

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Excellence in the Built Environment Inquiry into the Quality of New Build Housing in England CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Brick Development Association submission to the committee

The Brick Development Association is the Trade Association representing 99% of the UK brick making capacity. The Association provides technical and standards information to the construction industry and supports the wider masonry industry.

A substantial part of the UK Brick Industries output around 60% is used in new housing. The brick industry is therefore allied to the housing industry. There is a presumption in the briefing paper that current housing construction is flawed and there are problems not only with the number of houses being produced but also the constructional methods.

While constant improvement is essential the cavity wall is actually well suited for our climate and generally performs well. The construction system is tried and tested and while poor building practise can cause problems our generally well built housing stock gives few problems. The major housebuilders who have a vested interest in avoiding conflict with their customers and ensuring a good service are market driven towards a policy of continuous improvement.

Speed of construction is not a significant issue in increasing the supply of housing the actual time spent in constructing a typical estate is not a limiting factor. The reason that estates are built in small phases is because that is generally the speed purchasers for the properties can be found.

The brick industry has invested heavily to increase potential production to 2 Billion bricks a year responding to the increase prompted by Help to Buy and other helpful initiatives. Bricks are the UK's favourite cladding material chosen for the colour texture and durability. Planners favour brick in part because they are part of the UK heritage and relatively non contentious. Designers and Architects favour brick certainly currently because they are a controllable element enabling mould breaking designs to be developed. Clients and building owners in the UK like bricks because they are Economical and in our damp maritime climate durable.

A brick façade is 70 to 100 years to first maintenance. This is a powerful economic point as a project which requires no maintenance is also a low user of resources; a strong argument for sustainability as a durable product requiring little attention for decades is also a sustainable product. A brick can even be reused on another building after the building has been taken down.

Bricks also reflect regional differences and can offer a local identity with bricks particular region making a link not only to the local clay but also to the historic brick used in the area.

While only one of this year's 6 Stirling prize short listed projects was housing 3 of the projects were in brick including housing at Darbyshire Place.

The brick industry has a large number of different brick slip and cladding solutions. These range from lightweight retro fitted solutions to improve insulation in existing homes while maintaining a brick face precast whole wall solutions to lightweight panelised systems

The Brick Industry welcomes pre-fabricated housing and has a range of solutions suitable to supply fast construction innovation design and lightweight material.

- **Design Quality:**

The design of new houses has been generally improving in recent years this has been led by the urban dwellings blocks designed by Architects. Generic estate design which may not respond to the local vernacular are to be avoided.

- **Workmanship:**

Traditional craftsmanship and good working practices are a function of a settled industry. With the constant boom and bust in the housing industry a settled labour force is difficult to achieve. Stability brings with it the requirements to produce good buildings. Stability also includes regulations remaining stable. Changes in regulations and therefore building practise need time to be absorbed. The current period of stability is welcomed.

- **Building Regulations:**

The current system of building control is adequate.

- **Smart controls:**

The increase in smarter technologies to control building services is welcomed.

- **Offsite manufacturing BIM:**

The Brick Industry welcomes the opportunity to invest and exploit existing and future walling systems. The Industry was among the first to adapt to BIM and provide the necessary information to designers. Many brick cladding systems both lightweight panels and heavy weight prefabricated materials are readily available.

- **New innovative ideas for design quality improvement:**

The industry will assist in any way it can

- **Operational and maintenance costs for the homeowner**

The brick façade is the most maintenance free walling system available. Maintenance is virtually not required which is why the UK is a country substantially built with clay.

- **Improve new home owner experience and improved customer service.**

In the event of any issue the Brick Development Association Ltd. and our member companies will assist homeowners in any way possible.

Is there still a shortage of bricks in the UK?

There were certainly some supply problems last year brought about by the sharp increase in development of new housing and the time it takes to re-commission brick works that were closed during the recession. The situation was not helped by a degree of overstocking and double ordering by brick suppliers and users because of concerns about brick availability (sugar crisis/petrol shortage syndrome).

The market is now, however, much more balanced, helped by the increase of c200 million bricks from new capacity brought on by the brick manufacturers in the last 12 months. As a result brick production increased by 8% in the first 7 months of this year compared with 2014 and stocks are getting back to the level needed for an industry of this size and with the range of products that are produced. In addition, the last 12 months has seen an increase in imports, particularly from brick plants in the near continent. (Total imports in 2014 estimated to be around 400 million bricks).

