

AECB Conference 2008

Chair's Introduction

Good afternoon. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Chris Herring, and I am Chair of the Association. I would like to wish you all a very warm welcome to the AECB's 15th annual Conference.

This is my 11th AECB Conference, and I know that some of you have been attending this event for even longer than me. However, whether you are new to the AECB or the Conference, or an old hand, I hope this will be a very special event, and that you will go away encouraged and maybe even inspired from an event that is pretty much unique in the UK.

Since I joined the Association in 1992, and since I attended (well, actually helped organise) my first Conference in 1996 we have seen significant changes in the AECB and massive changes in the industry in which we operate. Over the last few years, the Association has grown modestly in size, significantly in ambition and hugely in significance. Where sustainability in the construction sector was the remit of enthusiasts - like many of us here - now it has gone mainstream. The need for action on environmental issues is so clear and pressing. There can be little doubt for any thinking person that we face a crisis of quite unprecedented proportion. Climate change is not the only important environmental issue, but it is certainly the one that is likely to have perhaps the most devastating consequences for both our own species and also for much of the biosphere. It cannot be ignored, and there are many siren voices saying so. Not only visionaries and idealists but those right at the heart of the political process.

I believe the AECB has an important and maybe even a critical role to play in moving towards solutions to some of the crises we face. Why? Because we have been at this a long time. Because we have members who have been developing solutions, and formulating best practice long before the issue became fashionable. Because we have members not only with expertise, but with passion, enthusiasm, and an openness to learning new things. Because members join the AECB to make a difference. To be part of an organisation which is dedicated to supporting its members to make a difference, and then taking that experience and disseminating it more widely.

It is easy to be pessimistic – even apocalyptic – about the challenges we face. And let's be realistic...this is an entirely sane response to the science, when we look at it squarely. But there is also hope. There always is. And I believe that is also what this Association is about. Hope. We can construct our buildings with dramatically reduced, or maybe even zero, carbon emissions. We can equally, address other environmental issues. We need a voice that 'says it as it is', and leads the way in showing how it should be done. That inspires others, that finds solutions. That is what many of you are doing. And that is what the Association, in representing you, is trying to do. This is why we have developed and are rolling out the Carbonlite programme. This is a programme which has grown out of the extensive experience within our membership, and which has learnt from international best practice. It is a programme, about which, if you are not familiar, you can find out more today and tomorrow from our Carbonlite Programme Director, Liz Reason, and from David Olivier, in two workshops. It is also a programme that has been endorsed by the RIBA, CABI, UKGBC among others. It has been called 'the only show in town'. It is certainly having a very significant influence, as well as showing practitioners the way in achieving truly low carbon buildings.

Learning from experience which has been successful. Finding out what has worked, and being honest and open about what has not, is key to developing best practice. Not only has this been at the heart of the AECB, but it has been the key to the success of the Passive House movement in Germany and worldwide. The Passive House concept grew out of what had been shown to really work in low energy building and developing this into a transferable concept. It has been extensively monitored and researched as increasing numbers of buildings are constructed to the standard. It is the standard and methodology on which the Carbonlite programme is based. So, we are delighted, this year, to have Dr Bertholdt Kaufmann, of the Passivhaus Institut, as our keynote speaker. Dr Kaufmann is not only giving our keynote address but is giving a workshop and taking part in our Big Debate. The AECB is now active in promoting Passive House methodologies as the basis of the way forward in the UK. We are the UK partner for Pass-net, which is a Europe wide network aimed at promoting Passive Houses. We are also an official partner in the UK with the Passive House Institut in Germany, and in fact this conference was specifically mentioned by Dr Feist in his closing address at this year's Passive House Conference in Nuremberg. So, I hope you will give Dr Kaufmann a very warm welcome a little later, and that we will all find his contribution to our conference of enormous

value. And there are other events around the theme: Will Anderson's look at Climate Change and construction, Pete Warm's Psi value and Therm modelling workshop, a tour of the outstanding buildings here, or the workshop on windows which Mark Siddal and I are running tomorrow.

