

## Eco Mods – A new concept of moving house!

The National Housing Federation (NHF) in a recent report concluded that there is a chronic shortage of affordable homes in rural areas fuelling the mass exodus of young people from the countryside. This has wider implications in that there is a clear danger that traditional village life will die out within a generation unless we can build more affordable homes for young people and stop what is fast becoming a mass exodus to less expensive, urban areas.

The issue of affordable homes has been an on-going topic of debate in the construction industry with many companies making claims to have the ability to deliver but few being able to substantiate these claims. Local Authorities have drawn up action plans to deliver affordable homes, but to date have been unable to meet the challenging criteria. Rural house prices tend to be well above the national average, while rural incomes are well below the national average – and this affordability gap has widened rather than narrowed over the last five years. A shortage of suitable land, local opposition and the inability of builders using traditional methods to deliver within budget often mean the affordable homes which are desperately needed are never built. Developers want to maximise their return from any development and building affordable homes, to date, has not been a way to achieve this.

The Essex Report on affordable housing in Wales was published in June 2008. The report indicated that to deliver One Wales housing commitments, wide and urgent changes were needed to be made to the way that affordable housing is regulated, funded, assessed and delivered in Wales. The report made 43 recommendations which are underpinned by the need for housing stakeholders to work in partnership. It identified the need to move forward quickly and adopt a more innovative approach to achieve the objectives.

In Wales alone the Welsh Assembly has made a commitment to deliver 6,500 affordable homes by 2011, yet progress to date has been limited. The Welsh Assembly has made available £42 million in funding to boost the economy and deliver 500 affordable homes over the next 3 years. This is in addition to £80 million to build 400 units in 22 existing schemes for 'green homes' that supports new approaches to reducing the costs of low carbon homes at Code for Sustainable Homes, Levels 4 and 5. In December 2008, Deputy Housing Minister Jocelyn Davies announced that Strategic Capital Investment Fund (SCIF) money would be available for Housing Associations to buy unsold homes and plots from private contractors.

Ms Davies said: "I hope that by 2011 that we have a regulatory framework for housing associations that's appropriate and updated. Creating affordable housing is central to this Government's aim of ensuring strong, sustainable communities throughout our nation."

Eco-Mods limited, a Mid Wales based company with over 30 years experience in the industry is unique in that not only do they claim to be able to build a quality home within the guidelines laid down for affordable homes, but they have actually done it!

Using an innovative approach and incorporating the latest technology and raw materials the House Pod is, to put it very simplistically, an answer to the need for affordable homes; it is affordable and meets the criteria for delivering 'green homes' by achieving level 4 & 5 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. The House Pod is manufactured entirely offsite in a quality controlled factory environment and delivered to site pre-finished, complete with appliances, fixtures and fittings, so there are no hidden costs. The Pods can be delivered on a 'Just in Time' basis and assembled in most weather conditions, minimising time on-site. Requiring only external finishing and a roof, the affordable home can be made ready for occupation within hours.

Using innovative manufacturing techniques off site costs are fixed and through economies of scale the house is unique in that it is affordable with no compromise on quality. The House Pod is Building Regulation compliant and can currently meet levels 3, 4 & 5 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. The quality and performance of all House Pods is assured to ISO 9001 standards. It is also environmentally friendly with fewer deliveries of materials to site required, minimising pollution and reducing the carbon footprint of the house. In summary it meets, and in some cases exceeds, all the criteria laid down for the delivery of affordable homes.

Malcolm Ball, at Eco-Mods, commented: "the needs of the Welsh Assembly Government was the catalyst for the research into this product, but following the recent budget announcement, which outlined measures such as the investment of £500m to restart frozen building projects, affordable homes such as the House Pod have never been more important. Many people make claims about being able to deliver such properties, but Eco-Mods has actually built a house, had it independently tested to ensure it complies and is therefore 100% confident we can deliver a product and not just an idea."

The weather proof structures are erected within a few hours of arriving onsite and all units come complete with fitted kitchen, bathroom, heating systems, windows, doors and decoration. Pods are also very flexible and can be easily developed into student or hotel accommodation.

The House Pod Show Home has been shown to a number of Local Authority and Housing Association representatives who to date have been amazed by its simplicity and performance credentials. More used to traditional methods of construction they admit it takes time to understand this innovative product meets the criteria in terms of quality, affordability and can deliver on all fronts. With Eco-Mods Limited having the capacity to currently produce in excess of 5 homes per week the House Pod could deliver the targets for affordable homes, well within the budget allocated for the initial 500 homes in Wales. One of the key targets set out by the Essex Review was to break down the barriers to

innovation and development – the House Pod delivers on all criteria and time will tell whether the Welsh Assembly embrace this innovation and deliver on their commitment for affordable homes.