

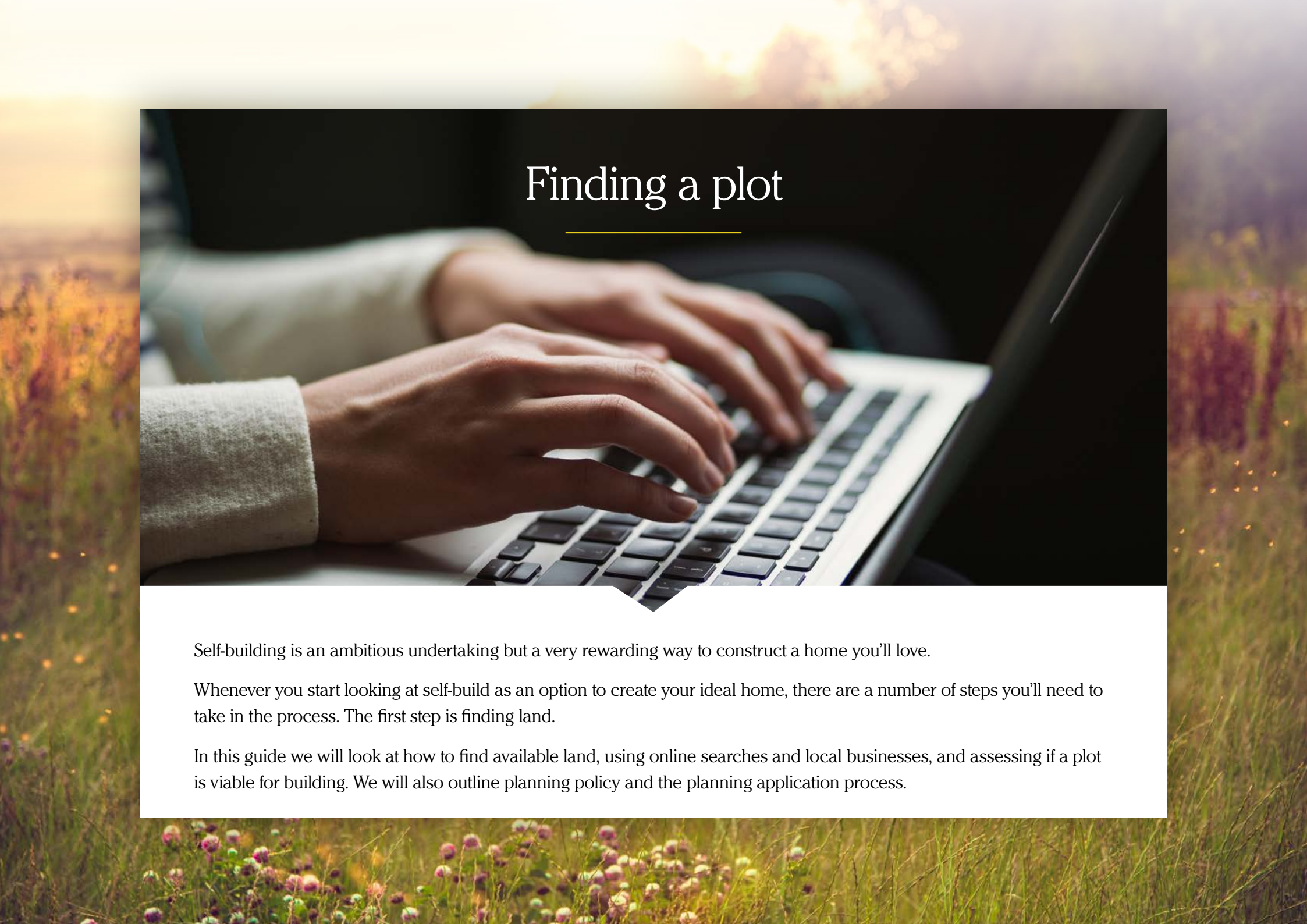


Finding land

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A self-build guide





# Finding a plot

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Self-building is an ambitious undertaking but a very rewarding way to construct a home you'll love.

Whenever you start looking at self-build as an option to create your ideal home, there are a number of steps you'll need to take in the process. The first step is finding land.

In this guide we will look at how to find available land, using online searches and local businesses, and assessing if a plot is viable for building. We will also outline planning policy and the planning application process.

# ONLINE SEARCH

## Landing your perfect plot

Unless you already own a plot of land, the first stage of your project will be purchasing land to build on.

