



The Homebuilders Insight Report

origin
DOORS AND WINDOWS



Foreword

The way in which we use our homes has fundamentally changed, with our personal and working lives intertwining more than ever before. This means that what consumers want, and are starting to expect, from their homes is shifting, and housebuilders need to adjust and respond, and do so quickly, in order to keep up.

One area of change that is becoming ever-clearer is the shift towards sustainable products and ethical practices being a necessity amongst all parts of a consumer's life. This includes their homes. They care about what materials are used and where the products come from, and are more educated than ever on a business' 'green' credentials. Those proactive homebuilders that appreciate this, and prioritise a sustainable approach will reap the rewards from a demanding and challenging marketplace.

On top of this, the increasingly stringent UK building regulations being introduced through the planning and build phases, mean housebuilders and developers need to be utilising products and services that not only help them meet the current guidelines, but exceed them, futureproofing the business against further changes.

With a major focus on 'building back better', housebuilders and consumers are continuing to support British companies wherever possible. This might not be a new trend, but it has been exacerbated by the uncertainty surrounding first Brexit and then the COVID pandemic. 'Buying British' is a movement that continues to gather pace.

To help housebuilders during this time of change, we have asked a series of leading experts to share their insights into some of the industry's hottest topics. We have curated their thoughts into this Report which features a series of articles. The subjects include the evolving buyer, retrofitting, accessibility, mental health and the importance of sustainability. Thank you to all the contributors who have authored an article.

By bringing a disparate array of thinking into one place, we hope you find this document helpful as your business squares up to the changing face of housebuilding. If you'd like to find out more about the role we can play, then do get in touch with me.

Victoria Brocklesby

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About Origin

Origin is the UK's leading manufacturer of bespoke aluminium bi-folding, sliding and residential doors and premium quality windows; complementary products that make up the Origin Home range.

The company was founded in 2001 by cousins, Neil Ginger and Victoria Brocklesby, with the ambition to create a company capable of manufacturing the UK's best doors and windows, backed by uncompromising levels of service.



Since then, Origin has worked relentlessly to perfect the design and functionality of its Home range, and to create and maintain the highly respected reputation for quality and service that it is synonymous with today.

At Origin, personal service and attention to detail is everything. High standards of craftsmanship and uncompromising levels of service, together with industry-leading initiatives, have positioned Origin as one of the UK's leading home brands. This was officially recognised in 2020 when Origin was awarded the Queen's Award for Enterprise: International Trade, and then again in 2021, when Origin won 'Product Innovation & Design' at The Manufacturer MX Awards.



As a British manufacturer, Origin has complete control over its operations, from sourcing through to design, manufacture and delivery, and always strives for the highest standards. This is apparent given its entire product range, excluding the sliding doors, became Secured by Design accredited. Rigorous quality testing at each stage of the manufacturing process means that everything that leaves the state-of-the-art UK factory is at a consistently high standard. This allows for an industry-leading guarantee of up to 20 years to be offered.

Origin is completely unique in its ability to be able to offer a 'Your Lead Time, Not Ours' zero lead time service, which means that when a product is ordered in one of the popular colours, it can be delivered the very next day.

As the business has continued to grow and diversify, the foundations of family ethos, pride and ownership in all stages of production firmly remain.



Contributors



Cat Smith
Director & Co-Founder at Pixel

After a career in housebuilding and developing and seeing a gap in the market, Cat Smith and business partner Steve Smith founded PropTech company, Pixel, in 1996. Since then, the award-winning company has grown from a two-person family business into an employer of 40 staff and more than £1.6bn worth of properties have been showcased through its cutting-edge platform, the Pixel HomeSelector.

The Pixel HomeSelector has been used by hundreds of developments to allow potential buyers to browse newbuild projects online. Buyers can walk virtually through each property with and without furnishings, walk around the streets of the development, see birds-eye perspectives of plots and floorplans, compare and shortlist multiple properties, and click to book a house without having to leave their kitchen table.

Data gathered through this platform gives Pixel a unique depth of insight into evolving buyer behaviour.



Matthew Richards
Partner at Ridge and Partners LLP

Matthew is an Architect and Partner at Ridge & Partners LLP, a national Multi-Disciplinary Design Consultancy and is based in its HQ in Oxford.

Matthew's specialist interests include Sustainable Design and Building Conservation and has a real passion for delivering high quality design solutions that protect our environment for future generations. He has 14 years' experience delivering both new build and refurbishment/retrofit projects across a number of sectors including, Residential, Education, Community, Leisure, Workplace and Heritage.

The retrofit challenge has been an important part of his work, and he has completed research and development projects for Innovate UK, working in partnership with Oxford Brookes University, exploring how to effectively adapt out existing buildings to meet the climate challenge we are facing.

Matthew is currently completing an MSc in Sustainable Building Conservation, to compliment and expand his skillset in delivering projects that specifically involve historically significant buildings.

