

# Refurbish Don't Demolish Voluntary Association Constitution

26th October 2024

'Refurbish Don't Demolish' will be formally constituted as a Voluntary Association on 26th October 2024.

## 1. Name of the Voluntary Association:

**Refurbish Don't Demolish; hereinafter referred to as RDD.**

## 2. Vision Statement:

Our vision is to ensure that housing needs are met first and foremost, by the repair, retrofit and/or refurbishment, of existing structurally sound buildings, rather than by demolition and the building of replacements.

We propose that a workforce can be trained and employed to refurbish existing buildings, and therefore include these buildings, often earmarked for demolition, as part of a solution to the housing crisis, a solution that is healthier for people and the environment (the planet) than their demolition and rebuild would be.

## 3. Terms of Reference:

### **Social Housing:**

We define **Social Housing** as being rent-controlled well below market rates, usually in secure tenure, and either owned and/or managed by local authorities or Registered Social Housing providers. This remains the most affordable form of housing.

### **Housing Crisis:**

We recognise the **housing crisis** is caused by a lack of truly affordable, well-managed, secure housing and, as such, will not be solved by simply building new properties if those properties are not social housing.

### **Demolition & Rebuild:**

**Demolishing** social housing estates is extremely detrimental to individuals, communities and the environment. The process of **rebuilding** these estates takes longer than refurbishing and retrofitting them and costs more money. A **cost benefit analysis of demolition** must take in all the long-term social, health and environmental costs as well as the economic ones.

## Regeneration:

In recent decades the dominant '**Regeneration**' model in the UK has itself been a major cause of the worsening housing crisis. Demolition and rebuilding generally causes **densification** in an area due to the priority given to achieving a private financial return and covering costs.

The **asset stripping of public land** and a profit-driven approach will never provide the housing needed by homeless/'unhoused' people, and those most in need of housing.

## Retrofitting & Refurbishment:

**Refurbishment** refers to bringing homes up to a decent standard, with no outstanding repair issues and includes any necessary modernisations.

**Retrofitting** involves refurbishing and insulating homes to a high standard. Retrofitting properties will cut heating costs, improve the well-being of residents, drastically reduce carbon emissions, make homes last longer, and often, give them a more modern appearance.

## VAT Inequality:

The current UK tax system adds a cost of 20% VAT to retrofitting existing properties while new builds are VAT exempt. This creates an incentive to demolish existing buildings, which exacerbates housing inequality and widens the UK's wealth gap.

## Regulating Empty Properties:

The number of empty homes has been growing unchecked for decades and their numbers have now reached a crisis point. The scarcity of decent housing, resulting from empty homes, is helping to drive up housing costs. The current tax and regulatory system fails to address the reality of the UK's huge stock of empty properties, both publicly and privately owned. Instead, the existing market-driven system rewards wealthy individuals, corporations and housing associations for building and purchasing properties as investments, with few penalties for leaving them empty.

## Housing Associations:

**Housing Associations** were originally small **charitable organisations** that supplied affordable housing, particularly for those in need. It has now just become possible to be a **for-profit**, registered provider of social housing.

Some Housing Associations have become large land and home owning **corporations**, paying large salaries to their CEOs while using their housing stock and land as investment opportunities. This investment-driven approach often results in a failure to keep up the condition of the housing stock and an off-handed, disrespectful treatment of tenants and those seeking secure housing.

Government grants for 'affordable housing' often go to these large corporate housing associations rather than councils, but increasingly grants are also going to for-profit, registered providers of social housing.

## Stock Transfer:

**Stock transfer** is the transfer of council-owned housing stock into the ownership of a housing association.

## 4. Mission Statement:

**The mission of Refurbish Don't Demolish will be as follows:**

- ( a) To promote “a retrofit-first and demolition-last” ethos for all existing buildings, especially for social housing and buildings that provide social benefits.
- ( b) To endeavour to ensure that the voices and views of communities facing demolition and social cleansing are heard at every level, by the institutions which are responsible, and by society as a whole.
- ( c) To lobby to change the current planning system which favours the interests of developers over the interests of communities and the environment.
- ( d) To campaign against further transfers of council stock to housing associations to protect these public assets, and make accountability for the preservation of existing buildings as democratic as possible.
- ( e) To offer advisory and practitioner services. These will cover alternatives to demolition, including promoting all aspects of sustainable upgrading and retrofitting practices, with the focus being on large-scale retrofitting of social housing estates.
- ( f) To simultaneously support the building of truly sustainable new social housing on publicly owned urban land, including land owned by Local Authorities, government departments, the NHS, Transport for London Network Rail and other public bodies, where no housing already exists.
- ( g) To support the conversion of existing commercial and public buildings into social housing.
- ( h) To lobby for all existing social housing and all new social housing, to be retrofitted or built to the highest environmental standards possible, in terms of energy conservation and day-to-day operation. This will improve well-being, increase the longevity of the building and minimise negative impacts on the environment.
- ( i) To lobby to change the laws around any tax and planning policies, including VAT rules, which incentivise demolition over refurbishment and retrofitting.

