



Selfbuild
as a volume housing solution

Foreword

I've been involved in the house building industry for many years. During this time I've witnessed, at first hand, the two main ways of getting a new house – most people end up buying a standard home from one of the volume housebuilders; but a growing number have decided to do-it-themselves and build a house for their families.

The DIY'ers generally build a terrific property. They take enormous care to get the design and quality of construction just right, and they tend to be very passionate about environmental issues. So the homes they build are tailor made and very "green". And they are delighted with the end result.

The same is not always true for the people who buy an off-the-shelf house from a volume builder. These frequently don't quite fit their requirements, they are (relatively speaking) expensive and the owners often complain about shoddy workmanship.

I'm positive more people want to build their own homes – they increasingly recognise that it's not actually that scary to do, and they realise it's a very cost effective solution.

The biggest barrier that stops them from doing this is the availability of land.

I have heard countless stories from would-be self builders about the real difficulties they have faced in finding and buying a plot. Typically it takes years of ferreting around; and in many cases people just give up and do a renovation project instead, simply because they just can't get hold of any land to build on.

If land were more readily available I'm convinced you'd see a major increase in the number of new homes built this way. They'd be great homes too – well built, well designed, and very energy efficient. That's why I support this campaign. It's a win-win situation for everyone concerned.

So come on Gordon, let's see some action, and some support for the army of people who would like to construct a good home for themselves.



Tommy Walsh,
Celebrity Builder & TV Presenter



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Executive Summary

The biggest thing holding back the expansion of the self build sector is the availability of land

There is already quite a lot of self build housing taking place in the UK – up to 20,000 homes a year are currently built this way. Self build appeals to a wide range of people – old and young, well off and less well off.

The market has been growing steadily over the last 30 years, partly as a result of the widespread media exposure on programmes like Grand Designs. Another key factor is the growing realisation that people who build their own homes save a lot of money so, for many, it makes housing more affordable; and people who build their own homes are able to custom design the property so they get exactly what they want - something that is very difficult for the big housebuilders to deliver.

In a downturn self build usually fares well – owners may decide to sell their existing homes and take on a self build project as it's the only way they can get a bigger property for the same price tag.

The one real hurdle that is holding back the expansion of the self build sector is the availability of land. We believe the current level of self building could easily double, or treble, if more land was available on the market. This doesn't have to be low cost or subsidised land, as most self builders expect to pay the going rate for a suitable plot.

In every other European country far more homes are built via the self build route. The UK currently delivers about 12 per cent of its housing stock via self builders; in many European countries more than half of all homes are built this way. The USA, Australia and New Zealand also build a much higher proportion than we do in the UK.

The benefits of encouraging an expansion of self build in the UK are:

- + It's a way of delivering affordable homes. With self build people can get a foot on the housing ladder more easily as the total cost of a home is much less than buying from one of the big housebuilders.
- + Each self build home requires, on average, 2-3 construction workers for a year; if we doubled our output of self built homes we'd safeguard 50,000 construction jobs.
- + Self build homes are greener. An extra 25,000 self build homes would save around 100,000 tonnes of CO₂ per year.
- + Self builders are innovative and entrepreneurial – skills the country needs to encourage.
- + If we expanded the self build sector we would be investing huge amounts into the economy, encouraging regeneration and faster economic recovery. And, as they are cheaper to build, a higher proportion of self built homes would help to bring down the retail price index.
- + Self build encourages community spirit and cohesiveness.
- + Self built homes are generally built to very high quality and workmanship standards, and they are custom designed to exactly meet their user's requirements – so levels of owner satisfaction are very high.

Our recommendations

There are a number of practical things the Government could do to help grow the number of self build projects undertaken in the UK. These include:

- + **It should urgently review all public sector land holdings and identify 50 sizeable sites that could quickly be made available for self builders. These sites should provide plots for 2000+ self builders. This could be achieved in a matter of months and would have a huge impact on the flagging housing market.**
- + **Each of the proposed new eco-towns should be required to provide sites for at least 500 eco self builders.**

- + **Every local authority in the UK should be tasked with zoning sites for at least 30 self builders a year.**
- + **A new organisation could be formed to help speed up the process of servicing, splitting up and selling the sites to self builders.**
- + **Developers could be required to make a certain number of self build plots available as part of section 106 Planning Agreements.**
- + **Private sector land owners should also be encouraged to look at the economic benefits of selling off some of their current land holdings to self builders.**

How people self build

Around 20,000 homes a year are classified as “self build”. There are generally four main ways of completing a self build project and these are detailed below.

