

# Unleashing Self Build: The Artists House Demonstrator

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A proposal by  
Impact Hub Birmingham and Eastside Projects  
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# Opportunity

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Within our city, across the country and throughout the wider western world access to affordable, sustainable, secure housing is fast becoming one of the biggest problems we face. The need for more housing development within the city and wider region is well known and being addressed in many ways, we believe it's now time to start looking at a complimentary self build strategy which benefits the many, rather than a few developers.

As a collective of active citizens we want to offer an alternative to the traditional version of development - one that sees participation and engagement as core principles rather than consultation add-ons.

The housing market isn't working for everyone. In fact, it isn't designed to. If we keep taking the same approach we will keep getting the same results.

Artist Housing is a new approach. It is to be home, workspace and public artwork in one powerful combination. Artist housing should demonstrate and confirm an ability to produce social power and social security, allowing both the form of your home and the way you pay your rent to be creative. The Artist House is proposed as a mutual support system, reinvesting into cultural infrastructure. Artist housing is cultural housing.

Artists know that the way to solve a problem is to begin. With each action the next step will present itself whilst injecting vitality into the world we live in.



# Proposal

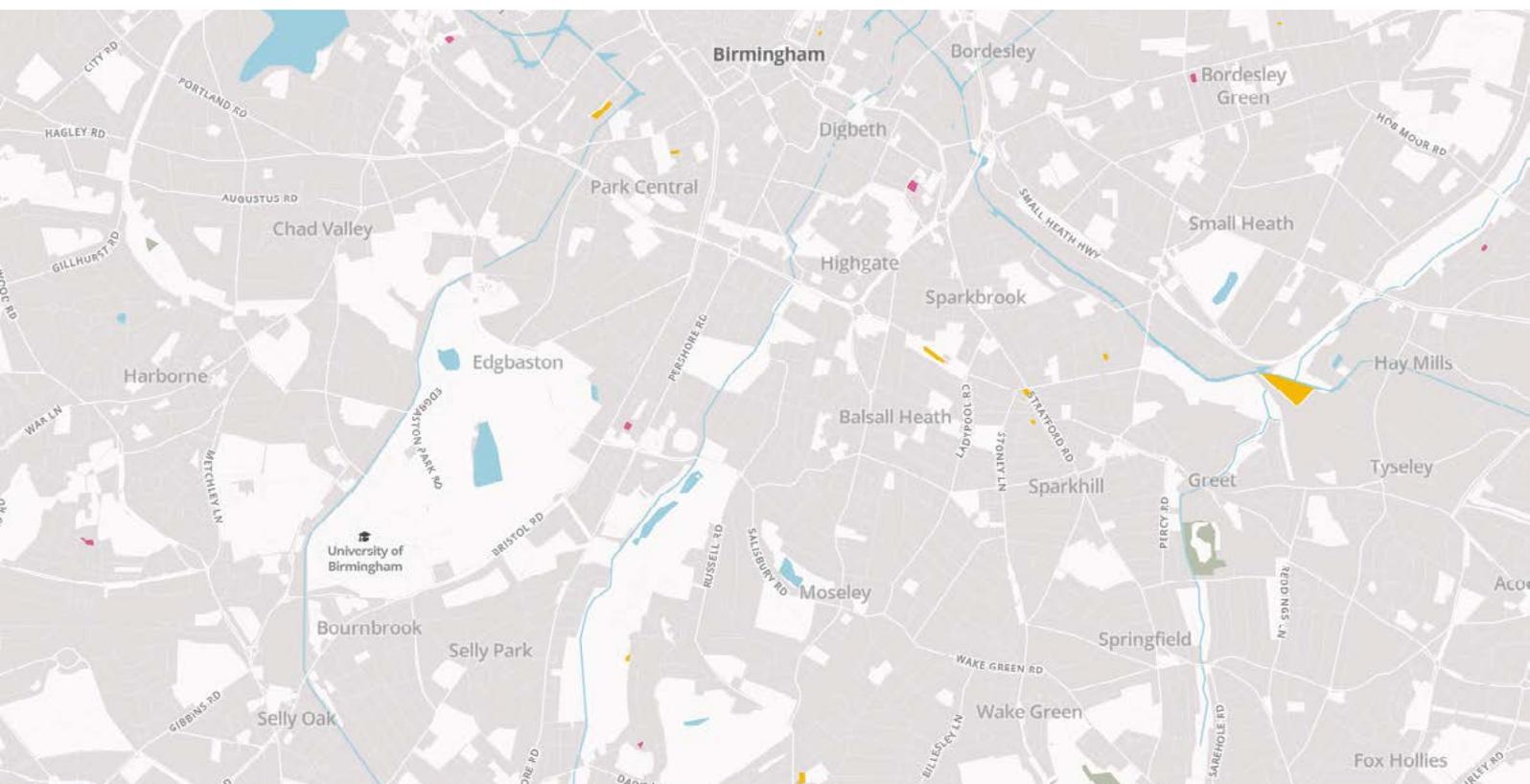
The first challenge preventing new approaches from emerging is the availability of land at a price most can afford. Potential land for development is often locked behind opaque ownership, does not have planning permission or is already owned by large developers. Furthermore, unlike professional developers, self builders often do not have the capital to buy the land outright upfront, and therefore cannot participate in bidding for sites at open auctions.

