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homeimprovements



Collective Custom Build is a web-based advocacy tool that makes the case for developing Collective Custom Build as part of a more diverse housing market in the UK. It uses an animated narrative to curate key research findings, revealing them as peelbacks at key points in its argument.

Collective Custom Build is part of the *Motivating Collective Custom Build* practice-based research project within the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded *Home Improvements Knowledge Exchange* based at the University of Sheffield. *Motivating Collective Custom Build* is led jointly by the University of Sheffield School of Architecture, Ash Sakula Architects and Design for Homes.

# STATUTE & POLICY

## CURRENT STATUTE AND POLICY CREATE FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE CUSTOM BUILD

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### Summary

There have been a number of recent developments in central Government policy and statutory legislation that not only create favourable conditions for, but could also be fulfilled by, the continued development of Collective Custom Build housing as viable, mainstream way of procuring housing.

These include:

- The publication of *'Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England'* by the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG), which includes references to 'self-build' and is evidence that central Government acknowledges the need for a different way to deliver housing (DCLG, 2011, pp. 1–4);
- The introduction of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG, 2012)<sup>1</sup> which places a duty on local authorities to identify and provide for those that wish to build their own homes;
- The launch of the *Custom Build Homes Fund* (HCA, 2012) by the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA), which makes financial incentives available to 'multi-unit', 'custom build' pilot schemes;

Some sources also highlight the opportunities presented by the recent redefinition of the *Community Right To Build* to include access to a dedicated support fund for community groups that wish to develop designs and build houses<sup>2</sup> (GOV.UK, 2013), and the underlying framework presented by the *Public Services (Social Value) Act* (UK Government, 2012), which helps local authorities account for social value when auditing an evaluating proposals and decisions and offers an opportunity to support local, independent housing solutions over those from volume house-builders<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Read a commentary on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) from the Royal Town Planning Institute in (RTPI, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Specifically, this now includes pre-application support from consultants, such as architects, sustainability specialists and developers as eligible costs in preparing schemes.

<sup>3</sup> A guide to the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 is available in (Social Enterprise UK, 2012). Chevin notes that under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, organisations like housing associations must define the social and economic value and impact of the services they offer, when tendering for a contract from a local authority or another relevant body (Chevin, 2013, p.

Many recent developments can be attributable – directly or indirectly – to the activity of the Self-Build Government-Industry Working Group, which published *An Action Plan to Promote the Growth of Self-Build Housing* (NaSBA, 2011), in association with the National Self Build Association (NaSBA) in 2011. The 'Action Plan...' principally encourages local authorities to use self-build as a way of helping to deliver sustainable, affordable housing, and includes research conducted by the DCLG to understand how the self-build sector operates in Australia, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Scotland and the US (Owen et al., 2011).

Since the launch of 'An Action Plan...' and the subsequent publication of the *Housing Strategy*, the Working Group has been working to progress the main recommendations set out in *An Action Plan...*, under the new identity of the Self Build Implementation Group, and with the support of NaSBA. On the 19th April 2012, NaSBA presented 'A Progress Report to Government on the Implementation of the Action Plan to the Minister for Housing and Local Government' (NaSBA, 2012). The Progress Report describes initiatives such as meetings with contractors and lenders, special workshops for planning officers and the preparation of a comprehensive Self Build Portal<sup>4</sup> to assist all future would-be self-builders. In addition more than £100,000 worth of support has also been provided by many of the self-build industry's leading organisations to help fund some of these initiatives (Ibid. 2012, p. 3), and NaSBA continues to monitor the growth of the 'self-build' sector in association with the Self Build Implementation Group.

## Laying The Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England

In *Laying The Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*, central Government acknowledges the need for a different way to deliver housing (DCLG, 2011, pp. 1–4) and sets out a policy ambition of increasing self-build homes from 100,000 to 200,000 over the next decade (Ibid. 2011, p. 9).

The Self-Build Government-Industry Working Group's *An Action Plan to Promote the Growth of Self-Build Housing* directly influenced the development of the *Housing Strategy*, securing the inclusion of an entire section on Custom Build (NaSBA, 2011, pp. 14–16) - a newly introduced term referring generally to 'self-build' - driving a shift in the terminology used within the house-building industry to refer to self-provided housing. The *Housing Strategy* also included the announcement of the £30m Custom Build Loan Fund and the policy of making public land available for self-builders, both of which were direct recommendations of the Self-Build Government-Industry Working Group.

