

► Self or Group Build?

Group self build can result in significant savings, sometimes as much as 40%, and you can have a say in creating a wider community but beware, group builds are often complex to get off the ground and complications/disputes can arise that are difficult and time-consuming to resolve.

► Location, Location, Location

Each plot is unique.

The plot you choose, its size and location, will depend on or shape your budget.

An average plot size for most small self builders is around 20 x 30m or 12 x 55m, slightly larger than most suburban housing estates.

Plot values vary enormously and depend on many diverse factors such as accessibility, flat or steeply sloping, links to statutory service connections, planning restrictions, covenants, proximity to annoyances such as busy roads, sewage works, noisy industry etc.

Plot location can also affect your build costs with the South East being the most expensive. Generally the more remote rural areas are cheaper, with land and construction costs considerably lower.

► How much to build?

You need to consider both present and future family needs before choosing the size of your property.

Don't just build big – not only will it cost you more to build, but you'll also end up paying more to heat it and probably more in Council Tax too.

Roughly:

2 Beds	70 – 80 m ²
3 Beds	100 – 120 m ²
3 / 4 Beds	150 m ²
4 Bed/Executive	200 – 300 m ²

► Design

You could design it yourself, but don't underestimate the difficulties. There are a lot of formal approvals and certification issues to contend with.

The appointment of an architect can help steer you through this minefield and, at the same time, help you to crystallise your ideas into a functional plan that works for both you and your budget.

The appearance of the building will be the result of many factors from the site context, orientation, the plan form and choice of materials down to individual preference. Your architect will advise you on any planning restrictions which may affect the design.

► Approvals

1. Planning

In order to build your proposals you will need to achieve a full/detail planning approval for your plans. This can be achieved in two ways:

a) Approval of Reserved Matters

If your site is a plot within a larger estate, then the whole site is likely to have an Outline Approval with certain conditions, which will affect what you can build and where. One of these conditions will be to submit further details on the 'Appearance' of your particular plot. This is called a 'Reserved Matters' Application. This requires just enough information to describe your dwelling as the site parameters have already been set out under the terms of the Outline Approval. The Planning fee will be £385.00 per dwelling.

b) Detail Planning Approval

If you decide you want to increase the size of your unit so that it no longer relates to any Outline Approval that might be available, or the site has no extant planning history, then you will require a Full/Detail Planning Approval in order to build your house. This is a stand alone application requiring a much greater level of detail than a Reserved Matters Application. The Planning Fee is again £385.00 per dwelling.

You could do this yourself, but don't underestimate the requirements of your Local Authority to achieve a validated application. They will generally require drawings, to a recognisable and appropriate scale, to show the full extent of the scheme, from site location plan, site plan, floor plans, elevations and sections to written statements to describe the design intent and accessibility issues. There may be other issues you will need to address depending upon the sensitivities of your site, such as a tree report, site access / safety audit, heritage report to show the impact of your proposals if sited within a conservation area, etc. Your architect / Local Planner can advise you on any particular requirements for your site.

Once you have achieved your permission, take note of any conditions that need to be discharged before you can start on site. This may involve taking samples of your final choice of materials/colour schemes etc. into the planning office to providing details of drainage connections for approval. And don't forget, your permission is purely for the design / drawings that were submitted. You will need to comply fully with those details or apply separately to have any changes approved. Failure to do so may result in enforcement to comply. Finally, be aware that your permission has a time limit (3 years) so, time to get building!

