



## PRESS RELEASE

### First 3-village community land trust set up in South Downs

#### Gillian Keegan MP attends inaugural board meeting

4<sup>th</sup> April 2019, Rogate. Gillian Keegan MP today attended the inaugural meeting of a newly-registered community land trust (CLT) and hailed it as a potentially important part of the solution to the lack of low-cost housing for South Downs residents.

The parish councils and concerned residents in three small villages in the South Downs – Rogate, Stedham and Trotton – had been discussing the possibilities of setting up community land trusts separately for some time. All three groups had talked to the directors of nearby Midhurst CLT, who were willing to consider extending their boundary to include neighbouring villages, but the village groups concluded that the Midhurst trust would – quite rightly – need to focus its attention on the town for some time to come. The three groups therefore started talking to each other, and formed a steering committee comprising parish council and other members from all three parishes, which joined and obtained start-up funding from the National CLT Network (NCLTN) and support from Chichester District Council (CDC) – who also provided some grant funding – and other advisors. Having agreed the outline of a joint trust, they elected a smaller board of directors to do the detailed work and put together an official application to the Financial Conduct Authority for legal registration as START community trust (START came from Stedham, Trotton And Rogate Together). The application was approved this week, and Gillian Keegan attended the inaugural meeting of the trust, which started discussing membership and financial policies.

Rogate and Stedham, the two larger parish councils are in the final stages of developing neighbourhood plans and have done housing needs surveys and housing site assessments as part of this work. These, and housing waiting lists at CDC, confirmed the need for low-cost housing in the area and Mairi Rennie, a member of the new board and the Rogate councillor who had done the exploratory work and kept the idea alive despite the apparently daunting challenges it faced, says that “people who were born here and are now starting their own families cannot afford to live and work here because of the shortage of houses – particularly small ones – and the associated rapid increases in house prices in recent years. We keep losing these young people, who are the lifeblood of the area, and it is getting ever harder to find young teachers, nurses and other essential workers who can afford to live here. We think there is a need for about 20-30 units across the three parishes. We are lucky to live in such a beautiful part of the country, but none of us want it to turn into a retirement area or a pure tourist destination.”

Chairman of START, Neil Ryder, says the directors will use the annual parish meetings of all three parishes over the next few weeks to start telling residents about the new venture, but most of their attention in the short term is on developing membership, finance and other policies in order to be ready to launch a drive for community membership this summer. “We have started work on identifying potential sites but it might take us several years to find and buy any sites and be ready to build. By then, like the other 300+ CLTs in the country, we need to achieve the maximum possible community involvement and voting membership, so that local people are making the crucial decisions about their villages. CLTs can have access to land that would not normally be developed and they have unique legal rights to be able to restrict the purchase and rental agreements – for ever. Members will have equal votes on how to decide who should be allowed to buy or rent any houses we build, on whether START should be involved in pubs, shops, community centres and other amenities and, of course, on electing the board and on all other key policies.

“We are grateful for the start-up funding we have already received from the NCLTN and from CDC, which has also enabled us to pay for expert advice from the Sussex Community Housing Hub. We also hope to be able to get further government and other grants to help us reach the stage where we either employ people to start site development or where we partner with developers. However, we believe we should at least be able to raise enough from our members to cover our administrative running costs. The board are all unpaid volunteers and we hope other members of our communities will at least stump up a few pounds to keep us going until we start receiving sale or rental income.

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“We also hope Gillian Keegan and other MPS can help publicise what we are doing and to press government to keep going with their support of the CLT movement. Government statistics for 2018 show that rural councils built 1,336 social housing units countrywide, while there are 173,584 families on rural waiting lists. At this rate it will take 130 years to house them all. Rural communities need to do more to help themselves - which is what we aim to do.

“This is a great way for communities to help themselves to ease the pressure for low cost housing for their own residents, and maybe to counter the inexorable decline of village pubs, shops, post offices and other amenities. We hope that our three groups of villages, by joining together can draw on a deeper pool of talents to help us do our work, a broader range of potential sites and a stronger demand for any projects we manage to develop.”

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Notes for editors:

Introduction to [START community trust](#)

National CLT network – what is a CLT?: <http://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/what-is-a-clt>

Sussex Community Housing Hub: <https://www.sussexcommunityhousinghub.org/about-us/>

CDC community-led housing: <http://chichester.gov.uk/communityledhousing>