

GRAHAM RAVEN *Convenor of the Steel Homes Group*



The mother of invention

Graham Raven argues that the London 2012 Olympics could be an important milestone in the quest to provide affordable, quality homes, only if local authorities and the Government make the most of the opportunity.

be built quickly but meet exacting environmental criteria.

These seemingly conflicting ambitions leave many planners and housing departments with a potential headache. However, a solution is waiting in the wings, which up until now has played a bit part but could be about to take centre stage. The feedback from English Partnerships Design for Manufacture competition demonstrated that Modern Methods of Construction, where homes are manufactured away from the building site and then assembled, could be the step change that housing providers have been looking for.

In an age when houses in many areas cost more than five times the average salary, it is not surprising that there is pressure to increase housing supply. The Barker review has highlighted the need for 120,000 new homes every year and the Housing Corporation plans to fund 70,000 new affordable homes within the next two years.

This is a level of housing development that the UK has struggled to deliver in recent decades. Add in the challenges of tightened environmental

regulations such as the new Part L, a laborious planning system, the need to deliver homes that people can afford, and problems facing the construction industry, such as skills shortages, and this challenge may appear almost impossible to overcome.

However, this is not necessarily the case. There is a massive opportunity facing the Government, local authorities and the construction industry to grasp the nettle of modern methods of construction. Necessity is the mother of invention.

Forget poor quality pre-fabs often associated with post war offsite construction, modern steel homes are a world apart. Off-site manufacture allows greater efficiency, accuracy and volume of production, reducing costs and minimising on-site labour. Computer assisted factory processes help to reduce delays and wastage of materials.

The Government and local authorities both have a role to play in promoting this solution to housing challenges. English Partnerships Design for Manufacture competition, to build a home for £60,000, represents a promising move to educate the

construction industry. However, if this is not to be seen as something of a gimmick, then planners must recognise the benefits demonstrated when overseeing planning applications.

The London 2012 Olympics could present an interesting milestone in the gradual emergence and acceptance of modern methods of construction. If the Olympic planning authorities use this opportunity to deliver quality, affordable and sustainable homes and buildings, the Games will set the standard for construction in the future. The Olympic Games could be the catalyst that changes the nature of construction, but only if the Government and authorities make the most of this monumental opportunity.

The UK is undoubtedly facing massive problems of delivering the housing that is needed, at a price that can be afforded but without damaging the environment. However, the Government and planners need to think differently and take this vital opportunity to deliver a construction industry of the 21st Century. [LGN](#)

Local authorities have been tasked with delivering the government's sustainable communities agenda since it was launched in February 2003. This initiative looks to tackle serious issues that will effect the way that we deliver new housing for coming generations.

Local authorities are, however, faced with a series of conflicting priorities – homes must be high quality yet affordable, they have to