

Tiny House Community Bristol - The Matrix, Sea Mills

Frequently Asked Questions



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If you'd like to add a question or request a paper copy, please email hello@tinyhousecommunitybristol.org.

This FAQ is available on our website www.tinyhousecommunitybristol.org

Q - What/who is Tiny House Community Bristol (THCB)?

A - THCB is a 'community-led housing group' made up of ordinary people from around Bristol who are in housing need and have formed a group to create their own affordable housing. We are all interested in and inspired by the global tiny house movement, it's diversity, ingenuity, creativity and design principles and we're all interested in learning how to live in community again. The tiny house movement is a worldwide movement of simple, low impact ways of affordable living (See YouTube channel 'Living Big in a Tiny House' for some great examples). THCB is constituted as a Community Benefit Society. Members make decisions locally using a framework of dynamic governance called Sociocracy.

Q - Where are you at in **the process** of developing the Matrix site?

A - We have put in our **planning application** to the council planning department and are in the process of receiving comments from the public and other consultees on it. We have a planning case officer. We don't know how long people have to submit comments and we're hoping that the planning officer will recommend it for approval once we have effectively addressed any of the concerns arising at this stage. We don't know if it will be passed to the Planning Committee for them to consider. This does often happen with new and groundbreaking schemes.

There are both objections and supportive comments on the planning website we're reading them all and doing our best to integrate people's concerns. We know that some people would rather the scheme didn't happen at all and feel the site is inappropriate for housing.

It's helpful to remember that the Council brought it forward in 2020 as suitable for housing, originally recommending 15 standard homes on the site. Our scheme, we feel, deals with the context and the opportunity as sensitively as possible. Underneath all this is the critical need for affordable, well made homes, both in Sea Mills and all across the city.

Our development stage funding ran out when we submitted our planning application, and our next wave of funding will kick in once we have planning approval. So in this gap we are putting

together a Crowdfunder - people's generous donations will enable us to make the necessary amendments, deal with Building Regulations, set up a plan for demolition and construction and hopefully engage more with our neighbours.

We have had fairly low capacity in the team over the last year due to the delays and complexity of the project making it hard for people to stay involved - the Council haven't given us a guarantee that those who are putting their time into the project will be the ones to live their. This has, understandably, reduced people's commitment. People in housing precarity, who are already stretched for time, need certainty. We're working with the Council to clarify how we can do 'direct lets' through Homechoice to our members.

Q - How can I **comment on the planning application**?

A - Use this document, ['How to respond to the Tiny House Planning Application'](#) which you can also find on the Sea Mills page of the website and in our Blog.

Q - Is this your **only site**?

A - Yes, so far. We are looking for more sites to create more tiny house communities across the West of England. Please get in touch if you have land and would like to collaborate, or if you know of a site with potential that you'd like us to investigate. We are looking at different models - not necessarily doing a development like Sea Mills - every site will be different and respond to its own context and the input of members interested in living there.

There are many many more people in need of affordable housing. We currently have over 150 members, most of whom are interested in being a future tiny house resident.

Q - is there **anyone living on the Sea Mills site** at the moment?

A - **Guardians** have been living onsite for the last few years. They are not connected with THCB, although early on they were invited to be part of the project if they'd like to continue living there. Guardian residents are managed by a company called Ad Hoc who rent the land from the Council.

Q - When will people be **moving in**?

A - This depends on how long the planning and construction processes take. We aim to reduce any delays of course, as people are in need of secure homes asap, though often delays will be out of our control. We are serious about minimising the demolition and construction time and minimising disturbances for neighbours.

There will be an allocations process to match members to homes. This will start to happen as soon as we have planning permission. All future residents will be involved in each stage of the

work. If you're interested in being considered for a home at Sea Mills, please join as a member (on the Become a member page of the website) and then become an active member, join meetings, take on roles and get involved in the work.

We would hope people to be moving in somewhere around **Winter 2025 / Spring 2026**

Q - Will there be any **community facilities that the local community can use?**

A - Yes. Once the scheme has been built, the new residents will decide and manage how some of the facilities can be best shared with people in the local community talk to neighbours about what's needed and what would be nice. For example, our refill shop, event space, workshop, communal garden and food growing area might host some events where we can invite others from the community in. Organising this with others in the local area will ensure activity always complements and supports existing local activity, for example, in the Cafe on the Square.

