser based at an enabling hub. In the research, some advisers were able to work with groups to draw on this specialist support at different points over a long journey. In most cases this research found groups worked with different advisers throughout the project, though some engaged with a central figure who was involved in most aspects of the process. This suggests that the role of community-led housing adviser was variously constructed by actors across a range of engagements, from short-term input to long-term partner, depending upon the group type and location.

Participants' opinions were divided over the work that individuals connected to the enabling hub should engage in to maximise their influence, with some suggesting that laying the groundwork for a more supportive environment was a key use of time and others holding that such an environment could only be created through successful community-led housing projects acting as anchors and

examples. However, a participant from Middlemarch, the future home of the enabling hub, suggested that they had seen more value in focusing on direct support of groups:

> *I suppose we, Middlemarch, have always been very much focused on the technical advice. So, we don't see ourselves as a you know, as a lobbying organisation, we've never had to market ourselves because the demand has always been no greater than our capacity to meet it. And so, we're really focused on that, we've always had this, sort of rule of thumb that 95% of our time should be spent with groups. You know and the rest of it will be when we're talking to local authorities or the National CLT network or ministry or something like that. It will be something connected to a project.* – Director, Middlemarch Associates

They explained that in taking over the enabling hub function from Wessex Community Assets they would continue to work 'in that spirit' focusing on delivering individual projects rather than doing "*a tremendous amount of policy work or awareness raising or those kind of overheads".* A participant from Community led homes questioned if a focus on policy and influence work would come at the cost of time to support groups:

> *Maybe the urban hubs where they've done a bit more around, you know, spent a large proportion of their time working on policy development and, and finding our own solutions and that kind of thing. And maybe they've spun out the support groups a bit more, they expect the groups to take on a bit more of the role of, you know, finding out the support themselves, rather than being handheld quite so much.* – Hub Manger, Community Led Homes

These opinions reflect tensions over the role of enabling hubs and to a certain extent a distinction between approaches to community-led housing projects. Enabling hubs that engage more widely in marketing and lobbying are more likely to uncover novel projects or work with community groups that are less traditional. The model of working that focuses on direct support to groups, the enabling hub, may support more projects, but they are likely to be similar to existing projects, as community groups identify themselves as hosts for projects similar to those they have seen nearby. This suggests there is a tension between the roles of community-led housing enablers as innovators versus deliverers.

Beyond these activities, Leeds Community Homes was engaged in development and management of housing as a RP. The organisation had received planning permission for the first units for which they would be the landlord. A participant explained:

So, the hub currently is moving towards, along with many other hubs, kind of like RP, basically becoming a small housing developer kind of angle to try and build an asset base that they can, yeah, become 'sustainable' in inverted commas. – Community-Led Housing Adviser B, Leeds Community Homes

The director of Leeds Community Homes further described the mode, emphasising the asset base it would provide for the organisation going forward that would allow the organisation to continue to engage with community-led housing groups:

And then we've got our kind of asset-based business plan, which is a little bit separate, which is kind of building homes ourselves, but also then becoming an RP so that we can partner with other groups, and maybe do partnership schemes with them. And obviously, as a community land trust, that bundles it all up together as well. We want to kind of own and manage or help our own as much land as we can and building sometimes too, so we can sort of bring that to the table in the future. – CEO, Leeds Community Homes

Becoming a Registered Provider put the enabling hubs in the role of a housing association and one participant questioned the distinction between this role and a housing association. They noted that enabling hubs would be closer to the community and therefore preferable to housing associations but suggested that joining the class of registered providers of social housing moved the enabling hubs into the mainstream world of housing provision for others and away from autonomous housing movements that the participant wanted to engage in. They stated:

The thing with RPs becoming effectively small housing associations is like what are they? Well, they're small housing associations... like that's better than some of the housing associations…. [housing associations] are set up in a way that should make them good, but they are just like, have boards full of old white man who get paid too much money; standard thing. So, hubs are genuinely more invested than that. – Community-Led Housing Adviser B, Leeds Community Homes

The activity of engaging in their own developments has the benefits of producing an asset, which could lead to longevity for the enabling hub, allowing the organisation to continue to take on work and support groups, as well as be the required Registered Provider partner for community-led housing groups accessing funding from Homes England. The move introduces questions over what the scope of these enabling hub organisations are, however. It is clear from the research that many organisations saw their role as broader than the delineated activity of 'community-led housing

enabling hub', as broader community housing organisations that engaged in any relevant activity to support community engagement with housing.

The main period of funding and activity community-led housing enabling hub programme also coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic and related lockdowns. This shaped the work of enabling hubs in several ways. Much work of the enabling hubs was moved online after the initial period of becoming organised. Participants noted that much of the community engagement work they had undertaken worked well online, and a participant noted this may even have widened the demographics of those who could take part in public meetings as it allowed parents of young children to engage online.   However, the pandemic and lockdowns also led to the pausing of some work and the disengagement of some volunteers. A participant recalled that the community minded individuals who might engage with community-led housing were engaged in other activities, or other elements were stalled, and groups lost motivation.

> *What actually happened over the past year is an awful lot of people have gone into hibernation. And there are other people where they're very interested in ...motivated to do things that our community, but that time has been taken up doing food deliveries and collecting, stuff like that, rather than thinking about housing. So, I think I, I would say there's a, there's a number of potential groups that have just stalled because of the situation we're in. And so, I'd say we've spent more time doing broader stuff, rather than working with particular groups than originally anticipated. So, for example, we've run a series of webinars.* – Community-Led Housing Adviser, Wessex Community Housing Hub

In general, participants attested that lockdowns had influenced the way of working, with an adviser noting how difficult it had been to never meet the groups they worked with in person. However, there was no sense that participants felt the Covid-19 pandemic had massively disrupted the sector's work and participants identified funding shortages as a larger issue.

8.3.2   Financing enabling hubs

The enabling grant programme included a requirement for enabling hubs to have a business plan that indicated a way for them to become financially self-sustaining. The sector had originally lobbied for four years of funding when envisaging the enabling hub concept. Furthermore, delays to the delivery of the funding, which meant the funding was actually delivered within an 18-month period, exacerbated these issues. A participant from the MHCLG described this:

When there were four years of funding available, the sector suggested that they might be able to become financially self-sustaining within four years. And I think that was probably quite tight. But by the time we've launched the programme there was only two years left. So, I very much doubt actually at the moment that many of them are going to become financially self-sustainable within the limited period of funding that they've had. So, this is reason to keep the funding going for another couple of years – Participant, MHCLG

Throughout the research, which took place near the end of the funding period, there was general agreement among participants that most enabling hubs in the network had not had enough time to make a transition to becoming financially self-sustaining and would face significant challenges after the end of the Community Housing Fund grants in 2021. This applied to both direct hub funding and routes for groups to access revenue funding to pay for support and complete projects that would lead to a payment for the enabling hub. A participant described the difficulty their enabling hub was facing in planning for the future:

The barrier is, I suppose in a way, the funding's stop starting and, you know, we don't know if we can keep the hub running, it's all very difficult, we have to spend a lot of time, a lot of time getting local authorities signed up so we can make the hub sustainable. And so that's gonna be a barrier. – Chief Executive, Cambridge ACRE (host of Eastern Community Homes)

Most participants felt that the original target of becoming self-sustaining after two years had always been nearly impossible, due to being too short, and proposed extending the funding period:

I think there was some huge naivety at a national level, about what it would take to get effective network of regional hubs. …So, the Wessex model is after you've built the homes, you get a payment back into the hub, and then that payment enables you to work with another group and the Wessex model has worked very effectively like that, but not all schemes deliver and as we say, sometimes they take ten years to deliver. So, getting that income back in and making it work is you know, is quite a challenge, really so I think it needs more year's funding and I don't know if the department will do that or not, you know, where the ministry will fund it for longer. And what will happen if it doesn't? That feels like it's on a bit of a knife edge, I suppose. – Participant, Homes England

Some also disputed if being financially self-sustaining through a fee-model was possible at all. Overall, participants shared a sense that the Community Housing Fund had offered an opportunity to develop the sector but not enough investment for it to continue without further ring-fenced funding from central government.

Part of the rationale for enabling hubs was to support the profession of community-led housing, however, the short-term nature of the funding available meant that the contracts for community-led housing enablers were often short-term and the stream of work could be unreliable. Funding allowed associates to be retained as salaried members of staff for enabling hubs, often part-time. Hubs also engaged associates and acted as the broker for independent consultants. The enabling hub funding programme provided hubs with the opportunity to employ these staff, and this was also supported by the ability of community-led housing groups to receive funding from the Community Housing Fund to pay for adviser support time. Both streams of funding came to an end at a similar time, leading to many contracts of individuals working in the sector ending. An adviser working with Leeds Community Homes stated:

> *Well, this, this is where it's got messed up, because they had community fund… which is finished now, which was about hubs being able to get funding that they could then pay for advisors to work with groups, now that funding is gone. Because, you know, again, with the sector, even advisors have to put food on the table. Yeah, it's, it's not an advisor can be the best advisor in the world. But he or she also has children has rent to pay has bills to pay. So there has to be a way of funding that work.* – EDI Consultant and Adviser, Leeds Community Homes

The Director of Leeds Community Homes highlighted that the short-term nature of funds meant short-term and part-time contracts for staff, which resulted in difficulties retaining professionals focused on community-led housing. They stated:

> *The other thing is capacity, you know, sometimes we do get asked to do a lot of work, and there's only so many people around who've got the right skills to do stuff. So sometimes it feels like we you know, we're at the point where we're being asked to do more than we can take on. So that's potentially a problem that caught that thing about capacity is you can build it, your capacity, a certain amount when you've got a lot of funding. And then when that funding drops off, people have to go off and get other jobs. So then work comes in and you realise we don't quite get enough people to do as much as we'd like.* – Director, Community Led Homes

The enabling hub programme led to the training and accreditation of a large cohort of community-led housing advisers, but short-term funding and other pressures meant that it had not evolved into a robust and secure profession for those that engaged with the work.