Contributors



Karen Curtin

Managing Director at Graven Hill Village Development Company

Karen Curtin has been Managing Director of the Graven Hill Village Development Company since 2017, steering the ship to deliver the outcomes of this unique self and custom build project. Through her previous role at Cherwell District Council, Karen has been involved with this pioneering project since the development of the option appraisal in 2013.



Victoria Brocklesby

COO and Co-Founder at Origin

Victoria co-founded Origin in 2002 alongside Neil Ginger and is a key driving force behind Origin's extensive growth and its deep investment in its people. Despite rapid expansion, the business has retained strong family values under her direction, particularly within its internal employee culture. Victoria is responsible for the efficiency of the business and has a passion for how world class innovation in manufacturing can impact climate change. She believes investing in technology will be key to sustainable manufacturing and is leading the charge for Origin to be self-sufficient.



Melissa Balk

Associate at Fisher German

Melissa is a Chartered Member of the RTPI and leads the South East General Practice Planning team at Fisher German. She has worked on a range of projects for both landowners and developers ranging from residential to commercial developments, and has experience in project managing multi-disciplinary planning project teams to secure planning permissions and the successful promotion of sites through emerging Local Plans.



Housebuilders need to adapt to keep up with evolving buyers

Cat Smith

Director & Co-Founder at Pixel

The evolution of the home buyer has been accelerated by COVID-19. Housebuilders would be wise to recognise the change and react quickly, so they don't miss out or get left behind. Cat Smith from Pixel Future, explains...

It feels like a generation ago that Blockbuster went out of business due to its failure to move with the times and keep up with the future-looking, tech-enabled Netflix. Since then, almost all sectors have embraced digital; high-street shopping has moved online, supermarkets do the shopping for you, and practically every restaurant in the country is now offering delivery through one or other of those apps you see during the adverts on primetime TV.

“You can purchase almost anything online these days, and there are some major benefits”.

You can purchase almost anything online these days, and there are some major benefits. Most obviously, you don't need to leave your house, but you also get a lot more information, you can see reviews, you can compare and contrast different products quickly and easily without worrying about what is or isn't in stock. Expert advice is available at the click of a button, and you get everything you need to know about the product you're considering buying before you spend.



From a seller's perspective, the cost is much lower, marketing and remarketing are easier, more targeted and more efficient, and you benefit from all that glorious data to continue to improve your business, whatever it may be.

But the housebuilding market is conspicuously behind on this trend. If you want to buy a new build property in 2021, you have to physically go and see a show home in person. A show home that may be significantly, if not completely, different to the property you're actually intending to buy, from little finishing details all the way up to layouts, orientation and plot size.



Housebuilders need to adapt to keep up with evolving buyers

Needless to say, after the pandemic, buyers are less satisfied with this approach. With people looking to move out of the cities into commuter belts after suffering in lockdown, or just because they no longer need to go to the office as often, having to physically view a show home in person is a massive nuisance. Worse, it's a massive unnecessary nuisance. Likewise, as other markets have become more transparent, buyers are becoming savvier, expecting more information and more certainty before they part with their cash.

Housebuilding is going through something of a Netflix-gate of its own right now, however. Virtual show home software suites, like the Pixel HomeSelector, are bringing new build sales into the 21st Century.

