

Prince and architects unite to tackle zero carbon housing

Dunster's practice Zed Factory and Bere Architects work with Prince's charity on housing plans

By Will Hurst

The Prince of Wales' built environment charity has teamed up with two of the country's green architecture pioneers on "game changing" plans for zero carbon housing.

In a move that will raise eyebrows in the architecture profession given the ongoing tensions with the Prince, his Foundation for Building Communities is working in partnership on separate schemes with Zed Factory, the practice run by architect Bill Dunster, and Passivhaus specialist Bere Architects.

Dunster, still best known for designing the UK's first and largest zero energy housing development, BedZed, is working with the foundation on plans for an "eco-hamlet" of up to 10 ultra-low energy homes in Neath, south Wales.

Meanwhile, Bere Architects – which produced the country's first code level 6 Passivhaus home – has joined the foundation on a competition-winning scheme for a pair of Passivhaus homes at the BRE Innovation Park near Watford.

Both architects hope that their collaborations can help produce a new "housing vernacular for the 21st century".



The Chestnut House in Watford by Bere Architects and the Prince's Foundation

Dunster told Building that the urgent need to reduce fuel and energy usage meant there was a pressing need for "everyone to work together to sort it out".

He said: "If people with different aesthetic priorities to us still do zero carbon, that is great. What we are producing is a long way from what we, and they [the foundation], would do if left to our own devices."

The Welsh project is set to feature barn-like timber frame houses on a steeply sloping site with extensive use of photovoltaic panels.

Bere Architects director Justin Bere predicted his project – which

already involves housing associations Hastoe and Orbit – would result in "technically superb, low cost, traditional looking homes that are proven to work robustly".

He said: "As a country we have an urgent and complex social and environmental challenge that's a much bigger issue than one architect's 'house style'."

Dunster expects his homes to perform above code level 6 and Bere has said his homes, with their photovoltaic panels, would achieve a similar level.

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Dunster and the Prince: A strange pair?

By Will Hurst

A lot can change in seven years. In 2005, Building published a debate between architect Bill Dunster and then Prince's Foundation education director, Michael Mehaffy, which demonstrated the chasm between two very different design ideologies.

Back then, we wondered what the two would find to talk about given that the foundation was "a defender of the quaint and traditional Dorset village dreamed up by Prince Charles" while Dunster was the architect of "south London's cutting-edge, solar urbanist community".

While the two did find some areas of agreement despite favouring different aesthetics, much of the gap between them has since closed.

The success of the Prince's House at the BRE Innovation Park has been a factor as is the realisation that both parties are striving to use local techniques, materials and labour.

Most important though is the UK's ongoing failure to tackle carbon emissions in buildings. The need to turn this around is relegating style to little more than an afterthought.

NHS sitting on '264 football pitches worth of underused land'

The NHS is sitting on around 264 football pitches worth of unused or underused land or property, which, if rationalised, could unlock £1bn of capital, a report by consultant EC Harris has found.

The report on the NHS estate revealed that, although the amount of underused or wasted space in the NHS estate reduced by 210,000 m² in 2010/11, there remained nearly 1.9 million m²

still underused or unused.

The report said this was equivalent to the entire footprint of Sainsbury's UK stores or 264 football pitches.

Conor Ellis, EC Harris partner in the health sector, said the NHS could unlock a capital sum of £1bn by disposing of 50% of this area, and save a further £1bn through better procurement and improved facilities management

performance.

The report highlights the scale of the challenge faced by NHS Property Services, the government's company set to take over up to £4bn worth of NHS property after the primary care trusts are abolished from April 2013.

Health secretary Andrew Lansley has said the new company would aim to cut costs by streamlining the management of the NHS estate.