

## AECB Conference 2010

### Chair's Introduction

Welcome to the AECB's annual conference for 2010. 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. If I have worked this out correctly - this is my 13th annual conference, and the 17th 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 am confident will be a highly rewarding event for us all.

This year, within the AECB we have some real causes to celebrate, and I hope we are all going to do so over the next couple of days. We'll be hearing during the next 2 days about the ways in which our influence has increased enormously, both as an organization and through the leadership and innovation of our members – all causes for celebration. But first to our birthday. The Association was founded back in 1989 by Keith and Sally Hall, who I am delighted to say are joining us for some of the event. So this is our twenty first year. I am not sure that it is entirely appropriate to celebrate 21 years nowadays, when the age of majority in the UK has now been 18 for so long. But, I guess its always good to find an excuse for a party, and with so much else to celebrate, that seems a great idea.

Sadly this year due to circumstances beyond our control the conference had to be delayed from our usual June slot to this autumnal one. However what started as a disruption to our normal arrangements has really turned into a great opportunity to hold the conference in this beautiful building. Being at CAT for our 21<sup>st</sup> birthday seems entirely appropriate. In many ways the AECB and CAT, and all of those who make up the two organizations, share many common threads, dreams and aspirations. And with this beautiful new space in which to hold the conference, where better to celebrate 21 years of such a great organization as the AECB? Of course during the conference you will have the chance to find out more about the WISE building in the company of architect Pat Borer and others who made it all happen. You will also be able to find out more about the 'big picture' work that CAT has been doing, now published in the 'Zero Carbon Britain 2030' report. As the report says:

Science says "we must"  
Technology says "we can"  
Time to say "we will"

This report shows *how*. While the AECB has been saying that "we must" and "we can" in relation to the built environment for many years, and showing *how* it can be done, this report shows the way for Britain as a whole. As Sir John Houghton, former Co-Chair of the IPCC says:

"Zero Carbon Britain 2030 presents detailed information and arguments to demonstrate that zero emissions by 2030 is within reach. May I urge you to study carefully its arguments and its findings"

So later this morning, I very much look forward to welcoming Paul Allen, Director of External Relations here at CAT when he explains the report in more detail.

This year, as many you will be aware, I cycled here from my business in Yorkshire accompanied most of the way by fellow AECB Trustee Peter Wilshaw. I guess Peter and I are part of a small – well, very small - minority who traveled in this way. Did anyone else? And if we were slightly mad, that is only part of the explanation. Apart from the pleasure of having 3 days away from my desk, I wanted to make a serious point. As all of us working in this field are aware, climate change is for real, and while it is not affecting our comfortable lives much yet, it is already having a devastating impact in poorer parts of the world. This year we have seen the highest global summer temperatures since records began, and terrible flooding in Pakistan. We will inevitably see much more of the same as global warming increases the instability of the world's weather systems. And while our suffering is at present limited to foregoing or delaying summer Mediterranean holidays because of the Saharan heat, or foregoing flying at all because of our consciences, poorer peoples of the world will be increasingly devastated. So this small gesture, and our sore bums, are to raise money for small charities working in the developing world, and hopefully a little more awareness of the link. And if you haven't sponsored either of us, but would still like to, we are collecting here, or there are Just Giving sites if you would like to see Peter or myself afterwards.

The AECB is at core a membership organization. It is the power of association between us all as members that gives us our strength. For the last 21 years, the Association and our members have been giving the lead in the UK in setting exemplars of how buildings can be more sustainable. We do not take things lying down; we question conventional wisdoms and we are always open to new arguments and ideas. This year a huge amount has been happening within the AECB – far more than I have time for now, but I want to highlight some developments which illustrate what we are about.

As most of you will know, the AECB Trustees made the decision several years ago to put a major part of the AECB's resources into supporting our members in creating more energy efficient buildings. The Carbonlite Programme was the outcome of this, and this programme became increasingly influenced by the German Passivhaus standard and methodology, to the point where last year's conference saw Dr Wolfgang Feist as our honoured guest – the first time he had attended such an event in the UK. Recognising that there was a void at the centre of the developing interest in Passivhaus in the UK, the AECB been working with a number of partners to launch the Passivhaus Trust. Together with the AECB, the Good Homes Alliance, CAT Graduate School for the Environment, Strathclyde University and the Sustainable Development Foundation have together created a body, acting in the public interest, to ensure that the Passivhaus standard and methodology are properly understood and taken forward in a rigorous manner in the UK. The Passivhaus Trust already has Founder Members and Members signing up, and will launch officially at the UK Passivhaus Conference which is just over a week away on the 11<sup>th</sup> October. The Trust is the UK partner to the International Passivhaus Association, established by the Passivhaus Institut this year to develop Passivhaus throughout the world. There will be more information on the Trust in a plenary session tomorrow morning after our Annual General Meeting.

I am sure some of you will have signed up for the UK Passivhaus Conference, and some will be considering it. This is an independent conference building on the success of a conference held in Camden in the spring. Although independently organized, there will be lots of familiar faces from the AECB there, many running seminars, and of course it will be a great opportunity as these events are for networking. I should just say that until this weekend, AECB and Passivhaus Trust members are being offered a special 10% discount, so if you are thinking of going now's the time to book.

There is often criticism that the AECB gives more attention to new build than to the much bigger problem of refurbishment. This year the AECB has played a key lead role in projects promoting high standards of refurbishment. Of course our Chief Executive Officer, Andy Simmonds, has himself recently undertaken one of the most advanced refurbishments in the UK of his own family's house, which you can hear more about in a workshop this afternoon.

