Software opens up residents' role in design

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What could be more sustainable than a sustainable community co-designed by the owner-occupiers and tenants who will live there? That's the premise behind a multi-disciplinary project launching next month that aims to bring self-procured housing to a wider section of the population.

Architect and software developer Slider Studio is heading a team that will develop a multi-user software tool that would allow future residents, architects, developers and planning officers to collaborate in real time on the construction of new homes.

It's called "enabled self-procurement", and the team believes it could be a viable alternative to volume housebuilding in the Thames Gateway and other growth areas. The 13-month project includes architect Mae and the University of East London's architecture department, with support from Cabe, Design for Housing and the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation.

Slider Studio director Michael Kohn, a UEL lecturer, says: "It will be online,

downloadable and free to use. Once we've proved it's manageable, the ideal outcome would be for an enabling developer to come forward, and a local planning authority or urban development corporation to give it permission."

In November, the team will launch an ideas competition for house types to be part of the demonstration software.

"Loads of architects have got schemes in their drawers — it's a chance to get them out and submit them," says Kohn.

The ESP-SIM project has won funding under Urban Buzz, a £5m programme run by University College London to help ideas on sustainable communities born in academia make the transition to the real world.