

# An Englishman's home is his self built **Castle**

Architect Benjamin Richards believes that the Callcutt Review of housebuilding may have missed a golden opportunity to promote self build in the UK.

**T**he Callcutt Review, commissioned in December 2006 by the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Ruth Kelly and released last month, raises some compelling points on local planning in this country. Initially it seemed to make good sense but on further consideration, I am left with an unnerving feeling that this review is confined to housebuilding from a volume housebuilder's point of view.

If there is to be a major review, surely it ought to include all viewpoints in order to evaluate which is best for the environment and the community. John Callcutt calls for better use of resources, suggesting that local authorities should work and partner with a preferred developer. I completely agree that resources can be better used and that private working with the public can create some extremely successful solutions. But I believe that partnering with a developer is not the answer. This would effectively eliminate competition and would need tight legislation to force the developer to deliver the required standard of housing.

I believe there is a better solution. The local authorities could partner one or more local architects, and include them in the planning process. The key to how we advance good housing stock in this country is setting out master plans for cities, towns and villages and promoting good design and integrated thinking.

There is another answer as well, which is often overlooked – self build. The Callcutt Review is critical of the quality and environmental performance of houses provided by volume house builders. Yet the self build sector is ahead of the game when it comes to some of the key areas highlighted within the review for improvement, such as quality of design and build, environmental qualities, and sustainability.

The self build market currently accounts for around 20,000 homes per year, which amounts to 12.5% of the 160,000 homes completed in 2006. The report assumes this figure to be static and that of the future target of 240,000 new homes, only 7.5% will be self built – a net reduction!

It makes sense that the self build market must be increased, and whilst mentioned several times within the report there are no suggestions as to how to increase this

method of procurement. Certainly after hearing the presentation and reading the review, there is a real danger of less land being made available to selfbuilders, especially for groups of houses – which tend to be the most sustainable.

By 'self build' I include all forms of bespoke housing and refurbishment. These should be a key part of the delivery of the required housing stock given the inherent benefits of the self build route. While a developer will always have one, or indeed both, eyes on the bottom line, in my experience selfbuilders who commission an architect to design a home, and in most cases fight for planning permission, are creating a sustainable development, that functions efficiently, makes best use of materials, and will be built to a high quality. It is obvious that this method of procurement is most suited to delivering the type of home the government wants.

## Role of selfbuilders

Indeed most other European countries have a much greater prevalence of self build projects; it is only Britain that seems to have adopted the developer as its main housing provider.

My main concern is that the government will take an aspect of the report and run with it without examining the question it first asked, and of whom it was asked.

It is worth remembering that John Callcutt was chief executive of major householder Crest Nicholson Plc 1991-2005, and is now deputy chairman.

His presentation last month seemed to be widely welcomed by his panel of speakers, and those lucky few who were selected to ask a question, each of whom he knew by name. Yet I can't help feeling a little cynical after the event, given the generous amount of back-slapping that went on.

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For Bob Matthews' comments on the Callcutt Review see page 75.



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