

## Consultation: Inquiry into community assets Response from the Nationwide Foundation

23 June 2022

To assist the Senedd's Local Government and Housing Committee, we are responding specifically to the third issue in this inquiry: **to explore barriers and challenges faced by communities in taking ownership of public or privately-owned assets, including finance and support services.**

We put forward two ways that the Welsh Government could facilitate the expansion of community-led housing:

1. introducing a revolving loan fund
2. developing a land-ownership database.

### Introduction

As an independent charity, the Nationwide Foundation influences changes to improve circumstances for those people who most need help. Its vision is for everyone in the UK to have access to a decent home that they can afford, and its strategy seeks to improve the lives of people who are disadvantaged because of their housing circumstances. To do this, it aims to increase the availability of decent affordable homes.

Through its programme of Backing Community-Led Housing the Nationwide Foundation has a commitment to strengthening, supporting and championing the growth of community-led housing, so that more people who are in need will benefit. The Nationwide Foundation envisages a future where community-led housing is thriving and where many more people are living in homes created through this approach.

In responding to this consultation, the Nationwide Foundation speaks as both a funder and champion of the community-led housing sector. Our work in this area seeks to remove barriers and allow the sector to grow at scale: one of those barriers has been, and remains, the difficulties faced by community groups in acquiring assets and land.

As part of our Backing Community-Led Housing programme, we fund Cwmpas to continue its work supporting community-led housing groups. The number of groups being supported by Cwmpas has grown from 27 in 2019 to 64 in 2022, reflecting the growth and promise of the sector in Wales. The current Welsh pipeline has the potential to create 653 new homes.

The Nationwide Foundation supports the response given to this consultation by Cwmpas.

### Introduce a revolving loan fund

There are significant financial barriers to community-led groups in delivering affordable housing:

1. **A lack of dedicated funding for land acquisitions**, which can stall a project in the earliest phases.
2. **Limited capital for covering upfront costs**, such as site searches.
3. **Access to grants is difficult** for groups that are not registered social landlords, and groups are often reliant on a small pool of specialist social lenders. In some cases, they are forced to partner with another organisation that may be less focused on community benefits and affordability.

Cwmpas's report, [Community ownership of land and assets](#), recommends that the Welsh Government should establish a revolving loan fund for community-led housing projects to resolve these issues.

A revolving fund offering loans for pre-development costs and site acquisition and development would address the financial barriers faced by community groups in taking ownership of assets. It would enable the community-led housing sector to expand, allowing groups to retain independence and deliver the affordable housing they want for their communities.

### **Develop a land ownership database**

Finding appropriate land, identifying landowners and then contacting them is difficult for community groups. Different government agencies hold mapping data, property characteristics data and property transactions data. Approaching each separately can be challenging for groups without the capacity and experience which private developers have.

Cwmpas's report recommends that the Welsh Government should develop a land ownership database. This would be a single access point for publicly available key data on land ownership and transactions in Wales, bringing together existing databases such as HM Land Registry and the Welsh Government Land Division. Each entry in the registry should include information on whether the land is owned by public bodies, private landowners or is unclaimed.

With proper maintenance and transparency, this would greatly improve access to key information about potential sites for community-led housing groups. This in turn would lead to fewer plans being abandoned on the basis of groups being unable to find suitable locations and also swifter delivery of homes.

### **Conclusion**

It is encouraging to see on 22 June 2022, the Welsh Government accepted the Empowering Communities motion in the Senedd. The motion noted the Cwmpas report above and the importance of enabling and empowering community groups to keep local assets for their communities.

As work develops on the production of a communities strategy, the points above should be borne in mind. Community-led housing can be a workable method for delivering genuinely affordable housing, and with the right support to address barriers to accessing finance and land, community groups can contribute significantly to a Wales that is prosperous for all.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to your consultation and would gladly discuss our response with you.

### **Contacts**

#### **Sam Dordoy**

Communications, Policy & Public Affairs Officer  
[sam.dordoy@nationwidefoundation.org.uk](mailto:sam.dordoy@nationwidefoundation.org.uk)  
0330 551 9203

#### **Gary Hartin**

Programme Manager  
[gary.hartin@nationwidefoundation.org.uk](mailto:gary.hartin@nationwidefoundation.org.uk)