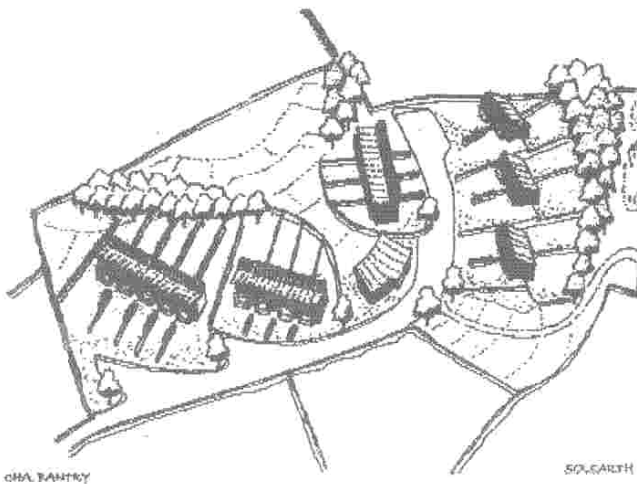
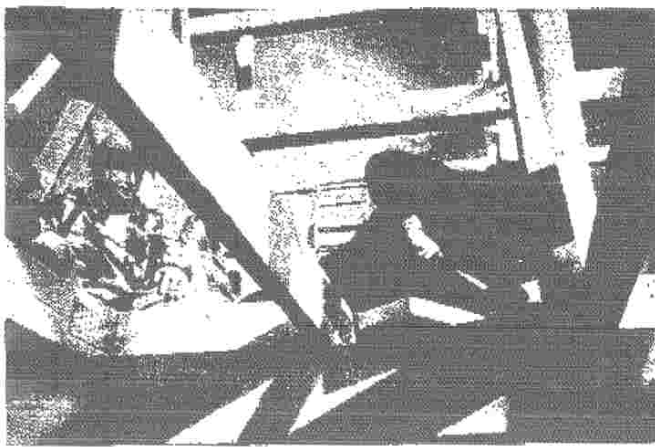




## A Pilot Project for Integrated & Sustainable Social Housing in West Cork



**annual report 2004-2005**

### Summary

Carbery Housing Association is a non-profit company with charitable status and is approved by the DoEHLG for social housing development, set up by concerned local residents in 2001.

To date it has had 124 applications for housing from local households who cannot afford to buy or rent adequate homes. Most are on the Cork County housing list and are single persons or childless couples.

Cork County Council has estimated that 48% of new households are not able to buy or rent on the open market. At the same time, they agree that Local Authorities will not be able to develop enough Council housing to provide for this level of demand.

CHA sees its role as contributing to solving this deficit by designing, building and managing sustainable, energy efficient social housing that meets local needs and contributes to renewable energy use.

The biggest obstacle to its progress to date has been the high price of residential land on the market. But in partnership with Cork County Council (Western Region) we have identified land in Bantry in public ownership that could be ideal for the development of a sustainable neighbourhood by CHA.

CHA has proposed the design and building of initial 20 sustainable homes and a community centre on this land. We have also recruited an expert Design Team to take this project forward. The proposed homes will be sustainable, incorporating renewable energy use. Rent levels will be set at genuinely affordable level.

The project will be funded under the Capital Assistance Scheme, managed by Cork County Council. It will provide affordable community housing and community facilities for single people and families in Bantry, and a model for future sustainable developments for other areas.

## Housing Need in West Cork



In 2001 Cork County Council Planning Department estimated that an additional 7,500 social homes were needed, and that demand was increasing at a rate of 1,200 homes a year. Local Authorities in the County (including the Town Councils) were intending to build 4,500 new homes for rent and sale by 2006. This was not enough to cover the annual growth in demand, or deal with the accumulated backlog of need. A further 1,500 social homes a year were required.

Some of the main casualties in this situation are single people who are unemployed or on lower incomes. This group will rarely be allocated Council housing, and cannot afford to buy or rent without subsidy. Around half of the households on the County's housing lists are single people or couples, and there are few options available to this group in terms of social housing. As a result, this group faces many barriers to permanent settlement and active citizenship.

## Corbery Housing Association (CHA)

CHA was set up in September 2001 as an initiative by residents in Baltimore, West Cork, to try to create alternatives for people locked out of the housing market. Through local fund-raising, a non-profit company was established, charitable status was obtained, and approved voluntary housing body status with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government secured.

## CHA's Membership

CHA is a membership organisation, where any member of the public (including prospective tenants) can join as Members on payment of a small yearly fee. The Association currently has over 80 members. Every year, the Membership elects an Executive Committee of 11 members to direct its work. The Association has three officers, a Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary.

## CHA's Housing Applications

Since its inception, and with relatively little advertising, CHA has had 124 applications for housing from households seeking housing in the area. Most applications have been for homes in the major towns, Bantry, Skibbereen, Clonakilty and Baltimore, and for some of the rural villages. Most of these applicants (around 53%) are single people or couples with no children. The remainder are families of different sizes.

## RENEASE - Renewable Energy Against Social Exclusions



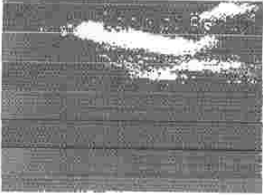
CHA was funded by the European Commissions ALTENER (Alternative Energy) Programme to carry out a feasibility study for design and development of sustainable social housing. The RENEASE (Renewable Energy Against Social Exclusion) Project included local and transnational Partners, including Cork County Council Energy Agency, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the REVES (Cities and Regions of the Social Economy) Network. Solearth Ecological Architects (Dublin) carried out most of the research and the Project included consultation with housing applicants, as well as study of other housing projects in Ireland and abroad.