Some participants raised the issue that the shape of the enabling hub programme meant that it was unlikely that all existing enabling hubs would survive as independent entities. This reflected the amount of work that might be available locally and the demand from groups to work with specific enabling hubs. Participants raised the pressure of finding enough work:

> *They themselves as a unit, in effect have become like little mini consultancies or mini organisations. Can they really survive in the future themselves? Question mark. I don't know. And that's one of the biggest questions I have in my programmes, but how sustainable is the infrastructure if ourselves and Power to Change weren't around.* – Programme Manager, Nationwide Foundation

To address this, some participants suggested that the sector may begin to see local enabling hubs merging together in order to occupy larger geographical areas, reflecting trends in third sector management:

> *I think some of them might choose to merge with maybe one of their neighbour enabling hubs. That might be the future of some of them and some of them might have already been thinking about that right at the beginning, but actually, you know, maybe it was more canny to set off two smaller hubs and get lots of funding and then merge later.* – Director, Community Led Homes

Furthermore, some participants argued that groups should be free to select their own consultants for long-term work and did not necessarily need to go through an enabling hub, which may add a small layer of extra cost. One participant suggested that enabling hubs needed to prove themselves to the community groups as well as other stakeholders to retain business:

> *You know, I think that's a bit of a challenge for some of the hub's really, they've got to show value, haven't they? They must be value for money. Otherwise, I think some groups would rather have them 10 grand in their pocket and they choose who the consultant is that works with them.* – Participant, Homes England

This reflects that some organisations might have increased skills in certain types of community-led housing development or generally be more aligned with certain groups. Leeds Community Homes' consultancy arm, People Powered Homes, was already operating from a national perspective. They considered their market for technical advice to be national based on the type of development rather

than linked to a specifically local mindset. However, the local enabling hubs may also continue to play a role in supporting projects in terms of the required local relationship building.

The idea of operating in a self-sustaining way had been inculcated throughout the programme. However, this had been noted as a cultural change for the sector, and therefore the sector faced a challenge in becoming more 'entrepreneurial':

> *So I think that it's not all of the hubs are entrepreneurial in their mindset. I think many of them have come forward from charities and are used to, you know, delivering on grant funded projects that their internal infrastructure is, you know, around delivering grant funded projects…. having that more entrepreneurial, entrepreneurial mindset as an organisation thinking, you know, possibly making harder decisions about the, you know, the finances and where you provide support and where you get return on these projects. To sustain the hub and in turn help them to deliver on their wider objectives* – Hub manager, Community Led Homes

This quote highlights an element of the entrepreneurial approach, that enabling hubs would need to focus on projects that are more likely to succeed and result in a fee-income for the enabling hub. A few participants noted that these requirements of profit making, and an economic focus also created conflicting motivations in the role of the enabling hub:

> *For us, our business model is like, we should push them towards going for it, because we'll get paid. And it'll be part of the development and doing this RP thing means that we could potentially lead on the development and build some of our own units and da da da. It's like, well, the community group that community-led housing group is like, we don't want to operate in this thing that works like the conventional model, because it's shit. No one wants this housing, the stuff they are building is rubbish, it's going to be this big construction programme. And I'm like, yeah, that is rubbish, like, but that in terms of an organisation, I think we should be like, 'Oh, no, I'm sure it'll be great.* – Community-Led Housing Adviser A, Leeds Community Homes

They therefore suggested that the idea of the financially self-sustaining enabling hub can run counter to the overall aims of the sector.

8.3.3   Assessment of the enabling hub concept

Participants affirmed that access to support and guidance was important for community-led housing groups and that the enabling hub, especially with funding attached, had provided this service. Considering the impact of enabling hubs a participant noted:

> *Honestly I don't think it is over exaggerating to say that that many of the schemes
> and proposals that were coming forward would have fallen away without the
> support of that enabling hub. So, from the very first sort of twinkle in someone's eye,
> and that sort of meeting in somebody's kitchen through to, you know, planning
> applications being submitted and diggers getting into the ground can, and has been,
> an inordinately long and torturous process.* – Participant, Homes England and other
> sector experience

Participants noted support from the enabling hubs in providing expertise and support in different approaches:

> *I don't think we'd be going anywhere near the idea of community share offer, if we
> didn't have the support of the hub who've seen other organisations do that and
> understand the process*. – Housing Enabler, multiple councils, South West

As there were no interviews with community-led housing project members it is not possible to understand the impact of working with the enabling hubs on individual groups. Furthermore, in comparison to the ten-year timescale of many community-led housing projects, the enabling hub network had only been in place for around 18 months at the time of this research. This meant there were not likely to be available groups who had started with the enabling hub and worked through their projects with the advisers. This research did not evaluate the impacts of the Community Housing Fund Enabling Hub Grant Programme or Homes in Community Hands fund. Evaluation of the latter was conducted by a team of researchers, with the interim finding that each funded enabling hub had increased the number of homes in its pipeline and secured key relationships politically and with partners to enable community-led housing in their area. (Archer et al., 2021). Overall, evidence for or against the efficacy of the geographically defined enabling hub is very limited, but the need for advice and guidance and the need for influencing local stakeholders has been underlined.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the role of the community-led housing enabling hub, and attendant funding where available, has been allocated to a wide range of organisations engaged in community-led housing development work. The broader concept of a need for advice and guidance to community-led housing remains, as bespoke 'enabling hub' funding has ended. The enabling hub concept and related funding created a pull towards institutional isomorphism through the constraints of the funding regime. However, as the funding is no longer motivating organisations to present as enabling hubs, their advice and guidance programmes are taking different shapes. Leeds Community Homes has broken off the advice and support element of their work to become People

Powered Homes, which does not have a defined geography. Wessex Community Assets enabling hub function has moved to Middlemarch Associates which has most experience in delivering a specific form of community-led housing (CLT/ Housing association partnerships), whilst Wessex Community Assets continues to work with more experimental forms of community-led housing but only from their already defined set of projects rather than an open resource. This shows that the operating model of a geographically defined enabling hub catering to all forms of community-led housing has not taken root during the period that it was promoted through the enabling hub grant programme. Furthermore, others raised questions around whether there would be sufficient work for so many enabling hubs to maintain the network as independent organisations, suggesting that there might be merges or further changes in line if funding did not become more available. However, at the time of writing, the enabling hub network run by Community Led Homes was still in operation, suggesting a role as a local voice for community-led housing. Considering if the enabling hub approach had worked, one participant suggested that the start and stop nature of the funding meant that community-led housing infrastructure and support was in the same position as before the funding:

> So, have we really got to a point where there is a proper infrastructure service or a
> hub for community-led housing? I don't think we're any further down the road than
> we were three years ago. — Board member, Wessex Community Assets

This suggests that the provision of advice and guidance for community-led housing is important, and that there is a robust market for it, but that the specific operating model of the enabling hub might not be sustained without continued direct funding from government.

8.4 CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that enabling hubs based their models on a national narrative of what was required in the sector and what had been successful previous examples. However, individual hubs were a construction of local resources and national investment. In this way, these findings align with the processes of institutional formation as a vertically nested and horizontally embedded phenomenon as described by Lowndes and Lemprière (2018). The research demonstrated that local stakeholders made use of what institutional resources they had available, for example the ACRE network, the emerging city region or existing community-led housing umbrellas, when forming enabling hubs. It also shows that these processes entailed negotiation among stakeholders in order to engage with the enabling hub concept as it was vertically transmitted from the national level. Changes in the form and functions of enabling hubs in different areas reflected variable power dynamics across implementation, pointing to an important role for the horizontal institutional

mechanisms in operation. Furthermore, limitations in the extent to which the envisaged network of enabling hubs was able to fully utilise these resources, and emerge fully independent and formed, reflected an over reliance on attempts to implement programmes using a top-down approach.

The research demonstrates that for some, the efforts to create a static enabling hub network risked overly formalising a dynamic sector and introducing power discrepancies. However, it is clear that for many other stakeholders this process of incorporation and professionalisation was vital for sector development. These points of contention raise normative questions about the style and shape of enabling for community-led housing and other community activity. Thompson (2020b) proposes a 'bureaucracy from below' to manage the competing aims of community control and scaling-up the sector. He suggests important aspects of this include a focus on democracy and locally accountable organisations and separating the resource provision from the state, especially through developing assets, in order to create independence. Of the case study hubs, Leeds Community Homes, with a board of local stakeholders and an incipient asset base, appears closest to this description. Whereas, whilst the Wessex Community Housing (now Middlemarch) hub does have structures to create its own income and remain independent from government, control of the hub rests with a smaller number of stakeholders. Furthermore, intended approaches are limited to work that delivers through the dominant modes of CLT development for affordable housing rather than engaging with a wider collaborative housing movement. Clearly, the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority Community-Led Housing Enabling Programme was not independent of government and closed after a political change, reflecting the concerns of stakeholders with embedding programmes too heavily in supportive regimes of local government that are susceptible to political change.

In general, I observed that the enabling hub programme that was put in place lent heavily on ideas of professionalisation and increasing production through the provision of advice. It emphasised engagement with powerful local stakeholders, such as local government, and existing incorporated community organisations. The shape of the programmes tended towards more formalisation and did not prioritise small-scale interactions between communities and enablers, or ideas of community empowerment, but on the provision of new professional services for communities. In this research, I have observed that these tensions have arisen but the focus on more prominent stakeholders, the scale of the research and the broader research questions prevented an in-depth discussion of these issues, which present an avenue for further research.

