

Property charlotte grobien people



Property developer Charlotte Grobien explains to *Mortgage Advisor* why she's donating all her profits to charity

It's fair to say that few property developers leave you with the overwhelming sense of altruism that Charlotte Grobien represents with her company Give It Away.

Founded in 2005, Give It Away develops property with the same financial motivation as all investors. However, there's one important difference – Charlotte will hand all profits to local charities.

THE IDEA

A relative newcomer to property development, Charlotte's only experience was adding an extra floor to her house in Putney, south London. Rather than relocating to temporary accommodation with her husband and five cats she decided to live there through the building work, and it was this experience that acted as a catalyst for the idea of Give it Away.

"We found that we got on really well with the builders and the site foreman – who is now part of Give It Away – and it was down to them that the whole process wasn't as tortuous as it could have been," explains Charlotte. "It took about five months, and at the end of it they asked what we were going to do next. I started to think about it and I thought why not do a Sarah Beeny and invest in some property, but give the money away instead?"

However, turning the idea into reality proved a little harder than anticipated. Charlotte's first task was to find a suitable property that would raise sufficient profits to donate to charity and began approaching bemused estate agents. "I went round all the estate agents in Putney with my Give It Away story with varying success," says Charlotte. "One who will remain nameless looked me up and down and replied, 'Oh, how commendable'. Another agent said that if there was a place like that for sale he'd be doing the same himself."

MAKING MONEY

Despite the initial negativity of some estate agents Charlotte eventually settled on Savills, who not only took Give it Away's plan seriously but directed her to a property that fitted her criteria.

Charlotte's original plan was to renovate a run-down house and sell it on at a profit, but the property in Putney was so run down that it had a demolition order on it. However, the land had been granted planning permission for two new properties to be built, meaning more work but higher profits.

The property was purchased in February 2005 and has since been demolished. The land has already been excavated for the foundation works, and basement installation would have begun in October but had to be delayed following complaints from residents who objected to the disruption caused by the construction work.

After this initial setback Charlotte has been able to devote time to a second project and will run the two simultaneously. Although her original aim was to work on one project at a time, when Savills informed her of a plot that had become available in Putney she couldn't turn the opportunity down. The plot is small, but has planning permission for a three-bedroom house.

"I'm funding it with my own money," explains Charlotte. "I wasn't expecting to do the two projects at once, but I understood that the first two or three would be hard, so it's just a matter of juggling."

GIVING IT AWAY

In order to maximise profits from both projects, Charlotte is keeping her costs as low as possible by approaching suppliers and convincing them to provide free or discounted products – so far with great success.

Before and after



Project one before demolition



Project one now

“We’ve got three houses to build now, so I’m on a major shopping expedition,” says Charlotte. “We’ve approached lots of companies asking for their help and a lot of people have been absolutely lovely about it, but we still need more.”

The hardest decisions Charlotte had to make when outlining Give it Away’s plan was which charities would receive donations. “I ended up deciding on a personal basis,” says Charlotte. “I wanted to keep things local as I’ve done some youth charity work in Wandsworth. I thought it would be nice to find charities that fulfilled the young person element and relied on donations from the public.”

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One of the charities Charlotte decided on was Fairbridge, which helps disaffected inner-city youngsters no longer in education back into mainstream life.

However, rather than just donating money to Fairbridge, Charlotte is also directly helping some of the children assisted by the charity by giving them valuable work experience. “Fairbridge is going to put four youngsters on site for two days a week for a couple of months so they’ll see the project progress from start to finish,” says Charlotte. “They’re not at school so wouldn’t get work experience otherwise, and I’m going to do an evaluation for them just like in a real job.”

One of the biggest benefits of working with local charities is that Charlotte can see what her money has been used for and the effect it has had on the young people who’ll work on her site and others.


SEEING THE BENEFITS

Give it Away’s long-term plan is to give away £1m. However, as the property market and the costs involved vary it’s difficult to know how long this will take.

“I haven’t told the charities how much to expect because it depends how much we spend and what the property market is like when it’s time to sell,” says Charlotte. “This is where not being a property developer makes things easier. I don’t have to say I’ll make 20% on each property. If I can give away £100,000 that’s marvellous, but if it’s more, that will be amazing. Whatever the amount, it will provide so much practical help.”

Despite having experience as the owner of a small company, nothing prepared Charlotte for the sheer volume of work involved in running Give It Away. “I’ve had my own companies before, including a conference company and an exercise and beauty salon that I ran for four years,” says Charlotte. “Give It Away is certainly the most time consuming and the hardest work I’ve ever done because there’s the construction side of things to handle plus the running of the limited company and dealing with the charities and press.”

However, it’s more than worth it according to Charlotte. “It actually hit me the other day that I’m working really hard to give money away,” she says. “It’s not like organising a charity ball or going to an auction, but it’s rewarding so it’s obviously worthwhile. It’s strange and tiring, but if I ever feel like that I just have to go back and look at the charities I’m helping and if I can see I’ve bought even six wheelchairs then that’s more than enough reward.”

Given the number of people who will benefit from Charlotte’s hard work and tenacity, this certainly seems to be the case. 

Contact Charlotte by calling 020 8876 8807
or visit www.give-it-away.co.uk