

## **Item: 14**

**Policy and Resources Committee: 22 September 2020.**

**Hope Cohousing.**

**Report by Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

To consider a request from Hope Cohousing for funding support towards an affordable housing project.

### **2. Recommendations**

The Committee is invited to note:

#### **2.1.**

That Hope Cohousing was established in 2018 as an older person's cohousing co-operative seeking to develop five cohousing properties in St Margaret's Hope.

#### **2.2.**

That Hope Cohousing has requested to purchase a plot of land at Taftingus Place, St Margaret's Hope, as detailed on the plan attached as Appendix 2 to this report, valued at £30,000.

#### **2.3.**

That Hope Cohousing has developed its project over the last two years with input from Housing Services and is hoping to lodge an application to the Islands Housing Fund over the coming months.

#### **2.4.**

That the Council has been awarded £1,042,993, as its share of the 2018/19 Crown Estate Scotland revenue, to be utilised in 2020/21.

#### **2.5.**

That the Crown Estate funding is a valuable additional resource that will be of great benefit to the Council in aiding recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, should it not be used as a source of grant funding to Hope Cohousing.

**It is recommended:**

**2.6.**

That, subject to a successful Islands Housing Fund application and a full funding package being secured, the site at Taftingus Road, St Margaret's Hope, referred to at paragraph 2.2 above, be sold to Hope Cohousing, at valuation, on terms and conditions to be determined by the Solicitor to the Council.

**2.7.**

That a grant of £25,000 be awarded to Hope Cohousing towards the purchase price of the site at Taftingus Place, St Margaret's Hope, to be funded from the Crown Estate Scotland revenue funding received for financial year 2020/21.

### **3. Islands Housing Fund**

**3.1.**

The Scottish Government's Islands Housing Fund programme is designed to try and enhance the amount of affordable housing that is built in rural and island areas and opened up the opportunity of housing development funding to bodies that have never had the opportunity to bid for funding or develop housing.

**3.2.**

Hope Cohousing was established in 2018 with the aim of developing five cohousing properties for older people in St Margaret's Hope. More information can be found at <https://hopecohousing.org/>. Appendix 1 to this report provides additional detail on the vision for the project and the design of the cohousing.

**3.3.**

Staff within the Housing Service have provided Hope Cohousing with advice and assistance as the organisation develops its project, plans and Islands Housing Fund application.

### **4. Request for Assistance**

**4.1.**

Hope Cohousing identified a site at Taftingus Place, St Margaret's Hope, owned by the Council, as its preferred location for the project and approached the Council to ask about purchasing it. The Council arranged a District Valuer's valuation for the site and it was valued at £30,000. The plan attached at Appendix 2 to this report shows the area of land in question.

## **4.2.**

Hope Cohousing has pursued various options for funding to help with the costs of the project and has to date struggled to draw in funding. This has also been the case for various cohousing projects across the United Kingdom. A key funding pot that Hope Cohousing hope to utilise is the Scottish Government's Islands Housing Fund and an application is being developed.

## **4.3.**

Hope Cohousing has requested a contribution of £25,000 from the Council towards development of the project and potential replication options elsewhere in Orkney.

## **5. Links to Council Plan**

### **5.1.**

The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan strategic priority of Caring Communities.

### **5.2.**

The proposals in this report relate directly to the priority to explore how care and/or support can be provided at home, work or in education whilst making the best use of resources.

## **6. Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan**

The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priority of Strong Communities.

## **7. Financial Implications**

### **7.1.**

Hope Cohousing approached the Council in November 2019 to ask for Council support for the project. Hope Cohousing has requested to purchase a site in St Margaret's Hope that has been valued by the District Valuer at £30,000. Disposal of the site as a Community Asset Transfer could have been an option to explore, however a more straightforward proposal was to consider grant assistance.

### **7.2.**

A possible source of grant assistance is the net revenue generated from the Scottish Crown Estate's marine assets out to 12 nautical miles that has been distributed to councils. Annual revenue allocations are distributed in arrears following finalisation of the annual accounts for the Scottish Crown Estate. An allocation of £1,042,993.65 was paid to the Council in July 2020 and relates to the net revenue generated in 2018/19.

