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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 SUPPORTED COMMUNITY SCHEMES

EMERGING SUPPORTED COMMUNITY CUSTOM BUILD SCHEMES

Summary

There are a number of emerging Supported Community Custom Build proposals currently being explored and implemented by public and third sector organisations, or by development partnerships.

According to Ted Stevens, Chair of the National Self Build Association, around 20 housing associations - and 45 local authorities - are currently looking at some form of self-built delivery (Stevens, 2013). Given the growing momentum and noise around the idea, and pace at which new schemes are coming forward, this is likely to have increased since the time of writing.

Examples include smaller-scale 'Enabled' and 'Assisted' Community Custom Build proposals as well as likely large-scale models currently in development. Some pioneers in the field - such as the partnership between Bristol City Council, Knightstone Housing Association and the Community Self Build Agency - have already completed schemes and are planning further developments.

Assisted Community Custom Build

Land Society, Devon

The Land Society is a non-profit, rural housing initiative, established as an umbrella organisation to support the development of local Community Land Trusts and involving – to date – approximately 80 families in around a dozen small villages across Devon.

The Land Society seeks to assist small groups of local people, on modest incomes, in getting together, in groups of between 5 and 20 households, to deliver a new, two-or-three-bed home whilst attending a part time training course at local college. Properties work out at Works out at around £100k including land, all materials and training (Stevens, 2013) typically less than half the price of an existing property in the area of the same size (Stevens, 2013). At present around 15 parish councils in Devon have projects in the pipeline, with the first homes due to go on site at the end of 2013 (NaSBA, 2013, p. 16). Many local authorities across Devon support the project and so far around 150 families have signed up (Ibid. 2013, p. 18).

Community Land Trusts are seen as a key mechanism for maintaining affordability in perpetuity, and are able to take ownership of parish council land to build homes, whilst the Land Societies latest initiative is to develop a low cost sustainable eco-home that is purpose designed to be very easy for novice self builders to construct (Self Build Portal, 2013).

The Land Society starts by organising local public meetings, and then helps potential self builders to identify and acquire a suitable site; generally land adjacent to the village but not identified for open market development. The Society offers £10,000 from the total budget of each home towards the cost of each plot, so if five homes are going to be built on an acre of land, the land-owner will receive no more than £50,000. To date it has not proved to be difficult to secure low cost sites in rural Devon (NaSBA, 2013, p. 18).

A Community Land Trust is then created, which holds the Option on the land, becomes the 'developer', employs the Land Society to handle everything, and ends up owning 25% of each home. This, the planning rules and the allocation policy ensure that the homes will always remain affordable should any of the self builders decide to move on at a later stage. Those that want to take part must pay a £5,000 deposit, but this is all the cash they have to put down as the initiative values the self builders' efforts, doing all the construction work, as being worth 25% of the total cost of the project. This means they do not have to raise a normal deposit as they would if they had a conventional mortgage (NaSBA, 2013, p. 18).

The self builders are supported by a part-time training course and plenty of technical help on how to build their home from start to finish, delivered by one of eight local Further Education partner colleges across the South West. The normal course lasts a year for those that are building their homes in their spare time, although a shorter course may be set up for those that are able to build on a full-time basis. The course covers 12 main stages of building work. Materials are delivered to the site at each of the 12 stages of the build – but only once the previous stage has been signed off for all the houses. The team from the Land Society provides technical support and monitors the quality of the work (Ibid. 2013, p. 18).

At the end of the project, participants own 25% from the 'sweat equity' of building their own house, buy the next 50% using a mortgage at a cost of around £590 per month, and the remaining 25% is held by their local CLT in perpetuity. By comparison; a typical three bedroom home in rural Devon costs about £750 a month to rent, and well over £200,000 to buy (Ibid. 2013, p. 18).

The Self Build Portal has a written case study, covering history, planning and construction, how it works and progress updates – [here](#) (Self Build Portal, 2013).

K1, Orchard Park, Cambridge, UK.

Orchard Park is a sizable urban extension located in the north of Cambridge, being taken forward with Cambridge City Council as land-owner. Most of the area has already been developed with conventional house-builders. However it has been difficult to achieve sufficient interest and values for the last remaining parcels, due to the economic climate (Hill, 2013a, 2013b; Roberts, 2012, p. 22).

