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06.21

HOUSEBUILDER & DEVELOPER



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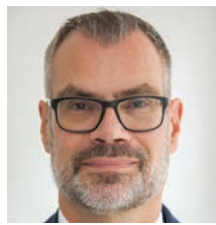
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James Parker

FROM THE EDITOR

How are you finding timber sourcing currently? The humble timber roofing batten is currently under the spotlight, with firms joining forces to raise the alarm on supplies. As our news feature on page 8 details, the trade body for roofing contractors has joined up with leading suppliers in a campaign to persuade housebuilders to work together with them to tackle the issue.

In a virtually unprecedented 'perfect storm,' low stocks of European softwood have been joined by huge pent-up demand from housebuilders as life returns to normal post-pandemic, and already rising prices. As availability is squeezed, costs naturally increase; there's no easy way out of this situation. The world is building again, but the basic materials are not there to support it.

The other major global markets are offering no rescue – far from it – with Russia already limiting exports, meaning its major customer China is now sourcing more timber from Europe. The US and Canada are also not the export source they once were.

Whether this is all the fault of Covid, or whether Brexit is also to blame, having led to delays and hassles between European logistics and UK customers, the challenge is mounting. DIY during lockdown has no doubt had a huge part to play, removing more timber from the chain. Whatever the case, at some point housebuilders will feel the pinch, if they're not already, when their suppliers can no longer absorb the costs.

However, as Brian Berry explains in his monthly comment piece from the SME-defending Federation of Master Builders on page 14, the problem is far from only restricted to timber. While timber prices may be up 50 per cent, cement is up around 30 per cent, and some small builders are finding it incredibly difficult to locate bags of this basic commodity. Steel and insulation, much of which comes from overseas, are also in short supply, and price rises of several per cent for various materials are expected later in the year.

Roofers are saying that timber battens are the hardest items to find currently, and being key to most housebuilding, they are fundamental to achieving the 300,000 homes target. But generally there are concerns around shortages across the board, with Q3 of this year likely to be when the worst impacts occur.

It is easy to say that builders need to work closely with suppliers to manage expectations. This means that suppliers will not only need to give early warning of problems with stocks to help clients reschedule, they will also need to provide transparency on pricing increases, if they want to retain trust. "Flexibility around contracts" between suppliers and builders is another strategy for coping with this situation that's easier said than done.

The impact of price rises as well as delays to programmes may not be sustainable for many small firms; we have to wait and see. While the industry is grappling with the problem, it's time the Government intervened to help, so that we don't have to wait for a very damaging end of year.

James Parker

HOUSEBUILDER & DEVELOPER

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ON THE COVER



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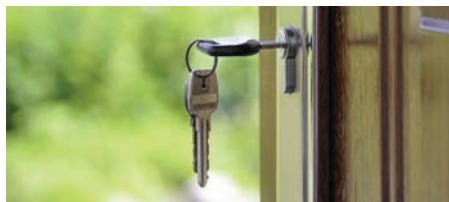


COMMUTER-AIDED DESIGN

Crest Nicholson invests in the Surrey commuter belt, creating a mix of home types in the prime location of Godalming to suit buyers from first-timers to growing families

Catteshall Court,
Crest Nicholson -
go to page 12.

First time buyer scheme launched



The Government has announced a programme to provide homes to first time buyers at a 30 per cent discount against market value, with a cap imposed on value across the UK, in a move to provide a quarter of affordable homes as 'First Homes.'

One of the First Homes programme's key criteria is that the sale value is no higher than £250,000 (rising to a £420,000 maximum in Greater London).

Local authorities will decide who will qualify for these homes, with other criteria including that a minimum of 25 per cent of all affordable housing units secured through developer contributions should be First Homes.

Developers can be exempted from paying Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) on First Homes, but they must only be sold to people meeting the eligibility criteria.

First Homes are the now the Government's "preferred discounted market tenure," and it said they should account for "at least 25 per cent of all affordable homes."

Local authorities and neighbourhood planning groups have discretion to require a higher minimum discount of either 40 per cent or 50 cent, "if they can demonstrate a need."

Rico Wojtulewicz, head of housing and planning at the House Builders Association (HBA), part of the NFB, commented: "Just like the delivery of social housing," the cost of First Homes will be a challenge for small and medium sized developers. "However," he says, "I am sure this policy will prove popular."

"We hope councils now take the social housing challenge more seriously by setting themselves higher housing targets in local plans and meeting that ambition to either build their own social homes or working with housing associations and other registered providers to deliver them," he added.

LGA warns of substandard permitted developments in urban areas



Office blocks left empty following the pandemic risk being turned into potentially substandard housing, as a result of 'permitted development' rules that bypass the need for planning permission, councils have warned.

New analysis by the Local Government Association (LGA) also found that more than 16,000 affordable homes could have been lost in England in the past five years as a result of offices converted into homes under permitted development rights.

In some areas, office to residential conversions account for a "significant proportion of new homes," said the LGA. While it notes that different types of accommodation will be appropriate for different people at different stages of their lives, and in some cases office conversions can provide a suitable option, the LGA said it has "long had concerns about some of the substandard housing created from permitted development conversions, and the lack of any requirement for developers to provide affordable homes or supporting infrastructure."

The LGA reported that in 2019/20 more than half (56.6 per cent) of all new homes in Trafford were office conversions, 40.9 per cent in Crawley, with other areas seeing similar high levels of 'permitted development' schemes. The association commented: "This means communities are unable to have their say on these conversions to ensure they meet high quality standards. There's no requirement for the developer to provide any affordable housing or supporting

infrastructure such as roads, schools and health services, as there would be if planning permission was required."

The Government has extended permitted development rights to apply to all commercial units and business premises – meaning shops, banks, restaurants, gyms, creches and offices can now be turned into homes without planning permission.

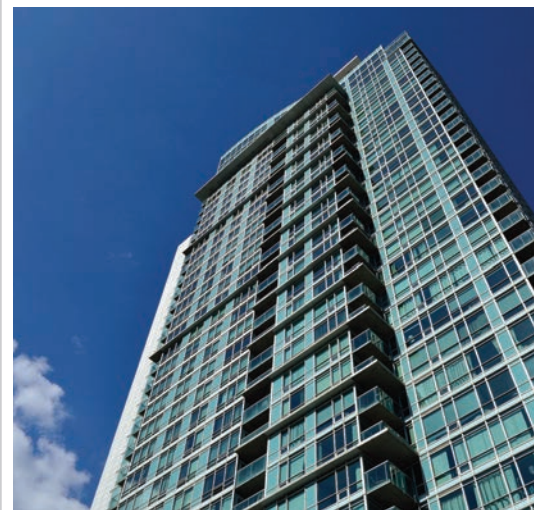
The Government's own 2020 report found that permitted development conversions can "create worse quality residential environments than planning permission-based conversions, in relation to a number of factors widely linked to the health, wellbeing and quality of life of future occupiers."

The LGA applauded its move to lessen the negative impact on communities of permitted development rights by introducing space standards for new homes. However, it said that "concerns remain" about the quality, design and safety, as well as location of such conversions.

The LGA has called for permitted development rights to be scrapped as part of a strengthening of a locally-led planning system. It feared that with many offices and other premises potentially being left redundant following Covid-19, they risk being turned into housing via the method.

Councils are able to remove permitted development in specific areas via 'Article 4' directions, although this can be a lengthy process requiring approval of the Secretary of State. The LGA warned that curtailing councils' ability to use Article 4 however would represent a further blow to local democracy.

Cllr David Renard, LGA housing spokesperson, commented: "Councils are committed to building the housing this country desperately needs as part of the national recovery, but we urge the Government to protect the future quality of new homes by permanently revoking the permitted development rights for change of use into homes."





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Housebuilding under “enormous pressure” from timber shortage

Global timber shortages and rapidly rising prices have put the UK housebuilding industry’s supply chain “in the eye of a perfect storm,” according to UK roofing companies.

Some of the leading businesses and organisations from the roofing industry have expressed “grave concerns” about extremely low stocks of European softwood (used to produce UK roofing battens), in a context of sustained high levels of demand from the housebuilding industry, as it continues to recover from the pandemic.

Avonside Group, Marley and SR Timber, alongside the National Federation of Roofing Contractors (NFRC), have joined forces to highlight the impacts shortages are having. They are fuelling “steep and rapid” cost inflation for roofing contractors, according to the firms, “forcing them to make a choice.”

A further reason for shortages is the supply chain “struggling to hold back the tide of global factors that are far beyond the UK’s control,” said the group.

A GLOBAL ISSUE

Demand from the three biggest global markets (China, America and Russia) has reportedly contributed to a situation that may take months to stabilise and years to fully recover.

China has been hit hard by flooding and strict forest protection measures, seeing a near halt in domestic logging, and forcing

it to look to other regions for additional supply. Meanwhile Russia, the world’s largest exporter, is proposing a ban on exports of softwood and hardwood logs.

North America is still reportedly reeling from its first lockdown, which led to the closure of half of Canadian and a third of US sawmills, and a halt in exports. The situation was exacerbated by wildfires and hurricanes, and imports are at the highest level in 15 years.

Despite sawmill closures during the first lockdowns, the major European producers such as Sweden maintained their production, and in some cases increased it. However, in the space of a few weeks, Europe became the world’s leading exporter of sawn softwood, and in Scandinavia and central Europe, sawn log prices (as well as routing and transport costs), are rising rapidly.

This combination of factors, plus growth in DIY and garden projects during lockdowns, a robust construction sector recovery, and shipping- and freight-related issues including Brexit, are all conspiring against a return to plentiful timber stocks.

HOUSEBUILDING IMPACT

Roofing contractors say the biggest impacts on the UK sector are cost and productivity. Delays in supplies of materials such as battens present “a real and serious” risk to housebuilders’ production schedules, the financial impact

of which can be “severe.” However, costs of avoiding such delays within the supply chain can itself be significant, said the roofing group.

Avonside Group’s CEO Eddie Stanton commented: “The price of battens is already more than 50 per cent up over the past six months, and lead times are getting longer. This is putting enormous pressure on the housebuilding supply chain in terms of what price increases they can absorb, and what they have to pass on.”

Marley’s roof systems director Stuart Nicholson said: “The global/US pressure of increased demand for timber has exacerbated the supply issues caused by the pandemic and Brexit. It remains extremely challenging.”

SR Timber’s trading director Shaun Revill added that the UK roofing sector has performed well so far “when you realise that the industry hasn’t seen anything like this since World War II.”

