

# Executive Summary

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

**T**here 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 CO<sub>2</sub> 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.**