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Lobby for local self-build plots

HOW TO LIVE IN 2013

Change is afoot this year. Get your head around it all with our guide to latest building legislation, current lifestyle trends and smart eco solutions *Words Luke Tebbutt*



JOIN FORCES
Tap the new group-building fund

Barbara Corsico/ODOS Architects; Alexander James; Thomas Stewart; Chris Tubbs; Rachel Whiting

The past few years have been fairly tough for the housing market, but 2013 could just be a golden time for grand designing. There's great news for budding builders, with the Government pinning its hopes for economic growth on construction, and seeing self-building as a vital cog. Currently, only about 14,000 homes are self-built in the UK each year – one of the lowest numbers in Europe – but there are more than 100,000 Brits looking for plots. There are plans to unlock this demand with more funding, more land, and relaxing of planning regulations. New-builds aside, there's scope for anyone keen to improve their home, be that through a daring extension, an on-trend open-plan scheme or an eco-friendly makeover. Take, for instance, the proposed changes to permitted development and the long-awaited schemes to encourage the installation of renewable technologies. Here's how to make the next 12 months work for you, whatever the size of your project. →



GO GREEN
Save money with new eco incentives

BUILD NEW



As part of reformed planning laws, local authorities now have a duty to measure demand for self-build land (previously, they had only to measure demand for private and social housing) – and they have to do this by March 2013. If there is demonstrable demand, the authority will be obliged to make provision for it, which could mean setting land aside for self-builders, encouraging projects on existing council land, or easing planning restrictions – so now is the time to make yourself heard.

‘Get organised and lobby your local authority between now and March. If there is a survey or register to gauge demand, make sure you contribute,’ urges Ted Stevens, chair of the National Self Build Association (nasba.org.uk). He and Kevin McCloud are also pushing for a scheme that will let self-builders acquire Government-owned land, and pay for it once they have secured a mortgage on their finished home. It’s called Build Now, Pay Later, and is already in place for big house-building companies. ‘It would make a huge difference for self-builders,’ says Stevens. For the latest developments, keep an eye on the Department for Communities and Local Government website (0303 444 0000; communities.gov.uk) and the Self Build Portal (selfbuildportal.org.uk).

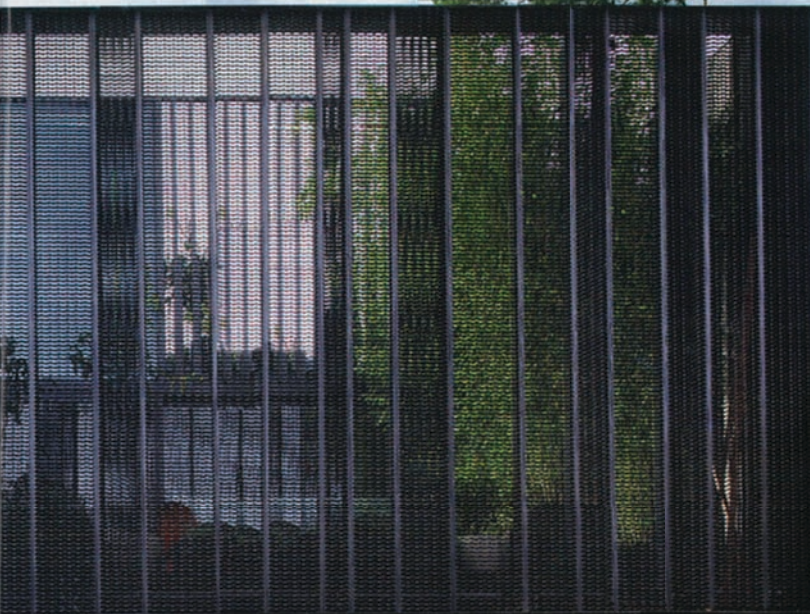
◀ Design-and-build company Solidspace (020 7234 0222; solidspace.co.uk) works with self-builders to create bespoke homes designed for twenty-first century living, with split-level open-plan layouts; it also offers a land-finding service



The Government sees self-build as a way to drive up the quality and sustainability of housing. London's first certified Passivhaus by Bere Architects (020 7241 1064; bere.co.uk) is a perfect example, offering a 90 per cent saving on heating, compared with existing houses



JOIN FORCES



Two years ago, housing minister Grant Shapps called for 'a self-build revolution', and asked industry experts, including Kevin McCloud, for recommendations. One of them was to make more finance available for group builds (which are common in other European countries such as Germany, but difficult to secure a loan for in the UK). The result is a new £30million fund to provide short-term loans for groups building at least five homes.

If you are a self-builder looking to pool together with others, or a small builder sitting on land you cannot afford to develop, this could be just the ticket to help you realise your plans. Groups must meet certain criteria (check the scheme information for details) and loans will only cover 75 per cent of costs, up to £187,500 per home, and will be capped at £3million per scheme. The money must be repaid by an agreed date, or once you secure a mortgage or a sale on a serviced plot or finished building.

The fund closes on 31 March 2015, but the expectation is that banks will use the model to offer similar loans after this date. The Government has also released seven plots for group builds – in Bristol, Hertfordshire, Derbyshire, Surrey, Stoke-on-Trent, Milton Keynes and Cornwall – to help kick-start the scheme. For more information, or to apply, visit homesandcommunities.co.uk/ourwork/custom-build. →

Ben Blossom; Barbara Corsico/ODOS Architects; Tim Crockier

◀ David O'Shea from CDOS Architects (+353 1 672 5300; odosarchitects.com) pooled together with two others to build three striking mews homes in an industrial area of Dublin's city centre, which replaced three lock-up garages. Each home has 190sqm of living space. The economies of scale helped to keep down the cost of the build