According to the NFRC, two-thirds of roofing contractors saw material availability deteriorate in the first quarter of the year, and 89 per cent reported price rises. Timber battens were the second-highest material shortage after roof tiles, with a third of contractors reporting shortages. The problem’s so severe that it was the top concern for roofing contractors – above Covid and Brexit.

James Talman, chief executive of the NFRC, added: “Our supplier members

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are doing all they can to alleviate shortages, but it will still be some time before we are back to steady levels of supply. Homebuilders therefore need to work collaboratively with roofing contractors to plan ahead, build in lead times, factor in price rises and ensure flexibility in contracts.”

THE 2021 PROGNOSIS

The availability of timber construction products is likely to get worse before it gets better, according to a recent statement by the Construction Leadership Council's (CLC) Product Availability Group.

SR Timber noted that even if sawn wood production is able to meet European demand, thanks to abundant forestry, it will take “longer than usual” to meet orders already received, while rebuilding minimum stock levels in sawmills.

Contractors are having to plan material supply further and further in advance, to assist suppliers in efforts to meet forecast demand volumes. The group says that last minute shortages affect production time, with further cost impacts due to the need for alternative sourcing.

In many cases, the rising prices plus the additional costs involved in dealing with material shortages will be “unsustainable if the burden is not shared,” says the group, endangering short term housing supply.

All the firms agree that the roofing and housebuilding industries “must come together” to address this challenge to ensure that the industry can deliver the homes Britain needs.

NHBC launches training hub for construction trades



A new ‘Training Hub’ in the West Midlands has been unveiled by the NHBC, intended to help “develop the next generation of skilled tradespeople starting out in housebuilding.”

The NHBC Training Hub in Tamworth has been built in partnership with Redrow and Tamworth Borough Council, with input from an industry working group.

The Hub, which was officially opened on 20 May, is intended to support more than 100 apprentices annually in a purpose-built facility that will “immerse apprentices in a realistic working environment,” said NHBC.

Bricklaying has been chosen by NHBC as the initial focus for the Training Hub, “due to the shortage of skilled bricklayers in the housebuilding sector, which has been compounded by the pandemic.”

The first cohort of new apprentices were welcomed to the facility on Monday 24 May, beginning an 18-month

programme delivered through “concentrated blocks of training, focusing apprentices on the key skills needed in housebuilding.” The NHBC added that the training’s modular nature “means that, after only a few weeks, apprentices will be able to contribute positively on active sites.”

Speaking at the opening, NHBC chief executive Steve Wood said: “It gives me great pleasure to be able to launch the new Hub. NHBC is addressing vital skills gaps in the industry and providing brand new employment opportunities for young people.”

Wood added: “Our commitment to developing the next generation of housebuilders aligns with the Government’s ‘Build Back Better’ campaign to support economic growth, and I look forward to seeing many apprentices successfully pass through the Training Hub in the coming years.”



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£5.16bn framework launched for public sector housebuilding in the south

A framework worth £5.16bn has been launched to support public sector residential construction and development in the south of England, alongside calls for developers and contractors to participate.

Launched by Southern Construction Framework (SCF), the four-year Delivery and Development Framework, called SCF Residential, is available to “all public bodies in the South East, London and the South West.”

Now open for tender, SCF is inviting residential developers (including SME developers), and residential builders (including SMEs) to express their interest in being part of the framework. Requests to participate must be submitted by midday on 2 July 2021.

The framework will “give public sector organisations access to a range of residential construction and development solutions,” said SCF. This includes “access to leading local housebuilders; construct-only or design and build and turnkey end-to-end development,

construction, and management services.”

SCF Residential will be tailored to suit a wide range of projects, said the body, including schemes over £30m, which will be delivered in three sub lots (south west, south east, and London), allowing up to six providers per sub lot. Smaller schemes (over £15m) will be delivered in seven sublot regions, “allowing up to eight providers per sub lot and focused on local delivery.”

The lots are split between schemes of 10-75 houses and 65+ houses and it is expected that SCF will appoint contractors and developers to more than one lot.

Kingsley Clarke, SCF operations lead, commented: “Our emphasis is on delivering value across all public sector projects that are built under this framework, but we are keen to avoid a race to the bottom.

“We want to work with developers and contractors that share our commitment to quality and collaboration,



so that we can build a portfolio of innovative developments that showcase the southern regions.”

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Crest Nicholson's Godalming goals

A collection of three and four bedroom houses and one and two bedroom apartments are being launched by Crest Nicholson at its new development, Catteshall Court, in the market town of Godalming, Surrey.

Once the units are complete in 2023, the development is set to include a mix of 43 apartments and 37 houses. It is intended that each of these homes will maximise natural light, creating “bright and airy” open plan living and dining areas.

The bedrooms are generously sized to suit growing families, while contemporary kitchens and bathrooms will reportedly feature top quality fixtures and fittings throughout. House buyers will also benefit from a private garden, while all apartments include their own balcony or terrace. Traditional exteriors have been selected to complement the village surroundings.

Located a short walk from Godalming town centre and high street, Catteshall Court offers residents an array of local amenities, including shops, restaurants, pubs, and a local library. For families with children, there is a range of schools and nurseries nearby including Godalming College and Busbridge Infant School, both rated ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted.

Nestled within a wooded hillside, and with a small lake nearby, Crest Nicholson hopes the development's residents will “enjoy a peaceful countryside home,” with the benefits of being within commuting distance of the capital.

With two train stations, Godalming and Farncombe, less than a mile away, the development is accessible to London Waterloo –



50 minutes away by rail – while drivers will benefit from the close link to the Guildford and Godalming Bypass of the A3, offering connections to the south. Several bus stops can also be found within walking distance of Catteshall Court, and footpaths connect the site to the town centre.

Eileen Guihen, sales and marketing director at Crest Nicholson South, commented: “We are excited to have launched this striking collection of homes at Catteshall Court for off-plan sales, with our show home available to view this summer. With so many different property options available, there really is something for every purchaser at every stage of life – from first time buyers to expanding families.

“Situated right in the heart of Godalming, and with so many amenities and such a beautiful countryside nearby to explore, we're already experiencing lots of interest in the development.”

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Brian Berry, chief executive of the Federation of Master Builders

COMMENT

SHORT SUPPLY

Brian Berry, CEO of the Federation of Master Builders (FMB), explores how the shortage of construction materials is constraining small builders' ability to 'build back better.'

Since the coronavirus pandemic, many small to medium-sized (SME) construction firms have struggled to access the materials they need. Builders can no longer rely on arriving at their local builders merchants and being sure that they will have a particular product in stock.

Key building materials are in short supply, including timber, cement, steel, roofing products and insulation. Furthermore, the latest data from the FMB's State of Trade Survey found that 93 per cent of builders reported material price increases in the first quarter of 2021, and 92 per cent predicted that they would continue to rise into Q2. Anecdotal feedback suggests that the cost of some materials, like timber, has risen by 50 per cent, and the price of cement has risen by 30 per cent.

The pandemic limited activity in the manufacturing industry in 2020, which has led to a backlog in orders and excessive delays.

But issues continue to be posed by Brexit, including the new rules on hauliers transporting goods between the EU and the UK. The shortage of drivers in the UK has compounded delays and the longer lead-in times for basic products and materials.

These supply chain issues have led to a perfect storm, as output is booming around the world, especially in the US and China. Indeed, the State of Trade Survey found that enquiries for building work in the UK were at their highest levels in more than 10 years.

The FMB is working closely with the representatives of merchants and manufacturers, under the umbrella of the Construction Leadership Council, to share information and communicate the causes and origins back to the industry. We must use all the opportunities we can to communicate these issues to consumers so that they know that it's now more important than ever to work closely and

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communicate with their builder.

Local builders are disproportionately impacted by these shortages compared to those who can buy in advance and in large quantities. This means smaller firms are struggling to complete their projects on time and are facing extra pressure on their cashflow. Builders are juggling their workloads much more than usual, as different materials become available at different times. It's essential that materials are made available not only to larger infrastructure projects, but also to the small, independent merchants that builders typically use.

A lack of materials will hamper the ability of the construction industry to lead our economic recovery and contribute to the build back better agenda. Local builders should be at the heart of plans to build new homes, retrofit our existing stock with energy efficiency measures, and train the next generation of apprentices. If they do not have access to the materials they need, none of this can happen. The FMB has written to Government Ministers to warn of the serious impact that this will have on builders' output. We must work together to find a solution to these shortages as a matter of urgency.

Granger Reis joins forces with Real Estate Balance



Executive search firm, **Granger Reis**, joins leading UK real estate industry membership body, **Real Estate Balance**; a progressive network of organisations working together to help drive further action around equal opportunities and inclusive environments within the sector. Granger Reis is dedicated to using its industry expertise and strong understanding of talent to drive greater diversity, inclusion and representation amongst the executive level. With a strong track record in areas such as finance, investment, home building, commercial and industrial development across EMEA and North America, Granger Reis will be working with Real Estate Balance to help further its message amongst its key audience.

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Geocel teams up with Britain's favourite builder



Geocel has announced a partnership with popular builder and TV personality, Julian Perryman. Geocel will be working with Julian throughout 2021 to highlight a number of its product campaigns as well the work it is doing raising awareness for

the Lighthouse Construction Industry Charity (Lighthouse Club). A video series, 'Setting the Standard with Julian Perryman', promoted across Geocel's social media and YouTube channel will document Julian's ongoing work with the brand. In the coming months, Julian is due to take up the ecoSEAL Challenge to try out Geocel's reusable ecoSEAL system. He will also be testing THE WORKS PRO and the newly relaunched Mate ranges.

geocel.co.uk www.youtube.com/channel/UCkqC3ly1F42-8zMTNAWnc6w

Encouraging industry to look after mental health



Over recent years, the construction industry has worked hard to improve health and safety on site. However, when it comes to supporting mental health and wellbeing, more still needs to be done.

According to a recent **Keyline Civils**

Specialist survey, 53 per cent of construction workers who responded have struggled with their mental health and 44 per cent of those have never spoken to anyone about this. In response, Keyline has launched a social media awareness campaign, #TOUGHTALK, in partnership with the Lighthouse Club, to encourage its customers and those working across the civils sector to do more to support workers' mental wellbeing.

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Norbord Europe Ltd is proud to join the **West Fraser** organisation. Serving the housebuilding and construction industry with a vast array of board products for flooring, panelling and roofing, Norbord is the go-to corporate name behind the company's popular brands for architects,

merchants, specifiers, end-users and consumers alike. These successful, well-known brand names will remain – SterlingOSB Zero, CaberFloor and CaberWood MDF as part of the West Fraser organization. In addition, it is business as usual at the three UK plants – in Cowie and Inverness, Scotland; and South Molton, Devon – with no change in personnel.

