

CoHut Decision Making



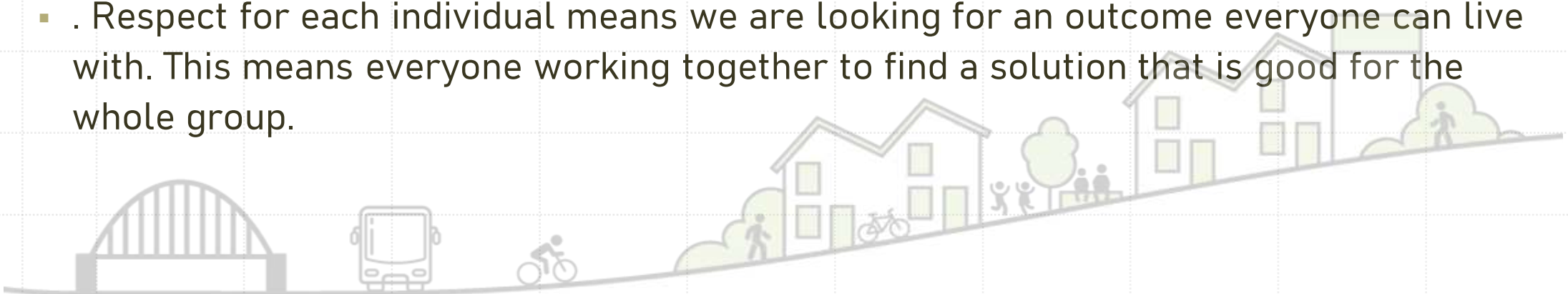
Consensus

- CoHUT members are committed to collaborative working and living. We recognize that establishing, maintaining and nurturing a housing and living community will require a lot of work. We have adopted a consensus based decision making process. Consensus means that decisions are made with the consent of all involved when all opinions, ideas and concerns have been taken into account.
- We believe that a consensus model is the best fit for a housing project that aims to treat the needs of all it's members equitably.
- The goal of consensus decision making is: working co-operatively to make sure everyone's needs are met
- Consensus decision making is a creative and dynamic way of reaching agreement between all members of a group. Instead of simply voting for an item and having the majority of the group get their way, a consensus group is committed to finding solutions that everyone actively supports, or at least can live with.
- . Respect for each individual means we are looking for an outcome everyone can live with. This means everyone working together to find a solution that is good for the whole group.



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Conditions for consensus

- **Common Goal:** Everyone needs to understand the common goal for the group and be willing to work towards it.
- **Commitment to reaching consensus:** This means not only being deeply honest about what it is you want or don't want but also being able to properly listen to what others have to say. Everyone must be prepared to shift their positions, to be open to alternative solutions and able to reassess what they consider to be their needs.
- **Trust and openness:** learning to openly express both our desires (what we'd like to see happening), and our needs (what we have to see happen in order to be able to support a decision) Differentiating between what we want and what we really need sounds easy, but it can take time for us to learn how.
- **Sufficient time** for making decisions and for learning to work by consensus
- **Clear process:** it's essential for everyone to have a shared understanding of the process that the meeting is using
- **Active participation:** if we want a decision we can all agree on then we all need to play an active role in the decision making
- **Good facilitation:** this helps the group to work harmoniously, creatively and democratically. It also ensures that the tasks of the meetings get done and that decisions are made and implemented.



The consensus process

Step 1: Introduce and clarify the issue(s) to be decided

Share relevant info. What are the key questions?

Step 2: Explore the issue and look for ideas

1. Gather initial thoughts and reactions. What are the **issues** and people's **concerns**?
2. Collect **ideas** for solving the problem – write them down.
3. Have a **broad ranging discussion** and debate the ideas. What are the pros and cons?
Start thinking about solutions to people's concerns. Eliminate some ideas, shortlist others.

Step 3: Look for emerging proposals

- ▶ Look for a proposal that weaves together the best elements of the ideas discussed. Look for solutions that address people's key concerns.

Step 4: Discuss, clarify and amend your proposal

Ensure that any remaining concerns are heard and that everyone has a chance to contribute.
Look for **amendments** that make the proposal even more acceptable to the group.