The research on the role of advisers presented here links to Fernandez Arrigoitia and Tummers' (2019) discussion of the role of a 'middle-agent' in establishing collaborative housing communities as an intermediary between the niche and mainstream housing landscapes. The authors suggest that

these agents are crucial in navigating both worlds and shape both the outcomes for groups and the sector as a whole. My research reinforces this finding and shows that advisers see themselves in this way, as interpreters between two ways of understanding housing. My findings suggest that much of the work of the adviser is translating the aims and requirements of the community group into language, terms and processes aligned with housing policy, governance and funding regimes. This links to findings presented earlier in the thesis that community-led housing projects that more closely mirror existing hegemonic ways of working in affordable housing have been more plentiful. Furthermore, this research highlights that the enabling hubs also acted as formal sites for relationships between stakeholders and community-led housing groups. The advisers then mediate the discursive space through which these stakeholders interact in a role that is as important as providing direct information and training to those community-led housing groups.

A clear finding from this research was that participants engaged in the community-led housing sector found the interrupted and short-term nature of funding for community-led housing to be an impediment to growing the sector in a sustainable fashion. The complicated nature of contracts and tracking down small funding sources led to significant time spent engaged with fundraising and reporting requirements. There was also a strong sense of frustration among participants relating to the closure of the community-housing fund. In particular, from the perspective of the enabling hub model, the concept of becoming self-sustaining introduces significant challenges and tensions to the landscape. Stakeholders predicted that some enabling hubs may merge or close, although this did not happen as soon as the funding was withdrawn.

9 CONCLUSIONS

The research aimed to enhance our understanding of the development of the community-led housing sector in England. Specifically, it was designed to interrogate how community-led housing was operating at a regional level and the interaction between national and local levels of governance in the sector. In doing so it builds upon the existing literature on community-led housing in England. Other authors have examined the sector at the level of the project (Bunce, 2016; Griffin, 2019; Arbell, Middlemiss and Chatterton, 2020), regions or municipalities (Moore, 2018; Thompson, 2020a) or from a national (Lang and Mullins, 2019) perspective. The research also contributes to an emerging body of literature on the role of professional support and intermediary organisations in community-led and collaborative housing approaches (Fernandez Arrigoitia and Tummers, 2019; Lang, Chatterton and Mullins, 2020). It adds to these studies by grounding the research within three case studies, thereby addressing the interaction of both national and local factors on the emergence of enabling hubs and providing empirical material on the operation of specific enabling hubs. The thesis extends a body of work that utilises an institutional perspective to illuminate the processes through which community-led housing innovation is established and scaled (Lang and Mullins, 2019; Lang and Stoeger, 2017). The research thereby sought to understand the opportunities, obstructions and compromises afforded by interaction with the institutional context, the strategies through which actors approached this engagement, and the ways in which the formalisation and professionalisation of infrastructure services was implemented and operated. This conclusion presents the empirical, theoretical and methodological contribution to knowledge of this research and its policy and practice implications, concluding by considering avenues for further study.

9.1 EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

Empirically, the thesis connects macro-scale and meso-scale analyses of the community-led housing sector growth. In particular the research findings illustrate the different factors which form the local institutional contexts in which community-led housing might operate and their relationship to the wider national institutional context. It presents a discussion of the manipulation of these contexts by actors. It has also generated data evidence of the implementation of the enabling hub concept for the first time.

9.1.1   Multi-scale analysis of sector

The research presented in this thesis provides a description of the operating environment of the community-led housing sector in England and its institutional context. Through an analysis of the interlocking institutions that form the institutional framework within which actors operate, the

findings highlight those opportunities for growth were highly differentiated by region. The findings reveal an institutional context for community-led housing that was heavily reliant on interest, support and investment from local authorities. Particular local models of community-led housing development, such as the CLT models developed in the South West of England or in East Cambridge, were supported though established local ways of working. These local practices included employing national institutional constraints and resources in a localised way. This has led to the landscape of community-led housing being characterised by established specific localised path dependencies. As the national targeted funding for community-led housing projects came to an end, there were questions about the routes which would be available for community-led housing groups to finance and develop homes. However, those engaged in more established ways of working generally were not reliant on the targeted fund and had other mechanisms for accessing resources. These included making use of national institutions such as rules within the planning system, like reserved land or acting as affordable housing partners, and affordable housing funding. Actors engaged in housing practices other than these established models emphasised a continuation of small-scale experimentation, making use of what institutional resources were available for adaptation in support of their projects, emphasising the importance of mid-tier governance and capacity for municipal action.

The research also addressed the construction of a 'community-led housing' sector itself. Engagement with the Community Housing Fund, the Community Homes partnership and the emerging network of enabling hubs had strengthened the sense among actors that 'community-led housing' was a definable sector of activity. Furthermore, the findings show that the sector had benefitted from the investment and legitimisation that targeted funding has provided. The process of defining community-led housing as a sector has been further supported by the promotion of community-led housing support as a profession and coincided with a narrative of creating a more 'mainstream' sector that could engage in a greater number, and larger scale, of developments.

 A key element of the professionalisation narrative is the role of the community-led housing adviser, which required accreditation from a national training programme. This process also required all enabling hubs to engage in support of all community-led housing models rather than focus on specialisms. For many participants, the development of a central identity had helped to secure further legitimacy for the community-led housing sector and assisted it in appearing a more reliable partner for both central and local government to engage with. These participants considered that a move towards a centralised definition of community-led housing and standardised professional support provided institutional resources to actors operating in community-led housing contexts. The converse, an operating environment in which advice and resources were more focused on individual

models such as co-ops, cohousing or CLTs with their related social and political conditions, was considered by these actors to be too narrow and lacking scope to expand. However, for others this direction of travel had challenged the underlying political or social aims of the housing movements they related to. Some participants expressed a desire to retain, or recreate, more politically driven or small-scale approaches within their practices or within the sector as a whole.

The sense of what "community-led housing" embodied was highly localised and linked to dominant models and ideologies within local areas. More politically radical practices seemed to define themselves as related to the concept but not constrained within its bounds. Previous research by Lang and Mullins (2019) argued that community-led housing was an incomplete field of action that provided space for multiple interpretations and strategic action by actors beyond the established affordable housing and for-profit development fields. This research builds upon these findings further arguing that much of the stabilising narrative of a community-led housing sector was temporal and did not result in a sector with firm foundations or clear pathways to growth at a national level. In doing so, this research contributes to academic discussions of the construction of institutions in the social world and how actors operate in contested social space with porous boundaries.

9.1.2   Analysis of the role of actors

A further empirical contribution is the examination of the roles undertaken by individual actors in developing community-led housing at both a project and sector level. The research demonstrates the tactics undertaken by actors to successfully exploit existing policies and political narratives and build momentum for community-led housing projects. Key examples of this within the data include actors utilising planning policies to secure land at rates that enable affordable housing development and linking community-led housing approaches to dominant housing policy narratives. The positions of these actors within the system include roles as champions within powerful organisations utilising their institutional resources and volunteers harnessing their existing social capital. Furthermore, community-led housing advisers perform acts of translation between community members and the mainstream affordable housing system. These are processes through which actors are adapting the existing institutional framework and altering it through action, engaging in a process of construction which can redefine what actions are legitimate. I link this to the concept of institutional entrepreneurs arguing that actors manipulate their institutional framework to advance new ways of working through re-interpreting existing institutions and leveraging their institutional resources and power (Garud, Hardy and Maguire, 2007). This in turn leads to a path-dependence that creates easier routes to delivery for projects within that context. This research, therefore, contributes further to our understanding of the intentional work of actors to adapt their roles and offers an

analysis of their actions in constructing and reconstructing the institutional framework within which they operate.

9.1.3 Implementation of the enabling hub

This thesis provides a unique analysis of the development cycle of the community-led housing enabling hub from its conception through its implementation and its legacy. By tracking the role of different actors through the stages of the development of the framework, the research demonstrated that national stakeholders, in particular those engaged with the establishment of the Community Led Homes partnership, drove the formation of enabling hubs as an institution. The strategy was based on a consensus narrative among these stakeholders that advice and support were crucial missing elements in enabling community groups to bring housing projects forward. Sector actors successfully lobbied for support for enabling hubs from national government alongside funding for individual projects by emphasising that an improved sector infrastructure would best enable community groups to make use of funds provided by the Community Housing Fund and further investment was provided for five urban enabling hubs from a major charitable grant-giving organisation. Existing practice of rural CLT umbrellas and emergent networks of community-led housing projects in urban areas were used as evidence of application of the approach. These existing institutions were adapted and incorporated into the enabling hub framework as part of the process of implementation, although integration into the programme also led to changes in the organisational form and practices of these earlier institutions.

During implementation, local enabling hubs were established through processes of negotiation with local stakeholders. Local authorities held particularly powerful roles in this process. Actors engaged with enabling hubs utilised the national funding programme and the enabling hub network as institutional tools to establish legitimacy and capture resources for their services. The funding had been intended to establish a stable stratum of professional support for community-led housing projects. However, in operation the organisational form of the enabling hubs continued to change as actors adapted their practices to access and utilise the institutional resources available.