## National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The Self-Build Government-Industry Working Group's *An Action Plan to Promote the Growth of Self-Build Housing* also directly influenced the final form of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published on 27 March 2012 (DCLG, 2012)<sup>5</sup>. The NPPF is a key part of central Government's planning reforms, designed to make the planning system less complex and more accessible, to protect the environment and to promote sustainable growth (GOV.UK, 2012; RTPI, 2013), reportedly simplifying the number of policy pages about planning from more than 1000 pages of planning guidance to around 50 (McCann, 2012).

The framework acts as guidance for local planning authorities and decision-takers, both in drawing up plans and making decisions about planning applications (GOV.UK, 2012) and therefore has significant influence in how Local Authorities deliver planning policy.

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31). The HM Treasury also provides advice on how to account for social value in auditing and evaluating its investments and decision-making, in its Green Book (HM Treasury, 2003), which has a recently updated section on the topic taking into account the latest available research.

<sup>4</sup> This initiative has since been launched - see [www.selfbuildportal.org.uk](http://www.selfbuildportal.org.uk) (Self Build Portal, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Read a commentary on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) from the Royal Town Planning Institute in (RTPI, 2013).

Paragraph 159 of the NPPF places a duty on local authorities to assess the local needs of 'those that want to build their own home' alongside the needs of other distinct groups, as well as make provision for that demand. It also introduces the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) as the means of carrying out these duties, describing the duty as being to:

Paragraph 159 of the NPPF describes the duty as being to:

*'...prepare a Strategic Housing Market Assessment to assess their full housing needs, working with neighbouring authorities where housing market areas cross administrative boundaries. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment should identify the scale and mix of housing and the range of tenures that the local population is likely to need over the plan period which:*

*- ...meets household and population projections, taking account of migration and demographic change;*

*- addresses the need for all types of housing, including affordable housing and the needs of different groups in the community (such as, but not limited to, families with children, older people, people with disabilities, service families and **people wishing to build their own homes**); and*

*- ...caters for housing demand and the scale of housing supply necessary to meet this demand.'*

(Emphasis added: DCLG, 2012, pp. 38–39)

The significance of the inclusion of a reference to self-build in the NPPF is highlighted by Ted Stevens, Chair of the National Self Build Association, who states:

*"Self Build/Custom Build is set to grow in a new planning policy context. It's real Localism; the Big Society in action. It gives people more choice and better value and it makes housing affordable for a new generation. Innovative group projects deliver fantastic communities that we can all learn from."*

(Stevens, 2013a)

There is some anecdotal uncertainty from local authorities in applying SHMAs and SHLAAs in practice and available guidance on what constitutes evidence of demand is described as very open and discretionary<sup>6</sup>.

### HCA Custom Build Homes Fund

The Custom Build Homes Fund was announced as part of *Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*, which established £30 million of support, made available to provide short-term project finance to 'custom build' sector on a repayable basis and designed to unlock 'group Custom Build Home projects which can experience difficulties in accessing conventional loan finance' (DCLG, 2011, p. 15).

The Custom Build Homes Fund is intended for group Custom Build Projects, which it defines as:

*'...where developers build group schemes for clients on multi-unit sites or where registered housing providers work with self organised community groups and a developer or contractor to bring forward a multi-unit custom build home project.'*

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<sup>6</sup> Evidence drawn from Motivating Collective Custom Build Focus Group workshop, held at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in London on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2013 (Brown et al., 2013).

As such, it has been criticised for preferencing Custom Build Developers over independent self-providing groups<sup>7</sup>.

The Revolving Loan initiative is supported by a programme of land promotion, with agencies such as the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) and Greater London Authority (GLA) looking at bringing sites forward across the country specifically for 'self-build', with particular preference for multi-unit proposals to be delivered on those sites (Stevens, 2013b).

The latest comprehensive spending review<sup>8</sup> from central Government has further consolidated the role of the HCA, now designated as the single point of contact for centralised disposal of Government land holdings to ensure land is released efficiently (HM Treasury, 2013, pp. 41–42). This new status could enhance its capacity to make land available specifically for Collective Custom Build schemes, particular large-scale enabled schemes led jointly by local authorities and private developers, which offer the most promising opportunity to test continental models of volume self-provision in the UK.

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<sup>7</sup> Significant concerns were raised in response to a presentation by Andy Nelson of the HCA on the progress of the Custom Build Homes programme at EcoBuild 2013 who, - although describing the progress of the programme as meeting expectations - could not confirm whether any independently-established self-providing groups had been able to access support (Nelson, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Also referred to as the CSR, or Spending Round.

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This excerpt is taken from [www.collectivecustombuild.org](http://www.collectivecustombuild.org) and forms a single element of a wider research study. Please visit the website or contact us at [collectivecustombuild@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:collectivecustombuild@sheffield.ac.uk) for more information.



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