# Steel framed housing solves green problems

## Graham Raven discusses the future for steel in residential construction.

STEEL framed housing is on the march. It is only 18 months since the Steel Homes Group was formed but there has been a marked change in how steel-framed homes are viewed.

The industry has matured and architects, developers and contractors consider steel homes and off-site construction methods a viable option.

This changing attitude shows in SHG members' sales – steel systems were used to construct over 10,000 homes during 2005. The figure is even higher if construction such as hotels is added.

SHG members are anticipating 20 per cent growth during 2006, with many companies predicting significantly higher returns. Steel is increasingly part of the mainstream of residential construction as it enables the industry to deliver homes faster, at a more affordable price, while meeting the sustainability agenda.

The UK's continuing housing shortfall, with Barker calling for an additional 70,000 new homes each year, presents off-site construction with a massive opportunity.

Off-site construction can deliver four homes using the on-site manpower that it takes the traditional sector to build one – making the whole process more reliable, less susceptible to delays and allowing homes to hit the market more quickly. These construction processes also minimise the impact of problems such as noise, dust and traffic on the local area.

Within all sectors of the construction industry there is a greater appreciation of the quality that off-site steel frame construction can deliver. It is being widely used by developers involved in commercial buildings and these innovative methods are steadily being transferred to residential properties.

Off-site construction's ability to deliver comfortable, affordable homes that meet customer expectations is demonstrated by the commercial success of Redrow's Debut range and the Metsec Metframe system.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for steel comes from the increasing necessity to deliver sustainable homes. As a 100 per cent recyclable material, steel is an extremely sustainable material that presents whole life benefits. The off-site construction methods used in the manufacture of steel homes can also eliminate up to 30 per cent of waste from all stages of the construction process.

As the Government looks to reduce $CO_2$ emissions from new homes, off-site construction can deliver a significant reduction when compared to traditional methods because of the high quality, consistent, off-site manufacture used.

The days where developers could merely pay lip service to sustainability are gone and the search for environmentally friendly methods can only benefit off-site construction.

Some issues remain for the steel homes industry to overcome, not least the need to develop a coherent, recognisable, trusted system of accreditation. We also have a role to play in getting out and educating the industry and consumers about the benefits of off-site. But there are far more reasons to be optimistic than concerned.

The coming years may well represent a turning point for steel in the residential sector. Developers will be under ever increasing pressure to deliver high-quality homes to market more quickly and at an affordable price that meets stringent environmental standards.

Off-site steel systems tick all of these boxes.

*Graham Raven is convenor of the Steel Homes Group*