



Other highlights of the event included the City's Carolyn Dwyer stressing that the built environment 'is an absolutely critical part of the cultural ecosystem', especially given the £100m it invests in culture every year; along with project updates including AXA head of leasing James Goldsmith on 22 Bishopsgate—a 'big call' for the investors after the Scalpel that preceded it and delicate economic conditions. The scheme—a 'container for a community'—aims at attracting a diversity of occupiers in a space that will adapt. 22 Bishopsgate is 30 per cent let, 30 per cent under offer, but success is also about the success of the companies in the building, said Goldsmith. For Devinder Bhogal, head of workplace strategy, Deloitte, it was also about creating flexibility in a space that needed to be unique but also simple and future proofed. 'Nearly 60 per cent of our workforce are millennials', she said. 'They all want choice.'

Finally, Sinéad Conneely, director, Scale Rule, and co-founder, Simple Works, said she felt that the City 'is missing a City-wide sense of place', and could work to redesign its roads and pavements to 'take back the streets' and lessen the 'crazy' atmosphere resulting from so many people. She added that another idea might be to use the landscaping design for the Garden Bridge and put it on a road between Monument and Bank. 'After all', she said, 'we technically own that'.

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MOVING TO MODULAR — ONE YEAR ON

Industry experts call for MMC Task Force

The construction industry needs a 'MMC Task Force' or other co-ordinating body to bring all the parties working in this field together and make a major contribution to solving the UK's ongoing housing crisis.

That was one of the key points made at a think tank discussion on the event held at the offices of Pollard Thomas Edwards.

The practice's Carl Vann introduced the session as host, noting the relevance of the location for the round table. Diespeker Wharf is Pollard Thomas Edwards' studio converted from a former terrazzo factory. It was here in the 1920s that Diespeker & Co made innovative leaps in stone technology to develop the first reinforced precast terrazzo. This was, he said, an excellent setting to discuss current advances in Modern Methods of Construction (MMC).

To mark 12 months since the launch of *Factory-Made Housing: A Solution for London*, NLA gathered together some key thinkers in the field to see what progress had been made.

And although the group believed there has been progress made in terms of new joint ventures and the inauguration of new factories to lift production of off-site homes from a number of players, there still remains an education job to be done on the benefits of this sector in terms of speed and cost to both the public and private spheres, if economies of scale can be reached.

The group met under the Chatham House Rule and made a number of points—which have been necessarily anonymised where possible. They include:

- There has been a 'ripple effect' in some architectural practices undertaking research on modular into the processes they are using in traditional build projects
- These have included the need to increase digital capability to deal with complex information, and investment in knowledge
- Japan's expectations of UK industry in this sector in the UK were higher than reality given its status as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution
- Homes for England is putting £44bn of public money into the housing market in various ways, with MMC a significant part of that. 'We're here to support innovators, and a changing industry'
- MMC has the ability to drive consistent quality
- R&D in the UK is underfunded, especially in comparison with Japan and other countries, and few people talk about the places they are making; rather, most of the talk is of units
- Some firms are looking to offsite construction as part of a wider push towards the circular economy (which 'needs high level government input') and diversifying the workforce
- Gender diversity is as important as age diversity in terms of attracting young people to the profession, and MMC may be able to help here through promoting a cleaner, non-building site based industry. 'The industry has a brand issue'

- Some relatively easy wins could be made—why not standardise bathrooms across the industry? A standardised product can bring economies of scale
- Manufacturers have got capacity but there are barriers to developers purchasing through them and there is often uncertainty surrounding the long-term viability of some of the factories
- Much of the industry is enthusiastic, but clients are still risk-averse. 'There's a sense that there is experimentation in MMC where it's volumetric'
- Factory processes allow more choice and customers are getting used to this, just as they have been with buying bespoke Nike trainers online, for example
- 'Modular contractors treat their design as a secret recipe. Getting everyone to share and agree to standardisation is going to be so difficult. But I think it is the key'
- 'The industry is trying to be as collaborative as it can but everything is still a dark art'
- The only way to do modular is at stage 0, said one attendee; to fully commit to it. But a 'nervousness' remains about the level of architectural quality that results
- 'Breaking through the Registered Providers (RPs) has been incredibly challenging to us'
- 'There's still a lack of confidence in the market. It's still seen as just the emperor's new clothes. We know it's not'
- 'We're only just getting back on track with building our homes (as local authorities). To go to MMC is just a leap of faith too far'
- But this is a great opportunity for London councils to come together as a commissioning authority and shake up the market, as has happened in education, where the industry collaborates. 'If we could engineer that aggregation there would be real power in the marketplace'

- There are also concerns over repairs, however, with maintenance teams not ready. Perhaps the industry could mirror automotive, where warranties are extended if owners have maintained their car/house properly
- The Prism web app—whose aim is to increase adoption of precision manufacturing across London—is being used by the industry but welcomes feedback from industry on how it can be changed
- 'We can talk about creative solutions all day long, but if the supply chain doesn't see a product they have confidence in, the momentum will just get lost again'
- The G15 could be one 'powerful force' that could bring organisations together
- A 'materials passport' for every home could be one way of listing every component of a home and their carbon usage, given to residents and councils
- The cost of producing MMC homes is 30 per cent more than traditional for one attendee. But put all the manufacturers producing around 100 homes a year under a standardised system and economies of scale would result
- 'Everybody's producing 100 homes of a different type across the country, and that's the problem'
- There is now a government presumption in favour of using MMC in education, prisons and hospitals across eight government departments
- 'The real unlocking of the market will be done through components, across the sector'
- 'There is a role for some kind of task force ... we're all making mistakes and can probably all help each other'

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A modular future? — PLACE / Ladywell in Lewisham by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, AECOM and SIG