### **7.3.**

The award of grant funding from the Crown Estate revenue would meet the Government's desired outcome from this funding of providing coastal community benefit.

### **7.4.**

Whilst use of Crown Estate monies is a possible source of funding for this project, if not utilised on projects such as this, the funding will be applied elsewhere on Council priorities. The Council has experienced a huge loss of income during 2020/21, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, together with additional costs and will face significant recovery pressures in 2021/22.

## **8. Legal Aspects**

### **8.1.**

Section 1 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 states that it is the duty of a local authority to make arrangements which secure best value.

### **8.2.**

In terms of Section 74(2) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 a local authority cannot normally dispose of land for a consideration less than the best that can reasonably be obtained other than in accordance with regulations made by the Scottish Ministers. The exceptions are where the best consideration is less than £10,000 or the proposed consideration is more than 75% of the best consideration.

### **8.3.**

It is noted that the recommendation is to sell the site at Taftingus Place, St Margaret's Hope, to Hope Cohousing at valuation. However, if the Council were minded to dispose of land for less than the best consideration, i.e. less than market value, and the exceptions in section 8.2 above did not apply, the Council would have to follow an appraisal procedure. This is set out in the Disposal of Land by Local Authorities (Scotland) Regulations 2010, as outlined below.

#### **8.3.1.**

The local authority must (a) appraise and compare the costs and other disbenefits and the benefits of the proposal, and (b) determine that the circumstances set out in regulation 4 are met.

#### **8.3.2.**

Regulation 4 specifies that the circumstances in which a local authority may dispose of land for a consideration less than the best that can reasonably be obtained are that (a) the local authority is satisfied that the disposal for that consideration is reasonable, and (b) the disposal is likely to contribute to any of the purposes set out in section 8.3.3 below, in respect of the whole or any part of the area of the local authority or any persons resident or present in its area.

### **8.3.3.**

The purposes referred to above are the promotion or improvement of:

- Economic development or regeneration.
- Health.
- Social well-being.
- Environmental well-being.

## **9. Contact Officers**

James Wylie, Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, extension 2401, Email [james.wylie@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:james.wylie@orkney.gov.uk).

Frances Troup, Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services, extension 2177, Email [frances.troup@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:frances.troup@orkney.gov.uk).

Luke Fraser, Team Leader (Policy and Planning), extension 2172, Email [luke.fraser@orkney.gov.uk](mailto:luke.fraser@orkney.gov.uk).

## **10. Appendices**

10.1. Appendix 1 – Design Statement.

10.2. Appendix 2 – Site Plan – Taftingus Place.



G Deveci RIBA, FRIAS, Chartered Architect. Robert Gordon University (RGU). ©

## Planning Design Statement for pre-planning application Hope Co-Housing Project, St Margaret's Hope, Orkney

*Our vision is to establish the first Co-Housing community in Orkney, and to do so as soon as possible. Our senior co-housing community will allow us to age actively, encouraging mental and physical well-being. The design will be eco-aware with an emphasis on sharing resources and limiting energy consumption. Our aim is to promote neighbourliness and address isolation. This in turn will reduce our demands on health and social care services. The five self-contained houses will connect to a communal area where we will have facilities for creative and recreational activities that the wider community will be invited to share. There will be a space to create a shared garden and even keep hens.....*

*Extract from Hope Co-Housing member's brief 2019*



**HOPE CO-  
HOUSING LTD**

# Hope Co-Housing Project, Orkney

## Planning Design Statement for pre-planning application

G Deveci RIBA, FRIAS, Chartered Architect. Robert Gordon University (RGU). November 2109

### Background

Hope Co-Housing Ltd (HCL) is a group of senior women based in St Margaret's Hope, Orkney. These ladies wish to rehouse themselves in smaller accommodation, with a mutually supportive approach to living. They contacted Architect Gokay Deveci, Professor of Architecture at Robert Gordon University (RGU), to help undertake a feasibility study for the project. The aim was to identify an appropriate site, and to prepare a design which could be costed by others. RGU have a number of ongoing research projects exploring ways to improve housing quality, particularly for active ageing. The project at St Margaret's Hope offers a route to bring a number of these research elements together.

