

Have your say on the future of building control

As you read the headline above, your first reaction may well be 'what has this to do with me' and you will pass on to read more interesting pages elsewhere in this issue. But I would encourage you to read on because there may be changes happening which could affect the way building work is regulated. And there is an opportunity for your views to be heard

By Paul Overall CBE
LABC Chief Executive



In March last year the Government issued a statement saying that it proposed to review the way building control is undertaken in England and Wales, and promised a consultation on specific proposals for change.

The reason for this review was that Ministers claimed to be unhappy about the way building control surveyors were implementing the more stringent energy efficiency requirements which came into force in April 2006, although in truth most things which went wrong with that can be laid at the door of the Government for failing to make the necessary documents and tools available before the implementation date.

LABC, as a member of the Building Control Alliance, contributed to a detailed response to the consultation on behalf of building control professionals, and then worked with civil servants as

they drew up proposals. These proposals finally appeared in March this year.

The document is divided into five chapters. The first discusses what building control is for and argues for a seamless link with planning – something which local authorities, as compared to the private sector, are well placed to provide.

The second suggests Government can itself do more in terms of better forward planning of changes to the regulations and in providing more targeted guidance than is currently the case with the Approved Documents.

Next it is suggested that building control bodies should adopt a more 'risk-based' approach to site inspection, something which many authorities are already doing, and argues that authorities require a greater range of enforcement powers than we currently have.

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The fourth chapter looks at alternative routes to compliance, and here local authorities have greater concern for what is proposed: while Robust Details have been a success in respect of sound insulation, we do not see much scope for the use of pattern books; and while self-certification has its place in limited areas such as replacement double glazing (the FENSA scheme), local authorities strongly believe that a robust system of third party inspection is vital if our buildings are to remain safe, healthy, accessible and sustainable. A number of European countries which have gone down the self-certification route are now seeing the error of their ways.

The final chapter looks at improved performance and capacity by building control bodies, something we are striving hard to achieve.

However, this requires that local authorities respect the ring-fencing of a portion of building control income to be reinvested in technology, training and people – just like private sector companies do. This investment would enable local authorities to continue improving service levels to customers.

So why might this be of interest to you? I hope you would agree that you benefit from a robust system of building control in which local authorities play a major role, and want to see it even better in the future.

If you do, please complete the questionnaire, which can be found in the consultation document on the CLG website at www.communities.gov.uk