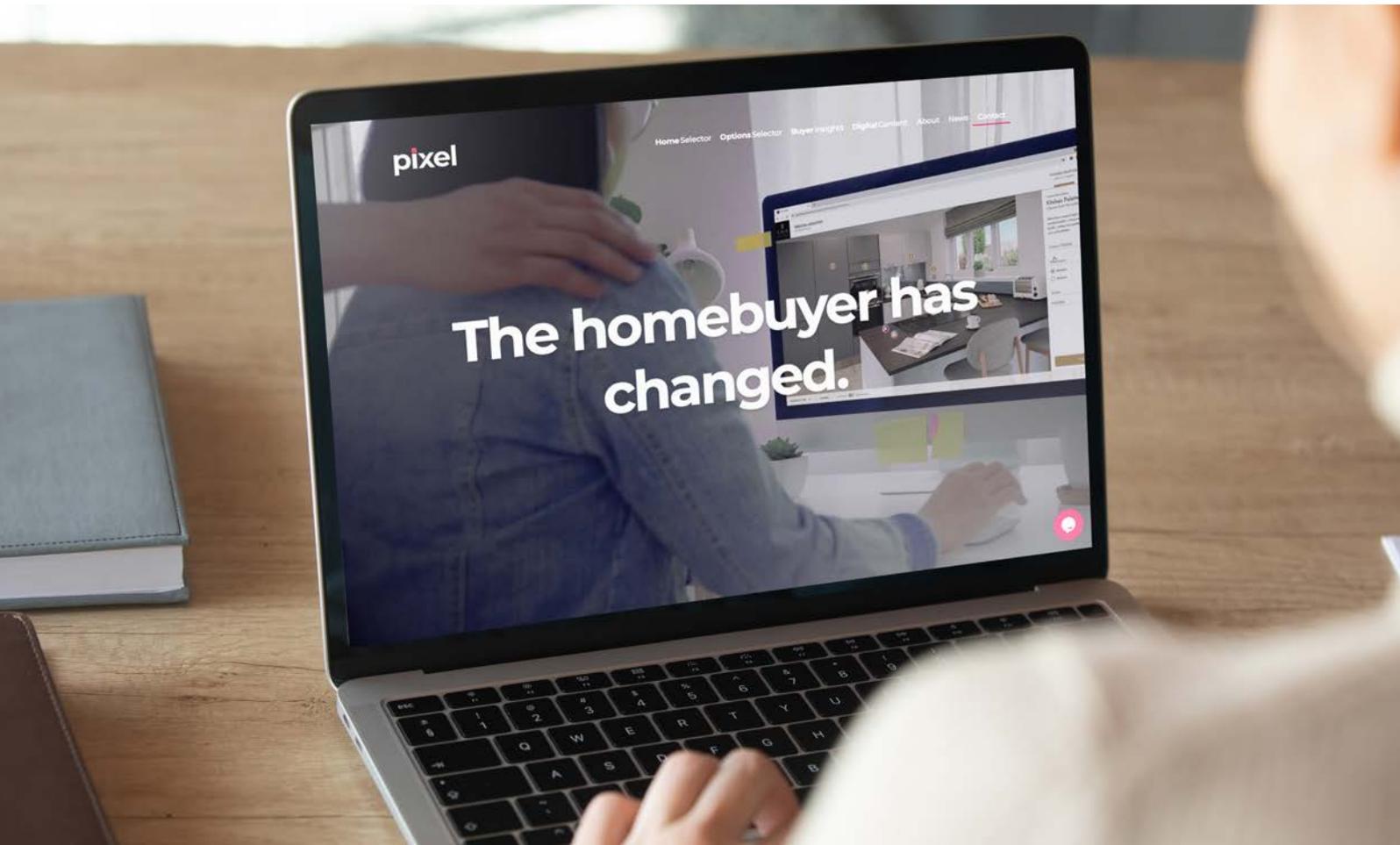
With the Pixel HomeSelector, buyers can browse newbuild projects online. While online, buyers can virtually walk through each property with and without furnishings, walk around the streets of the development, see birds-eye perspectives of plots and floorplans, compare and shortlist multiple properties, and click to reserve a house before they've had a chance to visit the site in person.

It's easy to say how this kind of technology will allow housebuilders to cast their net of potential buyers much further, catching all those people further afield who are interested in moving a long distance, but the more critical benefit is that it allows housebuilders to sell in a way that people have come to expect to be able to buy.

“Housebuilding is going through something of a Netflix-gate of its own right now.”

Additionally, the data is already looking really promising. In a pre-launch commercial trial, Pixel's HomeSelector saw buyers spending up to ten times longer engaging and interacting with properties than before the software was integrated to the homebuilder's site.

Home buyers are changing, housebuilders need to ask themselves if they're ready and prepared for that.





The Domestic Retrofit Challenge

Matthew Richards

Partner at Ridge and Partners LLP

Matthew Richards, Partner at Ridge and Partners, will take a look at the residential retrofit challenge, exploring where the opportunities are and what the challenges look like in order to make this a reality...

Context

The performance of our existing homes and buildings, the amount of energy needed to heat them, and the carbon produced as a result has been a hot topic in national news of late. Agree with the methods or not, the disruptive protests being carried out by ‘Insulate Britain’ demanding urgent action to respond to the climate emergency we are facing has brought the agenda to widespread attention. These protests are being carried out alongside the immediate challenges being caused by the record highs in global gas prices that are risking dramatic increases in household energy bills, of which have the potential to push up to 1.5 million additional homes into fuel poverty in 2022.

To set the context of the challenge, there are an estimated 29 million existing homes in the UK that will still be in use and be part of our housing stock in 2050 when the Government have set the requirement of the UK becoming Carbon Neutral in response to global warming. If we are to achieve these national goals and meet the set requirements, we must start acting now. There have been many positive steps made, with policy and regulatory

advances taken, which have focussed on the performance of both new residential and commercial buildings. A step-change approach to enhancing the Building Regulations has and will continue to drive improved efficiencies and reductions in carbon emissions, but this has not been the same for our existing buildings.