### Rationale

Orkney's aging demographic is faster comparable to the rest of Scotland. National Records of Scotland (NRS) 2016 figures show that by 2019 24% of Orkney's population will be aged 60 plus, with around 17% of Orkney's population being 70 or over. By 2030 the percentage of the population aged 60 plus is estimated to be 30%, with 21% being 70 or over. By 2040 the figures increase to 33% being 60 or over and 26% being 70 and over. In pure numbers the increase from 2019 to 2040 is from 6,851 over 60s to 8,337, and from 3,800 over 70s to 5,587. This increase will obviously necessitate a new approach to senior citizen's housing provision, and Co-housing will be a key element of this.

In the short term, the Co-housing project in St Margaret's Hope will provide the required additional housing in the village. This will also deliver a portion of future proofing for the demographic changes outlined above. The funding received from the feasibility application, was used to enhance community engagement and consultation, thereby ensuring that the project has community buy in. The Hope co-housing project will provide an alternative housing type which will assist addressing the housing needs of Orkney's increasingly older community. St Margaret's Hope has some Extra Care housing provision, but there are currently no options for older people without care needs, but who are looking for community, companionship, and support in an extra care housing environment.

Hope Cohousing will provide that community and support. This will help its residents actively age, and remain in their homes for as long as possible, without the need for formal care. If and when more formal care becomes necessary, the properties at Hope Cohousing will be designed in such a way that residents can receive care within their current home where feasible.

This will aid both the Local Authority and NHS Orkney, by reducing the need for residents of Hope Cohousing to receive formal care at an earlier stage. The project will deliver rental properties below the local housing allowance, and discussions have been held with Orkney Islands Council about potential rent levels.

## The proposal

The project for HCL involves the creation of five private two-bedroom houses, and one shared house and social spaces. The shared house will contain a large, communal kitchen-dining room, and a self-contained flat for many different functions and activities. This will include family visitors, health workers and other community-based activities.

The proposed Co-housing' project is a new typology of housing, which demonstrates a collaborative approach to age. This is possible by combining the principles of innovative housing design, wellbeing and healthcare principles, and technology to support active ageing. The aim being to create a new typology of senior citizen housing, in which people aspire to live, support and eliminate social isolation and fuel poverty. The proposal will be multi-disciplinary, with anticipated expertise required from the RGU.

The university aims to contribute to research and practice relating to this new type of housing. This can help alleviate the social isolation many people experience in rural and remote areas, through provision of a supportive and distinct community structure.

The following design principles are based on the "Salutogenesis approach" which focuses on creating coherent living environments, whilst strengthening socio-ecological health for individuals, groups and communities:

- Ensure safety
- Encourage independence
- A familiar design in order to assist emotional security
- Offer sensory and mental stimulation
- Protect privacy
- Enable social interaction

## Education and Outreach and Community Consultation

During the feasibility stage there have been discussions with the local community local Age Scotland office, and engagement with representatives from Orkney Health and Care and members of the local community council. Local meetings and open days in the village were held, with an invitation extended to all interested members of the community.

The proposed development was exhibited, and the concept of our proposed Cohousing project was discussed, and the wider social and economic benefits were articulated.

There was a local Orcadian press release to articulate the aspirations and specific plans of the Co-housing project, to ensure that the community became familiar and understood the project. (The Orcadian, 25 July 2019).





## Community consultation

### Site

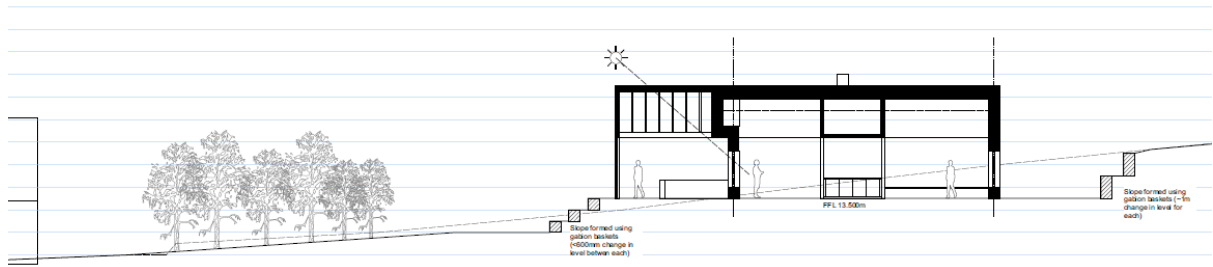
Two sites, both around 0.3Ha in size, were considered for the project, and assessed by the design team. A relatively flat, former storage yard at the east end of the village, and a west-sloping undeveloped gap site on the southern edge of the village.

