



## **Salen, Archaracle**

Three families in Salen put their skills, knowledge and resources to use in order to completely self-build their homes.

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### **Background**

Communities Housing Trust (CHT) acquired land from Forest Commission Scotland through the National Forest Land Scheme, now known as Asset Transfer via the Community Empowerment (Scotland Act 2015).

Three families approached CHT to be the vehicle to acquire the land. There was a clear route established for purchasing the land through the National Forest Land Scheme. The three plots were purchased with a Rural Housing Burden attached to the Title of each plot.

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## Delivery

An architect designed the homes for the self-builders and each house was a timber design. The construction was undertaken by the self-builders. The construction stage was completed over 6 years and whilst the self-builders remained in full time employment. The self-builders were skilled in working with timber and had access to local materials.

We caught up with one of the self-builders to ask him about his experience of building his own home:

“Once the land sale went through, work started in earnest with a very old 13ton digger that we had collectively purchased. The access road and sites were cleared of the soft overburden material and borrow pits were dug where possible on site to yield more useful harder material, suitable for the sub base of the road and sites. Bed rock featured highly on all 3 sites and this was broken out where necessary and crushed on site with our equally old crusher.

Foundations were cast onto the bed rock and built up to ground floor level. Locally recycled polystyrene blocks were used as insulation under the underfloor heating slabs. All services were installed using our own elderly machinery.

Timber from trees we felled locally was milled on the woodmizer to create around 90% of the structural and external cladding timber needed for the houses. The post and beam frames and many of the wall panels were fabricated inside the previously constructed shed buildings on the sites. These frames and wall panels were then erected with the tele handler to create the wind and watertight shell of the houses.

Triple glazed timber framed windows and doors were fitted throughout to boost insulation levels. Recycled newspaper insulation was blown into to the walls and roof to create a “full fill” high performance insulating layer. The locally grown and milled larch cladding was fixed to the external walls and treated with a natural oil to try to keep the freshly milled look and colour.

The houses are heated directly from wood burning stoves with back boilers, and provision has been made for more automated wood chip systems to be connected up in the future. Solar thermal panels provide some of the hot water requirements in the summer months (days).

All in all, the builds progressed slowly but steadily with much of the work being fitted in during evenings, weekends and around our paid self-employed jobs. Static caravans were

used as temporary accommodation on site, which saved on rent and provided a great incentive, especially in the winter, to get the houses completed.

Once moved in, the houses are warm, dry and comfortable and although not of massive floor areas, clever design by the architects has given the rooms a feeling of volume, natural light and space”.

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## Finance

The plots were all purchased at a discounted price and all received a Rural Home Ownership Grant (RHOG). RHOG was a Scottish Government initiative set up to help those in rural areas to purchase a plot and build a home on it. The scheme came to an end in 2011.

The builds were funded by the self-builders, as they were all able to continue working whilst building their homes. The builds took 6 years from start to completion

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## Learning Points

Acquiring the land took longer than anticipated to purchase from the Forestry Commission Scotland due to agreement of burdens and clauses