## Sustainable Design and Construction Brief

Thanks to RENEASE, CHA has developed and adopted a comprehensive design brief for sustainable social housing that it intends to apply to future developments. This brief includes detailed criteria for site selection, solar design, renewable and rational energy use, elimination of hazardous and toxic materials, use of renewable and recycled materials recycling of waste water and domestic waste, and the protection and enhancement of bio-diversity on sites, and is available for downloading on our Web Page.

Buying Land for Social Housing

One of the other conclusions of the RENEASE Project was that, given the current funding arrangements, social housing associations in West Cork could not afford building land on the open market, as the commercial land value for viable residential sites was 30% or more over the Purchase Grant Limits allowed by the DOEHLG for buying of land by Housing Associations.



Negotiations are currently ongoing with Cork County Council (Western Region) to consider if land can be made available from the Councils land bank for social housing development by CHA. The Council has identified a potential site in Bantry for this purpose, and CHA has requested the transfer of this site for development. The site is zoned for residential development, and within a mile of the Town Centre and therefore of shops, schools and other amenities. It is South facing, and therefore ideally suited for solar design.

The Design Team

CHA has tendered for, and selected, an expert Team to design the proposed Project. This Team will be led by Akiboye Conolly Architects, an experienced practise based in Cork City, whose broad experience ranges from grass-roofed homes in Wexford and a solar house in West Cork to design work on the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg. The Team will also include a Structural Engineer, Environmental Engineer and a Quantity Surveyor.

Bantry Sustainable Neighbourhood Development (BSND)

CHA has proposes the building of an initial phase of 20 solar homes within a community design. The entire development will incorporate renewable energy use, as well as other aspects of sustainable design and construction. CHA currently has 43 households on its housing list for Bantry. The development will comprise 12 homes for single persons and couples, and 8 for families.

Community Resource Centre

As part of the BSND Project, CHA proposes to build a Community Centre within the site. This will be built to the same ecological standards as the housing, and will provide a communal facility to help meet the identified needs of residents and the local community. The actual purpose of these facilities will be decided in consultation with future residents and the Council, but could include social and leisure facilities or workspace.

Funding for the Project

The development will be funded primarily from Voluntary Housing Grant, made available by the DOEHLG under the Capital Assistance Scheme and managed by Cork County Council, and from additional private borrowing secured by CHA. The Community Centre will be financed from National Lottery Funds, and CHA will also seek funding from the Homes of Tomorrow Programme managed (Sustainable Energy Ireland) to support the application of renewable energy.

Allocation Policy

Allocation of homes will be made once the development is completed, and based on the principles established by Cork County Council for allocation of voluntary sector housing. This will be to mostly to persons on the County Housing List (75%) but also to other in identified housing need (25%). CHA has drafted an Allocation Policy, which sets out the criteria on which housing need will be defined based on the circumstances of the applicant household.

Rent Policy

CHA has proposed an affordable rent policy, in which rents are set no higher than 23% of the net available income for persons on the housing list. This works out at around €60 per week for 3-bedroom houses and €45 per week for a 2 or 1 bedroom house or flat. This rent policy is in line with the recommendations of the United Nations Habitat Council on affordability.

Housing Management  
and Maintenance

This proposed rent level are intended to be at once fair and affordable to residents, but sufficient for CHA to meet its management and maintenance responsibilities, and to repay borrowing undertaken for the development. As voluntary housing associations working under the CAS Programme do not receive additional subsidy for management and maintenance, rental income must cover basic costs. CHA intends to provide a high standard of locally based housing management, as well as to make provision for day to day maintenance and periodic repair of the development.

Training

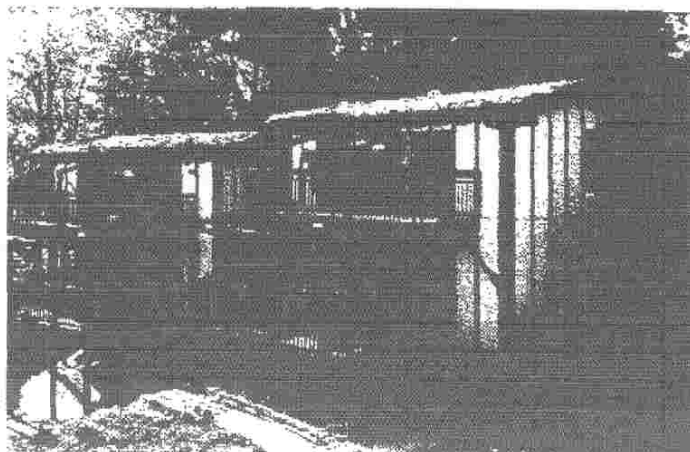
CHA intends to provide training in sustainable design and construction for those residents that are interested in learning more about how the homes works. We have already piloted a Certificate Course in Sustainable Building with the West Cork Adult Education Service (WCAES) in Skibbereen, which we intend to accredit with FETAC. CHA will offer this Course to prospective residents. The Course will involve work experience on the development.

Social Employment

CHA also intends to create employment opportunities for local residents. It is approved as an employer under the Rural Social Scheme (RSS), a new Government community employment programme aiming to provide 3 days a week employment to farmers and fishermen in receipt of benefit, in the development of community projects. CHA has proposed the setting up of a Building Team to work on the BSND Project, on selected aspects of the work like landscaping, permaculture and sustainable construction.

European Initiatives

Since 2004, CHA has participated in the ECSA (Exchange for Strategic Arrangements) Project, funded under the European Commissions Programme to Combat Social Exclusion. ECSA is continuing into 2005, and has promoted exchange and the development of housing and employment projects to combat social exclusion in 8 European regions.



'Diggers Housing Co-operative', Brighton, East Sussex

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