Despite its topographical challenges (step gradient) the latter was selected due to its elevated position, and good views towards the Ferry pier, lower purchase price and nearby infrastructure connections. It lies to the east of Taftingus Place, a residential development from which vehicle access will be provided to the site for the proposed co-housing project.

The site occupies around 50% of an area zoned by Orkney Islands Council for housing (ref SMH-B; previously H3). The 2014 Local Development Plan identified a potential capacity of six houses on this site, while the 2017 supplementary guidance Settlements Statement indicated a potential capacity of 12 houses. The proposals, for six houses on around 50% of the site, accords with the latter, higher density targeted by OIC.



Proposed site layout plan (refer to site plan drawing)



**Site Section**



**Site** - Looking towards Ferry Pier on the left - Access from ex development at Taftingus Place.



**Masterplan**- Indicative site layouts in previous OIC development briefs and the 2016 Masterplan.

### Project targets and resource efficiency

- Design and construction of a co-housing development of six units, including shared spaces
- Incorporation of design and technology strategies that maximise interaction, active ageing and enable residents to remain in their homes for longer. It will reduce hospital admissions, and provide an alternative solution to going into a care home.
- High energy efficiency standard, so that heating costs are no more than the Scottish Government's Winter Fuel Allowance (up to £300/year depending on age);
- Good quality sheltered external spaces, appropriate to climate and exposure, that maximises resident amenities, and prioritises green space over car ownership and use

This proposal represents a new typology of affordable housing design and delivery for remote and rural areas. This will address the Climate Crisis, by providing a reduction in energy demand in use, low embodied energy, carbon in construction, and health and wellbeing for those of all ages, leading to reduced reliance on social care. This project is fundamentally about making best use of resources.

### Design proposal

To minimise excavation on the site, the houses have been arranged in a linear terrace form, running roughly north - south, along the contours. A 'social corridor' runs the length of the west side of the houses, creating an attractive, light-filled and protected entrance. Semi-private front gardens (defendable space) to the houses that address the relatively exposed nature of the site, will give the resident access to daylight, and be able to utilise the space all

year round. Private external rear gardens with access are provided to the east side of each unit.

Indicative site layouts in previous OIC development briefs and the 2016 Masterplan by DPT illustrate new housing – with an access road to serve them – running parallel to St Margaret’s Road. The relatively steep gradient of the site is incompatible with Roads department adoptable standards, making such a layout impractical (accessibility) without major earthworks.

The proposed layout minimises road works and parking areas (4 cars) by confining these to the west side of the development site. As part of the co-housing ethos, residents will share a limited number of electrical cars. As a result, we would like to request that the standard requirements for parking space numbers are should not apply to this project. By running *along* the contours of the site, the development minimises excavation. This determines the general orientation of the houses and results in the major axis of the terrace running roughly south-west – north-east. (Precise orientation is 38° clockwise of north-south.) Six identical two-bedroom houses (one communal) are arranged to form a single storey terrace.

The south-west elevation of the terrace faces directly onto St Margaret’s Road, contributing to the streetscape of this part of the village.

Accessibility has been a key consideration in the development of the design. The whole project is single storey, and doors and windows have been designed for wheelchair users. This intrinsically makes this accessible for all. Vehicle access and parking lead directly from Taftingus Road, with 2 electric charging points included. From the parking area stepped and ramped access leads to the three entrance points of the social corridor.

Roofs to the individual houses comprise a double-pitched section over the sitting room, kitchen and dining room, and a low-pitched ‘lean-to’ section over the bathroom and two bedrooms. Vaulted ceilings in the pitched roof part provide an enhanced sense of internal space. To optimise solar gains, each house has a number of skylights in the south-west facing section of double-pitched roof. Each house has views north-westwards towards the ferry pier, and south-eastwards towards their private gardens.