The research found that the implementation of the enabling hub programme did not result in the full actualisation of an established network of regenerative and financially self-sustaining organisations able to extensively support community-led housing projects. However, the conceptual and institutional groundwork for such services has been established, for actors to continue to utilise, adapt and strengthen where possible. These findings contribute to academic understandings of support infrastructure which has relevance for the community-led housing sector in England as well as collaborative housing sectors across the UK, Europe and further afield. It builds upon previous

research into community-led and collaborative housing support infrastructures from (Lang, Chatterton and Mullins (2020) and Thompson (2020b). Beyond housing, this analysis provides an example of establishing an infrastructure to support citizen engagement which can have relevance to other social empowerment movements.

The central tension concerning the role of community-led housing as a politically motivated housing movement focused on community control versus a sector with a responsibility to deliver the maximum number of housing units possible, was reflected in the contestation I observed about the role of the community-led housing enabling hubs. Some actors felt the enabling hubs should be primarily focused on delivering established community-led housing models whereas others had hoped for more community rooted organisations with greater community accountability and a more radical or experimental approach. Given these tensions, the extent to which community-led housing would continue to function as a unified field of work and identity as these targeted funding streams ended was unclear.

9.1.4   Understanding the historical patterns of community-led housing movements

This thesis has highlighted that the contemporary community-led housing sector in England is a collection of movements, taken together the sector is an heir to previous housing movements with varied histories. In particular, the co-operative movement in England from the 1970s and 1980s provides an example of possible growth of collectivised housing options, but also of decline. Throughout the research many participants referred to this period of expansion, and the following contraction, of the co-operative sector. Many had first-hand experience of the sector during the period of state withdrawal of resources as co-operatives within the social housing sector merged into larger organisations adopting a more commercial approach or transformed into housing associations. This experience was a living memory which shaped participants' views of the contemporary community-led housing sector. In particular, participants raised the experience of secondary co-operatives which closed as the funding streams they had received from government ended, and their constitutive co-operatives had fewer resources themselves. This history has clear parallels to the trajectory of the enabling hub network which has bloomed during a period of available funding resources but whose future appeared unstable and likely to be marked by closures after the end of the funding programmes.

Overall, similarly, to the housing co-operative movement, community-led housing had enjoyed a period of favour of among policymakers in which it was in line with dominant narratives. However, this period of heightened interest seems to have been shorter, perhaps reflecting increasingly short-term policy directions, and ultimately has led to less investment in the sector than had previously

been available. Further differences between the two trajectories include the range of modes of community-led housing development and the geographical dispersion of the community-led housing sector versus the co-operative movement which was more homogenous in character and concentrated in a few key locations. This variety and geographical dispersion may leave space for greater distance from state funding across the range of community-led housing options which can provide space for growth in the sector in different directions as particular avenues to housing development emerge For example, the model of CLT development in partnership with housing associations may prove to be resilient to a reduction in state funding for community-led housing development whereas more independent models may struggle to find alternative mechanisms to fund early stage work.

The state as an actor has power and resources commensurate with those of market actors which can support community-led housing projects to emerge, which collectives of citizens would lack. The research has demonstrated that this can be achieved through engagement with the Government's house building programme at Homes England and through relationships with local government which entail favourable planning rules to support the land procurement. Still, this approach is reliant on the support of current political leadership teams, which are subject to change both at a national and local level as seen in the research. For example, the localism discourse which supported the original raft of Community Land Trust funding decisions around 2015 had, for the most part, waned by the time this research took place. Instead, narratives of housing choice, affordability and additionality of housing units were a focus of community-led housing campaigners and other advocates of the sector. These findings, in concert with the history of the co-operative sector in England, suggest that for the long-term, the community-led housing sector seems to require a constellation of projects with different relationships to the state in order to generate new community-led housing projects whilst insulating the sector from shifting policy narratives.

9.2   THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE:

This thesis has applied a new institutionalist theoretical framework to examine community-led housing. It contributes to scholarship through extrapolating this conceptual framing from the governance and political literature, in which the institutionalist approach is grounded, and adapting it to the process of producing innovation in housing development. This mapping led to the consideration of the multiple influences that govern community-led housing development and the local implementation of the enabling hub model. The thesis demonstrates how the conceptual tools of new institutionalism can be usefully applied to this emergent housing sector, following initial applications to understanding the English community-led housing field from Lang and Mullins (2019)

and institutional comparative work in Austria by Lang and Stoeger (2017). Specifically, this research has applied the approach to new institutionalist research advanced by Lowndes and Roberts (2013) of identifying relevant rules, narratives and practices that constrain and support the social action related to the operation of the community-led housing sector. It has further modified this theoretical standpoint through the separation of narratives from the institutional context and viewing them as both structures and tools for actors to advance their agency.

This thesis aimed to explore the relationship between the structures that guide actors' decisions and the results of the actions that they take. The theoretical framework allowed me as the researcher to isolate a specific facet of the system, named an institution, and observe how the participants had reflexively responded to this through their actions. As an approach, it is particularly useful to illustrate how embedded agency operate to shape the social world. The reflexivity of participants was an important factor in understanding the data. Participants were able to reflect on why and how they had chosen their actions, their success, and the outcome. I found that new institutionalist framework was fruitful in making this decision legible and bringing the decision-making facilities of actors to the forefront of the research. This approach also led to findings that consider the deliberate work of institutional change undertaken by actors engaged in promoting new social forms. This contributes to a sociological institutionalist (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991) perspective that the intentional activity of actors contributes to the structuring of the social world. In particular, in then applying this lens specifically to the enabling hub concept, this thesis represents an extension of the phenomena that new institutionalist thought is applied to, moving beyond the analysis of state governance activities into the internal organisation of the field of action.

The empirical material supports a theoretical position that innovation within existing structures is dialectal. It suggests that successful innovations establish themselves within the institutional context through creating new routes for action and establishing legitimacy for their action, which creates a replicable path. The prevailing institutional framework, however, has a significant impact on the shape and degree of innovation that is permissible. This leads to innovations being adapted by actors to the prevailing mechanisms within the institutional context. These adaptations take place in the daily strategic and reflective decisions made by actors in service of their aims and objectives. For example, two community-led housing groups within the research had to decide whether to take a financial reward in form of significant grant funding which entailed a form of tenure (shared-ownership) from within the existing framework as a condition of acceptance. One group accepted this tenure in order to maintain affordability principles whilst attempting to modify the terms and conditions as much as possible to reflect co-operative values. Conversely, the second group decided not to pursue the grant funding in order to develop their own collective tenure, but thereby made

the entire development less affordable and led to the loss of members from the planned housing community. Both routes established projects in a way which might be replicable by others, but they also included a compromise from the original vision which related them more closely to existing paradigms of housing as either affordable housing or market housing. This example highlights how actors must make decisions to adapt their innovations into prevailing norms in order to establish routes to delivery and begin to grow critical mass. This view of change emphasises the gradual transference of legitimacy to innovative ideas through a dialectal relationship with existing institutions. It therefore supports a more gradual view of the process of change in social institutions versus the exogenous shock model supporting the sociological approach to new institutionalist analysis.

A key tool for undertaking this process of adaption is the reflexive usage of narratives as tools by actors in service of providing legitimacy and guiding their innovation through the existing institutional framework. The selective application of narratives, to define the sector as 'community-led' housing or to emphasise goals of affordability, or local connection represent strategic decisions taken by actors in presenting their objective and giving it legitimacy. Throughout the empirical material participants express ambivalence over terminology and highlight the instrumental use of specific ways of defining their aims in accordance with more dominant narratives, especially those utilised by politicians or within policy decision enacted by Homes England. This indicates that use of narratives to frame innovation, and the decision-making arising from them, is not an elite activity mainly in action in lobbying and policy making but is a strategy applied by actors within the ongoing decision-making activity which occurs at different levels of action. This analysis of the role of narratives marks a modification of prior models of new institutionalism in that it utilises the framework from Lowndes and Roberts (2013) but adopts concepts of the discursive institutionalism suggested by Schmidt (2010) that foreground the reflexive and strategic use of narrative by actors as tools to create change in the institutional context.

9.3 METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This thesis has contributed to knowledge of methodological approaches to researching housing in three areas. First, it provides an example of research into an emerging phenomenon and the challenges of this in research design and application. Secondly, it demonstrates the application of a qualitative multi-level analysis, utilising the research stage with national actors combined with three regional case studies. Finally, it adds further knowledge of the experience of coproduction of research with non-academic partners. Additionally, for social research in general, it contributes to

the collective experience of conducting the research during the Covid-19 pandemic adds to collective knowledge in addressing and responding to a changing context.

9.3.1 Researching an emergent phenomenon

At the start of the research programme, I identified community-led housing enabling hubs as a focus of effort and expectation from actors in the sector. At this time, enabling hubs were an emergent phenomenon, still under formation. This focus on an emergent phenomenon held challenges as the actual organisations were in a state of flux and there was some hesitancy among potential participants to engage with the project, who cited the short-term implementation period of the enabling hub funding programme. Similarly, much of what the participants thought about the enabling hubs was centred on intentions for future activity whereas discussion of successful projects was more temporally related to the period before the implementation of the enabling hubs. This temporal issue was intensified by the Covid-19 lockdown periods, which also limited activities. Many enabling hubs were just receiving start-up funding. However, some organisations had been undertaking community-led housing enabling work previously and were thus eligible for, and prepared to utilise, full grant funding earlier in the process. These organisations also had experience of shaping the community-led housing sector locally as they were well established. For this reason, I chose to focus on these more established enabling hubs with the aim of collecting more data. However, this has resulted in the case studies being less focused on the distinctive activity of the enabling hub and more on general enabling activity in the area. This was effective in addressing these questions but a more focused investigation solely on the enabling hub concept may not have been possible for this depth of research at such an early stage of the hub's development.

