

Self Build Project - Business Plan

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Exmoor Young Voices
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Purpose of the charity

Exmoor Young Voices (EYV) is a charity dedicated to providing the tools and support which enable local young adults to remain living and working in the area they call home.

The imperative for this is that a whole generation is moving away to find better opportunities elsewhere; leaving behind an ageing population, depleted of its service providers, manual workers, energy, and drivers-for-change.

With direct intervention and by bringing together other organisations, we can help young people find Homes, Transport, Employment, IT, Childcare - so that they can choose to 'stay local', and continue to benefit Exmoor communities and authorities with their knowledge and skills.

Purpose of this plan

This plan sets out how Self Build can offer a housing solution to all who choose it.

Foreword

Houses by Hand

This document describes the way in which a pilot group of four young adults in housing-need will be provided with the house-plans, training and encouragement they need to begin building themselves a potential, future, family home, which they will own outright, on land which has been made available at a preferential price, and which has been identified by the Exmoor Park Planning Department as a possible site for the erection of Section 106 dwellings (perpetually affordable housing for people with a local tie).

We have called this pilot project **Houses by Hand**.

Pitch

'Housing crisis' is shorthand for the many difficulties faced by young people struggling to afford their first home. The problem is greatest where local jobs are poorly paid, and house prices highest. Within National Parks new-build affordable homes (a class of dwelling which conjures up mean-looking white boxes, cheaply built from unimaginative plans) are even less welcome than in urban areas.

Imagine there was a way to build desirable, expensive-looking homes - the kind of home in which we would all like to live - whose charming appearance was not just in harmony with traditional village settings - but added to the built heritage of rural Britain.

Imagine, too, that it was possible to build those highly desirable new homes for between £50,000 and £100,000, including the cost of the land?

It is.

This document explains how.

Let's meet the People behind this initiative.

1. Professional advice will be provided by team leader **Justin Ruthven-Tyers**. Justin is a self-builder and innovator. His vision is to empower people to outgrow their fear and resignation, looking beyond the familiar offerings to housing need which are not working for them because of cost, location, or housing design inappropriate to their work or lifestyle - to a method which meets their need: **Self Build**.

Justin's own home was built for £67k - including the erection of a 40m² insulated workshop; Private Water sterilization plant, Private Drainage, Solar based off-grid electricity with 5kVA generator backup.



£67k House - Exterior

His house has been showcased by the Exmoor National Park as a desired-model for future affordable housing within the authority area. His method and vision will guide four Self Builders - who are the beneficiaries of this pilot, flagship project - toward achieving their own 'dream homes'.

Justin's bold statement is that anyone can build.



£67k House - Interior

The job of building a house is ‘long’, he says, but it isn’t complicated. It entails the seemingly endless repetition of easily-learned skills ...but there will be an end, of course, and that end will be a ‘Dream Home’ which might cost as little as £50k.

He continues: once upon a time all houses were self-built, and they were beautiful - we can still see them in rural villages up and down the country. But decades of buying instant solutions has eroded our belief that we might be capable of solving them any other way. Lack of self-confidence has become our glass ceiling. We don’t talk in terms of lack of self-confidence, of course; the reason we give for not taking on an unfamiliar project is that we don’t have sufficient experience. Most of us never consider the fact that ‘experience’ begins as soon as you pick up a tool.

Describing his younger self as a ‘DIY disaster who couldn’t hang a shelf’ he is easily able to identify with people who feel they have inadequate skills to build a house. Having used his early cuts for kindling, he went on to build two houses - acting as designer, architect and builder for the second; and has built a fifteen ton sailing boat, starting with the trees.

With a first-hand understanding of the difficulties first-time, low-budget self-builders face; with fresh ideas on buying materials and services; and with an addictive positivity - Justin will be our build mentor.



