

MODERN CONSTRUCTION METHODS



Modern methods of construction – such as off site assembly – are in their infancy in the UK. But the Government has been looking at how best to foster their potential.

The use of prefabricated volumetric units in the construction of apartments for Raines Dairy in Hackney (see left), showed the flexibility of modern construction methods. The procedure maximised space available on site to the benefit of the tenants and the developer. The time on site to complete the 61 apartment project was 50 weeks, a saving of some 40 per cent compared with traditional site-based construction.

The Housing Corporation's 'Kickstart' programme has over the past two years allocated £45 million to schemes using modern construction methods.



A home of my own

Bart's nurse Mandy Keinamma thought she would never be able to afford a home of her own. But with the help of a Key Homebuy loan aimed at London key workers, she bought a place in Harold Hill, Essex.

Using the £29,000 loan as part-payment, Mandy arranged a £79,000 mortgage to pay for the rest. This knocked a massive £250 off her previous monthly outgoings, when she was renting in Barking.

Part of the Government's Starter Home Initiative for first time buyers, Key Homebuy is a safe way into home ownership for people who cannot afford to buy outright.

Those accepted can select a home of their choice – within certain price and condition limits – from the open market, provided it is within reasonable travelling time from their work place.

They get a percentage of the purchase price as a loan, up to a maximum of £35,000, leaving them to fund the balance through a normal mortgage. They only need to pay back the loan, including any growth in its value, when they eventually sell the property.

PARKS FOR PEOPLE

Refurbishment of the corner of a London park in Fulham, left dishevelled following the removal of a play area, was one of a number of successful Groundwork projects that contributed to the achievement of Beacon Council status.



Groundwork UK, the environmental regeneration charity, who redesigned the south east corner of South Park, collaborated with Hammersmith & Fulham Council who invested £65,000 in the project. Improved surfaces and scented planting transformed the park into a peaceful area complementing its more active parts – the park now contributes an attractive space for all people, young and old.

Over the next three years, Groundwork UK will receive a further £70 million under the Communities Plan, for work on more than 5,000 major projects in some of the UK's most deprived areas.



OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Communities rather than housing estates. That is the concept behind the £22 billion plan for action that was published in February.

The plan allies measures to tackle the housing provision mis-match between the South-East and parts of the North and the Midlands, with more imaginative design and the sustainment of an agreeable and convenient environment. The priority given to the plan was illustrated by eight high-profile launches hosted by the Government Offices (GOs) in each of the English regions outside London – most of them attended by Ministers.

Included is £5 billion for more affordable housing, including £1 billion for homes for key workers and £300 million to encourage modern build housing. There is also £500 million for deserted and run down housing areas in the North and the Midlands, while improvements to social

housing, and to the local environment receive £2.8 billion and £201 million respectively.

Announcing this radical action, the Deputy Prime Minister said it marked a "real step change" that would create and maintain places in which people wanted to live and to which they were proud to belong. It would improve the quality of life for people up and down the country, he said.

Some £259 million is allocated to tackle homelessness and there will be legislation to deal with bad landlords through licensing.

Additional investment to ensure decent social housing is supported by £2 billion for ALMOs (Arms Length Management Organisations), £685 million further credits for refurbishment via Private Finance schemes, as well as making

stock transfer accessible to more councils by removing many of the barriers against such transfer.

The Housing Corporation, which receives an extra £100 million for its £200 million Challenge Fund to encourage modern construction, will lead a task force to review home ownership programmes.

To ensure delivery of the reforms, new Regional Housing Boards have been set up to advise on the strategic use of housing resources.

London and the four growth areas – Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes/South Midlands, Ashford and London-Stansted-Cambridge – have the potential to accommodate up to 200,000 homes above the levels in current regional planning guidance.

They could also attract more than 600,000 jobs by 2031, the bulk in Thames Gateway and the Milton Keynes/South Midlands areas.

The Government is also topping up the £5 billion it is investing over the next three years to regenerate some of the nation's most deprived areas, with a new £500 million fund over the same period to help partnerships it set up in nine of those worst demand areas.

In some areas the only option will be to demolish obsolete homes, but the Government will make this easier for residents.

Home owners already get back the value of their home and the costs of moving. The Government proposes to increase compensation for disturbance of moving home by over £1,000 – the first increase since 1991.

The Government also proposes to prevent the automatic renewal of planning consents which will reduce development on greenfield sites in low demand areas.

Mr Prescott told Parliament: "In London and the South East, more and more young people and key workers can't afford to live where they want. They're being priced out of their communities.