This illustrates that, for researchers investigating emergent forms of social organisation, 'new' activity is likely to have antecedents and engaged actors that are not at first obvious through initial desk-based research. An example of these complications can be seen in the varying and evolving geography of the research case studies. I had intended to link the case studies very strongly to a particular, and strongly bounded, local geographical context. This was based on my understandings of the working of the enabling hub from the background research I conducted online where the localised nature of the enabling hubs was emphasised. However, the geographical boundaries of the enabling hubs were, in fact, much more porous and layered than anticipated. Similarly, the roles of individuals and names of organisations shifted as professional remits and funding streams started and ended. In order to accommodate this, I had to shift my perspective from efforts to create a static image of the sector towards an understanding that was more fluid and acknowledged multiple identifies, roles and perspectives of participants.

9.3.2 Using a qualitative multi-level analysis

The research design was based on a qualitative multi-level analysis designed to enable an understanding of the institutions that shaped community-led housing development from a national and local perspective. The underlying logic was to generate a picture of the national context in terms of policy and funding rules, dominant narratives and expected practices in order to trace their influence at the local level through the three case studies. Multiple case studies in different types of places were selected in order to demonstrate the interaction of different factors at the local level. This approach proved to be a fruitful way of answering the research questions. The three case studies demonstrated different institutional parameters, that is rules, narratives and practices, and participants could trace the progress of their activity through local particularities. A research design focused on an individual local area may not have drawn out the extent to which actors' strategies for supporting community-led housing were locally embedded or the variance between enabling hubs. Furthermore, the national actor interviews provided a better understanding of the genesis and rationales of the policy and funding support for community-led housing. Participants at this stage provided context on the emergence of the sector and implementation of different community-led housing funds. There was also a further unanticipated benefit of the national actor stage as many national actor participants also had deep and particular experience in specific areas that informed their opinions of the broader national picture. These perspectives provided further evidence for the discussion of the research questions in relation to specific area counterfactuals in comparison to the case studies. This experience suggests that studies of housing policy implementation can fruitfully intentionally disaggregate different levels of governance and influence in analysis of phenomena to capture the interaction between policy direction and local articulation.

9.3.3 Working with non-academic partners

This PhD project was funded through an ESRC Collaborative Award with Wessex Community Assets as the collaborative partner. This partnership contributed to my first understandings of the sector and establishing the background knowledge to define the research questions. A contact at Wessex Community Assets met with me over video call multiple times in the beginning stages of the project to discuss the sector and the activity of Wessex Community Assets. In particular, they participated in a scoping interview that formed part of my MA in research methods conducted the year before commencing the PhD.

 This thesis benefited from a collaborative relationship with Wessex Community Assets, however, closer cooperation might have been achieved through better alignment between the academic process of the PhD and the programme of work of the collaborative partner. As a collaborative partner Wessex Community Assets came to the research in an advisory role and the intention was

that my work would support the community-led housing sector in a broad sense and in some ways connect with the work of Wessex Community Assets. Ultimately, the timing of the research meant it did not have a role in contributing directly to Wessex Community Asset's organisational aims and objectives though the contact provided support in organising the case study and in being interviewed multiple times through the fieldwork. The nature of academic timelines, compared to policy and practice imperatives meant that some specific ambitions for how my work could relate to the collaborative partner were not realised. For example, stakeholders had originally hoped that I would be in position to undertake research that would support the development of a report on the timeline of community-led housing development as an aspect of my research. However due to the shape and requirements of my academic programme, I was not in post to complete that work during their required timeframe. Furthermore, once I was in-post as a post-graduate researcher, Wessex Community Assets was undergoing a period of significant change related to the decision to separate the community-led housing related activities of Middlemarch from the Wessex Community Assets umbrella. This period of change entailed internal discussion and some degree of contestation between stakeholders within Wessex Community Assets meaning that there was not an appropriate window to meet the board members and discuss the outcomes of the research for the organisation as a whole. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions meant that planned field work visits to the Southwest of England where the organisation operated never occurred. My contact at Wessex Community Assets was, however, able to meet with me semi-regularly over the research, especially in the early stages and was instrumental in shaping the project. If a way to make the project role more beneficial to the collaborative partner had been found, a closer working relationship might have been engendered which potentially would have enhanced elements of the research.

One way such relationships might be strengthened during future collaborative-model doctoral research programmes is to undertake a short-term research project for the organisation in the early stages of the work which would act as a scoping exercise for the main study. During my own PhD process, I was able to undertake such a project with a different community-led housing organisation, the Confederation of Co-operative Housing (CCH). This project involved writing case studies of several successful community-led housing projects for use in a training programme and significantly improved my overall network within the sector and my understanding of it. Such small projects, with clear instrumental aims and outcomes, can be very useful for scoping larger academic research as well as forming relationships within the sector. Therefore, I suggest a learning point for academic research going forward, particularly for collaboration on long-term projects such as PhDs, is to

identify opportunities to contribute to the collaborative partner in this way where possible, for example through short paid internships such as the one I undertook.

The relationship with Wessex Community Assets also had implications for my positionality as a researcher. In particular, I had the sense of wanting to produce research that was useful and that was seen as factually correct by stakeholders in the collaborative partnership who I assumed to have better understanding than I did. However, through this process I have strengthened an opinion that there is significant value in more detached forms of research such as mine, alongside research conducted by researchers who are more entrenched in the sector. This is because my research uncovered several different interpretations of the same circumstances and occurrences by different individuals. By emphasising my detachedness, I was able to generate an air of openness and trust with my participants.

In general, during the research, my role as researcher engaged in a field with social justice aims was occasionally difficult to explain to participants and wider stakeholders. As an academic researcher, whilst I am sympathetic to the aims of the community-led housing sector I was not a part of it. Research has separate objectives and requires an element of impartiality and detached observation. However, although my relationship to Wessex Community Assets facilitated some introductions and provided me with an air of greater legitimacy, participants did not assume that I worked "for" Wessex Community Assets. Therefore, the occasionally awkward positionality was more related to drawing a distinction between the role of an activist, or community-led housing sector campaigner, and that of the academic. Participants expressed their hopes that the research would demonstrate the success of the enabling hub approach and, in particular, be useful as a tool for campaigning for funding. However, the more general approach of academic study was less understood.

9.3.4 Research during Covid-19 restrictions

The Covid-19 pandemic occurred during the course of this research. Like most activity, the research process paused whilst individuals and organisations dealt with the immediate arising challenges. Then, in Autumn 2020 the fieldwork commenced, online. Ultimately, online interviews were practical and easy to arrange. They allowed the interviews to take place at a time most convenient to the participants over a period of months, rather than at times when the researcher was able to be present in the study localities. Meeting online had become common over the course of the pandemic and all participants were comfortable with the technology, even those who had not previously taken part in video conferencing calls. Some restrictions were lifted towards the end of the fieldwork period, yet participants continued to choose to conduct the research interviews via video call. This exemplifies the extent to which video calling has become a normal means of

communication, especially in professional occupational environments as for these participants the interview calls were taken as part of their working day. Therefore, researchers can consider video calls and interviews as a first approach rather than a secondary option when working with actors in professional roles. In fact, the video call is likely to be the habituated arena for conversations relating to 'work' topics.

9.4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This research has contributed knowledge with policy and practice implications for the community-led housing sector and government bodies that seek to support its growth. As a collaborative PhD the research was designed to produce insights on how the sector was growing and implications for its future. The empirical analysis has highlighted that the sector was not static and was in a process of responding to new institutional factors. Overall, the findings suggest that continual change within policy and funding landscape is challenging for both individuals and organisation to respond to, thereby increasing the workload of an already over-stretched sector. Furthermore, the thesis has documented the implementation of the enabling hub network. From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that the connecting and translation role of community-led housing advisers are important and positioning enabling hubs as a local resource has benefits in a highly localised sector. However, resources were not sufficient to create a stable infrastructure and therefore secure jobs for advisers engaged in this work. A key finding with implications for campaigners within the sector is the importance of building relationships with powerful actors within institutions who can support the process of identifying and acquiring resources for projects as well as shaping policy change. The ideas presented here are designed to support those engaged in the community-led housing sector development identify patterns in impediments to growth for the sector, providing a model of experiences based on the perceptions of participants at the national level and within the three local case studies.

This thesis has discussed the relationship between the community-led housing sector and the state. The nature of this relationship is critical for the form of the community-led housing sector. The theoretical discussion has foregrounded the relationship between these two actors and ways in which community-led housing actors have aimed to align themselves to state institutional mechanisms in order to gain access to resources and legitimacy. The findings have also highlighted the necessity of these relationships and the benefits that they can bring to the sector, but also the complications and precarity of such a dialectic position.

The research shows that grant-funding, especially large-scale grant funding, is seen as a crucial component for community-led housing organisations to pursue their projects, although some actors

are aiming to find other routes. Projects need to hire professionals to support processes of planning and funding applications. This requirement for revenue funding will also be greater in community-led housing groups that seek to involve a wider pool of individuals who may not have the skills required. It is unlikely that sufficient revenue funding can be acquired purely through applications to smaller charitable grant schemes, and engagement with such a large number of small funding avenues increases the workload of the group and the amount of support required. Furthermore, participants were clear that they needed grant or in-kind support, or both, to meet capital costs of land purchase and construction in order to provide housing that is below market rate. A further complicating factor is that small scale operators are not able to borrow at the same rates as larger organisations with existing assets that carry less financial risks. Therefore, grant and capacity to borrow on favourable rates is an important practice to support the sector. In addressing this need there have been several iterations of funding options, notably the Community Housing Fund in its two separate stages and various other resource streams. Though these have had benefits they have required actors to engage with new set of rules and expectations. As the fund has now been discontinued, they are required to adapt again to alternative sources of funding. Some actors are attempting to address this issue by developing an asset base and continuing to have ownership of completed properties through an umbrella organisation, in some cases linked to the enabling hub. Still, actors noted that engagement in the housing and land market was inaccessible to civil society organisations without significant financial support from government. Such reliable routes could be secured at the local or municipal level where local government is engaged and able to secure either funding or land use opportunities. However, presently, many projects are only able to proceed through a miscellany of different funding streams, remaining exceptional one-off feats rather than being underpinned by a sustainable and reliable platform of resources.