Organised by the self builder and constructed by a main contractor

This approach usually involves the owner finding a suitable plot of land, hiring an architect, getting planning and building regulation approval and then finding a suitable main contractor to do most of the building work. The owner may do some of the simpler physical building tasks (perhaps the decorating and landscaping) to help reduce costs; but the lion's share will be organised and provided by the main contractor. We estimate that between a quarter and a third of all “self builds” are delivered this way.

Self Build Community Projects

This method involves a group of people coming together to pool their skills so they can build a number of self build houses collectively. Usually the group will include people with existing construction skills, and often there is some training undertaken to boost the other participants' building knowledge. Each member of the group will work on everyone's house, until all are ready for occupation. By working around 25-30 hours a week in the evenings and weekends they can usually build all the homes in about 12-18 months. Some groups form themselves; others are co-ordinated by housing associations or an agency that helps people run projects like this. Almost 100 community self build projects have been set up over the last 20 years. The norm is for between 10 and 20 people to come together to build 10 to 20 new homes. This approach is a very effective way of reducing the cost of a house and means someone on a low or modest wage can afford to build their own property.

Self build

Organised by the self builder, who also hires and manages sub-contractors

This route appeals to people who are on a tight budget. The self builder again finds the site and secures planning and building regulations approval. But they also take responsibility for the detailed project management of all the construction work, and they frequently work full time on the site helping wherever he or she can. One of their main roles is to source suitable sub-contractors to do the specialist things that are beyond their capabilities (for example, the electrical installation or the plastering). They then manage these people when they are on site, ensuring they have the space to work, the equipment they need and the materials they require. Self builders who follow this approach often do quite a bit of the physical work themselves (so, for example, they may go on a course to learn how to lay bricks so they can do all the brick or block laying for their home) and they get very involved in the detail of every element of the building. They are also responsible for overall budget control. The amount of work done directly by the self builder can vary a lot – from a small proportion of the total to almost all of it. The savings are considerable – often 20-30 per cent less than using a main contractor. We estimate that between a half and two thirds of all self build homes are constructed this way.

Using a package contractor and prefabricated methods of construction

Here the owner again finds the plot of land, but then they tend to work alongside a specialist kit home provider to work out the design and help with the construction. There are numerous companies that provide “kit” houses for self builders. These range from traditional oak beam barn-like homes, to modern modular structures made to precision standards in a factory environment. Once the owner decides which kit home suits them the best, they and the manufacturer will usually work up the designs together and submit them for planning and building regulation approvals. Often the owner takes responsibility for clearing the site and preparing the foundations. The kit company then supplies the house and erects it. Sometimes they do all the internal fitting out work as part of their contract; sometimes the owner will do the finishing off work themselves to help reduce the cost. About a tenth of all self builds are believed to be constructed this way.

The demographics of the self builder

Self builders come in all types and sizes as the real examples on these pages illustrate

- + The majority are a couple, in their middle age or nearing retirement. They often own their own home, or a high proportion of the equity. With their children now grown up they decide to build the dream home they have always been keen to have.
- + There is also a sizable proportion who are younger - in the 25-40 age group. They use the self build route as a means of building a house for modest cost. Often these people have some connection with the construction industry, and use their colleagues to help with the different elements of the work.
- + Quite a high proportion are self employed - they use their entrepreneurial skills to get extra value out of their self build experience.
- + Many self builders get hooked on the experience, so they turn into small property developers, perhaps completing a self build project every couple of years.
- + Not all would-be self builders actually manage to build a new home from scratch. Quite a high proportion end up buying an older property to renovate or something like a barn to convert simply because they cannot find suitable land for a new self build home.
- + Many have limited budgets - for example the majority have less than £150,000 available for their plot of land, and about the same available for the construction of their homes.
- + Those participating in a self build community group project are likely to be younger and on much lower average incomes.

The committed environmentalist

Anna and Jackson set out from the start to try to build a house that has the minimum impact on the environment both during the build and once they were living in it. This involved designing the building to encourage passive solar gain, increasing the energy efficiency of the fabric and incorporating renewable energy systems. They also went for materials that have low embodied energy (the energy required to produce the product) and ones from renewable and recycled sources - for example they used timber for the frame and recycled newspapers for insulation.

A further key concern for them was the creation of a place they could afford to build and afford to live in, and self build gave them the opportunity to have a low cost home while meeting their eco requirements. They created their three bedroom home for £70,000 complete with all its renewable energy systems.

Having lived in the building for a number of years now, they are very pleased with the results. They have an amazing space to live and work in, have low energy bills (despite increasing fuel costs) and are using their knowledge and skills to assist others interested in building their own sustainable homes.





The designer home

Jackie runs a mail order company in the Midlands. She has always had a strong interest in architecture and design and couldn't find a property that matched her particular requirements. After a lot of searching she found a plot of land on the outskirts of a Derbyshire town. An enterprising local builder had bought a small field and persuaded the council to give him permission for five new homes. After lots of haggling she persuaded him to sell her one of the plots. She wanted a modern house so commissioned a firm of top architects to design the home of her dreams. The work was completed by a main contractor.

