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Lovell in Hackney land swap scheme

Lovell has won a £25 million contract to build two new sustainable housing schemes for Hackney Council through a land swap scheme. The two developments will create 107 new affordable homes for rent and 42 for open market sale. Hackney Council enabled the development of the 42 units at Alexandra National House, overlooking Finsbury Park, with a "red book" value of around £2 million, and in return Lovell will invest in the scheme by building 20 further Council-owned homes at another site, at Shepherds Lane, in a scheme worth around £3 million. "This is thought to be among the first instances of a local authority cross-subsidising the development of sites in its property portfolio on this scale, as the mixed-tenure model is usually associated with major regeneration projects or with housing associations," said Lovell. Construction work on both developments will start this month, with completions due at Alexandra National House in March 2014 and at Shepherds Lane in March 2012. Councillor Karen Alcock, deputy mayor of Hackney, said: "Hackney Council pledged to deliver high quality and affordable homes for local people, and this is one of the ways in which this commitment is being realised." Lovell regional director Steve Coombs said: "We have an excellent working partnership with Hackney Council developed through our extensive work helping refurbish and improve the authority's housing stock. We look forward to bringing our wide-ranging national expertise in the creation of sustainable affordable homes to these two schemes – our first new-build projects for Hackney – which will create energy-efficient, attractive homes for residents."

Social housing planning approvals plummet

The number of social housing units receiving planning permission has fallen to just 5,500 in Q4 2010, according to the Home Builders Federation's latest Housing Pipeline report – the lowest number the survey has recorded.

The report follows government figures which showed the number of new homes completed in England fell by 13 per cent in 2010. The HBF warned of further falls in the coming year, exacerbating the housing crisis. It added that the drop off coincided with the introduction of the government's localism-based planning policy. Stewart Baseley, executive chairman of the HBF, said: "The figures demonstrate the necessity for the government to clarify exactly how the new localism-based planning system will deliver the homes, and supply the growth we desperately need. Only by ending the ongoing hiatus caused by the scrapping of the old system without a ready replacements can developers and local authorities plan ahead confidently and effectively for new housing."

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Glass ceiling in evidence in social housing says WISH

Senior women are "woefully underrepresented" in the contractors, developers and consultant practices working in the affordable housing sector, according to support group Women in Social Housing (WISH), which says that while many women work in housing associations and local authority housing departments, few get to board or director level.

WISH founder Nicola Dibb (pictured) said: "Our recent career survey indicated that the vast majority of our members do still experience the concept of a 'glass ceiling'. Our current initiative as a group is to consider what more can be done to encourage women to join the affordable housing sector, retain them once they are in it and then to succeed to senior positions. WISH believes that by educating young women about the vast array of roles in the sector, supporting them in their career via mentors (male and female) and creating the conducive environments for women to succeed, we will change the image of affordable housing as a career choice." "We would be absolutely delighted to hear from anyone who would like to come to speak at one of our events. Likewise we would be pleased to hear from any individuals keen to set up a regional branch of WISH outside London," added Dibb.



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