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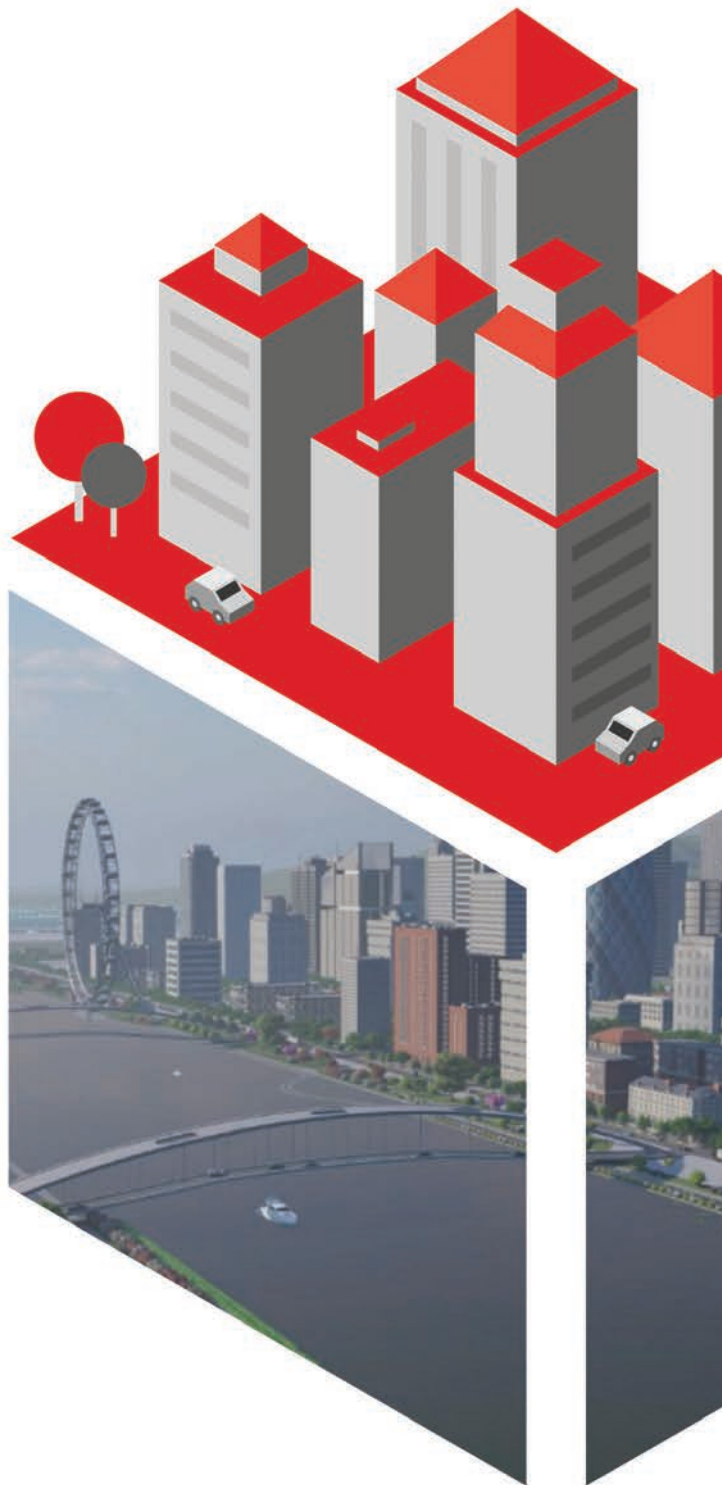
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Patrick Mooney, editor of
Housing, Management &
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ENGLISH
COUNCILS
HAVE
GRANTED
PLANNING
PERMISSION
FOR 2.78
MILLION
NEW HOMES,
BUT ONLY 1.6
MILLION
HAVE BEEN
BUILT

THE SOCIAL NETWORK

THE HOUSING STATS DON'T STACK UP

Patrick Mooney, housing consultant and news editor of Housing, Management & Maintenance asks, do the Government's numbers for how many homes with planning permission have not been built stack up?

There is a strange and mysterious coincidence about housing statistics sometimes, and one of those occasions occurred recently, when the reported number of unbuilt homes with planning permission almost exactly matched the number of households on local authority waiting lists.

In making a pitch to the Government for additional powers and resources, the Local Government Association revealed that since 2010/11 English councils have granted planning permission for 2.78 million new homes. But over the same 10-year period only 1.6 million homes had been built, creating a shortfall of 1.18 million homes.

A month earlier, the Ministry of Housing released its latest figures for social housing lettings in the previous year. Among the mass of statistics included in its press release, was one informing us that there were 1.15 million households on local authority waiting lists on 31 March 2020, which represented a one per cent decrease on the previous year.

The closeness of the 1.18 million and the 1.15 million figures should not fool us though – the waiting list for a council house would not be wiped out simply by building all of the homes with planning permission.

Not only are they located in different places across the country, but they also do not match up in terms of size, housing type, price or affordability. Even if we wanted to make the waiting list disappear, it could not be achieved by 'nationalising' the pipeline of unbuilt homes with planning permission. Life is not that simple!

AN ANNUAL CONTEST

The LGA produces figures every year showing how many homes remain to be built, despite being granted planning permission. And, every year the volume housebuilders cry 'foul' in return, claiming that they are not sitting on a vast land bank, and that bureaucratic planning rules and regulations need to be overhauled if they are ever to build sufficient new homes to meet the nation's needs. This

year was no different.

As part of its lobbying of Government ahead of the Queen's Speech, the LGA argued that local councils should be helped to build at least 100,000 new homes a year and that councils should also be able to charge developers the full council tax charge for every unbuilt house when the original planning permission expires.

The LGA also wants the Government to make it easier for councils to use compulsory purchase powers to acquire stalled housing sites or sites where developers do not build out to timescales contractually agreed with a local planning authority. This was the equivalent of the LGA putting their tanks on the housebuilders' pristine, manicured lawns.

In response, the Home Builders Federation denied that developers were sitting on land unnecessarily. Andrew Whitaker, its planning director, said: "While housing supply has doubled in recent years, the planning process remains the biggest constraint on further increases.

"Many of the homes included in the (LGA) numbers will have actually been completed or are on sites where construction work is ongoing. Others will only have an initial consent and be struggling their way through the treacle of the local authority planning departments to get to the point where builders are allowed start work."

BOLD ACTIONS REQUIRED

As we can see, the HBF returned fire on the LGA, and we are no nearer to achieving the Government's target of 300,000 new homes being built every year. Although in fairness to the HBF's members, it is only right to point out that builders have increased housebuilding rates in recent years, with completions reaching 210,600 in 2019/20, its highest level in the past 10 years.

But for the country to somehow generate another 90,000 new home completions in the coming years to reach the magical figure of 300,000, the LGA believes that councils need to be empowered to increase their output.



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Councillor David Renard, the LGA's housing spokesperson said: "Councils are committed to working with Government and developers to build the housing the country needs."

"It is good the number of homes built each year is increasing. But by giving councils the right powers to incentivise developers to get building once planning permission has been granted, we can go further and faster. Councils are granting permission for hundreds of thousands of homes but families who desperately need housing cannot live in a planning permission."

Councils are in many instances desperate to increase their own housing stock and reverse the trends of the past decade where as a result of Right to Buy sales and transfers to housing associations, their total stock of housing has fallen by 11 per cent to 1.58 million properties in 2019/20.

In contrast, housing associations have increased their stock numbers by 18 per cent during the same period to 2.58 million in 2019/20. In total, since 2008 the social housing stock has been increasing each year and now stands at 4.17 million houses and flats.

But because people are staying in their council or HA home for longer periods (they have more secure tenancies than

private rentals as well as lower rents), fewer of these low-cost homes are becoming available each year and this is putting greater stress on the waiting lists and extending the time it takes to provide homes to those in need.

NOT A NUMBERS GAME

There were only 306,000 new social housing lettings in 2019/20, a decrease of 2.5 per cent on the previous year and a whopping 23 per cent fall from the peak of 396,000 new social housing lettings in 2013/14. This is forcing councils to turn increasingly to the private rented sector for solutions to the chronic under-supply of affordable housing. However, it is usually a less popular option because the standard of accommodation available at lower, affordable prices is variable at best and unsafe at its worst.

It is estimated that up to 400,000 tenants have racked up huge rent arrears during the past year as a result of strained incomes during the various lockdowns and many thousands of tenants are at high risk of being evicted.

The ban on evictions was extended several times during the Coronavirus pandemic, but it ended on 31 May, and it is feared that tens of thousands of tenants (maybe even hundreds of thousands) will

be evicted. Many of them will then apply to join the council waiting list, pushing the combined lists well above the 1.15 million figure.

Giving approval to councils to build thousands more low-cost homes now will not create an overnight solution to the impending evictions crisis. But the Government could make help available through discretionary payments for those tenants in arrears, deferring the need for landlords to repossess their properties.

Proactive help to ward off huge numbers of evictions would save the Treasury a small fortune in paying for bed & breakfast, and it could also be seen as a better investment than the more than a billion pounds spent on the stamp duty holiday extended to home buyers in recent months.

This is actually a much more important social and economic issue than the ongoing tit-for-tat between the LGA and the HBF. Let's hope that Ministers make the right calls, but looking forward it would not harm to respond positively to some of the LGA's requests and give councils the tools to build 90,000 new homes a year, so they can bridge the gap between current targets and levels of supply. Surely that would be a win-win and satisfy both the LGA and the HBF.

Counting down to catch up at CFJLIVE



The flooring industry is preparing for CFJLIVE – its first official event in over a year – which takes place on Thursday 1 July. The free-to-attend global exhibition is the UK industry's first ever virtual event, bringing together over 100 global exhibitors. It will be broadcast live from a

main stage – at FITA's training centre in Loughborough – and from exhibitors' showrooms, offices and factories around the world. "The format is flexible, to suit schedules and time zones, and the content is shaping up to be incredibly exciting!" commented John Heath, Kick-Start Publishing's CEO. Fast registration can be accessed now.

stuart.bourne@kick-startpublishing.co.uk www.cfjliveexpo.co.uk

Extended deadline for Pump Cashback Scheme



In light of the government closing its Green Homes Grant, Panasonic has announced an extension to its own Green Cashback Schemes to provide installers and homeowners with a longer period to benefit from this generous scheme. Now extended for a further two months, the two schemes

offer generous cashback on the completion of installations of Aquarea Air-to-Water heat pumps. Projects must be completed by 31 August 2021 and all claims for the cash need to be submitted by 30 September 2021. The Panasonic Aquarea system offers a reliable system thanks to its quality components that provides an innovative low-energy solution.

