

CASE STUDY: THE GREEN, INGOLDISTHORPE

INTRODUCTION

A 10-plot custom build site, with two additional affordable homes, brought on by custom build enabler [LIVEDIN](#) in [Ingoldisthorpe](#), Norfolk. Buyers purchase directly from the landowner and commission their own home.



THE NEARLY-COMPLETED SITE, WITH HOMES SET AROUND THE NEW PUBLIC AMENITY SPACE AND POND. CREDIT: LIVEDIN

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- For planning, explain that the application is for custom and self-build (CSB) housing and that it accords with the definition, setting out how it does this.
- A well-put together Design Code can bridge the gap between design freedoms and control, which can reassure planners and neighbours about what will be built.
- Consider how affordable housing requirements will be delivered, and what policy requires of these, as registered providers may not wish to engage with small unit numbers.
- A communications strategy is an important aspect of any CSB application/scheme. Engagement with potential purchasers of plots early will help build support and evidence of local demand for CSB generally and the site specifically. It also facilitates earlier community engagement and buy in. As part of this approach, create a webpage early on to ensure you are tracking local demand. This gives you an audience to market to for plot sales and acts as a secondary source of demand.
- The enabler and the LPA should liaise early in regards to proposed planning conditions to ensure their compatibility with the proposed self-build delivery model. Phasing and delivery responsibility (whether by landowner or self-builder) is different on custom build sites and this needs careful consideration.

SITE DETAILS

The 1.16 hectare site (location PE31 6TR) is former grazing land, owned by a local landowner. Outline Planning Permission was approved for residential on land at Lynn Road, Ingoldisthorpe – allowed on appeal in 2016 (lpa ref: 15/00854/OM) with a reserved matters – major application (ref: 18/02200/RMM) setting out additional detail in line with the Design Code in 2019.

“Applying for full planning permission with a Design Code allowed for a balance between creating a coherent streetscape and protecting the neighbours’ amenity vs a good degree of design freedom. This ensures that buyers can proceed immediately on plot purchase, rather than having to submit individual reserved matters.”

Charlie de Bono, Founder, LIVEDIN



LEFT: THE PLAN FOR THE SITE. RIGHT: PART OF THE MATERIALS PALETTE FROM THE DESIGN CODE. CREDIT: LIVEDIN/PROJECT ORANGE

PLANNING CONTEXT AND PROCESS

Custom build enabler LIVEDIN obtained the site with outline planning permission for standard market housing in place, previously granted to the landowner at appeal due to issues with the five-year housing supply. LIVEDIN suggested a self-build route for the Reserved Matters application, which would have multiple benefits for both the landowner and the new community.

LIVEDIN’s application was for 10 custom build homes for the open market, with two plots for affordable housing, with an initial mix of 7 x 4 bed; 3 x 3 bed and 2 x 2 bed homes (with the latter forming the affordable units).

The proposal included the enlargement of an existing pond, together with new public space (at least 50%) to create a new village green and new vehicular access points to each adjoining road. It also made provision for a management company to be set up to oversee the new public and shared spaces upon hand over, funded by the homeowners.

The application for serviced plots used a Design Code [available on the council’s website] that allowed for limited external customisation on front elevations, which included permissible variations for window designs and sizes and a palette of external materials.

At the time of the application the [Borough Council of King’s Lynn and West Norfolk](#) had a [Self-Build & Custom House Building Action Plan](#), (November 2018) that was being developed into a set of draft policies within the 2019 Emerging Local Plan, which was broadly supportive of custom and self-build. In addition, the then emerging

policy LP26 (now LP31-Residential Development Reasonably Related to Existing Settlements, emerging plan) encouraged custom build by giving additional weight to schemes adjacent to settlement boundaries. However, this is limited to minor development, meaning this project would not have been compliant. This policy is still part of the local plan review.

DEVELOPMENT MODEL

LIVEDIN is custom build enabler that works with landowners to deliver serviced plots where the landowner sells directly to the plot buyer. Each buyer then acts as a self-builder, commissioning a specialist to deliver the build, which must be designed within the parameters set out in the Design Code.

