

Chinese homes to ease UK housing crisis

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A prototype of a China-made easy-to-assemble home built in Watford. Photo provided by Trillium Homes

A British property developer is hoping to combat the United Kingdom's housing shortage with homes shipped from China in ready-for-assembly kits.

Trillium Homes Construction erected the first British prototype of such a house at a site in Watford.

It was built using a light gauge steel frame and other materials that arrived from China in two shipping containers. The materials were manufactured by industrial company Shanghai Steel Fashion.

Sam Sabrah, founder of Trillium Homes, said he hopes the government will use the homes to build affordable housing.

The need for housing has grown faster than supply in the UK for several years. As a result, house prices have risen to such an extent that the average home now costs almost eight times the average wage.

"We are in desperate need of houses in the UK, especially social housing," Sabrah said. "I thought, rather than companies charging thousands of pounds per square meter and taking three to four months to build one house, we could do it a lot cheaper and a lot quicker."

Sabrah said the ready-for-assembly houses can be built in 40 days and cost around 1,000 pounds (\$1,390) per square meter. He estimates that total construction costs are 60 percent less than they would be for a brick house of the same size.

The steel framing and other building materials arrive loose, as opposed to in pre-assembled panels. This means houses can be built in different sizes and can also be assembled into six-story apartment blocks.

Shanghai Steel Fashion will eventually supply machinery to Trillium Homes so the company can manufacture the steel frames in the UK, while other materials will continue to be supplied from China.

The materials are being tested by construction science organization Building Research Establishment, which is also known as BRE. It is ensuring the materials meet UK regulations.

John O'Brien, BRE associate director for construction innovation, said the homes will serve as a "fantastic resource to tackling the housing crisis".

“Trillium is streamlining and simplifying the build process to something which is easy and takes minimal skill to put it together,” O’Brien told reporters at the BRE innovation park in Watford.

Sabrah said Trillium Homes is in discussions with Homes England, the UK government’s housing and regeneration agency.

“We are looking at developers in their preferred panel that we could be working with, as well as councils and government bodies,” Sabrah said. “We believe we can compete quite strongly in the social housing market.”

The UK government has looked to Chinese companies in the past to help with Britain’s housing shortage. In 2016, the government helped broker a deal that could see China National Building Material Company build six factories in the UK that will make prefabricated homes. The scheme aims to produce 25,000 homes a year by 2022.