

30<sup>th</sup> October 2013



**Stephen Williams MP**  
**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government**  
**House of Commons**  
**London**  
**SW1A 0AA**

## **The use of sustainable materials as a solution to achieving zero carbon homes**

Dear Mr Williams,

I am writing on behalf of the UK Timber Industry Accord following the recent review of Housing Standards and the consultation on the allowable solutions which house builders may support to achieve the zero carbon homes standard.

There are 13 signatories to the Timber Industry Accord representing a sector that exceeds £10 billion turnover and around 10,000 businesses employing 200,000 people principally supplying product into the retail, construction and packaging markets.

While we very much support the thrust of the Housing Standards review, we are concerned that it will be a retrograde step if elements of sustainability, for example those relating to materials, are cut completely from future standards. In this instance we believe that market forces alone are insufficient in recognising the clear social, economic and environmental gains or helping to meet the government's stated aims, firstly that all new homes to be zero carbon from 2016, and also that local authorities are obliged to ensure that new developments are energy efficient.

With the requirements of the Code for Sustainable Homes set to be sidelined, we still feel that there is a need for a national driver to encourage the procurement of low impact and responsibly sourced construction materials. Embodied emissions related to the manufacturing, transporting, installing and disposing of construction products and materials used in the UK (taking into account imports) are currently equivalent to around eight per cent of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions. As the operational carbon use in new buildings has fallen, embodied carbon is becoming the major source of carbon emissions from new buildings. We feel that more needs to be done to address the enormous embodied impact of the housing sector in its sourcing and construction in a way that is achievable and not a barrier for the market. The use of renewable materials is therefore one of the most straightforward solutions for achieving zero carbon homes and buildings.

By way of an example, timber based window options have negative Global Warming Potential values due to the carbon storage effect of timber during its growth phase. A recent study by Herriot Watt University concluded that using a timber window frame has the potential to save over 1.5 Tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e.

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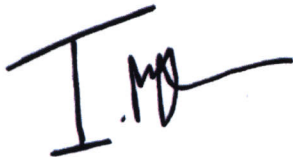
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The benefits of this are clear and the conclusions applicable to the use of a range of timber products, for example timber joist or wood based panels. Such products not only store sequestered carbon but require only very low energy inputs in production. Modern, engineered timber products can now be used as replacements and alternatives to energy intensive materials such as steel or concrete and the DECC led Grown in Britain initiative is driving the growth of the UK forestry sector. Where timber is imported from tropical countries, we have gone to great lengths to ensure that procurement is not only legal but sustainable, following CPET definitions and in alignment with DFID policy.

The Housing Standards Review presented a unique opportunity to emphasise rather than ignore the vital contribution that renewable materials can make. We believe that a specific materials working group should have been established and that the government should establish such a group to advise on such issues and consider the establishment of a Nationally Described Standard for embodied impact that would form the verification route for embodied carbon to be an allowable solution.

We would very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss this in more detail and hear your views on this matter.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'I. McIlwee', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Iain McIlwee**

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