

The drive for sustainable construction

By Paul Overall CBE
LABC Chief Executive



It is hard these days to open a professional construction journal without reading something on sustainable construction. So why should *SiteLines* be any different?

This being the official publication of the leading building control body in England and Wales, it is only right that I should start with the Building Regulations. The main element of sustainability currently to be found there, in Part L, is energy efficiency. The Government imposed much more stringent requirements for this in 2006, although by not publishing the guidance in advance and thereby not allowing building control and the industry more generally to be trained in what was required, the implementation did not go as smoothly as everyone wished.

Since that time building control professionals continue to be accused of not taking Part L seriously, and the very few prosecutions for breaches of Part L are cited as evidence for this.

To refute this, LABC has recently undertaken a survey in Cornwall where over a four week period all of the interventions made by building control staff, either when checking plans or inspecting works on site, were recorded. This showed that of all the Parts of the Regulations, Part L

showed the second highest number of interventions, only just behind issues of structural stability. I hope that this will help to silence our critics who claim we don't attach sufficient importance to Part L. Further details of the survey can be found on the LABC website www.labc.uk.com.

But soon Part L will not be the only Part of the Regulations involving sustainability. By the time you read this I expect the Government to have published new guidance on water efficiency, with minimum standards being enforced on construction taking place after October this year. There are some nine elements of sustainability in the Code for Sustainable Homes, and it is possible that some more of these will be added to the Regulations in due course.

If we are to make a real impact on climate change then we have to tackle the existing housing stock. Earlier this year the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) published a consultation document on a new Heat and Energy Strategy. That suggests that by 2050 carbon emissions from households should be reduced to a minimum, and

"IF WE ARE TO MAKE A REAL IMPACT ON CLIMATE CHANGE THEN WE HAVE TO TACKLE THE EXISTING HOUSING STOCK"

that by 2015 all loft and cavity wall insulation that is practicable should be completed. If implemented, that in itself could bring significant work to the construction industry.

And quite understandably this work is not confined to the UK. Preparations are in hand for a major climate change international summit later this year. But nearer to home the European Commission has launched a "Lead Market Initiative" on sustainable construction. Part of this work relates to monitoring what the Governments of Member States are doing to boost the construction industry in these difficult economic times, but another – which I have been asked to chair – relates to screening national Building Regulations in the community for sustainability provisions, and trying to ensure that unnecessary barriers are not being erected in the name of sustainability. We shall see what fruit this initiative brings in due course.

So it is just possible I shall be writing about sustainable construction again in the future!

Reducing carbon emissions from existing housing stock will provide significant work for the construction industry



'Father' of modern building control dies

George Barnett MBE, widely regarded as the 'father' of modern building control, has died. George spent his working life in building control, starting as a surveyor at Lewisham Council. He helped form the Guild of Municipal Building Inspectors, affiliated to the Institution of Municipal Engineers, which later became the Institution of Building Control Officers. George worked to support this body, particularly with training, and became its President in 1981. He also contributed to many other bodies and committees on all matters linked to building standards, testing and regulations.

A full obituary will appear in the next issue of *SiteLines*.