



RICS

the mark of
property
professionalism
worldwide

9 -11 Corporation Square
BELFAST
BT1 3AJ

Tel: 028 9032 2877
Fax : 028 9023 3465
Email : noneill@rics.org
www.rics.org/ni

27 February 2009

Mr Patsy McGlone MLA
Chairman
Northern Ireland Assembly Environment Committee
Room 245
Parliament Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3XX

(e) doecommittee@niassembly.gov.uk

Dear Mr McGlone,

**RE: RICS Northern Ireland submission to the Northern Ireland Assembly
Environment Committee Inquiry into Climate Change**

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Northern Ireland is the principal body representing professionals employed in the land, property and construction sectors and represents some 3,000 members. Our members practice in land, property and construction markets and are employed in private practice, in central, regional and local government, in public agencies, in academic institutions, in business organisations and in non-governmental organisations.

As part of its Royal Charter, the Institution has a commitment to provide advice to the government of the day and, in doing so, has an obligation to bear in mind the public interest as well as the development of the profession. RICS Northern Ireland is therefore in a unique position to provide a balanced, apolitical perspective on issues of importance to the land, property and construction sectors.

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors is pleased to have the opportunity to provide this submission regarding the Committee's inquiry into climate change. Tackling climate change is an integral part of the RICS sustainability framework that will also address energy, waste and water. The Institution takes a serious approach to the policy arena of the environment, climate change and sustainability. It established a Sustainability Commission in 2005 and set 'a low carbon built environment' as a policy priority in 2007.

BACKGROUND

“Climate change is widely accepted by the scientific community as a major environmental threat and is likely to result in alterations to the current situation in Northern Ireland. Predictions show increases to both annual rainfall and average temperatures, with a principal area of concern being resultant changes to species and habitats.”¹

Reports on climate change have indicated that:

- the world has warmed up by about 0.7°C in the last 100 years and man made emissions of carbon dioxide are the principal cause;
- global temperature rises of up to 4°C are predicted for the next 100 years if emissions continue at their present rate with knock-on effects on extreme events such as storms, sea level rise and rainfall. The impact on ecosystems could be devastating;
- the UK's buildings are responsible for almost 50% of the UK's energy consumption and carbon emissions²; and
- Northern Ireland has a larger ecological footprint when compared to England Scotland and Wales. If the rest of the world lived as Northern Ireland's population does, it would take three planets to support us.

EXECUTIVE ACTION

RICS Northern Ireland would like to acknowledge the actions taken by the Northern Ireland Executive which will help improve energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as:

- the introduction of the Code for Sustainable Homes (from 1 April 2008) which was applied to all new social houses to make them more energy efficient and environmentally friendly both in construction and occupation. The Code meant that a house built after 1 April 2008 will be 25% more energy efficient than one built two years before this date;
- the introduction of Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) will ensure that people are aware of the efficiency grade of their property and guide people towards cost effective improvements;
- the recent announcement that from 2010 'green' rebates will be introduced for homeowners who bring their homes up to modern standards of insulation; and
- the announcement of the creation of an eco-village in Omagh.

While it is welcome that these initiatives have been introduced much more work is required to deliver cultural and attitudinal change necessary to meet targets that will help mitigate against the worst effects of climate change.

INITIAL COMMITMENTS

As a minimum, urgent action must be taken if the Executive's target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 25% below 1990 levels by 2025 is to be reached. However RICS believe that the Executive should be taking action to meet the more

¹ Department of the Environment, State of the Environment Report, April 2008

² Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) website 2009

ambitious target set out in the UK Climate Change Act which sets out a UK Carbon account in 2050 at least 80% less than the 1990 baseline.

NECESSARY ACTIONS

According to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency the main driving forces and pressures in Northern Ireland with respect to both local air and contribution to greenhouse gases are transport, energy production, agriculture, industrial processes and residential development. RICS Northern Ireland has focused on transport, energy production and the build environment in this submission to the Environment Committee.

Energy

A two track approach must be adopted with a focus on reducing energy demand alongside improvements in energy efficiency (see section on building stock). Northern Ireland is precariously dependent on imported fossil fuel which comprises 94%³ of power generation. RICS Northern Ireland concurs with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's assessment that the primary focus of energy policy will be to tackle the threat of climate change as well as addressing concern around security of supply and economic development. Increasing sources of renewable energy will help meet these goals. Northern Ireland has a rich resource of wind power; there are currently 19 wind farms across Northern Ireland which equates to approximately 6% of our energy consumption. EU targets demand that by 2012 at least 12% of all electricity consumption comes from renewable sources. The European Commission Renewables Directive places an onus on us to develop renewable technologies as well as ensure that targets relate to the energy mix rather than just electricity.

A recent report "Turning Tides" by the Sustainable Development Commission states that energy contained in the tides around Rathlin Island could produce over 10% of the electricity needs of Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Executive needs to explore the viability of options for renewable energy. To ensure a meaningful reduction in green house gas emissions a cross-departmental approach must be adopted by Government for example ensuring greater compatibility between energy and planning policies.

