

Building Your Own Home

Contributed by Jonnyboy

For most of us, the first step on the road to downsizing involves relocating to a rural environment. It may be miles from anywhere, a nice local village or the outskirts of a town where you currently live.

One option open to downsizers on a budget is to buy land and then contract a builder, a 'self-build' project. The basics of planning permission When purchasing land, you can either buy agricultural land and apply for outline planning permission (OPP) or purchase land on which OPP has already been granted - There will be a huge difference in price! Agricultural land can sell for as little as £2k per acre. 1 acre plots with OPP can sell for well over £100k. As an example our 1.5 acre plot in Northern Ireland was bought for £42.5K

If you buy a plot with OPP, it's important to remember that whilst this gives you permission in principle to build a house, it will be subject to strict restrictions. You may be only able to build a bungalow, the floor area may be restricted, the height will probably be restricted and finishes, window types, porches and even location within your chosen plot will be controlled. Details of these will be contained within the OPP. Ask for a copy from the estate agents when looking at sites

It's very important to note that you have to apply for detailed planning permission within three years of the OPP being granted, this means submitting your finalised plans. So think carefully before buying a plot that was passed 21/2 years ago. Permission can be re-granted but there are no guarantees.

Once detailed planning has been passed you must commence work within five years. Pitfalls when choosing a site OPP confers no guarantees! It's essential that you utilise a solicitor in the same way that you would for a house purchase.

We nearly bought a site that was at the end of a private lane. The solicitor's background checks found that the owner of the site had no legal right for vehicular access.

Likewise you need to check the availability of key services such as water or electricity. If you have to run water half a mile you could pay £10k for the privilege. You also need to get permission to cross neighbouring lands.

Consider the siting of your house, slopes, trees and existing buildings will add cost to your build. They may also adversely affect the foundations required.

The type of soil will also effect the type of foundations and hence the cost.

Basic of house design & finance Despite the constraints of your OPP, you will have quite a lot of scope in the design department. Depending on your budget you will either want to design in individuality or design out cost!

As a rough rule of thumb, a standard house can be built for approximately £50 per square foot, or sometimes even less. As an example a 1500 sq. ft house would have two double and two single bedrooms or three good sized bedrooms (12 x 14) and could be finished to a basic specification for £75k

Of course this gives you a basic finish, no carpets, curtains, painting and a basic B & Q kitchen.

A few ways in which you can massively add to the cost of your build are below;
More than four external corners Dormer windows Curved internal walls Extra bathrooms, ensuite Bespoke/curved staircases Bespoke fitted kitchens Hi spec wiring Natural stone exteriors Stone or natural wood flooring. Garages, outhouses, summerhouses Agas, rayburns, Underfloor heating

One way to help control your budget is to have your plans professionally costed. This can cost as little as £35.00 and some builders merchants like Travis Perkins will do it for free if you purchase your materials from them. As an example I have a spreadsheet of my build costs available if anyone would like to PM me.

Initial costs Before you even start digging you will have expended a significant amount of cash, Solicitors fees will run to at least £1k, your architect can cost between £800 and £3k and you will have to pay the planning dept approx. £500 when you submit your detailed plans (non refundable if it is refused)

On top of that you may have to purchase the land from your own finance, although certain self build mortgages will cover a proportion of the land purchase cost.

Self build mortgages are normally released in stage payments, in arrears, so it's important to ensure that you have adequate finance to support the initial build phases.

Conclusion

From reading this you may be convinced that self build is a potential nightmare, it is a difficult route to take that involves a huge amount of planning. The key is to be realistic about what you can achieve and ensure you take every step with your eyes open.

However, given careful planning it is perfectly possible to build a four bedroom house on 1.5 acres for £150k. If you are looking to downsize on a budget then self build may be the way to achieve your dreams.

I'll be posting further in depth articles on this subject as time progresses and if there is sufficient interest.

Links

www.buildstore.co.uk
www.self-build.co.uk
www.selfbuild.co.uk

Recommended reading

The Housebuilder's Bible