Opportunities and Benefits

It is simply not possible or desirable to replace all our existing homes with efficient new buildings. Forgetting the logistical and resource challenge of doing this, our existing buildings contribute to our national and local communities and heritage in such a valuable way. Taking a sustainability

approach to this agenda, there is also a huge amount of ‘embodied carbon’ captured in the materials from which these buildings are made, so to simply demolish them places any replacement development on a negative starting point in carbon terms. This has been recognised by the UK government when they announced that tackling ‘embodied carbon’ is a key part of its upcoming ‘heating and building strategy’.

‘Retrofitting’ is the obvious answer to this challenge, and this has been proven to deliver a huge range of benefits to households. These include reduced energy bills, better quality homes, and healthier internal environments, which in turn, leads to improved wellbeing.



The Domestic Retrofit Challenge

There are many simple and relatively non-intrusive retrofit solutions that can have a substantial impact on the overall performance of our homes and reduce the levels of CO₂ being emitted. These include ensuring that we have optimised the loft insulation installed, upgrading windows and doors to high performance double or triple glazed systems, sealing 'leaky' structures that allow warm air to escape to the environment and instead adding controlled ventilation solutions.

Equally, simple changes to the controls we have in our homes can effectively drive efficiency and reduce consumption. Most older homes still rely on a single thermostat that controls the entire property. Advances in technology has seen the arrival of 'smart' controls on the market, including wireless thermostats and radiator valves, that can be installed with no disruption and allow 'zones' to be created within our homes, allowing them to operate on different schedules to suit their use. Smart metering provides live detail about the actual energy being used, which enables homeowners to act in an informed way, and can reduce their consumption and energy bills through behavioural changes alone.

In recent months, there have been reports in the media, particularly identifying the poor living conditions of rented properties with condensation, damp, and mould being present. What is often not appreciated is that the cause of these symptoms is typically poor levels of thermal insulation, a lack of adequate ventilation and inadequate heating (which can be linked to fuel poverty). The retrofit agenda will address these issues.

When more extensive projects are being considered, attention should be given to external wall insulation solutions and

to utilising low or zero carbon heating solutions such as heat-pumps. When exploring more expansive retrofit schemes, it is strongly recommended to engage with design specialists. Poorly installed insulation solutions can lead to damaging results in the fabric of the existing building if not done properly. Similarly, replacing gas fuelled central heating, present in 90% of our existing homes, with heat pump alternatives is not a simple process. These alternatives are reliant upon high levels of insulation, and if 'fabric first' measures are not undertaken first, the benefits they can offer will not be realised.

“It is recognised that delivering such a vast retrofit programme comes with some significant challenges”.

Challenges

It is recognised that delivering such a vast retrofit programme comes with some significant challenges. The cost of installing these measures largely sits with homeowners, and whilst they will deliver savings in energy bills, it relies upon homeowners being able to afford to implement the measures in the first place. In October 2021, the Government announced a new grant was being made available to homeowners, offering a £5,000 subsidy to make the switch from gas and install an electrically powered heat-pump. The £450m allocated to the scheme will allow some 90,000 homes to make the switch, but this is a drop in the ocean considering the 25m homes in the UK that are estimated to have gas boilers installed at present.

As previously described, other retrofit measures are also needed to ensure the efficient operation of these heat



pumps. At present, there are no grants available to homeowners to help fund these additional works. The Government scrapped the 'Green Homes Grant Scheme' after only six months in early 2021. The scheme was heavily criticised as being poorly administered and difficult to access. A replacement scheme is urgently needed to support this agenda. Importantly, this will need to be readily accessible and simple in its application to support the required change rather than be a further hurdle to overcome.

“The UK Construction sector is also facing a resource and skills gap that will act as a significant barrier to achieving these goals”.

There is a need to develop a robust and sustainable supply chain that can deliver these works. In the past, contractors and suppliers have mobilised to align their offerings with the grant schemes. However, the stop-start implementation of previous programmes which appear then disappear has damaged confidence in the sector. Time and effort have been repeatedly wasted to set up processes to utilise them just as they are scrapped.

The UK Construction sector is also facing a resource and skills gap that will act as a significant barrier to achieving these goals. Studies have shown that the UK construction workforce is ageing, with over 50's making up 35% of the overall workforce and there are fewer people entering the industry. It was estimated that the retrofit challenge would generate 200,000 new jobs, so if this trend isn't altered, it is difficult to see how we will be able to tackle the



retrofitting of 750,000 homes each year, starting now, to deliver all 21 million by 2050. To put this in context, between 2010-2019, there has been an average of 140,000 new homes built which fell to 123,000 in 2020 with the effect of pandemic, so the scale of the challenge cannot be underestimated.

There has been a history of some poor results of retrofit programmes, insulating high-rise towers for example, that has negatively impacted the confidence of both the public and financial backers when it comes to retrofit. The 2016 Every Homes Count publication investigated the retrofit sector and came forward with 27 recommendations to improve the situation. This report led to the development of the BSI process 'PAS 2035:2019' to be established. This is designed to deliver good quality retrofit programmes and help restore confidence. It is vital that

the sector takes an active part in the implementation of PAS 2035, and includes engagement with residents and homeowners, and looks at broader upskilling within the sector.

