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The Modern Masonry Alliance raises concern about the Government's focus on offsite manufacturing.

The Modern Masonry Alliance (MMA) has outlined its general support for the need for more housing and the Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) housing White Paper, '*Fixing our broken housing market*' which was published on 7th February.

The MMA supports the broad analysis and recognition of past problems limiting growth in housing numbers in the White Paper, as well as the inclusion of helpful recommendations such as the promotion of and aid for small and medium sized home builders. However, the White Paper incorrectly attributes delays to shortcomings in traditional construction and is misinformed as to the contribution offsite construction methods can make in terms of numbers, long term quality and immediate delivery.

The need for more housing is reflected in two of the DCLG's four strategic objectives for this Parliament: increasing home ownership, and increasing the supply of homes, with an ambition of delivering a million new homes in England by 2020.

Projections suggest there will be at least 227,000 new households formed each year between 2011 and 2021. This is substantially higher than the annual average of 166,000 extra homes in England over the last 10 years. Delivery of the Government's million new homes ambition by 2020 will require 174,000 net additions each year.

British Precast is part of the Mineral Products Association, the trade association for the aggregates, asphalt, cement, concrete, dimension stone, lime, mortar and silica sand industries.

Many of the factors behind the shortage of new homes are outside the control or influence of product manufacturers, they include access to finance and land, a range of planning issues and the fact that, up until now, delivery has been concentrated within private sector housing for purchase. There are now potentially new players that may change these dynamics well beyond the changes proposed by Government in the White Paper, in particular the build to rent sector, housing for the growing over 65 population and now the potential re-entry of Local Authority action led by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), in its new form, Homes England.

The HCA has been reported as stating that public money will be used to fund land and factory construction for offsite and modern methods of construction, in line with the tenor of the White Paper analysis and proposals. This, however, leads to a real concern that Government policy is now incentivising certain construction methods and materials at the taxpayers' expense most of which are likely to lead to increased imported materials.

The current proposals to favour offsite and modern methods of construction, fail to recognise the long-term benefits of masonry and potentially give rise to the dangers of focusing on numbers and speed in place of long term quality, durability, long life and whole life carbon reduction.

Support for increased offsite construction and even the expenditure of public funds to provide land and factories which may stimulate greater use of imported materials rather than indigenous materials needs to be questioned, particularly when local product and labour is available which avoids the need to wait for new factories to be built, and for factory workers skills to be developed before production can commence.

The Government's concentration on new and Modern Methods of Construction to meet the immediate requirement and challenge of 1 million new homes within the term of this parliament ignores the sector that currently already contributes over 80% of current output and which has existing capacity for expansion.

Both the Home Builders Federation and the Federation of Master Builders see no reason to change their support and use of masonry construction that overwhelmingly is the solution of choice.

The materials used for traditional construction are locally and responsibly sourced, plentiful in supply, low cost, low carbon and long whole life solution providers for housing.

The forms of construction currently used meet the highest 'fabric first' standards for energy conservation. In addition, the benefits of thermal mass and other properties, provide protection and resilience to climate change threats such as flooding, overheating and extreme weather events.

One benchmark for quality should surely be that homeowners and occupiers of the future are able to be assured that their homes provide high quality, healthy, comfortable and affordable accommodation in a quality environment capable of adaptation.

The increase of blockwork manufacturing is already in hand through investment in new production lines and additional working shifts and further measures to improve and increase skilled trades/training are in place. This will be aided further by the proposed measures to encourage small and medium sized contractors back into house building where the size of projects undertaken is most likely to favour flexible off the shelf masonry solutions.

Offsite construction has hitherto been limited in its application, needing high throughputs and significant repetition to be cost effective. It also requires long term certainty to attract investors for the appropriate investment in time, essential research, production facilities and trained operatives. Whilst it may have a role to play masonry was and will always remain the main solution and is not the problem being a proven product that is available now.

[QUOTE PENDING APPROVAL: Commenting, Chairman of MMA, Steven Large, National Commercial Director at CEMEX said:

"We welcome the ambition of delivering more housing and support the analysis, relationship to planning and the encouragement of new entrants to the market. But the whitepaper ignores existing solutions and the need for resilient housing that can withstand flood, fire and overheating and most of all last well into the next century."]

Ends.