

# The power of retail

Even though the retail construction sector in the UK is approaching £5 billion per annum, it has an influence that is disproportionate to its size. This is because retailers are very responsive to new ideas, changes in consumer thinking and the drive to increase operational efficiencies, writes Paul Overall, LABC Chief Executive

By Paul Overall CBE  
LABC Chief Executive



**R**etailers quickly test and adopt new ideas. They can react quickly because they have many sites in development at any one time. They also have a diverse range of sites varying from local to city centre, traditional high street to out-of-town. And they have a dynamic relationship with investment developers who need to 'sell' new sites to the big retail names.

Given the extreme entrepreneurial nature of the

retail sector, it surprises some to discover its strong working relationship with local authority building control. There are several reasons for this.

LABC's Partner Authority Scheme has created a framework enabling companies to work with just one local authority for all their design and plans approvals. It doesn't matter where in the country a development is occurring, the client can use the local authority building control team they prefer to approve plans and that

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authority arranges local inspections anywhere in the country.

This has enabled local authorities to develop an in-depth understanding of retail projects and to use this experience to innovate and produce entirely new solutions to the requirements of the Building Regulations. So retailers get in-depth help and advice backed up by a responsive national inspections network.

Local authorities take a design team approach to all commercial work which means that senior building control surveyors work with the client, architects and contractors to solve the Building Regulations requirements early in the design phase. This means that projects run with minimum delays or changes because of 'unexpected' Building Regulations issues.

Of course, there is a tension between Government policy, new regulations, local planners' preferences and the practical construction of workable buildings. But rather than hide from this debate, local authority building control teams are actively engaged on behalf of their clients because of the need to define practicable, actionable advice. Retailers and local authority building control are a good team.