

Our Approach to Strategic Land



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND



About us

The Strategic Land team at the Church Commissioners brings forward land for new housing developments across the country. Our aim is to deliver new homes and employment opportunities which support and enhance their local surroundings. We do this by seeking to build new, and strengthen existing, communities, helping to create and sustain vibrant and vital places.

Many new developments also include new schools, community facilities, local retail centres, libraries, sports facilities and new areas of open space, including new country parks, which benefit not only new residents but also neighbouring communities. The importance of high quality placemaking and thorough engagement with local churches and dioceses, local authorities and existing communities is at the heart of what we do.

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We are committed to the long-term stewardship of our land. We strive to manage the natural resources of our estates and support the building of new developments in our communities in accordance with best practice. We will facilitate positive change to meet the global challenges of combatting climate change and reversing the loss of biodiversity. We seek to collaborate with others to achieve this.

We seek to deliver new developments which enhance their surroundings, providing safe and stable new homes and job opportunities to local areas, and facilitating the curation of communities that can thrive for generations to come. Aligned with our wider land management activities, alongside and as part of our developments, we seek to safeguard habitats and, where possible, implement biodiversity improvements.

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Our Vision



Our Strategic Objectives:

- To deliver, across England, high-quality, safe and stable new homes and communities, focused on those areas with identified housing and employment need, or with specified growth aspirations;
- To curate sustainable new developments that seek to support, enhance, integrate with and celebrate their surrounding communities and landscapes, over the long term;
- To create, through high-quality and innovative place-making, sociable, satisfying, vibrant and thriving new communities supported by strong links to vital community services and facilities, recreation areas, walking and cycling links and public transport;
- To foster strong, ongoing relationships with key stakeholders, adopting a collaborative approach to our engagement with local communities and residents, local Councils, and members of our church community;
- Embedding environmental, social and governance (ESG) matters into our work to facilitate the transition to a net zero, low carbon future.



Our values

We believe in and support the five core values defined by the Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community, which articulate a clear vision of what good housing should be – sustainable, safe, stable, sociable and satisfying. These values are an important step in building thriving and successful communities.

We believe that where there is demonstrable housing and employment need, the delivery of new homes and jobs, alongside key infrastructure and community facilities, is vital for the creation and maintenance of successful and sustainable places.

We believe that the development of new housing, both market and affordable housing - appropriate for local needs - supports the common good.

We believe that it is predominantly via a functioning development plan process, led by local planning authorities, where local growth requirements should be set, and land deemed sustainable should be allocated for development.

In line with our Climate Change Policy, we strongly support the UK's commitment to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and the work of the Climate Change Committee in providing advice on how this might be achieved. Our Climate Change Policy can be accessed by following this link:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/eiag/policies>



The Church Commissioners' responsibility

The Church Commissioners support the work and mission of the Church of England across the country. We manage a diverse investment portfolio and take a long-term approach to stewardship. We are committed to being at the global forefront of responsible investment, advised by the Church of England's Ethical Investment Advisory Group.

Funds generated by the Church Commissioners are used to fund mission activities, support dioceses – especially those with fewer resources and in more deprived areas – to support bishops' ministry and contribute towards cathedral costs and clergy pensions.

We manage our investments to generate strong returns, consistent with our ethical and responsible investment principles, in order to maximise the funding we can provide to support the work and mission of the Church of England, meeting our charitable purposes.

For more information on our responsible investment activities, please see our 2020 stewardship report:

[The Church Commissioners for England Stewardship report 2020](#)
[\(churchofengland.org\)](http://churchofengland.org)

There is broad consensus that there has been a long-term under supply of new housing across the country. Action must be taken to address this issue. This matter was the focus of the *Coming Home* report, prepared by the Archbishops' Commission for Housing, Church and Community in 2021.

The Church Commissioners own land on the fringes of existing settlements which is well-suited for the provision of sustainable new homes and employment opportunities, to support and enhance existing communities and create new ones.

Our Strategic Land portfolio includes land across England which is suitable for the delivery of approximately 30,000¹ new mixed-tenure homes.

The scale of development varies from 25 homes to new communities of >3,000 homes, with all of the associated infrastructure and community benefits.

The Church Commissioners' Strategic Land team puts forward areas of its own land to local planning authorities which may assist in meeting the identified growth requirements of a particular area. Our approach is to work closely and collaboratively with local Councils, key stakeholders and members of the local communities, including the diocese and local churches, in bringing forward our proposals.

Whilst we see our role and approach as being integral to the delivery of new homes and communities across England, the Church Commissioners are not housebuilders, nor are we a housing charity. As landowners we seek local plan allocations over land we own and apply for outline planning permission so that we can work in partnership with professional developers, including house builders, to bring forward these new homes and communities.

Delivering new homes and jobs

The role the Church Commissioners play



We will liaise, wherever possible, with central Government on the formulation of emerging national planning policy, including that relating to the environment and sustainability consistent with our commitment to be a Net Zero Portfolio by 2050.