15 ton sailing boat - starting with the trees

2. Will Lock has been the **Chair of EYV** for 7 years. He leads a Committee of 12 other young Exmoor residents, 4 local Trustees, 80 members, 496 followers, and 8 pro bono professional advisors. He is an experienced, heritage builder, employing traditional materials and methods, passed down from generation to generation, for 13 years with the family's 160 year old, Exmoor firm. His work includes church and historic barn renovations, new builds, barn conversions and an award winning hostel on the Simonsbath estate at Limecombe (<https://www.sykescottages.co.uk/cottage/Devon-Simonsbath/Limecombe-951197.html>). Having specialised in heritage building, there is nothing he doesn't know about quality traditional construction.



Limecombe, Simonsbath

Born, bred and educated on Exmoor, Will knows both the joys and the constraints of living on the moor. As the youngest member of his village by a generation, the issue of young people moving away is clearer to him than most. He became heavily involved in sustaining community life in his teens, running a village film club, captaining hockey, sitting on the village hall, Village Revel and gymkana committees, reforming Exford cricket club as captain and lead fundraiser for £1,000's of small village activities. His community and EYV commitments take him everywhere in the National Park, of which he has an encyclopaedic knowledge.

He was a founder of EYV and has since advised other National Parks, worked with CPRE, broadcast on ITV and BBC television, local and national radio, BBC Countryfile, presented to the Parliamentary Lobby in the Lords and the Commons, at national housing hustings in London representing rural areas, and worked with all 13 major authorities on Exmoor. Just before C19 he co-chaired a Summit for the leaders of all those local, Devon and Somerset, county and district councils, with the Exmoor National Park and housing authorities, together in one room for the first time ever, developing pledges for sustaining young residents. Finally he has become one of the youngest Parish Councillors in the Park.

3. At the request of Exmoor National Park Authority **Leslie Silverlock founded EYV to provide a voice for young residents to share their ideas with the Park authority. He is a community development advisor, recently working nationally and internationally on education, training, and partnership projects for Government, Lottery, Eden Project, Police and Health Services. He is President of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister initiated Young Advisors Charity and employed by Government for the last two decades in neighbourhood renewal and Big Society initiatives.**

What will we do?

The focus of this plan is simple: encourage those thinking about Self Building to become Self-Builders.

Won't that happen all by itself?

Unfortunately not. In the UK, among our target group of young people, the number choosing self-build can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Yet self-build is a viable solution to housing need. Almost everywhere else in the world, self build is much more common.

The reason for the UK's low numbers is that we are so used to buying-in solutions to our problems (squeaky brakes, dripping tap) that it almost never crosses our minds to solve the problem ourselves. And if the thought does occur, inexperience, lack of confidence, and fear of failure crush the idea before our next breath. Even mistrust in the regulatory procedures is a further deterrent.

This plan shows how our planned intervention will equip four would-be self builders to become self builders in fact. De-mistifying house building (how do you build a house, anyway?) will allow our self builders to understand the work and processes involved, and to make an informed decision about whether it is for them.

The costings (covered in the attached spreadsheet) will fund the following empowering assistance:

Together we will produce

- four individual house designs
- architectural plans for Planning Application
- building drawings for Building Regs approval
- training with a focus on the use of natural materials

Who are our Self Builders?

A recent seminar in a self built house was attended by 30 enthusiasts keen to learn how it is done. A subsequent tour of 5 self built properties on Exmoor was organised by EYV and the National Park's Planning Dept. At both sessions young adults on Exmoor were able to inspect the self-built houses and conversions in detail. 17 families asked for their names to be placed on a list in order to receive early notification about self build opportunities on Exmoor.

Many of them have practical skills relating to their work - in agriculture, arboriculture, carpentry and joinery, workshop machinery, etc; some have none at all. What they all shared was that they were local people, planning to raise a family, hoping to stay local, but unable to afford local house prices suitable for their needs. Consequently they were considering the possibility of building their own home.

Our strategy for encouraging self-build as a solution to housing need

Once upon a time all houses were self-built. Now, in the UK at least, it occupies a tiny niche in the housing market. And the smallest part of that niche is the family unit who would elsewhere be known as 'first-time buyers'.

