

Bricks and Water Roundtable: Administration of a Property Resilience Certificate

10.00-11.30, Wednesday 29th April 2020

Top Lines

- **Gaining consumer confidence is critical to the success of any scheme.** Evidence from existing certification schemes indicates that a Property Resilience Certificate (PRC) should have a clear set of aims, be easy to understand, and demonstrate value to the owner/occupier. The benefits of each intervention must be measurable, along with the costs of inaction.
- **The current COVID-19 crisis will provide opportunities for a ‘green recovery’.** Development of a PRC could help demonstrate the green credentials of new homes and support shifting public sentiment towards sustainable living, with increased priority on availability of green spaces.
- **Both mandatory and voluntary schemes come with benefits and challenges.** Government is likely to favour voluntary intervention to reduce administrative burden and cut ‘red tape’. However, consumers and businesses often prefer mandatory approaches due to their fairness and clarity.
- **Comprehensive surveys are essential to avoid ‘performance gap’ issues.** The existing network of Energy Performance Certificate surveyors could be easily upskilled to deliver on the specification of a PRC, which would limit additional cost to the homeowner.

Actions

Further to completion of this roundtable and the preceding four evidence sessions, the Westminster Sustainable Business Forum will:

- **Draft its forthcoming inquiry on property resilience and put forward recommendations for Government on water efficiency, sustainable drainage and property flood resilience.** Changes to Building Regulations, Planning Policy and non-statutory guidance may prove the most effective vehicle for many of these issues.
- **Seek feedback from its advisory board, members and key stakeholders** in order to finalise the inquiry’s findings and recommendations.
- **Consider the benefits and challenges of a voluntary vs mandatory approach and develop a roadmap for implementation of a PRC** based on the evidence gathered to date.

Introduction

In June 2018 the [Westminster Sustainable Business Forum](#) (WSBF) published its inquiry: *Bricks and Water*, chaired by former Liberal Democrat MP Angela Smith and Conservative Peer Baroness McIntosh of Pickering. The report comprised an evidence-based assessment of the challenges associated with sustainable housebuilding and water management in England. Building on the recommendations set out in this report, the WSBF is currently undertaking a follow-up project, which will explore property resilience for new and existing homes, to feed into the Government's Future Homes Standard and related legislative changes during this Parliament.

This discussion formed the fourth evidence session to support the forthcoming inquiry and sought to explore how a Property Resilience Certificate could be introduced and administered. The roundtable was kindly chaired by Baroness McIntosh of Pickering.

Inquiry co-sponsors



Speakers

Baroness McIntosh (Chair)

- There is growing consensus around introduction of water labelling, which could be used to provide clear advice on the efficiency of fixtures and fittings and rid the market of the least efficient products.
- We still require more Natural Flood Management (NFM) schemes, such as the 'slow the flow' scheme in Pickering, which stores water in the upper catchment and reduces its rate of flow downstream. The forthcoming Agriculture Bill will provide opportunities for this.
- It will be important to avoid the pitfalls associated with the Home Information Pack which was withdrawn in 2010. Any new certificate should learn from the challenges that this scheme experienced.

Rob Allen - Policy Manager, Westminster Sustainable Business Forum

- The Westminster Sustainable Business Forum have now held three evidence sessions to support their current inquiry on property resilience. Preliminary recommendations from the inquiry include:

Water efficiency: Introduction of a national Per Capita Consumption Target, set by DEFRA; mandatory water labelling at the point of sale for all fixtures, fittings and water using products; and updates to Building Regulations to use a 'fittings-based' approach only, underpinned by minimum product standards.

Sustainable Drainage: Updates to the Non Statutory Technical Standards to reflect the multifunctional benefits of SuDS (controlling water quantity, enhancing water quality, creating amenity and sustaining biodiversity); ending the automatic right for developers to connect to the surface water drainage system; and mandatory use of SuDS in all new development (unless inappropriate).

Flood Resilience: Inclusion of information on flood risk and eligibility to participate in the FloodRe scheme as part of the conveyancing process and wider uptake of property flood resilience measures in accordance with the recent Code of Practice.

