

News Release

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Lancaster leads UK with new 'custom-build' heritage homes

A new waterside development of 14 family homes in the heart of Lancaster is trail blazing a revolutionary approach to house building.

H²O, a partnership between niche property development company *bloc* and the Canal & River Trust, is introducing house buyers to the new concept of 'custom-build' on a canal heritage site, Aldcliffe Yard, situated in a city centre conservation area off Aldcliffe Road.



Developers believe this will be a win-win for house buyers. Not only do they get to control the design and layout of their new home, they also have the potential to earn savings on the purchase price too. If the custom-build approach proves popular, it could be rolled out across a number of future H²O development sites.

Aldcliffe Yard, next to the picturesque Lancaster Canal, has been lying dormant for several years but will be given a new lease of life by the scheme. The development includes a mixture of brand new three and four bedroom houses as well as refurbished homes created out of listed, stone canal buildings.

House buyers can buy off-plan in the conventional way, with prices starting at £275,000 (including stamp duty). However significant savings can be made by purchasers taking the custom-build route. This is effectively a half-way house between self-build and buying off-plan. It allows people a great deal of flexibility over the interior layout of their new home without the risk and responsibility of a traditional self-build. People buy the plot outright, design their own layouts but then hand over the project management of the build to H₂O specialists.

Mike Atkinson, H₂O project manager, said: “Opportunities to buy into such an attractive piece of Lancaster canal heritage don’t come along very often. One of the plots even includes a small, historic cargo crane in the back garden. This really is a unique site, providing beautiful contemporary homes in a sought-after heritage setting.

“Custom-build is proving to be very popular with potential house buyers. People have enjoyed using our interactive customisation website (www.dreamplot.net) to create their dream home. The software enables you to move walls, perhaps make three large bedrooms instead of four smaller ones, expand your kitchen or move your living space upstairs and then generate your own 3D walk-through. It gives you the freedom to design a personal layout that is tailor-made for every family’s individual needs.

“The build price of the starter specification is pre-agreed with reputable contractors so buyers know what the end cost is likely to be. Any changes they make during the customisation process can, of course, alter the build price but this is carefully tracked so buyers are fully aware of the final cost before they sign the build contract. With specialist self-build mortgages now available and with the custom-build process clearly mapped out, custom-building is far more accessible to buyers than a full scale self-build project.”

Due to the unique composition of the H₂O partnership, house purchasers at Aldcliffe Yard will also have the feel-good factor of knowing that part of the profits from the development will be re-invested in the canal network for public benefit.

Mike Coates, Principal Development Manager at the Canal & River Trust, welcomes its redevelopment. He said: "It's great that disused historic buildings at Aldcliffe Yard will find a new use as attractive homes and the area will soon enhance the canal corridor again. Maintaining a 200-year-old canal network is clearly a constant challenge and its upkeep is supported by income generated by development schemes like this one. Nearly two thirds of the profits from H²O developments to date have been re-invested in Britain's waterways for the benefit of all canal users."

Construction work is due to start on Aldcliffe Yard in September and the whole scheme is due for completion by summer 2015.

For more information about the Aldcliffe Yard development, contact estate agent Paul Lowe at Fisher Wrathall, email paul@fisherwrathall.co.uk. Tel 01524 68822.

Or Mike Atkinson, H²O project manager, email michael.atkinson@blocgroup.org. Tel 07983 337545.

CASE STUDY



Mike Coates, Principal Development Manager at the Canal & River Trust, with Jim and Nicola Combe

Jim and Nicola Combe spotted the new development on Right Move and, in a frenzy of activity before going on holiday, reserved their chosen new build plot in only four days. They have embraced custom-build as a comfortable, less risky halfway house between self-build and the more conventional new house purchase.

They currently live a few miles away in Heysham, in a modern three bed semi 'box' and are keen to move somewhere with a little more character where they can have greater input into the design of what they call their 'forever' home.

Nicola explained: "We have often walked along the canal and thought it would be a nice place to live but the houses are usually very expensive. Aldcliffe Yard is an opportunity to still have that location but at a more realistic price."

After several moves, the couple are hoping this will be their last. Although they have bought a number of new houses over the years, they were frustrated their input was usually restricted to choosing the kitchen cabinets.

Custom-build offers much greater opportunity to tailor the interior to their personal specification and put their own unique stamp on their home. At Aldcliffe Yard, they have decided to change the ground floor layout by moving the kitchen and dining room walls and re-design their bathrooms, including the addition of sliding glass doors to create extra light and space. Their lounge, dining room, master bedroom and guest bedroom will overlook the canal.

Jim said: “We have looked at self-build and barn conversions but I think it would be too daunting just to have an empty plot of land. Custom-build takes away some of the risk. Someone else project manages the build. We might have the time but I don’t think we would have the skills and the patience to take on a self-build project. This is the perfect compromise and a safer option.”

The couple have paid the £1000 plot reservation fee and arranged a special mortgage through Build Store. They will initially buy the plot of land separately and then pay for the build in stages as it progresses. The total cost will be well below the market price for this type of property.

Nicola is vice president of global customer operations for AIG Insurance and when she’s not travelling, works from home. Jim manages the couple’s property portfolio in Lancaster and both are looking forward to the convenience of being in the city centre. Although the property comes with two parking spaces, living so close to all the city facilities means they can down-size to one car too.

Nicola said: “One of the big attractions is being only a 10 minute walk into town. It’s an exciting time. We’re looking forward to moving in – hopefully in time for our 20th wedding anniversary in June 2015. We’re planning a double celebration.”

Issued by

Lynn Pegler, Pegler Communications

Tel: 01928 789042. Mob: 07783 686246. lynn@peglercommunications.co.uk

On behalf of H²O