We feel there is an opportunity to unlock small sites across the city. Sites where the scale of traditional development is less viable, developers are usually looking for sites with space for 30+ units, of which there are a very limited number. However, often overlooked are the hundreds of smaller sites that could be developed, but fly under the radar of developers. These sites present a significant opportunity for artists, self-builders and communities.

Analysis of Birmingham City Council's available data revealed space for hundreds of units across the city just in public ownership. Being able to unlock all of this potential could lead to a more inclusive way of growing the housing stock.

Currently difficulties arise when engaging with the opaque process involved in identifying land and then being able to bid for, lease or buy land. The result is that identifying land is a lengthy and confusing process of building up trust, where connections and contacts trump everything. Mechanisms are needed that afford more transparency in the ownership of public land and micro-development opportunities.

By unleashing a cultural led process we can mobilise a movement of self builders across the city and allow them to benefit as our city grows whilst contributing to the richness of their communities.



Birmingham has a rich heritage of innovation and is the perfect testbed for a new model of housing, combining the industrial history and creative present to realise an innovative future. As the recent Cultural Investment Enquiry highlighted the “all great cities are home to great culture” now we need to create a housing system to build homes for those who create great art and culture in our thriving city.

Artists and creative practices are seen as drivers for wider urban regeneration, as well as key economic drivers for Birmingham and a marker for the progress and success of the community and the city. Artists are now working in a vastly expanded field, some directly addressing major societal questions of our time, and acting in collaboration with many other areas of creativity, thought and commerce. By working with an artistic approach we can approach this issue from a new angle.

This can be done by combining critical principles of art making with innovative ways of building, new ways of identifying and disposing of land and fundamentally, a new way of financing these developments. Demonstrating values of openness and transparency into this process brings with it new hope and citizen involvement beyond responding to twelve week consultations. The exhibition and demonstration of the Artist House is a long term strategy of demonstrating what a creative city can look like. The process is public in preplanning, build, and use. It is the exhibition of ‘home’ through practice not theory. Utilising existing statute and the power of Open Data, Open Design, artist led practices and self construction we can create an innovative contribution to the housing crisis.

The city council should aim to unlock underused land and turn it into open designed, sustainable, adaptable homes which can create revenue. Homes which can be self built and can grow and change as their area and residents lives evolve. Homes which enrich the neighbourhoods in which they are built. A movement which could be a trailblazer for local government and an illustration of the city’s desire to see all citizens benefit from housing growth, not just developers and landlords.



# Demonstrator Pilot

## The Artists House: Demonstrator Pilot

There is undoubtedly a demand for self build plots across the city but there is currently a lack of information in how to navigate the process and a lack of visible support from the city authority for self build. Therefore we propose an open, culturally led demonstrator pilot we are calling Artist House.

