



**Client Brief**  
**December 2022**

## Introduction

The London Older Lesbian Cohousing group (LOLC) is seeking to create the first older lesbian cohousing community in the UK. This could be realised in a number of ways - for example, partnering with a Registered Housing Provider and/or developer to secure a site on which to design and build, or perhaps re-purposing an existing building or site. We have done a great deal of consultation and research to create our business plan (available on request), but also remain open and flexible in relation to possible routes to our goal.

The group has been established since 2016 and currently consists of 19 members. The housing project we envisage will comprise between 12 and 25 units (some 1 and some 2 bed) for lesbians over 50, with mixed tenure and shared communal internal and external space. The size of site would depend on location, as well as viability and potential to provide outdoor space. The group is happy to discuss sharing a site as part of a larger development.

The members of LOLC are all Londoners, with many having extensive experience of working successfully in cooperative and collective ventures. Currently, most of us live (or have lived) in north-east London – Waltham Forest, Haringey and Hackney. These are our favoured locations, while being open to other possibilities in inner London (see 'LOLC Site Selection Requirements Dec 2022 document'). We are urban dwellers and have made a positive choice to live and remain in such a setting into our old age, developing a diverse cohousing group for older lesbians.

We are the first generation of 'out' lesbians who are in a position to develop alternative ways of ageing, exploring how mutuality, solidarity and interdependence can benefit ageing well whilst staying in place. We intend to be an alternative model of an intentional housing community for older people from within diverse communities, who wish to live together in their later years. Our focus will be on creating viable alternatives of staying well within a community, in times when state provision of health and social care for older people is under pressure.

## What we bring to the partnership

- a vision and a unique project - the first co-housing project of its kind in the UK, one which could complement and enrich the local community and provide a model for other initiatives in the future.
- a committed, engaged and skilled membership, ready to work to realise the project
- significant capital to purchase a number of properties
- a fundraising strategy that aims to increase our development equity from sources that may not be accessible to developers and registered housing providers
- continued recruitment, including managing a reserve list so that there will be no voids once the build is complete
- the possibility of unlocking currently unavailable sites through our engagement with local authorities actively seeking community-led housing partners
- potential savings to public services for older people through interdependence and mutual support
- easier planning permission given our community focus

- flexible approach to development, including the possibility of being an addition to, or part of, an existing development, or larger proposed development.

### Overarching ambitions for the project

Through a series of workshops and our subgroups we have identified the following four main principles for the project:

- accessibility
- community
- affordability
- low environmental impact.



This has led in turn to the identification of a set of key characteristics of well-designed housing. These are our aims, but we recognise the need to be flexible and open to compromise, as needed.

- Individual apartments, for affordable purchase and rent, with a shared communal area, facilities and garden space .

- Homes designed to accommodate all stages of life.
- A development that is safe and secure by design and location for our diverse group of older lesbians.
- A scheme that is energy and water efficient, with enhanced sound and thermal insulation.
- Optimum use of natural daylight.
- Use of sustainable and high quality, natural materials wherever possible.
- Communal facilities including laundry, a common room with kitchen, guest room and individual storage space.

### Site selection and location

LOLC is flexible on its site location, with a preference for an inner North/East London location in Haringey, Hackney or Waltham Forest. The group wants to live in an urban location, rather than suburban. We would prefer to live in a quiet road, with good public transport. The location needs to be safe for the group to be 'out' as older lesbians in a multi-cultural ethnically diverse area. More detailed site selection criteria are provided separately.

### Financing and funding

We envisage that the majority of capital funding for the scheme would come from a number of LOLC members in the form of equity, which is currently tied up in their homes. We *have* negotiated revenue funding and in principle grant funding from the GLA Community Housing Fund for our affordable units and would hope that this funding remains available over the lifetime of the GLA Community Housing Fund. In addition, we have an ongoing and strong link with Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH), who are willing to consider taking on management and ownership of the rental and OPSO units, including paying an upfront amount.

We have always intended to fund raise for the communal areas, but need the assurance of a viable scheme before a formal application will be considered. We have had initial positive soundings about this with the Lottery Community Fund.

### Property mix

Our preferred tenure would be a mix of London Affordable Rent [potentially managed by Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH)], Older Persons Shared Ownership (OPSO) and leasehold sale. This reflects the diverse economic standing of our members and offers a route to an affordable and deliverable scheme. However, we are flexible as to the types of tenure within our community in order to ensure the viability of the scheme, whilst also accommodating the needs of our members.



## Individual apartments

The design characteristics of the individual homes so far identified as aspirations include:

- innovative external and internal design that contributes to well-being
- fully accessible – Homes for Life standards
- mostly on a single floor
- open plan kitchen and living space
- bathroom with choice of bath or shower
- designed to maximise natural light with windows to all rooms
- part of a communal heating system, if affordable
- individual outside space, eg balconies
- possible individual adaptation of the internal space.

## The internal communal areas

LOLC, like all Cohousing schemes, are keen to invest in communal internal areas and facilities. The communal areas will have multiple uses and be accessible by all members. The key specific requirements are:

- a multi-functional large open space able to accommodate all residents and guests
- communal dining area with kitchen and toilet facilities
- guest bedroom/s with toilet and shower, kitchen
- food storage facilities for bulk purchases
- individual storage space
- laundry
- disabled access.



### Common areas

The group would like a beautiful place to live. Therefore, the group are keen to make the common areas as attractive and useable as possible. This would include:

- south facing garden (if possible) – with space for growing vegetables and flowers
- garden equipment storage
- bike and disabled scooter storage
- recycling storage
- some car parking spaces or access to public parking
- car parking spaces for disabled users close to communal internal space
- access for delivery vehicles.

### Current outline timescale

- Site and delivery partner to be identified early 2023
- Updated GLA revenue funding approval mid 2023
- Planning application and approval late 2023
- Start on site 2024
- Complete 2025-26

### Key contact

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