

Hook Norton Community Housing

The Green Lab pilot demonstrator of how a smart, local energy system can be integrated into a rural community housing project.



“The OxFutures programme has not only had a great impact on Oxfordshire businesses but also led to a number of further programmes that will continue to impact the energy efficiency of homes and organisations as well as Project LEO - one of the most ambitious, wide-ranging, innovative, and holistic smart grid trials ever conducted in the UK.”

OxFutures

The world is waking up to our climate emergency – and casting around for the right response. The truth is, the only solution is working together. Using all our skills, knowledge and resources in concert, to create a different future. In Oxfordshire we're showing the world how it's done. Making the most of our unique local assets. Creating a real vision of the future, an example to follow.

The OxFutures partnership has sparked a revolution in our region's economy – business, citizens, politics and academia, together driving a pioneering transformation. Thousands of pounds – and tonnes of carbon – saved by local businesses. Innovations backed and relationships brokered. Tens of millions of pounds of new investment secured.

From a thriving Greentech network, to projects harnessing AI and the take-off of electric vehicles, we've created an engine of ambitious zero-carbon innovation, and a legacy that will transform our region.

This is OxFutures. Our local vision – our global future.

OxFutures is a £3.2m project to boost low carbon economic development in Oxfordshire. It is supported by the European Regional Development Fund and run through a collaborative partnership between the Low Carbon Hub, Oxford City Council, the University of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University, Cherwell District Council and Bioregional.

The project is made up of three distinct parts:

1. GreenFund - The Low Carbon Hub will offer grants to SMEs and entrepreneurs for either energy efficiency measures or innovation projects. The energy efficiency measures are suggested in a free energy audit complete by the team at Oxford Brookes University.

2. GreenTech - Cherwell District Council and Bioregional are developing a new, county-wide networking organisation. Oxfordshire GreenTech will run Special Interest Groups, open to any interested SMEs, which will support knowledge transfer from Oxfordshire GreenLab to SMEs throughout the County.

3. GreenLab - A spectrum of research taking place in various institutions across the county and knowledge sharing between organisations and SME's.



The Project

At a time of climate emergency when many new housing developments lack sustainable measures, the people of Hook Norton have generated an innovative community - led project of affordable homes that will have a positive impact on the environment and be fit for the future.

The opportunity arose when Hook Norton Low Carbon (HNLC) identified a piece of neglected and overgrown land to the east of the Sports & Social Club behind Bourne Lane, that was owned by Cherwell District Council (CDC). The council were approached and were keen to work with the community and HNLC on developing an affordable and sustainable housing project for those in need with a strong local connection.

Low Carbon Hub

The Low Carbon Hub (LCH) in Oxford is a social enterprise that's out to prove we can meet our energy needs in a way that's good for people and the planet. The shift to renewable generation is gaining pace and gives us the opportunity to reshape the way we manage our energy. Low Carbon Hub is the lead partner on the OxFutures Programme.

HNLC received grant funding from the OxFutures programme via the Green Fund for community engagement and a feasibility study in 2018. By providing grant funding rather than a loan, LCH was key in kickstarting the project and being able to offer a risk free option for HNLC.

HNLC is one of LCH's Community members, and joined the Low Carbon Hub Community Interest Company (CIC) as community shareholders. Being a member enabled HNLC to apply for the LCH's community grants which opened up new funding opportunities.

The LCH are designing a micro grid for the project which could provide a decentralised system of locally generated energy and allow the community to be more energy independent and environmentally friendly. This was a high risk stage of the project and the LCH grant enabled this to be explored and developed.

The project aims to be a replicable example of a net carbon positive project and is also striving to have a carbon neutral construction process, by using local suppliers and installers and by establishing links with local colleges to provide construction apprenticeships where possible.

In 2019 it was decided that a Community Land Trust would be the most suitable legal entity to take the project forward.

Hook Norton Community Land Trust

Community Land Trusts have become an increasingly popular example of local people taking control and transforming the future of their communities. They are set up by the community for the community and can provide a creative and innovative solution to the growing housing crisis where rapidly increasing house prices far exceed what is affordable for local people.





Hook Norton Community Land Trust (HNCLT) is a not for profit Community Benefit Society that was set up in July 2019 and registered with the Financial Conduct Authority and is part of the National Community Land Trust Network. It was formed to develop a small group of affordable, sustainable homes that will be available to local people on a piece of overgrown land owned by Cherwell District Council (CDC). The homes will be based on the needs of the community already identified through extensive consultation and designed to encourage social contact and community spirit.