Like other key workers artists are suffering from a lack of suitable and affordable houses to rent or own. Housing is key to creating security, thus enabling creativity, building better communities and transforming cities into vital and diverse places. The unique ways in which artists approach problems, along with their intrinsic stake in this issue, may produce innovative solutions and create a new dialogue for self builders in the city.

Artists know that the way to solve a problem is to begin. With each action the next step will present itself whilst injecting vitality into the world we live in.

For this pilot to be undertaken we need access to a plot of land of a size circa 100sqm, in an existing residential neighbourhood to allow for connection to services. We believe the following sites, some included in the SHLAA, could be suitable for this innovative pilot and are owned by Birmingham City Council.

We would request a 6 month option on a site to then raise the required finance to run the project and provide a site cost contribution to the city council for purchase or long lease of the site.



Holders Gardens, Moseley, B13



Copley Hill, Erdington, B23



Guild Close, Ladywood, B16



# Project Financing

Modelling on a single plot build the financial not for profit model would work as follows:

The average single pot price for these small sites could create a sale price of £50,000 for the council but we feel that by leasing these land assets we can create greater financial returns whilst building stronger cultural returns and increasing the value of the initial land for the council.

Over a 50 year lease with a £1,000 upfront contribution and £1,000 yearly ground rent this would create a return of £51,000. Then an uplift in land value of circa £125,000 - £150,000 after construction which is still owned by the council.

Spreading this over the small plots in the SHLAA which are unallocated with space for 341 units this is a potential £341,000 initial cash return, £341,000 annual revenue and a potential £50 million increase in the councils asset value. An investment which benefits the council and benefits citizens of the city at the same time.

Modelled on rent returns of £720 for a 2 bed property to be built on the Holders Green site this could create an annual rev of £8640 after costs this is £6,000 per annum, and over the 50 year lease this creates a £300,000 pot to repay initial finance and create revenue for investment into cultural activities and future builds. Initial finance would be provided by the following streams.

<b>Initial Costs</b>		<b>Finance source</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Build costs	£105,000	Arts Grant	£25,000
Land lease	£10,000	e.g Arts Council England, Paul Hamlyn Foundation	
Project Management	£10,000	Social Enterprise Grant	£25,000
<b>Total project cost</b>	<b>£125,000</b>	e.g Unltd, Power to Change	
		Repayable Social Inv.	£50,000
		e.g Charity Bank, CAF, Lloyds	
		Crowdfunding	£25,000
		<b>Total</b>	<b>£125,000</b>

We believe that during this process by taking an unconventional approach we will be able to access a broad range of alternative finance not open to traditional developers. This could be from a number of sources, from charitable trusts, grant funders to crowdfunding. Many who are interested in the social issue of housing and new approaches are looking for pilot projects to be involved with. The list above is not exhaustive and most funders are looking for asset backed social investment, especially when local authorities are engaged and investing with assets.

## Impact Hub Birmingham

We believe those that are willing to dream, dare and have a heart for a better Birmingham need a place where they can realise these dreams.

A place to collaborate and discuss, challenge and be challenged, provoke and be provoked; a place where paradox and contradictions can cohabit with ease. A platform where they can meet like minded creators and disruptors and where they can continually challenge themselves and others. Innovating around solving systemic challenges in our city and beyond. This place is Impact Hub Birmingham and it is many things all at the same time.

We want to empower a collective movement to bring about change in our city, embracing a diverse range of people and organisations with a whole host of experiences and skills.

We work on a range of systemic issues including housing, childcare and civic justice.

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## Eastside Projects

Eastside Projects makes art public.

We are an artist-run multiverse, commissioning, producing and presenting experimental art practices and demonstrating ways in which art may be useful as part of society.

Eastside Projects provides vital infrastructure, supports best practice and works to expand the role of the artist-run space. Alongside imagining, testing and modeling a free public gallery, we are increasingly engaged in an expanded range of public activities – we devise public art strategies, serve as commissioning agents, produce national public art programmes and create structures to support artists locally, nationally and internationally.

Eastside Projects is an artist-run space as public gallery and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, in partnership with Birmingham City University. Established in 2008.

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