



Inconsistent central and local government policies, low investment and lack of support have been blamed for holding back development of the sustainable construction sector.

Research on green entrepreneurs by the University of Hull has found that the UK's sustainable construction sector is in danger of missing out on opportunities facing the larger building sector.

While output in Britain's mainstream construction sector continues to fall, green builders are bucking the trend as homeowners take action to reduce the costs of heating their homes, creating a huge opportunity for entrepreneurs and faster growth in the sector.

But the respondents to the largest and most in-depth qualitative survey of the sector yet undertaken have called for a clear strategic view from government to enable the transition to greener building practices. They said they were facing major obstacles, including:

- a tendency for government policy to favour large businesses in the construction sector over small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
- wide variation in the application of planning rules across different local authority areas that stifle innovation in sustainable building;
- risk averseness by banks unwilling to invest in green businesses and;
- a shortage of skilled labour capable of using sustainable building materials coupled with a lack of knowledge to incorporate new green technologies into building.

Research by the University of Hull's Department of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences took the form of in-depth interviews with 50 businesses and policymakers engaged in a wide range of practices aimed at reducing the environmental impact of building, from the use

of straw, hemp or rammed earth as building materials, to installing cutting edge technologies to reduce energy consumption after construction.

Green construction is rapidly gaining acceptance in the mainstream. The survey found that today's green entrepreneurs, inspired by German techniques such as the Passivhaus approach, are attempting to combine environmental and business objectives and to educate customers, suppliers and the wider building sector about green building practices.

Researchers Prof David Gibbs and Dr Kirstie O'Neill, said that they hoped their work would encourage policymakers to consider the real problems faced by green entrepreneurs in the sustainable construction sector.

Dr O'Neill said: "We've had a remarkable response from small businesses prepared to give up their time to voice their concerns. Much is made by the current government of its green credentials, but our research suggest that there is something of a gap between the rhetoric and the situation on the ground."

Prof Gibbs added: "Our research indicates that the UK could miss out on a big opportunity if comprehensive measures are not put in place to support this innovative sector."

The interim findings, published by Emerald and to be launched at the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship's annual conference in Dublin today (8 November), form part of a wider University of Hull research project into green entrepreneurship.