The homes will have a carbon positive impact on the environment and will benefit from renewable energy systems and low carbon transport options.

Many local people want to remain in their communities and know their neighbours but have no option but to move away from the area in order to afford somewhere to live. CDC have agreed to transfer ownership of the land for the community led project to Hook Norton Community Land Trust which will ensure that the homes remain affordable in perpetuity.

HNCLT was formed initially with a core group of four directors which has now grown to a Board of eleven members including members from the local community and other practitioners with a range of knowledge and expertise to guide this exciting project through to completion.

Cherwell District Council agreed to transfer ownership of the land to Hook Norton Community Land Trust at a price that would enable the homes to be affordable in perpetuity.

This document explores in depth the process and timeline of the affordable housing project in Hook Norton.

2018

To find out directly what people in Hook Norton thought about the need for affordable and sustainable housing they decided to interview members of the community in the street and make a short film of their responses. Everyone interviewed felt strongly about the current housing crisis and expressed overwhelming concern about the negative impact the lack of affordable homes for young and older people would have on the village.

In February, two open meetings were held to provide information and stimulate discussion about the project. Ward councillors and the parish council were involved as well as local Architectural Designer, Charlie Luxton who gave a presentation exploring the possibilities of the project and similar existing schemes and to discuss the gap in understanding between big housing developers and the needs of a community. The aim was to emphasise that the project could be something different from the norm and offer an alternative way of living that could encourage social contact and community spirit.

Both meetings were well attended, and the completed short film was shown. In the second half of each meeting the community were asked to gather into groups and write down their responses to 3 questions:

1. What does Hook Norton mean to you?
2. What is the dream? - ideal things in a housing community
3. What could possibly go wrong?

Discussing the answers stimulated lively debate and asking these questions allowed them to consider important ideas and issues to surface openly without confrontation. The response sheets were photographed and used to inform the survey questions.



Lemondrizzle Consultants were appointed to develop the village-wide survey and to facilitate a vision workshop at the open meetings as part of the discussion. Throughout March, HNLC worked with Lemondrizzle on the look of the survey and the questions. It was also decided that they would issue two surveys to each household to capture difference of opinion, that of younger people who may still be living with their parents due to lack of affordable housing. The surveys were hand delivered by HNLC Board members to each home in Hook Norton and the board members also collected most of the surveys in person which involved lots of discussion on the doorsteps and led to a high return. 533 completed surveys were returned from 1000 homes.

The results of the survey showed wide support for the project with 74% of respondents feeling that the current housing situation in the village needed addressing, whilst 26% felt that the present housing mix was adequate. Some respondents from this group expressed concerns that the village had already reached capacity and the existing infrastructure would be stretched.





Of all aspects that were asked about, the elements that emerged with strong support included:

- Mixed age groups living side by side
- Sustainable homes with low running costs
- Homes that relate to the existing architecture of Hook Norton
- Provision of smaller affordable homes

It was determined that a second, more detailed survey was needed for the 37 people interested in living in one of the properties. HNLC worked with the CDC Housing Strategy Team to develop a survey that would ascertain their current and future housing needs and initial financial situation to assess eligibility for the affordable homes.

The results from the second, detailed survey were collected and analysed by the CDC Housing team with independent evaluation provided by Midlands Rural Housing. The information showed that Hook Norton had a proven need for affordable community led housing, which is a criteria needed before the CDC is able to release any land. This site wouldn't have been unlocked had it not been a project lead by the community for the community.

Four local architectural practices were invited to submit bids to take the project forward. The four architects were interviewed, and Charlie Luxton Design (CLD) were unanimously appointed as the Architectural Design Team. They presented an imaginative bid and had thoroughly researched the sustainable and communal aspects of the build. They also considered the possibility of changes in life's circumstances by incorporating an element of flexibility into the design.

The 37 people interested in living in the homes were invited to take part in a Community Housing Vision and Design workshop with architects from CLD. They began by asking the question "What do we need?" in contrast to "What would we like?" There was enthusiastic feedback from those present who found the question thought provoking and stimulating. It was a creative and lively evening where the community and the designers collaborated on ideas that will inform the initial design and layout of the site. The idea of a community meeting space and shared plant growing areas began to emerge as popular and CLD went away to interpret the information and develop different options for the site.

A pathway on the overgrown site needed to be cleared to allow access for contamination and flood surveys to take place and in another example of community activity the local Green Gym, a community group that provides activities and exercise for older people, responded to the challenge and opened up an entire footpath.

