

BUILDSTORE WELCOMES SUPPORT FOR SELF BUILD

SELF build specialist BuildStore has welcomed the Conservatives' plan to help rural communities get on the housing ladder through self build (launched Friday 4th December) and has already begun a self build pilot scheme of its own.

Shadow housing minister Grant Shapps said he wants to tap into the vast number of people living in rural communities priced out of the housing market, and recognises that self building is an ideal way to achieve affordable homes in these areas.

Last year, the National Housing Federation (NHF) and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) reported that nearly 700,000 people are waiting for affordable homes in England's rural towns and villages, up more than a third on 2003 (507,757).

The Conservatives launched their plan in Rock, Cornwall, said to be one of the least affordable places in the world, after figures revealed that six of the 10 least affordable places to live are in rural areas, with many villagers forced to settle elsewhere.

Under their plans, local authorities will set up a register of families who are interested in building their own homes. The council will then assess how much land needs to be set aside for each self build community to be set up.

Grant Shapps said: "Across the country {self builders are} creating affordable homes in the very places young families struggle with sky high house prices. We want to see a self build movement spread across the country and particularly come to the rescue in rural areas. Local authorities will use the assessment of interest in self build to help kick-start this rural housing revolution."

BuildStore has already laid foundations for this revolution, partnering with Swindon Borough Council to launch an exclusive pilot scheme new self build development of up to 14 houses in 2010. BuildStore will act as lead facilitator on this pioneering scheme, and will offer a tailored support package, including finance, discounts on building materials, project management support, and access to the educational features, exhibits and independent experts at the National Self Build & Renovation Centre in Swindon. This pilot scheme is being launched with a view to national roll-out to provide thousands of new homes across the UK, with BuildStore providing support for each project through its National and Scottish Visitor Centre's and range of specialist products and services.

As the facilitator of the Swindon Borough Council pilot project, BuildStore is bringing together and delivering all the necessary services, products and support needed, and stresses that a support infrastructure will also be required to create the self build 'revolution' the Tories are hoping for; one which encompasses education, information, funding and a robust construction supply chain. Raymond Connor, BuildStore's Chief Executive, explains:

"It's encouraging that the Conservatives have highlighted the need for more affordable housing in rural communities and recognise self build as a solution to this problem. However, it will take more than collating a register of interested parties. Expanding the self build housing market will require a significant support framework that involves government, local authorities, lenders, and the construction industry.

"BuildStore already has over 80,000 people looking for self build plots in the UK, and we help thousands more access the funds they need, and provide information and advice through our National and Scottish Visitor Centre's every year."

"For the Tories plans' to be put into action, people will need education, advice, support and access to the right tools to build the homes they want. We welcome the opportunity to work with central government, local authorities and individuals to deliver these large-scale self build schemes, working as a facilitator to provide support and services, whether it's education through self build courses and our visitor Centres; tactical support through project management and materials procurement; or arranging the finance to fund the project," he concludes.

As a specialist provider of self build services, including mortgage finance, for over ten years, BuildStore has become concerned about the lack of money allocated to self build by lenders. It has called for an increase in self build lending, particularly from state-funded banks, in the face of increasing demand from frustrated homeowners over the last year. Mr Connor adds:

"Building a home from scratch requires a positive cash-flow, with money released in stages throughout the build, so specialist funding is needed. We believe that these plans for large-scale self build are an ideal opportunity for state-funded banks and local building societies to allocate funds for self build mortgages, as funding will prove one of the biggest obstacles, especially in expensive rural areas.

"Without the funding from lenders, these self build schemes will simply not be an option for many people. If the Tories are serious about self build on this scale, and they are successful in the next election, they should perhaps insist that state-funded banks allocate funding for these schemes. Once local authorities have identified sites, self build finance should be readily available and accessible for self builders to purchase their plots and get started with their build."

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

About BuildStore

BuildStore is at the heart of the UK's self build and renovation sector, with a bespoke end-to-end offering of products and services, specifically designed to help self builders and renovators throughout their projects.

BuildStore's core services include:

- Land finding via PlotSearch, the UK's largest and most accurate online database of building plots, renovations and conversions. There are approximately 6,000 plots, renovations and conversions available, constantly validated for accuracy and include aerial photography
- Financial Services - BuildStore is the UK's leading provider of tailored self build and renovation mortgages, allowing funds to be released in stages throughout the project giving positive cash flow. Mortgages are sold direct to the public and via intermediaries and BuildStore currently arranges over £500 million in mortgages each year
- Buying materials - BuildStore's TradeCard provides over 3,000 members with discounts and offers of building materials, plant and tool hire from leading suppliers and builder's merchants, by combining the buying power of the UK's self builders and renovators
- The UK's first and only National Self Build & Renovation Centre, opened in February 2007 in Swindon; an impressive 67,000 sq ft Centre designed to educate, inform and inspire self builders and renovators.

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