## Where do I really want to live?



Firstly, you need to decide on the geographical location. Would you like to live in the country, or would the suburbs and urban living suit you more?

In order to make a detailed, effective search, you need to pinpoint the area you want to live in. This will help create much more detailed search parameters – not too small, so that you are restricted, but not so large that you cannot refine your search further.

## Your self-build wish-list



It's useful to make a wish-list of what you need from your ideal location. Don't forget key factors that will influence your decisions. These include being close to good infrastructure links, such as motorway access, other major roads, bus routes and railways.

If you are searching for a rural idyll, you may not have to compromise on this, as even villages and smaller towns can still be well connected if they have a railway station. If your work takes you abroad, having an airport nearby might be a positive rather than a negative.

As well as the essentials for many, such as good schools and reliable shops, think about your hobbies and what you do in your spare time. Do you love the idea of a local pub to relax in or are you a real foodie who would like to be able to walk to a great restaurant? Are there good dog walks close by? If you are into fitness, are there some good running routes or a gym in easy reach?







## Looking online

Once you have established your ideal location, perhaps the simplest way to seek out available land is to use an online land search. There are a variety of online plot-finding websites that are free to access and can be easily navigated. You can search by region or postcode, and hone the search according to your budget. You may need to create an account and log in to do this. Your search parameters will filter out inappropriate options and provide you with a short or longlist of likely sites.

If the online 'plot finder' sites don't highlight any likely options, auction sites can also be useful too. You'll be able to check things like acreage, infrastructure and services in the locality, but there's really no substitute for going out and getting a 'feel' for the land and its surroundings in person.

Some of the principal UK land and auction websites include:

[rightmove.co.uk](https://www.rightmove.co.uk) >

[plotfinder.net](https://www.plotfinder.net) >

[plotbrowser.com](https://www.plotbrowser.com) >

[onthemarket.com/farms-land](https://www.onthemarket.com/farms-land) >

[ukauctionlist.com/land-auction](https://www.ukauctionlist.com/land-auction) >

[perfectplot.co.uk](https://www.perfectplot.co.uk) >

Other websites that are not land-specific are also useful starting points for land searches. These can include auction, marketplace and selling sites, such as:

[gumtree.com](https://www.gumtree.com) >

[ebay.co.uk](https://www.ebay.co.uk) >

[trovit.co.uk](https://www.trovit.co.uk) >

[geo.craigslist.org](https://www.geo.craigslist.org) >

With plot finding sites and auctioneer listings, you may find it's worth signing up to their small subscription fee, in order to receive weekly or monthly updates of land available. In this way, you'll keep up-to-date with what's available and see what's selling, what isn't and where the hotspots are when it comes to development land.

## Gaining insight

Another useful online tool is online land software. The two main ones are Nimbus Maps [www.nimbusmaps.co.uk](https://www.nimbusmaps.co.uk) and LandInsight [www.land.tech/products/landinsight/](https://www.land.tech/products/landinsight/). These are specialised land finding software that are used by many developers and land agents, but are available to the public for a fee. If you are serious about finding that perfect plot, it may be worth the investment. These can be helpful but you will need some background knowledge of planning policy.

# FINDING LAND VIA LOCAL BUSINESSES



As we always say, planning to self-build is a big commitment as well as being a very exciting undertaking. Finding land is obviously a very important step. Online land searches can be a good starting point, but there's no substitute for a bit of first-hand local knowledge, as you take the first steps towards self-build. To give yourself the best chance of securing the perfect plot, make sure you are covering every channel open to you.

## Finding land via planning applications

Don't forget that anyone who wants to get planning permission to build a property has to submit an application. All these applications are available to see, you just have to contact the local authority's planning department and ask to see them. Many are now available online, making them even easier to access, along with the applicant's contact details. Limit your investigations to looking for recent applications for single dwellings, preferably just with outline drawings, as this provides you with more flexibility when it comes to your own design. If the application has not yet been approved the land is probably not even up for sale so if you are quick enough, you can get in touch with the potential vendor to see if they are interested in selling to you before anyone else can.

## Reach out to estate agents and planning consultants



If you have a property to sell, you may already have signed up with an estate agent to market it. They may sell land as well, particularly if they are one of the smaller independents. Ask if they are involved with property auctions too. These agents should be one of your first ports of call in your preliminary research. Let them know what you are looking for and then

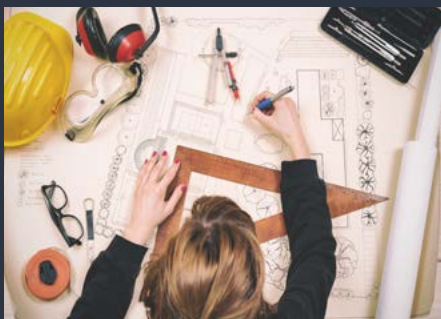
keep dropping in to see if any likely plots have come up so you will be front of mind when something suitable does pop up on their books.