HNLC continued to meet regularly with the new Housing Strategy Team at CDC. They provided advice and responded positively to an invitation to visit the site and have been helping to prepare a detailed report to take to their senior executives. This helped to decide the terms of the transfer of the CDC owned land to a newly set up Community Land Trust that delivered and ran the project.



2019

Charlie Luxton Design went away and developed three different community housing proposals based on the ideas expressed at the vision and design workshop. A feasibility study was completed by Tim Lunel (Hook Norton resident & LCH Project Manager), providing a detailed and clear understanding of the build costs involved. This formed the basis of a report that was compiled for the CDC showing the positive social impact the scheme could have on the local community, highlighting the possibilities for social contact and neighbourliness provided by the community building that would be open to the whole village, use of shared allotments and the possibility of locally generated energy shared with the Sports & Social Club.

An open meeting was held in late February which is where the project took a big step forward as CLD presented their three community housing proposals to a packed audience at the Brewery. Many of the 37 interested group who took part in the earlier meetings were present and keen to see the results.

The meeting was designed to be interactive to ensure everyone had the opportunity to contribute. CLD explained the Flexible Homes Concept, where individual homes can share a layout, but the interiors can be adapted over time to evolve with the changing needs of the residents. There were exciting suggestions from those present for the communal meeting space such as community café and work hub with gallery space for exhibitions.



To keep the community engaged whilst waiting for the CDC executive decision, HNLC and CLD promoted the community housing project at events in Hook Norton by showing the most recent plans and discussing with interested members of the public. The project generates a lot of interest and people were increasingly intrigued by the prospect of setting up a Community Land Trust as a way of moving things forward.

In July, the Hook Norton Community Land Trust (HNCLT) was formally set up in and registered with four initial board members.

The Executive Group at CDC then met and formally approved the transfer of ownership of the land to the newly formed HNCLT, subject to obtaining planning permission and demonstrating financial viability of the project.

CLD further developed the housing plans and submitted a pre-planning application in order to identify any controversial or complex issues in the planning process. The results of the pre-planning application meant a significant redesign of the site. It transpired that there couldn't be any dwellings within 30m of a nearby sports pitch due to noise levels so that area was changed to a car park and one of the housing terraces was re-positioned. The community building had to be moved and became a single level building to preserve sight levels from nearby existing houses.

Discussions began with the LCH about designing a micro-grid for the project which could provide a decentralised system of locally generated energy and make the most of renewable energy generated by the solar PV panels on the roof of the Sports & Social Club.

HNCLT put the next design phase of the project out to tender and invite submissions from architectural practices. Two practices submit excellent bids and are interviewed by the board of HNCLT. After an incredibly competitive process CLD are chosen as the HNCLT Project Architectural Designers who will take the project through to completion.

Catherin Ryan (Community Engagement Manager at the LCH and Hook Norton resident) worked closely with CLD on a series of intensive consultation evenings. The meetings were informative, lively, and vibrant and contributed to really defining the look and design of the site. CLD had produced a large-scale model of the site and surrounding houses which were placed on several tables so that the community were able to move the pieces around and really interact with the space.



A separate consultation for the community building produced some great ideas with a community run café emerging as the most popular, along with a communal laundry and a Library of Things. A library of things is a collection of objects that would be loaned at no charge to the community. Objects often include kitchen appliances, tools, gardening equipment, electronics, toys and games, craft supplies, musical instruments, and recreational equipment. The motivation for the community space largely revolved around the promotion of social contact and to reduce those feeling isolated within the village.

The provision of workspace to rent was also popular as no such thing currently exists in the village, as was the provision of small, self-contained guest bedrooms that could be booked by visitors. There were also suggestions to expand upon the already existing Car Club including mobile batteries, becoming a larger transport hub and being a part of the microgrid.

The homes all have a solar pv array and each terrace is aligned for maximum sunlight exposure. The homes will be built to Passivhaus standards and most likely be heated by air source heat pumps. The microgrid will make the most of the 50kw solar installation on the nearby Sports & Social Club. 12 homes consist of 3 units at Housing Allowance Rates, 5 Shared Ownership and 4 Shared Ownership which will be sold at market rates and will be used to cross subsidise the affordable homes. HNCLT will retain a 20% share in each of the S.O. homes to ensure that they remain within the CLT in perpetuity.

The community were shown different site layouts and styles of buildings and were encouraged to place post it notes on their favourite options and to discuss why they made their choice. The interested group of 37, now grown to nearly 50, were invited to participate in a survey to vote for the most popular housing design from a choice of three plans. The results were remarkably close so CLD incorporated both designs into the plans that are being submitted for the full planning application.