Q - Did you know that there is a **covenant on the land of Sea Mills that will prevent anymore house building happening?**

A - We were only made aware of this after we became 'referred developers'. We weren't told this until about 8 months into the process. We have sought clarification from the Council and looked at the The Land Registry Title document. The 2011 Character Appraisal document for the conservation area refers to an old covenant created at the time the garden suburb was built, in the 1920s. We have used the character appraisal document to help us create a scheme that will add value to the area and build on its valuable heritage whilst at the same time meeting current needs and standards and adding diversity to the housing offer in the neighbourhood. The Addison Act (that created Sea Mills) was a pioneering innovation over a century ago, created in response to a dire housing need as people were returning from war. We are doing the same over 100 years later - seeing what's needed, and providing it in the best way we can. Addison was lucky to have a blank canvas, whereas we have to work with a tricky, contaminated and constrained site! But we are determined to transform it from a neglected brownfield site to a place of meaning and community.

Q - Are you connected to the **community centre on Sylvan Way?**

A - No. The only site we are working on in Sea Mills is the old Matrix site, which used to be a construction skills training centre for young people, and car park. We have heard from local people about the story of the community centre closure and how much people want it to return. We aren't providing a community centre like that on the Matrix site, but when we are residents, we will be able to support local initiatives and campaigns such as for the restoration and reopening of the Community Centre.

Q - What's happening with the **garden license areas?**

A - The garden licenses are currently still with Bristol City Council. Our plans safeguard the

allotment area as community food growing and garden land which we would like to work on together with the current license holders. It is important, with the cost of living crisis, and for our health, wellbeing and food security that we work together to use the little land we have to grow what we can to feed as many people as we can and support as much biodiversity as we can.

Q - What guarantees are there that the **site will continue to be well maintained** once taken over by THCB?

A - Bristol City Council have set some high management standards (which apply to all Community Led Housing groups in the city) that we are required to adhere to, as a condition of us taking on a long term lease of the site. When we allocate homes to our members, it will be with the agreement that they will fulfill roles and responsibilities for care and maintenance. We will form a fully mutual housing cooperative that all residents will be part of which means members work together for the good of the whole site and the good of each other and have responsibility for that. As future residents of the scheme we are willingly imposing this on ourselves because it is how we want to share the responsibilities and hold each other accountable. This is a different set-up to ordinary housing where households are not obliged to look after the shared spaces or have shared care of the community, though people do do that voluntarily.

Q - **Who** will be living in these tiny homes?

A - THCB is a membership organisation. People sign up to be members and then do the work together to create their own homes, so these tiny homes at Sea Mills will be lived in by those who are actively involved in making the scheme happen - us! If you've been to a consultation you will have met many of us. We also want to do what we can to meet local housing need, and a few people locally have shown an interest in becoming residents. We haven't done an allocations process yet so no residents are confirmed. We're working out how to do that. As a condition of using Council land, the Council wants us to provide rental housing for people on the housing register. This means our members need to be on the housing register to be able to rent. Six of the homes will be Shared Ownership, which is a kind of part buy, part rent arrangement. This suits some of our members, full rental suits other members.

Q - How easy will **waste management** be in the development?

A - We are developing a waste management strategy as part of our planning application. This will be viewable by the public when it is published. Our aims are to move as close to zero waste as possible, which will drastically reduce the number of bins we will need. We are looking at the possibility of creating a waste management branch of our housing coop, so that we take full responsibility for the removal of any waste that cannot be dealt with on site. This might mean that we have an arrangement with the council about what they pick up and what we deal with ourselves. Part of our waste strategy is to use sealed compost tumblers and a micro Anaerobic Digester to transform garden waste & food waste into living soil, natural fertiliser and gas for cooking, we will also have an onsite zero waste refill shop, to prevent residents and other customers buying unnecessary packaging in the first place. We have designed this together because we want to minimise waste as much as possible and deal with it responsibly.

Q - How will the **housing remain affordable** within an expensive area?

A - By being a long lease (999 years) the land will be removed from the speculative market and held in trust (by THCB) for common good purposes of affordable housing in perpetuity (forever), along with food-growing and community resilience. All of the tenures we are planning to use (Social Rent, Affordable Rent, Shared Ownership) are 100% genuinely affordable and will remain so.

