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homeimprovements



WWW.COLLECTIVECUSTOMBUILD.ORG

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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EMERGING DEVELOPER-ENABLED SCHEMES

EMERGING DEVELOPER-ENABLED CUSTOM BUILD SCHEMES

Summary

There are a number of innovative Developer Enabled Custom Build schemes coming forward around the country that, although they yet to complete any dwellings, have reached significant stages of development at the time of writing.

Custom Build Developers take either a Development Management role, facilitating access to supply chains and other aspects of development on larger multi-unit sites, or a role more accurately described as that of a Home Manufacturer, supplying homes, with varying opportunities for custom specification and often involving some degree of pre-fabrication, directly to individual households or groups. In some instances, developers may provide a service that is a combination of the two roles, whilst the examples listed below also include initiatives set up by kit-home manufacturers, who, although more traditionally understood as part of the supply chain, are piloting more comprehensive services, either directly to self-providers or to Custom Build Developers.

Whilst the provision of serviced plots, with or without a house, is the most common business model, some developers are also actively seeking out and supporting local people to start off new developments as a group scheme (NaSBA, 2011, p. 9). Custom Build Developers will often make quite extensive use of social media to market their services – mostly via blogs and twitter – and other web-based technology, such as Google Maps to facilitate interaction with potential Custom Build customers. As a marketing strategy, this correlates closely with the aspiration to offer a product tailored to individuals and maintain the ‘friendly face’ to development.

However, many smaller developers offering Custom Build are only loosely ‘collective’ in their approach, despite being developing ‘multi-unit’ schemes. Most can be understood as the development of ‘self-build’ villages or streets, selling serviced building plots or a choice of pre-designed houses ‘off-plan’ to individuals. There is often some room for further customisation, with customers able to take existing house designs – which tend to have pre-approval in terms of planning permission – and alter it them using their own architect.

Groups of people that engage with emerging forms of Developer Enabled Custom Build tend not to know each other before buying-in to the development and, generally, don’t experience the development as ‘collective’. It could be observed that this version of Custom Build differs from

traditional speculative house-building in that the developer secures sales before taking on the additional risk of constructing dwellings, passing on a cost-saving – and the opportunity for limited customisation – to individual customers on a multi-unit site. This model has significant overlaps with off-plan development models, but with a greater focus on customers – who would live in the development - rather than on investors.

The Self Build Portal makes relatively frequent announcements¹ about emerging schemes, led by developers on multi-unit sites, and features a small number of case studies of 'developer-led group projects' currently underway (Self Build Portal, 2013a).

Development Managers

Igloo Regeneration

Igloo Regeneration has recently acquired a former Trevenson Park tin mine site in Cornwall from the HCA and plans to build a wide range of around 70 custom built homes in 2014/15 (NaSBA, 2013, p. 14), for which it will manage the development, including establishing a supply chain of 'home manufacturers' from which individuals and groups will be able to make specific arrangements for the procurement of their homes. Although the site will be 'multi-unit', the developer does not plan to target groups specifically in its marketing.

Anecdotally, Igloo are in negotiations with several local authorities and the Homes & Communities Agency to pilot Developer Enabled Custom Build on a number of large sites around the country, replicating key elements of the Homeruskwartier development at Almere in the Netherlands. There is considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that a large scheme equivalent to the Homeruskwartier, if demonstrated as viable and successful, will catalyse something of a revolution in the house-building industry in the direction of greater diversity and business models placing greater emphasis on supporting enabled forms of self-provision.

HAB Housing

HAB Housing are famously known as the development company founded by broadcaster Kevin McCloud, who is also the central Government's 'Self Build Champion', writing forewords to a number of significant publications by the Homes & Communities Agency and the National Self Build Association (HCA, 2012; NaSBA, 2011, 2012, 2013). Whilst HAB has previously completed a number of housing schemes, it now sees itself as the 'bridge between the custom-builder and the volume house builder' (Ramchurn, 2013) and aims to become a 'one-stop-shop for Self-build and Custom Finish projects' (HAB, 2013).

The most innovative aspect of HAB Housing's model is likely to be the way in it is 'crowd-funding'² the initial investment required to establish its Custom Build service, although it remains to be seen whether it applies the same innovative principals to funding individual developments.