"In other parts – in the North and Midlands – the housing market has collapsed and thousands of homes face demolition."

With regard to green measures and quality design, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) will receive £17.75 million over the next three years to set up a new green spaces unit. Called CABE space, the idea is to ensure that good quality design is at the heart of all communities. The project, which will champion parks and public spaces, is due to be launched in April.



CABE will also play a part in delivering a strategy to ensure the right design skills are available across the sector, for which another £17 million has been allocated.

Part of the total allocation includes £30 million specifically for a 'community enabler' scheme, aimed at encouraging the community to get involved in regeneration schemes and take pride in their local public spaces.

In addition, £50 million for neighbourhood wardens announced in 2001/2002 will continue to help deter crime, tackle environmental nuisances and improve community spirit.

"People should feel safe in the public spaces that belong to them without fear of crime. Neighbourhood wardens are helping residents to reclaim their streets and parks. They are the eyes and ears of the community," Mr Prescott said.

Furthermore, £89 million has been allocated for a 'liveability' fund supporting local authorities to improve public spaces across the country.

Retiring Housing Directorate chief Michael Gahagan, for whom the Communities Plan is his swansong, says that whether as an ODPM employee you are dealing with low demand, high demand

or the decent homes target, basically this is a plan of action. It sets out the things that need to be done, and especially on the decent homes part it changes policy to make the process easier.

"We've now got to get on with implementing it with the Government Offices and then through them, local authorities, developers, house builders and others, so the message is, this just sets the framework. There is now a lot of hard work to make it happen, very interesting work," he says.

Martin Jones, who was responsible for drafting the plan, says it is about creating affordable houses in high demand areas, and easing the plight of others trapped in homes they can't sell in low demand areas. But the principle underpinning the plan is the creation of communities, not housing estates.

"Housing is important, but without jobs, schools and so on the community won't work."

There were many unsung heroes in the Office who had beavered away to get the plan right, he said.

Much will now happen in the coming weeks. On the immediate horizon is the publishing of the review into how PSA7 (Public Service Agreement), the decent homes standard, is to be achieved. One of three PSAs directly concerning the Communities Plan, PSA7 involves making social housing decent and improving the condition of private accommodation occupied by vulnerable people. Also imminent is an announcement by the Housing Corporation of its approved development programme allocation, which is funding for social housing provision by housing associations.

North West

The North West was once the cradle of the Industrial Revolution. Today the region is suffering low demand in the older urban areas, and even abandoned housing is significant and growing, affecting some 440,000 dwellings.

But Salford City Council is currently piloting a home swap project. This works by offering to swap the homeowner's existing home with a refurbished property in a neighbouring street where the market is more stable and the new property of greater value. The lender benefits by having a bit more security on the debt, and the council can press ahead with the clearance. The resident's mortgage moves with them to the new property. Manchester/Salford is one of four areas in the region being helped by the £500 million national



Housing Market Renewal Fund being made available between 2003 and 2006.

Where the region's countryside is concerned, regional and county rural recovery plans have been drawn up in the wake of Foot and Mouth. The plans which will inject some £390 million over five years are focusing on promoting and diversifying the rural economy as well as delivering social regeneration.

South East

Covering more than 19,000 square kilometres and with an estimated population of 8.1 million, the South East is the UK's largest region. It also has the UK's biggest and fastest growing regional economy, accounting for more than 15 per cent of the UK's GDP. But many of the region's key workers can barely afford the high rents let alone buying a home of their own there. So four growth areas – Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes/South Midlands, Ashford and London-Stansted-Cambridge (LSC) – have been earmarked for growth.

Announcing more than £600 million to help build houses, schools and health centres in those areas, they provided "fantastic" opportunities to build homes in which people wanted to live, Mr Prescott told Parliament.

It was about creating "sustainable communities, not sink estates. We have a dynamic economy. It's time we shared the fruits of that success with the people," he said.

Of that sum, £446 million will be made available for the Thames Gateway, with the extent and timescale of development being considered by a new Cabinet Committee chaired by the Prime Minister. Of the other three growth areas, the Milton Keynes/South Midlands one has already demonstrated dramatic economic success and there is potential for some 370,000 homes.

In Ashford – the UK's gateway to Europe – at least 31,000 new homes could be built, and LSC, which is at an earlier development stage than the other three growth areas, could provide up to 500,000 new homes over the next three decades.

Potential jobs created by these four schemes could amount to more than 600,000 over the next three decades, with 300,000 apiece in Thames Gateway and Milton Keynes/South Midlands, and 28,000 in Ashford.

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