The research shows that the intermittent nature of funding schemes is a drain on the resources of the community-led housing sector. This includes change in terms of funding sources and their requirements and change that relates to the conditions of employment for those working in the sector. This instability also costs time and resources as individuals and organisations adapt to new requirements and generates substantial churn within the sector as individuals cannot maintain themselves within the profession. Additionally, community-led housing volunteers can become frustrated as short-lived funding opportunities mean that groups are unable to capitalise on opportunities and then need to wait for long periods for further funding to become available. Participants discussed difficulties in responding to short-term funding timescales and the inability to move at a steady pace with projects due to not knowing what resources would be available at future points.

The research has taken an actor focused standpoint and in doing so highlighted some key learning for the sector in regard to the roles of particular individuals. It has shown the importance for campaigners and other supporters of finding and connecting with champions within local authorities or other powerful organisations. The research shown that the social networks of community-led housing campaigners are crucial to securing resources. Furthermore, the findings highlight that key individuals within community-led housing projects are lynchpins that advance projects by continual endeavour and persuasive argument. This raises questions of the extent to which the sector can rely upon exceptional individuals with particular resources and reiterates the case for extensive professional support in building a community-led housing sector in balance with supporting grassroots initiatives in the sector.

9.4.1   Enabling hubs

A key component of this thesis has been the study of the implementation of the enabling hub programme which has provided some insight into the policy approach and implementation. This analysis interrogated the construction of the role of the enabling hub in terms of how the major programmes of funding was designed and its implementation into three localities used as case studies. The provision of advice and guidance support continued to be seen as an important factor in the potential for community-led housing growth. Understanding these advisers' roles includes a perspective on their role as conveners of stakeholders around projects and as translators between community groups and other stakeholders and actors in the wider housing and planning systems. The findings suggest that whilst additional professional support for community-led housing was welcome at the local level, in practice there was not enough time for the enabling hubs to fulfil the ambition of becoming self-funding and some doubted if this was ever likely to be possible. Participants raised questions about the practicality of multiple locally based enabling hubs, if community groups would prefer to choose their own adviser and if there was enough work to sustain advisers working across so many enabling hubs. Therefore, whilst the community-led housing training and accreditation programme created literacy in community-led housing approaches enabling hubs might not have provided stable employment opportunities. The research found that community-led housing professionals worked across diverse geographies and the catchment area for enabling hubs were often expanding, or the site of contention. In the Leeds Community Homes case study actors had resolved this complication through creating a separation between the consultancy arm, which was not geographically bound, and the geographically rooted umbrella CLT.

With particular regard to the enabling hubs and community-led housing support infrastructure, this thesis has reflected on a period of time in which state investment has been made available to the

community-led housing sector and subsequently ended. Several participants predicted significant challenges in moving on from state funding which are apparent in the data. Furthermore, many participants had witnessed cycles of state funding previously, and many expressed frustration with these short-term funding mechanisms and suggested that it has hindered the growth of community-led housing activity. Funding streams from local government are clearly contingent on the specifics of that locality, and for some community-led housing enabling hubs contracts with local government might offer a solution to the current direct central government funding shortfall. However, these are also contingent on political willpower and some resource streams from national government. Additionally, prior to and during the period of state investment community-led housing enabling work was also supported by third sector investment. Some of this funding was at very significant levels , such as the Power to Change programme, but much of it was smaller scale. At the same time that government funding streams ended there was a sense of less funding being available from these alternative sources and that this decline in third sector funding similarly contributed to problems of instability due to grant cycles. Overall, participants cited consistency and stability in funding as factors that could contribute to sector growth, however, the patterns of interaction with the state suggest that such stability is unlikely to be offered through either a direct funding relationship to the state or from third sector grant capture.

9.4.2   Summary of key messages for the community-led housing sector

These complications suggest that a more established community-led housing sector would require a more autonomous mode of operation which relies on its own assets to support an internal sector infrastructure, as much as possible. However, routes to this development remain challenging. The research highlights how the idea of self-funding a support infrastructure of enabling hubs through completed development projects has only been viable in the highly specific circumstances of the Middlemarch/ Wessex Community Assets model of CLT and housing association partnership developments. This model, now well established, has a long-term and predictable pipeline of future development. The research suggests that most local areas do not have this option at present. Furthermore, options such as becoming a registered provider and managing homes in order to secure an asset base may function to support an enabling hub but blur the distinction between community-led housing organisations and community focused housing associations. Additionally, the research suggests that community-led housing groups might prefer to work with advisers who are more aligned with the type of community-led housing they intend to undertake rather than a geographically bounded adviser. Given these constraints, the research suggests that a functioning ecosystem of multiple highly localised enabling hubs might not be feasible long-term and in all localities. A full-time cadre of professionals in various organisations take significant funding to

achieve. Therefore, routes to retaining sector knowledge beyond the enabling hub structure should be explored. This might include options such as sharing knowledge of community development work with other professions or nationally operating services which cater to specific forms of development context.

A summary of these messages for the community-led housing sector is presented in Table X below.

Table 9.1 Key messages for the community-led housing sector

Key messages
In general, the strongest routes of growth look likely to be in spaces created within existing systems, such as housing association partnerships and S106 partnerships. However, care needs to be taken to maintain and support the innovation role of the sector which is likely to include projects which operate autonomously from mainstream actors.
Currently, resources are not sufficient to create a stable enabling hub infrastructure and therefore secure jobs for advisers engaged in this work. The instability of the sector means that these are not reliable employment vehicles for individuals. There is significant knowledge and skills which might be lost to the sector if existing experience is not retained. Therefore, routes to enable continued relationships with those with such experience should be prioritised.
Whilst a full-time cadre of professionals in various organisations takes significant funding to achieve – skills and understandings can still be taught and shared within associated professions.
The community-led housing- sector can have an influence which extends beyond the number of housing units that it produces. It can act as a campaigning base for considering what is valued in public land disposal and in planning for housing. This role as a leader in supporting community engagement in development and driving sustainability efforts should also be recognised as success.

9.5   FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

This research has explored the community-led housing sector in England and the supporting infrastructure through case studies of regional activity combined with a national perspective.

Further research could build on this approach, providing further comparative material, or use the learning to formulate new research questions for the community-led housing sector.

One area for further investigation is the relationship between community-led housing volunteers and community members and the professional support infrastructure. This could be fruitfully analysed from a comparative perspective which would create an understanding of the factors that influence these relationships. My research has shown that enabling hubs are differently organised according to resources and local factors. Given this, it is important to understand how the relationship is constructed by volunteers and community members and how they conceptualise the intervention of professionals in developing community-led housing projects. The research has demonstrated that this engagement can take place in different points on a journey, in convening a group, supporting an already formed group or engaging with a community anchor organisation. Each of these infers separate power differentials, so future research should seek to engage with different sorts of projects.

Secondly, the research could be usefully augmented with further case studies of support infrastructure for community-led housing practices, particularly from an international perspective. Research from Ferreri (2022) has discussed the municipal and sectoral support available for co-operative housing projects in Barcelona. Incorporating international comparisons such as these would enrich the field by adding a further national policy context to the academic understanding of the operation of the institutional framework in which community-led and collaborative housing practices are enacted. Furthermore, such cross-country comparison could provide useful learning for the activist, policy and practice communities involved.

Finally, the study of the phenomena of regional community-led housing development would benefit from quantitative spatial analysis, including of the types and stages of development and their locational contexts to reveal further patterns and correlations in the shape of community-led housing development in England.

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11 APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – PARTICIPANT LIST

National Stakeholders	
NS1	Director, Community Led Homes
NS2	Hub Manager, Community Led Homes
NS3	Co-Director, Confederation of Co-Operative Housing
NS4	Programme Manager, Nationwide Foundation
NS5	Participant, Homes England and other sector experience
NS6	Participant, MHCLG
NS7	Participant, Community development practitioner - Multiple roles
NS8	Director, Self Help Housing
NS9	Participant, Homes England
NS10	Chief Executive, UK Cohousing Network
Wessex Community Housing Hub	
W1	Board member, Wessex Community Assets
W2	Community-Led Housing Adviser, Wessex Community Housing Hub
W3	Rural Housing Enabler and Manager, Devon Communities Together
W4	Housing Enabling Team Leader, Dorset Council
W5	Development Manager, Housing Association
W6	Smart Communities Manager, Somerset Community Council
W7	Development Enabler, Somerset West and Taunton
W8	Director, Middlemarch Associates
W9	Housing Enabler, Multiple councils in South West
The Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority Community Housing Enabling Service	
EC1	Community Housing Programme Manager, Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority
EC2	Leader, East Cambridgeshire District Council
EC3	Director, SME developer in East Cambridgeshire and surrounding region
EC4	Director, SME developer - wholly owned by East Cambridge District Council
EC5	Community Housing Programme Administrator, Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority
EC6	Chief Executive, Cambridge ACRE (host of Eastern Community Homes)
Leeds Community Homes	
L1	CEO, Leeds Community Homes
L2	EDI Consultant and Adviser, Leeds Community Homes
L3	Community-Led Housing Adviser A, Leeds Community Homes
L4	Community-Led Housing Adviser B, Leeds Community Homes
L5	Associate, Leeds Community Homes
L6	Director, Community-led housing organisation in Leeds
L7	Member, Community-led housing project in Leeds

National stakeholders' topic guide

Introduction

Introduce the project and discuss confidentiality. Remind the interviewee that they will be given the opportunity to ask for something they have said to be "off the record" (excluded from the transcript) at the end of the interview and that if anything is going to be attributed to them in the final work, I will seek express permission.

