

NEWS

Houses get green light

West Sussex practice MH Architects has won consent for an innovative social housing scheme in Horsham.

Horsham Council has backed the project to replace a former social club in the town with 38 units for Saxon Weald Housing Association. It comprises 12 terraced houses designed to meet Passivhaus and Code Level 4. The remaining flats and houses will meet Code Level 5. Work is due to start next month and will take a year to complete.

MH Architects changed its name from Miller Hughes Associates earlier this month, following a management buyout in 2008.



Porritt calls for UK to adopt Passivhaus

Will Hurst

Environmentalist Jonathon Porritt has called on architects and others in the construction industry to urgently embrace the Passivhaus system as a means of reaching the 2016 zero-carbon target.

Porritt, the founding director of sustainable development charity Forum for the Future, said the UK was "just waking up" to how far behind it was on low-energy housing, and could learn from Germany's years of experience with Passivhaus.

Porritt's call, which was made in the foreword to a film on the system launched this week by the Green Building Store, came as a new advice and lobbying body — the Passivhaus Trust — was launched this week.

"People in the UK are just waking up to how far behind we are on really energy efficient housing, in comparison with other European countries," Porritt said. "This government has now confirmed the zero-carbon housing target for 2016 so we're going to have to be doing a huge amount to catch up. We're going to have to see an unprecedented wave of innovation around construction techniques and design."

"For me it's really important that what's been going on elsewhere, particularly in Germany with Passivhaus, is now brought in as part of that innovation cycle in the UK."

The Passivhaus Trust was launched on Monday to build on the 50 or more Passivhaus schemes currently under way in the UK.

Affiliated with the Passivhaus Institut in Germany, the trust is a not-for-profit organisation which will focus on research, education and policy campaigns around the application of the system.

The trust is backed by a group of founder members including Bere Architects, Architype, ECD Architects and Prewett Bizley.



"We are just waking up to how far behind we are on energy efficient housing"
Jonathon Porritt

Director at Bere Architects, Dan Gibbons, welcomed the growing focus on Passivhaus and rejected the idea that it could prove a distraction from the UK's Code for Sustainable Homes.

He said his firm had used Passivhaus to help it achieve the "more holistic" Code level 6 on a zero carbon house in Ebbw Vale.

"The thing about Passivhaus is that it's an immutable thing which you cannot fiddle," he said. "It's about a tangible result in energy efficiency."

SEE DEBATE, PAGE 11

...as survey posits a prefabricated future

Architects face working on prefabricated housing as the industry shifts to meet Code level 6, according to a survey by estate agent Knight Frank.

The research also found that the housebuilding industry was critical of the previous government's lack of policy direction in its ambitions for all new homes to be constructed to zero-carbon standard — which still has not been given a formal definition — by 2016.

More than 60% of senior specialists said there would be a shift towards factory-built housing, and 40% believed the lack of a firm definition had led to reduced development volumes.

Liam Bailey, head of residential

research at Knight Frank, said: "With zero carbon there is this degree of uncertainty and that makes it difficult for developers to meet this target."

He added that similar problems were noted with the introduction of the first affordable housing targets, but that as "the rules became tighter and more clear-cut and because developers knew where they were, most just got on with it."

Meanwhile, architect Peter Marshall has secured a £8 million investment deal for a sustainable housebuilding factory for his firm Pretek in Blackburn, Lancashire.

Marshall, who previously worked with Terence Conran, said: "The houses vary in size from two to five bedrooms and we can build to any sustainability code. If someone asked us to design homes to Passivhaus standard we would be able to do that too."

Pretek is working with A2Dominion on its first project and said it has the capacity to build 3,000 homes annually.



Pretek's housebuilding factory.

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