

## AECB Conference 2009

### Chair's Introduction

Welcome to the AECB's annual conference for 2009. As chair of the Association I would like to wish you all a very warm welcome to what I hope will be a particularly exciting and challenging two days.

This is my 12th annual conference, and the 16th that the Association has held. Of course, some of you will have attended more annual conferences than me, and for some of you this will be a first. But whether you are an old hand, or a new face, I want to welcome you to what I sincerely hope you will find to be a highly rewarding event.

This year's conference is something of a departure from our previous events. For the first time the event is being run as a joint one with our hosts, Oxford Brookes University. So I am delighted that following my introductory remarks, Professor Mark Swenarton, Head of Architecture, will be offering his welcome to you on behalf of the university.

This year, within the AECB we have some cause for celebration. The association was founded in 1989, so this is our twentieth year. I wish I could say that I remember it more clearly myself, but at 20 we are finally emerging from childhood and starting to look at our place in the world. Without wishing to push this analogy too far, we might see this similarly as a critical time for the association, as its influence increases and it starts to find a leading as well as pioneering role within the UK construction sector.

A birthday is a time for celebration, and also, certainly as one gets older, a time for reflection. So, while, at this conference, we have the opportunity to celebrate the work of the association, I think this is also an important time to reflect on its achievements and its future.

Are we achieving what we should?

Is our members' expertise being used to maximum effect to move forward sustainability in the construction sector?

Are we doing the most we can to enable our members to have maximum impact?

Is the association itself going in the right direction?

Clearly, as chair, I hope we are getting the important things right. But even if we are, I know there is so much more to be done, and a diversity of views within our membership on what we should be doing and how we should be doing it.

So, while celebrating our success to date, please do take time for reflection. And please do feed back your thoughts either through the more formal opportunities at this conference, informally by talking to board members who you can easily identify by their gaily coloured name badges, or afterwards by contributing feedback on our online forum.

Of course, the stark backdrop to this conference, and all discussion of sustainability is now the potential for truly runaway climate change. The science is absolutely clear and incontrovertible. The prospect for our children and our children's children is certainly bleak. Right now the humanitarian and economic crisis already appears to be beginning to unfold. According to the recent report from Kofi Annan's thinktank, the Global Humanitarian Forum, climate change is already responsible for 300,000 deaths and economic losses of \$125 billion per annum right now, and of course this is just the start. It is our collective responsibility, and it is probably superfluous to say this any more, but I would say that we have a moral imperative to act in any and all possible ways, as effectively as we are able, and with the utmost urgency. Nothing could be more pressing, and the stakes could not be higher.

I think we can now say that our politicians are at least beginning to take the scientific warnings seriously.  
But are they acting effectively?  
Are they giving the issue adequate priority?  
However you judge this, I think we would all agree that the door is definitely now open and that this is a quite different from the world in which Keith and Sally Hall founded this association, just twenty years ago.

So, our challenge now must be to ensure that our voice is heard, and that it is listened to.  
It is the voice of experience.  
It is your voice: the voice of our members. Some of you have been pushing the boundaries of sustainability in buildings for many years, some have come to this more recently. But perhaps common to all is a passionate belief that we can make a difference.  
It is also the voice of the association, which has been enabling our members to network, learn together and develop since it was founded, and has also been speaking out on key issues of sustainability in the construction sector for the last 20 years.

If learning from experience is a key to the success of our association, it is also one of the keys to the success of the Passivhaus movement in Germany and worldwide. We should be proud that within our own association membership as well as among UK academic institutions, there is a tremendous body of knowledge and understanding on how to achieve low energy buildings. Never the less I think we must also acknowledge a very big debt of gratitude to the Passivhaus movement in taking this a step further into an integrated standard and methodology with which we can all work, and which has now delivered many thousands of truly low energy buildings throughout the world.

If one man is responsible for the development and growth of the Passivhaus movement, it is Dr Wolfgang Feist. So, this year, naturally we are both delighted

and honoured that Dr Feist has agreed to be our guest speaker, as well as agreeing to give a series of masterclasses for the first time in the UK.