Check we are recording

The participant and their role(s) in the CLH sphere – 5 minutes

Ask participants to introduce themselves and their orientation to CLH

- Please could you introduce yourself and your role?
- Please could you tell me a bit about the organisation you work for?
- How does your organisation and your work relate to CLH?
- What work do you do within the sector?
- How is this work financed? *(e.g., grants, consultancy work for CLH organisations, developer profit, or public sector)*

Community-Led Housing in England – 20 minutes

Explore how the interviewee perceives the CLH landscape currently, including individual and organisational perspectives.

- From your perspective, when we talk about "community-led housing" what does that mean?
- What is significant about community-led housing that distinguishes it from other forms of housing?
  - o Is CLH affordable?
  - o What sort of tenures should be offered?
  - o What is community control? How much community control should there be?
- What motivates your organisation promoting/supporting CLH approaches (or specific practice)?
  - o Is your organisation linked to a specific sub-sector of CLH? (e.g., Cohousing, co-operatives, CLT, self-build)

- What aspects of CLH is your organisation most concerned with? (e.g., affordability, self-management, localised decision making) and why?
- Thinking of the past five years or so, what do you think the major developments have been in the CLH sector? (e.g. specific policies, decisions, organisations emerging) – *Probe for local and national level changes*

Stakeholders

- Who do you see as the most important stakeholders in determining how and how much/how many CLH projects materialise?
- How much influence is there in national government versus local government?
    - What does CLH offer central government?
    - What do political leaders see as the benefit of CLH?
    - What motivates politicians to support CLH?
    - What motivates civil servants to support CLH?
- Who lobbies government on what the sector needs from them?
- What do you see as the contribution of CLH sector and the wider housing environment in England?

Sector

- What could growth in the sector look like over the next few years?
- will (or are) there be different types of communities creating projects?
- Will there be an emphasis on growing the numbers or growing specific types of housing?
- What does "scaling up" mean – ('scaling up' versus 'scaling out'
- What do you see as the opportunities for "scaling up" CLH in the next few years?
- What are the challenges?
- There's a few different models that sit under the umbrella term of "community-led housing", do you find that they are able to make use of government funding in the same way?

CLH infrastructure organisations – 20

Explore the interviewee's relationship to the enabling hub structure and the supportive infrastructure of CLH at a national level, and their understanding of its purpose. Seek to identify what work they see hubs doing and why it is structured in this way.

National

- Can you tell me a bit about the role of sector bodies at a national level?
  - What do they do?
  - In forming and influencing policy?
  - In implementing CLH practices?
- Can you tell me a bit about how the partnership of Community Led Homes?
  - What is the benefit of partnering?
  - How do you deal with sub-sectors which aren't part of the umbrella?
  - How does this relate to national bodies? E.g., whether and how they work in partnership or in co-ordinated ways

Enabling hubs

- Now thinking about enabling hubs – from your perspective can you tell me a bit about the role of enabling hubs in CLH?
- What are the benefits to CLH in establishing enabling hubs?
- Thinking of the ambition to "scale up" CLH – what is the role of enabling hubs?
- What work do enabling hubs do? What sort of work should they do?
  - Distributing funding (why/why not)
  - Providing expertise (why/why not)
  - Seeking out projects (why/ why not)
  - Promoting CLH (why/why not)
  - Political lobbying (why/ why not)
  - What else?
  - Developing their own housing/assets?
- So far, how effective do you think have hubs been at the sort of work they should be doing?
  - Why is this?
- Can you give me any examples of enabling hubs operations you think are going well or are good examples?
- Can you give me examples of anything that you think is going less well and why this is?
- From what you have seen what are the relationships between enabling hubs and grass-roots organisations like?
  - How does the way the current system is set up structure these relationships?
  - Do communities have a say in how enabling hubs are run?
  - How do or will they prioritise their support for communities?
  - How will communities access the help and support and expertise of enabling hubs?

o And how will they finance this support?

Regionalisation

- Why have a regional structure?
    - o What are the benefits of being regional as opposed to national?
    - o Are there any challenges in being regional?
    - o Are there any challenges to organising the sector through regional enabling hubs?
- What are some key facets of regional variation? In that ways do regional variation generate different kinds of CLH?
    - o Ask about: different levels of resource
    - o Centralization of capital funding versus regionalisation of approach?
    - o What are the challenges?
- How do enabling hubs interact with different local authorities?
    - o What determines these relationships?
    - o What are the outcomes of these differences?

Growing CLH through enabling hubs– 10 minutes

- How is the hub model intended to facilitate growth in CLH?
- What other factors are involved?
- How do enabling hubs influence CLH development in their areas?
    - o In terms of models?
    - o In terms of tenures?
    - o What are other factors?
    - o What are the factors that you think will be important in determining this?
    - o Do you think we are more likely to see certain models or practices supported by enabling hubs?
- Looking towards the next five years what do you see as the key opportunities for enabling hubs? What about the key challenges?

This research – 5 minutes

Overall, the theme of this research is about the way that creating an institutional support structure influences the CLH movement and how it can begin to think about scale, but I'm at quite a preliminary stage with asking these questions. Overall, it would be useful to hear from you what you think the sectors needs are in relation to this avenue of research.

- What are the big questions that you are considering when thinking about the future of enabling hubs?

- What does success look like?

- What could a detailed case study about the way enabling hubs operate tell you?

- I'm still trying to understand what sorts of enabling hubs should look at for this research, what do you think are the key factors that categorise different hubs?

Final questions – 5 minutes

- Is there anything else important you think I should consider when thinking about the role of the enabling hub in the community-led housing sector?

- What is the crucial thing that I should take from our interview today?

- That's all of my questions for you, do you have any questions for me?

Thank and close

- That's, the end of our interview, is there anything we've covered today that you would like to exclude from the transcript?

- As part of the research, I am doing an analysis of documents, are there any reports, policy papers, or similar that you think would help me that you're able to share?

- Is there anyone else in particular you think would be important to speak to?

- Thanks very much for making time for me today,

Case study topic guide

Introduction

Introduce the project and discuss confidentiality. Remind the interviewee that they will be given the opportunity to ask for something they have said to be "off the record" (excluded from the transcript) at any point in the interview.

Check we are recording

The participant and their role(s) in the CLH sphere

- *Ask participants to introduce themselves and their orientation to CLH*
- Please could you introduce yourself and what your different involvement is now with Community-led housing?
- Can you tell me a bit about your organisation?
- When we talk about CLH what does that mean?

About the Hub 10 minutes

This is for context on the hub and CLH in the area, and a bit of information on what the hub has been trying to achieve.

Enabling Hub context

- Can you tell me a bit about housing need in the area?
    - What is the housing market like? What is the housing need like?
    - What has community-led housing development in the area looked like?
- Can you tell me about the role of [organisation] in enabling CLH in your region?
- Can you tell me a bit about your relationship with community-led housing enabling hubs?
- What are the relationships with different councils?
    - And why is that do you think?
- What areas have seen a lot of community-led housing?
    - And why is that do you think?
- What is the history of enabling organisations in CLH in your area?
    - Please can you briefly explain the origins of the enabling hub, (and what it is emerging into becoming)?
    - [if change] What will be the key differences between what has been and what is emerging?
- Who is involved in the hub?

- o Who are they key people or organisations that have a say in how the hub operates?

  - o *Probe for:* individuals

  - o And why are they key do you think?

- What is the role of a hub from your understanding?

  - o what it is trying to achieve?

  - o what it has or has not achieved?

  - o Why has this been the case?

- What are some key things that the hub achieved?

  - o how has the landscape of CLH changed in your area in recent years?

  - o whether and how the hub has influenced this?

- When thinking about hubs people talk about local hubs and local knowledge a lot, can you think of an example of local knowledge in operation?

Specific questions related to background research e.g.

- How did Middlemarch first become involved with Wessex?

- Wessex had a long history of CLT provision, in the time of the hub how much has there been a movement towards more broadly defined community-led housing?

- And why is that do you think?

Institutional context 15

The research is going to investigate the whys that particular rules and practices can support, or hinder community-led housing practices.

Examples of typical CLH development

- What constitutes a "typical" community-led housing development you have been involved in? Can you think about a specific example of a CLH development that is quite typical?

  - o What sort of development?

  - o Who was involved?

  - o How was it financed?

  - o Can you think of examples?

  - o What is the role of the hub?

  - o What are the ideas about how to do housing that you are promoting or challenging? What is the guiding story?

  - o And why is that do you think?

- Can you think of a development that was unusual?

- Why is it unusual?
- What sort of development
- Who was involved?
- How was it financed?
- Can you think of examples?
- What are the ideas about how to do housing that you are promoting or challenging? What is the guiding story?
- And why is that do you think?
- Can you think of projects that have been controversial? Where does the controversy lie?

