

COMMUNITY*
LAND SCOTLAND



Castle Crescent, Closeburn Dumfries & Galloway

3 new build houses by Nith Valley LEAF Trust
Completed August 2020

Location

Castle Crescent, Closeburn
- Dumfries & Galloway



Priorities

- **Reversing population decline**
- **Tackling fuel poverty**
- **Supporting the primary school roll**
- **Sustainable, low energy housing**

Background

Back in 2012, Nith Valley LEAF Trust (NVLT) identified a real housing need in Closeburn, a village near Thornhill in Dumfries & Galloway. The lack of suitable housing, particularly for families, was causing people to move away from the village, and impacting on the small primary school roll. In addition, fuel poverty was identified as a major issue prevalent in local housing stock.

Having successfully purchased and renovated one house for long-term affordable rent locally, NVLT had the confidence to take on a more ambitious project, to meet the continuing housing need within the village. A low energy design was central to the Trust's sustainable ethos, as well as meeting local community need to provide housing that addressed local fuel poverty issues.

NVLT identified an obvious gap site within the village, which lent itself to development, and purchased the land from the Council, through an asset transfer. Early engagement with John Gilbert Architects was key, producing a design that met the community's low carbon, sustainable, high quality housing objectives. Work started on site in summer 2019 and following a hiatus due to Covid restrictions, the houses were completed in August 2020.

Funding

A grant from the Scottish Land Fund enabled the purchase of the land, and fund a Development Officer post. Funding for the build was secured from the Rural Housing Fund, local windfarm community benefit funds and a mortgage from Ecology Building Society. The Rural Housing Fund supported the Trust's pioneering approach and engagement with their advisors was very useful throughout all stages of the project.

Support

South of Scotland Community Housing (SOSCH), formerly Dumfries and Galloway Small Communities Housing Trust, have supported NVLT for 6 years, from undertaking housing needs and demand assessments, to guiding them through the asset transfer process to purchase the land, and preparing funding applications for the development costs. SOSCH also trained and supported the Development Officer, who was located within their office for the first 18 months in post.

Closeburn,
Passivhaus designed
homes, for the Nith Valley
LEAF Trust

Image credit:
Tom Manley Photography

Architect:
John Gilbert Architects



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“We love our new house - we are so happy - it has been amazing to finally have somewhere secure after being given 28 days’ notice twice last year and being made homeless with 2 young children. To finally have somewhere we can call home and know we are safe is amazing”

**Samantha Austin,
new tenant at Castle
Crescent**

Outcomes

NVLT’s allocation policy prioritised families in housing need, and three families have now moved into the new houses, with 5 children between them. Having previously lived in insecure housing nearby, or having had to move away from the village, each family now has a secure home, that is affordable to both heat and live in. The children will attend Closeburn Primary, which will boost the school roll, and the adults all work in and around the village, supporting the local economy.

Castle Crescent will be Scotland’s first community-owned Passivhaus certified housing. As well as creating affordable homes for the tenants, the project has been a real boost to community energy, and brought people together as they witnessed what a locally-led solution could achieve.

Future Plans

NVLT have demonstrated that good quality, sustainable homes can be delivered within the funding available, and that housing can contribute positively to the overall sustainability of a very fragile community. Following the success of this project, the Trust are keen to deliver another housing project and have already identified a potential plot of land. The Trust are committed to deliver further Passivhaus standard homes, but recognise that ongoing funding support for community led housing will be critical to achieving this.

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