



**Press Release  
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## **Timber engineering commentary for TTJ from Brian Robertson**

***Brian Robertson, General Manager of James Jones & Sons Ltd, Timber Systems Division, is pretty sanguine about the effects of the current downturn in the UK housing market.***

He commented "it's a bad time for everyone, without doubt, but the down turn is at least focussing minds on innovative ways forward- which is good for timber engineering. I believe the speed MMC delivers will be essential for house builders to meet demand once the recovery begins, especially as most will have had to shed experienced labour forces."

As an example of innovative approaches, Mr Robertson highlights the move in the last 2-3 years to specify I joists in commercial and industrial buildings, as opposed to housing; and to the increasing use of I joists in roofs and walls, as well as floors. Clearly this opens new opportunities, particularly for those companies – like JJTSD- with in-house design offices, capable of producing complex engineered roofing designs.

"Historically, architects and engineers would have looked to steel or timber roof trusses to create the mono-pitched and flat roofs some of these industrial and commercial designs demand" says Mr Robertson. "Now, more specifiers are looking to timber I joists, particularly the increasing numbers who wish to deliver sustainable and thermally efficient construction,"

In housing, the I-joists' traditional market, the drive for zero carbon, "which", says Brian Robertson, "every major builder is doing something about", is also good for engineered timber products. He predicts timber engineering "will play a major part in house builders' zero carbon strategies." Sustainability is also a key driver in social housing, where in order to meet the Code for Sustainable Homes Level Four and upwards, designers are specifying I- joists as wall components, exploiting their excellent insulating properties and ability to minimise cold bridging.

While welcoming specifiers' increased awareness of sustainability, (historically a strong market for James Jones as specialists in home grown timber, whose JJI joists carry FSC, PEFC and BRE Environmental Profiling), Brian Robertson comments on "the continuing need to educate specifiers". He believes there's a real need for factual (as opposed to promotional) information about engineered timber, which has resulted in James Jones producing their first CPD-approved seminar, written specifically for architects. According to Mr Robertson, the programme has met with an "overwhelming response from the architects" and a second seminar is now being developed with the Engineers as the target audience.



Looking at products beyond the familiar I-joint, Mr Robertson returns to his point about MMC being an essential tool for house builders when the recovery starts. He says "The demand for housing is there; the Government hasn't reduced targets; when the market recovers, the house building industry will be crying out for speedy, safe solutions."

As an example, he cites three high performance, innovative James Jones products which he believes will respond to this anticipated demand: the company's JJ-IntelliRoof product which delivers speed, high thermal performance, safety and floor space; their BBS® cross laminated structural panels which deliver remarkable thermal and acoustic performance, as well as a 90 minute fire rating; and their innovative Screedflo flooring, a combination of a timber floor with a gypsum anhydrite screed, which delivers both the "solid feel" so dear to house purchasers in England, as well as the excellent acoustic insulation required in "separating floors" in both timber-framed and masonry apartment buildings .

Clearly exciting products, tailored to an identified market: but will cash-strapped house builders really be specifying innovative products, which inevitably carry some cost premium?

Mr Robertson says "The challenge that faces our industry is to convince house builders that the multi-faceted benefits of engineered timber far outweigh any relatively small front-end additional costs. For example, time is money as everyone knows, and MMC can certainly deliver savings on time. Safety is another major cost factor, both financial and human. In an industry where falls from height are a major problem, systems like JJ-IntelliRoof deliver a real H&S bonus by providing a safe working platform straight away. These are the kinds of factors we believe that house builders are recognising increasingly and that we as an industry need to be pushing. We need to get people thinking outside the box. As Sir Egan said in his famous report, "We are not inviting UK construction to look at what it does already and do it better: we are asking the industry and Government to join with major clients to do it entirely differently."

**Ends**

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