



# Climate Emergency Development Plan Document

**Topic Paper: Alternative Living**

**(including one planet development and co-housing)**



This is one in a series of topic papers produced to inform the preparation of the Council's climate emergency Development Plan Document (DPD)

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<b>Renewable energy</b>
<b>Natural climate solutions</b>
<b>Town Centres</b>
<b>Mine water energy and deep geothermal</b>
<b>Energy and Sustainable Construction</b>
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<b>One Planet Development/Alternative living</b>
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## Executive Summary

There has been increasing interest in recent years in non-traditional housing from people or groups of people interested in reducing their carbon footprint. One Planet Development is development that through its low impact either enhances or does not significantly diminish environmental quality. The Welsh Assembly Government have developed a number of 'One Planet Development' criteria that must be met for development in the open countryside.

Co-housing developments are designed to be low carbon schemes of private homes sharing some facilities and open spaces. They can offer a low impact lifestyle with social benefits and a lower cost of living.

The UK Government have no specific policies on One Planet Development or on co-housing. Although there has been recent Government funded research to assess the benefits of community led housing, including co-housing models and some funding to help groups to bring forward schemes of this nature.

The Cornwall Local Plan currently contains no reference to a one planet approach or to co-housing; however, promoting sustainable development is at the heart of the plan.

Supporting innovative, low carbon development that supports self-sufficient lifestyles could be part of our approach to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, supporting the development of housing communities with shared amenities could help to address some of our social problems such as loneliness and inactivity.

For One Planet Development, we have drafted a policy to enable low impact residential development where it meets very strict conditions, including development that may take place in the open countryside. Such development must:

- Be well related to an existing settlement or on an existing farm or in another location if it can be justified in terms of the activity being undertaken and a sustainable transport approach
- Support a self-sufficient lifestyle and make a positive environmental and social contribution to Cornwall
- Demonstrate a zero-carbon approach to construction and deliver self-sufficiency in water, energy and waste
- Minimise use of resources in construction and reuse any existing buildings before building new; any new buildings should be temporary in nature and removable at the end of an agreed period of time.
- Lead to the regeneration of the site in environmental and biodiversity terms whilst conserving landscape character.
- Demonstrate, through a management plan for the site, that the proposed activity will substantially meet the needs of all residents

- Establish a management trust (or other mechanism) to govern the future of the enterprise and any future residents.

For co-housing, we may want to consider whether Cornwall Council should develop a further policy to encourage the development of low carbon co-housing schemes generally and specifically whether we should allow such developments to come forward on rural exception sites where affordable housing is provided and retained for local people.

## What is this topic paper about?

The Council is preparing a new Plan to set the framework for dealing with climate change. This will sit underneath the Local Plan and forms the strategic framework for planning decisions. This topic paper summarises the latest available evidence on alternative forms of low carbon living including One Planet Development. Reflecting the wide scope of this topic there are a number of overlaps between this paper and the other papers.

To view all the topic papers and the latest update on the Climate Emergency DPD, please visit [www.cornwall.gov.uk/climatechangedpd](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/climatechangedpd)

## Can I comment on this topic paper?

The Climate Emergency DPD topic papers are factual in nature and set out the planning policy context and current issues in Cornwall, along with potential future approach to inform policy development. There will be opportunities to comment on the content of the Climate Emergency DPD at various stages of its development. As such we are currently seeking views on these topic papers, in particular any gaps in evidence.

If you wish to be kept informed of any forthcoming consultation, please email [climateemergency.dpd@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:climateemergency.dpd@cornwall.gov.uk) with your contact details.

## Introduction

In seeking to address the Climate Emergency, we need to consider the impact that our homes and lifestyles have on our planet. Encouraging homes and ways of living that reduce carbon is a key component of this.

The One Planet movement seeks to encourage society to live within the capacity of our one planet, and to raise awareness of the continuous depletion of Earth's resources. One Planet Developments (OPD) are proposals on sites that seek to enable off-grid lifestyles that minimise the ecological footprint of the inhabitants to sustainable levels. OPD is low impact, highly sustainable development that either enhances or does not significantly diminish environmental quality; in effect, a one planet development should be broadly self-sufficient in terms of energy, water and waste, whilst also providing a significant proportion of food and income directly from the land.

As part of our scoping consultation, several respondents asked us to consider making it easier for other forms of highly sustainable off-grid and low-carbon development to come forward. We have included co-housing schemes in this paper to test whether this idea has more general support. Co-housing schemes are low carbon communities that are usually designed and managed by residents, arranged as a cluster of private homes around shared communal space and facilities. Such developments can enable lower impact eco-living whilst also offering more affordable accommodation and social benefits. A collaborative approach to design can result in some beautiful and innovative places, frequently offering renewable energy, car free living and shared growing spaces.