RDD will undertake any activities agreed on which are deemed fit to deliver our Vision and Mission, including **non-violent direct action, lobbying, community organising, and educational activities.**

## 5. Powers

In order to achieve its aims RDD may:

**Call actions:** including protests and lobbying any relevant organisation, institution or arm of government, including local and national government, housing associations, financial institutions and others with a role in providing housing.

**Open bank accounts & Raise money**

**Take out insurance**

**Pay people** to carry out specific pieces of work.

**Organise courses and events**

**Work with other groups** and exchange information

**Publicise** its activities using all available forms of mass media, social media, community networks and other platforms.

## **6. Membership**

- (a) Membership of RDD shall be open to any person over 18 or any organisation living or located in the United Kingdom who is interested in helping RDD to achieve its aims, willing to abide by the rules of RDD and willing to pay any subscription agreed by the Management Committee.
- (b) Membership shall be available to anyone without regard to gender, ethnicity, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief.
- (c) Every individual member and each organisation shall have one vote at General Meetings.
- (d) The membership of any member may be terminated for good reason by the Management Committee but the member has a right to be heard by the Management Committee before a final decision is made.
- (e) Each member organisation shall appoint a representative to attend meetings of RDD and notify the Group's Secretary of that person's name.

### **Proposed Membership Fee:**

Membership fee for individuals and organisations shall be a suggested donation of a minimum of £1.00 sterling annually. Voluntary contributions over this amount are recommended for those who can afford them.

## **7. Management Committee:**

- (a) RDD will be governed by a Management Committee elected by the members. This Committee shall be responsible for the overall management and strategic direction of RDD.
- (b) The Management Committee will consist of the Officers and not more than **10** other members elected at the Group's Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- (c) Management committee members will be able to delegate tasks and responsibilities to other committee members and members of RDD, as appropriate, with the agreement of the committee, as long as this falls within the rules and ethos of RDD.

- (d) The Officers of the Management Committee shall be: the Chairperson, the Vice-Chair, the Treasurer and the Secretary.
- (e) The Management Committee shall meet at least **4** times a year.
- (f) The Chairperson shall Chair all meetings of the Group. If they are unavailable for any reason, all meetings of the group shall be chaired by the Vice-Chair.
- (g) The quorum for Management Committee meetings shall be **6** members.
- (h) Voting at Management Committee meetings shall be by show of hands in both physical and virtual meetings. If there is a tied vote, then the Chairperson shall have a second vote.
- (i) The Management Committee may by a two-thirds majority vote and for a good and proper reason remove any Committee member, provided that person has the right to be heard before a final decision is made.
- (j) The Management Committee may appoint another member of the Group as a Committee member to fill a vacancy provided the maximum number is not exceeded.
- (k) If two members wish to stand for the same role, they may agree to stand as joint holders of that post, to be approved by a members' vote at the AGM. Equally, two or more members may choose to compete for a post, to be decided by a members' vote at the AGM.

## **8. Duties of the Officers**

### **{a) The duties of the Chairperson are to:**

Chair meetings of the Committee and of RDD

### **(b) The duties of the Secretary are to:**

Take and keep minutes of meetings

Prepare the agenda for meetings of the Committee and the VA in consultation with the Chairperson.

Maintain the membership list and deal with correspondence.

Collect and circulate any relevant information within the VA.

### **(c) The duties of the Treasurer will be to:**

Supervise the financial affairs of RDD

Keep accurate records of income and expenditure.

File all paperwork relating to income and expenditure.

Provide an annual report to the AGM and quarterly updates to the Management Committee.

Manage the group's bank accounts.

**(d) The duties of the Vice Chair will be to:**

- To Chair meetings in the absence of the Chair.
- To Chair the Annual General Meeting in the absence of the Chair.
- To act as Chair when requested to do so by the Chair.
- To respond and assist with tasks requested by the Chair or other members of the committee.

**(e) The duties of Committee members in general will be to:**

- Represent RDD at functions/meetings that RDD has been invited to. Represent RDD at functions/ meetings that RDD have organised and invited others to.
- Act as spokespeople for RDD when necessary.
- Promote the vision of RDD wherever and whenever appropriate.

**9. Finances**

- (a) Any money obtained by RDD shall be used only for RDD.
- (b) Any bank accounts opened for RDD shall be in the name of RDD.
- (c) Any cheques issued shall be signed by the Treasurer and one other nominated official.
- (d) The financial affairs of RDD shall be managed transparently and responsibly.
- (e) RDD shall operate on a not-for-profit basis, and any surplus income shall be reinvested in the objectives of RDD.

**10. Dissolution:**

In the event of the dissolution of RDD, any remaining assets, after the satisfaction of liabilities, shall be transferred to another Voluntary Association or charity with similar objectives, as determined by the members at the time of dissolution.

**+Current Temporary Committee Members (To be dissolved at the AGM):**

Diane Skidmore	Luke Plowden
Debo Adegoke	Rose Asengua
Georgina Schueller	Timothy Asengua
Miriam Weeks	Sabine Mairey

Constitution to be formally ratified at inaugural AGM on 26th October 2024

Signed ..... Date ..... Position in group .....

Signed ..... Date ..... Position in group .....

Witnessed by ..... Date .....