## Bonding with local builders and developers

Just like we do at CB Homes, you will find that some developers own plots of land with the intention of selling them as individual self-build plots. Our specialist land-finders are constantly on the look-out for prime plots of land that can be developed in desirable locations throughout the region. We actively search for land and know the advantages and disadvantages of what's on offer, so we are ideally placed to advise a customer who is interested in embarking on a self-build project.

Even if you get in touch and there is nothing available at that time, open up a dialogue, tell them what you're looking for and they may well come across something suitable and can get back in touch with you for further discussions. Local builders too are often aware of likely plots of land so by all means get in touch with them too.

## Make friends with local architects



Local architects are often involved with self-build projects and they may well be helping a vendor with outline planning permission for a particular plot. Drop them a line or give them a call to see if they can help you. Again, it is all about making contact with people who have their ear to the ground when it comes to possible plots.

## Visit building exhibitions

By attending one of the trade shows, like [Build It Live](#), you will meet hundreds of professionals who will be able to offer advice on locating land, finding the right builder and share their experience with you. Shows are dotted all round the country so you should be able to find one that is reasonably easy to access. You might well come across the team from [CB Homes](#) too.

## Promoting self-building

Sign up for your Right to Build by making sure you are on the Right to Build register, which every local council in England is obliged to hold to promote the growth of the UK self-build industry. Go to [www.nacsba.org.uk/campaigns/right-to-build-portal](http://www.nacsba.org.uk/campaigns/right-to-build-portal) to find out more.

Choosing the location of your self-build project is a crucial decision and landing the perfect plot is not always easy. You can always [talk to us](#) for planning and construction advice so we can help you find a plot that's right for you.



[talk to us >](#)

[www.nacsba.org.uk](http://www.nacsba.org.uk) >



# PLANNING POLICY AND YOUR PLOT

**Planning Policy is something that will impact your self-build project from an early stage. It's a tricky area. An understanding of the basic principles will enable you to determine quickly whether a potential plot is viable for planning. If you are unsure about aspects of planning policy, it's worth seeking professional advice from experts who will be dealing with the processes and applications on a daily basis. Don't forget that we offer FREE advice on all kinds of Planning issues.**

## The NPPF

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was initially published on 27 March 2012 and was further revised on 24 July 2018. In its original incarnation the NPPF comprised over two dozen different documents called Planning Policy Statements (PPS) and Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG), all compiled into one document.

Over 1300 pages have been condensed into a 65-page document and a 27-page Technical Guidance document. It sets out the government's planning policies for England and how they are applied.

The NPPF outlines a framework within which locally-prepared plans for housing and other developments can be produced. It has to be considered when preparing the development plan and should be included in planning decisions.

## Local Council Plans

At a more parochial level, Local Council Plans are local plans prepared by the Local Planning Authority in conjunction with the NPPF. They set out their vision for the future of each area and a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities.

The requirements of each area will be different, but in more and more cases developments in the countryside are being permitted on a larger scale, as the need for more housing has become a major issue. Idle land – for example former farmland – is being utilised for this, while in cities former industrial or other areas, referred to as brownfield sites, are also being developed.

## Neighbourhood Plans

These have become particularly important for developments in villages and towns and consider the population, the parish boundaries and the needs and desires of the local people. They assess the amenities that are already present and the ones that may be needed with future growth. They are plans developed by neighbourhoods or communities where they can set out their vision for their neighbourhood and how they see future development happening

in their area. These plans have to be created in line with the Local Plan and NPPF. If adopted, they form part of the Local Plan. They enable local communities to have a much stronger say in the future shape of their community.

When you are searching for a plot, it's very useful to understand which Local Planning Authority (LPA) and neighbourhood boundary it falls under and if they have a Local Plan and/or Neighbourhood Plan in place. These should be available online on local council websites and even though they are hefty documents, it's worth reading the main points in summary, in order to understand the development framework in place for that area.

It's also worth considering the following key aspects of planning policy when plot searching and bear them in mind when identifying a suitable location – though they may not apply in all LPAs.



## Where is development focused?

For the majority of Local Plans, development is focused in urban areas. This is where the majority of a region's resources – jobs, services, amenities, facilities etc – are based. Increasingly, some Local Authorities are allowing more development in smaller towns and villages. Is your plot in an area which promotes development?