From a technical perspective, developing robust guidance, which could include a set of agreed standardised methodologies and outcomes/metrics to report against, would arguably simplify and support the widespread uptake of retrofitting our homes. It is clear that, whilst advancement in technology that will make retrofitting totally unnecessary will no doubt happen, waiting and hoping for these is not the correct approach. Reducing our impact and reliance on energy resources will always be the most appropriate starting point to deliver a zero carbon UK.

In Summary

Meeting this challenge is possible and the benefits in doing so are both vital and immeasurable. In line with the 2020 Energy White Paper, over the next 10 years, priority and activity should be focussed on a 'fabric first' approach to reducing energy usage from our housing stock and not simply looking for replacement heat sources. By doing so, the low carbon heating sector will be given the chance to mature and enable it to provide cheaper and more efficient heating alternatives to gas boilers. The construction industry is hopeful that this will

be supported by the long awaited National Retrofit Strategy. We are at a critical juncture, but it is one where we all have the power and ability to make a positive individual contribution, which may appear small, but collectively, we can deliver the change needed to respond to the climate emergency. By doing this, we can all benefit from living in better-quality spaces, save money in running them, and enjoy improved wellbeing, all whilst securing and protecting our environment for future generations.

“The construction industry is hopeful that this will be supported by the long awaited National Retrofit Strategy.”





Help to Buy: making the property ladder more accessible

Karen Curtin

Managing Director at Graven Hill Village Development

Karen Curtin, Managing Director at Graven Hill, the UK's largest self and custom build community, explains why the Help to Buy scheme is more valuable to first-time buyers than ever before and explores the options available to buyers looking for personalised homes...

During the pandemic, many people re-evaluated what exactly they want from a home. Space to work and study became paramount, and access to green space also rose to the top of the priority list. However, achieving these wishes can feel out of reach for some, particularly first-time buyers.

“London, buyers can borrow up to 40%. Interest and equity loan repayments are then calculated based on the percentage borrowed.”

Breaking Free of Limitations

As a result, the Help to Buy scheme has become more valuable than ever for first-time buyers looking to secure their own piece of the property market. With flexible working remaining an option for many, people are no longer limited by location, opening up the whole of the UK to those taking their first step onto the housing ladder.

While the Help to Buy scheme has certain conditions, including the



home having to be a new build, sold by a Help to Buy registered homebuilder, and below the maximum property purchase price limit for the region, the increased freedom regarding location means that first-time buyers have considerably more choice than in the past. For decades, compromise has been an accepted part of house buying. For first-time buyers, it's practically a given. Whether it's taking a smaller garden for a bigger kitchen or a busy road for office space, choosing one priority over another has become the norm. After all, it's merely a stepping stone for greater things. However, this doesn't have to be the case.

Affordable and Desirable

Set to run until March 2023, the Help to Buy equity loan enables first-time buyers to cover up to 20% of the property purchase price, with a minimum deposit of 5%. If the home is in London, buyers can borrow up to 40%. Interest and equity loan repayments are then calculated based on the percentage borrowed, with interest not needing to be paid for the first five years. The scheme makes owning a dream house become considerably more accessible.

However, in order to break the cycle of compromise, developments will need to cater their offering to people's new needs. Access to green space and room to create a comfortable home office are no longer just 'nice-to-haves', but essentials for many. As such, developments should keep these new priorities in mind throughout the build process, incorporating gardens, village greens and as much living space as possible into every project.

Homes for Individuals

At Graven Hill, a self and custom build development in Bicester, providing buyers with choice is an essential part of its approach to housing. As well as offering countryside living with urban connectivity, it also enables people to choose the housing route that best suits them, from new and custom builds to self-building.

New builds come with a reputation for being uninspiring, with developments sometimes looking like they have copied and pasted every home. However, this isn't true of all new builds. Varying in size, layout and construction methods, sites such as Graven Hill offer a wide range of homes to inspire every individual. To achieve this on a broader scale, developments must move away from a focus on speed, and instead look to meet the differing needs of buyers.

Speed alone cannot solve the UK's housing crisis. The key is listening to buyers and providing homes that they want to live in, not that they have to settle for. For first-time buyers, this means ensuring that Help to Buy is available to them at all new build development sites, improving affordability.

As well as offering a wide range of new build homes, incorporating alternative routes to home ownership, such as self and custom building, into every development can further help people to find their perfect home.

What is Custom Build?

Custom building is an ideal middle ground for buyers seeking personalisation without having to start from scratch themselves. The structure of the property is built by professionals, while the bespoke features of the home, such as the fixtures and fittings, are decided by the owners. The earlier on in the construction process that the home is bought, the more customisation options that are available to buyers.

