House sizes

In order to know how much land you need, first you need a rough idea of what size house you want to build.So - what size house do I want to build ?

In the "normal" world of house selling in the UK, houses are generally described by the number of bedrooms. This is a bit silly really, because houses with the same number of bedrooms can vary enormously in size - a 3 bedroom house with large rooms can easily be more spacious than a 4 bedroom house with compact rooms.

Things are more sensible in the selfbuild world - houses are described by their floor area, either in square metres or square feet, which is far more meaningful. But at first it's hard to relate these floor areas to how big the house would actually feel.

As a first guide, I looked at the floor areas of some of the houses on our current estate. It's a reasonably new estate, built in 2001, and is typical of most modern developer-built houses - IE the rooms are quite small.

Our current 3 bed detached measures around 790 square feet, which translates to approximately 72 square metres. This is pretty compact, having two bedrooms that each take a double bed with enough space to walk round (no ensuite), plus a third suitable for a single bed or office desk. There is one main bathroom, a combined kitchen / dining room, a lounge, and a downstairs toilet.

Across the road is another 3 bed detached. This is similar to ours, but has an ensuite to the master bedroom, and has a seperate dining room & kitchen. From memory this was around 900 square feet, or around 83 square metres.

Down the road are some 4 bedroomed detached houses, from memory these were between 1000-1200 square feet, or roughly 90-110 square metres. These have slightly larger lounges and kitchen, plus the obvious extra bedroom.

All the above examples are modern developer style houses, where the main concern of the developer is maximum profit, and fitting as many houses in as possible. Hence the houses aren't particularly spacious, and the floor areas quoted above are the minimum you'd want for the number of rooms.

One of the attractions of selfbuilding is having input into the design of your house - and this usually means you want a reasonable amount of space.

We found a good way to get a feel for floor areas is to get hold of some house plan brochures from the kit home suppliers, such as the well known timber frame suppliers Potton and Custom Homes. Potton also have a show site with 3 of their (very popular) houses built, it's well worth a visit just so you can get a feel for how the sizes on paper translate into real space. They have two 4 bed homes (a 162sqm "Caxton" and a 219sqm "Gransden") and one larger 5 or 6 bed house that is absolutely huge inside ! A point to note - their show homes are not open every weekend, you need to phone to check when they are next open.

From what we've seen, most selfbuilt 4 bed houses probably vary anywhere between 140-200 square meters floor area, anything above that is usually 5 bedrooms or more.

So having read this and maybe looked at a few house designs, you should have a very rough understanding of what you want to build. BUT - don't fix your mind on a particular house style yet - as this will be largely determined by the plot, the local planners and the local house styles.