

AVAG Self Build: The Yard



Over a 10 year period, a unique community has been created on the land of a former scaffolding yard. This community is now known as The Yard.

The former scaffolding yard is located in the middle of Ashley Vale, Bristol. Ashley Vale is a lovely neighbourhood with a mixture of housing, light industrial workshops, a city farm and cafe, community developed garden and green areas, all surrounded by hills and embankments. The Yard faces a terrace of red-brick houses in Mina Road and a self-build house in Boiling Wells Lane and backs onto the Narrowways conservation area.

The site covers 2.1 acres and was almost entirely covered by a concrete slab. At the time the land was bought, there was an office block on the southern side, a large shed in the middle and several smaller buildings around the edges.

Before the scaffolding company bought the yard in 1965, the site was used as a mason's yard and firelighter factory. In the nineteenth century, watercress beds had covered the area. This mixture of industrial and rural usage in the history of the site reflects the current mixed-use of the area as a whole, where light-industrial, residential and environment-enhancing activities exist side by side.

In November 2010, The Yard received a **Building for Life Silver standard award**. It is the first time in the award scheme's 8 year history that this award has been made to a self build development. Other notable winners in Bristol and South West in this year were the multi million pound Cabot Circus development and the privately developed Robinson Building - against these hugely funded developments, The Yard can be very proud to be viewed as on a par in terms of its housing and building development achievements.

First Phase of Development:

20 self built houses.

AVAG sold 20 plots of land to a range of individuals/couples/families who designed and built each of their own homes from scratch.

Second Phase of Development:

5 new build/self finish single storey residences.

AVAG built each of these residences to a shell state which were sold to a range of individuals, who then completed the internal configuration and fit out to their own specification

Final Phase of Development:

6 refurbished/self finish flats.

AVAG with 6 other private individuals formed a commonhold (Quoin Commonhold Association) and refurbished (to high eco standards) an old 1960's office block that was situated at the opening of The Yard. A new top floor was built on top of the building and shells for flats were created on the first, second and third floors. These shells were then completed by each of the 6 private members of the new commonhold to their own specification.

The ground floor of this building was retained by AVAG and a large community room and 3 work units were built within this space. AVAG continues to own and manage the hire and tenancies in this space, known as **Wildgoose Space**.

The renovated office block won the Regional South West Green Energy Award for 'Best Housing Scheme' in 2010. A sustainable heating infrastructure is in place here which provides heating and hotwater to the whole building powered by wood and the sun. In addition, all single glazed windows were changed to timber/alu high spec double glazing and reduced in size; the walls have been filled with cavity insulation, the whole building has been wrapped in 120mm of external insulation; an extra storey on top of the building built with a glulam timber frame is fully insulated with 350mm of recycled newspaper, 2.4 KWh of solar photovoltaic panels have been installed which generate electricity for the ground floor community space and work units.

Social and Economic Sustainability



The diverse range of skills needed to build your own home has meant that everyone involved with The Yard project have developed extensive new skill sets and many have gone on to set up their own businesses in the construction sector. The self finish bungalows and office block redevelopment have also offered employment opportunities to many local residents.

Some of the homes are quite large and this has allowed residents to include work space in their homes, saving on rental and travel costs and keeping the community vibrant throughout the working day.

Wildgoose Space includes a community room, available at affordable rates for hire that hosts a whole range of classes and sessions by a number of local **practioners and teachers** as well as providing an excellent social space for private events and community get togethers such as film nights. Wildgoose Space also includes **3 work units** that are rented at affordable rates to a number of local, small and not for profit enterprises.

Environmental Sustainability



To reduce waste and the need for new building materials, AVAG decided to keep as many of the existing structures on the disused site as possible. An existing garage and office block have been renovated in to new buildings and the re-enforced concrete slab that covered the entire site has been built on using lightweight timber frames, reducing the need to excavate and dispose to landfill.

All self builders and self finishers were legally contracted to abide by AVAG's principles of ecological design. This contract included following agreed specifications for environmentally friendly materials.

All properties have solar panels on the roofs. The self finish single storey dwellings are each well insulated with sedum roofs.

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