The community self builder



Jon Brockwell says that building his own home as part of a group of 20 other self builders was very exciting, slightly nerve wracking, and one of the biggest achievements he has personally made. He first got involved in the group eight years ago when the opportunity to buy a self-build plot first came up. After lots of planning, hundreds of meetings, and many other hurdles had been cleared, the foundations were laid in May 2002. Three years later he finally moved in. His three bedroom home cost £80,000 to build, and his share of the site cost him £25,000. Jon says he had been looking to have a home in Bristol and couldn't afford any of the existing houses; by going down the community route he now has a terrific home at a fraction of the price he would have had to pay to a volume house-builder. He also states that he knows the building inside out, and through his personal involvement he knows the building is built to a very high standard. Jon had no previous building experience - yet felt confident enough to undertake such a project as he was surrounded by other self-builders; sharing knowledge, skills, labour and tea.



The package solution

Jennifer and David Lawrence are both retired. They decided to use a kit house as this offered a simple, cost effective and sustainable solution. They had purchased a small site in Lincolnshire for £71,000, and opted for a timber framed house that provided 1500 sq ft of accommodation. The kit cost around £48,500. Because of their age they decided to employ a project manager and a local builder to organise everything on site - from the construction of the concrete base to the final fitting out and finishing off work. This added another £168,500, bringing the total to £288,000. The end result is a delightful Arts and Crafts style home that fits in well. It was built quickly and relatively painlessly, and the Lawrence's are delighted with the quality of the workmanship, and the value for money they achieved.



The low waged self builder constructing an affordable home

There was a time when single mum Lynda Williams never thought she'd be able to buy a house that she could truly call home. For years she had been stuck in a cycle of renting and simply couldn't afford to climb onto the property ladder. But when Lynda's two sons grew up, and started their own groundworks business, a spark of hope materialised. Lynda's father (a farmer) generously gave her a chunk of land and the planners were supportive. She used a local timber framing company to build her house, and she managed to get it done for around £100,000. Her sons did the groundworks to help reduce the costs, and also pitched in with a lot of the internal fitting out work too. A brother in law did the plumbing. She's delighted and amazed that the three bedroom house was constructed so cost-effectively. "Our home fits me and the boys very well," says Lynda. "We really enjoyed working on the house together and feel very fortunate that my father had the land, otherwise we would never have been able to afford to live in a place like this."

The scale of the current self build market, and what restricts its growth

Thirty years ago only 2,000 new homes a year were constructed by self builders; now the figure is ten times this. The expansion is due to three main factors:

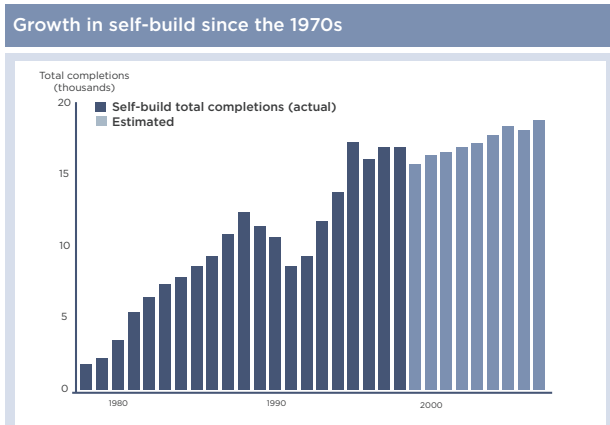
- +** **The huge publicity there has been for self build. The Grand Designs TV series, and a number of other similar programmes, have opened people’s eyes to what is now possible. At its peak one in ten people would tune into Grand Designs, making it one of the most popular programmes on the TV. This media exposure has also fuelled a growth in the number of specialist magazines that serve the sector – there are now four monthlies that are read by an estimated 200,000 people. And there are around a dozen major self build exhibitions held up and down the country.**
- +** **The possibility of making one’s money work harder – it is often mentioned that self-build is cheaper than buying in the mainstream market. While this is not always true, the fact is, by cutting out the middleman (the private housebuilder or volume developer), the self builder is able to make considerable savings – often 30%, sometimes even more.**
- +** **Frustration with the bland offerings available from the main volume housebuilders. Many self builders cannot find the home they want from those offered by the big housebuilders. They often complain about the blandness of the design, the small gardens and the lack of eco features. Would-be house purchasers face similar problems when trying to find an existing older property to fit their needs. So they opt to have something custom built to exactly match their requirements**

The desire to build a home seems even higher - a recent survey by the Norwich and Peterborough Building Society revealed that 70% of home owners had considered the idea of building their own property.

