

Questions and answers from the 'Meet and greet', 17/5/21.

25 information leaflets were hand delivered to the closest homes, and the residents were invited to a special zoom meeting specifically for them. 35 people attended the meeting including three councillors, Joe Boyle, Alderman Angus Carson & Nigel Edmund.

Can we expect all of you to be living in the project ?

Yes, the group who are developing the project intend to live there.

Will the 34 units be sold or rented? ?

The properties will be for sale. Some members of the group may purchase a house and rent it out privately. Part of our thinking is that it would be good to have some houses to rent, so that they would be available for people who are enthusiastic to be part of the project but cannot raise a mortgage. However this is not a fundamental and necessary aspect of the project.

Is there a link to a Housing Association or the Housing Executive ?

No, this is a private development. One of our criteria for people to become members is that they attend working meetings over a period of time so that they can familiarise themselves with the project and we can get to know them. Membership details on the web site.

Is this an English model ?

Cohousing started in Denmark in the 60's, now some 10% of the housing stock in Denmark is cohousing. From there it has spread with many projects across Europe, North America and worldwide. There are some 19 projects in the UK with 60+ in development. There are none in Ireland, the closest would be Cloughjordan in Co. Tipperary it is an eco village and has some features in common Cohousing but they are not the same thing.

What market research did you do ?

The group members created a list of criteria of where they wanted to live, including, edge of a town/village, close to the sea, space for growing vegetables etc. We have been searching for sites for over 2 years. This site in Portaferry most closely met our criteria.

Who gets to use the Common house ?

Primarily the cohousing residents. However cohousing is outward looking and seeks to be part of the local community so if there are activities or courses for example where other people want to join in then they will be welcome.

Have you met with the planners ?

Yes, we met with Planning and Road Service. In principle Planning were supportive of the project and advised us of some of the criteria we would need to meet.

Is this a profit making scheme ?

Portaferry Cohousing will be setup as a not for profit Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG).

We are looking to split the 13 acres into two areas, one for cohousing and one for traditional housing. We will apply for planning approval for the traditional housing and then sell off the sites, any profit will be used to provide loans to the cohousing group.

What about the pavement into Portaferry ? It is not wide enough.

We had not thought about this, something for us to take up with Planning and Road Service.

What about the provision of car access to dwellings ?

One of the principles of cohousing is that the site is pedestrianised with a parking area on the edge of the site. That way people get to meet each other more while going about their daily lives, it is a safer environment for children and a more attractive place for everybody. There will be no parking spots adjacent to people's houses. However there will be access for vehicles to all houses for emergencies or for example to move furniture. Maybe we need to look at some houses being adjacent to the parking area so that there could be better disabled access.

Is this a gated community ?

Our understanding is that a gated community is intended to isolate the residents from the surrounding area. So no, with cohousing the intention is to integrate with the neighbourhood.

What is the contract ?

We are in the process of creating a "members agreement" which is the contract and rules that residents will be governed by. It will include our vision and values, details of financial contribution that members will have to make towards the upkeep of the communal buildings and land and details of the hours per week members are obliged to commit for upkeep.

How ecological will the houses be ? What about grey water recycling ?

We want to incorporate as many aspects of sustainable build as possible. Then it is a question of what we can afford. We understand that it is possible to build to Passive House functionality for an extra 5-10% above the cost of standard build and that would be our intention, although we may not apply for Passive House certification. One of the advantages of Passive House is that the running costs will be lower.

Our prime consideration in appointing our architect was that they should have a commitment to sustainable and ecological build.

Will you use local builders ?

That would be our preference. Residences will be energy efficient, in practical terms that means most or all will be built with an air-sealed shell and a heat recovery system, so there are technical standards that will need to be met.

Can you as a company afford to build should people not invest ?

[As we understand, this question is asking how we will proceed if we don't fill the project initially.]
The short answer is no. We intend to submit to Planning for the full site. Then if for example we had 8 people signed up to be members we might build 10 houses in phase 1. We are looking to develop the scheme in a way that is financially robust, so that we only borrow within our means.