## Settlement boundaries

Depending on the area's classification, it may have a settlement boundary. These boundaries determine where towns and villages end, and where the countryside begins. Development is likely to be more feasible if the plot is within these settlement boundaries. However this is not always the case in some smaller villages and boundaries can change over time, to broaden the potential for development.

## Infill development

In the majority of cases, infill development is classed as a 'small gap or space in an otherwise built-up road frontage' which could allow the construction of one or two houses. Keep on the lookout for these opportunities in towns and villages, but be aware that not all these gaps are available for development, as whether it is defined as infill depends on certain criteria and the location.

## Replacement dwellings

These are becoming increasingly popular in areas where land prices are high. They entail demolishing the existing property on the site and rebuilding a new one. However, there could be restrictions in conservation areas or for listed buildings. It is also important to note that in many cases, you cannot build a larger dwelling and any newbuild has to be in keeping with the surrounding properties.

## Barns

Depending on the structure and the location of the barn, it may be possible to convert or re-build to a habitable dwelling, but some LPAs are now restricting these in current Local Plans.

## Brownfield land

This is land which has previously been developed and is not currently in use. Many LPAs actively promote the re-use of brownfield land for development, as in some cases there will be existing infrastructure or services onsite. Depending on its location, however, there may still be restrictions on development. It is also worth checking whether there is any contamination.

All this information is useful to assess the viability of sites for development. Each site presents its own unique characteristics and we therefore always recommend getting sites appraised by professionals, who are fully compliant with current polices.



# REPLACEMENT BUILDINGS AND YOUR PLOT



**When you embark on your self-build venture, you may find it's not that easy to identify an empty plot that exactly meets your requirements. But if there is a building already standing on a site that would suit your needs, it may still be possible to purchase the land and develop the site, by demolishing what stands there and building a new property.**

## Out with the old



Replacement buildings are becoming increasingly popular in regions where land prices are high or finding a plot is rare. They entail demolishing the existing property on the site and rebuilding a new one in its place. Applications are made to the Local Planning Authority for any necessary permissions.

Depending on location, however, there may be restrictions in conservation areas or for existing listed buildings. It is also important to note that in many cases, you cannot build a significantly larger dwelling on the site of the old building's footprint, and any new building has to be in keeping with the surrounding properties and environment.

## Keeping your self-build green

In our area, that's usually Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East, approximately 42% of the area is classified as Green Belt. In the Green Belt, there can be particularly stringent measures to ensure any new-build matches the existing area. Applications for replacement dwellings will be considered and permitted in line with Local Plan strategic policy on the Green Belt and Countryside, and also on Rural area development.

Legislation outlines that in the Green Belt and countryside, *"The intrinsic character and beauty of the Cheshire countryside will be protected by restricting development to that which requires a countryside location and cannot be accommodated within identified settlements."*

In line with national planning policy, inappropriate development should not be allowed in the Green Belt, except in very special circumstances.

In the countryside, a variety of different building developments are permitted, such as developments with an operational need (like agricultural or forestry operations), the reuse of existing permanent rural buildings where they can be reused without major reconstruction, and the expansion of existing buildings to allow the growth of established businesses – in proportion to the site and setting.





## What is permitted?

Applications for the replacement of existing dwellings in the countryside and Green Belt are authorised in line with Local Planning policy, which includes the following points:

1. The new dwelling cannot be significantly larger than the existing building it replaces.
2. The replacement of an existing dwelling should enhance the surrounding area and, as a guide, the replacement dwelling should not be more than 10% larger than the existing building.
3. The Local Council may control extensions and alterations to the replacement dwelling, through the imposition of conditions in the future. Otherwise known as restricting permitted development.
4. The new building must be sited to minimise any visual impact on the countryside or Green Belt, and is not sited outside the original residential site limits.
5. The construction, materials and design of the dwelling should always be appropriate to the countryside. Ideally, when you're planning your self-build, local materials should be used where possible, to ensure the local character is replicated and the style is retained. You won't be able to demolish the existing building if it is merited worthy, in terms of local character, architectural detail or historical interest.
6. It's also specified that any ancillary works and curtilage buildings (i.e. buildings also sited on the land) are of a scale and design to minimise any impact on the openness and character of the area.
7. It is also useful if any existing landscape features are retained and additional landscaping is carried out if necessary.
8. There must also be adequate control over the demolition of the original dwelling, prior to the construction of the replacement dwelling, unless justified by a particular circumstance.