01344 853 393 www.aircon.panasonic.eu/GB_en/green-homes

Ultranel named Best Brand New Product



Ultranel, the precision engineered 'room in the roof' system from Ultranel Building Technologies, has won Best Brand New Product at the esteemed Housebuilder Product Awards. The Ultranel system has been created to meet the demands of volume housebuilders by accelerating the build process and

removing the need for cranes. The Ultranel 'room in the roof' and spandrel wall system is BBA approved and NHBC Accepts to ensure verified fire, weathertightness, thermal, and structural performance every time. Tried and tested by one of the UK's most prominent housebuilders, the groundbreaking system increases return on investment by reducing build times and increasing saleable residential space by up to 60 per cent.

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THE CLIMATE CHALLENGE

Making the journey to net zero

Progress towards net zero carbon 2050 is gathering pace with the Government reinforcing commitments to a series of sustainability pledges. Tom Murray of Baxi Heating discusses the latest developments, and what housebuilders and developers need to consider right now.



The UK's commitment to a green recovery to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 is no mean feat.

Momentum has continued to grow however since the Government first outlined these ambitious plans. In the last 12 months for instance, several commitments have been made in a bid to shift away from predominantly natural gas-powered heating, in favour of lower carbon technology.

Climate change commitments have come in the form of pledges, such as those made in the Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan, which demonstrated the centre's continued prioritisation of heating technologies such as heat pumps and investment into hydrogen trials into 2021 and beyond.

Additionally, low-carbon regulations have also continued to be developed, such as the Future Homes Standard, which will prohibit gas powered appliances from being installed in all new build homes from 2025.

Building on this, more recently the Government published its response to the Building Regulations Approved Documents (Part L&F) consultation from 2019, which will require new homes to achieve a carbon emissions reduction target of 31 per cent (over the current rate for a 'notional' dwelling) from 2022. While the update places an emphasis on building fabric considerations, heating technologies will still play an important role.

Further to all of this, a new version of the Government Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP 10) will come into effect as the revised compliance calculation methodology underpinning Building Regulations. This will mean carbon factors for electricity will be changing and dwelling emission targets will be tighter.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

In order to meet the overarching net zero target, dealing with emissions resulting from the UK's new and existing building stock will be critical.

Improving the energy performance of new build residential properties will be an early indication of what is to come, and the changes this will represent for our industry.

As a result, manufacturers must prepare to deliver low carbon heating solutions and thereby play their part in tackling climate change.

DESIGN

Getting building services system design right, and knowing how to best use these technologies in the wider context of the building, is a science.

It involves careful selection of components in order to meet both the future property owners' needs, as well as emissions considerations. This is alongside other factors such as how the fabric, area and volume of the building will impact heat loss, and the overall performance.

It is also worth pointing out that for housebuilders used to working with compact gas boilers, homes with air source heat pumps (ASHPs) will require more space and design planning. This not only includes space outside for the ASHP with adequate free flow air around it, but also for the accompanying hot water cylinder inside the home.

SOLUTIONS

It is important that renovation, maintenance and improvement works carried out now continue to prioritise heating systems that are as energy efficient as possible to future-proof properties and safeguard residents.

Selecting highly efficient gas boilers

combined with accessories designed to improve SAP ratings will also help to keep energy bills as economical as possible by preventing wastage throughout the day.

Beyond 2025, housebuilders will need to be confident in the specification of low-carbon technologies exclusively however, such as electric powered boilers, ASHPs and hot water cylinders.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Such an evolving landscape will rely on heating engineers to upskill in the installation and commissioning of low-carbon technologies. A lack of skilled workers will halt progress to reach targets and result in poor quality installations.

In real terms, only 30,000 ASHPs are currently installed per year across all sectors, which are currently facilitated by less than a 1,000 MCS qualified businesses. This is not feasible in the long term if ASHP installation targets of 600,000 installations per year by 2028 are to be met.

Housebuilders will also need to consider that user education in ASHPs will be important. The majority of end-users will be used to boilers, and in order to better sell new build homes, developers should provide information with the help of manufacturers.

The journey to net zero will not be achieved overnight. But with the support of relevant industry partners, including heating and hot water product manufacturers and those offering the added-value services to ensure projects run smoothly, getting there is not only achievable, but can be tailored to the bespoke requirements of housebuilders across the UK.

Tom Murray is specification director at Baxi Heating

Double win for Aico at the Electrical Wholesaler Awards



Aico is delighted to announce that they are the proud winners of 'Best Training Provider' and 'Best Customer Service' (Brand) at the 2021 Electrical Wholesaler Awards, voted for by industry professionals. The Electrical Wholesaler Awards champion innovative brands, outstanding wholesalers, suppliers, and exceptional professionals within the electrical industry.

The European market leader in home life safety achieved the accolade 'Best Training Provider' for the third time for their training scheme Expert Installer previously winning the award in 2018 and 2020. To date, Aico's Expert Installer training scheme has trained over 30,000 industry professionals in domestic Fire Alarm specification and installation and is Fire Industry Association CPD certified enabling installers to earn CPD time for free. 2020 saw the Expert Installer training go digital – with the unprecedented times caused by the pandemic, Aico revamped their training scheme to be delivered online as a free, easily accessible webinar. Following the success of the Expert Installer training scheme, Aico have released a dedicated online community for their installers 'Aico Installer Community Online' which encour-

ages further learning through a points-based rewards system.

Andy Speake, Aico's National Technical Manager who is responsible for much of the content displayed in the training commented "We always strive to be the market leader in everything we do, and education is no exception. We have always been particularly proud of our Expert Installer training having recently had it accredited by the Fire Industry Association, it is a real honour to win this prestigious award yet again."

The second award for the 'Best Customer Service' award is presented to a brand that has demonstrated outstanding customer service and commitment to going the extra mile. Aico's ethos is to deliver education, quality, service, and innovation in everything that they do, and this is evident in their commitment to providing exceptional customer service, from their dedicated Regional Specification Managers consulting on bespoke alarm specifications, to devoted in-house teams for after-sales support.

Aico's Internal Sales manager Kelly Hodgetts added "We are extremely proud of the service we provide for our customers and are often commended on having real people answering

the telephones in times where automated services are the norm. We spend a lot of time training and supporting our customer service teams to ensure they are offering correct and up to date advice and were delighted to have won the customer service award, as voted for by those we serve."

It was nearly a triple award win for Aico as they also received special recognition in the 'Best New Product' category with their innovative Ei1000G SmartLINK Gateway. Providing a ground-breaking solution for landlords, the SmartLINK Gateway gives access to real-time data insight into the status of the Smoke, Heat, and Carbon Monoxide alarm systems across entire housing stock.



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CASE STUDY

Taking pride in inclusivity



Anchor Hanover has been chosen to deliver the UK's first 'extra-care' housing scheme for LGBT+ people, in south Manchester. Charles Taylor from Anchor Hanover takes Jack Wooler through the proposals.

What's believed to be the first UK purpose-built housing scheme for older people in the LGBT+ community is making headway in Whalley Range, south Manchester, with Anchor Hanover chosen as the developer to deliver the scheme.

With the city's older LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and other preferred identities) population growing, the £20m Russell Road LGBT+ project is set to deliver more than 100 apartments for people aged 55 or over. Providing a mix of affordable rent and shared ownership tenures, the homes are designed to be as accessible as possible for residents who identify as LGBT+, with the focus on Manchester locals.

England's largest not-for-profit provider of housing and care for people in later life, Anchor Hanover formed from the merger of Hanover Housing Association and Anchor Trust. Its Extra Care schemes prioritise essential on-site services, such as catering, as appropriate to users' needs in later life.

The Russell Road LGBT+ scheme is an example of how the provider, according to Charles Taylor, head of new business at Anchor Hanover, creates "safe, vibrant communities which enable residents to live independently as their needs and lifestyle change."

The offer will be developed in collaboration with a local Community Steering Group – made up of local councillors, local residents, but also importantly members of the Manchester-based charity offering advice and support to the LGBT+ community, LGBT Foundation. The team is aiming to submit the first planning application in early 2022.

A GROWING LGBT+ EXTRA CARE NEED

According to the developer, there are already more than 7,000 people in Manchester over the age of 50 that identify as LGBT+, and this figure is expected to rise over the next two decades.

A recent LGBT Foundation report, commissioned by Manchester City Council, found higher levels of loneliness and isolation amongst older LGBT+ people, and fear of discrimination in existing accommodation. They also reported a



desire for affordable, accessible and LGBT+-specific accommodation where they can be open about their identity in later life. “As such,” says Taylor, “there is a clear need for new specialist later living communities.”

Thanks to funding from Homes England, the LGBT Foundation was able to carry out a further survey of the community’s needs and hopes for the scheme, as well as create an online Learning Journal to track the journey of the development from the early discussions which took place over five years ago.

“The Journal summarises the need for the Extra Care scheme, and how we have reached this point,” explains Taylor. It is based on interviews with those involved in the project thus far, and groups the lessons learned under a range of themes such as evidence of need, roles of partners and community engagement.

“The journal is an honest appraisal of the challenges and successes of the past, and it gives people the opportunity to share their views as the journal grows,” he adds.

It is hoped that, via the journal, councils and developers can see what has worked here and what can be done differently as they plan their own housing

solutions for older LGBT+ people. Russell Road LGBT+ Extra Care is set to be the first of a range of such schemes across the country, which it’s believed will follow the siting, location and design principles behind the report.

Paul Martin, CEO of the LGBT Foundation, comments on how the Manchester project is the first to meet an important need: “It’s fantastic to see the LGBT+ Extra Care Scheme move forward into the next stages of development. Everyone deserves to have access to safe, affordable housing where they can be sure they feel secure and welcome.

“Many older LGBT+ people have grown up in a world hostile to their identities, and are worried about their future, particularly if they are likely to require care in later life. This scheme is a vital and exciting step forward for our communities.” He adds: “The Learning Journal will track our journey and share recommendations for other schemes that will follow.”

Charles Taylor says that in creating this development to meet a specific set of requirements, Anchor Hanover aims to “give people the opportunity to live in an environment where they feel safe and part of a community, and are accepted for who they are.”

