

Newsletter ~ No 1 ~ April 2018

Welcome to our first DACLT Newsletter. Perhaps a little background to start ..

Dorchester Area Community Land Trust Ltd (DACLT) was formally set up in 2017, being registered with the FCA on 12th July that year and having its first Board meeting just eight days later.

Our formal aims are to:

1. Maintain or improve the physical, social and economic infrastructure within Dorchester and seven adjoining Parishes;
2. Advance education (particularly concerning asset based community development and enterprises with a community or environmental focus);
3. Facilitate community ownership of renewable energy production;
4. Promote and support the arts locally;
5. Function in accordance with the legal definition of a Community Land Trust;
6. Promote and protect local heritage;
7. Hold land in trust for its community.

The Trust can do this in various ways with the most significant being that it is community based, can attract government funding, and can ensure that what it does remains working for the community in perpetuity.

The Board of thirteen unpaid directors is elected by its Members from the community. We meet monthly and then have extra meetings as and when projects or issues demand.

DACLT Members have a very important role to play in shaping and supporting the Trust. To join up, Members must purchase at least one £1 share in the Trust, but the money is really neither here nor there in our case. The importance is to have supporters from the community, encouraging and supporting the Trust to meet its aims. And, of course, Members can speak at Board meetings and have a vote at the General Meetings. DACLT Members are important. We are, therefore, looking to increase our membership to help us develop our role in the community.

Full details of our FCA registration, postal address, current project and list of directors can be found on our website at www.DACLT.org.uk or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/DACLT>.

So what have we been doing?

Our first project, the building of 20 or so affordable, one-bedroom flats for young Dorchester employees, was triggered by Dorchester Town Council. The council see the support of young employees in getting onto the Dorchester housing ladder as an urgent priority. They are thus making the tennis court site available to us at a reduced price. This reduced price, together with various government grants, imaginative architecture and support from West Dorset District Council should allow us to put these flats onto the market at around £100,000. (The tennis court site is at the back of the Trinity Street car park in the corner between West Walks Road and Bowling Alley Walk,.

The rationale for this can perhaps be best summarised as

- 1) Average wage for young Dorchester workers is about £25k pa. This is too low for even the cheapest accommodation in town. The alternative way of seeing this is that the price of the cheapest properties is far too high for the average young worker in town.
- 2) Dorchester has approximately 18,000 jobs but only some 9,000 resident workers, of whom some, of course, commute to Bournemouth, London and elsewhere.
- 3) As a consequence, some 10,000 or more come into Dorchester each day. Clearly, there is too much traffic and commuting in and out each day. This is unsustainable.
- 4) The average age of the resident population is increasing with an imbalance of too many retirees and too few young working residents. This is unhealthy for a vibrant community.

(A fuller and more precise version of the rationale can be seen on our website.)

We invited submissions from interested architects and following shortlisting and interviewing appointed Reed Watts from London - <http://www.reedwatts.com> . Their plans are developing and offering us some fascinating ideas.

One of their enthusiastic themes, which fits very well with our brief, comes from the Pocket Living work being developed in London: <https://www.pocketliving.com> .

This concept has two really significant threads for us;

- 1) with clever design a 38 m² one-bedroom flat can work both for the residents and our finances, and
- 2) the architects are working with prefabricated Cross Laminated Timber (CLT) units which offer a lighter building which can be constructed in less time and with less waste than normal.

In order to explore these ideas further, five of us went up to Waterloo in London to see one of these "Pocket Living" flats and then onto Regents Park to see the CLT construction technique which the architects are working on at the open-air theatre in the park.

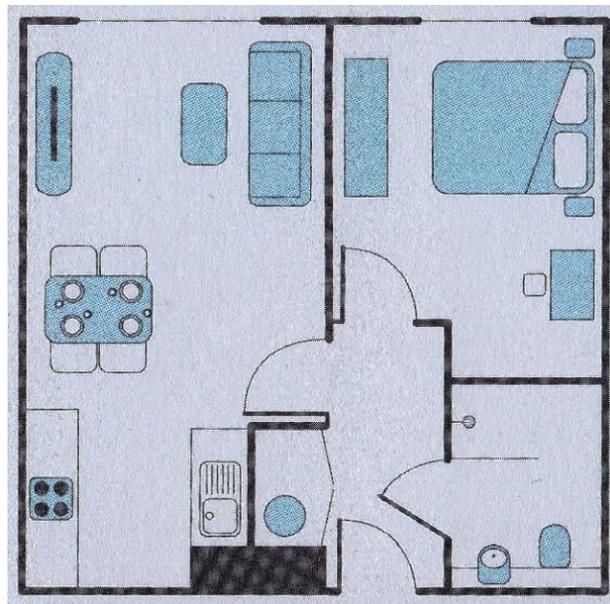
DACLT Visit to “Pocket Flats” in Sail Street, Waterloo

We visited the development at 8 Sale Street, SE1, where there are 30 new one-bedroom flats over five floors, with a lift and small roof garden. Each deck has a small communal cycle store. Letter boxes are at ground floor level inside the main front door.



Photograph and design layout c/o Pocket Living

The ground floor at street level is also used for flats with doors direct to the pavement though set back from it by about a metre or so with occasional vertical posts to delineate the edge of the development.



