

RURAL HOUSING MODELS: CLOUGHJORDAN ECOVILLAGE, IRELAND

Homes completed:
2009 (ongoing)

Housing Need

The desire for a dedicated ecovillage to model sustainable living in an intentional community was the driving force behind the development at Cloughjordan.

Accessing Land

Sustainable Projects Ireland (SPI) was established in 1999, and then put an advertisement in Ireland's leading farm magazine looking for a site close to an existing town or village that was serviced by a railway. Eight different sites around the country were identified. Cloughjordan was chosen because local community leaders saw that the project could help reverse its economic and social decline.

Photograph credit: Eoin Campbell, JustMultimedia.com



Ground-breaking community-led Ecovillage

Founded by not-for-profit co-operative company Sustainable Projects Ireland (SPI), Cloughjordan Ecovillage in Co Tipperary, Ireland has become an internationally recognised destination for learning about sustainable living with more than 100 residents living in high-performance green homes. The community works to a revolutionary organisational system based on the principle of sharing responsibilities amongst members.

The Homes

There are currently 55 homes in the ecovillage housing more than 100 people in high-performance, green homes. These are mainly stand-alone houses but there are also a number of three-house terraces, one block of five apartments and a block of three apartments above live-work units.

The model agreed when the project was first developed was the provision of fully serviced freehold sites.

Most houses were built by local builders, one of whom is a member of the project. Some houses were built by the owners themselves and a few houses were constructed from pre-fabricated units assembled on site.

Community Engagement

As part of SPI's commitment to community engagement, a participatory process lasting more than a year was initiated with the community.

This included a series of town hall meetings with residents and working with children and adults in the two primary schools, who created models of the ecovillage.

The process helped to develop relationships between members of the project and local residents and laid the foundations for a smooth transition to the development of the ecovillage which got under way in the mid 2000s.

Find out more: www.thevillage.ie



Designing the Homes

The objective for the Ecovillage was to build low-energy homes with a high building energy ratio, all fuelled by a carbon-neutral district heating system run on renewable energy.

An Ecological Charter was drawn up by members outlining a set of agreed standards to be met in building houses and which was binding on all members.

This states that the primary objective of the ecovillage 'is to demonstrate truly sustainable development, in as holistic a way as practicable, in order to serve as a model and an educational resource for Ireland'.

As well as specifying energy standards to be reached by all housing in the ecovillage, the Charter includes principles such as prioritising natural and local materials, and prohibiting the use of toxic materials or those produced with low-cost labour.

It also requires using as environmentally friendly materials as possible throughout the ecovillage.

Partnership Working

Tipperary County Council awarded the first ever designation of a site for sustainable development when granting approval for the project. The building of the district heating system was supported by a Concerto grant from the European Union under the SERVE project. This also funded retrofitting houses in the district to make them energy efficient.

Accessing Expertise

SPI was able to call on an extensive range of expertise among its members and supporters. Additional expertise was paid for.

Keeping the Homes Affordable

All the homes at Cloughjordan are privately owned. The ecovillage was initially planned during the 'Celtic Tiger' economic boom when housing finance was easily available.

However, the severe recession which hit the housing market and the national economy from 2008 onwards severely affected the development of the project, which was left with 47 unsold sites and 25 sold sites that have not been built on.

This raised the issue of affordability in a major way and the decision was made to ensure that affordable housing and social housing - subsidised housing for those on the local authority housing list - be included in the next phase of development.

This new phase is now being finalised in conjunction with Tipperary County Council.

"The greatest challenge for developing an ambitious project like Cloughjordan Ecovillage is to get commitment from a group of people to buy into it and to maintain that commitment despite difficulties, both financial and interpersonal. Developing skills of community facilitation and conflict resolution has proved vital.

"Be aware that circumstances can change in unexpected ways that can affect the possibility of servicing borrowings, and long-term planning needs to take this into account.

"It is important to maintain good relations with both local and central government. The project has also required a lot of ongoing technical expertise and we are lucky to have a wide range of skills available from within the community. Perhaps most fundamentally, the capacity to maintain the founding vision is crucial."

Peadar Kirby, Village Education, Research and Training Co-ordinator

Funding

Resources for the project were generated through members' fees and loans, and a loan by an ethical investor.

When the site at Cloughjordan was bought in 2002-03, a deposit of €15,000 was required from members before buying a site to build on.

Initially, there were deposits on all 132 sites but many members lacked finance to build and left the project.

Once major costs were incurred in relation to buying a 67-acre site contiguous to the main street of Cloughjordan and installing the infrastructure prior to housing construction, the project also had to borrow from a commercial bank and from a community finance fund.

This case study was produced for the 2021 Rural Housing Summit from Rural Housing Scotland with support from UN-Habitat and sponsored by Ecology Building Society.