Part of the application may also include a change of use of the building to residential. In urban development, the concerns about design and style are lessened as there is often a wider range of architectural styles and ages of buildings, with a more modernist approach. Nevertheless, there are still restrictions.

## Ask an expert

If you are unsure about your proposed replacement building development, you can approach the Local Council for advice.

Typically, the information required to be submitted for such a pre-application discussion includes a description of the proposed development, photographs and/or sketch drawings showing the site, buildings and trees as existing, an outline of the proposal (on plans scale 1:50 or 1:100) and sketch drawings showing the size, height and scale of development, to give Planning an idea of your intentions. From this, you'll be able to ascertain the viability of your plans and whether to proceed.



# IS YOUR PLOT VIABLE FOR YOUR PLANS?

Good access is imperative. This will be a condition of any planning application so you must ensure that the access meets current highway standards. Will your new-build impact on highway safety? Is the visibility acceptable? How many dwellings does your access serve? Advice on access through highways consultants or planning specialists like CB homes is also worth knowing before making an offer for a plot.

## Water, water everywhere?

Ground conditions need careful investigation and planning for as these can really impede or push costs up on your build. The two main areas are;

**Surface Water:** it's important to make sure that you understand hierarchy for surface water discharge. Discharge to soakaways is usually the preferred method, is the ground capable of draining away at the required rates? If not are there any accessible water courses nearby, are there any surface water or combined sewers that are accessible? All possible solutions will require permits by the relevant authorities so ensure that you have this checked off before any

commitment. Rainwater harvesting systems are becoming a popular and sustainable choice and are definitely worth considering too.

**Foundations:** we have a saying that until you are out of the ground with any project you need to expect the worse. That is why thorough due diligence of the ground before embarking on a project is well worth the time and energy expended. What foundations have you planned for your project? Will the ground conditions be viable for this? The foundations will have to pass building regulations and warranty providers so make sure you know the requirements for that specific ground condition.

## Utilities

Your preferred plot may be far removed from necessary utilities. This isn't just mains sewerage and gas but also electricity, water and phone/ internet services.

If you are interested in a replacement building plot then it is highly likely that re-connecting these services will be easy to do. However, if you are breaking new ground, even if it is not remotely located, you must consider how you are going to access utilities and find out how much it's going to cost. You should do this as soon as you can. Remember that your self-build project will be a lot more straightforward if you have power and water on-site from the start.

Many plots will be near enough to a water main to make connection straightforward. If connecting to mains water isn't practical, then drilling a borehole could be the best solution.

When it comes to sewerage, if there's more than a couple of hundred metres to cover, it may make more financial sense to look at installing a treatment plant.

Facing one or more of these challenges need not be a deal breaker but before taking the plunge with your self-build, you need to understand the scope of works that may be necessary to undertake and what costs will be involved so you can tailor your budget accordingly.



## Any objections?

Always investigate to find out if there are likely to be objections made to your building before you go in for planning. Are there acceptable privacy distances between you and your nearest neighbours? Could you be causing a loss of light to them? Your development will be deemed unsuitable for the plot if what you plan to build there will overshadow a neighbour, causing loss of light, or overlooking issues.

Find out if planning permission has been sought for the plot before. If it was refused, investigate on what grounds. It might be perfectly possible to work around the problem.

Are there any local restrictions in place that could prevent you from building what you want? A tree with a protection order on it located where you want your house to be built could present an insurmountable problem or issue with foundations.



## Protected land

Land that is dedicated as protected can be defined as ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees and land with protected areas and wildlife in the vicinity. You'll need to check if your proposed development is on, or might affect, an internationally or European protected site, a nationally protected site, a locally protected site or a protected area.



It is also recommended to check land titles and plans to make sure there are no restrictions in place which prevent any development. Land titles are easily available from land registry and it is always worth taking legal advice if unsure.

## Animal rights?

The presence of particular wildlife doesn't automatically prevent development, but you can get advice from Natural England on planning proposals that will require a protected species mitigation licence. The organisation offers a pre-submission screening service so you can get advice on planning and development proposals which might affect European or nationally protected species, before planning permission is secured.

Remember that the above are just preliminary searches that we advise should be undertaken. There are many more items involved with plot due diligence and it is always worth seeking the advice of a professional before committing to a plot.





We can assist you to find a plot, or if you have already found one, talk to us about your next steps.  
We can offer you help at every stage of your self-build project, including free planning and pre-construction advice.  
Talk to us to find out more.

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