

Network Coordinator

Job pack

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Background to the UK Cohousing Network

a) Cohousing

Cohousing is a way of living which brings individuals and families together in neighbourly groups to share common aims and activities while also enjoying their own self-contained accommodation and personal space. It first developed in Scandinavia and the Netherlands where there are now many communities and where cohousing is accepted as a mainstream housing option. In these countries it is possible to live in a cohousing community as an owner occupier or as a tenant with a supported rent. Cohousing is also strong in the US where it is primarily available for owner occupiers or private tenants.

The key features of cohousing are

- Intentionality, set up and run by their members for mutual benefit
- Members live consciously as a community
- Fully self contained dwellings
- Designed for easy communal contact but with a balance between privacy and communality
- Designed, managed and controlled by their members
- Size and scale to maximise community dynamics
- Common house facilitates shared activities like communal meals

Cohousing does not usually involve

- A shared faith or other ideology
- Income sharing – people go out to work (or not) in the same way as in mainstream society
- A Housing co-op or a commune – it is much more than just your house, much less than your entire life.

Although co-housing has much in common with the eco village movement, it remains distinct.

Two distinct types of cohousing have developed in the UK and abroad

A) Intergenerational – a mix of household types but with significant numbers of families, tending to give the community something of a child centred feel

B) Senior – specifically for people aged 50 or so + and specifically excluding children

In some parts of Europe, the concept of clusters has developed with a senior cluster, an intergenerational cluster etc.

In the UK, cohousing is still in its infancy but there is a rapidly growing interest

- 40 + groups seeking sites
- Many individuals seeking group to join
- 10 established cohousing projects
- Another tier of up to 60 loose coalitions
- 5000 hits on our website in typical month
- Public and media interest

The benefits of cohousing remain anecdotal but considerable

- A focal point for energy and activity – internally and externally (culture, sport, “active citizenship”). More happens in a cohousing community.
- Exposure of young people to wide range of adults (and vice versa); associated opportunities, support and informal supervision
- Attract additional resources (one community in the UK has received some £80k+ in grants for activities for itself and the local community and for facilities)
- Create economic activity (one community in the UK has over 15 economic partnerships amongst members)

And for individual residents

- Children are seen to be more articulate and more confident

- Skill sharing
- “Stuff” sharing
- Support in the day to day and in the big things
- Economic opportunities
- Support in accessing new opportunities – a “learning community”

Although there is considerable interest in cohousing, groups in the UK face significant barriers in setting up new communities – access to finance, access to sites, expertise within the group, planning restrictions – are all formidable issues.

b) The UK Cohousing Network

The Network was set up in 2004 following the UK’s first cohousing conference. The objective was to create a focal point for cohousing in the UK – to make it easier for people to find out about cohousing and to bring those with an interest together to promote it.

The Network was established as a company limited by guarantee with a board of directors who were simply those interested in being part of it. The website was set up at an early stage as the principle repository of information and the primary channel of communication. Its key functions are

- Develop as a resource point for new and forming cohousing groups
- Provide an advice point for planners, registered social landlords, and other professionals
- Seek ways of making cohousing as financially accessible as possible
- Develop and maintain the cohousing website
- Promote & signpost workshops for individuals and forming cohousing groups
- Promote cohousing via the media
- Raise awareness of cohousing
- Undertake lobbying & policy development with government ministers and alongside other housing professionals

Since then we have had two periods of funding. Most recently, we were funded under the NESTA Age Unlimited programme. That funding is drawing to a close and we have now been offered funding from the Tudor Trust to support the new post of coordinator.

The outcomes from the Nesta project and decisions recently made by the Network’s board mean that we go into this new era with the following in place;

- A revamped website – this is currently underway and should be complete early in the new year
- A new constitution – to introduce the concept of membership; to define how people become directors and for how long; to introduce elections and to establish an AGM/annual conference at the heart of the Network’s year
- A clear focus for policy work through the Mutual Housing Group – a coalition of organisations looking at housing from a mutual perspective.
- Good links with some Housing Associations who are beginning to form partnerships with groups
- Interested local authorities and sympathy within government
- Stronger contact with forming groups
- Developing international contacts

