

Right to Build Expo Northants 7 November 2017

How to facilitate building plots, Mark Stevenson,
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Session Notes

Session 1

As an introduction there was consensus within the group that:-

- (a) There is clearly availability, particularly within small rural areas, of parcels of land suitable for custom and self- build
- (b) Landowners and small developers found the provision of Custom Build Plot option potentially attractive rather than sell to developer
- (c) There is currently too much risk in pursuing due to:-
 - Lack of engagement by LA officers (pre-app meetings/advice)
 - Cost of pre-app engagement
 - Cost of Outline App without certainty of Consent
 - Time in pursuing

Local Authority response to the Act varies considerably. Team compared Lawrence at South Cambs to their experiences (not typical!). Issues raised:-

- Register hard to find/not promoted (e.g South Cambs numbers 400+strong v Huntingdonshire 40)
- Little attention to advertising on websites
- Little help in gaining advice
- Lack of connection or direction to CB providers/experts/ RtB/NaCSBA
- 'Due regard' often dismissed (incorrectly)

Planning (officers) Responses can vary considerably. Experiences were mixed:-

- Some saw CB as irrelevant to planning process
- Enabling a consent to be varied to provide choice of design can be difficult depending on route taken
- SB&CH Act is adding to officers already large workload
- Clarity required on what 'due regard' relates to. Eg measured by opt outs on CIL exemption? This does not reflect new build opportunities/CB plots and will include replacement dwellings.
- Some policy refers to 'subject to viability' a opt out opportunity to developers

Ideas and Suggestions

LA attendees made clear this to be the very reason to be here today; to engage and learn. It is clear that events like today's Expo are a great start, but need to be rolled out to sub-group level leading to more specific discussion relative to local opportunities and issues.

The role in build delivery is key, both in terms of the infrastructure delivery and the option for turnkey contractors to build homes. There needs to be greater involvement and opportunity provided to local SME's. This should be extended to Registers/links etc . Need for SME's targeted to join network opportunities and joining up with LA/Custom Build enablers and experts.

Consideration might be given (by Taskforce or by LA support) to provide pre-app service to non-developers for CB without charge. Fees might be recovered from larger applications.

Alternatively more LA's adopting a CB officer/engager.

Some LA's had policy to provide percentage of plots given consent over to Custom/Self-build. This is difficult to deliver and not attractive to purchasers and should be avoided.

It was noted that whilst it is duty on LA to have regard to Registers, Planning is process driven – CB is not a magic answer and a field is not a plot. The site has to stand on it's own two feet.

Session 2

Session 2 kicked off by considering stakeholders in the provision of plots for custom build.

Following on from the first session there was agreement for the need for greater engagement and joining up of stakeholders. However it is clear we need also to consider consumer demand in the equation.

Consumer aspiration and reason to custom build will vary but regardless key will be equating build and plot price to worth or sales value. There is a clear need to educate and get the message out to the masses. Customers (demand) will be driven investment in design – option to vary by Design Guide or Code is crucial. Also need to relate ft² equity. Self-builders do not have advantage of developers supply chain prices so this needs to be reflected in plot price.

The connection to SME was again recognised.

The barriers/difficulties in delivering affordable housing via self-build route (self-build a rented plot/ are custom build already not affordable in sweat equity aspiration?)

Focus turned to the provision of larger 'garden village' sites , and the challenges and opportunities for Tresham Garden Village.

Careful consideration required as to who build and self builds on a larger site. There is a clear need for co-ordination between designers and construction teams. Also again the need for negotiation, dialogue and engagement at all levels allowing enough time prior to delivery. The role and need for a well-constructed Design Guide is even more important on larger sites.

On smaller ,or windfall , sites there are opportunities for plots missed as they may not be considered as too small numbers. It is important for an expert to coach or give consideration to potential 'good sites' which may be missed (i.e. will not come through without guidance/confidence of delivery – see previous). This is something SME's can often bring for consideration or alternatively can be issued by LA to consider. This approach has been promoted by South Cambs in their Strategic Plan.

There is opportunity by relaxing provisions flexibility can be made to village plans which could provide numbers of small scale additions needed to meet local needs.

Alternatively custom build can deliver opportunity to vary layouts meeting demand for first time buyers or down-sizing aging local community who then do not leave village life.

Finally in summing up challenges two key issues were raised:-

1. Taxation issues with Custom Build land development are complex and appear unfair compared to 'standard development'. This is a major challenge for Government to address but warrants consideration to enable comparison of like with like.
2. It is recognised that some LA's are setting ambitions very high compared to others who are looking to avoid. Promoting the Register must not be seen as a negative thing and LA's who set sites higher should not be considered to fail in their duties if not achieving all targets.

Next step..... let's work out how we connect and join up the consumer to the forum!