Step 5: Test for agreement

Do you have agreement? Check for the following:

- Blocks:** There is a fundamental problem with the core of the proposal that has not been resolved. We need to look for a new proposal.
- Stand asides:** I can't support this proposal because ... But I don't want to stop the group, so I'll let the decision happen without me.
- Reservations:** I have some reservations but am willing to let the proposal pass.
- Agreement:** I support the proposal and am willing to implement it.
- Consensus:** No blocks, not too many stand asides or reservations? Active agreement?

Then we have a decision!



Step 6: Implement the decision

Who, when, how? Action point the tasks and set deadlines.

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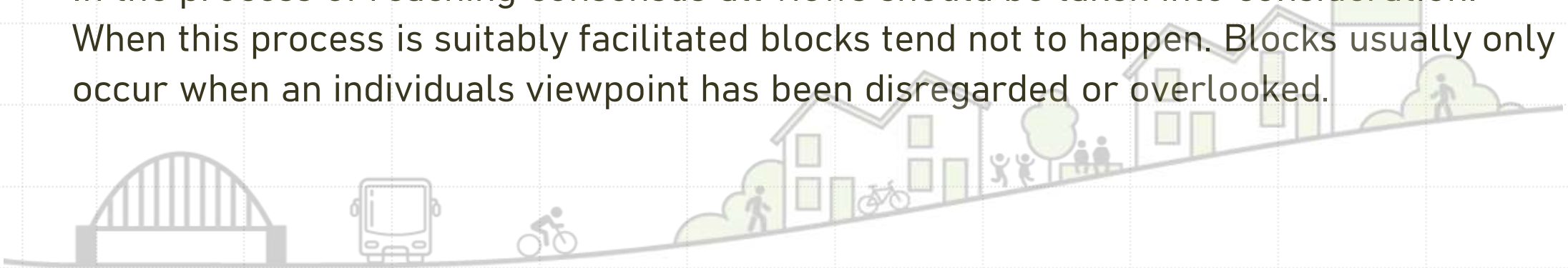


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Blocks

- By definition, in consensus, anyone can block a proposal by not giving their consent. This is not an option to be used lightly, simply because you don't like an idea – it means stopping other people going ahead with something they want to do and that should only be done in extreme circumstances.
- The right to block decisions is about much more than individual empowerment: it requires people to work together to meet both the individual's and the group's needs.
- In the process of reaching consensus all views should be taken into consideration. When this process is suitably facilitated blocks tend not to happen. Blocks usually only occur when an individual's viewpoint has been disregarded or overlooked.



Common reasons a block may occur:

- The proposal goes against the agreed aims and principles of the group.
- The proposal impacts in a profoundly negative way on an individual's fundamental needs.
- An individual hasn't been able to express their concerns in a way that the group can understand, or maybe not at all.
- Going ahead with the proposal would lead to severe consequences for individual members or the group, e.g. members leaving the group, either immediately or in the longer run; or serious legal or financial consequences.
- The group is not ready to make a decision – more indepth discussion is needed to address everyone's concerns and to involve everyone in the decisionmaking. There are many reasons for this, including: members of the group may be absent; not everyone had a chance to feed in their views; the proposal is being rushed through; people need time to think about it; vital information is missing.