If you visit the AECB website you will see a series of recently completed films on Passivhaus retrofit. Not only are these films an exciting development in their own right, but they also form part of what is to be a ground breaking webinar. This was developed as part of the AECB's role with the Passnet project, for which it is the official UK partner. Passnet is a collaboration project between key European organizations all working to promote the Passivhaus standard and methodology. The AECB has been congratulated for its innovative approach to supporting Passivhaus refurbishment through the use of this webinar. So, the Passnet Refurbishment Webinar takes place live on the 8 October. There is of course more information on the AECB website, and I do hope as many of you as possible will be online to take part.

And to emphasise that refurbishment is at least as important, if not far more so, than new build, the AECB has also been working closely with the Technology Strategy Board to ensure that the Retrofit for the Future programme really does deliver some effective exemplars. Not only is the AECB ensuring that these projects are robust approaches to refurbishment, but it has also developed a low energy buildings database for the TSB which will include all of the Retrofit for the Future projects...around 80 of them...as well as all other low energy buildings. You can learn more on this at a workshop this afternoon.

Another development at a different scale has been the recent Biomass discussion paper which has received a huge amount of interest, both friendly and hostile. It has been featured in much of the building press, as well as in many other quarters. I have just for example read an interesting overview of it by Rob Hopkins, founder of the Transition movement. There will be an opportunity to hear from the authors and to discuss this paper tomorrow, and of course there is a very active forum board, which I would encourage members to follow or contribute to. However, it is easily forgotten that this is a *discussion* paper. It is intended to stimulate debate, and to that end it is clearly being quite successful. I think it is fair to say that this paper does demonstrate the importance of the AECB, but also some of its limitations. The character of the AECB is very much that of our members. We should and do push the boundaries and ask the radical questions. Who else can this really be said of in our sector?

The Association has always been and continues to be primarily funded from membership subscriptions. This is a fundamental strength in that we are independent of most ties to funding, and can maintain an independent and radical voice. It also means that our establishment is very secure as we are not subject to the usual funding vagaries. But this does all come with a price, in that we work with very modest resources. And it does mean that while we need to be ambitious for the AECB, we have to be aware of the difficulties lack of resources pose for us at times.

I think it is inevitable that a radical paper like the Biomass will be criticized. I would very much hope it would be. It may well also be fair to criticize the process whereby we have issued it, and certainly in the light of feedback the Trustees will be considering whether a more structured

approach to issuing discussion papers is now needed. However, we have to be aware that if we want the AECB to be radical and questioning on very limited resources of both time and money then there will always be a balance to be struck between caution and action. I believe and hope you feel that we get it right for the majority of the time.

Chris Baines, our President, has always encouraged the AECB to play a bigger part on the national stage. I feel confident that we can now say that we are doing just that. It's a regularly stated cliché, certainly for the board of Trustees, that the AECB is an organization 'punching above its weight'. If this means that we achieve a lot with our very limited resources and huge amounts of voluntary effort and goodwill, this is undoubtedly true. However, we do continue to grow and to develop. One area which I find particularly exciting is the continuing growth of our network of regional groups. In many ways I feel that these groups form the bedrock of our organization. Above all the AECB is a networking organization, and the regional groups are undoubtedly one of the most powerful tools for increasing our level of networking. So if you haven't considered your regional group, then maybe now is a good time. And of course if you don't have one, how about setting one up! In fact, we think these groups are so important, that AECB Trustee Jo Saady will be talking more about them immediately after my introduction.

Personally I am pretty excited by the line up for this years conference. We have a fantastic and wide ranging array of thought provoking workshops, including John Willoughby's long awaited exploration of 40 years of energy efficient design, which is very much part of our celebratory theme. We also have the CAT Zero Carbon Britain 2030 report, our keynote speaker George Monbiot and of course then we have our 21<sup>st</sup> birthday celebration, which Chris Baines will be kicking off for us this evening.

On a sadder, but also in a way celebratory note, I would also like us to celebrate the life of Edi Walker, and the legacy he has left to the AECB. Edi of course was well known to some of you. He was a staunch and long standing supporter of the AECB from its early days who very sadly died of cancer, far too young, earlier this year. And as part of his legacy he bequeathed £10,000 to the AECB. At the moment the AECB Trustees are debating the most appropriate way that this legacy can both be put to work to further the work of the AECB as well as at the same time honouring a staunch supporter. If anyone, has any thoughts on this matter do have a word with one of the Trustees during the conference, or contact me afterwards.

In our 21<sup>st</sup> year, it would obviously be impossible to try mention all those who have contributed to make the organisation what it is today. I would, though, like to express a debt of gratitude to Keith and to Sally Hall in founding the organization and taking it forward over many years, and particularly perhaps to Sally for her 21 years as Administrator. Many of our current members, and even our Trustees, have never met Sally, and yet know her efficient and usually patient voice on the phone.

At the very beginning of this conference I would also like to say thank you to everyone who has put in so much hard work to make this event possible. A lot of paid and voluntary work, and a huge amount of commitment, goes into organizing the AECB conference each year, and this one is no different. So for everyone who has been involved, can I say a very big thankyou, and hope that its success will be the best possible 'thankyou' for all your hard work.

And finally perhaps the biggest thankyou of all. At core, as I have already said, the AECB is a membership organization. So, most of all, in these thanks, I would like to say thank all of you as members, for continuing the passion and enthusiasm on which this Association was founded just 21 years ago.

Thankyou