What is Self-build?

A route common in the rest of Europe, but yet to enter the mainstream in the UK, is self-building. Self-building gives purchasers the highest level of control when it comes to the design and build of their home. Whether they take the project on themselves or bring a project manager on board, there are a variety of construction methods to consider.

Often viewed as out of reach for the majority of people, introducing self-build plots on development sites will help to make it an option for everyone, including first-time buyers. While self-building is guaranteed to create a home that fits the personality and needs of the owner, it can be challenging, particularly for those only just starting their housing journey.



Overcoming Common Hurdles

Finding a suitable plot and being granted planning permission is one of the most common problems for self-builders, but there is a solution. Graven Hill provides a Plot Passport that has been approved by the local council for each of their plots. These set out the maximum size and height of the home, as well as the materials that can be used to build it. As long as self-builders follow this guide, planning permission can be gained in just 28 days, as opposed to the average 56 days. If developments work alongside local authorities, these stumbling blocks can be overcome. Affordability is another major hurdle for prospective self-builders.

“For first-time buyers, this means ensuring that Help to Buy is available to them at all new build development sites, improving affordability”.

However, with the Help to Build scheme on the horizon, further financial support will soon be available for first-time buyers taking an alternative approach to the house buying process. Currently set to run over four years, Help to Build will operate in a similar way to the Help to Buy scheme, allowing house hunters to secure a building plot with a deposit as low as five percent, topped up with a government-backed equity loan. The scheme will also apply to custom build homes, for those looking for a project that is lower maintenance.

Embracing Diversity

However, a hands-on approach isn't for everyone, which is why developments must ensure that their new build offering is as considered as every self-build home. There is no set type of first-time buyer. They may be a young professional starting their career and moving to a new location, a family with children, who want to break the rental cycle and own a home of their own, or a retiree looking to downsize.

Therefore, new builds must reflect this diversity, with varying numbers of bedrooms, different sized gardens, and enough space for people to live comfortably.

Where possible, keeping prices below the Help to Buy's maximum regional limit is essential to making new build homes affordable for first-time buyers. Taking the first step onto the property ladder shouldn't be full of compromises, with a home that's only half-suited to its owners. Addressing the diverse needs of first-time buyers with carefully thought-out housing, that's affordable as well as practical, will make the house hunting process one that inspires people to find their ideal home. Prioritising quality over quantity is the solution the housing market needs.





Prioritising Sustainability for the Future of Housebuilding

Victoria Brocklesby

COO and Co-Founder at Origin

Victoria Brocklesby, COO at Origin, the UK's leading manufacturer of premium aluminium doors and windows, explores the need to prioritise sustainability in the modern age of housebuilding...

Sustainability itself is not a ground-breaking topic. It has been on the agenda for years, but the fact that it's still being discussed without much progress having been made, signifies that there is an attitude problem. Not just in our industry, but across the board.

The pandemic has given consumers a lot of time to reflect and reassess what is actually important to them, and what their priorities are. As a result, many are putting their wellbeing first, and an increasing number are becoming concerned with the climate crisis.

The latest consumer data from TGI backs this up. It shows that five percent of UK adults anticipate making home improvements within the next year, demonstrating the increasing desire for improved living spaces. This, coupled with data from Mastercard which reveals that 62 percent of consumers think it's more important now than pre-pandemic for companies to behave in a more sustainable and eco-friendly way, proves that homeowners want and expect better, in all areas of their lives.

When it comes to housebuilding, sustainability should be a top priority. Businesses need to create an industry

that builds with a conscience and that aligns with consumer opinions towards the environment. Having this holistic view not only limits the environmental impact of building projects, but also helps consumers meet their sustainability ambitions.

So, what needs to be considered?

Materials

The road to sustainability starts with the materials being used. This is the most tangible aspect of housebuilding. At Origin, all our doors and windows are made from high-grade aluminium. This isn't just because of its high-performance capabilities, but because it's the eco-choice.

More than 75 percent of all the aluminium ever extruded from Earth is still in circulation today because of its durability and excellent recycling characteristics. This means that when aluminium products reach the end of their life, they can be recycled and made into something else, whether that be an alloy wheel, drinks can, or even another window or door. Aluminium products are unique in this respect and it's what sets them apart from their uPVC or wooden alternatives, both of which lack durability and the increasingly important environmental credentials.

It isn't just about being able to recycle a product at the end of its lifespan



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Prioritising Sustainability for the Future of Housebuilding

though, it's about the whole material lifecycle. To minimise our impact on the environment, 100 percent of our manufacturing waste, derived from factory and warehouse operations, is diverted from landfill, and 100 percent of scrap aluminium profile is recycled. This means there is no waste! It's also more energy efficient to recycle than to make new aluminium. With the energy needed to reprocess, it is as low as five percent of the energy needed for primary aluminium production. So, by recycling our scrap aluminium, we are helping other industries reduce their carbon footprint. It isn't just aluminium either. The polyamide we use across our products for increased thermal efficiency is also recycled, ground into a pulp, and used to make new road surfaces.