Gideon Richards – Chief Executive, Consulting With Purpose

Based on his experience in the sector, Gideon made five key recommendations for deployment of an effective certification scheme:

- Gaining consumer confidence and trust in a scheme is crucial, as it can be almost impossible to operate effectively without this.
- Certification schemes need to be clear and unambiguous for all stakeholders. Their metrics need to be well understood and must be measurable and verifiable against pre-determined baselines. This includes ways of validating what has been done, but can't be seen.
- The scheme must be very clear in its aims and what it can and can't deliver. An accreditation body will measure a scheme's performance against its specification. As schemes are used more widely it is important that they can still deliver effectively.
- There must be clarity around how the scheme documentation will be verified and audited. Accreditation and Certification Bodies will only audit, verify and validate against the scheme documents and requirements. So schemes have to put in as much detail as possible.
- Regulation and legislation is effective to get consumer and industry buy in. However, a scheme must be maintained over time to make sure that it is delivering against its goals and to avoid unintended consequences.

Martin Townsend – Global Head of Sustainability and Circular Economy, BSI

- The challenges and benefits of a mandatory vs voluntary scheme should be weighed. Government is likely to favour a voluntary intervention to reduce administrative burden and cut 'red tape'. However, consumers and businesses often prefer mandatory approaches due to their fairness and clarity. Whichever route we choose needs to be clear and fair - there can also be a journey from a voluntary to a mandatory position.
- The aims of the scheme and any changes over time need to be clearly communicated to consumers and industry to allow investment and training. The scheme should be maintained in order to keep up its credibility and relevance.

- Demonstrating the value of a PRC will be a key selling point. Increasing water efficiency, reducing domestic leakage and cutting home insurance premiums all have benefits for the owner or tenant. We must communicate that the costs associated with producing a PRC can be offset with the savings made by improving a building's performance.
- Consumer buying habits and attitudes to sustainable homes are changing. Engagement with companies such as Rightmove and Zoopla will provide opportunities for getting momentum behind the scheme.

Dr. Ana Mijic – Senior Lecturer, Imperial College London

- Imperial College's CAMELLIA ([Community Water Management for a Liveable London](#)) project is a NERC funded impact programme to explore water management and housing in London over five years.
- The Project includes four case studies at Mogden (infrastructure regeneration), Enfield (environmental risk), Southwark (urban renewal) and Thamesmead (housing development).
- Urban planning presents an opportunity to test deployment of a PRC in new developments. This could be used alongside modelling tools to evaluate a scheme's suitability. The Thamesmead case study could provide opportunities for this.
- It will be important to work with local residents to link any certification scheme to the requirements of the community. In the first instance, a prototype should be developed to get community feedback and determine viability before upscaling.

Discussion

- Much of the information to be incorporated into a PRC could be obtained through CON29 searches or from the forthcoming Data Warehouse and Property Hub, which could cut down the costs associated with surveying.
- A PRC could be important for gaining public trust in new housing, especially to demonstrate a property's sustainable credentials. However, the introduction of a PRC needs to support the Government's commitment to delivery of new homes at pace instead of adding to 'red tape'. The scheme must be win-win for both the Government and the consumer.
- The retrofit programme (24 million homes over the next 30 years) that will be required associated with the UK's net zero commitment provides a huge opportunity to build water efficiency and flood resilience measures into the existing housing stock.
- There are currently 10,000 assessors trained to complete low cost energy assessments for the Energy Performance Certificate. Upskilling this workforce to survey a home for water performance could be done at relatively low cost. Having a register of completed certificates in the public domain is

important for transparency and to hold the Government to account where standards are not being met.

- To get buy-in from Parliamentarians it will be important to demonstrate the benefits associated with each intervention and the costs associated with inaction, from introduction of water labelling through to installation of property flood resilience measures.
- The existing model for biodiversity net gain associated on new development could be extended to cover overall 'green gain'. A PRC could form part of this, especially with regard to green SuDS that provide amenity benefits.
- The BRE's Home Quality Mark already has a method for assessing water efficiency as part of the Standard Assessment Procedure so it would be straightforward to develop this further.

About the Westminster Sustainable Business Forum

The Westminster Sustainable Business Forum (WSBF) is Policy Connect's coalition of high-level stakeholders informing better policy-making on sustainability issues for the built environment.

The WSBF's members include key UK businesses, Parliamentarians, Civil Servants, academics and third sector organisations. Providing a politically neutral environment for knowledge sharing and discussion on sustainability policy, we help to impact the agenda in government and are a trusted source of independent information and advice for policymakers.

We publish authoritative research reports; impact on government policy through our in-depth round table policy discussions and outputs; and inform the wider sustainability debate by convening key stakeholders at our larger policy events and seminars. The WSBF works in the policy areas of construction, infrastructure, water, sustainable planning, green finance and natural capital. We are cross-party, independent and not-for-profit. For more information on our activities, please visit: www.policyconnect.org.uk/wsbf