

Architects hail Shapps' self-build 'boom'

Government initiative to boost finance and cut red tape is 'promising', says RIBA

Mark Wilding

Architects have welcomed a government initiative aimed at sparking a boom in self-build housing, citing it as a much-needed source of work for local practices.

Housing minister Grant Shapps last week launched a package of measures which he claimed would create a "self-build boom and support the industry to double in size over the next few years".

Shapps promised to make more finance and land available,

encourage industry to support self-build, cut red tape and improve access to information.

The move to cut red tape referred to measures in the recent planning reforms which require councils to identify land for self-build housing.

Matt Wood is senior architect at Lucas Hickman Smith and writes the rural design blog Ruralise. He said: "Making more land available — that's the big thing. Councils will now have targets for self-build in the same way that they do for affordable hous-

ing. That's fantastic for architects if it actually happens. It's a potential game changer."

The RIBA said the package was promising. Anna Scott-Marshall, head of external affairs, said: "The proportion of self-build in the UK is much lower than in other European countries so it's encouraging that the government is taking steps to remove some of the barriers to self-build and encourage its take-up.

"British architects have a long tradition of self-build and we hope the announcement today will launch a second generation of self-builders."

The initiative was also welcomed by ASBA, the national

network of self-build architects. Philip McCulloch, director at ASBA — the national network of self-build architects, said he was hopeful they would lead to more work for the profession.

"The point that Shapps made regarding people donning hard hats and building themselves should be taken with a pinch of salt," he said. "We find that the majority of self-builders want their new home built for them with full assistance from architects."

Shapps' announcement coincided with the launch of an internet portal providing information to prospective self-builders. www.selfbuildportal.org.uk

LEARNING FROM HOMERUSKWARTIER

Grant Shapps is leading a trip to the Netherlands next month to see self-build in action. The housing minister will be shown round Homeruskwartier (pictured), a 100ha zone in the south-west of new town Almere, by project manager Jacqueline Tellinga.

Masterplanned by OMA, it is Europe's biggest



low-cost self-build experiment and has ridden the economic storm better than conventional parts of the city. Shapps has declared

Almere a "workable model" and the communities department featured it as a case study in last year's housing strategy.