Of course, in the UK we already have our own initiatives in the Code for Sustainable Homes and the 'Zero Carbon Homes 2016' target. Does the Code give us an effective way forward? Can the 2016 target be achieved? Is it a sensible target at all? Many doubt it, and certainly these are questions which are at the forefront of many of our minds. I am sure over the course of this Conference there will be a lot of informal discussions around the theme, but tomorrow afternoon we also have our Big Debate around the zero carbon theme. Our panel will have valuable insights on this very timely debate. And I am sure the rest of us will too, so I am looking forward to a very lively debate with keen interest.

Although much of the Association's energy has been focussed on...well, yes...energy, we cannot ignore other environmental challenges, and many of us have extensive expertise in these other aspects of environmental construction. I certainly wouldn't want to pigeonhole Pat Borer's workshop on the WISE building at CAT, but I believe that its remit covers the many environmental issues addressed by the building. Similarly, Ian Pritchett has been at the forefront in developing innovative lime based technologies and I am sure his workshop will give fascinating new insights into the subject.

If, as I believe, the AECB has a key role to play in the UK construction industry, then we do need to ask ourselves precisely what that role is, and also, how can we enable the Association to best meet the challenges the role places upon it. Again and again, in our discussions on these topics, certain themes reoccur. The key to our value is in our membership...you and me... and the length of time we have been established. We are independent and have no vested interests. We are established to support our members to develop best practice and to help disseminate this. We are also 'punching above our weight': a modestly sized organisation which is influencing the industry at all levels, both directly as an organisation and through many of our members individually. We are also an organisation which is heavily reliant on the goodwill of our membership, enormous amounts of voluntary time, and paid staff working well beyond their remit. The Board has been considering some of these issues, and in particular has been considering the future sustainability of the Association with the assistance of an external

consultant. Your feedback is very important, so, during the Conference, we shall be exploring some of these themes in more depth.

Later this afternoon, before our formal AGM, Andy Simmonds, our Executive Officer, will be exploring the work the AECB is doing, and considering its future role and functioning. This is intended to be in a very informal format, to allow plenty of time for discussion and feedback from the floor.

Tomorrow afternoon, we shall be holding some short sessions where you have the opportunity to explore these, and any other themes relating to the AECB's functioning and role which you wish to, with members of the AECB Board. The Board continually needs feedback from our members, so do if at all possible, stay on for these and contribute to taking the AECB forward.

Jo Saady is also running a session on Local Networks. Jo has been very active in promoting local groups, and partly as a result of her work, we now have an excellent spread of AECB local groups running throughout the country. I would urge you, if not already involved, to consider going along to this session, but also to your local group: they are generally very informal and offer an excellent opportunity for networking as well as learning. And if you don't have a local group, Jo is just a phone call away, and can advise you on how to go about setting one up.

There is a lot more to say, and even more to be done. However, I hope a lot of this will emerge and develop during the course of this Conference. Before I finish, I would, as always, like to thank all of those who have contributed to the organisation of this conference both within the AECB and here at UEA. In particular, I would like to mention Geoff Stow who has this year picked up the bulk of the organisation of this event, in his own inimitable style. On a wider note, I should also express my profound thanks to all members of the Board, for the huge amounts of voluntary work put in on the AECB's behalf, and to our very limited staff and sub contractors, in particular Sally Hall who continues to administer the Association single handedly, Andy Simmonds our Executive Officer, who works far beyond his remit and hours and Liz Reason who has done so much to take the Carbonlite programme forward this year. Most of all, perhaps, to you all as members, for continuing the passion and enthusiasm with which this association was founded.

And now I would like to hand over to Chris Baines, our President, to discuss the work of the AECB a little more, and put it in the context of the enormous challenges we face both here in the UK, and worldwide as a species. Chris has supported our work and been our President since sometime before I can remember. He recently chaired the official launch of the Carbonlite Programme at Ecobuild, and has always been willing to promote our cause. He has continually encouraged us to look to the wider picture and to see our work as vitally important out there in the mainstream. I know he continues to be fully supportive of the direction we are taking.

So, can I ask you now to welcome Chris in the traditional manner.

Thankyou.