Transport

The Northern Ireland road surface transport system is almost entirely dependent on fossil fuel, global reserves of which are depleting at a faster rate than the discovery of replacement. RICS Northern Ireland acknowledges that while roads play an important role in social cohesion a significant amount more than is currently envisaged needs to be spent on public transport.

Whilst increasing numbers of people are using public transport in Northern Ireland, figures show that car use is the dominant mode of transport. In the period 2005-2007 car travel accounted for over four fifths (81%) of the total distance travelled in Northern Ireland⁴. Since 1990 emissions from road transport in Northern Ireland have

³ Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment – Northern Ireland Strategic Energy Framework Pre-consultation Scoping Paper

⁴ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), 2005-2007 Travel Study

risen by 34.7%.⁵ Emissions from cars have reduced in recent years due to the development of 'cleaner' cars, however, carbon dioxide emissions from road transport in Northern Ireland accounted for nearly 1/3 of carbon dioxide emissions in 2005, and road transport is also the largest combustion related source of nitrous oxide.

RICS Northern Ireland considers there to be a need for greater investment in the rail network. The introduction of new rolling stock has contributed to increased use by passengers. The weekly average rail passenger journeys have increased by 12% since the third quarter of 2007, during the same period weekly average rail passenger receipts rose by 14%.⁶ Northern Ireland Railways (NIR), unlike England, Scotland and Wales does not carry freight transport. There is potential to tap into the investment from the private sector, if NIR were to adopt a policy of allowing freight to be transported on its lines. We need to move to more sustainable forms of transport, encouraging people to become less reliant on their cars through investment in public transport, links to developments and development of workplace travel plans.

Building Stock (Residential & Commercial)

- Buildings contribute 44% of carbon emissions. Of this figure non-domestic buildings constitute 18% and domestic 26%.
- 63% of all energy consumed in the UK is used in the built environment.
- The largest proportion of energy consumed in the built environment is in the domestic sector, where consumption has increased by 15% since 1990 and 27% since 1970.

The RICS and its members are strongly committed to the delivery of a sustainable property sector where the use of resources, particularly energy, is minimised throughout the life of the building, from concept to disposal. Significant cost and energy savings are possible using low cost technologies and management and behavioural change techniques that already exist. The British Government is currently consulting on the Heat and Energy Savings Strategy which contains policies aimed at reducing annual emissions by up to 44 million tonnes of CO₂ in 2020 – the equivalent of a 30% reduction in emissions from households compared to 2006. RICS Northern Ireland urges the Northern Ireland Executive to explore the proposals contained in this strategy and adopt examples of best practice to reduce energy loss from buildings.

To date the focus of Government policy has been on two key areas: measures to improve domestic energy efficiency, through grants for insulation; and micro-generation equipment and new buildings, through the Code for Sustainable Homes and stronger building regulations. While these are welcome steps, a significant impact can be made on carbon emissions from ensuring improvements are made to existing commercial buildings.

Building regulations can ensure environmental standards in new building, provided there is proper compliance, but the current focus is too biased towards new build and public funded stock and not majority owned existing stock. It is imperative that building regulations will reflect the highest possible European standards.

⁵ Greenhouse Gas Inventories for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: 1990-2005
AEA/EDO5452200/Draft Final

⁶ Northern Ireland Road and Rail Transport Statistics July- September 2008, Department for Regional Development

New build homes are typically more energy efficient than older properties: carbon emissions from a typical pre 1914 home are in the region of 8 tonnes of CO² per year compared to 4 tonnes from a home built after 1995. In light of the vast number of existing properties, improving the energy efficiency of these homes must be a priority.

The adoption of best practice within the construction sector and the exchange of information to enable owners and developers to improve the environmental performance of their buildings offer the better way to meet the challenges of climate change.

COSTS

“No-one can predict the consequences of climate change with complete certainty; but we know enough to understand the risks. Mitigation – taking strong action to reduce emissions – must be viewed as an investment, a cost incurred now and in the coming few decades to avoid the risks of very severe consequences in the future. If these investments are made wisely, the costs will be manageable, and there will be a wide range of opportunities for growth and development along the way.”⁷

BCIS (is the Building Cost Information Service of the RICS) published the Greener Homes Price Guide in July 2008. The book is aimed at getting people to organise and budget for energy efficiency and reducing their carbon footprint. The guide also contains information on payback periods on the installation of energy efficient measures. RICS Northern Ireland will forward a copy of this book by post to the Committee for information.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that transport, energy production and energy loss from buildings significantly increase levels of greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. Urgent action must be taken to address these issues if we are to assuage the consequences of climate change.

RICS Northern Ireland would welcome the opportunity to provide oral evidence to the Committee should Members require further information on any of the issues raised.

Yours sincerely

Nuala O'Neill
Public Policy Executive

⁷ Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change