For the shared ownership/equity properties, no one will be able to own their home outright, meaning that if they want to move out, the property returns to THCB and the residents get back the equity (money) they have put in plus an increase in line with inflation. This will prevent costs of rents or sales rising to market rates, which are unaffordable. We are looking at what a 'living rent' might be. They have started using this for We Can Make's community-led homes in Knowle West (also a post-war garden suburb).

Q - What additional **security measures** will be put in place for the residents whose properties are adjacent to the matrix site?

A - We will be working with residents adjacent to the site, to put in place security measures that are felt to be needed. This might be fencing or planting or something else.

Q - How will you manage **visitor parking** in the area?

A - The site does not lend itself to car access - this is the nature of the site. We have had to develop a strategy for minimising car use for both residents and visitors. Our residents and their visitors will need to sign up to, and adhere to, a set of agreements and policies around car-use and reducing car-use. These could be legal agreements, and/or we could run a permit scheme. We're also keen to set up a car club (shared vehicle) to minimise car ownership and use. Visitors and other locals could use this too. As you know, visitors sometimes need to use cars, if there are children, or mobility issues for example. As far as we are aware, resident and visitor parking is not something that is currently monitored or managed across Sea Mills, nor are we aware of any traffic reduction scheme in place. Some of our immediate neighbours told us they have two or three cars per household so on street space is already at a premium. This is a concern for a number of neighbours that we take seriously.

We are discussing with the Council about taking on other small council sites nearby that we could lease for parking a few cars and running the car share club, to keep any cars we do use off the streets. This is important to residents, particularly in the Crescent.

Q - Is there capacity for installing a **ground source heat pump** before building starts, to provide hot water to the community and surrounding residents?

A - A group of consultants have joined the team to work with us on identifying our options for energy on site. We've applied for funding to do a feasibility study on how we can best source

our energy - we're interested in whether we can support our immediate neighbours to access ground source heat or solar energy too.

Q - Is there a way of incorporating **green roofs** on any of the buildings?

A - We decided not to use green roofs because they require more structural support which has cost implications, and use non-degradable materials. We also need roof space for solar energy. These are all factors we need to weigh up. We are creating larger spaces for nature at ground level and will be planting more trees.

Q - Will you be able to incorporate **wind energy** as well as solar power?

A - Domestic wind energy isn't something which has been supported to take off in the UK like it has in other parts of the world, so there may be difficulties, particularly in planning, in setting up small scale wind turbines. We have opted for solar and (depending on the outcome of the feasibility study) ground source heat.

Q - Are **electric vehicles** the best option after researching how the materials are mined and disposed of? Are there any better transportation alternatives?

A - We are weighing up the pros and cons of all our transportation options and will develop a transportation strategy, which we can share with the public when it is ready. We are committed to minimising harm to the planet and the manufacture of electric vehicles, the materials, and disposal, is a concern. The site will be a zero car development, apart from disabled access and deliveries. We agree that new electric cars, as a substitute for fossil fuel powered cars, are not a good option. Our approach is most likely to be to use one (or two) as a shared vehicle(s) and to look at second hand options first.

Q - How will the new homes affect **water supply**? Will more homes cause floods of **sewage** in gardens?

A - We will be recycling/reusing grey water and collecting rainwater, and will be incorporating as many 'sponge city' approaches to rain water absorption as possible in buildings and landscaping. There will be no possibility of sewage ending up in peoples' gardens. Tiny homes and tiny home lifestyles are about minimal resource use.

Q - How can **local people get involved** in the work of THCB?

A - We encourage you to get in touch via the website or hello@tinyhousecommunitybristol.org and tell us what you're interested in and how you'd like to be involved. We'd love to hear from you. Membership of THCB (as an organisation, we cover the whole of the West of England, not only Sea Mills) is open, meaning that anyone is welcome to join us. Once people have completed a simple

membership form (on the 'Get Involved' page of our website) and have paid their £1 membership fee, they will be invited to a newcomer welcome event of some kind (the nature of this will vary depending on our capacity and the stage of the project) where they will hear about the process of joining themed circles (small groups of members) that do the work to make it all happen. Members are able to decide what level of involvement feels best for them, until, if they become residents and members of the housing cooperative, their roles and responsibilities will be decided by consent. There may well be other ways of involvement for local people that emerge / develop over time, which might not require them becoming a member of THCB.

**This is a working document which we will update regularly.
Feel free to email hello@tinyhousecommunitybristol.org with
further questions and we will do our best to answer them as
fully as we can and post an updated version.**