

**Minutes
Environment Scrutiny Panel**

**12 December 2007
5.30 p.m.
Abbey Leisure Centre, Pity Me**

Present: Councillors Wolstenhome (in the Chair), Crooks, Moderate, Turnbull and Wilkinson

Also in Attendance: Councillor Marsden.

Mr Stuart Bell – Building Control Manager, City of Durham

Apologies

There were apologies for absence received from Councillors Colledge, Kelly, Mavin, Mitchell and Simpson.

Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 November 2007

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a correct record.

Note: *Councillor Moderate entered the meeting at 5.31 p.m.*

Report for Information – Visit to PARC – Aerobic Digester

Members discussed the report Panel's visit to the PARC facility and thanked the Clerk for his help in the preparation of the report.

Scrutiny Topic – Climate Change

Witnesses in Attendance – Mr Stuart Bell, Building Control Manager

The City of Durham's Building Control Manager was in attendance to inform Members of the role of Building Control in relation to issues associated with Climate Change.

Members were informed that in the past the primary role of Building Control was to inspect developments to ensure compliance with building regulations and Health and Safety regulations. In more recent times additional emphasis has been placed on the issues of sustainability, access ability and energy efficiency.

It was noted that in the past, Building Control departments have been instructed to enforce on health and safety issues such as lack of fire doors in buildings. Central Government is pushing for Building Control departments to enforce on issues relating to energy efficiency just as vigorously.

The legislation that governs building control regulations relating to energy efficiency is "Part L", the latest revision of Part L came into effect in April 2006. A new property cannot be signed off as complete without an energy efficiency certificate.

New powers are available to Building Control departments such that issues of non-compliance older than 12 months can still have enforcement action brought forward. Further powers are expected in future revisions of Part L.

It was noted that in the majority of cases, Developers would only aim for compliance with the minimum standards, to minimise development time and cost.

New products, until approved in revisions to Part L, cannot be used in isolation and must be used in conjunction with approved materials and / or construction methods. An example of this is the new multi-foil type loft insulation, whilst it may have similar insulation properties to traditional insulation material several times as thick, until it is approved it can only be used in addition to the traditional insulation material.

Calculations involved with compliance with regulations relating to energy efficiency are now more complex. In the past, it was sufficient for a Developer to demonstrate that they had used materials that were of at least a minimum U-value (relating to thermal conductivity) for each component of a property, i.e. floor, wall, roof etc. Now a holistic view is required, with computer programs being required to calculate the overall rating for a property.

However, in larger developments such as the Rivergreen Centre at Aykley Heads, Cassop School and the recent New College Durham development, there is often an opportunity to include energy efficient components such as ground source heat pumps, grey water recycling tanks, solar panel / photovoltaic cells, small scale wind turbines etc. Some grants are available for the installation of such technology.

Grants relating to loft insulation can be obtained from the Energy Saving Trust, though the City of Durham's Energy Officer, Michael Straughair can be contacted on such matters.

A draft "Code of Sustainability" produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is currently out for consultation with relevant stakeholders. Within the document there is a call to increase energy efficiency for new homes such that in the heating and lighting of these homes there is a reduction by 25% of the carbon emissions in comparison with the limits within current 2006 regulations. This would be followed up with a reduction 44% of the 2006 standards by 2013. The document sets out an aim such that by 2016 new developments would have zero carbon emissions relating to their energy usage.

Indeed, Part L has provision such that if an amount, over a certain percentage, of an existing building has alterations then there would be a requirement to carry out works in order to provide a related percentage improvement in the energy efficiency of the building. Also in the past a straight "like for like" policy applied when replacing building components. However, replacements must now meet the current building control regulations. This is to address in some small way the existing housing stock as in general regulations mainly concern new build properties.

One example of an area where regulations have changed towards sustainability and reuse is that of soakaway. In the past, these were considered a last resort, with the preference being for excess surface water to be diverted into the nearest suitable sewer. However, now the situation has reversed completely, with a soakaway being the first choice.

Members were informed that the North-East was leading the way nationally in many of the new technologies that improve energy efficiency and enhance the sustainability of new developments, such as photovoltaic cladding and wind power.

Members thanked the Building Control Manager for his attendance and the information he provided in relation to the scrutiny topic.

Any Other Business

The Chairman thanked Members for their contributions over the past year and wished those present a happy Christmas and New Year.

Actions for the next meeting:-

- First Draft Climate Change Report.
- City of Durham's Sustainable Development Manager to be invited to attend.
- City of Durham's Planning Officer to be invited to attend.

The Meeting terminated at 6.10 p.m.