Rank	Company (by size)	UK Completions
1	Taylor Wimpey	22,000
2	Britain's Self Builders	20,000
3	Barratt/Wilson Bowden	19,808
4	Persimmon	16,701
5	Beilway	7,117
6	Berkeley	3,001
7	Redrow	4,735
8	Miller Group	3,960
9	Bovis Homes	3,123
10	Galliford Try	3,000

The table above demonstrates the importance of the current self build sector.

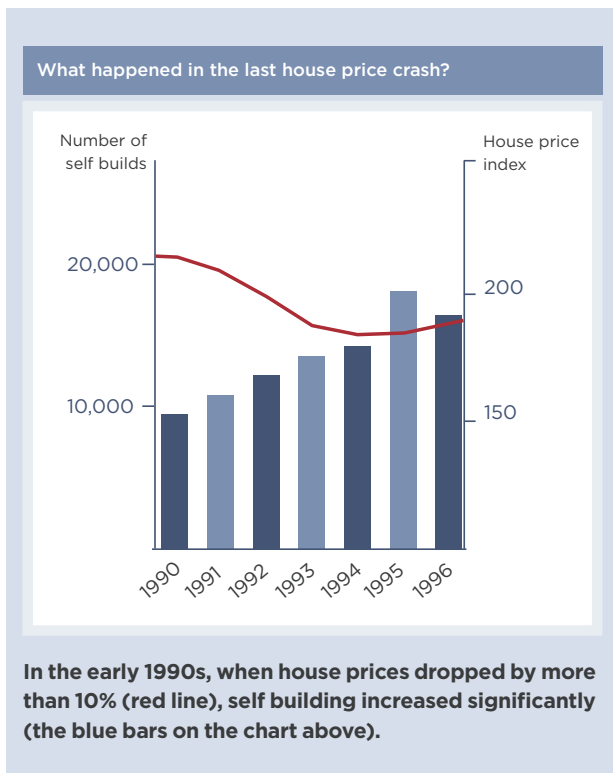
The average build cost of a self build project (excluding the site cost) is about £150,000 – so that’s around £3 billion invested in construction materials, tradesmen and professional consultants. This is roughly 5 per cent of all construction output.



What happens to self build in a housing downturn?

In previous downturns the self build market has fared well. Indeed, in the early 1990’s, when house prices last slumped, there was a significant upturn in self build activity. This was driven by the fact that home owners realised that they could make the value of their existing properties work better for them if they sold up and used the money to fund a self build project. A recent survey of 500 would-be self builders reinforced this message, with nine out of ten of them saying they would still be undertaking their projects, despite the country’s current economic problems.

At present house building levels in the UK are at an all time



low, with the smallest number of house starts since records began in 1945. This situation is unlikely to change in the short term because the volume housebuilders are in virtual hibernation, sheltering from the credit crunch. Sadly, for people trying to find a home, the Government's main housing programme is also in limbo as it is closely linked to the volume housebuilder's output.

Until now the self build market (despite its actual size) has been overshadowed by the powerful lobby and united voice presented by the volume housebuilders. So Government has listened to them and generally treated self builders as a quirky irrelevance.

Perhaps now is the time for Government to wake up to the already significant scale of self building in the UK, and the huge potential there is for the future?

What is limiting the growth in self build?

There are several things that have made it difficult to expand the self build market beyond its present figure. But the main problem is **definitely** the availability of suitable plots of land.

At present there are many more people seeking suitable sites, than there are plots available. At any one time there are around 6,000 plots listed in the UK; yet there are tens of thousands of people chasing them; perhaps as many as 50,000. Bear in mind too that many of the sites that are available are in parts of the UK where there is less demand (for example in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland), and some of the sites are not well suited to housing (backing onto railway lines or motorways, for example).

In urban areas site finding problems are often compounded as small pockets of land suitable for self builders only very rarely become available and they are often prohibitively expensive.

And in rural areas – where many self builders would prefer to build – land availability is constrained by tight planning regulations or Green Belt restrictions. In Nottinghamshire, near Hockerton, there is an interesting self build housing scheme, built by a group of five committed families. It's heralded as one of the most successful projects of its type. But as Nick White, one of the team responsible for the development explains, getting planning permission for similar housing projects – even innovative or environmentally strong ones – has become increasingly difficult in rural areas. He says: "Things are now more formalised. Now, local authority Plans identify land that might get planning permission one day, and the areas where there is no chance. That has meant that most land that could be used for housing has been bought up by developers who may sit on it for decades."

We believe the annual number of self builders in the UK could easily be doubled, or even trebled, if more land were made available.