There has been growing interest in co-housing as a housing option over the last few years, with many professionals recognising the social benefits that it can offer and a growing number of people considering it an increasingly attractive living option. A policy that encourages this type of development could have social, environmental and economic benefits, helping local people to live a more sustainable lifestyle and reducing the use of scarce resources. Taking a pioneering approach to policy here could demonstrate that Cornwall is promoting innovation and seeking to deliver on its ambition to be a leader in sustainable living.

Evidence suggests that the biggest stumbling block for groups is often finding an appropriate and affordable site. Land within urban areas can be very expensive, making affordable co-housing difficult to achieve. Building outside urban areas is highly restrictive meaning that it is often not feasible, particularly for larger co-housing schemes, or those seeking larger areas of productive land for food growing. This may be better related to one planet development type proposals that don't currently have a policy basis in Cornwall.

Currently, any use of exception sites would require the provision of affordable housing. Whilst co-housing schemes can offer a way of living that reduces the housing and living costs of residents, they may not meet the criteria of traditional affordable housing.

## Policy Context and Evidence

### National Planning Policy

The UK Government have no policies on One Planet Development or specifically on co-housing.

**The Future Homes Standard:** On 1<sup>st</sup> October the government launched an initial consultation on their Future Homes Standard and options to increase the energy efficiency requirement (Building Regs Part L and F) of new homes in 2020 as a meaningful stepping stone to the Future Homes Standard and to restrict Local Authorities from setting their own standards. This included a proposed restriction on Local authorities setting their own standards, which may impact upon the application of One Planet criteria or on any requirements for co-housing schemes to meet zero carbon standards.

### Local Planning Policy

The Cornwall Local Plan currently contains no reference to a one planet approach, or to co-housing; however, promoting sustainable development is at the heart of the plan.

The One Planet Approach (as applied in Wales) would be a departure from the Local Plan spatial strategy of focusing development in the main towns and away from the open countryside. Enabling the development of co-housing schemes on rural exception sites could be a change to existing policy.

### Evidence

Welsh Assembly Government: In 2009, the Welsh Government presented its Sustainable Development Scheme (One Wales, One Planet) with an ambition to be more sustainable and reduce its 'ecological footprint' to a level that's fair compared to the rest of the planet's population and resources. The requirements are set out in a Technical Advice Note 6 (TAN 6) and Planning Policy Wales. This sets out an ambition for development to use 1.88 global hectares per person make an important contribution to reducing the carbon footprint of Wales, whilst delivering sustainable development and tackling climate change.

Planning guidance specifies that One Planet Development located in the open countryside should provide for the minimum needs of the inhabitants in terms of income, food, energy and waste assimilation over a period of no more than five years from the commencement of work on the site, evidenced by a management plan produced by a competent person as set out in TAN 6 .

The criteria include:

1. An initial ecological footprint of 2.4 global hectares per person or less and clear potential to move towards 1.88 global hectare (excel calculator available to work this out)
2. Buildings being zero carbon over their lifetime
3. Carbon analysis and improvement plan for the plot
4. Biodiversity and landscape improvement
5. A community impact improvement
6. Transport assessment and travel plan to minimise carbon impact of travel
7. Sustainable water supply
8. Zero waste (including biological waste – sewage treatment)
9. 100% renewable energy
10. Over a reasonable length of time (no more than 5 years), to provide for the minimum needs of the inhabitants in terms of income, food, energy and waste assimilation from land-based employment.

### **Regenerative development**

Research has been undertaken since the development of the OPD policy focussed on the likely application to Cornwall and Devon as rural counties with a great diversity of sorts of place. Whilst the Welsh policy is a success and has resulted in households living with greatly reduced ecological footprints and created new rural livelihoods and beneficial regeneration of farms and woods. However, OPD is a low impact model rather than a regenerative one and take up of schemes of more than single household size has been small. OPD's emphasis on site wide management plans and foot printing could offer potential for rural regeneration and help incrementally to tackle both the climate and ecological emergencies.

It is suggested that in Cornwall the principles of OPD could be focused on a more regenerative approach, in turn being used as a direct means to secure sequestration (tree planting) and biodiversity gain (nature recovery) at the same time as meeting needs for housing, employment and community facilities. The approach being developed through the Climate Change Task Group looks to build on two key principles:

- That the net zero and other benefits are significant and demonstrable / measurable
- That the net zero and other benefits are appreciable to those living and working in the new development and the 'host' community.

