

Ashley Vale



26 homes
**Community self-build
owner occupied**

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When a former 2.1 acre scaffolding yard site and a redundant three storey office block in Ashley Vale near central Bristol came up for redevelopment in the 1990s, local people were concerned about a volume developer building on the site. They formed Ashley Vale Action Group (AVAG) to influence the process, and to create the opportunity for local people to build their own homes. Registering as a Company Limited by Guarantee, AVAG bought the site for £605K. It provided space to develop 20 individual self build plots and six self-finished bungalows. It was planned to convert the office building into work and art space, and, by adding an additional level, six further apartments and a large multi-use community room. Registering as a company was important for AVAG in that it meant that the group could engage more formally with a land owner, local authority, product supplier, and others rather than the self-builders as a collection of individuals. The group also benefitted through trade discounts, and was able to arrange group training on principles of construction, group work, sustainable design, renewable energy, and in other areas.

Most of the self builders were first time buyers. Some had the average £35K needed to buy their plot land outright

while others borrowed from relatives. Those with no possibility to raise finance up front were able to buy plots using a 100% accelerator mortgage from Buildstore. Affordability was a key factor – the low plot prices that included installation of site infrastructure and services meant it was possible to build a simple family home for as little as £70,000 including the land. Typical build costs were £35,000 to £100,000 for a 3 or 4 bedroomed house. The six self finish bungalows were sold for £150,000 in 2006 and cost between £15,000 and £30,000 to finish. The self finish apartments were sold at £40,000 plus an additional cost of £70,000 per flat for communal works to the building. Internal finishing works cost around £15,000 to £35,000. The completed self build homes are now valued at £250,000 to £350,000 and the bungalows at around £225,000.

Sustainability has been addressed in various ways, including insulating to higher standards than required, and installing solar panels and a community pellet boiler for the six apartments. Lightweight and flexible timber frames enabled some homes to be completed within a year of site purchase in 2001. Almost all the homes were completed within 5 years.



As we built our homes, we formed a close bond, helping, advising and assisting one another, developing a community alongside our homes, and navigating a difficult planning process not suited to our community approach. We enjoyed the process for what it was. The journey was as important as the destination; it took longer than we had planned so we had to consider the potential impacts of this at the start.

Jackson Moulding – founder member of AVAG