

## **OSCO Homes Limited, its philosophy and its operations**

OSCO is well known as an established, successful, efficient off-site builder.

We focus on using innovation to enhance quality whilst at the same time driving down overall costs. The rationale is to deliver physical and personal social value through innovation and delivery rather than to make profits.

Our whole approach lends itself to bold design opportunities using cutting-edge materials. We are excited that the signature architect Stephen Tomkins (RIBA Stirling Prize Winner 2008, and RIBA London Architect of the Year 2008) has worked in partnership with OSCO Homes to design a group of eighteen houses due to be built in Liverpool.

We believe Local Authorities to be a natural partner for OSCO Homes in its development of low-cost, fit-for-purpose social housing for rent and affordable, mortgageable family homes for purchase. Our inclination, and our mission, is to work with others nationwide to deliver the high quality and reasonably priced housing the country so badly needs.

What we can offer will appeal to Local Authorities wishing to dispose of land assets in order to realise the maximum return for the public purse, as well as to deliver housing. Rather than simply to sell land to developers and hope that suitable housing will emerge in due course, the better option could be to licence the land to OSCO Homes so that housing tailored to local needs can be constructed immediately and quickly. Profits would be shared. Two-fold benefits could thus accrue - the growth of public funds, and the rapid and certain delivery of first-rate housing tailored to local needs. We do not sit on land. We want to see results now, not sometime or never.

As to the future, our design and construction approach continues to give huge scope for innovation. We constantly review our effective use of the most durable and resilient materials available. We are already able to build heat pumps into the foundations of buildings and can easily upgrade specifications to deliver what can truly be described as eco-housing. Building specialised features into the walls of houses for particular housing needs and incorporating smart features are also possible.

Our parent company, Procure Plus Holdings Limited (PPH), resolved in 2015 to design a vehicle specifically to tackle the urgent need for high quality affordable housing, and thus brought OSCO into being. PPH was driven by the compulsion to enhance its contribution to social value as well as the determination to redesign house building to create fairly-priced homes of exceptional quality.

PPH itself established in 2006, has been purchasing materials and labour for its numerous clients to enable them to refurbish or deliver new builds for the social housing sector. Huge savings are made for its customers, combined with efficient delivery and information services that are regarded by independent observers as "best in class". OSCO Homes is thus able to

benefit from the vast procurement power of PPH to obtain parts and internal fittings at an exceptionally low cost.

All the operating surpluses from PPH are used to train people who are furthest from the employment market, bringing them into skilled and sustained employment. It does this through its own charity, Re:Vision North. Significant social value is thereby created for social housing infrastructure, as well as for numerous individuals being developed into new careers. Some 400 people were brought into full-time, long-term employment in this way in 2019/20.

The PPH group, which includes OSCO Homes, won the Queen's Award for Enterprise in 2017, in the category of Promoting Opportunity, for its outstanding efforts in the area of training and employment.

PPH has provided the considerable funds and expertise needed to develop cutting edge building techniques and to undertake their continuous refinement. It has also provided all working capital needs to date, and has been rewarded by the completion of two excellent building projects from which much has been learned that is being taken forward into on-going operations. Projects in the pipeline include housing, forest chalets, and even a church.

OSCO's first assembly site, still in operation, was developed inside HMP Hindley, near Wigan. A number of prison volunteers there have been trained in the techniques of off-site construction. Upon release from prison the company ensures that trainees have both employment and a support package to assist rehabilitation. The aim is to achieve a nil rate of re-offending, adding even greater value to the social benefit advantages.

In order to meet growing demand, a second manufacturing site has now been opened in Runcorn. As more and more major business is generated, further new assembly sites will be needed, and will open up scope for unemployed people to gain skills and employment in those localities.

A stimulating recent development for OSCO has been a productive partnership with award-winning architect, Stephen Tompkins (2014 RIBA Stirling Prize, 2014 RIBA London Architect of the Year). Some clients want our homes to look "traditional", which we can achieve without difficulty for example by the use of brick slips. However, not all homes need to be completely conventional. Originality is certainly needed in order to offer something fresh to the affordable housing market in terms both of superlative design and the imaginative use of novel materials. The resulting project will be instigated in Liverpool soon, integrating a Haworth Tompkins design with highly innovative materials, and we look forward to working on it.

Our intention is to design unnecessary cost out of building design and construction, so that we can deliver quality dwellings that are both desirable and affordable. We have chosen to adopt off-site construction methods in order to deliver controlled and predictable quality. Using mild steel construction techniques for strength and durability, we employ a grid methodology to enable a wide range of designs and styles to be provided to

meet different customer needs. The fully completed panels (floor, ceilings, walls, rooves) that are manufactured in the factory are then delivered directly to site, followed by rapid assembly to create instantly weather-tight homes. Our record is the full assembly of a three-bedroomed house in thirteen hours.

All construction, both external and internal, is done under controlled conditions. This facilitates quality outcomes and very short snagging lists. With solid experience behind us, we are now expanding our horizons to deliver larger-scale developments. Factors that are so often problematic in the building trade, like skill shortages and lead times on materials, are not of critical concern to us. An added bonus, too, is the strong employment and earning prospects we can offer, within their own communities, to those who have been out of work long-term, are ex-offenders, or have never worked.

The panel construction approach allows housing complexes to be constructed on sites with very demanding access issues, like infill spaces, or brownfield sites, but with minimal disruption for nearby residents. Our rule of thumb is: if a bin lorry can get through that gap, then we can build there. We are proud to be the first contractor using off-site construction panel approaches to receive formal building approval from the NHBC, essential for mortgage requirements.

The result of the approach we take is happy customers who have had their expectations exceeded with timely delivery and outstanding quality. To quote the Together Housing Group Ltd.: “The property was handed over without any snags, which was a great demonstration of the benefit of building off-site... improving the quality throughout the project”.

Alongside our customer, Together Housing Group, we were a finalist in the Northern Housing Award for Off-site Project of the Year, 2019.

Full details of the company, its projects and techniques can be seen on its website: [www.oscohomes.com](http://www.oscohomes.com)

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