Alsop to design Eden rival in Norfolk

 Architect Will Alsop is to enhance his green credentials by designing a £240m biomass power station in East Anglia, writes Ulrich Miller.

 The architect is working on plans for the renewable power plant in the centre of Norwich. It is thought that it will be the largest of its kind in the UK.

 The development is being compared with the Eden project as a showcase for sustainability, and will include a visitor centre, as it is expected to attract thousands of people each year.

 Alsop is working with Davis Langdon and the University of East Anglia, which is the client for the scheme. Trevor Devlin, the vice-chancellor of the university, said Alsop was chosen because his designs were in the crowns. He said: "We want it to be iconic and to attract people. It's very important for it to be visible. We want it to be a bit of a fan."

 He added: "It has been likened to the Eden project but we want to go beyond that. We want it to be a greenhouse for the future - a demonstration of what future landscapes will look like."

 The power station might also be linked to homes and commercial properties to monitor their energy performance. Sensors would be installed in the homes and offices that would feed information back to a data centre.

 Devlin said the project team was finalising funding for a feasibility study to be carried out in the next five months. After that Alsp will complete the designs.

 "The idea for the power station originated from Cited, an environmental group in the east of England that has set itself a 60% carbon reduction target by 2050."

 For more sustainability news, go to www.building.co.uk/sustainability/news/.

 Siberian homes

 Architects in Residence has completed this £500,000 residential project in Camberwell Place, south London. It is made up of two three-storey town houses and a single-storey artists' studio. It was constructed using a solid timber, prefabricated system from Slovenia. All the timber is sourced direct from Siberia.

 Send your project images to buildingimages@grm.co.uk.

 RICS frustrated by failure of visa campaign

 The RICS has launched a fresh campaign against visa restrictions imposed on QBS coming to the UK from outside the EU. It was reported earlier in November that the RICS had called on consultants to petition the government to relax work permit rules for foreign QBS. But it has now emerged that the industry has been trying to get the rules changed as far back as June.

 With backing from major firms including Glades, Gardner & Theobald, EC Harris, Cyril Sweett, Franklin + Andrews, Turner & Townsend and AVN, the RICS has again approached the government to change the rules.

 Richard Stear, senior partner at Glades, sent a letter on 1 June 2004 to the Department of Work and Pensions about strict immigration laws and the shortage of qualified QBS in the UK.

 He said: "We agreed to write the letters because it's increasingly difficult to recruit qualified, skilled people in the UK with a proven track record. It's important that we recognise where the shortage is in available labour fees. The letters went off eight months ago and absolutely nothing has happened."

 Public to get chance to buy shares in new-build prisons

 Under a new Home Office scheme, prisons could be funded by Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), the state is to be allowed to sell shares in prisons to the public. The scheme would allow for the construction of new prisons, and the use of REITs to fund their construction.

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 The proposals have been welcomed by the industry, which has been calling for changes to the funding system for new prisons. The government is said to be considering a number of options, including the use of REITs to fund the construction of new prisons.

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