

First person: Cuff takes up residence at Pocket

After two years at Essential Living, planner and land buyer Nick Cuff last week started work for intermediate housing developer Pocket. He explains his move to **Nick Johnstone**

A social narrative ...

I was drawn to the idea of a private business with a social narrative. Too often the private sector gets a bashing, but often it provides the answer to many of the country's challenges.

Pocket is the only developer in London focused entirely on intermediate housing. London is experiencing huge change and sizeable house price increases.

Many of my mates in their late twenties and early thirties are in good jobs, yet they really are finding it difficult to put together deposits. Pocket is not the answer but it is part of the solution – and that attracted me.

Small infill sites ...

Pocket has big ambitions and aims to grow to be a 300 to 400 homes a year developer in the medium term. My role is to look for land across the capital.

Pocket focuses on small infill sites, where compact homes can be built, and can also be an affordable housing solution on larger sites.

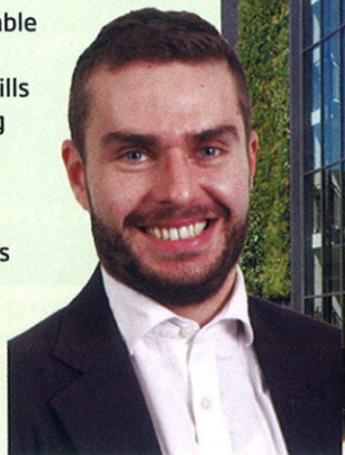
The next generation ...

There's plenty of land but delivery is slow. A big challenge will be the construction industry's capacity to scale up as the London development market expands over the next five years. The industry has been slimmed down by the recession. A lot of the skills have left the country or disappeared.

There needs to be a sustainable base. We mustn't make the mistake of simply importing skills from abroad instead of training the next generation.

Sites specifics ...

Currently Pocket has eight sites either in the planning process or close to acquisition. This includes Lambeth and sites in Hammersmith, and Fulham, Ealing and Hackney.



Housing solutions ...

What London mustn't do is close its doors to international investment. London is a global city and policy makers need to accept that many from across the world want to live here and that this investment provides a vital capital stream for development.

However, there needs to be a balance and London mustn't price its first-time buyers out.

I think [London mayor] Boris's idea of housing zones has merit and, more generally, London needs to have a grown-up debate about tall buildings. Too often the discourse is reactionary.

Good-quality design and public realm can make all the difference, yet this is often overlooked. If we are to meet London's growth, then a denser and taller built environment is inevitable. ■