

The BEST Show began at the NEC Birmingham today, 18th October, with all sectors of the construction industry converging to discuss climate change, lower carbon emissions and the necessary changes in both the behaviour and culture of the construction industry to reflect these worries.

The show got underway with Paul Morrell, Chief Construction Adviser to the government outlining what he saw as the five challenges the construction industry faced in getting to zero carbon. Mr Morrell believes the challenges that face the industry come in terms of integration of sectors, what could be a major skills shortage, misleading data on the industry, product innovation and leadership.

Outlining each aspect, Mr Morrell believed that the best way to achieve a zero carbon approach is to throw out the hierarchical culture and instead encourage builders, contractors, planners, designers and all other project workers to work at the same table, ensuring that all practices understood the challenges and worked together to find creative, yet real solutions to reducing the carbon footprint of buildings.

Over at the Retrofit Hub, , Paul McCloghrie, Policy Adviser on the Green Deal from the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) outlined the scale of the problem the current housing stock faces. The government hope to cut 24 million tonnes of CO₂ from domestic emissions by 2022 and with a reduction of 14 million tonnes already accounted for in forthcoming legislation and new build homes, DECC is hoping to see considerable reductions (equal to almost 7 million tonnes) from retrofitting of the 27 million houses that already exist in Britain today.

Providing incentives to encourage homeowners to retrofit could prove key to this reduction, the DECC argued. The coalitions 'Green Deal' scheme could present homeowners with the information they need to change their behaviour towards retrofitting. The best way to do this was through incentives to retrofit, including upfront finance as well as education of homeowners.

Whilst 80% of homeowners are aware of the benefits of insulation, 75% of home owners are unaware of their current level of insulation. Changing this, the DECC argues, is linked to the perceived value and benefits of energy saving measures. Whilst savings are key, the DECC would like to see house prices linked to the amount of energy saving measures and encourage energy saving measures to be seen as an aspiration, with homeowners willing to invest in the measures.

With DECC stating the case for carbon reductions, Andrew Mellor from PRP architects looked at developing a checklist to deliver on retrofit projects. Mellor believed that to ensure the retrofit market didn't fail, innovations and techniques would have to provide solutions that were replicable and cost effective, not just expensive one off projects. The projects must also be sympathetic to the heritage and culture of the typical British street so that "we don't lose the character of our streets". One overlooked fact that PRP were keen to stress was the need for future proof solutions. While we need to keep our homes warm, the technologies we use must be able to adapt to changes in the fuel we use and the changes that climate change will cause. Keeping warm in the winter is important, but keeping cool in the increasingly warmer summers must not be overlooked.

After lunch, Wayne Hemingway defined sustainability as "when you live in a place, sustainability is the stuff that makes you get out and do things that makes you happy". A packed seminar area listened as he discussed the design aspects and outdoor fixings that make "sustainability equal liveability". Using examples of his work, Hemingway discussed a common sense attitude that must be taken when designing new housing developments to avoid the prison style developments that have appeared since his article on the "wimpeyfication" of Britain.

Hemingway then considered retrofit in his own unique way. Again using his own unique projects across the country, he believes that retrofitting shouldn't just focus on making properties BREEAM excellent. Instead he argued for "retrofitting to make people happy", he believed that by talking to residents and taking their wants and needs into consideration, a community could be transformed and report less anti-social behaviour.

The BEST Show continues today (19th October) with John Adams, Group Procurement Director, Barratt and Sandy Taylor, Head of Climate Change and sustainability at Birmingham City Council. On the final day, the government's spending review is announced and will be discussed live at the show straight after the announcement.