

Inner city building sites can be an oasis of peace and tranquillity

Volumetric Modular in-fill city homes are fast to install with minimum of noise and disruption to the surrounding area.

Building sites are usually noisy, dirty and very disruptive to the community in which they are located, so neighbours rarely welcome them even when new housing is desperately needed. But it does not have to be like that as Brian Maunder of pioneering construction company Totally Modular Ltd explains.

New houses and flats are needed all over the country, partly to address the current housing shortage and partly to renew existing housing stock. Most people are sympathetic to this need, but few actually want construction work too close to their own homes.

In large part this is because of the disruption that will be caused by the actual construction process. In cities and other urban spaces, the disruption is likely to be even worse, because the construction will be on infill sites which have restricted access and could be in close proximity to already occupied buildings. A typical house building project will take six to 18 months to build, with larger projects taking longer and/or causing more disruption.

As well as the noise and disturbance of the construction processes, there is the constant arrival and departure of trucks that could cause traffic queues, block pedestrian access, create driving hazards such as mud on the road etc.

Solutions not problems

However, there is an alternative that minimises the on-site construction process and produces attractive high-quality homes almost instantly. Volumetric construction is a technique in which houses are built off-site and delivered as complete ready to go modules. They are craned onto prepared foundations and connected to the utilities. In a matter of hours, they are ready for occupation.

As well as houses, blocks of flats can be built in exactly the same way, with each flat being a module that can be stacked and arranged in almost any configuration up to 11 storeys high (although currently most projects are low rise). This is possible because all units are built around an incredibly strong three-dimensional steel frame.

In fact, they are built indoors, in a factory environment so there is no need to allow for weather delays or any of the other issues that can slow up traditional on-site construction. Further efficiency gains can be made because the techniques and disciplines developed in the manufacturing industries can be brought to bear, including just in time delivery of supplies, safe working practises and high levels of security.

Modular accommodation units are used throughout the construction industry on everything from luxury cruise liners to high rise tower blocks. The only difference is that Totally Modular houses are built with weatherproof walls and in a visual style ready to fit-in with existing traditionally constructed houses.

On-site

While the modules are being built, the site can be prepared. With volumetric construction it is very different from digging traditional foundations. Precise piled foundations are laid, or existing ground pads or structures are re-used, which is particularly helpful in brownfield sites. Utilities are piped in and the rest of the site is almost completely untouched. Indeed, landscaping to improve the immediate environment can be included in the construction project and completed as building works progress.

Modular Construction employs highly trained on-site management teams to organise the day to day activities on the ground. These include maintaining construction schedules, groundworks and landscaping, overseeing health and safety, co-ordinating utilities connections, waste management, liaising with local residents and all the quality checks needed for BoPAS (Build offsite Property Assurance scheme) warranties.

On the delivery date the installation team takes over to manage the installation phase, including connection to services. Delivery of multiple units is always dovetailed to minimise disruption while maximising operational efficiency on site. It is not uncommon to install and commission six or more house in one day!

The houses and flats are brought to site 97% complete. That is to say, they are fitted out with fully equipped kitchens and bathrooms, plus possibly built in furniture, door bells, blinds, lighting etc, etc. This means there is no need for a stream of trades to travel to site to install one or two items, the usual post-construction delivery traffic is minimised to almost nothing.

The construction industry has always moved with the times, changing and adapting as new needs arise. Volumetric construction is one of the latest developments; it drives efficiency into every aspect of the build phases and guarantees high-quality long-life homes.

Photo Caption: Volumetric construction is a technique in which houses are built off-site and delivered as complete ready to go modules.

About Totally Modular

Totally Modular is a leading manufacturer of steel frame, modular homes for social and affordable housing. As a turnkey provider, Totally Modular designs, manufactures and installs homes that are 97% complete when they arrive on site; including pre-installed kitchens, bathrooms and finishes. Ground works, services and landscaping can also be incorporated as part of any housing solution. With the inherent scope and manufacturing capacity to provide multiple housing structures to fully accredited standards with maximum convenience, Totally Modular offers a comprehensive solution to tackle the housing challenges of the future.

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