



# Design of the times

Following housing associations' call for government to do more to support the provision of new social housing, **Ian Kemp** discusses how off-site construction has an important role to play.

**D**emand on the construction industry to accelerate its housebuilding programme will only increase. As the current economic climate shows, the good times don't last forever – but nor do the bad, and once the economy recovers an accelerated building programme is going to be essential to meet the upturn in demand and need to satisfy housing requirements.

To be able to do this, the industry should look closely at off-site construction as it can help to deliver projects in a timely, and cost efficient way. On the multi-use Paragon building in London a modular solution, including a 17-storey block, shortened the project by a full 12 months.

Off-site construction is definitely growing in popularity, seeing greater and more varied uptake as the benefits it can offer in terms of speed, quality, skills and

sustainability become increasingly recognised. For housing developers, modular construction is an attractive solution when building larger, multi-storey apartment blocks as it increases ease and speed of construction.

## Changing perceptions

Changing perceptions are also helping to boost the sector. Modular construction can allow for designs beyond traditional perceptions – there are opportunities to build a range of uniform V, W, L and T shapes, as well as curves and triangular buildings, all completed in a range of architectural claddings, with bolt-on features such as balconies, to suit individual developments.

At the same time, modular construction is also helping the industry meet its targets for sustainability. High levels on the sustainability scale – such as achieving

BREEAM Excellent and Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 – are heavily dependent on the efficiency and quality of the construction of buildings. Energy efficiency and airtightness are improved with modular construction, whilst waste is reduced and recycling maximised, through the refined factory processes and the efficient purchasing of materials by off-site manufacturers.

For example, at Caledonian we have been able to foster a relationship with our plasterboard supplier to buy board that fits the dimensions of each of our project's individual specifications and ensure any waste from door and window cut-outs is returned and recycled through a specialist. With Code level 3 homes now a requirement and level 4 an aspiration on many schemes, methods such as modular construction helps a project achieve higher ratings with less additional cost

