

Parliamentary Launch of ‘Cohousing: Shared Futures ‘

ESRC ‘Collaborative Housing and Community Resilience’ Project

Tribute to Jo Cox, MP

Everyone here will have been touched by the life and death of Jo Cox- whether or not as a personal friend or colleague.

It is fitting that we pay our respects to Jo’s personal and political life- not least because today she would have been celebrating her 42nd birthday.

Jo was invited to attend this event. I personally wanted us to share our report with her- because I knew it would resonate with how she chose to live her life in a cooperative live-aboard maritime community on the Thames.

I am fortunate to have visited the pioneering Hermitage Community Moorings (HCM) regularly since 2010, staying on a lovely historic Dutch barge belonging to a friend of mine. This way, I witnessed first-hand the way this intentional neighbourhood demonstrated all the hallmarks of the collaborative ethos of cohousing.

Much of what you will hear us report from our project today- about the benefits of supportive, clustered, self-managed alternatives to conventional housing- already exist in the UK in a handful of pioneering examples, including HCM where Jo forged and sustained her unique belief in humanity.

The story of how HCM got built is a familiar one for grassroots groups: the origins speak of pioneers struggling for years to secure affordable access to a stretch of the river bank; steering a non-commercial cooperative project through the planning system; actively demonstrating benefits not only to the members who shared their vision of collaborative living, but also to the wider local population.

HCM operates a registered charity from the mooring, in order to fulfil a shared mission to promote knowledge and understanding and stewardship of historic boats and the Thames landscape. They also run occasional boat-building workshops for young people with little or no access to the river.

From the outset the intention was to create a close-knit community. This ready-made network of support has been acutely evident in this dark chapter for Jo’s friends.

Over recent days, Jo’s neighbours have gathered each day in the common (pier) house, collectively working on making a raft of silk flowers which they will sail up river in a birthday flotilla today- from Wapping to Westminster.

This is our tribute to Jo- to demonstrate that Jo’s ideal that we all have “more in common” can be achieved in built form, at least in part, in the cohousing concept.

Helen Jarvis

22/06/2016