This allows development without a developer, making it a more cost-effective model for housebuilding, as it allows landowners to process their land, with the help of an enabler, and sell directly to end users. As an enabler, LIVEDIN oversaw the design and consultation and secured the final planning permission, prior to installing the infrastructure and shared landscaping.

MARKETING

To test demand LIVEDIN set up a simple website, shared on social media, that received over 1,100 unique visitors within a few weeks. At the time the council had 132 people on its local council register.

Visitors were encouraged to fill out a short questionnaire about what they wanted in terms of involvement (below). This indicated demand preferences that helped inform LIVEDIN’s approach.

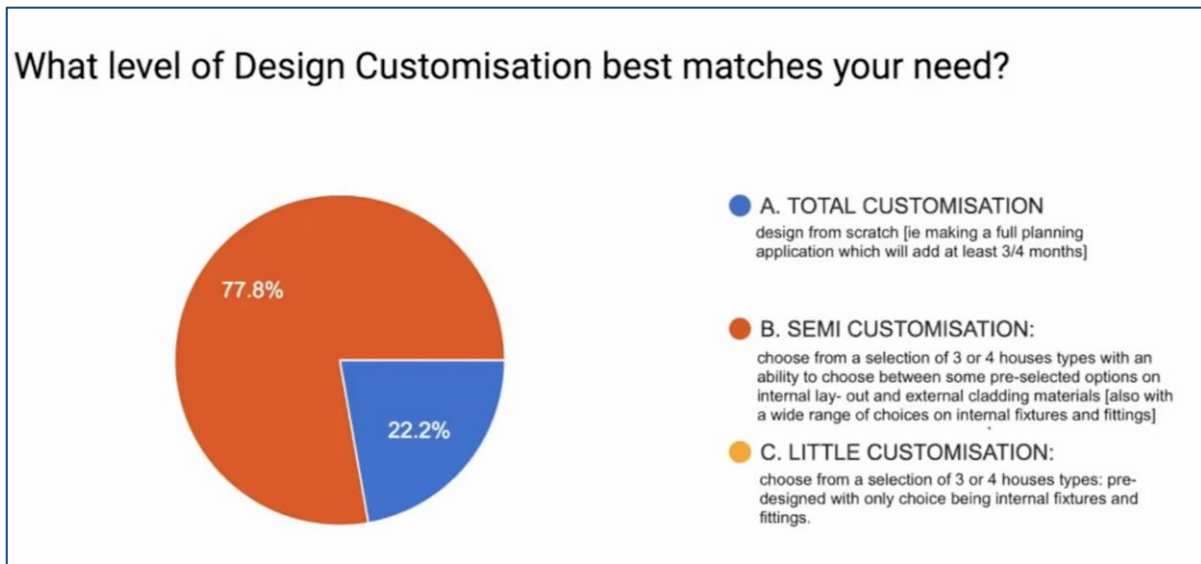


FIGURE 1: CUSTOMER PREFERENCE QUESTIONNAIRE ON AMOUNT OF CUSTOMISATION

DESIGN

Architectural practice Project Orange designed the scheme of low-density, detached homes arranged around an existing pond on a greenfield site on the edge of the village. The council’s Core Strategy required two affordable homes, which were designed as semi-detached homes.

The design for the low-density homes drew on the local vernacular, with the LPA wanting traditional references that avoided pastiche. Consequently, the homes are a modern interpretation that use locally-suitable materials to fit in with the locality.

The Design Code allowed for customisation of the exterior material selections, window and door arrangements, and included options for solar panels. The Planning Committee noted¹: “It is considered that by restricting the customisation elements to external materials and fenestration it provides the balance between offering flexibility and individual expression for buyers but within carefully controlled parameters.”

Homes were designed with indicative internal layouts, but buyers had the freedom internally when it came to their final scheme, as well as greater freedoms on rear elevations. However, they did need to meet the planning requirement for the housing mix in terms of the number of bedrooms required.

Because the Design Code provided more opportunity to create a scheme that read as a collective, LIVEDIN did not want to use Plot Passports, which gave the planners more assurance about the outcome. This was important as the corner site was visible to the wider village.

