

Self-Build – A solution to housing shortage.

An excellent and comprehensive article on self build was written on August 16, 2012 by [“Plainview planning consultants”](#). This is required reading for prospective self builders, local authority planners and their regeneration managers. Self build will eventually be accepted by UK planners as a major source of high specification, low carbon affordable homes with beneficial employment within the building trade and suppliers.

The Self Build Industry in the UK equates to approximately 15,000 homes a year; between 2010 and 2011, this represented 14% of new homes built – a small proportion when you compare it to other developed countries whereby in some instances half of their homes are self-build. Many view the term ‘self-build’ as a ‘Grand Design’ thanks to Kevin McCloud’s popular TV series and The Restoration Man – presented by George Clark, however, this is a rather skewed impression of the industry.

The term ‘self-build’ simply means housing built by individuals or groups for their own use, often referring to delivering affordable, sustainable, innovative and custom-designed homes to meet the needs of the developer. In other countries building your own house is an accepted way to provide a home for your family, so why is it that the UK hasn’t experienced a ‘self-build revolution’?

Countries which have excelled in the self-build sector have developed planning regimes that recognise the benefits of self-build and assist people to realise their projects. For example, in the Netherlands and Germany, innovative ‘light touch’ planning helps enable large self-build projects that deliver in terms of community place-making, sustainable homes, social cohesion and contributes to good urban design. The UK

is currently experiencing a lack of housing supply; a more accessible self-build market would provide a genuine opportunity for meeting consumer housing demand.

Having a policy-based nature to the planning system means that many local policies are restrictive and even the simplest planning application can face a number of problems for anyone who is not in the development sector. In much of continental Europe the planning process is much simpler, allowing self build schemes to be completed quickly and efficiently. Self-builders are not part of established supply chains for land, finance, professional services and building operations meaning they cannot compete with established developers when it comes to accessing and buying land. One way around this hurdle is to work directly with existing developers or housing associations, or with public or private sector intermediaries or enabling bodies. It can be difficult to get funding for self-builds; however there are lenders out there with products available, encouraging these products into the market would then help support the growth of the industry.

Within the Self Build Action Plan (NaSBA, 2011) they mention a number of procurement options which they believe are available and which need to be promoted if the UK are to double the number of self-build homes built annually over the next decade. Revolving funds – (something which the state of Victoria, Australia have made available for would be self builders) – would enable access to development finance, particularly helpful before the construction phase when securing and buying land. Another viable option would be for industry to work with local authorities to encourage the use of New Homes Bonus grants to support particular types of housing. There are a number of examples within the UK where self builders have worked together as a group and taken full responsibility for land purchase, design, planning and construction. Springhill Cohousing, Stroud was the first pioneer new build cohousing development within the UK. The

development consists of 35 dwellings, ranging from one-bedroom flats to five-bedroom houses, there is also a common house containing community cooking and laundry facilities, other community-based social activities happen there too. The development is predominantly car-free and the roads are pedestrianised acting as a safe environment and adds the village like feel of the site. There is an extremely strong focus on social and environmental sustainability and mutual social support. The development has been recognised by The Deputy Prime Minister's Award for making an outstanding contribution to Sustainable Communities.

Enabled group developments are where self-builders work with a developer or housing association, relying on them to supply land, fund and deliver any or all aspects of development, with varying degrees of customisation of house types and site layout. Although in infancy, there are several projects in the UK whereby local authorities, private companies or individuals act as intermediary to facilitate and manage all or parts of the whole development process for individuals; they have the potential to lead the expansion of the self-build sector.

Availability of suitable land is one of the biggest limiting factors within the UK when it comes to self-build, with regard to this there are two main barriers – Planning and housing policy does not recognise self build as an element of the housing industry, either in support of it or to employ it to achieve policy outcomes. Also, private sector land is commonly the main source of land supply for self build homes; however, public sector land has the potential to play a huge role to enable growth within the sector – following in continental Europe's footsteps. As a result of this, the Self Build Action Plan (NaSBA, 2011) suggests the NPPF should ensure that self-build housing development is recognised as an element of local housing markets, ensuring that Local Planning Authorities assess the need and demand for self build in their

areas and prepare evidence to inform the preparation of plans and policies and consider if self build can contribute to achieving other planning policy outcomes. They have also mentioned that the government should work with industry and ensure that all public land intended for disposal is listed in key self-build land availability websites and information on the new Community Right to Reclaim Land is made available on such sites. As well as this, the governments should engage with private developers and land owners to offer rewards and opportunities which can be generated from making serviced plots available to individual or community self-build schemes.

To ensure that lending and finance to self-build projects becomes readily available there is a need for better market research and data. It would be impossible to put a figure on the number of self-build homes constructed in the UK. Due to there being limited statistics in this area, local needs and demands are not recognised by policy makers. If this information were to become available it could inform future lending strategies and promote the growth potential to financial investors.

Local authorities often don't support the change of use of redundant buildings, especially farm buildings, in the hope that they will be taken up by commercial use. However NaSBA (2011) believe that wherever possible they should be converted into live-work units and homes. Previous projects at Plainview include an appeal win at an historic barn in Sussex, with similar cases in the Cotswolds and Hampshire.

Along with many benefits of self-build schemes, they are usually committed to environmental sustainability – meaning that their homes carry a low carbon footprint. Building a house yourself will inevitably mean that you will pay more attention to design and detail, contributing to good urban design. At this moment in time, the industry represents around £3 billion of investment, safeguards around 30,000 jobs and strengthens the construction supply chain. A 'self-build

revolution' will in turn boost the UK's economy and expand the job market which will be welcomed in today's economic climate.

If you want to discuss your self-build opportunity with Plainview Planning please feel free to call or email.