Alongside doing good for the environment, using sustainable materials and robust product design helps products meet increasingly strict building regulations. These include the Part L changes to Building Regulations and the new Future Homes Standard, which aim to radically improve the energy performance of new homes and make them zero carbon ready by 2025. Part of this relies on thermal efficiency. With strict new targets for U-values throughout new homes coming into effect, many are contemplating how they will reach these new low thresholds. If building regulations are changing, then housebuilders cannot afford not to prioritise sustainability, or they will be left behind.

For windows and doors, aluminium with polyamide breaks is inherently positive for thermal efficiency because it prevents heat escaping in the winter and keeps it out in the summer. This saves on homeowners' bills and energy use and, importantly for housebuilders, helps meet building regulations.

Taking a Holistic View

However, true sustainability goes beyond the product. To make a real difference, our attitudes must consider entire supply chains, overall operations and the processes in place, not just for now, but for the future.

As a business, Origin is fully committed to sustainability and has strict processes in place to be as environmentally friendly as possible, with a view for continual improvement. That includes carefully choosing our suppliers. We have a rigorous tender process in place which assesses a new supplier's sustainability and ethical credentials. This includes evidence of them reducing their energy consumption and emissions, reducing their resource intensity, preventing pollution, and reducing their consumption of resources through waste management strategies that promote waste minimisation, reuse, recovery, and recycling.

We don't just expect our suppliers to do this without us putting in the effort too. That's why we have worked hard as a business to achieve ISO14001. This shows that we are doing things in the right way to reduce the impact of our operations and uphold our legal and ethical obligations.

Our responsibility starts from where and how we source our components and extends right through to where they end up. Throughout the process, we aim to divert as much waste from landfill as possible. Our environmental management system also covers our waste management and energy strategy to reduce our overarching impact on the environment, including reduction targets for energy and water consumption across the business. All of this is a part of our Environmental Policy and Energy Policy.



Prioritising Sustainability for the Future of Housebuilding

Our overall operations and product design therefore consider recyclability from start to finish, sustainability, and the environment, to help future-proof our 'green' credentials.

Finally, we consider our whole supply chain, not just our suppliers, as well as things like the packaging we use, as this is a simple and effective way to cut back on plastic waste throughout the supply chain. Equally, something as simple as reviewing delivery routes and letting suppliers know when we're passing their depot so we can collect materials, rather than them being delivered by their own fleet, is a small change that can save fuel, lower costs, and help build even better business relationships. We also hold the aspiration to transition our fleet to be entirely electric, and will look to do this as soon as the infrastructure of the UK is able to support this. In the interim, we will start moving the fleet across to hybrid vehicles.

Offsetting is another popular buzzword. At Origin, we have a long-term offsetting plan which goes beyond paying a set amount to a certification scheme. This year, we began working with Chiltern Rangers, a local conservation organisation. The partnership allows us to support local areas by planting trees and hedgerows which not only helps us reach our net zero targets, but also benefits local farmers and communities. The Chiltern Rangers are also helping us find a plot of land to plant woodland as part of a larger, more long-term strategy for offsetting.

We regularly communicate this information with staff too, which enables them to make changes to how they work, so that we can all be set on the same goal.

In Summary

It's this type of commitment that sets companies doing good apart from those seeming to do good. In the long run, it's only those actually doing good that will help transform the future of the new homes strategy in the UK.

Being sustainable shouldn't be seen as a fashionable move. It's the right thing to do and is an incredibly powerful business tool at the same time.

Sustainability has been a consideration

for years. However, it has never been high enough on the agenda in housebuilding to make a real difference. With consumers becoming more acutely aware of the climate crisis and how important it is to reduce their overall impact on the environment, they are considering their efforts in all areas of their lives including where they choose to call home, and the products being used within it.





Planning for Mental Health – A Post-Pandemic Reflection

Melissa Balk

Associate at Fisher German

Prior to the first national lockdown, Melissa Balk, Associate at Fisher German, analysed the importance of mental health and wellbeing in planning and how it should join the likes of climate change and biodiversity at top of the planning agenda. Here, she discusses how planners delivering mentally healthy places is now more important than ever post-pandemic...

The pandemic and lockdowns have likely affected all of our mental health to varying degrees. They have further accentuated the stark inequality in society. Our jobs, standard of living accommodation and accessibility to technical infrastructure, such as Wi-Fi, determined how resilient we were to making it through each day. Our only certainty at times was what was outside, accessed on our daily walks. Even the roof over our heads was sadly an uncertainty for some.

