

Piling firms see green shoots as housing starts to recover

NEW FIGURES show that the slump in the housing market is easing as both public and private developers start investigating again.

The National House-Building Council (NHBC), which regulates new home building, has seen the first quarter-on-quarter rise in applications for new homes in almost two years.

NHBC chief executive Intiaz Farookhi said: "Alongside figures for March and April this year, provisional figures for May provide further evidence of a slight recovery in house-building production. The figures suggest that we may now have passed the lowest point in housing production for the current cycle."

Applications for new homes in

April rose 50% from their lowest ebb of December last year. The biggest rise in applications has come from the private sector.

The reports follow news from housebuilding firm Redrow that it has begun to commission homes again after almost a year of halting schemes because of the severe downturn in property sales.

Redrow group financial director David Arnold said: "We have been encouraged by sales activity since the start of the calendar year with sales ahead of the same period last year".

Rumours of "green shoots" have circulated since the beginning of the year, but piling firms are finally seeing projects coming to fruition.

Geotechnical contractor May Gurney have three housing projects on site, all for schemes that were meant to start 18 months ago. Its contracts manager Neal Willis said: "We have seen more business from housing projects in the past two months, than in the previous nine."

Bachy Soletanche's business development manager Paul Hodgson agreed: "In the past month or so there have been more orders. We have been getting start dates on a number of big housing developments that had been shelved. It has started in the north but it is spreading down south.

"There are definitely green shoots, but we must remember that another period of frost can destroy them."

Piling on track at Welsh CCGT

CONTRACTOR BAUER Technologies is halfway through installing 2,250, 600mm diameter continuous flight auger piles to support the new 2,000MW state-of-the-art, combined cycle gas turbine (CCGT) power station near Pembroke, west Wales, for RWE Npower.

The piles are being augured to refusal, with a machine capable of delivering a minimum torque of 220kNm. BAUER will use four of its fleet of BG28 drilling rigs. Work is scheduled for completion in September 2009.

BAUER Technologies' contract award follows on from completion



The Bauer team at the CCGT

of 1,500, 32m long rotary bored piles for the Severn Power CCGT power station in Newport, south Wales. The piles were embedded 5m into mudstone.

The former power station site was being developed for the new facility so was peppered with over 7,000 driven piles that had to be negotiated. "We looked at the blueprints from the 1940s and estimated it would take three days to pull each one out, so the designer decided to position piles around the existing ones," said Bauer director Micheal Jones.

Where piles could be spaced further apart, they could be 900mm diameter, but where they had to be placed closer to each other, 600mm diameter rotary bored piles were used.

BSI calls for comments on reinforced soil code of practice BS8006

THE BRITISH Standards Institution (BSI) has completed its revision of BS8006 Code of Practice for strengthened/reinforced soils and other fills.

The BSI is inviting comments from the geotechnical engineering community for the three months commencing 1 July 2009.

BSI has been working for the past five years to revise the code of practice BS8006:1995. The revisions

were needed to bring it into line with the Eurocode EN1997-1 Geotechnical Design and include updates to the design methods for reinforced soil works.

The original code of practice included a short section dealing with the design of soil nailed slopes.

Since the publication of BS8006:1995, the practice of reinforcing insitu soils with soil nails has developed significantly, to pro-

vide a more detailed framework for the design of soil-nailed slopes.

The design methods for soil-nailed slopes will be covered in Part 2 of the new code of practice. BS8006-2 Soil Nailed Slopes will be published later in 2009 or early in 2010.

To comment on the draft code of practice BS8006-1:2009 visit <http://draftsbsigroup.com>. The committee is only able to receive comments through this route.

Road to Casablanca

Morocco has received a £136.9M loan to finance two highway projects and a dam from the Kuwait-based Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. The Arab Fund awarded a first loan of £103.9M to finance a highway section linking the central city of Fes and the eastern town of Oujda, and another highway linking Rabat to Casablanca. A second loan of £33.1M will finance a dam in the Essaouira region on the Atlantic coast. The Fund has lent the country a total of £2.06bn in the past three decades.

Shard site checked

Enabling works on the Shard have now been completed. Demolition specialists Keltbury, which began the job in 2007, has checked the site and removed the remnants of the old Southwark Towers. Piling work is currently under way on the 310m tall tower.

Albion gets Scottish contract

Drilling and blasting specialist Albion Drilling Group has won a contract at Scottish Power's new wind farm at Arecleoch, Ayrshire. Working for main contractor Farrans Construction, Albion will be drilling and blasting borrow pits to remove rock that will enable the construction of access roads to the site where 60 wind turbines are planned. The £750,000 contract will last one year.

Windy up north

North of England regional development agencies have launched a new collaborative programme, to bring together industrial and technological capacity for offshore wind energy from across the north. Development organisations EnviroLink Northwest and NaREC are to deliver the Northern Wind Innovation Programme, funded through the Northern Way partnership. Visit www.nwip.org for more information.

Orders stabilise at Keller

Orders at engineering specialist Keller have stabilised following a 20% drop in autumn 2008. Keller also announced that Roy Franklin is set to take over as chairman of the firm when Michael West retires in July.

Crossrail appoint Mitchell

Crossrail has appointed Andrew Mitchell, current major programme director with Network Rail's Thameslink Programme, as programme director for Crossrail.