SolidSpace

SolidSpace markets itself around the particular architectural idea of split-level open-plan living (SolidSpace, 2013a), including renovations and new-builds of both the speculative and custom build variety.

¹ See www.selfbuildportal.org.uk/latest-news

² See relevant section in this study.

A Solidspace director is also vice-chair of NaSBA, and Solidspace is developing a business strategy for supporting collective custom build, using their website as a 'match-making' service for those interested in custom build to form a group around a particular site opportunity for multi-unit or collective delivery. As well as filling in a web-based form to express an interest (Solidspace, 2013b), prospective custom builders can identify themselves on an 'Opportunity Map' that reveals their location in relation to other interested households and 'scouted' or secured sites, as well as allowing them to outline the extent of the area in which they would like to live (Solidspace, 2013c).

If enough interest is evidenced in a particular area, Solidspace will use their expertise as developers in finding land and negotiating prices to secure a multi-unit site on behalf of a group of individuals, using up-front deposits to finance the purchase of the site (Zogolovitch, 2013).

The company has yet to complete any dwellings on site.

Custom Self Build Ltd

Custom Self Build Ltd is a Development Contractor that specialises in multi-unit self-build housing projects across England; acquiring, designing, building and project managing residential schemes for self-builders and aiming to 'make self-build simpler' (Custom Self Build Ltd, 2013a).

The company will typically develop freehold homes for individual households, but also construct new homes for Registered Providers who support skills training through the construction work (Custom Self Build Ltd, 2013a), which is seen as a core element of the business (Custom Self Build Ltd, 2013b).

In the private model, deposits are first paid by buyers to secure their plot, before consultation with the local authority, site surveys and detailed designs are begun. Customers have a wide range of choices of design to choose from, rather like a menu in a restaurant. The completed 'shell' comes with the planning obligations and council levies, roads, sewers and utilities in place, and the company provide support right through to completion and Building Control 'sign-off' (Custom Self Build Ltd, 2013c).

Custom Self Build Ltd can also partner or 'co-work' with Local Authority and Registered Providers on sites where public land and buildings are made available to the company. A structured build programme enables mostly young adults (but not exclusively) to learn a trade, new team working skills and a new positive route to providing both housing and training as 'assisted' self builders, who also attend a trades or technical course at college (or similar establishment), and help to construct their own home by attending site alongside their site based 'mentor' for a minimum number of hours each week. Custom Self Build offer leadership and support throughout the entire duration of the project, acting as Principal Contractor, usually under a partnering or management form of contract (Custom Self Build Ltd, 2013b).

The company has yet to complete any dwellings on site.

Bloc Plot

Plot, a subsidiary of developer bloc, publicise themselves as a Partnership Development Company set up to '*break down the barriers to people who are interested in custom and self-build opportunities*' (bloc, 2013a).

Bloc place an emphasis on Partnership working and aim to facilitate access to a range of services for self-providers, including providing serviced plots with or without planning approval, carrying out project management and/or construction, and accessing professional and financial services and information (bloc, 2013a), collecting these services at *dreamplot.net* (bloc, 2013a) where interested parties can also search for a plot in England & Wales, Scotland or Internationally and access a guide to 'the self-build process'.

Bloc's service seems to be marketed at individuals, with plots delivered on multi-unit sites, and currently offer plots in Lancaster, Cheshire and France (Bloc, 2013b) and is currently on site with a 14 home custom build scheme alongside the canal at Aldcliffe Road in Lancaster (NaSBA, 2013, p. 14).

Wellstride

Welsh low-volume house-builder Wellstride is offering Custom Build at its 'self-build village' Church View in Bedwellty, Wales (Wellstride Limited, 2013).

A 13 acre site in Bedwellty was acquired in 2005 by a joint venture between an investor and local housebuilder, and promoted exclusively as an enabled development for 118 self build plots, some of which are reserved for 'affordable housing'. Partly as a strategy to reduce overhead and cash flow risk in the downturn, the approach now aims to yield premium plot prices. Purchasers buy serviced plots, subject to a strict construction management code agreed with the Council, and can draw on the joint venture or other local contractors as required. Typical fully serviced plots cost £105,000 (NaSBA, 2011, p. 9).

The Self Build Portal has a written case study covering history, planning and construction, finance, time-scale, long-term outcomes and learning points – [here](#) (Self Build Portal, 2013b), but at the time of writing the project is on hold.