**Mass model** – View from West showing vehicular access from Taftingus Place



### **Social Corridor** for interaction and front gardens

A 'social corridor' runs the length of the north-west side of the houses, creating a shared and sheltered space, that extends the useable living space of the houses, and provides room for social interaction and other activities.

The communal unit is intentionally offset by 3m to create an entrance point roughly halfway along the length of the terrace. Entrances (fire exits) are also positioned at each end of the social corridor. The social corridor gives access to the 'front' doors of each of the houses. Each house also has a 'back' door directly onto a private garden, and to a new path leading to St. Margaret's Road.

Roofs to the individual houses comprise a double-pitched section over the sitting room, kitchen and dining room, and a low-pitched 'lean-to' section over the bathroom and two bedrooms. Vaulted ceilings in the pitched roof part provide an enhanced sense of internal space. To optimise solar gains, each house has a number of skylights in the south-west facing section of double-pitched roof. Each house has views north-westwards towards the ferry pier, and south-eastwards towards their private gardens.

### **Planning policy context**

OIC's Sustainable Orkney Energy Strategy 2017-2025 encourages a move towards low carbon transport and heat networks. The development proposals incorporate this in two ways:

1. Use of electric vehicles, instead of petrol and diesel-fuelled vehicles, to serve the needs of the occupants. This will be a smarter way, with fewer vehicles required.
2. Use of a low-carbon, district heating network to provide the heating and hot water.

The Scottish Government has six qualities for successful places. These are delivered as follows:

1. **Distinctive-** Massing, materials and scale of the development relate directly to the surrounding houses in St Margaret's Hope. These complement and strengthen the existing village, and add a degree of visual quality and sense of identity that the adjacent Taftingus Place (which has a homogenous, non-specific, basic level of design quality) has eroded.
2. **Safe and Pleasant-** The proposal aims to respond to a gap site, which has lain empty for a considerable period of time. The development of this terrace form will positively add to the definition of the street. Its positive landscaping will add attractiveness and biodiversity, and help create a safe and pleasant place.

3. Easy to move around- This site is a good location for six households, as it will fit well into the existing settlement. Accessibility of the site, and the individual houses has been a key design driver. All external landscaping has been carefully designed to aid and encourage use by those of all levels of mobility. The 'social corridor' provides a sheltered, enclosed space for residents to interact with one another. It creates an extended threshold between the external public realm and the internal private realm of individual houses, that provides space to shake off wet coats and boots, park a mobility scooter, or find a set of keys while chatting to a neighbour.

4. Welcoming- Unlike Shetland, its northerly neighbour, housing on Orkney is not renowned for its colour and visual vibrancy. While avoiding the use of primary colours and any sense of garishness, the proposals include some judicious use of colour (internally and externally) for some elements of the timber-clad exterior. As well as adding to its distinctiveness, the use of colour is known to be of benefit to those with dementia, as it elicits a strong sense of recognition and connection. With one of the drivers of the project being its design to enable long term occupancy by residents, and dementia becoming increasingly common among older people, the use of colour forms an essential part of the proposals. A secondary benefit is the increased sense of welcome and domestic scale that carefully selected colour can bring to a project.

5. Adaptable. To help occupants live in the houses for as long as possible, the houses have a number of flexible areas. Physical adaptation strategies are as follows:

i. The houses will be built from robust materials and finishes, that allow simple fittings such as grab rails & hoists, to be easily retrofitted without any future structural alterations.

ii. The wall between one of the bedrooms and sitting room can be repositioned to make the bedroom larger in the future to accommodate, say a hospital bed or mobility equipment. Doorways are intentionally all wider than the minimum requirement, which has benefits not just for mobility of older people, but for pushchairs and moving furniture;

iii. The social corridor provides additional space for occupants to enjoy, for example as a space for growing and tending plants, if access to the gardens becomes difficult.