“This is all part of Anchor Hanover’s key

The new extra care housing will be located on the site of the former Spire Hospital in Whalley Range, which is currently being demolished

A RECENT REPORT FOUND HIGHER LEVELS OF LONELINESS AND ISOLATION AMONGST OLDER LGBT+ PEOPLE, AND FEAR OF DISCRIMINATION IN THEIR EXISTING ACCOMMODATION



ANCHOR HANOVER AIMS TO “GIVE PEOPLE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THEY FEEL SAFE AND PART OF A COMMUNITY, AND ARE ACCEPTED FOR WHO THEY ARE”

priority – to provide homes where people love living in later life,” he adds.

PROPOSALS

According to Charles Taylor, the desire to develop an LGBT+ later living scheme goes back some years, the site first being purchased by Manchester City Council (MCC) specifically for the proposed development.

In 2020, the council went out to tender for the scheme. Following this competitive process, Anchor Hanover was chosen as the housing provider. According to Charles, it was selected from the shortlist based on its “credibility as an LGBT+ affirmative provider,” after demonstrating their experience in delivering similar projects across England, including New Larchwood, an LGBT+ inclusive retirement housing scheme in Brighton, and showing “ambition to create a facility that meets the needs of the city’s LGBT+ community.”

“In our bid,” explains Taylor, “we gave evidence of our existing LGBT+ affirmative policies and procedures we have in place to support our LGBT+ customers and colleagues, along with our development experience and understanding of sustainability.”

The team then partnered with LGBT Foundation, a Manchester-based charity offering advice and support to the LGBT+

community who have set up a Community Steering Group to put forward the community’s views (including the wider Whalley Range community) to ensure that Anchor Hanover effectively delivers the scheme and ensure its suitability, while complementing the local area.

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS

Once the right site was acquired – at Whalley Range, in south Manchester, formerly holding a Spire Hospital – the council and the LGBT Foundation reportedly worked to develop strong relationships with the local community to help guide the scheme. Following these consultations, Manchester’s LGBT+ Extra Care scheme launched, and given the go-ahead by the council’s executive in 2017.

Since then, the council has retained its close working relationship with the Foundation to develop the core principles of the scheme, how it should operate, and what care should be available onsite to support LGBT+ people as they get older.

“In collaboration with the Community Steering Group, we will develop the plans for the Russell Road site, with a view of submitting our first planning application in Easter 2022,” comments Charles.

Looking towards the project’s full design and development, Anchor Hanover is currently considering the options for the built form, working with Brewster

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Bye Architects and the Community Steering Group representing members of the LGBTF and Manchester council.

The intention is that the extra care style development is focussed on secure access and external spaces which meet 'HAPPI' (housing design for older people) standards, alongside a range of onsite facilities to support older people and provide an accessible community facility.

"The exact amenities are yet to be decided," says Taylor, "but our Extra Care locations are designed to create safe, vibrant communities that enable residents to live independently as their needs and lifestyle change."

A REAL NEED

Since Anchor Hanover began, more than 50 years ago, Taylor tells *Housebuilder and Developer* that it has expanded exponentially, and today serves more than 65,000 residents in 54,000 homes across almost 1,700 locations. Its residential care services employ the majority of the 9,000-strong workforce, providing services to

residents at 114 care homes, and operating in more than 85 per cent of local councils in England.

Taylor believes that it is this experience which not only placed them as front runners among those considered for the development of the project, but has put them in the best position possible to push this specific agenda forwards: "There's still a lot to be done around diversity and inclusion, but it's important for Anchor Hanover to be at the forefront of developing affirmative LGBT+ majority housing as there is a real need for it, our insights and research within the LGBT+ community show this."

He tells me the team have already been "overwhelmed" with support in Manchester since announcing the project in May this year, and have received some "great feedback, and lots of interest about what the scheme is going to deliver and bring to the local community."

"I hope to see more projects like this come to fruition in the future to ensure LGBT+ communities feel safer at home," Charles concludes. ■

BATHROOMS, KITCHENS & WASHROOMS

Supplement

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A knock-out finish for tiling



BAL – the market-leaders in full tiling solutions – have launched a streamlined grout family including new BAL Grout Flex.

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Cool concrete sinks for industrial style kitchens

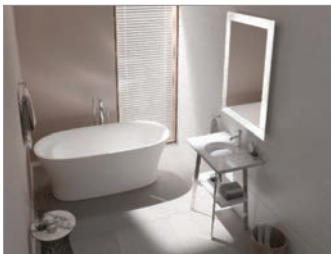


Building on the popular trend for industrial style kitchens, a truly unique range of concrete-style sinks has been introduced by design pioneer, **BLANCO UK**. Eight sinks, from three ranges – ETAGON, VINTERA and METRA – are now available in the super-durable, award winning Silgranit®

material in the new concrete colour. The portfolio is perfect for those who aspire to something different; every sink is unique in terms of the way the finish appears. The structure varies from sink to sink while gradients differ just like real polished concrete surfaces. It even has the same tactile qualities as concrete but is much more hardwearing. The Silgranit is an anti-bacterial material which is easy to clean and super-hygienic.

www.blanco.co.uk

Cape Cod opens up a world of design options



The hallmark of the Cape Cod bathroom program is the fusion of material and form designed to the highest aesthetic standards. The untamed nature of New England's Cape Cod region inspired Philippe Starck to create a bathroom range composed of elements that rejuvenate body and soul. The new additions to

the series open up a whole host of design options, especially for smaller bathrooms. Please visit the **Duravit** website for more information.

01908 286680 www.duravit.co.uk

Sales of the Dakota surface are on the rise



Königstone has seen a substantial increase in sales for the sleek Dakota worktop surface.

Dakota is a colour option in the KönigQuartz range which is guaranteed to add an enticing twist to kitchen spaces. The impressive portfolio consists of easy-to-maintain, aesthetically-

appealing quartz worktops. The dappled grey and white colour palette of this surface introduces an element of individuality to a kitchen; the glossy effect creates a luxurious effect and is attractively light balancing. Dakota has the appearance of natural stone, with chameleon-like properties, so the surface complements many kitchen styles. The additional benefit of opting for a KönigQuartz worktop is high stain, heat and scratch resistance.

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Multiboard finds its calling for Kettering convent conversion



The ease of installation and all round performance characteristics offered by **Marmox** Multiboard have led to a leading dry-lining contractor recommending the versatile tile-backer boards to a client engaged in the redevelopment of a former convent near Kettering. Conroy Dry Lining originally learnt about Multiboard through the trade press, but the directors of the family run business became converts after purchasing a pack for a trial installation and now they are making rapid progress employing large quantities of the 12.5mm x 1200mm x 2400mm boards, plus metal washers, for the bathrooms within the 60, three-storey town houses as well as the apartments being created in the old listed building. Director Leo Conroy, who runs Conroy Dry Lining with his brother Martin, commented: "We had used different tile-backer boards on projects in the past, but having seen an advert for the Marmox product we bought 40 sheets to try them out and were really impressed with how easy they are to install: our lads love them as they just cut with a knife. On the Kettering project we're doing all the internal plaster-boarding and skimming, but in the bathrooms – for which we proposed the Multiboard to the developer – the boards are being fixed to the timber frame for the tilers to follow on. We're really impressed with the product and have recommended it for some other prestige work."

01634 835290 www.marmox.co.uk

A man with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark vest over a light-colored shirt, is seen from behind, sitting at a wooden desk in a dimly lit workshop. He is holding a pencil and sketching on a piece of paper. A desk lamp is positioned to his right, casting a warm glow. The background wall is covered with various technical sketches and drawings.

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Comprehensive bathroom solutions for wooden structures



and Fundo RioLigno shower elements fit and sit flush in the wooden flooring, without having to cut into floor joists or build up further floor height. With their outer edges of just 20mm and 25mm respectively, keeping safety at focus, both shower trays are fitted with a support plate on the underside reinforcing the area around the drain opening to provide unrivalled peace of mind within the moisture sensitive and ever moving timber floor. Uniquely, all wedi Fundo shower elements have a sealing set developed especially for the all-round sealing of their perimeters and a 360° dry-fit drain technology that offers reassurance of their use in/on wooden floors. Furthermore, to eliminate any possibility of failure, wedi offers a drain-substructure element for wooden floor installations and to aid reliable support and accurate aligning of the drain.

Sufficient insulation of bathroom floor and wall surfaces is imperative especially in wooden structures. Coupling wedi Fundo shower solutions with wedi building boards and/or wedi Subliner Dry & Flex membranes, would not only result in a CE marked walk-in shower area but also would be awarded with a full wedi system guarantee. wedi building boards are famous for their suitability to be directly bonded onto timber or metal stud frames without the need for mechanical fixing and thus save time and offer further safety through elimination of laborious sealing measures over penetrations. The wedi Subliner range, as a complement to wedi building boards, is renowned for its reliability in waterproofing and/or decoupling of bathroom walls and floors.

Arriving to the surface finish, to tackle condensation on bathroom surfaces and thus further protect against mould and fungi development, the standard wedi product range now includes seamless design surfaces that keep grout lines to the minimum thus promote hygiene around the bathroom. The brand new wedi Top Line boasts wall panelling (wedi Top Wall), pre-formed shower tray finishes (wedi Fundo Top) and pre-formed Top solutions for cladding of shower seats (wedi Sanoasa Top), niches (wedi Sanwell Top) and toilet cistern cladding for wall hung toilets (wedi I-Board Top). Every one of which is installed simply with the use of wedi 610 adhesive sealant. Their characteristics such as the antibacterial surface, warm feel and excellent slip resistance (R11) along with their natural feel makes them a perfect complement to use on top of wedi sub construction elements. Thanks to their low heat-conductivity, condensation is kept at bay on bathroom surfaces and thus the added value of precision engineered wedi solutions is further enhanced.

0161 864 2336 www.wedi.de/en

Insulation is in the centre of sustainable energy and is extremely important to incorporate into any renovation project especially in timber structures that are subjected to damp and draughts. Due to the high level of humidity generated in bathrooms, without sufficient insulation the substrate is extremely vulnerable to mould and fungi development that can spread and cause further structural problems.

wedi's wide range of products and system solutions provide a systemised insulation for wet areas, so there is no need to ensure compatibility of different brands or worry about security of the installation. wedi's sub construction elements are not only 100% waterproof to the core, decoupling, but also have the best

thermal conductivity of 0.036W/mK for tiling substrates and building boards on the UK market and can be either tiled directly onto or plastered. Unlike a moisture retardant plaster board, wedi needs no additional waterproofing or tanking, therefore reducing the number of steps in the installation process further reducing the risk of errors and leaks.