Being a small and unattractive market opportunity, nothing is commercially in place to support them in their endeavours: no information, no 'brochures', no guidebook, no training.

Well funded self-builders, on the other hand, can go online to browse examples of house plans, and prices. All their primary questions will be answered:

- What will it look like?
- How much will it cost?
- How long will it take?
- Who can answer my questions about all the stuff I don't know?

At EYV we propose to make the same advantages available to our Self Builders.

- We will design houses appropriate to the Exmoor National Park plan.
- We will amend the design according to need.
- We will cost the design chosen.
- We will provide the training to help the self-builders have the confidence they need to proceed.
- We will show them how to re-imagine the materials they choose.
- We will suggest ways in which to source the materials in such a way as to avoid retail costs, and at the same time providing local primary trades with more work.

In short, we will support our self-builders every step of the way through guidance and mentoring, and creating the conditions for them to share skills, materials and labour.

Risks

- 1. The greatest risk is that one (or more) of our initial group of four, planned self builders doesn't proceed. For this reason we will be offering our services to six self builders, the other two being those whose plans are less well advanced, expecting to be in our second tier development.**
- 2. Inability to raise finance. If raising finance in an individual case proves difficult, owing to their personal circumstance, we will ask them to temporarily withdraw from the scheme until their situation normalises, or we are able to help them with raising finance.**
- 3. Build quality not of sufficiently high standard. Remedy will be sought by either: further training; purchase of professional services; dismantling and rebuilding; or sale of assets.**

Immediate Goal and Future Vision

- 1. To achieve a successful pilot project of four affordable homes which exceed all expectation in perceived value, appearance, build quality, and energy performance, which are appropriate and sensitive to the National Park environment, and intended to cost less than £100,000, including land.**
- 2. To use our success as a blue-print for affordable housing in the other 14 National Parks - and in rural settings nationwide.**
- 3. To inspire young people to take control of their lives by solving their own housing need.**
- 4. To recruit self-build mentors, technical advisors, and building material resource organisers, in each area, from among local, successful self-builders.**

Conclusion

Self-build is a viable solution to housing need. Although it is never likely to become mainstream, those who choose it will discover tremendous advantages over other housing options:

- A house designed according to need**
- Pleasing appearance inside and out**
- Many 'luxuries' become affordable - Argon filled double-glazing; slate roof; bespoke kitchen**
- Skills for life: practical; can-do attitude; project management experience ensures that finding work will never be a problem again. In many ways the least important gain from self build is a house.**

Project Summary

Description of the Project to advise and supply 4 young, Exmoor residents with the knowledge and skills to achieve 4 quality, eco-friendly, self built homes within the National Park.

The Need Young people migrate away from Exmoor, depleting the Park of knowledge, skills and experience because they cannot afford local property prices or rents.

EYV's Self Build Foundations include 4 Focus Groups of young residents who contributed to a comprehensive research report which led to EYV being established and becoming a charity. A self build seminar attended by 30 local residents, 17 of whom signed up for self build. A self build tour organised for 11 young residents to visit five, existing, self built properties on

Exmoor. EYV has its own self build specialist advisor, **Justin Ruthven-Tyers**. Park Planning Officers work with and support EYV. A housing needs survey has also recently been conducted by young residents themselves (report attached).

Objectives within two years to have four new, quality, self built properties on Exmoor suitable for the environment and local working, restricted to local needs for young residents and workers.

Primary Stakeholders four, local self builders and their families; Exmoor National Park Authority; Somerset West and Taunton Council; Lendology; Wessex Housing Hub; EYV.

Secondary Stakeholders Exmoor communities; other young residents, raising their aspirations; all 13 Council and Housing Authorities plus, Health, Police and Fire Authorities, and 42 Parish Councils.

Outcomes 4 attractive, individual, local needs, self built properties setting a new standard in National Parks.

Unique Value A flagship housing project for young people. Environmentally excellent housing. An example to other National Parks. Tackling EYV members' feedback on the unsuitability of currently built, affordable housing for local employment practices.