If Passivhaus is to become a central building block in the UK to achieving truly low energy buildings, then we clearly need to learn from international experience and to build our own indigenous expertise as quickly and effectively as possible.

This expertise is something that forward looking members of the AECB are already developing. I find it no surprise that many of our members have been at the forefront in pioneering the Passivhaus approach in the UK. In fact long standing AECB member, John Williamson, of JPW Construction, is to be congratulated as he has recently completed the very first Passivhaus certified building in the UK. You will have the opportunity to hear more about his work in a workshop this afternoon.

The AECB has placed so much importance on the Passivhaus approach, that it is itself now an official UK partner to Dr Feist's Passivhaus Institut.

The association is also the UK partner in PassNet. This is network of European organisations, including the Passivhaus Institut, which are actively promoting and disseminating Passivhaus information and expertise in their respective countries.

Through its Carbonlite initiative, the association has been promoting the Passivhaus methodology and standard as the key route to truly low energy construction. The Carbonlite programme which incorporates this approach and was originally funded by the Carbon Trust, is now virtually complete. Very shortly you will hear more from Andy Simmonds, AECB Executive Officer, about the delivery of the final elements of this work, in particular the long awaited Passivhaus and Gold guidance document, and our online database of low energy buildings.

However, perhaps even more excitingly, the AECB has been working with key partners to develop and take forward this work, specifically in promoting Passivhaus in the UK. This afternoon, Liz Reason, currently Director of AECB Carbonlite, will be bringing us up to date with the latest developments, and the contribution the AECB is making to them. I will leave it to Liz to expand on this theme except to say that the association sees this as vital and urgent work, which needs developing with the utmost urgency in the light of the latest information on climate change.

Although developing Passivhaus in the UK has been a key activity for the association, we do not intend to be and should not become, a single interest organisation. There is certainly more to sustainability in our industry. An example of the association's work this year is the publication of our own set of exemplar water standards, which are now available to download from the website. These have already been very well received, and we hope will inform

an ongoing debate about the most effective way of achieving water use reduction in the UK.

Although we have given pride of place to Passivhaus at this conference there is much more here too. I know that Dr Feist has criticised us for not calling this a Passivhaus conference, which certainly in part it is, and I am also sure there will be members who feel that other important areas of interest are not receiving adequate attention. But in the end, this is the opportunity for AECB members to get together, and is for all of you, and all of your interests. I hope we have got it right. And I hope you will tell us if we haven't. Even better, I hope you will volunteer to help make it better next time.

At its core, this is a membership organisation – this is where our strength lies. As such, a key function is to enable our members to network, and to work together. So I am delighted that our regional groups network is going from strength to strength. If you have not already discovered your regional group, why not look it out? If you have no regional group, why not found one? Jo Saady, who is an AECB board member, and our regional groups co-ordinator, is always willing to help. And Jo will be speaking shortly about our regional groups network and the opportunities it offers to you as an AECB member.

If a regional group simply doesn't work for you, another opportunity for networking is the online forum. I know for some this can be a little daunting – there are some seriously heavyweight contributors, many of whom are here. But it is also extremely supportive to anyone open to developing their understanding. And as a pure resource, the passion, variety and standard of debate is extraordinary. So, if you haven't already dipped into it, perhaps now is the time!

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 Oxford Brookes University. There is a lot of work to putting on a conference like this, and everyone involved, both paid and voluntary, has worked very hard to ensure both that the conference works smoothly and that it is at least as wide ranging and thought provoking as many have come to expect from the AECB. Thank you to you all.

On a wider note, I should also express my profound appreciation 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, including Sally Hall who continues to administer the Association almost 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 work forward this year.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank those organisations and individuals, some of whom are here or represented here today, who have been

working behind the scenes, as partners to the AECB in taking forward the development of our Passivhaus work, as successor to Carbonlite.

Most of all, though, I would like to thank you all as members, for continuing the passion and enthusiasm on which this association was founded just 20 years ago.

Thankyou.