This project has been supported by Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council, who have jointly funded an enabling team with representatives from specialist consultancies - Instinctively Green, C20 Future Planners and Cambridgeshire Architectural Research. NaSBA describe the initiative as follows:

“The councils identified a site for potentially 40 homes on the northern edge of Cambridge and the consultants have been recruiting local people to form a group. They are also running ‘visioning workshops’ to help the potential residents decide exactly what they want to build, and they have been developing detailed costing and feasibility studies. The consultants have also identified some keen contractors who will build the whole development (the contractors will also partly fund the construction work). The residents will then take out mortgages to

repay the builders. The aim is to get everything sorted and start on site in mid-2013, with completion a year later.”

(NaSBA, 2013, p. 8)

The London Legacy Development Corporation – conducting their own research into Custom Build precedent initiatives - have written a synopsis of Orchard Park in their report ‘*Custom-Build Housing: An alternative model for development on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park*’:

“In 2010 the City Council decided to proceed with the disposal of the K1 site in Orchard Park by way of an enabled self build co-housing scheme. This involves providing houses in partnership with an established house builder for outright individual ownership with collective ownership of the public realm. This approach is a version of the model used in Tübingen in Germany, where a developer carries out the enabling role as local authorities in the UK are not often in a position to undertake development risks. The developers interested in this approach are likely to be smaller or niche house-builders with an interest in higher quality or more sustainable homes. They will forego some of their usual profit as the project risks are shared across the future households involved, and the profit may come on the build cost rather than the scheme overall.

The City Council has begun to establish a group of residents for K1, building on local interest from existing cohousing groups and housing co-operatives. The City Council then plans to procure a development partner to design and build a scheme in close liaison with the confirmed and committed K1 co-housing group. The development partner would develop an integrated housing and landscape vision and sell to the individual purchasers in the usual way.

Purchasers arrange their own mortgages and pay for homes on completion. Each sale document would require purchasers to become members of a not for profit Resident Management Company, which would own the common areas and benefit from covenants requiring households to pay a service charge for the upkeep and development of the common areas and maintenance charges. Following initial soft market testing, 7 households have expressed strong interest in the scheme. A further 13 are interested but have questions regarding the finer detail. The next step is to ensure that a suitable housebuilder is procured in the enabling role.”

(Roberts, 2012, p. 22).

Others

A number of other Assisted Community Custom Build initiatives are also emerging.

In Barnet in North London a group of elderly women - called Older Women’s Cohousing, or OWCH - are building a 25-home, mutually supportive retirement project in partnership with Hanover Housing Association (NaSBA, 2013, p. 13).

In Northumbria, Allendale Community Homes has established a CLT, bought a site and then entered into a lease-and-leaseback agreement with Homes for Northumberland (HfN) to build 22 two and three bed houses, apartments and bungalows. The project was enabled by a HCA grant and long term loan secured by HfN that the CLT would have been unable to obtain itself. The head lease will be surrendered when the CLT is able to refinance the outstanding loan on its own account (NaSBA, 2011, p. 9).

In Scotland, the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust provides low cost loans to help self builders get their projects off the grounds – typically it offers between £5,000 and £20,000 (NaSBA, 2013, p. 15).

Enabled Community Custom Build

Build! Programme at Cherwell District Council, UK

Cherwell District Council no longer owns any housing stock of its own (Cherwell District Council, 2013) but its Build! Programme aims to offer affordable rented homes, affordable home ownership (shared ownership and equity loans) and homes sold on the open market (Build! Programme and Cherwell District Council, 2013).

To date, the Build! Programme has completed a number of predominantly self-finish projects, such as those at Juniper Court and West Street in Banbury, that are bringing vacant homes back into use using co-ordinated sweat-equity of people on Cherwell's housing waiting list (NaSBA, 2013, p. 11).

At Newton Close in Bicester, twenty one self finish homes are being delivered here as part of a much larger self build initiative piloted by Cherwell District Council. The council is currently looking for potential residents and is keen to recruit people with existing construction trades. Work is due to start in early 2014 and the homes will be available on a part rent/ part ownership arrangement (NaSBA, 2013, p. 17).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Cherwell may well be the location for the first UK-equivalent of the large-scale, local authority enabled self-build development at the Homeruskwartier in Almere, the Netherlands, whilst the authority is widely considered a pace-setter in facilitating opportunities for citizens to provide their own homes, an accolade commonly attributed to its proactive Housing Team and enthusiastic elected Mayor.

Urban Pioneers, Middlesborough

A number of sources suggest that Custom Build – of other property types as well as homes – is a central strand of the regeneration strategy for the Middlehaven district of Middlesborough (Bomken et al., 2013; HCA, 2013; NaSBA, 2013, p. 6; Wunderlich and Campbell, 2013). NaSBA describe the initiative as:

“... [involving] a prominent site near the River Tees, where space to accommodate around 15 large building plots (or roughly 40 homes/work spaces) have been identified on either side of a new park close to the town's distinctive Transporter Bridge. The team behind the initiative is the HCA and the local council, and it is seeking to attract go-getters who are looking for an affordable site to build a home on. In addition to providing the land at zero initial cost, it is also offering loans and technical assistance to those interested in taking part.

