
RIBA Climate Change Policy

Introduction

At its December 2005 meeting RIBA Council received presentations from a number of experts on climate change. The result was a decision to:

- hold an expert seminar in Spring 2006
- develop a clear institute policy
- develop toolkits
- establish and publish targets
- develop campaigns aimed at members, society and government

Climate change is a topic where acting in partnership with others in the industry is as pertinent as it can be. The RIBA has had contact with many bodies pursuing the sustainability / low energy / climate change agenda such as the Association for Energy Conscious Building (AECB), The BRE, BioRegional, The Edge and others. As a result of further contact with these bodies it became clear that action better targeted than an expert summary was needed. In particular it became clear just how varied and confusing were the various tools on offer to help achieve sustainable, low energy design. Indeed one of the organisations asked the RIBA to act as a broker to help establish consensus on standards. One of the key tasks therefore is to find some order in this scene so that the RIBA can best serve its members, their clients and industry colleagues need for good information.

The Policy & Strategy Group, with particular input from Lynne Sullivan, its lead member for Climate Change, has carried out preliminary work to help establish the scope of the task. The group has also liaised with Bill Gething representing the RIBA's Sustainability Group. We now put before Council a plan of action for endorsement.

This plan of action has a simple purpose – to establish what RIBA members and the RIBA as an institute could do to help combat climate change. It is self evident that by themselves individuals and even institutions have limited scope for making a difference. However, we are centrally involved in a sector of the economy that is responsible for a very significant portion of total emissions of carbon dioxide (45-50% of UK emissions for example). Moreover, the RIBA as a professional institute with a part to play in society's intellectual and cultural life has the opportunity to campaign for its beliefs and to work with others to influence the shape of the future.

Comprehensive action on an adequate scale to help mitigate or counter climate change has yet to be undertaken by the built environment professions, either collectively through CIC, or individually. The first step has to be towards raising awareness: not so much as an issue of climate change, but of the developing language and basic figures as they relate in particular to the built environment. We need to establish what realistic scope and at what cost is available to each of us and to our clients. We then can go on to focus on particular areas such as what can be done to existing building stock or how the planning system can be used to reduce emissions.

Tackling climate change is the greatest challenge facing our society, and requires concerted and focused action. This will include reducing carbon emissions through changing the way we design, build, manage and use buildings. The principles of sustainability or sustainable development are complementary to the measures needed to curb climate change, but far broader and more diffuse. Addressing climate change has emerged as

a matter of survival and needs to be tackled in its own right. Of course action to tackle climate change has itself to be sustainable.

We propose a four part strategy for the RIBA on Climate Change

1. **Targets** – the RIBA has adopted the policy of Contraction and Convergence (see below for further details) as the overarching policy to guide targets for the reduction of GHG emissions associated with the use of energy in buildings. Contraction and Convergence involves a globally balanced approach to the stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations at safe levels, consistent with the aspirations of different communities to development and quality of life.
2. **Tools** – the web-based package of Climate Change Tools is intended to provide critical, authoritative guidance for architects, their clients and their partner consultants about the standards and targets, measurement and assessment techniques, design principles, technical tools and skills that are necessary to the delivery of low-carbon buildings.
3. **Corporate Behaviour** – the RIBA is developing policies to guide reductions in its own impact, and that of its members, on greenhouse gas emissions, and to help them to take action.
4. **Campaign** – The RIBA will continue to organise lectures and events to promote greater public awareness of the climate change threat, and will join with other institutions to lobby government and to influence other public and private organisations.

Contraction and Convergence

One approach to reducing GHG emissions is known as “Contraction and Convergence”¹. This involves emissions from industrialised nations reducing (contracting) and emissions from all nations converging to an overall target consistent with stabilising GHG concentrations in the atmosphere. Over time, emissions would contract and converge to an equal share per person. To achieve this equitable distribution, each of us in the UK would need to reduce our average annual carbon dioxide emissions from ten tonnes to two tonnes or less.

¹ Contraction and Convergence is the science-based, global climate-policy framework, proposed to the United Nations since 1990 by the Global Commons Institute. See www.gci.org.uk/ICE.pdf. It is supported by many climate change scientists and policy makers, including the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. See <http://www.rcep.org.uk/energy.htm>.