



Press Information

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Survey reveals housebuilders' discomfort at 2016 target

A recent opinion poll by Inbuilt shows that, despite generally embracing the Government ambition for zero carbon new homes by 2016, many major housebuilders are deeply uncomfortable about whether they can achieve this target.

Dr David Strong, chief executive of Inbuilt, said:

“This was a targeted survey where we could speak at length with senior managers in seven of the UK’s largest national housebuilding firms. At first almost all of them said they thought the 2016 target was achievable, albeit with significant caveats. As our discussions continued, their discomfort became palpable, expressed in warnings about the unrecoverable costs, the lack of reliable technologies, supply chain, skills or expertise, and the trouble accessing renewable energy sources.

“Consequently, when we asked the 64 million dollar question about whether the housebuilding industry can actually deliver under the existing rules, there was a mixed and mostly pessimistic view – from ‘yes, but...’ to ‘very unlikely’ and ‘extremely difficult’, with one outright ‘no’.

“There is a clear message coming from all the housebuilders we speak to: the Government has got to simplify its definition of zero carbon and allow builders to access at least some offsite-generated renewable electricity from certified, additional sources if we are going to stand a chance of meeting its aims for 2016.”

Encouragingly, all respondents said that new build housing had a significant role to play in helping to combat climate change, although there was also a clear view that a lot more needs to be done to tackle the performance of existing homes as this is where the greatest environmental, social and economic returns could be made.



All respondents were also aware of the Treasury's very strict definition of zero carbon for Stamp Duty Relief purposes (as outlined in the Statutory Instrument published in 2007).

However, most housebuilders felt that such a definition played no part in helping them to deliver zero carbon homes. Stamp Duty Relief was seen as a red herring – a potential financial saving (with limited availability) to the homebuyer is no use to a housebuilder facing increased build costs and very little chance of passing on this cost to the buyer.

All respondents believed that, subject to limitations, new developments should be allowed to connect to off-site sources of renewable energy, including additional certified, specially funded, large scale renewable energy schemes which could then be accessed via the national grid (as well as private wires).

In terms of the renewable energy technologies currently available to housebuilders to help them reach the zero carbon target, most felt that biomass boilers, ground source heat pumps and solar technologies were most likely to be useful – but again, with some caveats. Micro wind was considered the least helpful option.

David Strong said:

“We were pleased that everyone we spoke to said they had a clear internal programme to meet the zero carbon target, and the intermediate stages planned for the 2010 and 2013 Building Regulations. UK volume housebuilders are moving as fast as they can to prepare for the changes ahead.

“But there is clearly a risk that some housebuilders are seizing the first technical solution they can afford, rather than taking the long-term view or considering the broader sustainability implications of their decisions. This could lead them into technical cul-de-sacs which cost a fortune to back out of later on.

“We should also heed the warnings of insurers like NHBC and its equivalents in Canada and New Zealand, all of whom at some point have had to deal with costly construction crises as a result of untested, poorly managed Government initiatives to speed up the delivery of new homes.”



The opinion poll among national housebuilders was conducted by Inbuilt between January and February 2008. All comments received were given in confidence and are not attributable to any individual company or respondent.

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About Inbuilt

Inbuilt Consulting is the UK's first major consultancy specialising exclusively in sustainable buildings, communities and construction. Launched in December 2007, Inbuilt is a young and innovative company providing technical and consulting excellence in the research, design and delivery of sustainable built environments. It aims to ensure that sustainability becomes 'inbuilt', by providing integrated solutions. Drawing inspiration from nature and natural systems, Inbuilt's objective is to 'design out' technical complexity and cost, by continuously rethinking, challenging and improving accepted practices. Working in partnership with its clients, Inbuilt delivers spaces, places and buildings which are genuinely sustainable - healthy, safe, productive and inspiring - fit both for people and the environment. It is part of the RES Group, one of the world's leading renewable energy companies.

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