A master plan has been drawn up for the area, and the new self build homes are seen as a way of stimulating interest and getting some building/economic activity underway. Each of the fully serviced plots is 15x30m (so they could take more than one home) and those that get involved can build pretty much what they like – a one-off home for themselves, an office or work spaces, a mixture of both or small developers can construct a terrace or a block of flats.

The land is offered on a 'deferred payment' basis (so its effectively free up front, though this approach means the value of the land can be realised at a later stage). The council and the HCA are paying for the provision of services, and are supporting the project by agreeing to take payment for the land later on. They are also considering offering three of the plots for free, as a way of generating interest and encouraging people to come forward with their proposals. There will be a set of simple rules or a basic design code, but the team doesn't want to make this too onerous as it's looking for innovative proposals and creative ideas to kick start regeneration.”

(NaSBA, 2013, p. 6)

London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC)

The London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) is in a unique position – and example of a specially created planning authority, tasked with the regeneration of a significant area of east London associated with the creation of the London 2012 Olympic Park, and simultaneously landowner, regeneration agency, and planning authority. The LLDC is keen to explore whether self-build or custom build homes can be included in the transformation of the Olympic Park from Games mode to Legacy mode, which includes a commitment to provide a significant amount of housing across the Park. It has hired a team to assess demand levels and then work out what type/size of homes might be included, how to identify potential would-be self builders and how to fund the scheme (NaSBA, 2013, p. 8).

Others

A number of other Enabled Community Custom Build initiatives are emerging across the country.

Stoke City Council, Shropshire County Council¹, Teignbridge District Council², Hastings Borough Council³ and Orkney Island Council⁴ are all known to be pursuing Custom Build strategies, or enabling self-builders directly through land allocation, and short summaries feature in recent NaSBA publications.

'Self-finish' is a popular custom build strategy for Local Authorities, probably due to its potential to reduce some of the risk. For example, four 'shell finish' homes are being constructed by the Orwell Housing Association, at Elizabeth Way in Felixstowe, aimed at local families on modest incomes. Potential residents have been involved in discussions about the design and interior layout options. More than 30 families enquired about securing one of the homes. Contractors are now constructing the shells to 'first fix' stage, at which point the self builders will finish them off. The housing association believes many of the potential residents will have contacts in the construction trade that will help them get good deals on materials and thereby make additional savings

They also believe the four residents will do a lot of skill swapping – so if one ends up being a plasterer, and another an electrician, they will both work on each other's houses to mutual benefit. A rough estimate suggests that the finished two-bed dwellings will be worth £135,000 to £140,000, and the finished three-bed homes about £155,000. The 'self finishers' will save between 5 and 25% on this – depending on how much work they end up doing (NaSBA, 2013, p. 17).

¹ Shropshire County Council - People in housing need are able to build a house as their plot is treated as an exception site. The house must be less than 100m² (internal area) and legal agreements are required to ensure it remains 'affordable' in perpetuity. This policy is providing 10% of the affordable housing in the area, with a steady stream of 20 to 25 homes per year coming forward (NaSBA, 2013, p. 15).

² Teignbridge District Council are using land designation to support collective custom build. This part of the UK is in high demand from would-be self builders, but suitable building plots are not easy to find. The council has little land of its own that it can offer up, so it has introduced a requirement that 5% of all sites of 20+ homes must be set aside for self builders. The first project affected by this policy - at Kingsteignton – has already identified eight potential plots for self builders. The council is also enthusiastically supporting the Land Society – a not for profit organisation that is helping to provide low cost self build homes in a number of villages across the council's patch. The Society has teamed up with South Devon College to provide a bespoke self build training course as part of this initiative and more than 150 families have signed up for it. In addition the council is setting up a fighting fund to help it purchase land that it can then split up into serviced plots and sell on to self builders (NaSBA, 2013, p. 15).

³ Hastings Borough Council - Two serviced plots are being sold at Ore in a pioneering scheme organised in conjunction with the HCA. In total there is scope to build around ten homes on the land (NaSBA, 2013, p. 16).

⁴ There is a long tradition of providing serviced plots in the Highlands and Islands. This latest initiative is for ten plots at the settlement of St Margaret's Hope, where the plot prices will be between £30,000 and £37,000 (NaSBA, 2013, p. 16).

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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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