Home Manufacturers

Fairgrove Homes (Fairgrove Homes Ltd, 2013)

Although the Fairgrove model of Developer-Led Custom Build involves the initial purchase of land by the developer, no homes are built until a group of people can be identified to buy them. Fairgrove will then build from a discrete, pre-determined range of options, allowing some customization by the end-user within the planning permission already given in the original application for the site (McKenna, 2013).

Fairgrove Homes are also one of the first successful applicants to the HCA Custom Build Homes Fund to kick-start projects in Morton, Derbyshire (HCA, 2013, 2012).

Fairgrove Homes are also developing a small site of three custom build homes at Hucknall, also in Derbyshire. The serviced plots (each with planning permission for four or five bed homes) start at £150,000. A range of standard house types can be constructed on the plots (and the potential owners can adjust the internal layout). Homes can be built to waterproof stage (typical cost then will be £357,500), or built out to completion (typical cost £425,000). The company has another site nearby where nine more modest homes are planned. Serviced plots here will start from £78,000 (NaSBA, 2013, p. 14).

The company has yet to complete any dwellings on site at the time of writing.

Urban Self Build (Urban Self Build, 2013a)

The Urban Self Build model offers three choices to Custom Build customers under the banner 'your home your way': building a design 'off-plan' that already has planning consent using traditional or 'turn-key' packages, adapting a permitted design within a design code agreed with the Local Authority, or gaining their own detailed planning permission within the agreed design code on a serviced plot (Urban Self Build, 2013a).

Urban Self Build are also a successful applicant to the HCA Custom Build Homes Fund, to kick-start a project at Hempstead Green in Peterborough (Urban Self Build, 2013b).

The Self Build Portal has a written case study covering key points – **here** (Self Build Portal, 2013c) and although the partners have completed multi-unit self-build schemes in previous incarnations, Urban Self Build has yet to complete any dwellings on site at the time of writing.

CornerstoneZED

CornerstoneZED is a social investment company formed in a partnership between environmentally-orientated 'enabling' and commercial developer ZEDprojects (ZEDfactory, 2013) and social investor and mutual fund Cornerstone (Cornerstone, 2013).

CornerstoneZED is leading the Bickleigh Down Eco Village (Bickleigh, 2012) project near Plymouth in Devon, which will provide 91 homes and is one of the largest self build developments in the UK (NaSBA, 2013, p. 15).

There will also be a kit home assembly facility (which will create 33 jobs), a green building store, cafes, shops and business space (NaSBA, 2013, p. 15).

The energy efficient kit homes have been designed so that each can generate enough income from the solar power they produce to cancel out any utility bills (NaSBA, 2013, p. 15).

The house design offers self builders lots of choice over size, layout and finish as it is based on a flexible kit of panels. Cornerstone is also exploring the possibility of a 'self finish' option – where it constructs the homes to watertight stage, and self builders finish them off. Work is expected to begin on site in summer 2013 (NaSBA, 2013, p. 15).

The company has yet to complete any dwellings on site at the time of writing.

Kingspan-Potton

Kingspan Potton are one of Britain's leading kit home suppliers and it regularly works with land owners or local authorities to provide tailored solutions to specific challenges. Although the organisation is best known for its larger bespoke homes it can also provide (via the Kingspan connection) much more modest and affordable homes too (NaSBA, 2013, p. 15).

BoKlok

This is a division of Ikea that works with contractor Skanska to provide modestly priced 'flat packed' homes. It has completed one UK project so far (57 homes in Gateshead where two bed townhouses cost from £125,000 each) (NaSBA, 2013, p. 15), although this development was procured speculatively.

Concept2 Group

Concept2 Group offer Custom Build ('chosen by you') alongside Bespoke ('working with you') and Premier ('made for you') homes (Concept2 Group, 2013), describing a range of 'flexible build options' including serviced plots with or without outline and/or detailed planning permission, watertight shell, fully finished, or varying extents of interior décor, alongside a number of flexible purchase options. The company also offers to find land on behalf of custom builders.

Concept2 Group offer little indication of their capacity to support a collective custom building group and like other Custom Build Developers, its service seems to be marketed at individuals, and may or may not be delivered as part of a multi-unit site.

The company has yet to complete any dwellings on site at the time of writing.

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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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