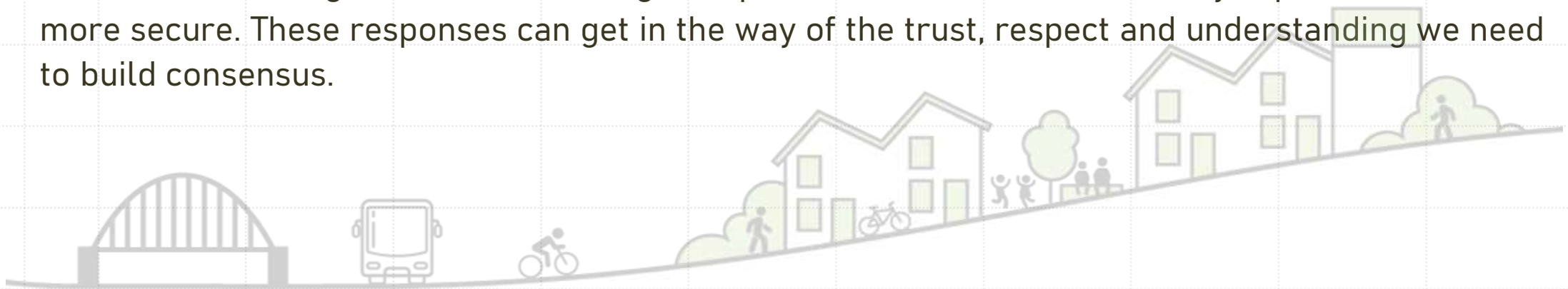
Dealing with blocks

- Once someone has blocked, it is important for the whole group to understand the reasons behind it. Find out whether an amendment to the original problem might be satisfactory to everyone, otherwise go back to discussing other potential solutions to the issue. It is also worth checking whether the block is actually a stand aside, as sometimes people don't understand the difference – but remember to be careful to avoid putting pressure on the person blocking when checking this.
- In CoHut we have a clause that allows for some decisions to be taken by majority vote if failure to move forward on a legal or financial issue could mean the end of the project. This is a precautionary measure which should only be utilised in extreme circumstance to resolve a deadlock. The reasons for doing so would need to be clearly stated before a vote is called.



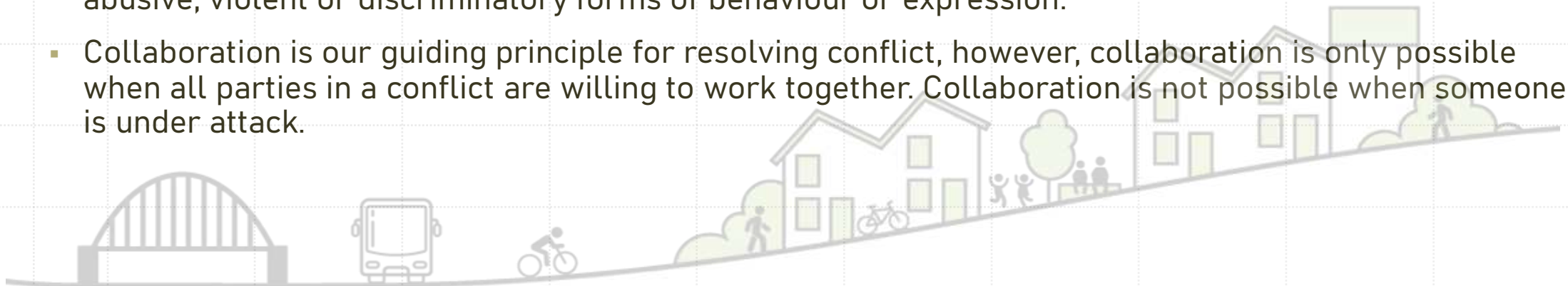
Conflict

People often associate conflict with arguments and bad feeling. However, another way of looking at it is that conflict simply involves people having values, needs or opinions that are, or seem to be, incompatible. We face conflict in every group or relationship we are in, although it can show itself in a variety of ways. Sometimes incompatibility can be straightforward to work around. At other times, conflict can bring up strong and uncomfortable feelings like anger and anxiety. It can often trigger emotions which have a longer history than the situation you are in. For example, someone whose childhood involved inconsistent parenting and repeatedly broken promises might have a much stronger reaction to changes of plan than someone whose early experiences were more secure. These responses can get in the way of the trust, respect and understanding we need to build consensus.



Conflict and disagreement

- Disagreement is an important and healthy part of consensus decision making. When disagreements are dealt with inclusively, respectfully and creatively, the whole group benefits from the outcome.
- Conflict tends to arise when a problem has not been clearly defined or when a decision is rushed without effective consideration for the needs of the whole group.
- Conflicts can lead to heightened emotions and can damage the relationships within a group if they are not given the required attention to reach a resolution.
- As a group we accept the importance of disagreement and that conflict will sometimes arise as a result of unclear communication. However, we also believe that conflict doesn't provide an excuse for abusive, violent or discriminatory forms of behaviour or expression.
- Collaboration is our guiding principle for resolving conflict, however, collaboration is only possible when all parties in a conflict are willing to work together. Collaboration is not possible when someone is under attack.



Collaboration

Collaboration: is based on commitment to your own needs and goals, as well as to the relationship with the other person – in other words it works on the principles of consensus. It combines aspects of both confrontation and accommodation, and goes a step further than compromise, in that it takes a deeper understanding of what is going on to look for solutions which really work for everyone.



- For more detailed information on how to deal with conflicts and reach resolution please read '**Bridging the gap between theory and practice – A Consensus Handbook**'