Another factor that used to make it difficult was the availability of finance. Ten years ago there were no special mortgages available for self builders; now nearly 40 are available. Even though there have been recent difficulties in the financial markets, applications for self build mortgages have held up relatively well. A recent report showed that £1.8 billion in self build mortgages is currently awarded each year, and this figure is still expected to double by 2010.

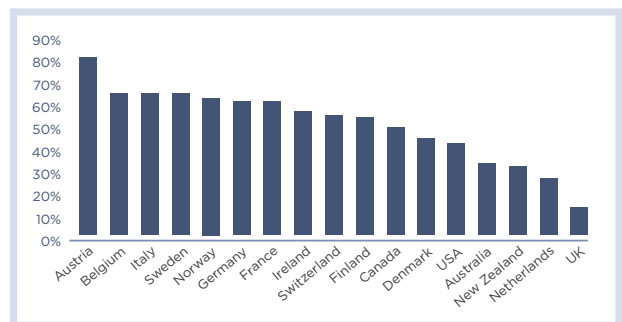
What happens overseas?

Britain trails the rest of Europe when it comes to self build. The US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand also encourage much more self build.

Most European countries build a much higher proportion of their new homes via the self build route. In Austria more than 80% of all new homes are delivered this way; around 50-60% of all Scandinavian homes are self build projects. Ireland builds well over half its homes via self build.

Many other developed countries also employ this method to deliver a sizeable proportion of their housing stock – for example in the USA 30% of homes are self build, in Canada the proportion is 45% and in Australia and New Zealand well over a quarter of all homes are procured this way.

Britain trails the rest of the world miserably, with about 12%. One of the reasons is that, in the UK land is scarce and difficult to purchase, and the established big house-builders have been very good at buying up large tracts of land, to feed their



own needs. For owners of large land holdings it is often more attractive to sell to these big players, rather than to split the site into smaller plots for self builders.

French case study

France has an interesting approach to encouraging self build. Local Mayors have much more power than their UK equivalents, and they will regularly purchase a field on the edge of a settlement and carve this up to make plots available to local people who want to build a home. This has been especially effective in rural areas, where families can purchase a site for a modest cost (typically the equivalent of £20,000), and then build a simple home for a further £30,000 - £40,000. Initiatives like this mean that people on low wages can afford to get on the housing ladder. And the cost of the plots more than recovers the initial purchase price of the field and the provision of gas, water and other infrastructure supplies. Nearly every small town or village in France has sites available like this.



German case study



In Germany there is a really impressive new town which has been built in recent years, that includes many self build homes. Indeed, it's one of the examples the UK Government uses to make the case for its current eco-towns project. Called Vauban, it's close to Freiburg in southern Germany. The 38 hectare site provides 2000 new homes, the majority of which were built by small groups of self builders. The main goal of the Vauban project has been to create a new town organised in a co-operative and participatory way, meeting ecological, social, economic and cultural requirements. And the key to this has been the way the land has been divided into small plots and allocated in preference to private self builders and to around 30 small community self build housing groups. The end result looks terrific, the district is a fantastic example of an environmentally sound community, and the overall development has generated some £400million of investment into the area. The scheme has also been hailed as exemplary in terms of public realm and transport infrastructure (the tram system was the first element constructed to allow the builders to travel to the site).

One lesson that may be useful for the UK Government was that the local community set up a new organisation to help facilitate the self build bonanza that has taken place.

Called the Buergerbau (Citizens' Building Stock Corporation), it specialises in co-ordinating the building co-operatives. Each co-op consists of several households that get together, decide on a piece of land, plan the buildings and hire an architect and building team, thus saving money and time. The Buergerbau then offers a range of services throughout the project development, right up until the builders move into their homes. These services include answering any questions during the planning and building process, controlling costs, schedules and quality and overseeing the implementation of the building work.



What are the benefits of self build as a volume housing solution?

We believe there are many benefits to be had from expanding the self build sector. These include:

- + Helping more people get a foot on the housing ladder.** In the current housing downturn it is proving to be increasingly difficult to get a mortgage so younger people often have no other choice but to rent accommodation. But if it were possible to buy modestly priced plots of land in the UK, many younger people, or those on modest wages, would be able to build a home of their own – just like they do in most of Continental Europe.
- + Safeguarding construction jobs.** The UK construction industry employs around 1 million people. Since the downturn tens of thousands of these have been laid off. If the self build sector could be quickly expanded we estimate an extra 20,000 to 30,000 new homes a year could be built. This would involve an additional investment of billions of pounds in new construction work, safeguarding as many as 50,000 construction jobs.
- + Reducing the UK's carbon footprint.** Many people who build their own homes are very committed to the Green cause. The vast majority will install additional insulation and many are very keen on modern environmentally friendly ways of generating energy – for example heat pumps, solar water heating or photovoltaics. They also tend to source products from local suppliers, reducing the amount of transportation required. We estimate that 25,000 self built homes would save perhaps 100,000 tonnes of CO₂ a year compared to conventional alternatives.
- + Increased innovation in construction, design and energy conservation.** Self builders are very often at the cutting edge of new ideas in housing and construction. By encouraging more self building we'll get more innovation. The same is true for the businesses that supply the sector; a bigger uptake in self build will result in more innovation from product suppliers, house kit providers and others keen to embrace modern methods of construction.
- + Wider economic and regeneration benefits.** Everyone who builds a house is investing – and the supply chain this impacts on is enormous: from estate agents and architects to building materials providers, corner shops that provide food for the workforce, utility suppliers, sub-contractors... the list goes on and on. The additional billions of pounds that could be invested in self build could play a valuable role in helping to offset some of the other economic problems we currently face. The vast majority of self build projects are constructed on "brown field sites" – land that has been used before. There are significant environmental and biodiversity benefits to be had here too, as self builders turn eye-sores and difficult sites into attractive homes and gardens.
- + Building Britain's entrepreneurial skills.** Building a house is no mean feat. You need good management and cost control skills, good negotiating skills and good recruitment and people skills. All of these are key to success in business. That's why a high proportion of self builders then go on to do it again, or get involved in new business ventures related to the sector. Their increased skills will certainly make them more employable.
- + Improving community spirit.** Self builders have to work with their neighbours to get their projects completed. Many form themselves into structured groups to deliver their homes. This builds community cohesiveness; a quality that is sadly lacking in many neighbourhoods. Self builders naturally have pride in their home and environment and so take care of it for future generations. They also foster professional relationships by tending to use locally based construction professionals.
- + Better designed homes to suit people's distinct needs.** Most self built homes are custom designed to exactly suit their user's requirements; whether it is having a work/office space, a granny annexe, a garden room, a usable attic space or storage area. Self builders are passionate about getting their homes exactly right. This is especially true with self builders who have someone in the family that is disabled or aged; they end up with a home that precisely meets their specialist needs. Also as self builders are on the whole driven to create a quality home rather than concentrate on business profit margins, there is a high likelihood that such homes will appeal to other families once they are sold on.
- + Self built homes are generally constructed to higher quality standards.** There has been a great deal of criticism of the quality and finishing standards of the standard "product" produced by the volume housebuilders; surveys of new home buyers' show that satisfaction levels are woeful. When people manage their own self build projects they are sticklers for detail, and insist on good workmanship. The result is a better quality finish and happier customers.
- + It helps to suppress the Retail Price Index.** If homes are cheaper to build, this helps keep the RPI lower.

What needs to be done by Government and other land owners?

The National Self Build Association has developed the following eight key recommendations:

- ⊕ **The Government should immediately ask all public sector organisations to provide details of all the sites they own that have scope to be used by self builders.** The idea would be to generate some “quick wins” – say 50 sizeable sites that could be made available to self builders in early 2009. Each of these sites would provide enough plots for a good number of self build homes; the target ought to be to get a minimum of 2,000 plots available in early 2009. Priority should be given to the more densely populated parts of the UK, urban areas or rural areas where there is a big lack of affordable homes for local people.
- ⊕ **The Government should commission further research and support demonstration projects** into the various mechanisms which can be implemented and promoted to address both affordable housing need and sustainable housing need through self-build.
- ⊕ **All of the proposed new eco-towns should provide space for a minimum of 500 self build plots.** These would then be sold to self builders who were keen to build low energy/environmentally friendly homes.
- ⊕ **Every relevant local authority should be tasked with allocating serviced sites for at least 30 self build homes a year.** Larger authorities should provide more than this minimum figure. This should become a standard feature of all future strategic and spatial plans. With around 500 local authorities in the UK, in time this would easily generate at least 15,000 additional self build plots a year that would contribute to meeting essential housing targets. By building the infrastructure for developments such as roads and energy systems then selling the plots, land owners including local authorities, are able to make their profit at lower risk than completely constructing homes before selling them on, particularly in the current economic climate. Planning policies can be enforced through the preparation of a spatial masterplan and design brief, which is usual for large development sites. The cost of this could be covered in the sale of plots, in the same way as it would usually be covered in the sale of completed homes.
- ⊕ **The Government could also look at forming a new organisation to help public sector bodies split up sites for self builders** (like the Citizen's Building Stock Corporation that has been formed in Germany). There is scope for this kind of organisation to be a company retaining a long term stake in the land e.g. as an energy service company or Management Company. This organisation could be based within the public sector, or it could be “outsourced” to external facilitators. Whichever way was adopted their role would be to manage the process, organise the necessary infrastructure and handle the sales to self builders. The organisation would also be responsible for ensuring any design guide compliance.
- ⊕ **The Government should consider boosting the resources of the Community Self Build Agency** to encourage the formation of more groups to provide affordable homes.
- ⊕ **The Government could require developers of large plots of land to make a certain number of self build plots available, as part of Section 106 Planning Agreements.** This could be requested if self build allocations became part of local development requirements in the Government's Planning policy documents. New documents (called Local Development Frameworks) are being prepared by English local authorities at the moment, so it is a good opportunity to pro-actively embed self-build as a housing option into policy now.
- ⊕ **All other land owners, especially the main private house builders, should look at the economics of splitting up some of their land banks and making serviced plots available to self builders.** At a time when many house-builders are struggling to find buyers for their own homes, they could improve their cash-flow with little effort by selling off the land to self builders to construct the homes they want. Self builders are generally prepared to pay the going rate for a site – one acre could generate in excess of £1,000,000 for the land owner.