DELIVERY

Delivery was phased, starting with the installation of infrastructure and plot delineation, followed by the delivery of the houses by each self-builder. The road was then finished and the temporary contractor parking removed.

The Outline Planning Permission stipulated two affordable dwellings, with the Core Strategy dictating one intermediate and one rented. However, LIVEDIN struggled to get a registered provider (RP) to take on responsibility for just two affordable homes, nor would they build them out, meaning that the landowner had to build these out. This is an ongoing issue for small- and medium-self-build sites that neither have a main contractor nor provide enough affordable units to be viable for most RPs to be able to bid on them. An alternative approach could be either off-site contributions or, better, to discount land value in perpetuity on discounted plots.

There was another issue, in that the LPA policy contained a trigger point for when affordable units must be handed over to the RP – before 50-70% of the plots could be occupied. Due to the problems of securing an RP this delayed the entire project, and penalised the self-builders with something that was outside their control.

TIMEFRAME

Initial outline planning permissioned the site for housing in 2016, with the reserved matters application granted in April 2019. Following Covid delays, the infrastructure works were completed in 2020. All plots were sold within the first year with the first buyers starting on site at the start of 2021. The first plots were occupied in 2022 with the rest due for completion in 2023.

¹ <https://democracy.west-norfolk.gov.uk/documents/b12906/Planning%20Committee%20-%201%20April%202019%20-%20Report%20marked%20to%20follow%201st-Apr-2019%2010.15%20Planning%20Committee.pdf?T=9>

TASK FORCE STATEMENT

The Green at Ingoldisthorpe demonstrates that custom and self build housing can be built on the edge of settlements that are sustainable, and even in sensitive locations. A Design Code can address concerns and provide the level of control when an LPA needs to maintain high levels of design, scale, and density.

LIVEDIN'S application did just this, but it is important to bear in mind that the statutory definition of custom and self-build requires initial owners to have input into the design of their home. In this case, the Design Code meant that buyers only had limited, controlled input into the design of the front elevations.

This reflects a division in how many people see custom and self-build, and where individual schemes sit in relation to this definition. But much of the sector is on a spectrum, and solely using a Design Code with customisable elements is a practical solution in areas where 100% design freedoms, framed in a Plot Passport, would be unpalatable locally. These could be in Conservation Areas, Special Landscape Areas, AONB or edge of settlement sites where the character of the locality warrants a particular approach to design. In such a case it be a decision that the LPA balances carefully in accordance with local and national policy.

In the case of The Green, Ingoldisthorpe, the freedom to configure the interiors and the fact that homes were commissioned by the owners once the plot was purchased redresses this balance around input into primary design, as the process of individual commissioning remains true to self-build.

See the [Task Force's Planning Guidance Note 1.2](#) for more on definitions, and factors that can help identify custom and self-build as distinct from standard spec-built housing.

As part of its initial application LIVEDIN created a 17-page report: *The Case for Custom Build* to explain the model and its benefits to the LPA planners and local communities (available in the planning application documents on the council's website). Such supportive documents can help facilitate engagement, as many people, including professionals and members of the public, do not have experience of custom and self-build.

This development also stresses the fact that affordable housing is a key issue for custom and self-build, especially on smaller sites where an RP is less likely to want to take on fewer than four units, for example, due to costs and management issues. LPAs can take a different approach and seek serviced plots that are sold at below market value so that the purchaser, who is on the LPA housing register, can buy the plot.

This approach has worked with the Shropshire model which has been in existence for more than a decade. These houses then remain in perpetuity below market value and can only be sold with written permission from the LPA, as they would count as part of the overall affordable housing provision. Find out more in our case study about [Shropshire's single plot exception site policy](#).

ABOUT THE DEVELOPER

LIVEDIN is a team of custom build enablers and architects. They promote land on behalf of landowners securing planning permissions for custom build homes, with 'ready to build' plots selling on the open market.

The company enables the site from appraisal to overseeing the installation of infrastructure and sale of plots to self-builders ready to complete their homes as they choose. This is why they call what they do 'development without developers'.

You can see the progress of one of the homes at The Green on Instagram: [@ournorfolkselfbuild](#)