Current trend shows increased popularity of walk-in showers but when it comes to suspended timber floors, it is imperative to evaluate between different brands in order to select the best solution. wedi is always at the cutting edge of innovation, now offering two different solutions for creating stylish wetrooms on timber floors. Both the wedi Fundo Ligno



VitrA launch WC with Built-In Bidet

WCs that have a built-in bidet washing function have been used throughout the Far East and the Mediterranean for many years, and now a simple solution for enhanced personal hygiene is being launched in UK on selected WC's from VitrA.

VitrA Aquacare is an innovative solution that makes it easy and quick to install a mechanical bidet function within a WC pan, and the advanced technology prevents any possible contamination with household water supply. VitrA Aquacare comes as a complete set:



a WC with a pre-assembled and integrated air breaker, and a WC seat and cover. The WC pan requires no additional equipment or preparation besides water installation. If maintenance is required, one simple click is all that is needed to remove the Aquacare cover below the WC seat.

"Bidets have typically been less popular in the UK as they have been in other parts of the world," says VitrA Marketing Manager Margaret Talbot. "Lack of space in small UK bathrooms has caused bidets to fall to the bottom of the priority list, plus using a bidet has not been commonplace in UK culture. Times and attitudes have changed though, and the growing older population and increasing cultural diversification means there is a need for products in both domestic and commercial settings that makes independent personal hygiene easier. Users really appreciate the clean feeling that this sort of system delivers."

VitrA has designed, with a patent pending, Aquacare to protect potable water against contamination from dirty water while saving time and money for the installer. Additionally, it represents an invisible, concealed solution for end users that offers extra hygiene in the bathroom. This highly engineered solution is available for Sento, Integra and M-Line wall-



VitrA Sento wall-hung WC hung pan showing Aquaclean in action. Aquaclean is also available on VitrA's Integra and M-Line wall hung WC pans.

hung WC pans and is automatically compatible with EN1717 as well as LGA and DVGW certified.

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RAISING THE STANDARDS IN LIGHTWEIGHT ROOFING

STEELING YOURSELF FOR THE FUTURE

Stuart Judge of the Steel Window Association considers the performance benefits of contemporary steel frames in terms of meeting the future challenges for housebuilding.



Britain can take pride in the way its big pharmaceutical companies and top research universities responded to the pandemic over the past year. We have proved we are world leaders in the fields of vaccine development and gene sequencing, and the UK's construction industry was also among the fastest to adapt to new working practices in order to safeguard its workforce and customers.

Despite the media's attention mainly concentrating on the Government's handling of the pandemic, Ministers were meanwhile continuing to address other urgent issues including climate change and the necessary energy reduction measures. Accordingly, building product manufacturers and many specialist contractors were also readying themselves for further tightening of regulations intended to cut carbon emissions.

While the much-heralded Future Homes Standard 2025 has resurrected targets for 'near to zero energy' buildings (nZEB) and focuses on an ambitious switch away from gas boilers to heat pump and hydrogen-based heating systems, contractors and consultants will be compelled to target improved U-values and airtightness far sooner. SAP assessors will be seeking gains right across the building envelope, while still ensuring healthy ventilation; by either mechanical or natural means.

April 2021 saw the conclusion of the Government's consultation on revising Part L of the Building Regulations (conservation of heat and power), and Part F (ventilation), along with the formulation of the Future Homes Standard. Further important changes, including ones scheduled to be implemented this December, will see significant emphasis on the role of fenestration in both new build and refurbishment projects across all types of property.

Surprisingly, however, many specifiers remain unaware that steel windows have continued to keep pace with the Building Regulations' requirements for new-build as well as retrofit projects.

Thanks to the investment of time, resources and experience – much of it led by the Steel Window Association (SWA) – important technical product improvements, as well as greater choice in terms of style and opening options, have been regularly brought forward.

THERMAL BREAKS

Most recently, the development of a new option for thermally broken steel frames means manufacturers here have access to an innovative suite of profiles able to meet the benchmark U-value of 1.4 W/m²/K, which will begin being used from June 2022.

Thermal breaks were introduced by the suppliers of aluminium systems as the replacement double glazing market began to mature in the latter decades of the 20th century, primarily to tackle the problem of condensation forming on the inner faces to the frame. They have changed in shape and sophistication since then, with many manufacturers preferring polyamide as the material to separate the aluminium extrusions.

The latest advancement for thermally broken steel profiles, though, uses polyurethane, which can offer multiple benefits beyond the strength to match the 60+ year life expectancy of contemporary steel window frames. Using polyurethane is more economical than the available alternatives without compromising on quality, and still delivers very low thermal conductivity.

Unlike previous options for thermally broken steel frames, which tended to be more bulky, the latest development retains the stepped-leg design of the

W20 window, which suits such architectural styles as Art Deco and many of our 20th century warehouse and industrial buildings.

SIGHTLINES & SECURITY

Importantly, the modern 'marque' maintains the characteristic slim sightlines, together with excellent light transmittance and an aesthetic of openness. The inherent strength further facilitates large overall window sizes, not possible with framing types such as PVCu, unless they are reinforced using steel. The availability of tubular steel profiles further enables even larger spans and the fabrication of heavy-duty doors for high traffic locations.

Steel windows and doorsets are also able to meet the toughest requirements on security and resistance to burglars, and are frequently the default option where fire performance is considered of prime importance. In such cases, the glazing selection is likely to swap from toughened to laminated featuring special interlayers; or even the multi-layered products of the type which support pedestrians in such locations as the walkways at Tower Bridge, or Portsmouth's Spinnaker Tower.

TARGETING 'FUTURE HOMES' PERFORMANCE

Returning to the residential sector, Passivhaus and other approaches to ultra-low energy building have seen a greater focus in the past 20 years, and have generally utilised the best-performing triple glazed windows available. At the same time, across the wider housing stock far more carbon emissions have been saved thanks to the widespread installation of double-glazing that makes use of low-E glass, warm edge spacer bars, and argon filling.



CONTRACTORS AND CONSULTANTS WILL BE COMPELLED TO TARGET IMPROVED U-VALUES AND AIRTIGHTNESS FAR SOONER THAN 2025

has long been a trusted resource for both prospective customers and member manufacturers, and the association's website is in the process of being redesigned to enhance its value and accessibility to all users.

Given the swathe of improved products and services – those already available and in the pipeline – the steel options available make them fully relevant to the needs of property developers and discerning homeowners. And, the development of 'new generation' thermally broken frames also ensures they will continue to satisfy Government ambitions for 'Future Homes,' combined with a secure UK supply chain.

Stuart Judge is president of the Steel Window Association

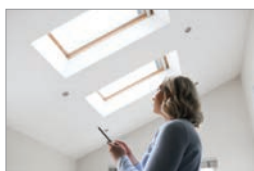
However, with the Future Homes Standard aiming for U-values below 1 W/m²/K from 2025, triple glazing is inevitably going to become the default, with new materials already in the pipeline to permit further performance improvements. Not only do Krypton and Xenon gas deliver better U-values than argon, but new types of glass

featuring special treatments have been trialled which are able to achieve centre pane values below 0.7 W/m²/K.

The challenge for window manufacturers will be to achieve the desired overall fenestration performance by balancing the glass area with that of the frame elements.

The SWA's technical advisory service

Open the window to a smarter home



Keylite Roof Windows (Keylite) suggests that fresh air ventilation, natural daylight and thermal protection are amongst the top factors in making your house a healthy and comfortable home. Keylite has designed a brand new smart home technology product range called keyliteConnect®,

which includes app-enabled Keylite Roof Windows and Blinds, and wireless technology to transform the way we experience natural daylight and fresh air in our homes. Using the keyliteConnect® app and hub, homeowners are able to monitor and operate their smart app-enabled Electric and Solar Powered Roof Windows and Blinds from anywhere in the world.

info@keyliteuk.com

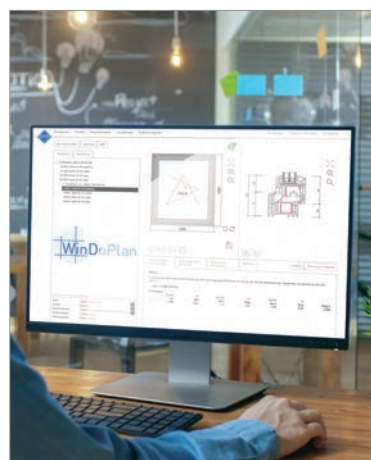
Parex has a new 'Ex' advertising campaign



Parex has launched an innovative and eye-catching new 'Ex' advertising campaign to highlight the range and benefits of its advanced renders and facade solutions.

The goal of the campaign is to cement the company's reputation, as well as grow market leadership in its renowned range of products across key sectors of the construction industry. So, whether it's the extraordinary and exceptional finish of the company's renders to the experienced and knowledgeable technical team, the extensive choice of 48 colours and the exacting standards of the heritage range, Parex can make a difference.

01827 711755 exceptional.parex.co.uk



VEKA's exclusive WinDoPlan software is now available

VEKA plc has launched WinDoPlan to Architects and Specifiers. WinDoPlan is a digital planning and tendering tool for all processes related to Window & Door specification including calculation and evaluation. The software is exclusive to VEKA, and is a platform for virtual collaborative working providing architects and specifiers with an entire technical process online. WinDoPlan has been designed to give quick access to live technical information, 24/7. The software can also be used as a sophisticated virtual presentation tool in demonstrations and pitches, particularly helpful in the current climate when face to face meetings are not possible. Providing 3D rotations of profiles and cross section views, WinDoPlan also calculates U-Values and isothermal histories, providing a comparison of planned elements with accreditation results and likely geographical weather conditions. The completed specification can be output in one of several formats, (dwg, dxf, docx, pdf) and the BIM interface also makes data exchange among all project partners easier. WinDoPlan has been developed by one of the VEKA Group companies; Digital Building Solutions in Germany and has already been well received across Europe and Russia. Permission to access WinDoPlan can be granted by visiting the VEKA website.

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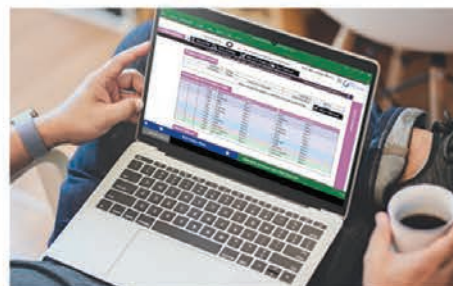
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A MODERN METHOD OF COVID RECOVERY

John Carter of Aldermore argues why builders need to embrace modern methods of construction as a way to help the industry recover from the pandemic.

The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have demonstrated the importance of the need for businesses to be flexible in order to deal with economic challenges. Many have shown incredible resilience and innovation, building good foundations to make the best of the opportunities that lie ahead as the economy begins to open up again.