Who has been setting the pace?

A small handful of pioneering public sector bodies, local authorities or community groups have been making land available to self builders for some time.

Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes has been a real pioneer of self build from its initial planning stage back in the early 1960's. In the first 30 years of its life the Milton Keynes Development Corporation provided 1649 individual sites for self builders. At its peak 150 sites a year were provided.

The Corporation also showcased some very innovative one-off homes with exhibitions like Energyworld (in the mid 1980's) and Futureworld (mid 1990's).

English Partnerships was tasked with helping the Corporation bring the self build sites to the market.

Its reasons for encouraging self build were:

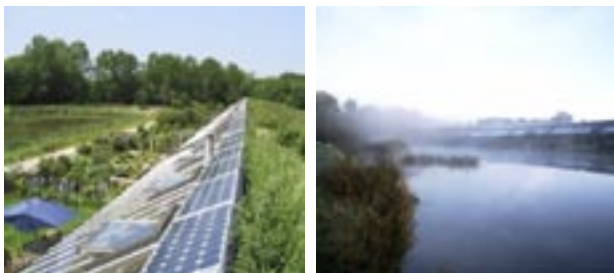
- ⊕ It resulted in an interesting variety of housing
- ⊕ It was helpful in attracting senior executives to the new town – the sites enabled people to have a custom designed home built to their own specification
- ⊕ It encouraged innovative designs, and novel ways of delivering homes – for example housing co-operatives

Since 1998 a further 121 plots have been made available. All are sold at the market rate, either via tender or at auction.

Milton Keynes plans to encourage further self build in the city by providing 24 self build plots at Tattenhoe Park, the last remaining grid square that is due to be developed within the current boundary.

Hockerton - Newark & Sherwood District Council

Almost a decade ago a group of five families clubbed together to build this terrace of earth sheltered homes near Southwell in Nottinghamshire. When they went to see the planners with their proposals the response was generally supportive, as one of the group had been heavily involved in a similar eco house. All the homes are built into the land, draw their energy from a wind turbine and photovoltaic cells, and need no space heating.



South Somerset – Future Roots and Ecos Trust

Future Roots is a group of around 15 families and individuals based near Langport. All are on below or average incomes and currently have no access to secure long term housing. By working together the group aims to create a model which can be replicated across the South West and beyond. The project they plan to construct will be a small rural community housing scheme based on a modest and affordable parcel of land, ideally adjoining a village with well established amenities and infrastructure. The current plan is to build low cost innovative timber homes – either partially fabricated off site or fully self-built on site. The group has been searching for a suitable site for three years and still hasn't been able to secure a plot. This scheme is closely linked to a similar initiative launched by the Ecos Trust. This organisation now has a database of some 140 people who have been searching to find a largish plot that several people can split up and build their own homes on. They too have been searching for a site for three years, but have found it very difficult to acquire anywhere suitable. So far only two of the original 140 people who registered an interest have managed to find land for their own homes.



Swindon self builders serviced sites initiative

The local council has been working with the National Self Build and Renovation Centre to try to find a suitable site that can be marketed to local self builders. Discussions are still at an early stage, but there is the possibility of a site being made available shortly. The idea is that the Centre would act as the "broker" on behalf of the local authority – organising the service connections and infrastructure, the overall site planning and design guidance and then selling off the individual plots to selected self builders.

Ashley Vale, Bristol

The Ashley Vale Action Group (AVAG) is a community group in inner-city Bristol which came together and formed a not-for-profit company to take control of the re-development of a brown-field site in its neighbourhood.

