



ARCHITECT Nicholas Grimshaw & Partners' design for an indoor climbing centre in north London received planning approval from Hackney council last week. High Performance Sports wants to convert a disused pumping station in Stoke Newington, known as The Castle, into a rock-climbing centre. Structural engineer is Alan Baxter & Associates, QS is Dearle & Henderson and building surveyor is Norris Reading.

## Fifth Chunnel rail link bidder withdraws

Other consortiums complain of tough tendering criteria. Adrian Barrick reports.

A FIFTH consortium pulled out of the bidding for the £2.7bn Channel Tunnel Rail Link on the eve of the Government's deadline, it emerged this week. And three of the nine consortiums that prequalified to build the 108 km line from St Pancras to Folkstone may be excluded because they do not meet the Government's tendering criteria.

Building understands that John Prideaux, former chairman of British Rail subsidiary Union Railways, was preparing to bid for the line, backed by a consortium including two merchant banks, Babcock & Brown and Barings, and supported by contractor Amec. But on the eve of the

Government deadline for prequalification, 25 April, the consortium withdrew. Norman Crowe, a director of Babcock & Brown, said the consortium attempted to win the backing of large non-contracting companies, but failed.

He said: "There's an 18-month period before you get any return and the bidding process is horrendous. If you bid and come second, it could cost people their careers."

Four other leading contractors - Bovis, Italy-based Cogefarimpresit, and two French firms GTM Entrepouse and Spic Batignolles - also decided not to bid, because they feared the risks of the project

were too great. (29 April, page 11).

Sources at Union Railways also warned this week that the Government may exclude up to three of the nine pre-qualifiers.

The three are believed to include Richard Branson's Virgin group, and the French national railway company SNCF. However, a Virgin spokesman said the company was "not involved" in the rail link project. SNCF could not be contacted.

A Department of Transport spokesman said: "We are not giving a blow-by-blow account of who has been struck off the list."

The DOT is understood to have its warning in questionnaires which were circulated to all the

### IN BRIEF

#### BRE radon advice

The Building Research Establishment has published advice on how to prevent the deadly radioactive gas radon from entering extensions and conservatories. BRE guidance note XL10 has been issued following warnings by environmental health officers that extensions - which do not need planning or building regulation approval - are being built without proper membranes to prevent ingress of radon.

#### Failures halve

The number of construction companies sliding into receivership or administration fell by 49% to 457 in the 12 months to the end of April compared to the previous 12 months, according to accountant Touche Ross. Twenty-eight failed in April compared to 39 in April 1993.

#### Environmental code

The Building Services Research and Information Association has launched an environmental code of practice for buildings. Copies ARE available from BSRIA, tel 0344-426511.

### Few openings in new South Africa

UK CONSULTANTS are cautiously eyeing opportunities in South Africa after last week's change of government - but there could be few immediate openings for UK professionals, experts have warned.

International recruitment consultant PRS said over-capacity in the South African construction industry, caused by the current recession, would be able to cope with a sharp increase in demand.

Alick Goldsmith, director general of the Export Group for the Constructional Industries, said: "The general view is that South Africa has a highly developed construction industry with few opportunities for outsiders."

Institute of South African Architects executive director Martin Knoetze said there was almost "zero" work for the country's 2500 registered architects. "Many architects are out of work at the moment - it will probably take a year or two to recover."

## Pollution compensation fund rejected

Help for homeowners decreed "unfair" by housebuilders. Erica Billingham reports.

HOUSEBUILDERS have shunned calls for a levy on all house transactions to fund compensation payments to buyers whose homes turn out to have been built on contaminated land.

The idea of a fund to help homeowners who discover their homes are worthless is part of a package of measures put forward by the RICS this week in response to the DOE's contaminated land consultation exercise.

The RICS also wants the Government to force all developers to submit a land

quality statement with every planning application which would detail existing contamination and state the treatment needed to clean it up.

But the House Builders Federation, which is preparing its response to the DOE paper *Paying for Our Past* published in March this year, will reject both suggestions.

The HBF believes the number of cases in which people have genuinely been unable to find out about the state of the land before buying a house is very small, and in these cases the Government should pay.

David Coates, HBF national planning officer, said: "If there is true ignorance on the part of the purchaser and no one can be held directly liable for the pollution, the public purse should bear the costs of compensation. It's unfair to target housebuilders for this."

But RICS environment spokesman Philip Wilbourn said: "Many of the problems are down to the excesses of the 1980s when too much was built too quickly. Housebuilders should look more closely at land before they build on it."

He said the number of

homeowners eligible for compensation would be "only several thousand" and the levy could be as small as £1 per transaction.

Coates also rejected the idea of compulsory land quality statements, which he claimed would "add to delay and cost with more paperwork and bureaucracy". He said 99% of applications would have no problems with land contamination.

He added: "The onus must be on the local authority, not the developer, to identify contamination."

### DOE crackdown on late payers blasted for discriminating against contractors

INDUSTRY LEADERS are pressing for a massive overhaul of the Government's prompt payment policy - less than three months after it was introduced.

Environment minister Tony Baldry introduced tough new measures in February, forcing contractors to pay their subcontractors within 17 days of the issue of an

architect's certificate. The measures, which apply to all government contracts, mean late payers face interest charges at the High Court judgment rate of 8%.

But the BEC and the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors have warned that the scheme could cripple contractors.

BEC legal affairs director Stephen Davies said: "These regulations are deeply

flawed. If subcontractors are to be paid promptly, contractors need to be paid promptly too."

The BEC wants the Government to promise to pay main contractors within 14 days of the issuing of the certificate, giving them three days to pay subcontractors.

Alternatively, the period for paying subcontractors could be extended from 17 to 30 days, Davies said.

Subcontractors' organisation the Specialist Engineering Group also opposes the prompt payment rules. Spokesman Rudi Klein said the interest penalty was too low, and should be raised to credit card company rates of more than 20%. "Credit card companies treat their customers as unsecured creditors. We are in the same position with main contractors," he said.



TWO DEVELOPERS have been invited to make financial submissions to the London Docklands Development Corporation in the final stage of a competition to design a new 1200-home village.

Wimpey Homes and a consortium of Barratt, Fairclough and Ideal Homes were selected from four developers who put forward proposals for phase one of West Silvertown urban village, an 11 ha site on the south side of the Royal Victoria Dock. Tibbalds Monro is the architect for Wimpey's scheme (above) and PRP Architects designed the Barratt consortium scheme (right). The LDDC will choose the winning developer by the end of July, so that work can start on site this autumn. The scheme is the first phase of a 5000-home development, planned over eight to 10 years.



### Team seeks new leader as Moayedhi announces departure from chief executive post

STAFF AT the 250-strong construction manager Team Services were stunned last Friday by the shock departure of its 53-year-old chief executive Paris Moayedhi.

Moayedhi, one of six former Walter Lawrence directors who established Team in 1988, left "to pursue personal interests", the company said in a three-line statement. A new chief executive was expected to be announced by today. Moayedhi's 55 000 shares - 16.5% of the total - have

been redistributed among the other directors.

Ian Ruperti, Team's group marketing director, said: "Paris's departure was a shock to all of us. But we are a strong company with a strong board. The titular head may have been removed, but it will not adversely affect our performance." The Enfield-based firm made a £2.1m operating profit in 1992/93, on a £55.8m turnover. The company predicts turnover will rise to £85m in 1993/94.