The flats are all similar and 38 m² in size with the plan on the right giving the layout of the flat we visited on the first floor.

The front door is off a common walkway which runs along the west side of the building. This provides partial screening from the road and railway. The walkway has secure access. The communal areas are cleaned and maintained by the management company.

Inside, the flat we saw was painted white throughout, ceilings were high and doors were large - though whether wheel chair accessible is uncertain.

Each flat had three windows - one small in the kitchen at high level onto the walkway (presumably for ventilation), one large multi-way opening window in the bedroom and one very large window with Juliet balcony in the east-facing living area. There was a good deal of light and the windows gave an air of extra space though we did not see the flat at night when, presumably, the curtains would be drawn.

The bedroom was comfortably big enough for a double bed and a small amount of furniture. The photo on the right was taken looking back towards the front door - the bathroom was effectively behind the hanging space and living area behind the wall to the right. The two pictures below show the bed, desk and window in the bedroom.



The kitchen/diner had a small but functional kitchen area - see below. On the left in the picture is the large stainless steel sink with its drainer and a small amount of worktop. Cupboards underneath with some storage. Behind the sink in this photo is the riser duct containing all the services, both up, and down.

The gas boiler and washing machine services are in the hall cupboard off the left side of the photo, behind the back of the sink.



Opposite the sink unit is a worktop with electric hob and oven under. Above are some relatively large wall cupboards. There are equally decent cupboards below with space for integrated fridge. However, a fridge-freezer would have to go where Adrian is sitting at the table under the wall poster. We did not check for task lighting.

There is not a great deal of worktop for cooking nor for draining and stacking before putting away. However, the table between the kitchen and living area could double up for this purpose. The choice of stainless steel for the sink is a shame considering the quality of other fittings.

With the total internal size of just 38 m² you might think it would feel cramped, but you can get four adults into the living area without too much effort. Note also the height of the ceiling and of the main window.



The extra height gives an impression of extra space, and the flat certainly did not feel cramped albeit it was a show flat with very little of the usual clutter associated with normal life.



Unfortunately, there was no electricity when we visited the flat so shots of the bathroom were limited as no window either. However, the photo on the left shows the wall-mounted wc and the sink unit. The shower unit was simply half enclosed by a glass screen as discernible on the plan. The floor was a non-slip vinyl material though why so dark? As bathrooms go, this was plenty large enough and possibly could take a wheelchair.

The developer talks of underfloor heating, but there was no sign of this in this flat. There was, however, a physically large (combi) Vaillant boiler on the wall in the hall cupboard allowing it to vent out to the open outside corridor. The boiler provides water for the shower, bathroom basin and kitchen sink. It also heats two radiators.

The windows were not triple glazed as far as we could see but otherwise the flats were apparently very well insulated. Sound insulation was also good - very little was heard of the passing trains just a few metres away.

The flats were of modular construction and were basically built as front-to-back halves in a factory in Bedford and then shipped in a virtually finished state. The walkways, staircases and lift shafts were all then built on afterwards. This process is, apparently, slightly more expensive than conventional building, but time on site is roughly halved and the amount of equipment, disruption and wastage is reduced enormously.

There is a good video of the process at <https://vimeo.com/177203603?from=outr-local> . But please bear in mind that this is a sales video as much as anything else.

Pricing for these flats in London seems to vary from about £170k (Southall) to more than £300k (Camden) presumably depending upon location and access to good transport. The Sale Street flats are apparently on the 80% market at £267,000 but this is unconfirmed. All these flats are priced at 80% of the market and aimed at first time buyers, or people who own no other property and with individual salaries less than £90k pa.

Some concern has been expressed in various blogs on the internet that purchasers may find them difficult to sell on at these prices. However, they do not seem to have been around long enough for there to be any concrete evidence either way yet.

For DACLT there appear to be a number of issues that come to mind ...

- Are these large enough for our purpose? (For those visiting the unanimous answer was “Yes!”)
- Ceiling height vs number of floors. Can we get four floors to provide us with 25+ flats given that our purpose is to provide as much affordable housing as possible?
- Can we be sure that the final sale price will hold up over time thus allowing for owners to sell them on in due course?
- Heating and insulation: If we increase the insulation, how do we balance extra initial sale cost against lower running costs? Difficult when the mortgage is a multiple of the purchase price.
- Can we go for electric only and thus save money on not laying in gas?
- The flats we saw had no parking. But they were in London with excellent transport systems. Will this work for us?
- The developers provided no white goods - residents brought in their own. Extra cost = extra mortgage. Is this OK in Dorchester?
- These flats had a single outside view/aspect. Reed Watts’s design for us currently has large windows and a double aspect for most flats. Will the planners accept this?
- These were flat roofed blocks. Pitch roofs may fit our locality better, and provide some south-facing slopes for PV, but at the same time the pitched roof would reduce the inhabitable height of the blocks and hence the number of flats we can build.
- Sound insulation and services. These flats were “handed” such that bathrooms were next to bathrooms and kitchen/diners next to kitchen diners. This reduces annoying noise. Some worries about noise from the risers by the front door.

All these issues, and indeed many more, will come to the fore over the next few months as we follow the tortuous route from initial ideas to final realisation. We anticipate producing a series of newsletters over time to follow the story and keep our members and friends in touch with what we are doing.

Dorchester Area Community Land Trust
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