In May 2001, the group succeeded in buying a 2.1 acre former scaffolding yard in order to create a site for 20 new self build homes. The Group's aims were:

- ⊕ to create an organisation capable of funding the buying and selling of the land
- ⊕ to divide the land into plots to re-sell for self-build housing
- ⊕ to promote ecological, innovative and affordable housing design
- ⊕ to attract a diversity of people to the community
- ⊕ to provide a community facility and to enhance the local environment.

Through local promotion and word of mouth the group discovered there was a huge interest for the self build plots within the local area. To finance the purchase of the whole site, the interested self builders needed to finance the scheme, as AVAG had no funds of its own. A very complex series of negotiations, planning and site design was required for AVAG to initiate contracts with the self builders as they needed to know what they would be getting for their money. This very nearly resulted in the site being taken by a major developer who was also interested in this prime land in a central location within Bristol. By sub-selling the plots to the self-builders and six plots to the a Housing Association for single storey homes aimed at the elderly, the group finally raised enough cash for its offer for the site to be accepted.

One of the main aims of the Group is to promote imaginative and environmentally-sensitive housing, while giving local



people a chance of getting on the housing ladder. The majority of the directors who were involved in setting up of the project were living nearby, and were not interested in building a home themselves, but purely wished to ensure that the site was developed in a way which benefited the local community.

Ashley Vale Action Group has not only provided the opportunity for 20 self-build homes, but it has also created six 'self finish' low energy homes, and is currently in the third phase of the programme - the conversion of the original office block that stood on the site to create a further six homes. AVAG is setting up a commonhold ownership arrangement (made up of the future occupiers) who will take on the management of the renovation of the office building. The new occupiers will then also have a 'self finish' role in the completion of their own flats within the building.

The majority of the houses have been fitted with photovoltaic cells - a form of solar panel which generates electricity for domestic use - funded in part by the Department of Trade and Industry's domestic photovoltaic field trial. The central 'self finish' plots had solar hot water panels installed, and the new homes in the old office block will be heated by biomass and solar thermal.

Most of the 20 self-build homes are now finished, and the cost for the properties (including the share of the site cost) has ranged from £60,000 to £160,000



Springhill Cohousing - Stroud

Springhill Cohousing is the first new build cohousing community in the UK and is an interesting model for future sustainable communities. This project consists of 35 households plus a Common House. The Common House is the hub of the community, and acts as a communal extension to residents' private living rooms. As well as hanging out for a chat and a cup of coffee, there are regular singing, dancing, tai chi groups, films, parties and celebrations. Downstairs there is a workshop, table tennis area and laundry. Designed in the Walter Segal tradition, the project shows how a small, inconvenient sloping site can be transformed into a new community. Timber construction and cladding give the development a distinctive character and the relatively narrow, pedestrianised 'main street' meanders around the site parallel with the contours, creating a characterful village feel. Walking and cycling are priority modes of transport within the area and beyond. While car ownership remains high, car use is reportedly lower than average, with easy walking access to the town centre. Recycling, community composting, high-intensity insulation, PV panels, Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS), and a car-sharing scheme all contribute to an environmentally sensitive scheme



South Tyneside

The Strategic Planning Policy team at South Tyneside Council is actively promoting self-build within one of its key housing policies. Its latest revised draft Local Development Framework Core Strategy document states:

"We will promote and facilitate opportunities for individual and community self-build housing developments, particularly where they will contribute to meeting local housing needs, including encouraging commercial house builders to set aside serviced plots for self-build housing where appropriate"

The council's planning team say they recognise that the self-build sector plays an important part in enabling and delivering high quality, innovative, sustainable and environmentally-friendly housing.



Tutti Frutti, New Islington, Manchester

One of Britain's most innovative property developers, Urban Splash, (working with English Partnerships) is behind this unique self build project in Manchester. The development involves a terrace of plots alongside a canal, close to the city centre. An architectural competition has already been held for the design of the 26 funky new homes and a queue of people has formed to snap up the opportunity to build some very individual new city centre homes.

The plots start at £160,000 and all the homes have to be built to exacting environmental standards.

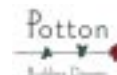
The National Self Build Association

Many of the industry's leading organisations have come together to form a new campaign group.

The group that has been formed to steer this campaign includes all sides of the industry – from local self build support groups to the organisers of a permanent national exhibition on self build; from a firm of architects that specialises in the sector to one of the main manufacturers of timber framed houses. Collectively we are known as the National Self Build Association (NaSBA).

All share the same core goal; to make it easier for people to obtain sites for them to construct their own homes. Several of the people involved in the group have already built their own properties, and they all know, from first-hand experience, just how difficult it is to find a suitable plot. Indeed many of them spent years trawling every possible source of land before they managed to unearth a suitable plot.

The group believes that there are literally tens of thousands of people keen to follow in their tracks, and they would start today, if it were easier to find a suitable piece of land.



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