Government and other stakeholders

- Who do you see as the most important stakeholders in determining how and how much/how many communities led housing projects materialise?
  - Nationally (e.g., England, vs. Wales, vs. Scotland) – and why
  - Regionally (e.g. City region, District council) – and why
  - Locally (or even hyper-locally) – and why
  - *Probe for individuals*
  - How does their influence materialise? – and why
- Can you think of examples of national policies or practices that promote community-led housing?
  - Follow up: And what was their impact? Did they manage to achieve their aims, or did they have unintended consequences? and why
  - From national government?
  - Community housing fund
  - Favourable policies
  - Planning policies
  - Non- governmental actors? E.g., National infrastructure organisations?
- Can you think of examples of local government that promote community-led housing?
  - Where areas have more CLH what are sorts of things that local government does to encourage this?
  - Can you give an example of this?
- Can you think of anything that local government does that actively hinders the options for CLH?
  - and why do they do these things?
  - Does CLH ever happen when the council is not in favour – what would that look like?

- Outside of government what sort of behaviours influence community-led housing development?
    - (Some of my ideas: landowners, sense of community/place, skillset/availability of volunteers, knowledge of CLH, history of CLH, support for hubs)
- What can block CLH development in different areas?
- How does the relationship with housing associations shape the community-led housing in your area?
    - What are the housing associations involved?
    - What is the benefit for the housing association?

Narratives of CLH and campaigning for the future 15

- What are the key values of community led development
    - According to you?
    - *According to others?*
    - *And why? And are they different?*
- When you think about the values for community-led housing that the hub is promoting, what does that vision look like?
    - E.g., what are the key benefits according to people involved in the hub?
        - and why
    - Are there any "stories" or ways of thinking about housing development that you see CLH as challenging?
    - From locals *(e.g., all housing development is bad, social and affordable housing is bad*)
    - From Government *(e.g., CLH takes too long and is too expensive, communities should not be involved/can't be trusted)*
    - – and why
- What are the ways that people see and understand CLH in different parts of life?
    - 'communities' *(or parish councils etc. – a vehicle for control over housing? A way to accomplish a certain way of living?*
    - Government – *a way of working with communities, an affordability control?*
    - What do you think community-led housing can tell us about what people want from housing in a broader sense?
- Does this vary between communities?
    - and why

- What are the key campaign goals of the sector that you can see in the future?

- What do these campaigns focus on about community-led housing?

Close

- And finally, what do you think the main enabler of community-led housing in the region is?

- And what do you think the key challenge or barrier is?

- Is there anything else that you think might be important about community-led housing we haven't spoken about today?

Thank and close.

APPENDIX C – DOCUMENTS

Document	Year	Author	Type	Published[2]/ Unpublished
Community Led Housing Enabler Hub Grant Programme Guidance	2019	Community Led Homes	Funding prospectus	Published
Delivering a community-led housing enabling hub service: experience and lessons from existing practice	2018	Duncan and Lavis, Power to Change	Working paper	Published
Homes in Community Hands programme guidelines for applicants	2018	Power to change	Funding prospectus	Published
Community-Led Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	2016	East Cambridgeshire District Council	Supplementary Planning Document	Published
Community Housing Fund Prospectus	2018	Homes England	Funding prospectus	Published
Wessex Community Housing Project Proposal to Nationwide Foundation's Backing Community-Led Housing Funding Strand	2017	Wessex Community Assets	Funding application for hub	Unpublished
Letter to local authorities regarding community housing fund	2016	DCLG	Government communication	Unpublished
Leeds Community Homes/People Powered Homes Business Plan (Not to be shared)	2021	Leeds Community Homes	Business Plan	Unpublished
Community Housing Fund– Sector Support: project summary	2017	MHCLG	Internal document	Unpublished

[2] Full Bibliographic information for published work is available in the Bibliography

APPENDIX D – PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Participant Information Sheet

Research project title: Scaling-up community-led housing

You are invited to participate in a research study which investigates the contexts in which community-led housing emerges and role of enablers and technical advisors, including the regional enabling hub, national supportive infrastructure and any other enablers in the development of community-led housing in England.

Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to understand the regional contexts of community-led housing development in England from the perspectives of people involved in the sector. This includes policies and way of working that influence community-led housing, the operation of enabling hubs and other enabling organisations, day-to-day support of CLH development, and experiences of being involved in community-led housing projects. The study will also ask about key contextual factors that contribute or block community-led housing development. The project aims to develop learnings for the CLH sector about approaches to sustainable growth of CLH in different regional contexts.

The study will include looking at these questions from a national perspective and through three case studies of regions based on the geography of the regional enabling hubs, taking into account that these are fluid and may have changed over time.

2. Why have I been chosen to take part?

This study is speaking to people involved in the CLH sector in a range of ways in either a voluntary or professional capacity. You have been asked to take part because you have knowledge and experience about community-led housing either at a local or national level.

3. Do I have to take part?

Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage.

4. What will happen if I take part?

- If you have been invited to take part in an interview this will consist of a one hour-long conversation with you at a time and place that is convenient to you. I will ask you questions about your experience with community-led housing and wider views on community-led housing.
- If you have been invited to take part in a focus group, this will consist of an hour and a half long group discussion with around six to eight others. The aim is to explore your experiences as community-led housing volunteers and find out what is similar and different about your experiences, especially in connection to the regional enabling hub.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded for note taking purposes, transcribed and analysed. The recording will be deleted after transcription. The transcription will be saved on University of Sheffield computers.

5. Are there any risks in taking part?

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantage or discomfort. No potential physical or psychological harm or distress is expected. However, there is a risk of having opinions and perceptions identifiably attributed to you in the work, which you need to understand. The risk of being identifiable increases significantly if you are in a prominent professional role in the sector taking part in an individual interview and is lower for volunteers and those taking part in a focus group.

It is important that you understand the limits of confidentiality in this work, the identities of individual will be obscured, but it is possible that people familiar with the sector will be able to identify individuals. The regional hubs (and their areas) that are taking part as case studies will be identified in the work and the identities of organisations will not normally by obscured. Though findings will generally be reported on aggregate the research findings may include quotes, paraphrases, or positions from your interview attributed by organisational affiliation. If there is a sense that any such quote, paraphrase or position is sensitive or controversial, whilst making an individual readily identifiable then your further consent will be sought to include this. You may request that any part of what you have said is removed from the transcript at any time, during or after the interview until publication of the thesis.

6. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let me know by getting in contact with me or if you would prefer you can contact either of my supervisors:

Tom Moore: Thomas.Moore@liverpool.ac.uk

John Flint: John.flint@sheffield.ac.uk

7. Will my participation be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. You will not be personally identifiable in the research. However, it is possible that you could be identified as institutions and the geographies of the case study and regional enabling hubs will not be obscured. Please refer to point five above which discusses the way the material will be used in the research outputs. If you have any concerns about this, please speak to me as we can discuss exactly what this means for your participation.

Data will be anonymised, and any data collected about you in interview will be stored in a form protected by passwords, or in a locked space. Audio files will be deleted once transcription has taken place. At the end of the project, transcriptions will be uploaded to a secure storage facility for ten years, for potential use in further research, at this stage <u>all identifiable material will be redacted and anonymised</u> as thoroughly as possible.

8. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

Your answers will be recorded and analysed by myself, and all the records will be stored in a form protected by passwords or in a locked space. Once transcriptions are completed, audio recordings will be deleted.

9. What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

The research will collect information about your professional or voluntary experience with community-led housing and your perceptions and opinions on this. It will seek your views on a range of issues in community-led housing, especially as they pertain to the enabling hub framework. This is to support the research projects objectives of developing an understanding of the regional enabling hub in the community-led housing sector.

10. What will happen to the results of the research project?

Results of the research will be presented in a doctoral thesis presented to the University of Sheffield. They will also contribute to academic journal articles. Additionally, material from the research may be used to develop materials such as reports, briefings or workshops for the community-led housing sector.

11. Who is organising and funding the research?

I am organising the research as a PhD student. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and conducted collaboratively with Wessex Community Assets (though it is not funded by WCA).

12. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

The ethics committee of the University of Sheffield has reviewed this project.

13. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw at any time, without explanation. If you decide to withdraw part or all of your interview or focus group contributions after you have already taken part, you can contact me at the address below. You do not need to explain the decision to withdraw.

14. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

For questions about the research or your involvement please contact the lead researcher:

Philippa Hughes, phughes4@sheffield.ac.uk, 07875798482

If you would like to contact the supervisor of the research, please contact either:

Tom Moore, University of Liverpool, Thomas.Moore@liverpool.ac.uk

John Flint, University of Sheffield, John.Flint@sheffield.ac.uk

Consent form

Title of Research Project: Scaling up Community-Led Housing

Name of Researcher: Philippa Hughes

		Please initial box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated *16/4/2021* explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.	
3.	I understand that organisations will not be anonymised in this research, so whilst findings will be reported on aggregate, organisations, including the case study enabling hub, will not be obscured.	
4.	I understand that while the content of the interview will be kept confidential and findings will generally be aggregated for reporting, it may be necessary for the research to use quotes and paraphrases from the interview. I understand that these quotes or paraphrases may be attributed by organisational affiliation and if there is and reason to expect they are sensitive, they will be checked with me prior to using.	
5.	I understand that I can ask for material to be reacted from the transcript at any point during or after the interview until the conclusion of the thesis (due September 2022).	
6.	I understand that the researcher intends to use this research for production of a doctoral thesis, academic journal articles and dissemination work within the community-led housing sector such as reports and workshops.	

7.	I understand that this interview will be recorded and then transcribed by the researcher and that the audio file will then be deleted, and the transcription saved on a secure University of Sheffield server.	
8.	I understand that at the completion of the project these transcripts will be anonymised, including redacting identifying details, and saved on a secure server for future research for a period of 10 years.	
9.	I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research	
10.	I agree to take part in the above research project.	

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Name of Participant:	Date:	Signature (initial and return by email if digital)
Lead Researcher: Philippa Hughes	Date:	Signature (initial if digital) PH