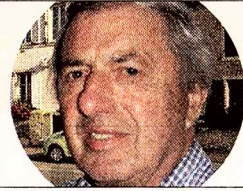


Horsham Society

David Griffiths



Self-build offers some welcome variety

More than half the adult population of the UK would one day like to build their own home, to their own specifications; nearly a third would like to do it in the next five years.... But in this country few people get to realise the Grand Designs dream of a home that is tailor-made to the needs of its occupiers, rather than the standardised product of one of the big housebuilders. The UK has one of the lowest Self and Custom Build sectors in the developed world, running at about 8 per cent of the market.

But that is changing. A change in the law in 2015 meant that local planners now have to keep a register of people interested in self-build, and that in turn encourages them to allocate space, in the form of "serviced plots," sections of land with planning permission, already linked to the water and electricity mains, and sewers.

This is now happening locally. The 2015 Horsham Local Plan required the big new North of Horsham housing development to take into account local demand for custom build. The 2018 planning permission for the development included a requirement

to provide 30 serviced plots for self and custom build.

Of course, the self-builders will still have to go through the normal planning permission process, but the result will be a bit of welcome variety in design - and this is not just about people realising their architectural dreams; they may want a home that is designed around the needs of a disabled relative. They may want a home meeting high ecological standards, and there may even be groups of householders who want to form mini-communities based around some shared need or vision. Self-build can make all of these possible.

These ideas are far less rare in other countries than they are here, but self-build is an idea that is taking hold in the UK, too.

The Housing Minister, Kit Malthouse says local authorities report that about 42,000 people are now signed up to the registers - an increase of 133 per cent in three years. He sees self-build as a key way to get more choice and diversity into a housing market dominated by a handful of big providers.

Some local authorities - Cherwell in Oxfordshire, for example - are now running with this idea. Their Graven Hill scheme



offers a "self-build package" which allows people to design and build, with the scheme providing a village environment, complete with roads, footpaths, drainage and landscaping. Self-builders are offered a fixed price for bespoke foundations, constructed to their layout and design, ensuring there are no nasty surprises later on, and removing some of the biggest risks

from a project.

The Government is providing significant funding to support community-led groups bringing forward local affordable housing schemes, and MPs are calling on mortgage providers to take a more sympathetic approach to self-builders. Horsham District Council are already working with developers to allocate self-build plots (although they do not provide them directly). The other incentive available is that self-builders can be exempted from paying the per square metre Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in the last financial year HDC granted 35 self-build CIL reliefs.

So there is help out there - and more positive policy ideas for the Council to pick up - to help deliver the dreams of local grand designers.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 259038.