One of the sectors beginning to thrive again is construction; since summer of 2020, most development sites have been open, albeit with reduced capacity due to supply chain issues and social distancing. There have also been some delays where teams may have had to self-isolate.

ONS figures March 2021 showed a 5.8 per cent increase in construction activity, and data from Glenigan shows that the development pipeline is now ahead of 2019 levels, pointing to the prospect of a sustained recovery.

With a strong demand for development funding, has come a rapid rise in demand for construction products, which is continuing to impact some supply chains for certain materials. The Builders Merchants Federation (BMF) reported surging sales of building materials in the first quarter of 2021, reaching record levels in March. Sales in March were up 47.4 per cent compared to last year, and sales were up 23 per cent compared to March 2019. This increase in demand for building materials, coupled with Brexit issues affecting deliveries from the EU and suppliers struggling to keep up with the sudden surge in demand for certain products, has led to a shortage of certain materials and rising prices in the short term.

However, with confidence growing and the construction sector starting to up its performance, businesses are now beginning to look beyond the pandemic at the steps they can take to capitalise. Many businesses are now focused on investing in the future of their business, with recent research revealing that the top three planned investments by construction SMEs include new equipment (26 per cent), online presence (20 per cent) and



new technology (17 per cent). Beyond Covid-19, as priorities slowly begin to shift to business as usual, a fifth (17 per cent) of businesses are also looking to expand their customer bases and enhance their sustainability practices.

One area that is increasingly discussed as part of innovation and also sustainability is around Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). It's encouraging to see that specific businesses – and the industry more widely – are embracing such technology, investing in the training and skills required and acknowledging that a transformation in practices will enable the sector to “build back better, greener and faster.” There's growing recognition that MMC has an important role to play to help the UK build more houses. The House of Commons' Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee's report from June 2019 on MMC, for example, noted that the Government's target of building 300,000 new houses a year by the mid-2020s cannot be met using traditional methods alone; citing issues such as a shortage of skilled workers and availability of traditional materials.

MMC could play an extremely important role in the future of construction, and its use is only likely to increase. It brings a myriad of benefits, such as higher quality, and safer working practices. However, its true potential arguably lies in its role in accelerating the development and adoption of low-carbon design and new

technologies which will bring forward transformational and sustainable change in the sector. This will contribute towards the climate change target of cutting emissions by 78 per cent by 2035 (bringing the UK more than three-quarters of the way to the 2050 net zero target).

BUILD OFFSITE PROPERTY ASSURANCE SCHEME (BOPAS)

Despite the potential that MMC can bring for businesses, for some lenders MMC is still unfamiliar and they take a more conservative approach to adopting such methods, which is limiting its growth.

For lenders, recognising the expanding role of MMC and investing in such projects are two very different concepts. One of the stigmas attached to MMC is that if a project takes less time to build, it must be of a poorer quality, compared to traditional methods. Such stereotypes are now out of date, with 21st century technology delivering better quality, safer, and far more cost-effective homes at the same or, with upscaling, lower cost.

To help diminish the MMC stereotype and verify the quality of MMC projects, the Buildoffsite Property Assurance Scheme (BOPAS) was established. BOPAS is a risk-based evaluation scheme which demonstrates that a particular method of construction will stand the test of time – for at least 60 years. For funders and lenders, BOPAS accreditation provides confidence that a MMC project is fit for purpose and removes the uncertainty of



the construction for valuation purposes. Although BOPAS is recognised by the majority of mortgage lenders as providing the necessary assurance regarding the system or design, the scheme does not cover the ongoing construction checks needed nor does it provide the necessary link between the manufacturer and the construction team. It, therefore, needs to

be used in conjunction with a warranty provider such as Building LifePlans (BLP) or the National House Building Council (NHBC) that can give assurance with regard to the construction and ongoing maintenance of the property. BOPAS accreditation could encourage more lenders and developers to invest in and build more MMC projects and

thereby, become more sustainable. Sustainable developments that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs are challenging in a sector which, by its nature, is a big user of natural resources.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

MMC will no doubt become much more prominent in the future as companies invest in the technology and skills needed, and this will lead to increasingly innovative practices in construction.

Rather than replacing traditional construction, MMC is more likely to be increasingly integrated into it as part of the mix of producing an end product. However, it offers exciting opportunities to deliver homes in a high quality, carbon efficient way, and in less than half the time of traditional construction.

Lenders must embrace changes in construction, and work closely with construction firms, housebuilders, investors and property developers to provide funding solutions to deliver the homes this country needs.

John Carter is managing director of commercial real estate at Aldermore

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Garador launches Slategrain garage doors



Garador has introduced an exciting new surface finish, **Slategrain**, for its popular sectional garage door range. The new **Slategrain** finish imitates the fine grained and foliated surface texture of the natural rock, **Slate**. **Slategrain** is available for **Garador's** **Linear Medium** and **Linear Large** models and comes in two colours, **Traffic White (RAL 9016)** and **Anthracite Grey (RAL 7016)**, for a clean, contemporary look. **Garador's** sectional garage doors also offer outstanding thermal performance with 42mm thick insulation and weather seals on four sides.

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Tasked with specifying the soil and waste drainage on a luxury new build-to-rent development in Manchester, MEP contractor **Ameon** once again turned to **Marley Plumbing & Drainage** for support. Contracted to deliver the complete mechanical, electrical and plumbing package on blocks A5, A6 and A7 of the development was Blackpool-based **Ameon**. Talking about the project, Rod Bunce, Contractors Director at **Ameon**, said "When it came to specifying products for the development's soil and waste drainage system, we immediately turned to **Marley Plumbing & Drainage**, having worked with them on many projects throughout the years."

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Heating controls for social landlords



There's a new force in heating controls that social housing developers and buying groups are tapping into across the UK. ESI offers a range of programmers from a simple 1 Channel version to a 3 channel Multi-Purpose Programmer which enables the installer to comply with Part L of the Building Regulations by providing separate timed heating control for living and sleeping zones in a home, whilst also providing timed control of hot water.

However, the ESI range offers 24 Hour / 5/2 day and 7-day programming options for each channel. And these programmers also feature a "Landlord" option to encourage social housing and private tenants to allow access for annual maintenance, often a real challenge for landlords.

01280 816868 www.esicontrols.co.uk

Silhouette concept adds colour to rads offering



A number of coloured radiators have been added to the range of coloured radiators available from Stelrad – from June this year.

Within both the Vita and Softline Series, the new Silhouette Concept will be available in stylish Anthracite Grey.

Over the past couple of years the demand for coloured radiators has been on the up and Stelrad has been happy to respond to the new trend with multi-colour options available for a number of their products from stock.

0844 543 6200 www.stelrad.com



Indoor air quality

Never has indoor air quality been more important. Reducing the spread of Covid-19 in the home is vital. Virus transmission occurs more readily inside than out. Inadequate ventilation and insufficient fresh air allow pathogens to build up, increasing the likelihood of infection. Government advice is for enclosed areas to be regularly ventilated (mechanically or by letting in fresh air). This can reduce infections by over 70 per cent. Control condensation and extract pollution (and pathogens) continuously, economically, at really low noise levels ensuring heat loss is minimal with one product – the Vectaire Midi, Maxi and Maxi Plus MVHRs "BY-AT" models with integral acoustic attenuation and a choice of speeds do all that. Installation is simple – nothing extra required other than the unit itself. They incorporate summer bypass and frost protection, with commissioning via touch screen. Performances are between 14 l/sec to 238 l/sec, with sound levels below 5 dbA (BRE tested). They are SAP PCDB listed and manufactured in our own UK factory to ISO9001. The best solution to reduced noise and improved air quality in residential properties.

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RAISING THE STANDARD

Steve Cipriano of Vaillant examines the real-world impact of the 2025 Future Homes Standard for England's housebuilders.

The long-awaited publication of the UK Government's response to the Future Homes Standard (FHS) consultation provided much needed clarity around the direction of travel concerning changes to Part L and Part F of the Building Regulations.

The industry now knows what changes will be made, and when. The Government will first update the Building Regs later this year to reduce carbon emissions in homes built from 2022 onwards by 31 per cent compared to a 'notional home'. There will be a year's grace for developers if required, but by 2023 the regulations will be set in stone. In 2023, the Government will consult on technical aspects of the FHS before updating the Regs again before it comes into force in 2025.

The Government's chosen 'Fabric Plus Technology' route encourages the use of low carbon technology such as heat pumps, as a more practical and cost-effective method of achieving the requirements compared with installing a boiler or PV panels. The good news for housing developers is that the consultation does not present a prescriptive approach to compliance. As long as carbon reductions are met, developers are free to use whichever combination of energy efficiency measures suits their needs.

This is welcome, as it offers the flexibility and scope for innovative new technologies. Many housebuilders are already mixing different solutions to meet, or exceed, the targets, varying not only by region but also by property type and developer.

The FHS names heat pumps and heat networks as the main means to deliver heat to new homes. It is anticipated that the standard – based around a heat pump, wastewater heat recovery, triple glazing and minimum standards for walls, floors, and roofs – will deliver a reduction in carbon emissions of 75-80 per cent.

Hydrogen is not included in the Standard, but it is hoped that further details will include gas infrastructure to new homes, to give homeowners a choice of low carbon technologies in the future.

CONSTRUCTION PRACTICES

The inevitable outcome of the changes is increased build costs, likely to be passed on to



homeowners in the purchase price. The consultation also asked for 'future-proofing' of developments in anticipation of the widespread use of heat pumps and low carbon technologies, beyond the FHS.

Since heat pumps operate most efficiently at low flow temperatures, the Government's preferred method is for developers to install correctly sized heat emitters designed to operate at a mean water temperature of 50°C, which equates to flow temperatures of 55°C. This would also provide the immediate benefit of maximising condensing boilers' efficiency, resulting in energy savings for the consumer. It would also mean lower cost and less disruption when low-carbon heat systems are installed in the future, because they will not need to have new radiators or pipework installed.

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The consultation considered the tightening up of transitional arrangements, which provide developers with assurances on the standards they have to work to, and that no material changes will be required when new regulations come into force. Part of the Building Regulations' overhaul will involve more stringent transitional arrangements to close the loophole that allows new schemes to be built to much older standards.

Government states that under the proposed changes, "Where work has not commenced on a specific building covered by the building notice, initial notice, or full

plans within a reasonable period, that building would not benefit from the transitional provisions and so it would need to comply with the latest set of energy efficiency standards. Those already benefiting from transitional provisions applied to earlier changes to Part L and the energy efficiency standards would not be affected."

