

Berkeley scouts out site for modular homes factory

Firm explores potential site near Ebbsfleet for facility that could build 2,000 homes a year

By David Blackman

Berkeley Homes has been exploring a potential site to build its own modular homes factory, Building has learned.

Two sources familiar with Berkeley's plans told Building that if the factory goes ahead, it would most likely be used to build volumetric steel-framed modules, which can then be "zipped" together to create new homes.

The FTSE250 volume housebuilder is understood to have been on the hunt for a site where it could build a plant, and has been exploring a potential site at Northfleet, north of Ebbsfleet in north Kent, according

to the sources.

The site Berkeley has been looking at is on the River Thames and is equipped with a pier, which would enable materials and completed modules to be shipped in and out, thus minimising lorry movement to and from the site, especially into central London, where much of its output is built, according to one source.

Berkeley is understood to have discussed building a facility with a floorspace of approximately 250,000ft², which one expert contacted by Building suggested could be able to produce 1,500-2,000 homes each year when fully up and running.

Berkeley is currently building a number of prototype "Urban Homes" using steel modules at its Kidbrooke estate regeneration project in south-east London.

The news that Berkeley has been exploring a potential site for its modular housing plant follows last week's announcement by Legal & General (L&G) that it has hired Rolls-Royce executive Rosie Toogood as chief executive of its modular housing business.

Toogood, who is due to start work at L&G later this month, is currently business development director for Rolls-Royce's civil aerospace business.

L&G plans to deliver 3,500 homes

a year from its factory near Selby, North Yorkshire.

Rory Bergin, a partner in housing architect HTA, said that it was increasingly a "no brainer" for housebuilders to explore setting up their own off-site manufacture plants given the growing scarcity of construction skills.

"The people who are there now are not going to be there in the future."

Berkeley is the latest in a string of housebuilders and housing associations to explore setting up their own off-site manufacturing facility. North west-based social landlord Your recently announced it is exploring creating its own plant.

Berkeley declined to comment.

Construction firms urge extra vigilance in wake of London attack

Construction companies operating in central London have been urged to be extra-vigilant following Saturday night's terror attack at London Bridge.

Laing O'Rourke has issued guidance on security and vigilance protocols to its whole workforce, with a focus on major projects, after each of the three recent atrocities in Westminster, Manchester and London Bridge.

Gary Sullivan, chairman of construction logistics outfit Wilson James, said: "We are sending a communication to all staff and clients to be extra watchful, as we did after Manchester and Westminster. They need to keep an eye out for any suspicious vehicles, be careful not to leave equipment unattended, and report anything they see.

"Most major sites have tight security, and legal

checks are carried out on anyone working there," he added. "Construction sites would also be difficult to attack with a van, because if they are not booked in, it is difficult to get access. But the attackers could strike anywhere."

Seven were killed and scores injured in Saturday's attack, with Laing O'Rourke worker Gerard Vowls praised for trying to distract the terrorists by throwing chairs and bottles at them.



Rivals line up for Brent Cross revamp

Laing O'Rourke, Multiplex and Sir Robert McAlpine are competing for Hammerson and Standard Life's £1.4bn redevelopment of Brent Cross Shopping Centre, Building has learned.

Hammerson and its joint-venture partner Standard Life are anticipating work starting on the scheme as early as summer next year, subject to detailed planning approval.

The detailed plans for the scheme designed by Callison RTKL and Chapman Taylor were submitted by the joint-venture partners to Barnet council in May, having already secured outline planning consent in 2010.

The plans aim to double the size of the shopping centre to 2 million ft².