Some families were crammed around a kitchen table juggling home schooling with work, some were furloughed or made redundant, and some had a study to work from peacefully. Gardens were a luxury, and those without struggled to access greenspace and risked being accused of breaking lockdown rules should they have needed to travel what was deemed “too far” to let their children burn off some energy. For some, the lack of an accessible and positive environment will have caused them to spiral further into distress and

mental health issues. This in turn may have impacted their physical health.

It is widely recognised in the planning and built environment professions that the physical and social environments we experience can affect our mental health both positively and negatively. The ‘Mind the GAPS Framework’ outlines four key considerations that a place should offer to promote good mental health. These are green places, active places, pro-social places and safe places. It is time to consider what we can learn from the pandemic in order to create mentally healthy places for all in the event that another pandemic occurs in the

future. Our needs and priorities may have changed, and we need to assess whether the current planning system sufficiently addresses this.

We saw a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in July 2021. However, despite its focus on design codes to achieve well-designed and beautiful homes, it still only mentions mental health once, and that is within the definition of disability. We saw the publication of the Planning for the Future White Paper in August 2020 which focused on building back better and beautiful. Following the cabinet reshuffle, this is likely to be scaled back. Nevertheless, the White Paper



again only mentioned mental health once. Planning policies rarely mention mental health, let alone have a policy specifically for achieving good mental health. Whilst policies that are focussed on matters such as climate change, open space requirements, minimum space standards and the provision of amenities and facilities that can indirectly help achieve mentally healthy places, in order for mental health to be a top priority, there needs to be specific policies and strategies within national and local legislation to achieve this. It needs to be at the forefront of our minds.

“During 2020 and 2021, the housing market has seen a surge in demand for larger properties with gardens and home offices”.

During 2020 and 2021, the housing market has seen a surge in demand for larger properties with gardens and home offices. The commute has become less relevant for those who can work from home, at least part time. People want to have good access to shared greenspaces where they do not have access to gardens.

Michael Gove is the sixth Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities since 2010. With each new Secretary of State, we have seen backtracking, constant policy changes, and uncertainty in the planning system. This has led to a continued housing shortage and an ingrained housing affordability issue. The charity Shelter found that housing affordability and the condition of housing were most likely to impact on a person’s mental health. The RTPI notes that housing quality is the

most direct link between mental health and the built environment.

It is clear then that there are two facets of the planning system which can affect our mental health: our immediate home environment, and the quality of our public realms and neighbourhoods.

Improving our Homes

The Conservative Party Conference on October 6, 2021 saw another mandate for fixing the housing market. Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, appears to have scrapped the 300,000 dwellings per annum target and has once again reinvented the wheel by focussing housing delivery on brownfield sites: he stated [homes would be built] “not on greenfields, not just jammed in the South East, but beautiful homes on brownfield sites in places where homes make sense”.

Brownfield sites can absolutely make a contribution to housing delivery and to the regeneration of an area, but it is widely known and accepted that brownfield sites can be less viable and present more constraints than greenfield sites. In order for brownfield sites to achieve mentally positive places, it is likely that their density, for example, would need to be reduced in order to deliver the desired gardens, study areas and onsite public open space.

Flexible and adaptable homes could be more widely rolled out. This would better enable homes to be adapted or changed, for example, through the removal or addition of walls, or the use of pre-installed foundations for an extension. If more people had had access to these types of homes during the pandemic, it may have helped them readjust to life.



Homes should continue to be built with tenure blind principles to avoid those in affordable housing comparing themselves between the perceived ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ of society.

“Housing in the right place that’s an affordable price will add massively not just to your general joie de vivre [the exuberant enjoyment of life] but your productivity”.

Feeling ‘lesser’ than others in a community purely by comparing a home could lead to mental health problems such as depression, possibly leading to an inability to work, then falling into poverty, all of which could create deeper inequalities in society.

Boris Johnson also stated, “That housing in the right place that’s an affordable price will add massively not just to your general joie de vivre [the exuberant enjoyment of life] but your productivity”. Society should not only be about productivity, but without looking after people’s mental health through the places we create, our productivity will slump.

Improving our Neighbourhoods

Our mental health can also be protected and enhanced by ensuring that the neighbourhoods we create are inclusive and cater for all needs. Access to greenspace is vital, however, a truly inclusive neighbourhood needs to naturally be varied. Using the principle of the 20-minute neighbourhood, everyone should be able to access a public

realm (including amenities) that is suitable for them within 20 minutes of their home. This is more than just providing a park; it should also include accessible standards, sensory gardens for those who are neurodiverse, areas for both large and small groups to socialise, event space, and areas that can be enjoyed individually for those seeking some alone time.

To conclude, in order to tackle the inequalities that lead to mental health problems, we need to have mental health at the forefront of our minds. We need a properly funded planning system. We need to stop backtracking. We need continuity and certainty. Perhaps then we will be able to properly plan for mental health and wellbeing and create the world we need.





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