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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.

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PIONEERS & PARTNERSHIPS

COLLECTIVE CUSTOM BUILD INNOVATION DEPENDS UPON PARTNERSHIPS

Summary

A number of pioneering schemes are coming forward across the UK that seek to deliver self-provided housing at scale through a Collective Custom Build route, enabled by partnership between key stakeholders in the construction industry. Wallace et al. observe that these represent a diverse range of pilot initiatives, which are likely to grow in the short term as a response to Government initiatives in the field (Wallace et al., 2013, p. 8)

In almost all cases, such pioneering partnerships aim to share the risk of a pilot project and work mutually to access resources, such as finance, or expand capacity to deliver projects that no single partner would be able to deliver alone.

As Wallace et al. observe, partnership working and/or special purpose development 'consortia' have the potential to overcome barriers that currently limit the scaling up of self-provision (Wallace et al., 2013, p. 8), such as access to short-term development finance to get pilot schemes off the ground, access to suitable development land, capacity to carry out both physical construction work, design and administrative duties associated with construction, and the capacity to form, manage, direct, serve professionally or otherwise support a group of people, who may represent a client or beneficiary with more than one point of contact, and a very different dynamic to an individual representative.

One of the main benefits attached to partnership is the ability to draw in funding from diverse sources, acknowledged by the Ashley Vale Action Group as a critical factor for success in their self-build neighbourhood at Ashley Vale in Bristol, which included contributions from individuals within the self-building group (Moulding, 2012, p. 35). Bristol City Council also highlight the strategic value in partnering with the Community Self Build Agency to deliver Collective Custom Build at the West Street Community Self-Build Project for returning service veterans facing a high likelihood of unemployment and homelessness, citing the CSBA's capacity to access sources of finance unavailable to the local authority¹.

¹ Interviews conducted for this study by the authors, which in turn were corroborated at the Motivating Collective Custom Build focus group workshop, held at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in London, 18th June 2013 (Brown et al., 2013).

Custom Self Build Ltd is an example of a developer that specifically markets their ability to partner with local authorities and registered providers to deliver 'self-build' housing, usually on 'multi-unit sites', offering leadership and support throughout the entire duration of a project. They describe the mechanism for facilitating partnership as a partnering or management form of contract, with the developer acting as Principal Contractor (Custom Self Build Ltd, 2013), but have yet to fully complete a Collective Custom Build scheme. Private development company, D & O Management Services Ltd - who have completed a number of multi-unit schemes in which they have assisted formerly unacquainted groups of people, usually working in the building trades to form project specific housing associations and build homes - highlight the importance of positive group dynamics and the value that experienced developers can bring to Collective Custom Build partnerships:

"An ideal group has to be balanced with a mixture of skills and professions as well as complementary interests and attitudes. Many things are taken into account when allocating the membership of a scheme. You obviously need skilled tradesmen however, equally important, there should be someone experienced at administration and book-keeping. Group members come from a variety of professions and walks of life but they each have something to offer to the success of the project."

Seems like a good idea? It is!! But it needs experienced, professional guidance to ensure success and that's where D & O Management Services Limited come in."

(D & O Management Services Ltd, 2013)

In other schemes, the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) has been a critical partner in facilitating access to land or development finance and other grants, both for successful built schemes such as the LILAC development in Leeds, and for other developer-enabled proposals via the Custom Build Homes Fund², through which it provides short-term development finance to multi-unit schemes (HCA, 2012, 2013).

Particular attention has been paid to the capacity of Housing Associations and interest groups such as Community Land Trusts, working together, to build affordable housing (Peacock, 2011) and a recent report commissioned by the Smith Institute, entitled anticipates that the *Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012*³ will promote new partnerships across the range of housing association activity (Chevin, 2013, p. 31). Chevin goes on to note:

"One of the recurring themes of this report is the need for housing associations to forge new relationships and partnerships. The consensus among interviewees is that working more closely with local authorities will be of critical importance, as councils explore their own new-found freedoms. Both councils and associations will need to work more closely with their tenants, especially over managing the impacts of welfare reforms".

(Ibid. 2013, p. 58)

There is particular acknowledgment that pioneering, large-scale, international schemes have been the product of specific partnerships emerging from their local context, often led by the public sector. The Homeruskwartier in Almere, NL, is frequently referenced for the way the local authority promoted land through allocation for self-build, producing an urban design and facilitating the sale of serviced-plots direct to self-providers, whilst the plots themselves were developed out largely by private individuals or groups, supported significantly by commercial, developer-led 'home manufacturers' (Stevens, 2013; NaSBA, 2013; Brown, 2013; Self Build Portal, 2013b; DCLG, 2011).

² Successful applicants to the HCA's Custom Build Homes Fund include Urban Self Build's proposals at Hempstead Green in Peterborough (Urban Self Build, 2013; Self Build Portal, 2013a) and Fairgrove Homes' proposals in Derbyshire (Fairgrove Homes Ltd, 2013; McKenna, 2013). To date, the HCA confirm that there have been fifteen successful applicants, although not all have completed the necessary procedures to begin development and draw down their loans (Nelson and Chettle, 2013; Nelson, 2013).

³ Chevin notes that under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 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. 31).

At Vauban, for example, an urban extension to the city of Freiburg in Germany, the success of developing a sustainable urban neighbourhood - with high concentration so of self-build apartment blocks for young families - was a product of the availability of public land, a sympathetic political climate and the presence of a strong local environmental industry (Kasioumi, 2010 IN.; Wallace et al., 2013, p. 17). Within the overall scheme – made possible by partnerships between local authority and local developers and supply chains, and driven by strong political leadership – other, specific partnerships delivered building-scale or street-scale Collective Custom Build schemes (Hill, 2013a, 2013b).

There is significant anecdotal evidence to suggest the emergence of a Custom Build Enabler - as a commercial service encompassing some degree of skill in participatory design facilitation, alongside a sensitivity to group dynamics and comprehensive development management credentials – is both essential to fulfilling the potential of Collective Custom Build and an inevitable consequence of its continued development as a sector (Hill, 2013c; Brown, 2013). This role demands a complex and socially-and-culturally attuned set of skills, and it is not yet clear which – if any – profession currently possesses the appropriate range, or whether any evolving profession should align itself with the public, private or 3rd sector.

It has also become evident that whilst there is a general will to engage in partnerships amongst stakeholders in the construction industry, translating that will into effective partnerships relies on the development of legal, contractual and organisational frameworks for partnering, and consensus as to what constitutes reliable evidence of demand for Collective Custom Build⁴.

Although many agencies are breaking ground in the field, it is observed that they are often doing so individually, with limited opportunity to share knowledge and experience. Wallace et al. note that there is a clear role for Government to play in evaluating emerging schemes and models, as well as promoting horizontal sharing of good practice among key industry stakeholders (Wallace et al., 2013, p. 8).

Please refer to the following pages for examples of emerging Collective Custom Build schemes and partnerships.

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⁴ For example, developers may require some robust evidence of demand for Collective Custom Build from local authorities before entering into partnership. The lack of consistent terms of reference when discussing 'evidence of demand' between key stakeholders - and particularly between local authorities and private developers - was a significant talking point in the Motivating Collective Custom Build focus group workshop, held at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in London, 18th June 2013 (Brown et al., 2013).

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This excerpt is taken from 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 for more information.



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