### **Technological adaptation**

Robert Gordon University has been involved in a number of projects exploring the potential for digital technology to supplement the support offered by care workers. This includes fitting of sensors that – without being invasive – detect movement (or lack of) and occupant wellbeing, and can reduce social isolation through voice recognition. It is proposed to develop a technology-enabled proposal will:

- enable residents to remain in their homes for longer
- predict health related events reduce hospital admissions and enable early discharge
- provide a solution for people not wanting to enter a care home

### **Landscaping**

The communal garden is positioned on the flattest part of the site and includes a storage shed, greenhouse and planted/raised beds with wide paths. Selective tree planting provides shelter and reinforces the street edge of St Margaret's Road. Species selection follows guidance in Orkney Woodlands Project's 'Woodland Design Guide' document.

## **Pre- Planning meeting**

A brief pre-planning meeting took place in OIC, with planning officers on 13 September 2019. The design team were asked to address additional car parking spaces, including electric charging points, and to provide external store facilities. The colour selection on external timber cladding finishes were discussed. The design team requested that landscaping follow guidance in Orkney Woodlands Project's 'Woodland Design Guide' document which was provided. These items were addressed as per attached drawing documents.

## **Benefit to Orkney**

The design of a co-housing development will match the needs of a group of residents in the St Margaret's Hope area of Orkney. This demonstration project can then be used to inform the longer-term housing strategy for OIC, and the development of a housing stock which will assist the Council to respond to ongoing future challenges.

Cohousing is a specifically beneficial form of intentional residential community, designed and managed by its residents. The proposal will initially provide five self-contained homes, coupled with a communally run building, with shared services such as laundry, social facilities. Additionally self-contained accommodation for family visitors, carers and respite users. Hope Co-housing will benefit senior citizens who are resident in Orkney, and who support the core values of the group. Providing for those of housing need by reason of either their economic circumstances, social isolation or physical necessity, the cohousing project will offer a new option. This will be eminently suitable for those who wish to maintain their independence, but see the value of living together with the support and companionship of others.

The aim is to promote neighbourliness, mitigate social isolation, and offer mutual support. The aspiration is to be part of, and to contribute to local community. It encourages local residents and potential future co-housing residents to visit the project and share in activities. The Hope co-housing project will benefit the wider Orkney community in perpetuity, by the nature of its structure which combines affordable housing for social rent, with all the benefits of a mutually supportive community.

The project has the potential to become a template for similar future co-housing schemes in Island communities in Scotland.



**View** - through kitchen to sitting room of proposed house



**Social Corridor entrance** and semi-private external space outside one of the private houses





**View** - from sitting room form one of the units- looking towards the private garden



**Communal Room-** Kitchen, dining and multi-purpose room, for social and health related activities.



**Standard bedroom**



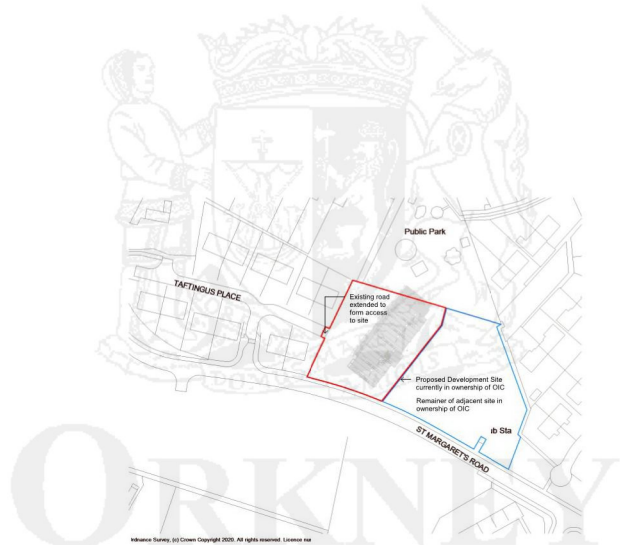
**Extended bedroom (partition relocated)**

Adaptability- The wall between one of the bedrooms and sitting room can be repositioned to make the bedroom larger in the future to accommodate, say a hospital bed or mobility equipment. doorways are intentionally all wider than the minimum requirement, which has benefits not just for mobility of older people but for pushchairs and moving furniture.

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Proposed Development Site



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