



Far left: Model housing in the Florence Mall; Left: Forests of sticks at the Coming Home exhibition. Photos: Harley van Meerberg. Below: Wayne Heringway's housing scheme for Wimpsey on the Tyne.

Housing is the next big thing, again, judging by the success of the RIBA's three new shows, writes Kester Rattenbury

House of fun

It finally happened. Housing got hot again. The cumulative effect of Laurence Llewellyn Bowen, Charles Lanyon, and scores of young designers working on jobs, microflats and self-build is undeniable. The opening of the RIBA Architecture Centre's three new shows, Coming Home, Model Housing and 150 Years of the Future, was packed – and so was the list of the series of accompanying lectures. Every school in London must be doing housing projects. It's what we've all been pushing for for years.

And the shows are a great introduction. Once you've got past the dips in reaction to forests of sticks and fields of little houses in the RIBA pavilion (the Future show) and the heretofore ubiquitous red-brick, graphic, Coming Home is an excellent show. It's a kind of blueprint of the current situation, in which models of occasional high-rise and fully emerged from the carpet of little cardboard houses like a tourist map. Amid the forest of

houses, you are presented with bits of accessible research: the UK's density (340 people per sq km) and housing preferences (bungalows) – and introductions to some of the work on show. These include Sergio Rota's self-build, Percy Connor's microflats, Glenn Howells' Urban Splash jobs, Bushara Herley's housing at Clifton, RICHIE's Peabody scheme at Baiton's Dairy, London, and many others: an excellent and encouraging selection of interesting projects under way. Site info is shown on the digital screens – and Charles Lanyon was showing slides on the stand.

Model Housing is simpler and more elegant: models of eight examples of "new models" of housing. Most of these were well shown. Far's lovely, controversial Garner Street house. Mar's classy, walnut-clad mobile home scheme for Dames Interiors near Tin Pyrie's Sergio Rota's rental on the canal and Simon Condy's black rubber house at Dun

green made a really strong, clean show. Against them were the others looked misplaced. The large-scale housing seemed to belong to the other show (though 511's elegant Grouse Park scheme was worth a glance). And what Jonathan Ellis-Miller's new pretty aged houses were doing in this forward-looking show I simply can't imagine.

The accompanying debate was packed, almost entirely with twenty-somethings. And the speakers – Sergio Rota of Sergio Rota, Stuart Percy of Percy Connor, Richard Lanyon of MacGraw Hill and Wayne Heringway, former owner of fashion label Red at Dead-End Wimpsey – have designers all featured in the show and introduced by Simon Allford – were so cumulatively enthusiastic that it turned out to be the major issue for debate.

There is certainly a lot of good work. Rota showed a dense urban housing scheme in ex-

London with a flexible sequence of rooms it isn't new, but to achieve it under the building regs is pretty fierce) and three lovely suburban semi, plus the self-build and other flats. Percy showed the microflats, including feedback from the resident who lived in one in Salford's window just enough space for shoes, and a second-story scheme of microflats above a supermarket, featuring community shops and resident garden: a possible model of high-density, key-worker development. Lanyon showed the built Utrecht scheme and the new plans for Cambridge, dealing with similar issues of grade and flexibility of indoor and outdoor spaces – and both much more interesting.

But it was Wayne Heringway who – for good or ill – stole the show. He was commissioned by Wimpsey after slugging off the Wimpseyfication of Britain – and, as one audience member subtly suggested, all the fanciness

and eccentricity of his fashion design immediately vanished. His scheme, on the Tyne near the bridge and the Baltic, is based on his and his wife's childhood experiences: a sequence of community and private outdoor spaces, private gardens and locked neighbourhood gardens with balconies or look-alike areas. Residents have to park elsewhere (or build parking for a neighbourhood, surely, is possible). The houses, fully pedestrian looking, are angled to catch the sun.

Though it doesn't look like a mainstream scheme, Wimpsey and Alice Coleman with a touch of Rinkinen – and by all means very pretty reactions with its clean, polished ergonomics – the Heringway's scheme is an experiment, which of course we hope turns out well. But Heringway's overwhelming confidence toward slugs tells in able members of the audience since housing is an unpredictable and complex, for example, he



said things such as "the gardens were bound to work". Heringway got away with murder: the audience usually loved him and the city on his terms and his good communities remained, explicit. But the others – though probably more aware of the dangerous pining of good intentions – were confident too.

Allford moderated well, pointing out that these excellent examples weren't all that common but were, nonetheless, more common than in the past few years. He also advised against feeling that we've learnt the lessons of the status and have got it right

now. He picked up all the key points – like the potential danger of good communities which some of these schemes could become. You can have both types, Heringway asserted – but then he's got fairly low density and a lot of back-up funding. Allford concluded by saying that we need to follow up not just other people's projects to see what's worked, but our own, even five years down the line.

The enthusiasm and youth was both incredibly encouraging and slightly scary, with Allford suddenly categorised. Even debut young architect to occur

able rage. Now we've got housing to be popular, we'll have to deal with the consequences. A very timely series of shows and debates.

Coming Home: 2.5 million reasons to think about housing, until January 11.
Model Housing: From mobile home to country house, until November 20.
150 Years of the Future: London's social housing stock today, until November 30.

At the RIBA Architecture Gallery, 66 Portland Place, London. Tel: 0966 302 0400.

