

PLOT FINDING

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For most people wanting to self-build, finding a building site is one of the most challenging parts of the whole project. Not only do you need to know where to look, but also what to look out for. Many a self-builder will tell you that once you have found your plot, the rest is easy! There is no doubt that finding a suitable site is difficult, but if you are determined and know where to look, you will find that there are more plots around than you may at first have believed.

Before you start your land search, however, you should note that what you are looking for is not any piece of land, but a **building plot**. This means a site that has at least outline planning permission. This is vitally important since, without planning permission, you will not be able to build on the site. Ideally, utilities should also be located nearby and be easily accessible, or you may be looking at large additional costs to access these.

There are a number of places in which you may start your search :-

LOCAL ESTATE AGENTS

The most obvious way to find a plot is through an estate agent. Up to 80% of building plots are bought and sold through estate agents, who may either already have plots for sale on their books or may be willing to negotiate to find one on your behalf. A few pointers to bear in mind when dealing with estate agents are :-

- Telephone or visit every estate agent in your area of search, and keep contacting them every week to check that they are still looking for you.
- If you are a cash buyer, tell them so, as many estate agents keep two lists; an A list of cash buyers and a B list of people requiring finance.
- Ask the estate agents to approach clients of theirs who may be selling a house with land or a large garden that can be divided, and encourage them to sell this as two properties rather than one.
- In Scotland, solicitors virtually act as estate agents when it comes to selling land, and many issue regular lists of plots and other properties for sale.

EXISTING PROPERTIES

Ask the estate agents to notify you about sub-standard houses and bungalows that come onto their books. It may make better financial sense to demolish these to create a building plot, rather than renovating them.

AUCTION SALES

Plots are frequently sold at auction. Check with local papers and estate agents for announcements.

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

- Local newspapers often advertise building land for sale, so ensure you buy all local publications. You could also try advertising yourself under 'Land Wanted'.
- Other good sources for plots are publications like Exchange & Mart, Country Life, Build-It, Home Building & Renovating and Self-Build & Design.

LOCAL COUNCILS AND OTHER LAND-OWNERS

Local Councils and other public bodies as well as major industrial conglomerates also own land. You may therefore extend your search for a building site to include your Local Authority, the Church of England, Railtrack, the British Coal or any of the utility companies as well as industry giants who may have land to sell. You could ask your solicitor or surveyor to make an approach on your behalf or simply write a letter direct to the Estates Department, Chief Executive or appropriate Area Manager.

DEVELOPERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

- Developers and local builders may also have spare single plots. However, beware that they do not offer to sell you the plot only on condition that they undertake the build, unless you feel comfortable with that.
- It may also be worth contacting local surveyors, solicitors, architects and other property professionals asking if they know of any building plots for sale.

LOCAL PLAN

- All local councils have a Development Plan and from this you may be able to see where planning permission is most likely to be granted. You will be able to inspect the Plan at the local council offices.
- Should you find a suitable site, but be unable to uncover the owner, you will be able to find out to whom the land belongs by checking with the Land Registry.

PLANNING HISTORY

All planning applications are published in the local papers and opportunities may exist for finding building plots by approaching applicants expressing your interest in purchasing their plot, should permission be granted.

The applications are held by the Local Authority for a period of five years, and there may be plots of land where permission has been granted but where development has not taken place. Check recent and not-so-recent planning applications in your area of search. A few hours spent pouring over planning applications can often be fruitful. But remember, before you complete on the purchase of any plot, make sure your solicitor has undertaken a full search, that you have good access, that there are no restrictive covenants and that the planning permission is active and current.

SELF HELP

Self-builders frequently track down land for themselves :-

- Once you know the area you would like to live in, talk to the locals. Visit the pub and the post office and chat to people. Drive and walk around and keep your eyes as well as your ears open.
- It may also pay to knock on doors asking if owners of large houses have ever considered selling off parts of their gardens.
- Place your own advertisement in the local paper of your selected area specifying that you are looking for a plot with outline planning permission.
- You might also consider putting up a reward for information leading to the acquisition of a plot.

LAND FINDING AGENCIES

There are a number of land-finding companies who operate nationally and specialize in searching for building plots. These can be found on the Internet, in the self-build magazines and at the self-build exhibitions.

As you may have seen from our 'Finance and Insurance' Fact Sheet, Scandia-Hus work closely with BuildStore with regard to mortgages and insurance. Our customers may also benefit from BuildStore's land finding service 'PlotSearch', which provides specialized services for self-builders. They can be found on the Internet at www.buildstore.co.uk/plotsearch or be contacted by telephone on: 0870 870 9994.

BuildStore's PlotSearch service has a dedicated plot-finding team that spend all their time contacting estate agents, developers, builders, large land owners and local professionals with a view to tracking down available sites. They also scan advertisements in local papers throughout the UK on a regular basis to collect information on building opportunities for self-builders.

Subscribers using PlotSearch are encouraged to inform the team of any plots they know of that are not listed, by entering their names into a monthly prize draw.

PlotSearch's Key Features include :-

- Over 6,000 building opportunities at any one time, made up of single plots, multiple plots, renovations and conversions.
- Over 5,000 sources for land.

- PlotShare is an additional service that enables self-builders to identify other self-builders interested in jointly purchasing a large plot and subdividing into individual smaller plots.
- New plots are added daily.
- Every plot is checked every five working days to ensure that it is still available and that all the details given are correct.
- PlotSearch will list as much information on each building site as is available to their team, e.g. availability of utilities.
- Each plot is mapped so that you can see its location and suitability for your requirements.

Benefits to you :-

- PlotSearch takes out the time, cost and effort involved in contacting the standard sources for land in your area.
- Because PlotSearch is an on-line service you can access new information on a daily basis as soon as it is listed.
- You have as much information as you need to make an informed decision as to whether to visit any of the plots listed.
- The team members are experts in land finding and the issues that you face, you therefore have professional advice at hand.

Subscription to the PlotSearch service costs :-

- £59 for a lifetime subscription to six counties, including aerial photography and PlotAlert, and an on-line service.
- £35 for a 3 month subscription to six counties, including the same services as outlined above.

All PlotSearch subscribers who subsequently become BuildStore 'Accelerator' mortgage customers will have their PlotSearch subscription refunded. (See the Scandia-Hus Fact Sheet entitled 'Finance and Insurance' for further details on the Accelerator mortgage).