A "visual map" of the journey of HNCLT was commissioned from graphic artist, Lisa Curtis, who came to one of the consultations and took notes and is shown on the next page.

HOOK NORTON COMM

"EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO AN AFFORDABLE HOME"

WITHOUT AFFORDABLE & SUSTAINABLE HOUSING - THE HEART WILL LEAVE THE VILLAGE

OVERGROWN LAND

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU IN THE MAKE UP OF A GOOD COMMUNITY?

"A VARIETY OF GENERATIONS, AGES AND BACK-GROUNDS"

WHAT SORT OF AMENITIES SHOULD WE LOOK TO SHARE?



WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY??

GOOD CHAT AT THE CHIPPY ON A FRIDAY

THE STRENGTH OF THE COMMUNITY

NOBODY TAKES HOOK NORTON FOR GRANTED

"THE PLAYGROUND ON A SUNNY DAY"

"THE MIXTURE OF RURAL AND INDUSTRY"

"THE SHOP WINDOW"

"VIEWS OF THE COUNTRY-SIDE"

UNITY LAND TRUST OUR JOURNEY

WHAT COULD A MODERN, SUSTAINABLE HOME LOOK LIKE?

WHAT IS...
PASSIVE



COMMUNITY

"INTERESTING"

VERY WELL INSULATED

WORKS LIKE A THERMOS OR TEA COSY

HOUSING

CONTINUAL FRESH AIR

DRAUGHT FREE

NO MOULD OR CONDENSATION

SIGNIFICANT HEALTH BENEFITS

LESS HEATING REQUIRED

QUIET

DISTANCE FROM NEIGHBOURS

SO PLACEMENT ON SITE IS KEY

WHAT ARE THE CONSTRAINTS?

NOISE

WILL NEED ACOUSTIC BARRIERS

ING
RDABLE

"AFFORDABILITY FOR ALL AGES IS CRUCIAL"

WHAT'S YOUR IDEA OF A GREEN HOME?

"SOLAR PANELS & RENEWABLES"

"LOW CARBON EMISSIONS"

"BUILT TO ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS"

"USING NATURE'S MOTHER POWER SOURCE"

"IF YOU WANT A COMMUNITY TO GROW, YOU NEED TO KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE HERE"

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT THAT NEW HOMES ARE AFFORDABLE TO YOUNGER PEOPLE & THOSE ON LOW INCOMES?

HOW DO YOU THINK THE SORT OF HOUSES WE BUILD COULD CREATE COMMUNITY SPIRIT?



2020

In January, HNCLT held a vibrant and successful exhibition of the plans for the community led housing project. The all-day drop-in event was an opportunity for the whole village to view and discuss plans for the affordable community led housing project in Hook Norton, prior to a submission for a full planning application.

The plans and scale model that have been created are the result of two years of extensive consultation in Hook Norton and over a hundred people attended the event and discussed the plans in detail with Charlie Luxton Design and members of HNCLT. Some had come from curiosity; others had a strong interest in living in one of the homes and others had come to express concerns. Most people were very positive about the community led ethos of the project but some were worried that it might become an enclave, so it was great opportunity to explain that the popular idea of a community building on site with a community run café and other amenities would be open and shared with the whole village. Everyone showed interest in the affordable and sustainable elements of the homes and agreed that they would have a positive effect on the environment making them fit for the future.

Secretary of State granted approval for CDC to sell the land to HNCLT at a substantially reduced rate for the benefit of the community was received (a legal requirement if councils sell land at below market value).

The full planning application was completed and submitted on time at the end of January. It was a gigantic effort, with all members of the team working at capacity.

Social Enterprises Working Together

The Hook Norton site was previously extremely overgrown and, before clearing the site, it was important to HNCLT to preserve the wildlife qualities the site possesses. The hedges are a haven for birds and there is an abundance of snowdrops at springtime, so they had the site cleared early to avoid disruption to the bird nesting season. The Incredible Edible team lifted clusters of the snowdrops on one of the few dry days in February, so that they can be replanted back there when the project is completed.



May 2020

The planning application was approved in May, 2020 with a unanimous vote at the Cherwell Council planning meeting. Charlie Luxton & Cathy Ryan (Chair, HNCLT) spoke in favour of the application and no-one spoke against.

What's happening now?

