

NEWS

# MPs back push for improved components

David Rogers

Plans are being hatched to take the issue of poor design in building components to the heart of government.

The idea is the brainchild of Rod Macdonald, chairman of engineer Buro Happold, who is assembling



**"The government is one of the biggest clients and could be driving design as a client"**  
Rod Macdonald

a panel of people to produce a report into the issue by the beginning of next year.

The panel is backed by parliament's all-party design and innovation group, and among its members will be former architecture minister Alan Howarth and former construction minister Nick Raynsford. The pair will present the report to parliament later in the spring.

Macdonald said an architect would also be on the panel, which will be asking the construction industry how to improve the quality and design of components.

Questions will also be posted on the internet, inviting responses from the whole industry.

"So many architects have to

bespoke design things because they are not available," said Macdonald. "That costs time and money and we need to be moving away from bespoke design."

Macdonald said issues that needed tackling included why windows could not be secure when opened, the absence of standard window shades, the lack of wireless light switches and the poor design quality of light fittings.

"The government can put it on the national agenda," he added. "The government is one of the largest clients and could be driving the agenda as a client."

At a meeting of the parliamentary design and innovation group earlier this year, the then shadow construction minister Mark Prisk cited David Chipperfield's work on the Stirling Prize-shortlisted Neues Museum in Berlin as an example of innovation.

He added: "I would say the real advantage for businesses... lies in the ability to get a real edge, to open up new markets."

Government construction tsar Paul Morrell has given the panel his backing, but admitted Macdonald faced a tough task.

"The reality is that construction doesn't innovate most of all because it doesn't have to," he said. "You can get away with second quality products because the first quality are too expensive to find."

# Powell Dobson's £2m eco-house reprieved

A controversial £2 million eco-home in Wales by Powell Dobson has been spared from the bulldozer after a heated two-year planning row.

The semi-completed five-bedroom concrete and glass home, on the Gower Peninsula, was designed for multi-millionaire property tycoon Martin Morgan, whose Swansea hotel Morgans is popular with Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas.

Local residents were outraged when the house was given planning consent in 2008 under delegated powers, arguing that it was a major scheme that should be the subject of public debate.

Building was subsequently halted after it emerged the mansion taking shape at Three Cliffs



The five-bedroomed house is semi-complete.

Bay, a designated area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, was 25% larger than the plans originally approved.

Now Swansea Council has given retrospective planning permission to the enlarged house, despite scores of objections.

One neighbour described the proposals as resembling a "concrete bus shelter", while another dismissed it as a "scar on the landscape".

The Design Commission for Wales gave lukewarm support, saying the "design concept is sound" while warning that "much refinement to the details needs to be carried out".

But members of the council's planning committee approved the proposals after considering a report by officers which described the house as "a high quality contemporary design which responds positively to the unique site".

The house has a glazed south elevation, and a green roof boasting flowers and grasses from the surrounding area.

It is to be clad in wood and stone reclaimed from the former thatched cottage on the site.

FIRST LOOK



The houses are semi-detached with gardens.

# Mae Architects rethinks the semi for Urban Splash's New Islington

The next stage of Urban Splash's New Islington project in Manchester is set to start on site in November following a grant of £936,000 from the Homes & Communities Agency.

Mae Architects, led by Alex Ely and Michael Howe, is the practice behind The Guts — a £2.3 million, 18-home scheme that will complement similar housing developments at New Islington by Fat and de Metz Forbes Knight.

All three projects share the same developer, the Great Places Housing Group, selected by Urban Splash to help deliver housing for former residents of the site who have a right to return.

Mae's scheme, on a 0.45ha site in the belly of New Islington, is split into two blocks with houses ranging in size from 92sq m to 130sq m.

The northern block continues an existing terrace on a tapering site on Weybridge Road, while the



The houses come in different colours but all have red brick plinths and slate pitched roofs.

southern block features a series of front-to-back semi-detached houses with side gardens.

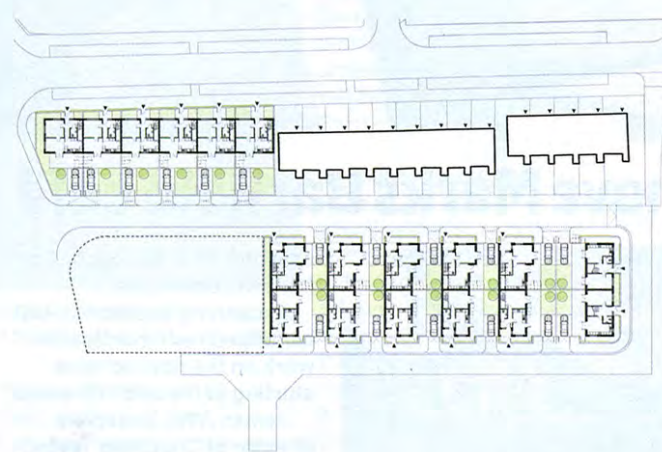
Although the top levels of the buildings are different colours, they share a unifying red brick plinth detail, painted timber window frames and slate pitched roofs.

"The archetype of a 'home' with its association with the form of a pitched roof house was key to the design development," said Howe, who said the scheme was a "joyous and constructive"

response to the brief.

The practice was appointed to the project last November and won planning permission in March this year.

All the houses have been designed to Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 and are due for completion late next year.



Site plan



Plan of four-bedroom house

Plan of three-bedroom house