Having said that it does not mean that every different kind of brick is immediately available. The wide range of bricks available and specified for housing and other construction projects in the UK mean that there may be a delay in supplying particular kinds of bricks (not very different from other industries – for example, you can't walk into a showroom to get a new car to your specification 'off the shelf'). To try to ensure that this does not unreasonably delay projects, particularly small scale housing projects, earlier this year we wrote, with others, to planning authorities throughout the country urging them, wherever possible, to allow appropriate substitute of bricks on developments where the brick identified in the planning permission is not readily available.

The Housing Minister said on 20 September that the Government wants a million homes to be built in England by 2020. Can the brick industry provide enough bricks for this level of housing?

Such a significant increase in housebuilding will not happen overnight and the industry does have the capacity to meet the level of increase that we are likely to see. In the short term UK production may need to be supplemented by imported bricks from the near continent, but once brick manufacturers have confidence in the long term prospects for housebuilding (and other construction projects which use our products) then companies will invest in additional manufacturing capacity in the UK as this will always offer the most cost effective, efficient and sustainable way of supplying bricks. The country's largest brick manufacturer was recently given planning permission to build a brand new brick works in the midlands. This will be the first new brick plant to be constructed in a decade.

Even if there are enough bricks will there be enough bricklayers? What is the industry doing to address this problem?

1. *Is there actually a shortage of bricklayers?*

CITB estimates that there is a need for 3070 new bricklayers to come into the job market every year from 2015 to 2019 <http://www.citb.co.uk/careers-in-construction/discover-it/careers-progression-tool/a-z-careers/bricklayer/?overlay=true>

Estimates from CITB and others suggest that only about 2000 bricklayers are currently being trained each year which means that considerably more needs to be done to avoid shortages in years ahead, especially with the increasing age of the existing workforce.

Equally significant, and a growing concern is the quality of the bricklayers coming into the industry and this focuses back on the level of training that people coming into the industry are receiving.

2. *What is being done to address this issue?*

The brick manufacturers do a great deal to support colleges where bricklayers are trained and annually make available at no cost over a quarter of million bricks for them to use. In addition they support initiatives like the Love Brick Campaign led by the BDA and supported by CITB, which is taking the message to bricklaying colleges around the country about the exciting and rewarding career that bricklaying can offer. The BDA and the Association of Brickwork Contractors also have a series of case studies and videos on their web sites and where recent recruits demonstrate the interesting and rewarding career that they are finding in bricklaying.

3 What more can be done about these issues?

- *Government targets for schools need to acknowledge the value of apprenticeships and consider progression into vocational training as a successful outcome of secondary education.*
- *The opportunities provided by a career starting in bricklaying need to be promoted to encourage more able students to take this path.*
- *Colleges and employers need to communicate better and more frequently. This would allow for employers to influence the training, ensuring the methods taught are up to date and relevant. A positive relationship would also promote a progression from college to bricklaying work.*

Brick is surely something from the past and not a product that is in tune with modern forms and methods of construction, or the growing importance of sustainability

Brick has been around as a construction material for thousands of years and created some of the most aesthetically pleasing environments all over the world. In the UK brick is the most loved of all construction materials and you only have to see the confidence and assurance that people have in a brick built house, never mind the aesthetic appeal that brick cladding brings with it.

Brick is also one of the most sustainable of all building materials and as we become ever more conscious of the importance of sustainability issues, so the value of brick for its longevity and minimal maintenance requirements will increase. The carbon used for the manufacture of the bricks needed to build a typical house is no more than emitted in a return flight to New York, and the brickwork in the house will last for over 150 years.

Brick will always make a valuable contribution to the built environment of this country and its appeal is increasing not decreasing. Evidence of this can be found in this year's Brick Awards for which there have been more, and higher quality, submissions than ever before.

Construction materials go in and out of fashion but bricks have stood the test of time and significantly a number of recent articles in national newspapers have declared that 'Brick is Back' and illustrated this with some outstanding brick clad buildings.

Are moves towards more pre fabrication a threat to the brick industry?

Not at all. The attraction of pre-fabrication are the claims that it is a quicker form of construction but it is nearly always more expensive, whilst there is little evidence that it provides a more sustainable solution. Brick in its various forms makes a positive contribution to many different forms of construction and construction methods, and there are very successful brick clad pre-fabricated buildings.