Over the course of the summer the HNCLT website is being designed and built and a new logo has been designed as well. All the policies, housing designs and application forms will be included on the website. Tim Lunel is putting final touches to the business case, and HNCLT are planning to launch a community share-offer later in the year, once the details are complete.

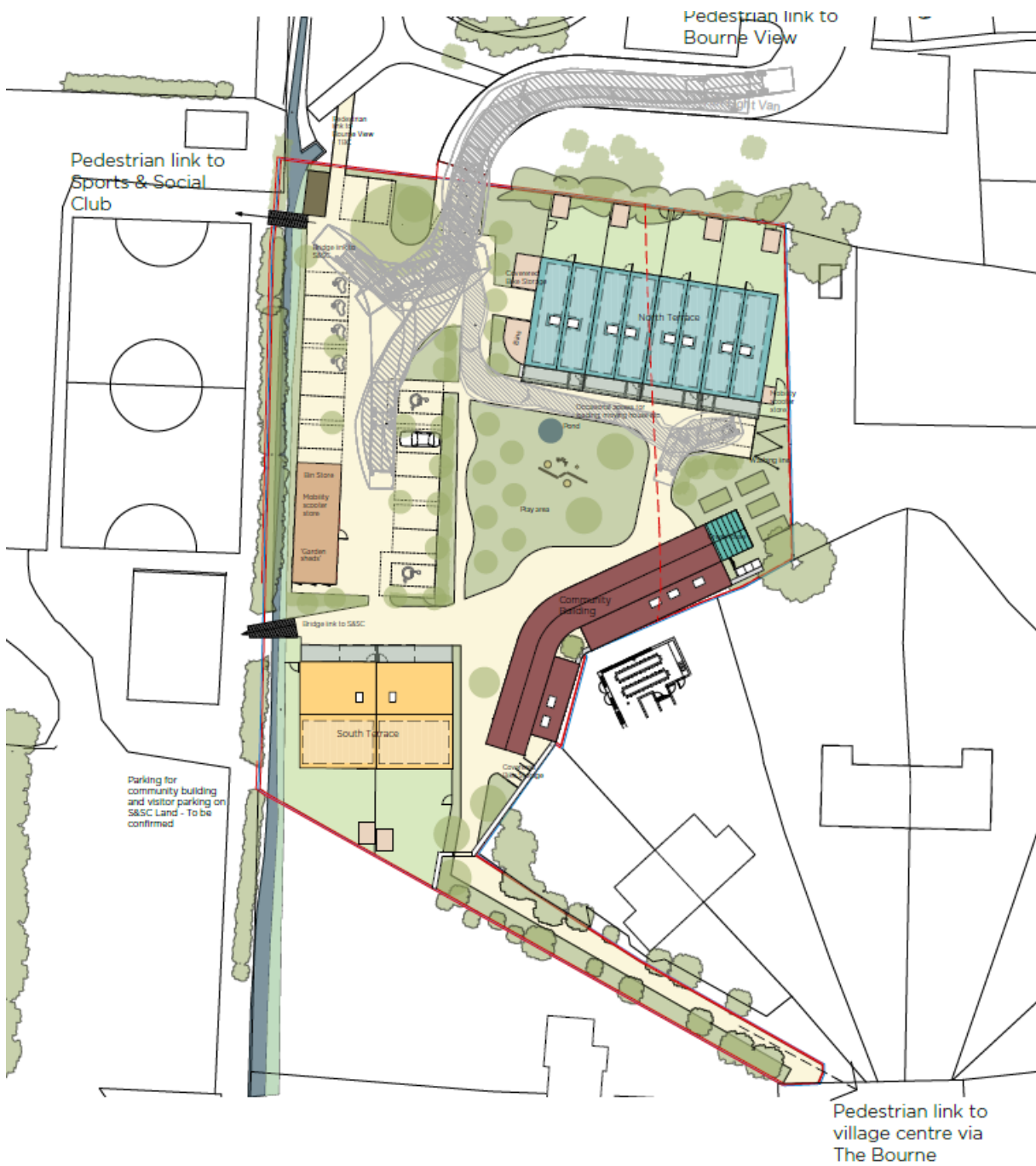
HNCLT are making significant progress on the development of their Allocations Policy, alongside CDC, to ensure that the homes remain affordable in perpetuity, and that each resident has a strong local connection to Hooky.







HNCLT is exploring funding possibilities including setting up a joint SPV (special project vehicle) with Low Carbon Hub and the energy aspect of the project is likely to be funded by Project LEO.

The legal wording of the Land Transfer document is being finalised and the Section 106 agreement is currently being drafted.