More information can be found on our website: www.cohousing.org.uk

The UK Cohousing Network

Network Coordinator

Job description

Purpose of the post

1. To develop and manage the information resources of the UK Cohousing Network to ensure that forming groups have access to effective support
2. To develop a programme of training and support events in conjunction with existing and forming groups
3. To promote the concept of cohousing more widely
4. To promote and research the social benefits of cohousing
5. To support the board in achieving the objective of making cohousing a realistic option for anyone with a serious commitment to it regardless of their personal circumstances
6. To develop new projects to promote and extend cohousing
7. To manage the website effectively including managing any contract for IT support
8. To introduce an effective membership programme to engage existing and forming groups, interested third parties and individuals more closely in the Network's activities
9. To establish (through action research) the feasibility of generating sufficient operating resources through advertising/sponsorship/membership fees
10. To introduce an annual conference/training/networking/AGM event
11. To service and support the board
12. To manage the work of the project officer and the IT contract

Specific duties

Development of cohousing

- Support the board in understanding and responding to policy developments and initiatives
- Attend, contribute to and report on the meetings of the Mutual Housing Group
- Develop new projects to promote and extend cohousing
- Develop contacts with key potential collaborators including the media but also representative bodies operating in related fields
- Develop contacts with cohousing networks abroad

Website management

- Ensure that the website remains fit for purpose and arrange for it to be upgraded in line with new developments in technology as appropriate. Arrange for the development of other online platforms as appropriate.
- Keep the site up to date and attractively presented
- Take lead responsibility for content
- Research advertising deals elsewhere; approach potential advertisers and sponsors

Information and resources

- Develop a system for accessing resources which distinguishes between those freely available to all and those only available to members/subscribers
- Consult with forming groups/individuals/media/policy makers about what information is needed, in what format and at what cost and develop/update/upgrade information accordingly including access to over the phone/livewebchat advice/information if a demand is established
- Maintain, update and develop the toolkit for forming groups

- Introduce a system for selling publications/dvds etc
- Research/Introduce additional features – forum, blog, gallery etc
- Produce a regular newsletter
- Develop and organise a programme of training/workshop style events in conjunction with established and forming groups and external bodies as appropriate

Membership

- Introduce and promote membership in accordance with the agreed strategy
- Keep effective records

Annual event

- Support the board in the organisation and delivery of an annual cohousing AGM/event
- evaluate

Support for board

- organise board meetings (whether in person or by phone or weblink)
- draw up agenda in consultation with link board member
- support board in running elections
- support board in producing annual accounts, annual report and in meeting statutory obligations as a company
- take day to day responsibility for finances in consultation with treasurer/admin worker including monitoring budgets

Manage project officer and IT worker

- agree revised job description for project officer to include book keeping
- manage project officer
- manage IT contract

Other

- Any other duties as may reasonably be requested

Responsible to

Designated board member – as primary accountability point

Supervisor – regular supervision/support/mentoring will be provided as agreed

Responsible for

Administrative support worker

IT contract

Terms and conditions

Salary £27000

Based at home

Fixed term 2 years renewable for further 6 months

Holiday 5.6 weeks inclusive of bank holidays

Person specification

Qualifications

Educated to degree level or equivalent

Experience

Essential

- Project management
- Budget management

Desirable

- Cohousing
- Social/sustainable housing
- Community development
- Advice and information
- Management of a membership organisation
- Supporting a voluntary board
- Planning and delivery of events
- Bid writing and fund raising
- Staff management

Skills

Essential

- Strong planning and organisational skills
- Good communication skills – written and verbal
- Strong analytical and research skills – ability to understand policy developments and apply them to a specific situation

Personal

Essential

- Ability to self motivate and plan and manage own workload
- Ability to prioritise
- Able to communicate with highly diverse range of people
- Entrepreneurial approach – able to spot and develop opportunities

Application procedure

Please send CVs + a statement (max 3 pages) saying why you would be suitable for the post and how you would tackle the challenges the post presents together with details of two referees to

recruit@cohousing.org.uk

Closing date midnight Friday 20 January 2012.

Interviews in London on Monday 30 January 2012.

For an informal discussion please contact Melanie Nock by email mel@laughtonlodge.org or by phone 07903 168891 – please leave a TEXT MESSAGE if you cannot get through immediately. In both cases please provide a phone number so Melanie can call you back.