We will work collaboratively with local planning authorities in the preparation of their local plans and will put forward site proposals that we believe to constitute sustainable development for consideration via this process.

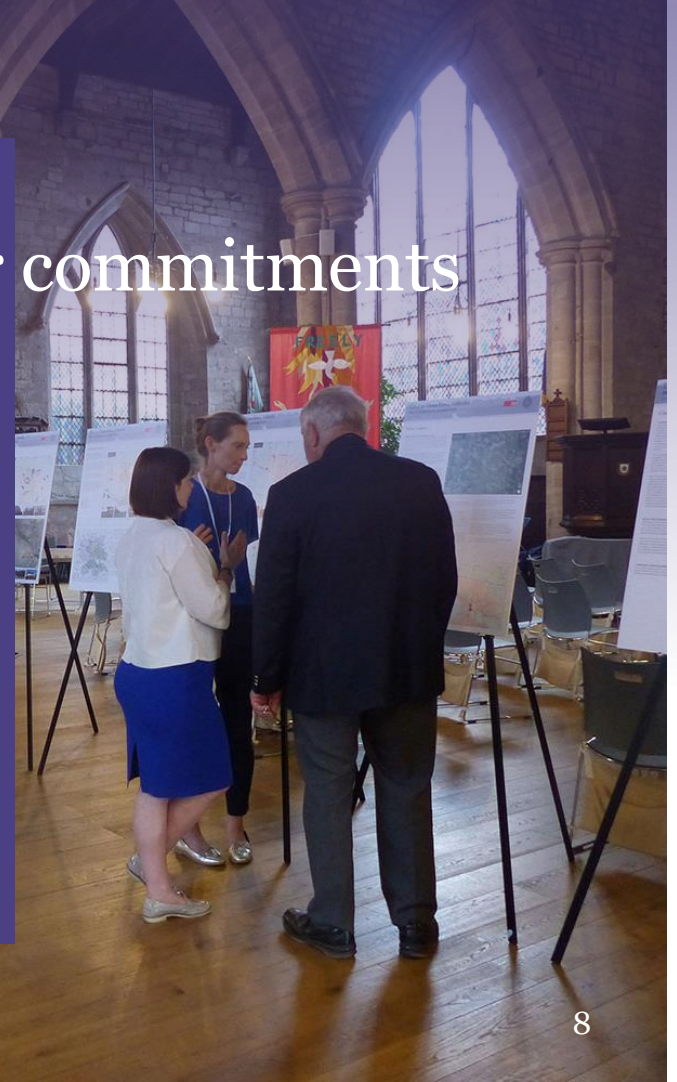
We will work in partnership with local planning authorities striving to meet local needs. In all but exceptional cases, we will bring forward development proposals for sites that have been allocated in a local plan – at least in substantial draft – by the local planning authority. We may also bring forward proposals for smaller sites not allocated in the local plan due to their size or location, but which we believe are consistent with the plan's wider policies, or those of Central Government.

We are developing an Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) Framework to formalise our approach to ESG, enabling us to measure our work against objective ESG benchmarks, and ensuring that we can provide meaningful and objective disclosure on ESG matters affecting the portfolio. Further information on this area of our work can be found at the following link.

[New development – defining what matters \(churchofengland.org\)](https://www.churchofengland.org)

When bringing land to the market for sale, we will require that our potential development partners confirm, as part of their tenders, the commitments that they will make to the delivery of ESG criteria, both for the site itself and within the local area, as well as how they will deliver the five core values - sustainable, safe, stable, sociable and satisfying.

Our commitments



We will appoint professional planners, masterplanners, designers and technical consultants in our land promotion work and will continue to strive to ensure that our planning applications create good places to live. We will provide social infrastructure (community halls, schools), complementary uses (such as shops), green infrastructure (country parks, play areas, allotments, structural landscaping) and biodiversity/ecological enhancements appropriate to the scale of development that we are promoting and as required to meet the impact and needs of the development proposed.



We will continue to be open about our development proposals with the Church of England at diocesan and parish level, and we will be responsive to their views on worship requirements associated with new developments. We will take care to explain to those connected with the church locally that Commissioners' funding (including proceeds from development) must be applied via national funding arrangements.



Our commitments



We will be open with local communities and key stakeholders about our development proposals, consult with those most affected by them and be responsive to local insight that can improve our proposals, while maintaining their commercial viability. Whenever possible we will attend all consultation meetings in person, together with the specialist advisers appropriate to the scheme, to answer community questions and respond to concerns.

We are committed to delivering more, much-needed affordable homes across the strategic land portfolio. Typically, in all but exceptional cases, our applications for planning permission will be aligned with up to date, locally set, target levels of affordable housing. We will only propose schemes with lower levels of affordable housing where the other costs associated with a development demonstrably compromise the ability to deliver housing on the site viably.

When selling land to developers, we will include a contractual requirement to adhere to the level and mix of housing tenures which have been approved by the planning authority.