This is considered to also include restoration and management of often neglected habitats such as woodland, marshland, heathland and others and also to rewild the most marginal agricultural land. This would fit well with an overall ambition in Cornwall to actively increase environmental management and quality. The proposal made is that development should be required to be intrinsically regenerative rather than degenerative. This would require one planet type development that is net carbon negative and biodiversity, soil, energy and food positive onsite (potentially allowing for

an offsite contribution in exceptional cases). In this way development would contribute to net zero and help resolution of other common and systemic problems.

Examples:

TAN 6 - Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities, Welsh Assembly Government (2010) <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-09/tan6-sustainable-rural-communities.pdf>

Planning Policy Wales, Welsh Assembly Government (2018) <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/planning-policy-wales-edition-10.pdf>

One Planet York: One Planet York is a network of organisations working to make York a more sustainable, resilient and collaborative 'One Planet' city. This is not purely planning, but planning will play a role.

<https://www.york.gov.uk/one-planet-york/one-planet-york-1/1>  
<https://oneplanetyork.com/>

Bioregional One Planet Living – Local Government Actions (2019) [http://storage.googleapis.com/www.bioregional.com/downloads/OPL\\_local\\_government\\_actions.pdf](http://storage.googleapis.com/www.bioregional.com/downloads/OPL_local_government_actions.pdf)

Dartmoor National Park has included a one planet development policy approach in the submission version Local Plan.

## Co-housing

The government has funded research into and offered funding for more community led homes (to include co-housing) which will provide training and advice for groups seeking to deliver homes to meet their community needs, Research into loneliness has suggested that co-housing could be a good way to address loneliness in older people as they can build a sense of community by combining private homes and shared communal space. In addition, research has shown that co-housing schemes can be a good way of making housing more affordable for younger people and also reduce the loneliness that is often common among single under 40s.

The Design Council's work on the 'House of 2030' did not identify co-housing and the sharing of facilities as a key priority - but 25% of respondents suggested that they would be interested in a home where some facilities were shared, showing that a small but significant minority might be interested in this type of lifestyle.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/malthouse-boosts-funding-for-community-led-affordable-housing>  
[https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/sites/default/files/clh\\_report\\_new\\_2.pdf](https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/sites/default/files/clh_report_new_2.pdf)  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness>

<https://redbrickblog.co.uk/2020/06/housing-is-key-to-tackling-the-uks-loneliness-epidemic/>

Co-Living: A Solution to the Housing Crisis? Scott Corfe, Social Market Foundation (<https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/co-living-solution-housing-crisis/> )

<https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/publication/download-public-vision-home-2030>

## Future Approach

We have drafted a policy option for One Planet Developments which sets out an approach for Cornwall. It supports the development of low impact, easily removable homes that would support regenerative land management techniques to improve biodiversity. This would be aimed at small groups and potentially private estates providing affordable, low impact housing tied to the restorative use of land, controlled by conditions and requiring measurable environmental net gain. Such development must:

- Be well related to an existing settlement or on an existing farm or in another location if it can be justified in terms of the activity being undertaken and a sustainable transport approach
- Support a self-sufficient lifestyle and make a positive environmental and social contribution to Cornwall
- Demonstrate a zero-carbon approach to construction and deliver self-sufficiency in water, energy and waste
- Minimise use of resources in construction and reuse any existing buildings before building new; any new buildings should be temporary in nature and removable at the end of an agreed period of time.
- Lead to the regeneration of the site in environmental and biodiversity terms whilst conserving landscape character.
- Demonstrate, through a management plan for the site, that the proposed activity will substantially meet the needs of all residents
- Establish a management trust (or other mechanism) to govern the future of the enterprise and any future residents.

### Co-housing

In addition to a One Planet /regenerative, low impact development policy, we also need to consider whether we should include a further policy to encourage co-housing developments in Cornwall and the criteria that should be included in such a policy.

Co-housing schemes can already come forward under existing planning policies, but few have been delivered due to issues competing with standard housing developments

for land. It has been suggested that cohousing developments should be supported on exception sites to allow for cheaper land acquisition. There are a number of issues that might arise as part of developing a policy approach to co-housing, including:

- Are the social and environmental benefits of co-housing (shared living, zero carbon fabric etc) sufficient to justify an exception to normal housing policy and the use of exception sites?
- What criteria would we use for co-housing schemes in Cornwall – should there be a minimum size, a minimum quantum of shared facilities?
- Whether a policy should allow for co-housing to be developed on exception sites that would normally be used only for affordable housing where a mechanism for controlling future residents and price can be provided. What would be the implications of co-housing development on affordable housing provision?
- What the social benefits of developing co-housing communities would be and whether they can make a significant impact on sustainability and outweigh other impacts.
- What will be the impact of proposals for Future Homes Standard (particularly re renewable energy and zero carbon over lifetime of building).