

**Low carbon technology showcase building
professionals' panel discussion, 29/02/08**

Chaired by Helen Northmore, Head of Energy Saving trust Wales

Panel

Julia Williams, Sustainable Buildings Project, Welsh Assembly Government
Peter Draper, Rounded Developments Sustainable Building Centre
Ian Draisey, Dulas
John Blower, Filsol Solar

Question

Dilys Howells, Energy Saving Trust advice centre:

If you're aiming to reach zero carbon buildings using building regulations what role is there for planning policy?

Answers

Julia Williams, Sustainable Buildings Project, Welsh Assembly Government:

Planning guidance is being reviewed with the 2011 target in mind. It will reflect the Code for Sustainable Homes. Planning policy sets the scene for the building regulations, which we need to be devolved to the Welsh Assembly.

Ian Draisey, Dulas:

Part L of the building regs is a tome- complex and detailed because it has to be. To update Part L is an enormous task. In England planning authorities have set the scene themselves, as in the case of the Merton Rule. If we can encourage the same initiatives by planning authorities in Wales we can advance the low carbon agenda quickly. The Merton Rule has been a powerful agent of change.

Question

John Smith, Arup:

What about extended properties?

Answers

Julia Williams, Sustainable Buildings Project, Welsh Assembly Government:

The Code for Sustainable Homes only applies to new build. In terms of a similar standard for renovating, WAG wants to explore this but it's a longer process. There is no equivalent standard for renovation. This is part of the Sustainable Buildings Project's remit.

John Blower, Filsol Solar:

As a consultant, this is a huge growth area. There is a thirst for knowledge on microgeneration technology performance so that they can reach these standards, but it is all about new build. There is no market for renovation; there has to be a market before commercial activity and growth.

Peter Draper, Rounded Developments Sustainable Building Centre:

We are working with the BRE and Valleys 2 Coast to create a refurbishment standard for Wales. We are looking at energy efficiency, etc. including any impact on the supply chain and impacts on properties. We expect some results in 12 – 18 months.

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Ian Draisey, Dulas:

Barriers to the refurbishment market include cost (particularly of microgeneration technologies) weighed against the cheaper cost of fossil fuel options. As well as development of regulations, legislation and standards there must be market stimulation. Historically funding has come from energy suppliers but now we should be more innovative. Wales must get its fair share of European funding to incentivise landlords and RSLs.

Question

Gavin Killip, Oxford University:

What does the panel think of possible regulation of property transactions to push this agenda?

Answers

Julia Williams, Sustainable Buildings Project, Welsh Assembly Government:

The minister, Jane Davidson, wants to explore it. Wales would have to seek the power to do that from the UK Parliament. How would it work? Onus on the seller or landlord might work? I'm in favour of regulation- the driver to increase demand is supply, but it's very difficult from a voter's point of view.

John Blower, Filsol Solar:

From a personal point of view, I think it's very difficult. I live in an old terraced house with solid walls and microgeneration, but I'm uncomfortable. If I bought the house with an energy rating of G but must upgrade it to F before I can sell it, this distorts the situation from being commercial, it's a double-edged sword.

Ian Draisey, Dulas:

I share concerns over practicality and political realism. Factors influencing behaviour are the price of energy and an incentive. We could add a carbon tax to fuel prices and incentivise better. The fuel poor must be protected and assisted.

Peter Draper, Rounded Developments Sustainable Building Centre:

I agree. Practically and economically it's tricky, with measures that get more expensive as you move up the energy ratings. Finding a balance is difficult, as it may stop properties being sold.

Helen Northmore, Head of Energy Saving trust Wales:

Energy Saving Trust supported Energy Performance Certificates because many leaps forward in appliances are through consumer choice. Private landlords are a big problem area where regulation is required.

Question

Patrick O'Flynn, Welsh School of Architecture:

How do we plan to manage the effectiveness of level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, and what about non-domestic properties? Is microgeneration of electricity the answer, with all the resources that go into it, plus maintenance? Isn't this putting all our eggs in one basket?

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Julia Williams, Sustainable Buildings Project, Welsh Assembly Government:

It is only for homes. WAG is working on a definition of zero carbon for non-domestic buildings. Code level 6 is a problem. EST is working on a code level 6 development in Surrey to monitor the effectiveness.

Ian Draisey, Dulas:

Attitudinal surveys by housing associations looked at the changing behaviour and attitude of residents as they build to new standards. There are huge costs involved so we need to win hearts and minds. At the last conference I went to no one mentioned attitude and behaviour; until this happens you can build what you like.

Question

Patrick O'Flynn, Welsh School of Architecture:

How can planning law help?

Answers

Julia Williams, Sustainable Buildings Project, Welsh Assembly Government:

The Wales Spatial Plan is the umbrella for the system in Wales. White goods are also a key element- not focusing on behaviour, but making the market more efficient.

John Blower, Filsol Solar:

In the Merton Rule, which looks at the whole energy use of a building, PV dominates. Did we perhaps miss a trick with Planning Policy Statement 22? We're working far too much in England- we want to be working more in Wales.

Peter Draper, Rounded Developments Sustainable Building Centre:

The Code for Sustainable Homes is less holistic than the Ecodesign standard.

Julia Williams, Sustainable Buildings Project, Welsh Assembly Government:

Planning policy needs to reflect those gaps.

Question

John Blower, Filsol Solar, to the audience:

How many of you are aware of the number of units of electricity you used in the last ¼?

(Silence)

Question

Robert Jones (?):

There is a suite of policies and rules plus Part L- who's pulling it all together, policing and promoting it?

Julia Williams, Sustainable Buildings Project, Welsh Assembly Government:

For the 2011 aspiration, for all non-WAG-influenced buildings, we need the building regs. It can't happen overnight. It is an aspiration, it cannot be a commitment. We need clarification on devolution this year to get the building regs changed in time. WAG-influenced and WDA projects have always strived to reach standards above building regs.

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Peter Draper, Rounded Developments Sustainable Building Centre:

Policing is a major area of concern. Developers want to build low carbon buildings but local authorities don't have the expertise to inspect for compliance to those standards. There's a related problem with planning applications- if local planning authorities are in the position of trying to assess proposals and whether or not they're realistic. There is low expertise in the planning system to provide training and advice to developers.

John Blower, Filsol Solar, to the audience:

We often have to negotiate between planners and developers. Merton planners are particularly well-informed. They will concede if developers do all that is feasible or reasonably possible.

There is concern about over-strong regulation and costs that are too high.

Helen Northmore, Head of Energy Saving trust Wales:

EST has done planning events across Wales. There is uncertainty, but we are trying, as is the Design Commission for Wales and WAG.

Peter Draper, Rounded Developments Sustainable Building Centre:

It gets even more complicated when we're talking about new materials, especially natural materials, because people don't understand them.

Helen Northmore, Head of Energy Saving trust Wales:

Also, there is a high staff turn-over in local authorities so training staff is an ongoing job.

Question

David Priddis, Kier Weston:

For non-domestic buildings Part L2 of building regs scores an own goal against energy saving as the SBEM calculation/framework cannot cope with naturally ventilated buildings, so developers have to use air conditioning to get compliance with the SBEM system! Please can legislators do proper trials to check practicality and achievability before imposing the regulations on industry?

Julia Williams, Sustainable Buildings Project, Welsh Assembly Government:

We don't underestimate the challenge of getting the building regs and we know that they are currently not workable in some ways. There will be a full consultation with industry.

Peter Draper, Rounded Developments Sustainable Building Centre:

Many standards applied elsewhere in Europe are working fine- see Germany and Denmark. The Passivhaus standard works. We can learn from Europe.