We will only consent to requests for changes that we believe are reasonable and that we know are deemed acceptable by the local planning authority. We will not sell land to companies who are excluded from investment under our ethical investment policies and we will undertake appropriate due diligence prior to contracting with any purchaser or development partner.



Our commitments



Strategic Land Case Studies





PHOTO: WESTHAVEN HOMES

Completed

Barton Meadows, Devon

In 2016, the Church Commissioners' sold a 2.5 acre site on the edge of the village of Thorverton near Exeter to Westhaven Homes, a Devon based housebuilder. The site benefited from detailed planning permission, which had been secured by the Commissioners' strategic land team, for twenty houses of which half were to be new affordable homes. The application received the support of the local parish council, who were keen to see the delivery of affordable homes within their village. The site, called Barton Meadows, has now been completed and, in 2018, Westhaven Homes won the award for "Best Rural Development" at the Devon Rural Housing Awards for the site.



PHOTOS: STORY HOMES

Completed

Wetheral, Cumbria

We achieved planning permission for new homes within the existing community of Wetheral in Cumbria in 2015. Story Homes have delivered a high-quality new community of 41 houses, of which 30% are affordable, in line with local policy, within a landscaped setting and including areas of public open space. Financial contributions have also been provided to enhance local education provision and open space within the community. The new homes are now fully occupied.





PHOTOS: CREST NICHOLSON

Ongoing

Finberry, Ashford, Kent

In 2014, the development of 1,100 new homes, to the south of Ashford town centre, began on our land. Of these new homes, 20% are affordable, in line with policy at the time planning permission was granted. Our development partner, Crest Nicholson, commenced the construction of a new Kentish village surrounded by water meadows and accessible countryside, with footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes established within the wider landscape. Seven years later, the village is now well-established, and the community is flourishing. Several residents who bought their first homes at Finberry have, as their families have grown, moved to larger new homes within the village, demonstrating the popularity of the community.

During the development's inception, we engaged in detailed dialogue with Canterbury Diocese regarding a local church presence within the new community. We were pleased to be able to site a new vicarage within the development, thereby ensuring a continuing clergy presence as well as a church point of contact for us within the new community.

A new nursery and primary school opened in 2017. A further planning application has been submitted for a local centre, including a food store, three other local shops, a family restaurant and further new homes, of which 30% will be affordable, in line with Ashford Borough Council's updated policy. We hope that planning permission will be granted soon, and that construction will begin on this important facility in 2022.





Forthcoming

Chidswell, West Yorkshire

At Chidswell, we have been involved for many years in proposals to bring forward a vibrant new community that will deliver much needed new homes and employment opportunities for the local area.

A significant programme of stakeholder consultation has been undertaken, involving local residents, businesses, interest groups, ward councillors and the Yorkshire Design Review Panel. We also consulted with the local parishes and diocese as our proposals progressed.

We recently submitted a planning application to Kirklees Council for the provision of 1,535 new homes, of which 20% will be affordable in line with local planning policy, 1.2 million sq. ft. of employment uses and a new primary school. The new community will also include extensive areas of public open space and new cycle and walking routes.



Forthcoming

West Bersted, Bognor Regis, West Sussex

In West Sussex, we have adopted virtual methods of engagement in order to ensure that residents are able to fully review, and provide feedback, on plans for a new community at West Bersted, to the north west of Bognor Regis.

We have also continued to engage with Chichester Diocese as our plans for this new community evolve. We meet regularly with the diocese to provide updates of our proposals to understand and assist them with their own growth aspirations for this part of West Sussex.

Working collaboratively with the council and three parish councils, we have secured the council's formal endorsement of a framework masterplan for this new community that will provide at least 2,500 new homes, of which 30% are to be affordable in line with

local planning policy, a primary school, sports pitches, a local centre, parkland areas, employment provision, and an expansive network of walking and cycling links. The masterplan, which adopts a landscape-led approach to design and placemaking, shows how the new residential development will be successfully integrated within the existing community.

Virtual consultation events and advisory group meetings have been arranged to present the proposals, including online presentations and a public exhibition for residents.

Whilst fully recognising the ongoing need for, and benefits of, face-to-face consultation (when we are safely able to do so), we have been pleased with the extent of stakeholder participation in the process which has helped to shape and inform our emerging proposals.

Forthcoming

Shepherdswell, Kent

The Church Commissioners, in partnership with English Rural Housing Association, received planning permission for 13 new homes, 10 of which will be affordable, in Shepherdswell, north Dover. The new homes will allow older generations to downsize into age-appropriate accommodation while enabling younger, low-income families to stay in the village, helping to secure the future of the area's local primary school. To support ease of access to the new development, the adjacent road will be widened and a new footpath created, enhancing pedestrian access to the site.

The new development supports the Archbishops' Commission's vision for more affordable homes and stronger communities, as outlined in the *Coming Home* report 2021.



IMAGES: ENGLISH RURAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION



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