The Plans



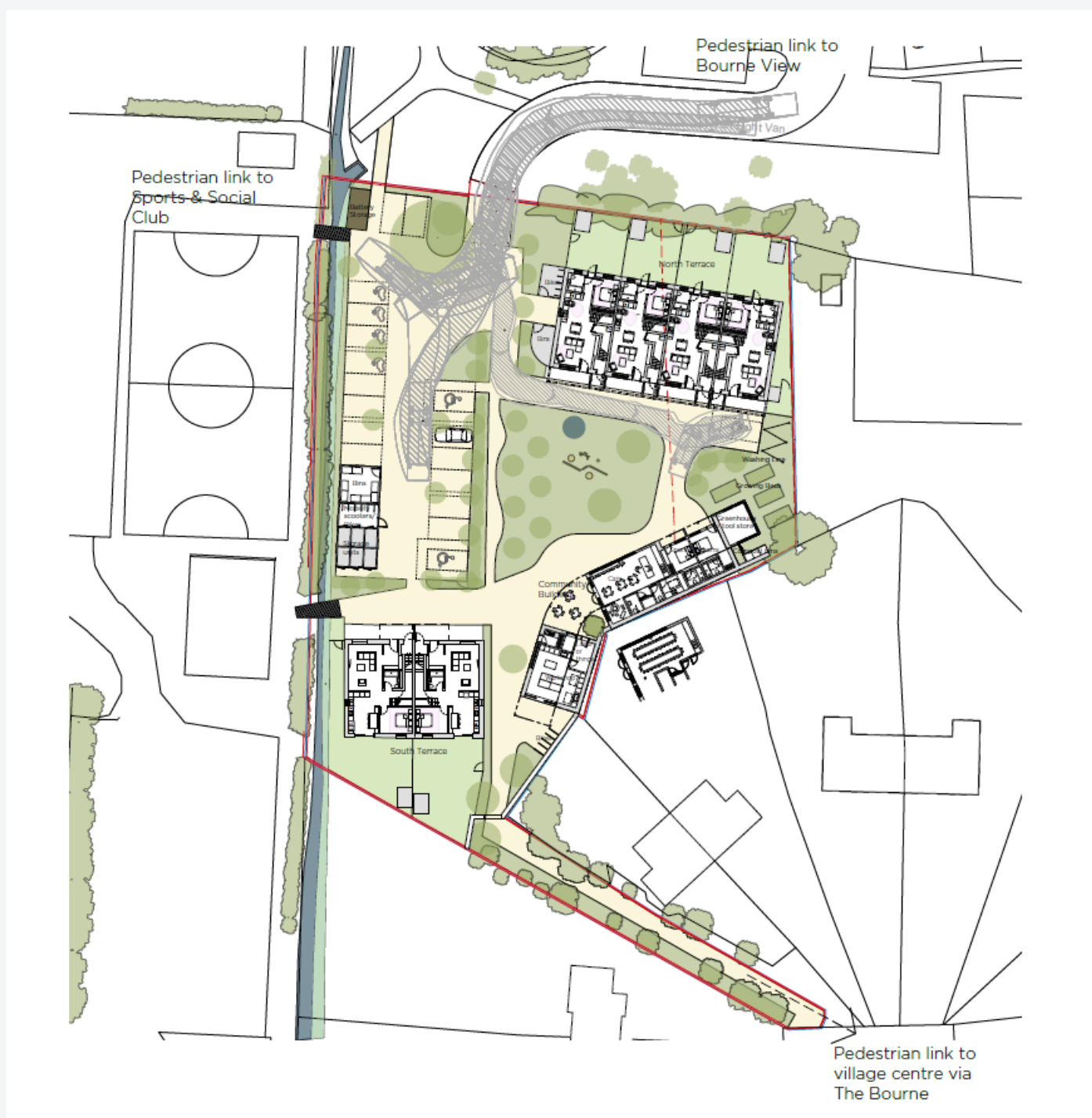
	2 bed flat with 2 bed maisonette above	HOUSING UNITS	
	3 bed maisonette with 1 bed maisonette above	1 BED FLATS	2
	Community building	2 BED MAISONETTE	8
	Community Greenhouse	3 BED HOUSE	2
	Stores	TOTAL UNITS	12
	Waste storage	PARKING	
		CAR POOL ELECTRIC	4
		DISABLED	3
		STANDARD SIZE	11
		TOTAL SPACES	18
		CDC technical requirements	18 un-allocated spaces

The Designs

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