

## **A Briefing Note for Nigel Griffiths MP, Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry for Small & Medium Enterprises**

### **Sustainability: Its Adoption by the Construction Industry**

#### **New CIC (Construction Industry Council) Guide - Constructing for Sustainability - a guide for clients and their professional advisors (DTI sponsored)**

i) The CIC recently produced a concise 'client guide' *Constructing for Sustainability* on the vital issue of sustainable construction, publicly launched on June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2003. The guide is funded and supported by the previous DTI scheme "Partners in Innovation" within the Construction Sector Unit. The guide demonstrates how viable projects can be achieved while constructing within a framework that can embrace challenging sustainability criteria.

ii) This briefing note:

- aims to identify the part the recent CIC Guide can play in promoting sustainable construction by summarizing, in the sections below, some of the key points included within the guide
- sets out CIC's broader activities in sustainable construction and its related views on taking this agenda forward.

iii) CIC advocates that government should give due consideration to:

- supporting the guide's promotion
- developing a programme of production of authoritative guidance
- integrating requirements for sustainability criteria (within Planning legislation) into other related legislations
- making a mandatory component of the LPA / stakeholder meetings as outlined in the client's guide

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** Government through example, or by regulation, can be the most significant driver towards sustainability and the preservation of our planet. However, individually and collectively we all have a role to play. While it may take a considerable time to change the public's perception of sustainability those of us participating in the construction process – and the operation of buildings – make highly significant impacts and need to adopt sustainability practices immediately.

**1.2** Government can play an ever greater role in encouraging sustainable construction by adopting more challenging sustainability criteria for all their own buildings (not stopping at the 'ceiling of ambition' that 'BREEAM excellent' can be.) This, quite apart from any regulatory requirements, would raise the credibility of sustainability as a goal and assist in convincing the more suspicious clients that there is a strong business case.

**1.3** For sustainable construction a team effort is required, involving investors, planners, designers, surveyors, constructors, occupiers and operators. Entrenched mindsets can dismiss

the potential advantages of sustainability and can also stifle opportunities to introduce innovative yet robust solutions at birth, even with the very keenest of clients.

**1.4** Financially, firms can gain a competitive advantage from a sustainable development agenda. Concepts such as whole life costing allow the small capital costs of innovative and sustainable buildings to be offset against their lower operating costs, and increased amenity, that can underpin the business case for sustainable construction.

**1.5** The heads of large firms have a responsibility to their shareholders to maintain profit margins. They have a wider responsibility to all stakeholders too, through CSR. But also, they have a moral responsibility for ensuring that we can all live in a sustainable and durable environment. Translating this moral responsibility into a business opportunity is the *raison d'être* for *Constructing for Sustainability*, which contains a message that needs to be drummed home if construction is ever to be truly sustainable

**1.6** Representative professional institutions (like ICE, RIBA, RTPI) have already started integrating the sustainability element as a criteria for professional membership and the accreditation of degrees and life long learning. A recent letter published in The Independent, signed by a diverse range of senior construction professionals, is attached as Annex 1. This calls for effective fiscal incentives. It expresses concern at the effects of climate change and the need to adopt a sustainable approach in all aspects of construction.

## **2 PLANNING ISSUES**

**2.1** The planning process and its consequences are crucial to the success of a project. The guide provides information to improve the interactions and transitions from planning to design processes.

**2.2** Planning approval for projects now contains conditions related to sustainability. Guidance for planners is contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 1 (PPG1) - *General Policy and Principles* - issued by ODPM, which outlines three governmental policy drivers including sustainability and the detailed credentials which need to be considered.

**2.3** Many planning applications are now failing as they do not devote sufficient attention to these credentials. Rejection and consequential public inquiries are likely to be costly. The very minimum which should be arranged is a meeting with the Local Planning Authority attended by all the stakeholders at which all the obstacles and 'flash points' are discussed, with decisions recorded. This approach should result in convergence to an ideal planning submission demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and should virtually write the planning officer's report.

**2.4** Planning departments are encouraged to attain skills to understand what sustainable designs are like and so assist them back up and infiltrate sustainability criteria into future proposals for building and civil projects.

## **3. ISSUES FOR DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION**

**3.1** There is an urgency for the industry to include sustainability practices. These can offer benefits to all concerned if the *opportunities* (many would say *necessities*) are grasped constructively and rapidly. As such, the guide describes design criteria in terms of fitness: for purpose, for

people and for planet. It also identifies key elements which should be considered to achieve them, including location, long life, low energy and how 'likeable/loveable' the product is.

**3.2** Implementing sustainable principles, however, must be based on knowledge rather than opinion. There is a barrage of sustainable development terminology and different messages. The *Constructing for Sustainability* guide aims to provide targeted guidance that overcomes the confusion. The guide provides a consensus on the factors of sustainable construction that the array of professionals involved in construction can support. The guide aims to set out the case to persuade clients *and their advisors* that sustainability is part of the construction process, is here to stay, and hence automatically good for business.

#### **4. CONSIDERING THE ROLE OF OTHER PROFESSIONALS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

**4.1** Although Clients are the decision makers and also people most under pressure for time and profit, other stakeholders and other professionals need to be engaged with sustainability principles. In this context the guide aims to provide an initial description of the issues.

**4.2** The case studies in the guide demonstrate that there are many different stakeholders already committed to making sustainable construction a reality. This demonstrates how to evaluate and overcome risks and how developments can be made more attractive to occupants and investors. It is therefore crucial that the professional advisors develop clients' and their advisers' sustainability agenda with them.

#### **5 CIC AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**5.1** CIC is actively involved in recent industry wide initiatives and integrating through wide representation the language of sustainability. Among these are:

- The London Sustainable Construction Initiative (with collaboration from the Corporation of London)
- The Egan Skills Review. Like CIC's aim of integrating sustainability into various training courses in the 'Sustainable Development for Building Professionals' guide, it aims to make it carry with it the most possible of the sustainable.

**5.2** CIC believes much of the real heart of the Industry is ready and waiting - and keen even - to do much more on sustainability (albeit appearing in various quarters occasionally to be dragging its feet, allocating blame elsewhere, feeling threatened and begrudging Government).

**5.3** CIC recognises that some parts of the Industry will fight against this, but they are the parts that are stuck in the past, and the parts that are least sustainable now. There are several groups – of which the CIC Sustainable Development Committee is an example - who will give their full support to Government for a radical and ambitious new agenda for real change – a change of the sort that will deliver the huge CO<sub>2</sub> savings needed for example.

**5.4** In the context of the planning process, CIC recognises its pivotal role. CIC believes it is essential that conditions relating to sustainability are integrated with the many legislative Acts which apply to construction, and currently this is not the case.