The Government has also said that local planning authorities will retain the power to set their own energy efficiency standards for planned new homes. However, there is a need to ensure that all those living in private and local authority new homes have the lowest possible fuel bills both now and in the future and therefore the fabric first approach to reduce heating demands is welcome.

It is important for housebuilders to be aware of these changes, as they may have to revise project timescales and build homes faster, to remain compliant. This could result in different dwellings on the same site being built to different specifications, but the Government envisages that these changes will nevertheless "pave the way for the Future Homes Standard."

The most effective way to increase energy efficiency and reduce CO₂ is to enforce changes at the point of construction. In that context, housing developers will play a pivotal role in the UK's transition to zero carbon.

Steve Cipriano is commercial director at Vaillant

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Reginox unveils stunning Aurora tap

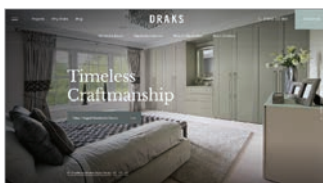


Sinks, taps and accessories manufacturer, **Reginox UK**, boasts an impressive range of high-quality kitchen taps including the visually striking Aurora. The stylish tap, made out of brass and finished with chrome plating and black spout, is the ideal combination of style, compatibility, quality and performance. The Aurora also has a pull-out hose making it easier to

clean your dishes making it the perfect functional addition to your kitchen. Aurora would match perfectly with the Lemans sink, as well as any sinks from our Kansas range, and easy to fit.

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The beauty of space in the home



Clever, beautiful, design-led wardrobe and room divider solutions from **Draks** are renowned in the housebuilding and residential markets in the UK where hundreds of bespoke, quality installations have been

completed over the past 25 years. A new, crisp, easy-to-navigate website – www.draks.co.uk – has been launched to illustrate the company's continued prowess today; and it reflects the sheer skill of the team in creating stunning space-saving storage and roomdividing solutions for the ultimate in stylish home comfort.

www.draks.co.uk

Classic Duo Oval leads the way with bath trend



Bi-colour bathtubs are a must-have statement piece for modern bathrooms. The Classic Duo Oval from **Kaldewei** is the perfect example of this trend. With its simple oval shape and coloured panelling that surrounds the elegant steel enamel bathtub it creates a striking feature in any bathroom.

Available in alpine white, alpine white matt, black gloss and lava black matt, the range of colours enables a multitude of combinations for bi-colour baths. The free-standing Conoduo and Ellipso Duo Oval models are also available with coloured panelling.

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F. Ball launches floor finishing compound



F. Ball and Co. Ltd. has launched Stopgap Micro Rapid, a new ultra-smooth, flexible, rapid-drying floor finishing compound for creating a flawlessly smooth subfloor finish. Stopgap Micro Rapid can be applied to a seamless feathered edge to fill indentations formed by screws used to secure plywood and hardboard sheets as well as the gaps at joints between the panels. It can also be used to repair minor surface defects in a wide range of other absorbent surfaces,

including sand/cement and calcium sulphate screeds. It is ideal for use where an ultra-smooth surface is required.

www.f-ball.com

DESIGNS TAKING FLIGHT

Eric Nicholls of Spiral UK explores the different options for feature staircases available to housebuilders and developers, detailing the benefits of each.

Choosing a staircase sounds easy – after all a staircase has only one function – but why should residents suffer a monotonous trudge up and down steps every day when they could enjoy descending a feature flight every morning?

If you are embarking on a new build or a structural renovation, start thinking about your stairs early on. Thanks to bespoke staircase manufacturers, there is a world of stair design to consider – virtually whatever you can dream up, can be made.

The first thing to consider is the space you have available, as that will define the shape of stair you can consider. Of course, if you have a large atrium hallway to fill, then you can go as elaborate as your budget allows, but corner stairs or restricted footprints may need a bit more clever thinking for example, if your space is low and wide, a cantilever stair may suit the space best, but if the main distance to cover is vertical, a spiral stair is the most efficient and aesthetically pleasing option.

The size and type of staircase may influence the build, so be sure to contact a specialist at a stage where it won't be expensive or difficult to make alterations such as load-bearing walls and concrete footings. However, what staircase suits your project best?

SPIRAL STAIRS

Spiral stairs are defined as steps fitted around a central pole, so they are best for tight spaces or small footprints – but that doesn't mean they need to disappear into the background. Interior spirals can be made to match the décor or stand out as a feature, delicate 'tendrils' climbing up to the next level or sturdy structures that are solid in appearance.

The main design consideration with spiral stairs is headroom – the turn and tread depth need to be just right to allow for more than adequate room to walk underneath, and this includes stepping on and off the beginning and end of the stair. This can be tricky to achieve in limited spaces as the where you enter the stair may need to be at a different angle to where you leave it.

Building Regulations are strict on safety

protocols – defining minimum widths and gap sizes depending on the intended use of the stair.

HELICAL STAIRS

Otherwise known as curved stairs, these can spiral but without the support of a central column, allowing for a beautiful floating visual effect, or simply a straight flight that arcs for a more organic form.

Helical stairs are often the most dramatic and impressive options, but they require some serious engineering to ensure they are adequately supported. The shape and weight can cause tension at the points it attaches to the fabric of the building, twisting and contorting and pulling the footings up. By their design they are usually more expensive, but well worth the end effort for buyers if the budget can allow.

CONCRETE STAIRS

Once within the remit of Brutalist architecture, concrete stairs are now en vogue for domestic settings, in particular the use of 'fair face' concrete which has a beautiful white colouring to match modern décor.

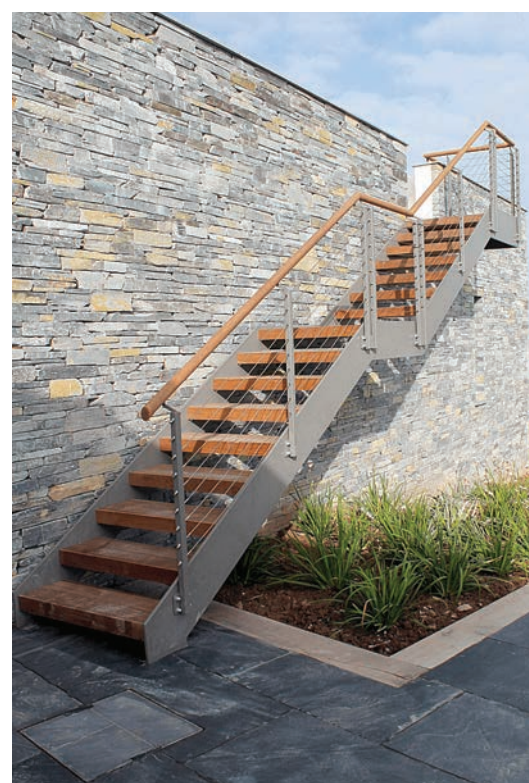
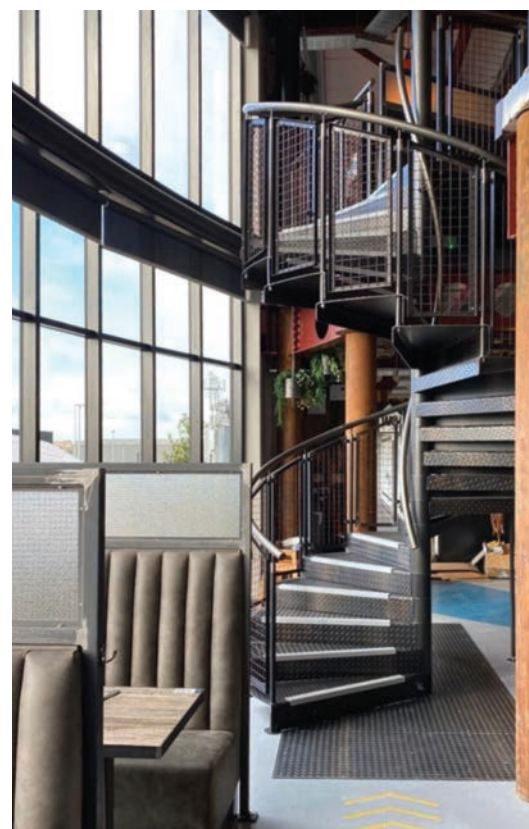
Concrete is a heavy material, but can be designed to create a surprisingly light looking structure, the juxtaposition of solid stone seemingly floating mid air as it ascends forming an impressive feature. It is also extremely practical – hardwearing as well as quiet as there is very little movement. They are also comparatively affordable, making them all the more attractive.

CANTILEVER

A firm favourite this decade, this is a simple update to a standard stair that makes a big impact, with an individual stair seeming to protrude from the wall unsupported.

The chosen location will need a structurally sufficient, load-bearing wall for the stairs to hang from, but the stringer that attaches them can then be hidden behind your chosen render.

Most cantilever stair have open treads, which allow light through and aren't too imposing in a room, but it's becoming more fashionable to have closed treads, which creates a zig-zag side profile.





SPINE BEAM

A useful option where there are no supporting walls, one or two central beams connect to the building at the top and bottom, with steps 'balanced.'

This design can be quite artistic in an open space – the space all around the stair allows for creative options for

balustrading such as futuristic tunnels, simple full height uprights or anything else you can come up with that adheres to safety standards!

MIXED

Sometimes you need a stair that traverses a building in a less than simple way, involving going around corners as well as upward. This may mean a bespoke stair created from straight sections as well as curved, cantilevered as well as solid.

Your specialist stair manufacturer can advise what would work best for you and your customers, but sometimes it pays to think outside the box.

ESCAPE STAIRS

Any of the above can be applied to internal or external use, but of course weather conditions need to be taken into account, affecting material use and protection.

Most fire escapes are simple galvanised steel spirals, but for some buildings the aesthetic suits a feature helical, or interesting cantilever. Spirals may also require canopies and/or caging, all of which can be advised on a case-by-case basis.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

There are many materials stairs can be constructed from but for longevity,

IF THE MAIN DISTANCE TO COVER IS VERTICAL, A SPIRAL STAIR IS THE MOST EFFICIENT AND AESTHETICALLY PLEASING OPTION

stability and flexible design, steel is often the way to go. Steel structures can be fabricated then either powder-coated for a more industrial aesthetic or clad in timber, stone, marble, inlaid with tiles, carpet – the list is endless.

So, before you buy an off-the-shelf option that adds little to your otherwise ideal building project, have second thoughts and consider something more bespoke. The right supplier will not only make your customer's dreams a reality, but build to budget, consider Building Regulations on your behalf, and make expert recommendations on options.

Eric Nicholls is managing director at Spiral UK

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